



FIRST WORDS
Jeremy Fenton

These pieces were written for various reasons. Many were for the Gairloch Writers' Group on a monthly theme, which explains oddities like Bottle and Glass, Black Tulip, Rain Stopped Play, the Spanner in the Works, the Message in the Bottle, 55 and Counting, and Volunteering. Some were for the local Church Magazine. But most were just for my own entertainment. Most have appeared in the Two Lochs Radio programme *Westwords*, and many in the *Gairloch and District Times*. They are roughly in order of composition. Some might be called doggerel, some verse, a few may deserve the name poetry. All should (like any poetry) be read ALOUD!



Knowing Gneiss

Like skerries in a sea of greenery
rock breaks the land here, shakes away
the softness of grass, splashes itself in
rags of heather, repels waves of
whins and ferns and windblown rowan.
It bursts from hiding, boasting its
solidity, its everlasting strength.

Gneiss knows its age, numbers its years
in hundreds thousands millions billions.
Gneiss shows still its birth in earth's long
heating, kneading, tearing, twisting;
shows too its slow death, worn by ages
of gneiss-eating ice, ancient oceans, and
last and least the storm of upstart life ... and us.

Does gneiss ignore us, ephemeral gnats,
featherweight and fragile as we scutter by,
too taken with our niceties to notice it?
Or does it sense, this ancient creature, that here
at last is the one long promised, the Adam, the namer,
the knower, giving to all created things
existence?

Recognise the rock and make it glad.

** Lewisian Gneiss,
pronounced nice, is the
oldest rock in Western
Europe, and found in the
north west of Scotland.*

*This was my first attempt
at poetry, read out to the
Wildlife group on a hill
above Loch Ewe.*

If only

It seemed the first morning of the earth, the birth
of light and life in land and sea and air.
The sun rose singing in a crystal sky,
as new-born hills showed off their silhouettes,
teased briefly by a few young sun-touched clouds.
A buzzard's cry called wildness to the world,
a whisper of breeze rustled the trees from sleep,
and dew-washed leaves shone with primeval green.
The air was crisp with wide-awake freshness: it was a day
for alleluias. As I stopped to drink it in,
there passed a fellow prince of creation, a man
head down, oblivious, thumbs working at his messages —
perhaps urgent to tell abroad the glories of the day?
If only.

Seeing Skye

The island is never the same island.

On its best days Skye flaunts itself, reveals all, baring its basalt from Kilt Rock to the grey cliffs of Suiramach, white dots marking the houses. Fragile clarity: too soon, only a shape remains.

Yesterday Skye was inexplicably absent, leaving not even an island-shaped gap. Perhaps on an island-hop to visit neighbour Hebrides, or Trotternishing off to America — who knows?

Today the sky fell on Skye, a grey leveller, crushing its contours, stamping on the Storr's ambition, beheading high Beinn Edra, quashing the Quiraing into a Flodigarry flatness.

Often Skye sky-larks, self-indulgently decking itself with cosmetic sunbeams carefully arranged, or nestling comfortably in an eiderdown fog, or transforming to a row of cloud-puffing volcanoes.

Never the same island. But always the same island behind the chaotic whimsies of the sky: just as humanity's unquiet weather limits our vision, distorts the view of each from his own misty isle.

The Trotternish peninsula of Skye forms the horizon to the west of Gairloch.

The world might have been different

There might have been no eagle
slipping silently round a cliff-edge into my life,
shocking me into awareness and awakesness, into
open-mouthed worship of animal grace.
There might have been no life in the world.

There might have been no skylark,
as I lie back and centre on its soaring rhapsody,
pauselessly extravagant invention, weaving
joy for me — for the bird, who knows what?
There might have been no music in the world.

There might have been no flowers,
tiny colorations catching my sight as I walk,
entertainment in detail beyond man's artistry,
shining their message of sun-filled optimism.
There might have been no colour in the world.

There might have been no mountain
to call me far above the scale of the everyday,
above human alterations into a larger region
of depth and height, and mind-widening distances.
There might have been no grandeur in the world.

There might have been no sunset,
starting small, then catching clouds one by one
and spreading its profligate splendour over the sky
as the all-giving sun and I give thanks for the day.
There might have been no beauty in the world.

And there might have been no world, no universe,
no showcase for God.

And there might have been no God, nothingness.

But thank God, there is, there was.

Power Cut

Home late: the village lights below, a random sprinkle
of pinholes in the black — electric white and amber.
Close out the night with electric cosiness — light heat music...
Suddenly the house flashes into darkness, vanishes with
a startle of unelectric shock. Check the village:
it has abandoned us, or we it, and we are lost in space.

No: a car's lights search uncertainly invisible streets
and faint glows grow into windows: the village is back,
centuries back, a candled shadow of itself,
its bubble confidence burst — now a fragile settlement
edging an uncertain ocean, fearful
of the enclosing dark... of wolves... of Viking raids...

But as we candle ourselves and join the village,
we find a web of warm light woven between us all,
an open-curtain oneness of experience, of humour
in TV-less adversity. An hour-long moment — then
we are flicked back into the electric now, and each house
cold shoulders its neighbours, re-embraces isolation.

Encounters

As I lean down the path, gravity-defying
on the roar of the wind, the ground erupts
in a clattering adrenalin burst of wings,
and a shape sails, jet-propelled, over the horizon.

Day-dreaming along a track, miles from nowhere,
I wake to a splash, where no splash belongs,
and hurry to catch a wet black back slithering
into hiding beneath secretive banks.

High on an evening hill, as I watch the shadows
slowly swallowing detail from the land,
a rock growls at me, unmelts into a shaggy form,
scuttles out of sight behind a crag.

Such is the sorrow of human isolation — shunned
by grouse, otter, goat, all our neighbour animals.
Not quite all: walking home I meet that
miraculously tiny machine of vengeance, the midge.

New Zealand Birds

PUKEKO, stalking disdainfully around the campsite,
high-stepping on pink spindles, red beak leading,
bulky black blue-breasted body following.
What do you make of your changing landscape
of tents, cars, two-legged suppliers of crumbs?

KORIMAKO, bell-bird, you hide your talent behind
a dowdy exterior, but in song you astonish the forest
with your true-toned tunefulness, your bel canto brilliance.
Do you understand that you have discovered Music?
Do you preen yourself in the praise of your audience?

KEA, flying in a flash of parrot red, but
a dull green waddle on the ground; your beak
designed for destructive testing, tearing, trashing.
Is that a glint of humour, or of vengeance, in your eye
as you innocently vandalise a car for the camera?

KIWI, brown blob with a beak, unflying
contradiction in bird terms, grubbing noisily
for worms at night, a ready meal for predators.
Do you know what anachronism means,
what an icon is, why you are kept alive?

And we — do we know what anthropomorphism means?
What do we make of the wondrous creatures
who share our space, in their own parallel world?

Beinn a' Chearcaill

There are no hippos on Beinn a' Chearcaill.
In Africa there are hippos in pools and rivers,
showing only their goggle eyes above the surface.
On Beinn a' Chearcaill in April, like miniature hippos,
showing only their goggle eyes above the surface,
croaking and splashing in snowmelt pools,
there are frogs.

Round their horizon circle the higher hills,
magnificent — but frogless, and the frogs have eyes
only for each other: like tourists who glance
unseeing at hills and hippos, then turn back
to each other and resume their interrupted croaking.
But there are no tourists on Beinn a' Chearcaill:
only the frogs and I, and the eagle high above.

Beinn Leoid

On lonely Beinn Leoid there are fewer lions
than its name leads one to expect.
But today I was a lion, or perhaps a fox.
I told her I was harmless, but she insisted,
scurrying pertinaciously three paces ahead,
clucking petulantly if I strayed off course,
flashing an impatient white wing at me if I stopped:
ptarmigan, *Lagopa muta*, but not today.
At last she released me, and the mutual deception
was over. She sidled off, flew back on
suspiciously vigorous wings to gather
what my casual clumsiness had scattered —
her precious brood of small brown balls of fluff;
leaving me to ponder a mother's courage and that
Beinn Leoid, no longer lonely, had one lioness at least.

In fact Leoid is pronounced more like "loud", and is related to the name MacLeod rather than lions!

One More River

It was a testing day.

The lying in the tent wide awake test
The cuckoo that calls without break test
The seeping-through-waterproofs rain test
The pack-weighted shoulders in pain test
The wearisome uphill trudge test
The boot-clinging muddy sludge test
The leg-tangling dense vegetation test
The featureless moor navigation test
The short-cut which disappoints test
The aching of over-worked joints test
The promising path which soon fades test
The multiple foot-wetting wades test
The crossing a two-metre fence test
The notice that doesn't make sense test
The finding a way through the peat test
And at last just one hazard to beat — the best
last
test.

“Bridge Closed.” It was easy to see why:
tilted, skeletal woodwork poised high
above the hurrying water, ripe for collapse —
the final trial, a test of faith perhaps...
Tentatively, I climbed round
the locked gate.
Weightlessly, I tiptoed across
the doubtful planks.
And the trumpets sounded on the other side!
And the sun shone on the other side!
And the path rose easily to the day's ending.

And the prize?

A place to pitch my tent: an ordinary place, just

a deer-cropped patch of grass in the heather under an elderly alder
tree beside a tumbling peat-brown stream with small pools and
waterfalls and smooth grey lichened boulders on the mossy bank
and an island with another alder and pine trees all around and
birdsong but no cuckoos and no insects and little bright flowers
and the shy deer watching from a distance and the sun shining
warmly in the blue-sky west.

Just an ordinary piece of paradise.

*This was written after
the TGO Challenge, a
cross-Scotland walk. It
first appeared in TGO
magazine.*

Reductionism

This poem is not a poem.
It is only a list of letters which are
linked by linguistic laws into words which are
grouped by grammatical laws into sentences,
as scientific dissection demonstrates:
no need to hypothesise a poet
for this which is not a poem
is only letters and laws.

And a flower is not a flower but only
biochemistry and genetic coding
and a rainbow is no marvel but only
a phenomenon of refraction.
And the universe wrote itself.
So science rescues us from illusion
strips away the surface
unearths reality at the foundation of things.

Unless —
unless there is a Poet —
unless the world is a poem
and its meaning is not in the making but in the being
and wisdom is not in taking apart but in enjoying
and we the readers know the Poet
in his infinite invention
in the needless beauty of nature's syntax
and a flower is not what it is made of but a flower
and a window into the Poet's mind
and a rainbow is an extravagance
and nothing is only.

Analyse the orthography and the typology,
but do not think the only view is down.
Know the power of the Poet
who makes all letters and all laws
and writes the world into being
and praise him.

Small Wonder

Steering my two tons down Glen Torridon
I had to stop. The road was blocked
by a mouse.

Even by mouse standards he was small,
a youngster, but unafraid though faced
by a monster.

He looked up, considered, consented to amble
calmly to the roadside where he stopped
to smell the flowers.

Lessons from a mouse: size counts for nothing,
and there is always time to stop
and smell the flowers.



Transcendence

The sea becomes the sky as we slip silently
across blue clarity and chaotic cloudscapes,
our wake the only mirror-breaking wave
until a dark shape darts beneath the boat,
slices the surface in a breath-taking black curve,
and we stare spellbound at the porpoise's mastery
of its own dense element. So two worlds meet:
we the watchers agape — as angels, say,
might gaze into the material universe
which we call home and wonder at our mastery
of our own dense element, experiences denied
to creatures of a greater air and light.
And we the watched — are we porpoises? or fish,
trapped unaware beneath the sea-sky surface
where sunbeams flicker faint and unexplained?
Oh, rather be a porpoise! Breathe life from
that other world, feel the Sun's warmth, and know
that we are made for more than this world gives.

All's Well that Ends Well

The field was booked, the caterers were hired,
programmes were printed, seating was acquired,
the forecast said the weather would be fair
for entertainment in the open air:
the village all made ready for the day
when their own players would present their play.
"Merchant of Venice" was the piece selected,
and practised, if perhaps not quite perfected;
they all had tried their best to learn their parts,
and keen anticipation filled their hearts.
Too soon the day came round. Anticipation
became a panic-stricken realisation:
rehearsals might be fun, but this was real —
now they were faced with trial by ordeal.
The audience arrived, filled every seat,
and chatted, looking forward to a treat.
They quietened as the actors all appeared.
Antonio came forward and declared
"In sooth I know. Not why I am so sad" —
at once the audience knew it would be bad,
and as each actor massacred the text,
they tried to understand but were perplexed.
Bassanio spoke too slow, the Duke too fast,
and cues were often missed by all the cast;
Shylock kept coughing, Portia was too old;
the busy prompter had the hardest role.
The audience, embarrassed by the flop,
were wishing that the agony could stop.
And then, as Portia wearily proclaimed
"The quality of mercy is not strained,
it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven",
the rain came, far from gentle, as if given
in answer to the prayers of all concerned
for mercy, and the last act was adjourned.
Both cast and audience fled to the marquee
and drowned their memories in beer and tea.
A brief and generous review next day
appeared under the headline "Rain Stopped Play".

Bootleggers on Sgorr Ruadh

Ignoring forecast wind and rain, the valiant eight
(plus dog) set out, and managed to negotiate
the valley of a hundred hills, six swollen burns,
two showers (no more), the path's uncounted twists and turns,
to reach Sgorr Ruadh's northern ridge: a quartzite scramble,
a breezy lunch, a sandstone tower, a grassy amble.
The thick cloud broke, revealing to their wondering eyes
great airy depths and cliff-girt hills and high blue skies.
The wind increased: an awkward belt of scree was crossed:
the ridge grew steep and narrow. Clinging on, wind-tossed,
all made it up the final rocks, achieved the summit,
relaxed, and felt relief and pride that they had done it!
Refreshment taken, came the time for the descent:
back down the windy ridge precariously they went,
buoyed by the beauty of the cloud and mountain scene,
the shattered quartzite crags, the sandstone cliffs, the green
and easy slope which took them down into the corrie.
The long walk back now tested fitness: few were sorry
to reach the road, where leg and boot at last were Still,
and Bootleggers could Smugly recollect their hill.

*These Bootleggers
are a hill-
walking group.
The original
bootleggers were
associated with
illicit whisky stills
and smuggling.
This report
appeared in the
Gairloch Times.*

The Lost Flower

with apologies to Adelaide Anne Procter and Sir Arthur Sullivan ("The Lost Chord")

Seated one day in my garden, which was dreary and full of weeds,
my eyes were wandering hopelessly over the flower beds.
I don't know the names in Latin, nor what I have planted where,
but I saw one single tulip which was black — jet black, I swear.

A colourless tulip offended, like a blot on a white paper sheet;
however ungreen were my fingers, here was one weed I could beat.
I went for my fork and trowel and uprooted it that very day,
and tossed it onto the compost, where it wilted and shrivelled away.

Next week in the garden centre, I mentioned that flower's decease,
and was shocked to be told that this tulip was rare as the Golden Fleece.
I re-planted and watered it vainly, that one black tulip of mine,
and tried to achieve resurrection, but of life there was never a sign.

It may be next Spring will revive it, and win me undying fame;
or it may be I'll give up gardening, and probably change my name.

The Bottle and the Glass

A Cautionary Tale concerning Communism

Said the bottle to the glass as they were standing on the table,
"I should like to pour a drink but I'm afraid that I'm not able."
Said the glass, "I need one badly: can't you see that I am empty?
Won't you help me?" "I would like to, but although I now have plenty,
if I gave you some of mine then I would find that all the glasses
were demanding drinks, and soon I would have joined your poorer classes."
"Just you wait," replied the glass. "Your greed will cause the revolution,
for the glasses will arise and force a radical solution:
you'll be taken by the neck and made to pour out all your treasure
and distribute it to every glass in strictly equal measure."

But idealism seldom hits its target. Shortly after
came a hand which poured the drink, indeed, but then with cheerful laughter
grabbed the glass and said "Good health!" and held it high
— and drained it dry.

Spanner in the Works

There's always

a snake in the grass	a scratch on the table
a smudge on the glass	a kink in the cable
a fly in the ointment	a blip in the data
a glitch in enjoyment	a noisy spectator
a spider in the bath	a worm in the bud
a puddle on the path	an eye in the spud
a knot in the plank	a midge in the porridge
a leak in the tank	a gap in your knowledge
a leaf on the track	a flea on the dog
a sheep that is black	a lie in the blog
a stone in the shoe	a stain on the carpet
a bone in the stew	a hole in the basket
a mistake in the spelling	a witch in a fairy tale
a growth in the telling	a chip in your Chippendale
a smear on the windscreen	a blistered heel when trekking
a bump on the putting green	an error after checking
a weed in the flower bed	a bill to pay for wine and dining
a nail in the tyre tread	a cloud with every silver lining
a mist on the Isle of Skye	a typo in the email
a pip in the apple pie	and a devil in the detail.

But Sod's Law says that, however much it irks,
I can not find a rhyme for a spanner in the works.

The Turning of the Tide

The year is dying, drowned by storm and snow;
the sun too tired, too old to climb the sky;
days dwindling, starved of colour, warmth and light.
The stars stand crystal clear, cold and remote
from humans huddling in their cosy homes
waiting, resigned, the turning of the tide.

Or shopping,

Also cooking, baking,
writing, wrapping, sending, making,
entertaining, decorating:
children eagerly awaiting
the day, the one day, the wondrous day
when darkness is defied,

one day to mark the turning of the tide:
Yuletide, a blaze of colour, warm and bright,
meetings, greetings, music, gifts, delight
in food and drink and family and friends.

It can not last: this day of days soon ends.
The magic dies, the days again grow dreary;
the revellers are impoverished and weary.
For parties, shops and being wined and dined
are not the way to finding peace of mind —
the real peace, in which we have no part
unless the sun shines deep down in our heart.

On that same day, by inconvenience of history,
others there are who celebrate a different mystery:
the simple story of a child's birth
two thousand years ago. That night
a billion billion stars gazed down on earth
in wonder. That night
the whole created universe was still,
expectant. That night
our world was at the centre of all things.

Who was this child?

The barriers were broken: angels came
to sing his birth to men.

Who was this child?

Only the one true God, by whose command
the universe exists and we have life,
entering (who knows how?) our time and space.

Only the unseen God made actual man,
come to proclaim the turning of the tide:
to bring back to himself our failing race,
to show his love and win us our release
and fill our lives with joy and give us peace —
the true peace which he only can impart:
he is the sunshine deep within our heart.

Cnoc and Lochan

*A useless patch of land, they say.
Build a windfarm, dam a stream, plant a forest.
Let it justify itself.* The land replies:
I am what I am. I do not do grandeur.

*“Small hills
and lochs”, a
type of land
commonly
found in the
north west of
Scotland*

My mountains are not epic peaks, but haiku hills,
ice-written on the earth with ancient art:
little ridges, rock-encrusted, ripe for exploration,
whole ranges to tackle in an afternoon.

My forests are not tree cities, but rustic villages,
built small for beetles and bugs and gossamer spiders:
jungles of heather and woolly willow, where a man
can stride across the tree tops in seven-league boots.

My waters are not great symphonic lakes, but chamber pieces,
composed of liquid freshness, note-perfect:
secret lily-speckled lochans, pools rush-fringed,
peat-brown epitomes of highland wilderness.

My moors are not horizon-stretching canvases, but miniatures,
water-colour painted on a ground of golden grass:
wind-waving cotton, a splash of sphagnum, asphodel candles
to light a land where small is beautiful.

Master-classes all for all with eyes to look,
as useless as a poem or a painting or a book.

Stag

Rounding a casual rocky knoll on the way to —
stop! shock crackles, shatters the day-dream:
stag and man stand face to startled face,
a world-stopping lightning flash moment:
frozen we stare, startle melting to curiosity,
each reaching, searching, wondering, but
failing to penetrate the mystery of otherness.
One of us must go. With a flourish of antlers
I turn and run.

Invasion

This summer my home was invaded by aliens.
One perched on the fence chanting strangely, repetitively.
One stood in my garden, quietly contemplating the flowers.
One mini-alien galloped over the carpet and hid behind a chair.

What should I think of these visitors? —
welcome them to my world, or drive them out?
Communication seems unlikely: we share no language,
and their cultures are, well, alien.
But I have to ask questions.

Why does a cuckoo? A reasonable question
at four in the morning when he wakes me
somewhat earlier than I had planned.
At first he struggled to get it right:
a hard tune to learn. But now
he has mastered the minor third and sings away
like a Pavarotti: a virtuoso concert, with two notes.

What does a roe deer make of a garden? —
this patch of land filled with exotic tastes,
this seeming paradise — but tinged with danger:
suspicious abundance, too many straight lines,
perhaps a trap, baited with temptation.
She stands alert, sensing the serpent in paradise:
playing my part I twitch the curtain and she is gone.

And what is a house to a mouse?
Maybe it knows the building better than I:
the hidden spaces, below and above and between,
the gaps and cracks, backs as well as fronts,
the woollen fields where crumbs grow,
and dark cupboards filled with nesting materials.

Welcome them to my world, or drive them out?
Guard my territory from those who would
destroy my sleep, my flowers, my fabric and my food?
Too much “my”. Their parallel worlds
know no boundaries; no more does mine
as I trample the wild beyond the fence.

The Message in the Bottle

There was a lonely island, quite unknown
to all the world, the world alike unknown
to those who lived on it. Now, long ago
the ocean sent on them a dreadful woe
which changed their world: tsunami struck their shore,
destroyed their fishing boats and left them poor.
The sea had turned against them: none were wishing
to build new boats and go back to their fishing.
They asked their god, in misery and terror,
if they were punished for some sin or error.
No answer came, until the famous day
when children who were on the shore at play
found floating in the sea an object, green
and shinier than they had ever seen.
They feared to touch it, but one ran and told
the priest, who, trembling, doubtful, yet was bold
to catch it and to take it to his temple.
The people, wondering, started to assemble,
and waited. Finally the priest appeared,
and to his hopeful people he declared,
"This is the answer we were waiting for!
This thing is surely god-made. And there's more:
concealed within I've found our god's own sign."
He showed a leaf-like thing, white, with a line
of shapes drawn on it. Eagerly they stared.
The shapes meant nothing to them, but they dared
believe that their salvation had been given:
their god had spoken from his distant heaven.

The priest spent ages studying the leaf,
attempting to interpret each motif.
He pondered long, and finally reported
the shapes to be familiar, though distorted.
The first, their island standing in the ocean;
and then a fishing spear, their god's own token;
the third a sailing boat; the next the same;
and last the sun. The message thus became:
"Your god shines blessings on the island fleet."
The people cheered; their joy was now complete.
Thenceforth at each full moon and highest sea
the priest would don his robes and reverently,
with all the people, walk down to the shore,

and raise the sacred objects, and implore
the god to guard them. Faith brought its reward,
and thus their trust in fishing was restored.

Years passed, and generations came and went.
Then suddenly occurred the great Event.
A ship arrived. The islanders in awe
believed their god was here. He came ashore;
they fell down at his feet. The priest was sent
to fetch the sacred leaf, and then present
it humbly to the god. And he, bemused,
received and read the gift, grew more confused,
and wondered greatly how, at this first meeting,
they'd learnt to write an English word of greeting.

For the captain knew not that a child at play,
pretending that he was a castaway,
had thrown into the ocean long ago
a bottle. And its message? - just HELLO.

Autumn

Autumn is best. Not the brash youth of Spring,
nor Summer's frantic insect-ridden heat,
nor yet the chill of Winter's darkening:
all fade when seen in Autumn's golden light.
Now rowan berries richly weight the trees,
the bracken blazes, woods are touched with glory;
now nature, effort spent, can rest at ease,
and sunset's blessing closes each day's story.

For us when autumn comes and time's our own,
the golden years begin; then wisdom learned
turns toil to pleasure, noise to peace; seeds sown
long since now bear a crop of fruits well-earned.

But woe to those who waste the days of gold
and unprepared face winter's deathly cold.

The Art of Gairloch

*This was written
for Ceangal, a
group of visiting
artists.*

And God said

Let there be Rock, half as old as Earth,
shaped by the mighty shifting of continents
and the careless, careful sculpture of grinding ice
to make a glory of hills and glens and lochs.
And God saw that it was good, in Gairloch.

And God said

Let there be Sea and Sky to match the land,
an ever-changing infinity of colour and light,
sun and storm, wind and calm, wet and dry,
the unpredictable drama of weather and water.
And God saw that it was good, in Gairloch.

And God said

Let land be clothed with colour, season by season,
painted with a rich palette of Plants:
splashes of brightness, subtleties of greens,
on a broad-brush ground of golden-brown.
And let it be home to Birds and bashful Beasts
(and, in case it is taken for granted, midges).
And God saw that it was good, in Gairloch.

And God said

Let there be Man, to know and love the land,
to cherish and enjoy, and give it meaning.
And God saw that it was not so good,
and so he said

Let there be Art of all kinds —
making and telling, music, performance and drawing —
to waken sleeping minds and unseeing eyes,
to tease out meaning and stimulate new sight,
that people may see that it is good, in Gairloch.

And there was, and they did.

55 and Counting

It started in my youth when I was made to climb Ben Lawers;
I enjoyed it, unexpectedly, and soon climbed Cairngorm Mountain,
and before I grew much older was a convert to the cause.
And now that I am 40, I am 55 and counting.

I can look back on so many happy days of Munro-bagging
on the likes of Driesh and Tolmount and the Tarmachans and Oss,
but the years have not been kind, and I can see a certain sagging
in my middle, and my knees are sore; there seems to be a loss

of the energy I had when climbing Ciste Dubh and Klibreck.
So I'm wondering if I should carry on. I've climbed Mount Keen,
but that's what I don't feel now, and my body is a sad wreck.
I've even been up Buachaille Etive Mor, but when I've seen

the Aonach Eagach's ridges, not to mention Torridon,
I've felt a touch of panic and a sense of vertigo;
An Teallach and the jagged Cuillin summits would be horrid. On
the other hand, there's Hope and Lap and Glas and Beinn a' Ghlo,

which anyone can climb, and Fionn Bheinn and Meall Buidhe
(the Lyon one, not Knoydart which is quite another matter),
and if get in training I could even manage Lui...
I've decided. Yes! I'll go for it: I must get fit, not fatter.

I know I'm only 55 and counting: 227 's
a daunting task, but if I give up now I'll be a fool —
no Wyvis or Sgurr Fiona or Lochnagar or Ladhar Bheinn,
no Sgurr na Ciche or Bidean or Slioch or Cairn Toul.

I'll do it! — go for Gairich, Alligin, Garbh Chioch Mhor,
and Sgurr nan Ceathreamhnan, Beinn Eighe, Lurg Mhor, a' Mhaighdean,
and Liathach and Gulvain, and the three hills called Ben More,
and at last even the Cuillin and the frightening In Pin.

It's too soon to be a Bodach: while I Mayar, I'll Dubh Mor,
before I'm any Alder and too Creise'd and Saddle-sore!

The Writers' Group theme originally related to a wedding anniversary, but this piece is about Munro-bagging: climbing the 282 Scottish hills over 3000 feet high. It does require some knowledge of Gaelic pronunciation!

Good God

Strange how *God* is usually
a mark of exclamation.

O my God or *OMG*
does not mean adoration.
But it should.
O my God, I worship and adore you.
O my God, who ever could ignore you?
But they do.

For God's sake seems to most to be
a way of saying *Listen to me*,
not *For the sake of God*.

An odd
mistake.
For all that we do should be for God's sake.

Thank God, they say, and only mean *I'm glad*.
That's sad,
for heartfelt gratitude
should be our attitude.
When faced with all God's gifts, our hearts should sing
Thank God for this, and that, and everything.
And thank God for being God.

For God is. And God is not
an adverb or a punctuation mark.
For God is a noun: *the* Noun,
the great unchanging eternal Noun,
giving all other nouns their reality.
Absurd to waste the word on banality.

Good God.
Exactly.

Mons Vitae

Each of us has our own mountain to climb.
The foothills are green and easy, guarded and guided:
we wander our way in pleasant wooded valleys
and up well-trodden rises, until the walk
grows lonelier, gloomier, the ground rougher,
the slope steeper, and the way ahead
hidden in cloud; and here the climb begins.

The mountain is what each one makes of it:
straight up, zigzag, hands-on rocky scramble,
stroll or steady mindless head-down plod,
or precipiced to set the nerves tingling,
thrill roused by risk. None is quite safe:
stones may tumble, stumbles and slips happen,
skills may be found wanting in the fog.
For some the climb itself becomes the purpose,
an endless toil, obsessive, Sisyphean;
or there are those who, weary, purposeless,
settle resigned and cold on some bleak ledge,
the summit a fading dream, all desire lost.

But others, alert and observant, enjoy the effort:
the steeps are conquered, and the ridge walk starts,
and with it the finest views, the keenest sport,
and well-trained legs lap up the happy miles,
until at last the summit cairn draws near.
And then? Rumours tell of a land beyond
where hills of metaphor give way to truth
and a welcome waits for those who find the way.
Meanwhile the mountain is what we make of it,
and mountaineering is the matter of life.

*“The Mountain of
Life”: a metaphor
for the human
experience.*

Hidden Treasure

A thousand years ago or more,
people lived along the shore
of Gairloch. Those were peaceful times
for them: no roads, no cars, no crimes,
no shops, no schools, and no TV.
They planted crops and fished the sea,
they milked their cows and hunted deer,
and only had one thing to fear.

One day a girl was guarding sheep
above the village, trying to keep
the flock from wandering. The day
was clear and sunny. In the bay
she saw the fishing boats; beyond
was Skye. The sea was like a pond,
so calm and blue. But then she spotted
that in the Minch the sea was dotted
with dark shapes: she counted ten;
she wondered what they were, and then
she knew, jumped to her feet, and raced
downhill full pelt. Her dog outpaced
her, barking madly. Out of breath
she gasped her news: "The ships of death
are coming!" She was quickly led
to see the village chief, who said
"Now calmly tell me what you saw."
"We've heard" she said "of ships of war
which come from far away to kill
and burn and steal. Well, from the hill
I saw them coming: rouse the village."
The chief said "Vikings! come to pillage:
just what I feared. Now sound the horn
to gather everyone, and warn
the fishermen to come ashore."
So all the village gathered for
the chief to tell them what to do:
"We can not face them, we're too few.
We'll go into the hills and stay
in safety till they've gone away.
Bring food and clothes, and travel light:
we must get quickly out of sight."

The men complained: "It is not right
to let them land without a fight.
We'll stay. But if they are too strong
we'll follow you before too long."
The chief reluctantly agreed,
and said that he himself would lead
the rest to safety. Up the hill

they climbed, with heavy loads, until
they paused to rest, and saw below
that Viking ships, their deadly foe,
were in the bay and soon would reach
their men who waited on the beach.
They staggered on and passed the top,
and here the chief told them to stop.
"I think" he said "that some of you
have brought more than I told you to.
Empty your bags and let me see.
We have to move more rapidly."
The chief was right, for they had got
their pots and pans, their knives, the lot! —
their precious metal treasures which
they would not let the Vikings snitch.
The chief was kind and did not scold;
instead he thought a bit, then told
them: "This idea seems best to me:
here where the Vikings cannot see,
bury your treasures in the ground,
and trust that they will not be found."
They did as they were told, and then
they hurried on their way again.

Meanwhile the men were wishing they
had not been quite so keen to stay.
They had some rusty swords and spears,
but had not had to fight for years.
And as the Viking ships drew near,
their confidence soon turned to fear.
Before the first ship reached the shore,
they had decided to withdraw,
or rather run until they dropped.
And when at last, tired out, they stopped,
one said "I've had a good idea.
There is a little lochan here.
We've no need now of weapons, so
let's hide them: easiest to throw
them in the water. There they'll stay
until the Vikings go away."
They all did as he said, and then
they hurried on their way again.

And so the villagers, by hiking
to the hills, escaped the Viking
raid, and saved their precious treasure.
But this gave them little pleasure:
for they saw the smoke of burning,
and they knew they'd be returning

to the ruins of their village:
victims of the Viking pillage.

This perhaps is why today
there is a hill above the bay
called Hill of Treasure, while beyond
there's Weapon Loch, a muddy pond;
but in the water and the ground
no swords or saucepans have been found.

This story is not original; it is a traditional explanation of the name of a small crag (Torr na h-Ulaidh) which overlooks Achtercairn, Gairloch. I have added the Weapon Loch (Lochan nan Airm), although this probably has a more recent origin; it is near the main road north of Gairloch.

Solstice

Above the village a tumbled ring of rocks
looks out across the sea to Trotternish:
the broken remnant of a massive wall,
half-buried, grass-grown, grandeur long since gone,
a mystery from prehistoric days.
Step back two thousand years and see it whole.
See people living, farming on this hill,
who built their houses with round walls, thatched roofs;
and then built this — a home fit for the gods,
apotheosis of the roundhouse form,
but roofless, open to the sun and moon.
Sun and Moon: the sacred pair who ruled
the circle of the year, the days and nights;
the distant gods who deigned to bless the earth.
And one great fear, perhaps, chilled human hearts
each winter as they watched the setting sun
slide slowly down the ridge of Trotternish,
their light and life fading away. Afraid
of being abandoned to perpetual dark,
they gathered here on winter's shortest day
and prayed and raised a blaze of urgent fire:
the beacon's message shone encouragement
from circle centre through the entrance way
to where the sun sank in a golden glow.
Their efforts were not vain: next day the sun
turned in his track — began his northern run.

This tumbled ring of stones alone remains.
No fire is needed now, except the flame
of knowledge melting superstition's gods.
And yet the ancient instinct was not wrong.
The one true God, creator of all things,
has sent his Sun to shine, not in the sky,
but in the hearts and minds and lives of men.
We celebrate his birth in Bethlehem.

Above Achtercairn there is a large stone circle, which was not a dwelling. The evidence points to its being a kind of Wester Ross equivalent of Stonehenge, a ceremonial circle, one of whose uses was as described here. Charcoal from the central fire has been dated to 250BC.

Falkland Penguinology

When God invented nature, did he foresee that one day there would be penguins?

And did he smile when they came along, and plan their anthropomorphic potentiality (the humanity of penguins, the penguinity of man), and present to each penguin a particular personality?

Gentoo is everyman:
a plain no-nonsense penguin,
city-living, sociable,
busy but balancing work and play —
the sea for fish and for frolic.
He runs when we walk near,
but sit still and he edges slowly close
to study eye to eye this strange new shape.
And we, masters of the world, find the world
for one moment a friendlier place.



Rockhopper rocks, and hops rocks,
a small sack of energy
with a funky hairstyle
and a wicked irritable beady red glinting eye;
fated to a cliff-top life where
each trip from larder to livingroom
is a wave-battered scrabble,
a weary waddle and hop to his skyscraper home.
A feisty fighter, yet he ignores us:
a penguin put-down for the rulers of the world.



Jackass is different: an individualist,
nervous and bashful and — to be frank —
not much to look at; perhaps that is why
he lives alone in a hole.
But the quiet one is the loudest one:
at day's end he raises head to sky
and brays, bellows,
howls his confidence at the world;
and we, lords of the world, lose our sleep.



For the King, presentation is all.
Aristocrat of the penguin world,
he preens and poses, struts and simpers,
handsome and he knows it,
half-witted and he knows it not;
redeemed from aimlessness
by the chick so proudly carried on his feet.
Too self-possessed to acknowledge us,
superior to us mere princes of the world.



Strange how we, despoilers of the world,
can be so moved by
the indifference of penguins.
Here where sealers used to club to death and boil
a thousand penguins, eight for each gallon of oil;
here where our greed bloodied the South Atlantic tide;
here where men quarrelled over territory and died,
penguins bring hope.
No-one can watch penguins without a smile.
When God evolved the penguin, perhaps a ripple of delight
washed through heaven and earth —
and still we catch the backwash of that mirth.

The Secret

The dream dissolved: awake I struggled to recall
How in my dream I grasped the meaning of it all:
Enlightenment — the Lost Chord found, the Holy Grail
Achieved: the secret answer from beyond the veil.
No: sleep's illusion faded and I knew it lied.
Such things are only for the credulous: they hide
Where gnostic knowledge-mongers ply their foolish trade,
Ecstatic vision giving answers ready-made.
Reality is not so simple: forty-two
Is sadly not the secret, though at least it's true.
Science's latest entry Higgs's Boson's overstated;
Go to philosophy and still you'll be frustrated.
Over the rainbow, in the stars or underground,
Don't bother searching: from the start the secret's found.

*The clue is
in the last
line: it is an
acrostic.*

Volunteering

When I was but a little boy, I heard my mother say
"I love a volunteer", or that was what I thought she said.
And as I wished to please her, I decided every day
I'd volunteer to do a task before I went to bed.
And this has been a habit which I've never overcome,
so mine has been a life obsessed with helping everyone.

When I was young I volunteered
to walk the dog and feed the fishes;
after every meal I cleared
the table and washed up the dishes.
I dusted shelves, I wound the clocks,
I mowed the lawn, I trimmed the shrubs,
I cleaned my room, I darned my socks,
and obviously I joined the Cubs.

At school I always answered questions,
took in books and picked up litter,
stayed behind for extra lessons,
acted as a baby-sitter,
cleaned the blackboard, kept the score,
tidied classrooms, issued hand-outs;
when prep was set I asked for more,
and obviously I joined the Boy Scouts.

At work I'd always volunteer
to make the tea, to work on late,
to post the mail, to buy the beer,
to pay the bill, to lock the gate.
In public life I volunteer
to do the jobs no-one is keen on.
I give a hand, I lend an ear,
a shoulder too to cry or lean on;
face the press, produce the briefings,
and, when no-one else will write 'em,
write the minutes, chair the meetings.
Et cetera, ad infinitum.

The problem is, as you can guess,
I cannot say the small word "No".
And since all I can say is "Yes"
my climb to power has not been slow.

I volunteered my way to being MP;
I volunteered to be the new Prime Minister.
When people asked me how this came to be,
I told them that my rise was nothing sinister:
my mother's chance remark had sown the seed.
My mother, when she heard this, said "My dear,
you heard me wrong; for I'd just read Candide,
and said how very much I loved Voltaire."

The Pool

He wandered carefree as a cloud,
and came upon a pool of water,
and saw, for the first time,
himself.
Narcissus.
Wondering he stopped and gazed,
and knew, for the first time,
his humanity:
the blessing and the curse of self-awareness.

Beneath the surface lay a little world.
Slaters and snails and scuttling shrimps
sheltered in algal groves.
On the muddy plains roamed
small beetles and tardigrade bears.
Like tiny knights in armour
caddis larvae clung to their stones.
Mini-monsters, cyclops and hydra,
threatened no-one.
Overhead water boatmen winged their way
and dragons sailed the sky.

A heaven-sent frog briefly rippled the surface,
but Narcissus saw only his own face,
heard only the echo of his own voice.
Trapped in the whirlpool of himself
he drowned.

Stone Ball

Time is a serial book,
a story revealed sentence by sentence,
the future yet to be written;
but the past is damaged — letters illegible,
sentences smudged, pages lost.
In the prehistoric past only a scatter of words remains,
all nouns.
From four thousand years comes ago this ball,
and hundreds like it, stone strangely carved
perhaps to hold, perhaps to tie on rope:
lost nouns looking for their verbs.

Speculate. Is it a —

prize which people won before our cups or medals were invented;
globe by which the world and all its continents were represented;
oracle with painted symbols, rolled to tell what fate is bringing;
banged against a drum or log, percussion for a dance or singing;
image of the sacred sun or moon for ritual celebration;
polisher for smoothing leather, or for skin exfoliation;
ball bearings for moving stones which are too big for carrying;
special gift to give to one who's come of age, or marrying;
bauble for a giant's bracelet, or a giantess's necklace;
rope attached, a hunter's bolas, thrown to make the quarry legless;
orb held in the hand of him who rules the tribe, the honoured chief;
kitchen tool for shaping pastry, squeezing fruit, or pounding beef;
ball for playing ancient games like our football or golf or tennis;
testpiece for examining a stone age stoneworker's apprentice;
scraper used for shaping wood to make a cup or bowl or vessel;
wielded to hammer nails, or with a mortar as a pestle;
like a staff, held in the hand to show which speaker holds the floor;
souvenir or present given as a guest walks through the door;
jack for bowls, or dice for gaming, ball for juggling, top for spinning;
weight for fishing, shot for tossing, canine plaything, stone for slinging;
measured weight to set the standard for the sale of meat or cheese;
symbol of authority for envoys sent across the seas.

Or something else...

Take your pick.

But remember, this is a question without an answer.

*This mystery object is
in Gairloch Heritage
Museum; many similar
balls have been found
around the country, but
their purpose is unknown.*



S.L.O.R.

I'm starting a Society
for Lovers Of the Rain.
You wonder who will join it? —
allow me to explain.
We sit inside our houses and
we watch the window pane,
and as the rain slides down the glass
we bitterly complain,
and talk of awful weather,
and wish for sun in vain,
and curse our British climate
and long to be in Spain,
where rain (we think) is never known,
not even on the plain.
But hate of rain's a state of mind,
a bias in the brain:
why not decide that rain is good? —
go out in it, and train
yourself to count its blessings,
to love it! Yes, regain
your childhood's joy in wetness when
you met with mere disdain
the adults' horror if you played
in pouring, drenching rain.
Learn to simply love our weather,
see it all as gain:
wet or dry, in cloud or sun,
it's pleasure, never pain.
At first you'll find this difficult —
it goes against the grain —
but with a little practice you'll
find water's like champagne:
it cheers you up and cools you down
and takes away the strain.
So when it's raining cats and dogs,
to stay in is inane.
Beginners may wear waterproofs,
but soon you will attain

a higher level where from such
a weakness you'll abstain:
after all, your skin's a perfect
waterproof membrane.
Don't worry if the others stare
and say that you're insane.
The truth is quite the opposite:
it's you who's right as rain.
They grumble when they look outside
"Oh no, not rain again!
How horrible: no choice for us
but indoors to remain."
But you are wiser: "carpe diem"
must be your refrain.
Go out, get wet, and spread the word
to join my rain campaign.

P.S. But perhaps not if it's cold as well.

Home

Home is an onion: a many-layered encirclement of Self.

Home is the immeasurable totality of everything,
the universal cosmos which (who knows why?) exists,
the laws and forces which (who knows how?) produce us.

Home is this one galactic conglomeration,
elegantly spiral, mother of uncountable stars,
our own island of something in a vast everything.

Home is our small diverse flock of wanderers,
joyfully circling their great benevolent shepherd,
the radiant giver of life and illumination.

Home is our very own loveliest of worlds,
rich with the wonders of ingenious life,
ripe for our enjoying, and for our despoiling.

Home is my own peculiar set of accidents,
unchosen circumstance of family and time,
chosen context of place and people and purpose.

Home is that one small shelter I call my own,
comfortable refuge from the threats of otherness,
a nest adorned by memories and amusements.

Home is this wondrous compound with scaffolding of bone,
dressed with flesh and a complexity of organs,
receptacle of mind itself, myself: the I which is at home.

And some day this home will fail,
the onion peeled down to nothingness
to reveal — nothing.

Or maybe not: perhaps it is planted
in an infinite garden where my Self finds at last
its final home, with the great gardener.

March

Time marches on and March is back:
March, month of moody ambivalence,
the adolescent of the calendar,
poised on the equinoctial fence,
swaying on the seasonal see-saw.
March it does not, but meanders,
trudging one day to a wintry dirge,
sprinting the next in a spring-loaded dance:
battlefield of the seasons, the Ides of the year.
But this Mars is a mere apprentice,
his war mercifully brief, the winner certain:
the rainbow after rain, the flowering of life,
the death of death, the victory of hope.
In this war the good clichés always win.
Time marches on and March is gone.

The March of the Months

First comes *January*, dashing hopefully into the year.
February strolls more slowly, grumbling, with no cause to cheer.
March attempts to march but, wind-assisted, totters into spring.
Happy *April* scampers as the growing year at last takes wing.
May flies, splashing all with light and colour (often water colour).
June struts proudly at the solstice summit. But the view grows duller...
Tired *July* just wanders idly, swatting flies and mopping sweat.
Sultry *August* saunters through the summer, stagnant, hot and wet.
Livelier *September* dances merrily and shares the stage
with *October* — older, wiser, cooler now in middle age.
November trudges, silent, sullen, suffering from slow starvation.
December crawls, only alive through artificial respiration.

Swords and Ploughshares

Poppies grew in Flanders fields
splashing blood-red the ground
as if there was not blood enough:
nature's innocent mockery of madness,
of the plague of rage which blew red
across the continent;
or maybe nature agonising for humanity,
sweating, like Christ in Gethsemane garden,
drops of blood.

Happier the world
if Flanders had been a garden indeed
where men dug flowerbeds not trenches
and battled only weeds,
if the blind guides who led the world into despair
had spent their ambition
caring for a little plot of land,
nurturing poppies on compost,
not on the flesh of men.

Christmas Angels

Christmas Eve. Under a fickle moon I feel my way,
the path a glimmer of crusted frosted snow;
stand still to hear the quiet coda of the day
as darkness quenches sunset's dying glow.
Below, the sea's slow swishing rhythm whispers calm;
the bass note is the river's muted roar.
Night's leitmotifs — a blackbird's staccato alarm,
a dog's quick bark, a child's happy cry — then no more
but silence, sea and river breathing the earth asleep.
Still I strain to listen, as the stars on the stave of the sky
sketch their vast theme. And suddenly, distant, deep
beneath the universe, a flash of a greater symphony:
on the edge of hearing, a crash of glory that shakes the earth.
It fades: the path leads on, to church, to celebrate a Birth.

Him

In my dream I was woken
by the singing of birds,
louder and happier than I ever heard.
The garden was aglow with music,
and my heart was warmed by it.
In awe of I knew not what
I crept to the window, peeped out,
and saw, sitting on the bench,
Him.
All of me — body, mind, spirit — knew him:
terror and joy battled within me.
I hid myself behind the curtain, then
dared to look again. His eyes met mine:
and he smiled.
And in that smile my world changed —
doubt banished, guilt washed away,
drowned in the glory of his presence.
I ran outside, and fell at his feet.
Every bird and flower, every leaf
sang joyful praise to its maker,
and the garden was made a paradise,
wrapped in the power of his peace...
I woke to a bright morning
and the glow in my heart told me
the truth of my dream.

Home

I reach out and touch the horizon
and home becomes a bowl
rimmed by hills and sea —
a bowl filled for me
with milk and honey.
If only I could take it with me
as I travel beyond the rim
and sip its sweetness
when the world grows sour.

Chaos

"You can not step into the same river twice." (Heraclitus, c.500BC)

God be praised for the disorder of the world,
for bees bumbling from flower to random flower,
for sparrows bush-squabbling over noisy nothings,
for the chaotic collapse of water down the stream,
for fractal clouds forever reinventing the sky.
So nature never repeats, randomised by chaos,
breaking the bland continuum of matter
from boredom into beauty.

A grass waves in the wind:

no grass was ever the same as this, waved like this.

Your every footstep enters a new world.

Every tree in that monotony of forest is itself.

Every face, place, moment, midge, ridge, raspberry
is a one-off wonder.

And then God made Man with the gift of mind
and gave to him the Eden of the earth.

But dissatisfied with Paradise

he prefers rational to random, concrete to chaos,
battling disorder — but forever baffled
by the unpredictable uncontrollable genius of nature.

A rustle of autumn leaves swirls

in a fluke of wind, and — oh so easily! —

creates a pattern never seen before,

never to be seen again.

The Dream (18th September)

The village woke to find, in every street,
advertisements which showed the fishing fleet
and posed the question "Want to catch more fish?
Join us," they said, "and you'll fulfil your wish.
We know a place of plenty where you'll find
the seas are teeming and the land is kind:
a land fertile with crops of every sort,
a sea where fish are eager to be caught.
Come with us to this land of milk and honey
and never more will you be short of money."

*18th September
was the date
of the Scottish
Independence
Referendum. The
Yes side was led
by Salmond and
Sturgeon, the No
side by Darling.
This piece is
obviously biased.*

The names below appeared to some auspicious,
but fishy to the rest, who were suspicious:
the leader was called Trout, his second Whiting.
So quiet village life became exciting
as parties formed and arguments began:
to stay at home or seek the promised land?
The Stay-at-homers' leader was called Dear;
he told the Seekers what they had to fear
in leaving home for unknown foreign shores
and risking life and fortune without cause.
"Scaremongering," said Trout to each prediction,
and out of hand dismissed it as pure fiction.
When Dear asked what was wrong with village life
and why they were so keen to stir up strife,
"Mere balderdash," cried Trout. "We must be free:
in our own land is where we ought to be."
Soon Trout and Whiting's vision ruled supreme
as hearts were stirred by this romantic dream
and minds were closed to questions and to doubt.
Poor Dear was clueless how to answer Trout.
Some help came when the rulers of the city
arrived and told them it would be a pity
to lose so fine a village, and they swore
to tax the people less and pay them more;
they held debates which filled the village hall,
but still the outcome was too close to call.
The great day came at last for the migration,
and Trout and Whiting, filled with expectation,
awaited by the boats the multitude.
They waited, but the boats remained uncrewed.
They waited, but by nightfall, all alone,
they knew the dream was done, their hopes had flown.
The villagers, awake at last, had seen
that this whole project was indeed a dream,
and gambling all their livelihoods away
seemed foolish in the clearer light of day;
for life, if not quite perfect, was okay.
And so their Aye turned just in time to Nay.

Mini-Macbeth

Witches: Macbeth of Glamis, and Cawdor, and our King.
Macbeth: One out of three: what nonsense you do sing.

Ross: Cawdor's dead: his place is yours, Macbeth.
Macbeth: Wow, that was quick: next, wait for Duncan's death.
Lady Macbeth: No! You must kill him now, while he's our guest.
Macbeth: Must I? Of course you always know what's best.
Is this a dagger? Yes. [He does the deed.]
Lady Macbeth: Well done, you're King. Now backbone's all you need.

Porter: You knocked? Come in.
Macduff: We want to see the King.
Alas, he's dead! Who did this bloody thing?

Macbeth: A few loose ends: I'll hire a contract killer.
First, Banquo... Oh! — his ghost! Now that's a chiller:
I'm off to ask the witches for a hand.

Witches: Macduff, trees walking and an unborn man
are all you need to fear.

Macbeth: A good reply.
Macduff and all his family must die.

Messenger 1: Bad news, my lord: the Queen is going barmy;
Macduff lives, and has brought an English army.

Messenger 2: Worse news, my lord: the Queen has gone and died,
and Birnam Wood has just arrived outside.

Macbeth: Against all humans born I've still protection.
Macduff: Bad luck: I entered life by Caesar section.
Congratulations, Malcolm, you're now King.
But mind, you owe the English everything.

The number of currently common mistakes you can find in the following depends partly on your views on language, but it is intended to have nine:

So, today the issue is, is modern education seems to you and I to be comprised of recreation. Prior to today, there was a different criteria: the grades of he who knew the rules of grammar were superior.

Wester Ross

I wrote myself a landscape in my dreams,
a poem crafted with meticulous art.
To begin, I selected proper substantives
of ancient geological etymology,
and shaped them with strong erosive verbs
actively modified by aesthetic adverbs.
The outline complete, I seasoned it
with a diversity of colourful epithets
and planted newly-minted botanical nouns.
I varied the diction from quiet lyric
to climactic epic grandeur.
I added rhetorical flourishes:
liquid alliteration, craggy interjections,
a touch of high-flown metaphor.
No civilising rhyme or regularity here,
but a wilderness of syntactic subtleties
and hidden rhythms.
I polished the phrasing until
the meaning shone out, clear and bright.
It was done: and I saw that it was good.
And then I woke, and behold,
the poem I had written in my dream was true
and it was called Wester Ross.
But the Writer was not I.

