

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 nature'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.

Linger 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.

