Heaven's Gate



Cuillins on Skye. Photo by Lily Spence

Poems by Keith Spence

HEAVEN'S GATE

Shakespeare: Sonnet XXIX

... Like to the lark at break of day arising from sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate ...

My poems are a way of knocking at Heaven's gate. I am not much of a singer! From the routine day and common task of 'sullen earth', I rise in words to reach for the sense of beauty, hope, joy which I feel is there, waiting for us.

As with my earlier poetry books, the sale of them goes to the work of Hospice at Home, to support their wonderful work with cancer patients. I am happy to receive any donations for this cause.

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SKYE SONG

Jagged teeth biting the air at the limit of the world, where otters roll in waves and porpoise jump for joy, this is Skye.

Waves dash onto rocks older than Adam, feet sunk into the icy cold, of lonely Loch Coruisk, this is Skye.

The Cuillins ridge so high, magnet to climbers, who traverse the teeth, stepping across the void, this is Skye.

Down Glen Sligachan go walkers striding out, in incessant driving rain looking for a welcome inn, this is Skye.

As evening closes on the darkening day, across the sound a silent cloud of fog rolls over the island, this is Skye.

CURLEWS

Across the windswept northern fells rising and falling with the clouds, is a tiny shape flying at speed up high, and uttering a mournful cry.

The sound pierces the brooding air like a wild whistle cutting the sky, it strikes fire into your very being, a revelation you are seeing.

Whether city types or country folk, no matter class or education , we are transformed to natures's friends by a sound that never ends.

Follow their flight to the lonely sea where curlews gather on the beach, and watch them paddle with style, they really make me smile. MORNING (Part 1 of Triptych)

It catches unawares, this gentle brightness when trees take shape, and birds sing, it is familiar and yet always new.

Held in the changing bars of light that cross the bedroom wall in silence, is a promise of something new.

Along the wet pavement and houses stirs a song we all remember, so stepping out we start anew.

A rainbow unfurls above, just to show us our dreams awoken with an adventure new.



NOON (Part 2 of Triptych)

Cows slow time, to chew each passing second to the bone ,in contemplative resting.

Sunlight filters through the trees, to sparkle across the rippled and breathing river.

Here is our source of constant satisfaction, the crown of day, when all is alive.

Sunlight blesses the flowers, bursting with their scented mouths all smiling.



NIGHT (Part 3 of Triptych)

The rooks chatter like stones struck together as they whirl to roost with the fading light.

Across the lake the last ferry is tied bobbing at the silent pier, final passengers gone.

A clear and moonless night with starlight spreading across the black mountains shape.

Pale waves roll towards the near shore, as the trees sigh softly under the evening star.



DON'T WORRY (Bob Marley)

Just a slip of a song with a catchy beat, easy to learn and you tap your feet.

"Every little thing's gonna be alright", forget your fears, the future's bright.

Three little birds gave us the song, "don't worry", it takes you along

Reggae's rhythms broke new ground, uniting people the world around.

The Trenchtown music is so cool, broke barriers, love will rule. ELGAR'S CELLO (Jacqueline Du Pre)

What alchemy is this, an aged man's lament for a war blasted past, with a young woman's open soul?

Simple themes, like tunes heard as he cycled the Malvern hills on his solitary ancient bicycle.

How can one so young comprehend his aching loss, and nostalgia, flowing through the notes?

Disastrous in its first outing, almost, never heard, Elgar's elegy silent for long years afterwards.

Then, arriving in the swinging sixties, pouring emotion into the air with Jacqueline's flying fingers.

The cello's deep heart sang it's pain, captured by her bow so completely, Elgar and she became one.

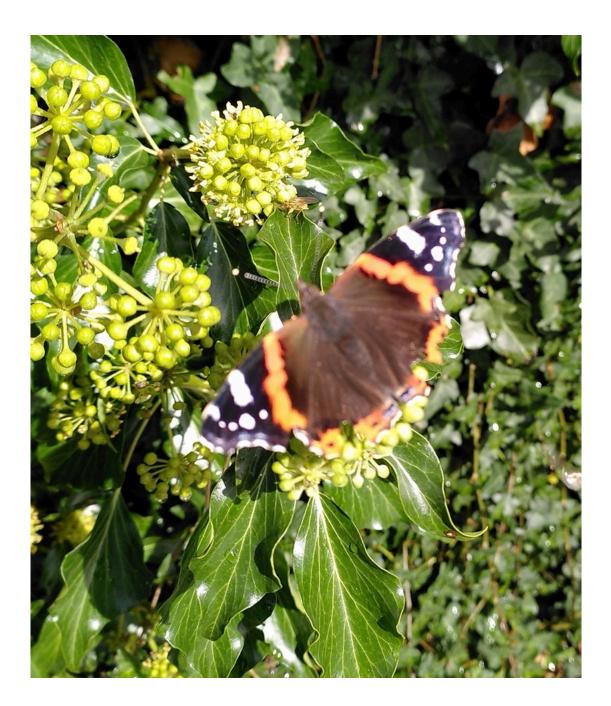
LATE FLOWERING

Seasons fall beside the way as climate change dictates, summer comes in disguise and autumn colour's late.

Roses flourish in the sun when leaves begin to fall, and butterflies nectar is found in ivy on the wall.

Life continues to amaze, as new variations arise, when all seems fated it still springs a surprise.

When news can plunge us into deep despair, late flowering hope floats on autumn's air.



AWARD WINNING

There is hardly a film or a book that isn't promoted with fame, if you want to sell some in bulk then choose a familiar name.

Of course, we all love winners, striving, anxious to be known, there is a reflected glory on us when we can pin them down.

But, it soon becomes a bore when every name is a star, they can't all be so successful, I just wonder who they are?

Perhaps it would look better if they reduced the hype a bit, don't try so hard to impress, they can't all be such a hit!

OYSTER CATCHERS

A cold light of evening spreads across the autumn hills where sheep prepare to spend another freezing night. It has been a calm day, with light clouds, just a tracery of white vapour from passing jets in the height of heaven.

Then, above the fells pink glow from the setting sun a few specks come swiftly moving across the sky, and the unmistakeable cry fills the air with magic, a haunting whistle of oyster catchers passing by my home.

What loneliness it conjures up, of windswept moors and shimmering mudflats stretching seawards, there they tiptoe looking for nourishing food, and with other waders search together , forwards in unison.

I have heard them high in city skies , fast as jets, with life-time partners in a close formation, bringing the wilderness into urban squalor, a reminder of nature's ever present relation to ourselves.

A MACKEREL SKY

Dawn flushes the hills, fleecy smoke rolling across their flanks, sun warms earth.

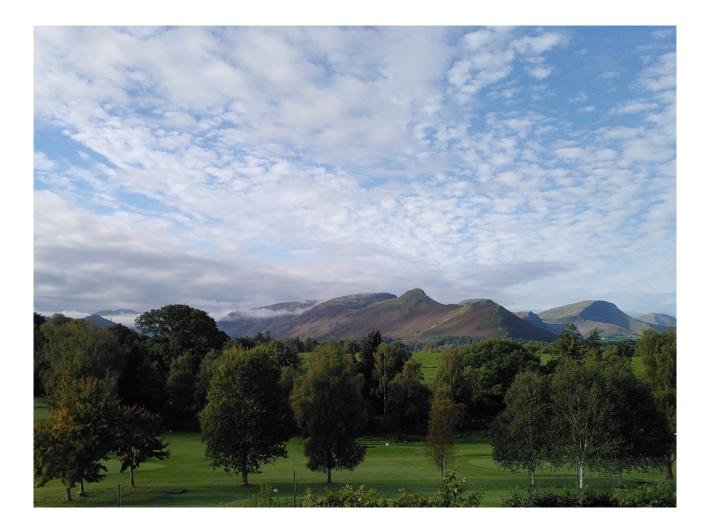
Such tender hopes grow with the day, offering so much, we smell the air.

A day to climb high towards the clouds, as we did before, fit and young?

Age means that the green path is not taken to the top, just the flanks.

Vision is no less, these volcanic ribs still inspire our spirits.

Ribbons of cloud float in space, promising joy in walking.



WALKING

From the first tottering steps, arms spread wide to keep our balance, we learn the biped walk.

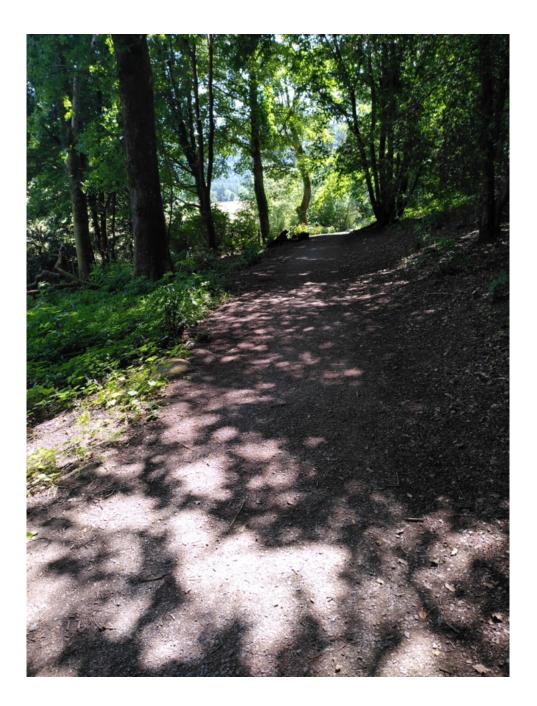
In youth we run for choice, walking is for wimps, get there first our ambition, make them talk.

Discovering hills and moors creates a new dynamic, seeing how far we can tramp in a day.

Soon mountains loom ahead, challenging muscles and lungs with height, and taking fear away.

In old age we still venture, feeling the urge again, but this time, easier, flat ground we seek.

Lingering in dappled light, along woodland paths, with time to reflect on nature's delights.



SYCAMORE GAP

On all the photos, proud and strong, a tree for the ages, source of a song, linking our past with the Roman wall, where the legions tramped along.

This famous tree a lone sycamore, gave silent witness to local lore, loved of hikers trekking the wall, vandalised, it stands no more.

Who would want to chop it down, what motive can a person own to desecrate this harmless tree, and will it ever be known?

Violence can take strange forms, as protest oversteps the norms, but this mindless catastrophe is worse than winter storms.

Trees are our inherited friends, ancient neighbours, who send oxygen and water to our sky, without them life would end.

MULTI-CULTURAL BLUES

("Multiculturalism has failed" Suella Braverman, Tory Home Secretary)

I heard this remark the other day, I couldn't believe she would say such a crazy thing to woo the Right.

When you are floundering in a mess you shout your mouth off, I guess and leave your brains out of sight.

She's a successful immigrant child, so why is she making such wild accusations of a cultural blight ?

Every city in this beautiful country has its immigrant citizens aplenty, who exactly is she trying to fight?

Our national sports teams recruit, immigrant talents that really suit, it's a policy of doing what's right.

We're a hybrid nation from history so really there isn't a big mystery, let's all help her to see the light! WATERFALL (Stenkrith falls, Kirkby Stephen)

It is the noise attracts you first, the roaring, crashing, sound filling the air with spray, until you see the liquid force leap out of the very ground.

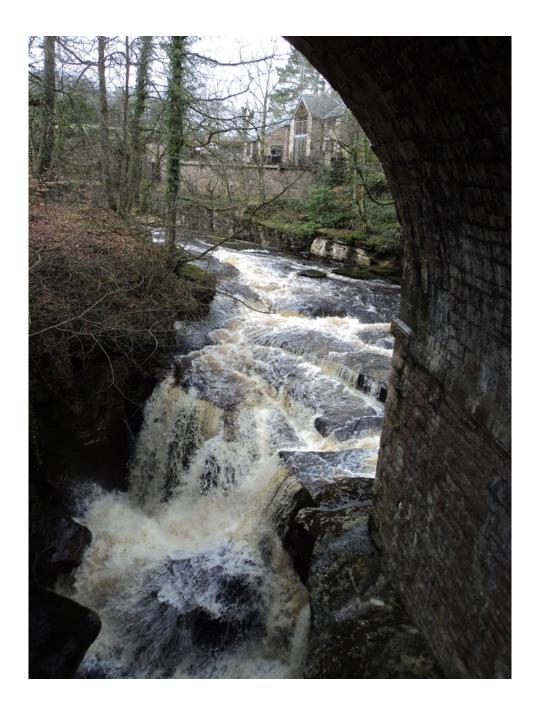
There are river monsters that hurtle over cliffs, huge falls, Niagara, Victoria, chasms of molten energy carving out valleys through rock, which echo between vast walls.

Here, at Stenkrith, the Eden hollows out a rock ravine, slender bridges, sculpting limestone into fantastic shapes, of bowls and cups, cut from stones that lean.

Elemental force of water, challenging us to create mills, and sluices, a hush* washing down the minerals we burrow out of hills, for the fortune of a magnate.

Stand and listen to the roar, nature's choir of change, remnant of the ice and snow that gripped the land below, before we set foot on soil, or on a mountain range.

(* A hush is a mining dam used by lead miners on the fells)



DAWDLING

Childhood reverie supreme, slow absorption of time, a true art of seeing.

Then in venerable years, standing stock still, just fixed upon being.

Dawdling, life's simple gift an act of contemplation, of being aware.

The mind and body one, resting in silence, is beyond compare.

SAVED

My latest poem complete the words are rhyming, got the meaning I seek, it's all about the timing.

So, now I can end typing and with one finger stop a flow of creative writing, pressing 'save' at the top.

Word processing for me, I can change mistakes, trying to make work free, taking off the brakes.

Would that life did this, allowed a new re-write, I guess it's just a wish, make it all come right.

Funny, saved is a word used by religious folk, if their pleas are heard, fixing what was broke.

Their life turned around, starting again like new, fresh inspiration found, I like the idea, don't you?

GAZA

The well is empty of all its tears shed for this land, a running wound for so many years.

Bitterness burned into the stones from savage violence, no mercy to ease the broken bones.

The destiny of two great nations locked in deadly fear, lost in vengeance not reparations.

We mourn so many lives stricken caught in crossfire, unable to mourn the other's children.

The loss is ours, pain universal as bloodshed rises, and major powers brook no reversal.

We cry out, often with profanity to end this insanity, to plead for our common humanity.

PRAYING

Seems a waste of time to sit and pray, as if eternal power hears what I say, with whole universes expanding out, timeless dark matter flowing away.

What difference do human cries make, can the inevitable alter for my sake? Among galaxies, circling round, me expecting answers looks like a mistake.

But, millions do give time to prayer, so, what are we doing, why do we care, from ancient times to modern day, when it appears to be a forlorn affair?

Daily miracles of existence show creatures like us, all able to know, despite nature's iron laws, what is good, and with compassion, grow.

Prayer is tapping silent power enabling love to live and flower, reflecting a new strength within, a grace sufficient for each hour.

GERALD DURRELL (Founder of Jersey Zoo)

A gentle pioneer of conservation, friend to animals great and small, a childhood passion taking root in Jersey's quiet old country hall.

A lifetime, dramatised in books, spent looking for rare creatures, seeking to nurture and protect them, out of poachers reaches.

His zoo, now universally known, he established to breed and save species endangered in the wild, encouraging others to be brave.

So many primates, many birds he saved from cruel extinction, his statue at the zoo sits quiet, loving tribute to his distinction.



THE CLIMBER

Age, no barrier to ambition, the drive for the top remains even when in your eighties.

Rocks have a fascination, a siren call to the climber, each crevice and buttress demanding a response.

Summer it was mountains, in winter the indoor wall, each with its challenge to stretch the senses.

Climbing is a lifelong sport, fulfilling in its pleasure, forgetting all life's aches as you climb higher.

