

CREACHADH
NA CLÀRSAICH

Plundering the Harp

CRUINNEACHADH DE BHARDACHD
1940-1980

RUARAIH MACTHÒMAIS

Collected Poems
1940-1980

DERICK THOMSON



MACDONALD PUBLISHERS · EDINBURGH

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ISBN 0 904265 58 7 (*limp*)
0 904265 57 9 (*cased*)

Published by
Macdonald Publishers
Edgefield Road, Loanhead, Midlothian

*The publisher acknowledges the financial
assistance of the Scottish Arts Council
in the publication of this volume*

Printed in Scotland by
Macdonald Printers (Edinburgh) Limited
Edgefield Road, Loanhead, Midlothian EH20 9SY

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1 AN UILEBBHEIST

Ag òirigh á muir uaine
cobhar-shrianagach an Fhoghair,
air d'uilinn,
O uilebheist mo dhomhain,
tha mi tighinn thugad le m'adhradh,
le mo shùilean prabach, leis a' chainnt
a dh'ionnsaich mi aig d'altair,
leis na briathran
a choisrig mi 'na do sheirbheis,
leis a' cheòl
a chuaileanaich ma mo chluasan,
leis na buadhan,
leis a' chreideamh —
mòr no beag e—
leis an fheirg,
leis a' mheirg air mo bhilean,
leis a' ruithleum, leis a' bhàs
a dh'fhuing mi air do sgàth,
leis a' bhrèig, leis an taise,
le do mhaise ga mo mhealladh,
leis a' chruas, leis a' chràdh,
leis a' chuimhne, leis a' chridhe,
leis a' chridhe sin a chailleadh,
leis a' chaile-chridhe-bianain,
leis a' mharcan-seachran-sine,
leis an earball-sailte-sàile,
leis an fhuidheall dhe mo ghràdh dhut.

2 NA FREICEADAIN

An Gallan 's Aird Chirc 's Aird Phabail
'nam freiceadain nuair thilleas m'anam,
's ged gheibh mi seachad air a' Ghallan
tha Biastan Thuilm 'na mo rathad
is altair na Circe ga falach
le sprùilleach de chlachan-meallain,
is sagairtean Phabail
a' cantainn na h-èifhreann an Laideann
's ri èisdeachd chan fhan iad.

1 THE MONSTER

As you rise from the green sea,
foam-streaked with Autumn,
on your elbow,
O monster of my world,
I come to you in worship,
with red-rimmed eyes, a language
learnt at your altar,
the words
I consecrated to your service,
the music
that stole upon my hearing,
the talents,
the faith —
small or great —
anger,
the rust on my lips,
the élan, the death
I suffered for your sake,
the lies, the sentiment,
your beauty blinding me,
the hardness, the pain,
the memory, the heart,
that heart I forfeit,
phosphorescent heart,
spendthrift spindrift,
salt-tail-tangle,
remnant of my regard for you.

2 THE WATCHMEN

The Gallan, Chicken Head and Bayble Point
will be the watchmen when my soul returns,
and though I may pass the Gallan
the Beasts of Holm are in my road,
and the altar of Kirk Head hidden
under a scatter of hailstones,
and the Bayble priests
chanting the mass in Latin,
not waiting for listening or confession.

(Chicken Head and Kirk Head (Rubha na Cìrce) are one and the same. The Norse name, referring to a church, is misinterpreted in Gaelic. Bayble is a Norse name, containing the Norse word for "monk".)

3 AN ÒDHRAG

Gu h-àrd air a' phalla
tha 'n òdhrag liathghorm 'na laighe,
ri feitheamh.

Tha miig neart 'na mo sgèith,
dh'fhàg mi chreag às mo dhèidh,
chail an t-eunadair geur
a shealladh 's a ghrèim,
tha mi saor anns an speur,
's mi tuiteam.

3 THE YOUNG SHAG

High on the rock-ledge
lies the blue-grey shag,
waiting.

Strength came to my wing,
I left the rock behind me,
the eager fowler
lost sight and grip of me,
I am free in the sky,
falling.

4 LEANNAN M'ÒIGE

Cia fhaide thuit mi bhuat, a leannain m'òige?
le do chuailean donn 's do shuilean dorcha,
gach lag is bràigh nach do dh'fhidir mi, nach do dh'fhairich mi,
Muirneag an toiseach Og-mhios,
is Méalaiseal is Mòinteach Shuardail,
is Loch nan Ruigheannan a' sniomh
a ghàirdeanan mu mo chom.
Clach Steinn 'na bloighean mas do dh'fhalbh mi
's an saoghal ud 'na phristealan mu mo chasan.

4 SWEETHEART OF MY YOUTH

How far have I fallen from you, sweetheart of my youth?
with your brown hair and your dark eyes,
each mound and hollow that I did not know, did not feel,
Muirneag in early June,
and Méalaiseal and Swordale Moor,
and Loch nan Ruigheannan with its arms
clasped round me.
The Norse Stone shattered before I left,
and that world in shards about my feet.

5 AN DOIRBEARDAN

Tha 'n doirbeardan anns an lochan fheurach
ri mion-shnámh eadar lusan chraobhach,
is meanbh-ghluasadan a bhith shaoghalta
air an òrdachadh;
agus ma tha a Chlach-Steinn-san air a bloigheadh
dè 'n diofar?
Dè 'n diofar dhutsa, a dhoirbeardain na h-Albann,
a dhoirbeardain Shasainn, a dhoirbeardain an t-saoghail mhòir,
ged a bhiodh do reul-iùil a dhith ort
's do chridhe 'na phristealan 'na do chuimhne?

5 THE MINNOW

The minnow in the grassy loch
minutely-swims between branching plants:
the tiny movements of his earthly life
are ordained;
and though his Norse Stone be shattered
what of it?
What's it to you, minnow of Scotland,
minnow of England, minnow of the wide world,
though your guiding star be lost
and your heart in shards in your memory?

6 "BÜRN IS MÖINE 'S COIRC"

"Bürn is möine 's coirc"—
facal am beul strainnseir,
ann an dùmhlachd a' bhaile,
ann am baile nan strainnsear.
Boile! An cridhe gòrach
a' falpanaich mu na seann stallachan ud
mar nach robh slighe-cuain ann
ach i.

An cridhe ri bacan, car ma char aig an fheist
's i fàs goirid,
's an inntinn saor.
Is daor a cheannaich mi a saorsa.

7 DH'FHAIRICH MI THU LE MO CHASAN

Dh'fhairich mi thu le mo chasan
ann an toiseach an t-samhraidh;
m'inntinn an seo anns a' bhaile
a' stri ri tuisge, 's na brògan a' tighinn eadarainn.
Tha dòigh an leanabh duilich a thrèigsinn:
e ga shuathadh fhèin ri mhàthair
gus a faigh e fois.

Dh'fhairich mi taobh an ascaoin dhiot 's an taobh caoin
's cha bu mhisde,
dá thaobh an fheòir is dá ghrèim air an còrna,
riag is còinneach,
is bhon a tha an saoghal a bh'againn
a leantainn ruinn chon a' cheum as fhaide
chan fhiach dhomh am poll sin a ghlanadh
tha eadar òrdagan a' bhalaich.
Agus a-nis aig meadhon latha
tha mi dol a-steach gha mo gharadh,
le mo chasan-rùisgte air fàd ri taobh na cagait.

6 "WATER AND PEATS AND OATS"

"Water and peats and oats"—
a word in a stranger's mouth,
in the throng of the town,
in the town of the strangers.
Madness. The foolish heart
lapping along these ancient rocks
as though there were no sea-journey in the world
but that one.
The heart tied to a tethering post, round upon round of the rope
till it grows short,
and the mind free.
I bought its freedom dearly.

7 I GOT THE FEEL OF YOU WITH MY FEET

I got the feel of you with my feet
in early summer;
my mind here in the city
strives to know, but the shoes come between us.
The child's way is difficult to forget:
he rubs himself against his mother
till he finds peace.
I felt the rough side of you and the smooth
and was none the worse of it,
the two sides of the grass and the two grips on the barley,
peat-fibre and moss,
and since the world we knew
follows us as far as we go
I need not wash away that mud
from between the boy's toes.
And now, in middle age,
I am going in to warm myself,
with my bare feet on a peat beside the hearth.

8 A' MHÓINTEACH

'Se mhóinteach as fheàrr leam,
an riasg ud a' gluasad fo mo chasan gu faire,
agus an aonranachd,
oir 'se 'n aonranachd a tha an dàn dhuinn;
air cho fiataidh 's gum bi briathran
aig a' cheann ma dheireadh
ruigidh sinn inbhe nam beathaichean snàgach
fo dhion an rèisg is fo bhinn a-màireach.
A' mhóinteach thuiganach thonnach thorrach
'na laighe siud gu sìorraidh
's a craos fosgailte,
a' slugadh chaorach,
is dhaoine,
's gam shlugadh-sa.
Ach 'se mhóinteach as fheàrr leam:
na bothaichean dubha, a' chòinneach,
fliuch le srùladh Earraich,
reubadh dealanaich air bac, as t-Fhoghar,
is pruganan fraoich.
Is gaoth na mòintich sin ann am meadhon na mara
air m'aire.

9 CHAILL MI MO CHRIDHE RIUT

Chaill mi mo chridhe riut ann an toiseach Màigh,
bha do shliasaid bliath,
teann, min, 's ged a b'òigh thu
bha do chiochan lán,
bòidheach fon t-sròl uaine;
agus ann an Og-mhios nan uan
laigh mi air t'uaichdar,
's cha robh thu air do thruailleadh;
is an uair a thàinig Iuchar
dh'fhaoisgneadh na lusan
is thàinig bliath air a' chanach;
ach thàinig a sin am bruaillean
is fras air na gruaidhean
is mas robh fhios agam dè chanainn
thàinig an lith donn air a raineach,
's cha robh a chridh agam na chanadh
gun do chaill mi sìoda min a' chanaich.

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8 THE MOOR

The moor is what I like best,
that peat-fibre moving under my feet to the skyline,
and the loneliness,
for loneliness is what is in store for us;
however generous words may be
at the end of the day
we reach the level of the crawly creatures
protected by the peat and facing tomorrow's doom.
The heaving, billowy fruitful bog
lying there till eternity
with its mouth open,
swallowing sheep,
and men,
and me.
But the moor is what I like best:
the black bogs, the moss
wet with streaming spring,
lightning's gash on a bank, in Autumn,
and tufts of heather.
And the wind of that moor in the midst of the sea
holding me.

9 I LOST MY HEART TO YOU

I lost my heart to you at the start of May,
your thighs were warm,
firm and smooth, and though you were a maid
your breasts were full,
beautiful beneath green satin;
and in the lambs' month June
I lay upon you,
and you were not defiled;
and when July came
the buds of the plants burst open
and bloom came on the cotton grass;
but then came anxiety
and tears on cheeks,
and before I knew what to say
a brown tint spread over the bracken,
and I could not say—I had not the heart to do it—
that I had lost the smooth silk of the cotton grass.

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10 BHA DO SHÙILEAN CIÙIN

Bha do shùilean ciùin, a latha sin,
beag, aosda,
aodann na h-àird an ear
sgith le coiseachd ròidean Ruisia,
rochach mar chaillich Thibetich,
's do lámhan an-fhoiseil
air cuibhle na h-ùrnaigh;
chunna mi sealladh dhìot air bruaich na Ganges
's tu 'g ràdh riut fhèin—dh'fheumadh tu sin—
gu robh sal a' pheacaidh agad ri ghlanadh dhìot;
cha b' e do pheacadh fhèin, cha robh sin mòr,
peacadh nan athraichean.
Cha robh do pheacadh fhèin ach beag:
corra bhriag nuair a thigeadh e teann ort,
càineadh corra uair;
cha do chuir thu làmh ann a fearann do choishearsnaich,
cha d' rinn thu magadh air ceòl nan Innseanach,
cha do chuir thu às do chainnt Shìna,
cha dug thu oighreachd an Tighearna do chàmhail
's na daoine bàsachadh leis a' chaitheimh.
Peacadh nan athraichean 'na do chliabh
is spruilleach a' ghràis a' tuiteam troimh na briagan.

10 YOUR EYES WERE GENTLE, THAT DAY

Your eyes were gentle, that day,
tiny, old,
the face of the East
tired with walking the roads of Russia,
wrinkled like an old Tibetan woman,
with your hands restless
on the prayer-wheel;
I caught a glimpse of you on the banks of the Ganges
as you told yourself—you had no opium—
that you must wash off the stain of sin;
it was not your own sin, that was not great,
the sins of the fathers.
Your own sins were trifling:
an occasional lie when you were cornered,
a little defamation of character;
you did not meddle with your neighbour's land,
nor mock the music of the Indians,
you did not obliterate China's language,
nor give the Lord's inheritance to camels
while men died of consumption.
The sins of the fathers in your creel
and crumbs of grace falling through its apertures.

(The Gaelic word for the apertures in a creel has a homophone which means "lies").

11 A' CLUICH AIR FOOTBALL LE FÀIDH

Ma bha thu riann a' cluich air football le fàidh
leanaidh a' chuimhne sin riut,
cha tèid i fodha ann an cop phàipearan-naidheachd,
ann a spruilleach chairtean bingo;
turchair spioradail.
'Sann air fàidhean an Aonaidh a b' eòlaich mi,
ach thuig mi, gu math tràth,
gu robh fàidhean anns an Eaglais Shaoir cuideachd,
fàidhean ann am Barraigh
agus eadhon anns an Eilean Sgitheanach,
agus beag air bheag thuig mi

11 PLAYING FOOTBALL WITH A PROPHET

If you ever played football with a prophet
you will remember it,
the memory is not submerged in the froth of newspapers,
in the strewn bingo cards:
a spiritual jetsam.
I was better acquainted with Church of Scotland prophets,
but understood, quite young,
that there were prophets in the Free Church too,
prophets in Barra,
and even in Skye,
and bit by bit I came to know

nach robh tròcair an Tighearna air a cuingealachadh
ri creud no ceàrnaidh
no eadhon cànan.
'Se 'm peacadh as motha
a bhith càrnadh a' ghràis gu léir 'na do chliabh fhèin.

12 IS CHUNNAIC MI THU 'NA DO CHLOICH

Is chunnaic mi thu 'na do chloich
sàthie am meadhon mòintich,
stobach, stuirceanach,
còinneach mu d' aobrannan,
crotal air do chom,
do chonaltradh ris a' ghealaich seachad
is iobairt do chloinne crìochnaichte,
is thuig mi, thuig mi glè mhath
nach robh e idir fo d'aire
a bhith 'na do Chalanais ann an tìr nam beò.

13 IS DUBH A CHOISICH THU LATHA

Is dubh a choisich thu latha
a' caoidh nan gallan bu bhòidhche,
'na do ghurraban cràbhaidh
ann am fàsach do sheòimair,
le d'aparan geur
suathadh dheur 's sgapadh sòlais:
thog an iolaire 'na spòg
mìre 'n ògain bhon chòmhradh.

Is thubhairt thu gur h-e toil Dhè a bh'ann
gun deach am bàta sin air na Biastan,
a' diochumhneachadh na chual' thu às a' chùbainn:
gu robh Abharsair nan iomadh riochd a sàs unnad.

that the Lord's mercy is not confined
by creed or region,
or even language.
The greatest sin
is to pile all of the Grace in your own creel.

12 AND I SAW YOU AS A PILLAR STONE

And I saw you as a pillar stone
set in the midst of a moor,
stocky, defiant,
moss round your ankles,
crotal on your breast,
your converse with the moon over
and your children's sacrifice finished,
and I understood, I knew very well
that it was no part of your purpose
to be a Callanish in the land of the living.

13 BLACK YOU WALKED THROUGH THE DAY

Black you walked through the day
mourning the handsomest youths,
crouching mumbling piety
in the waste of your room,

your bitter apron
wiping tears and routing joy:
the eagle lifted in his talons
the youth's mirth out of the talk.

And you said it was God's will
that that ship went on the Beasts,
forgetting what you had heard from the pulpit:
that the Adversary of many guises was working on you.

(The reference is to the *Iolaire* (Eagle) which was wrecked on the Beasts of Holm, near Stornoway, drowning a large number of returning servicemen, at the end of the First World War).

14 IS CHUNNAIC MI THU 'NA DO BHEAIRT

Is chunnaic mi thu 'na do bheairt
an taigh-cùil is glas air:
thainig bodach eòlach á Glaschu
a dhearbhadh dè bh' unnad,
is dh' aithnich e 'n t-slinn 's an crann-snàth,
an t-sliseag-uchd a bha dlùth ri broilleach,
's am maide-teannaidh;
chunnaic e làrach nan cas,
is làrach nam meur air an spàl,
agus na fuigheagan,
is chaidh e dhachaigh agus rinn e sgeulachd ort.

15 CEÒL NA BEAIRTE

Chan e 'n aon cheòl a th' aig a' bheairt
ann an Leòdhas 's ann a Leeds:
tha Gàidhlig aig beairtean Leòdhais.

16 CLIATHAICH A' CHNUIC

'Na do shuidh a sin
air cliathaich a' chnuic,
's a naosg a' gabhail seachad,
sitheadh ann a siorraidheadh Leòdhais,
bha thu aig fois,
do chrodh faisg ort
's a latha fada,
an àile mhin 'na do chuinnlean
is Beanntan Bharbhais air iomall fàire.

17 AIR MÒINTEACH SHUARDAIL

Ann am beul an latha thog thu ort
gu Mòinteach Shuardail.
B' ao-colthach ris a' phampas i,
ach bha do chù ri do shàil
's bha thu còmradh ris anns a' chainnt Spàinnich.
A' dol seachad air Loch Cheòis
chunna tu caorann a' fàs air eilean

14 AND I SAW YOU AS A LOOM

And I saw you as a loom
in a locked outhouse:
a knowledgeable fellow from Glasgow
came to identify you,
and he recognised the sley and the beam,
the breast-beam that was close to the chest,
and the beam that the weights hung on;
and he saw the footmarks,
and the finger-marks on the shuttle,
and the thrums,
and he went home and wrote a report on you.

15 THE MUSIC OF THE LOOM

The loom does not make the same music
in Lewis and in Leeds:
the Lewis looms have Gaelic.

16 THE SIDE OF THE HILL

Sitting there
on the side of the hill,
with the snipe passing by,
a swoop in the eternity of Lewis,
you were at peace,
your cattle close at hand
and the day long,
the gentle air in your nostrils
and Barvas Hills on the farthest horizon.

17 ON SWORDALE MOOR

At daybreak you set out
for Swordale Moor.
It was hardly reminiscent of the pampas,
but you had your dog at heel
and spoke to him in Spanish.
Passing Keose Loch
you saw a rowan growing on an island,

's gun chraoibh air faire ach i,
is chuimhnic thu air coillean Chile,
air Punta Arenas is Santiago,
boireannaich fo chòmhdach a' mhanilla,
is fion, is measan,
is soitheach a' fàgail cidhe Valparaiso.

18 AM BODACH-RÒCAIS

An oidheh' ud
thàinig am bodach-ròcais dhan taigh-cheilidh:
fear caol àrd dubh
is aodach dubh air.
Shuidh e air an t-sèis
is thuit na cairtean às ar làmhann.
Bha fear a siud
ag innse sgeulachd air Conall Gulban
is roedh na faclan air a bhilean.
Bha boireannach 'na suidh' air stòl
ag òran, 's thug e 'n toradh às a' cheòl.
Ach cha do dh'fhàg e falamh sinn:
thug e òran nuadh dhuinn,
is sgeulachdan na h-àird an Ear,
is spruilleach de dh'fheallsanachd Geneva,
is sguab e 'n teine à meadhon an làir
's chuir e 'n tùrlach loisgeach nar broillichean.

19 FÁS IS TAISE

Ceò mhin 'na laigh' air na buailtean,
sgeallan as a' choirc, a' breacadh nan raon,
stealladair gos frasadh,
is seileasdair a' bòcadh, buidhe ann am bruaich dig:
fàs is taise.
Cò chanadh gu bheil am baile seo ri uchd bàis?
Tha nighean bheag, le sùilean sgeanach,
a' cluiche air tricycle.
Dh'fhalbh an liudhag
is thàinig an dolla à Hong Kong,
is falbhaidh tusa cuideachd
air slighe an fhortain 's an TV
's bidh a' chreathail a' broethadh anns an t-sabhal ur le mullach zinc air.

with no other tree in sight,
and you remembered the forests of Chile,
Punta Arenas and Santiago,
women wearing the mantilla,
and wine, and fruits,
and a ship leaving the quay in Valparaiso.

18 SCARECROW

That night
the scarecrow came into the ceilidh-house:
a tall, thin black-haired man
wearing black clothes.
He sat on the bench
and the cards fell from our hands.
One man
was telling a folktale about Conall Gulban
and the words froze on his lips.
A woman was sitting on a stool,
singing songs, and he took the goodness out of the music.
But he did not leave us empty-handed:
he gave us a new song,
and tales from the Middle East,
and fragments of the philosophy of Geneva,
and he swept the fire from the centre of the floor
and set a searing bonfire in our breasts.

19 HIGH SUMMER

Fine mist lies close to the fields,
wild mustard in the corn, speckling it,
great masterwort ready to shed its seed,
and iris swelling, yellow on wet green bank:
growth and moistness.
Who could guess this village is at death's door?
A little girl, with frightened eyes,
plays on a tricycle.
No rag-doll now—
plastic from Hong Kong—
and you in turn will take
the road of fortune and TV,
and the cradle will rot in the new barn with its zinc roof.

20 DÒMHNALL ISEABAIL

Dùsgadh an òir 'na do dheud
's an gàire mall 'na do shùil.
Bha thu eòlach, a-rèir do theisteanais,
air Hoover 's air Roosevelt,
's bha thu 'na do thramp
air ròidean Ameireagaidh.
Fabhannan crom sgìth
gan togail a-nis air Blàr Phabail,
an *Spectator* air a' bhòrd;
bha là eile aig fear na mònach:
mura b'è a linn anns an d'rugadh tu,
's an dùthaich a dh'altruim thu
dheanadh tu Castro co-dhiù
gun tighinn air a' chòrr.

21 BLÀR PHABAIL

Tha sgoath fhaoileag air Blàr Phabail,
am peiteanan liatha 's geala ris a' ghaoith,
a' mhòinteach lachdann ag èisdeachd riutha:
Seisean Eaglais a Rubha air cruinneachadh,
fuaradh frois' ann, stoirm 'na coltas.
Dè an naidheachd a th' agaibh?
Boireannaich as a' Chlàir,
Bòrd Leasachaidh na Gàidhealtachd air Gàidhlig ionnsachadh,
na Bothanan air am briseadh,
sagairtean Phabail ri diolanas,
sìth ann a Vietnam,
no a bheil sibh a' caoidh nan conastapal
d'am b' aithne crìochan nam poll-mònach,
no a' leughadh a' *Ghasaer*
is facail eagalach mar "Arminianism" nur gàgail?

20 DONALD MATHESON

A gleam of gold in your teeth
and a slow smile in your eye.
You knew Hoover and Roosevelt well,
or so you said,
and you were a tramp
on the roads of America.
Tired, drooping eyelids
raised now to the Bayble bog,
the *Spectator* on the table;
changed days:
had you been born at another time,
and reared in another country,
you might have been a Castro at least,
to put it no higher than that.

21 THE BAYBLE PLAIN

A flock of seagulls on the Bayble Plain,
grey and white waistcoats in the wind,
the tawny moor listening to them:
the Point Kirk Session come together,
breeze before shower, dirty weather ahead.
What news do you have?
Women in presbytery;
the Highland Development Board learning Gaelic;
the bothans broken;
the Bayble priests fornicating;
peace in Vietnam;
or do you mourn the village constables
who knew once the boundaries of the peat-lands,
or are you reading the *Gazette*
with terrible words like "Arminianism" in your cackling?

22 CHA B'E 'N AOIS

Cha b'e 'n aois a liath mo cheann
ach ag èisdeachd sgeulachdan a' chogaidh,
is còmhraidh mu chidhe Bhrèvig,
is cràbhadairean Eilean Beag Donn na Gaoithe.

23 MURCHADH MOIREASDAN, 1872-

Cha robh cus dha do shamhail
air thalamh na Criosdachd,
no eadhon ann a Leòdhas fhein:
Murchadh Moireasdan. Rugadh tu
a' bhlianna thòisich na sgoiltean Beurla;
chuir an saoghal car-a-mhuiltean ri do linn
is chum thu do ghrèim air le do chasan.
Tha do shùil dìreach, biàths 'na do chridhe,
d'inninn air ghleus,
Gàidhlig shùibhlach na naodhamh linn deug
a' co-sheirm ri Beurla 's Fraingeis;
gach nì air a' mheidh;
cha do chuir inbhe no aois sìos no suas thu.

24 DUINE CHAIDH ÀRACH ANN AN LEÒDHAS

Duine chaidh àrach ann an Leòdhas
cluinnidh tu sgal na gaoithe 'na ghuth,
agus tùchan na gaoith' deireadh Foghair
ag èaladh eadar goc is garradh;
tha a bhonaid m'a shùilean,
's tha na fèithean air an teannachadh:
na cuir casg air.
Gun teagamh tha corra dhuin' ann cuideachd
is gaoth air a stamaig,
's tha gaothairean ann mar ann an àiteachan eile.
Ach an uair a chi thu am bonaid teann
's na sùilean fèitheach,
tha seo thugad!

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22 NOT AGE

It wasn't age that made my hair turn grey
but listening to stories of the War,
and talk about Brevig Pier,
and the pious prattlers of the Little Brown Isle of the Wind.

23 MURDO MORRISON, 1872-

Not many like you
in Christendom,
nor even in Lewis itself:
Murdo Morrison. You were born
the year the English schools began;
the world turned a somersault in your time
and you kept a grip on it with your feet.
A straight eye, warmth in your heart,
a mind well tuned,
fluent nineteenth century Gaelic
in harmony with English and French;
all things in balance;
neither position nor age put you up or down.

(Murdo Morrison was Director of Education in Inverness-shire for many years).

24 A MAN REARED IN LEWIS

With a man reared in Lewis
you can hear the whip of the wind in his voice,
and the husky wind of late autumn
stealing between stack and wall;
his bonnet down over his eyes
and his sinews taut:
don't check him.
Right enough there are a few too
suffering from flatulence,
and there are windbags there as elsewhere.
But when you see the taut bonnet
and the sinewy eyes
look out!

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25 STÈIDHICHEAN LÁIDIR

Tha do stèidhichean làidir
anns a' mhuir shàthach sin tha bualadh
's a' suathadh 's a' bragail,
cnap muil air clàr creige.
Do bhallachan air an eagadh
's air a snaidheadh
le locair na mara,
le cruaidh na gaoithe.
Sitheanan a' fàs orra,
blàth air a' chreig,
is bileagan milis feòir.
Tha do chlachan-oisinn daingeann:
An Rubha Dubh, A' Chàbag, An Gallan;
tha do fhreiceadain-cuain 'nan dùisg.
Nuair a dh' fhuilig thu spòltadh nan tonn sin
fuiligidh tu obair mhic-an-duine,
teampall is eaglais is mosque;
thog Nàdur a' mhinariet ort,
tha na tuinn ag ùmhlachd aig altair do stallachan,
tha 'n fhaoidig a' frithealadh na h-èifhreachan,
tha 'n ùrnaigh air a steuchdadh ann an cop a' chladaich.

26 CREUTAIREAN BORBA

Muir uaine os cionn na gainmhich,
madainn shamhraidh os cionn na blianna:
chi mi fodham
na creutairean tha a' gluasad anns an fhuil
le sithidhean borba,
a' stad fo chloich, 's a' leum às an dorchadas,
's a' laigh air a' ghainmhich ghil;
nach do stòlach tonn no tim,
nach do shàsaich aois no àis,
dearg anns a' mhuir dhearg sin,
anns a' mhuir bhorb
a tha 'na laighe uaine
air gainmheach gheal.

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25 LEWIS

Your foundations are strong
in that thrusting sea that thuds
and strokes and cracks,
pebble mass on level rock.
Your walls are notched
and carved
by the plane of the sea,
the chisel of the wind.
Flowers grow on them,
blossom on the rock,
and blades of sweet grass.
Your corner-stones stand firm;
Tolsta Head, Càbag, Gallan Head;
Your sea-watchmen are awake.
Having withstood the mauling of these waves
you can suffer man's work,
temple and church and mosque;
Nature has built on you its minaret,
the waves kneel at the altar of your cliffs,
the seagull celebrates the mass,
the prayer is prostrated in the foam on the shore.

26 SAVAGE CREATURES

Green sea over sand,
a summer morning above the year:
I see below me
the creatures that move in the blood
with savage thrusts,
stopping under a stone, and leaping out of the darkness,
lying on the white sand;
that neither wave nor time has tamed,
that neither age nor wisdom has satisfied,
red in that red sea,
in the savage sea
that lies green
over white sand.

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27 OBAIR NA H-IOLAIRE

Iolaire a' seòladh os cionn beanntan Uige:
air rathad Bhrèidhnis chunnaic i cailleach dhubh,
le plèid an àite caille;
am Baile na Cille
chunnaic i fear a' cur air falbh "phools";
ann a Bhaltois
bha iad a' taghadh Bannrigh na Bòidhchid;
ann a Miabhaig bha fear à Inbhirnis
ag iarraidh orra Gàidhlig a chleachdadh;
ann an Càirinis
chuala i sailm á taigh-fhaire;
is thuir i ri the fhèin
"Tha m'obair a seo crìochnaichte.
Theid mi Lunnainn 's gun toir iad crìochan ùra dhomh."

28 REANGAN AN EATHAIR

Reangan an eathair anns a' ghainmhich—
thuir a' chailleach rium, "Carson nach bitheadh?
Tha a là seachad. Cha chuir sàthadh na mara
sùgh troimh na seann phòraibh sin.
Leig seachad i,
caomhain do dheòir airson tè ùir."
Ach tha màthair-uisge nan deur sin
a tha a' tighinn bhon chridhe
glaise air chùl nan còig blianna fichead.
Tha sùghadh a' chuain sin
a' tìormachadh mo chuimhne.
Tha eagal orm
lasair o m' eanchainn a chur ris an t-seann chranntlach ud.

27 THE EAGLE, SAILING OVER THE UIG HILLS

The eagle, sailing over the Uig hills,
saw on the road at Brenish a nun
wearing a plaid instead of a veil;
at Baile na Cille,
it saw a man posting his pools;
in Valtos
they were choosing a Beauty Queen;
in Miavaig, a man from Inverness
asked them to speak Gaelic;
in Carinish,
it heard psalms sung at a wake;
and it said to itself
"My work here is done.
I shall go to London and get fresh orders."

(There was a nunnery at one time in this part of Uig).

28 THE RIBS OF THE BOAT

The ribs of the boat lie in the sand—
the old woman said to me, "Why not?
Her day is over. The thrust of the sea
cannot sent sap through these old pores.
Let her be,
spare your tears for a new one."
But the spring of the tears
that come from the heart
is locked behind these twenty-five years.
The ebbing of that sea
dries up my memory.
I am afraid
to set a torch from my brain to that old timber.

29 DÙSGADH

Dùsgadh!

Abair gu bheil feum air dùsgadh anns a' chladh seo.
Tha fear san oisinn thall rinn ainm dha fhèin
leis an eòlas a bh'aige air teinntean Ifrinn;
fear eile aig a robh searmoinean Spurgeon
air a theanga;
fear a thainig dhachaigh le creud coimheach
a fhuair e air bruaichean Chluaidh,
is fear eile chaidh cho fada ri Plymouth;
tha duineachan briathrach fon chloich sin
a chaidh domhainn anns an t-soisgeul a-rèir Mharx—
cha do leugh e facal Gàidhlig 'na bheatha.
O, nan tigeadh soisgeulaiche
a lorgadh ceann-teagaisg air na seann chreagan seo,
anns a riasg donn,
ann a flùraichean na machrach,
nar cainnt fhìn.

30 NA TRÀLAIREAN

Bidh iad ag ràdh gu sgrìob na tràlairean
an grunn uile.
Bha iad an dè sa' Bhàgh a Tuath;
chan eil fhios dè thogas ceann an ath-sheachdain
air cidheachan Obair-Dheadhain is Fleetwood—
no air deasc mhòr Rùnaire na Stàit an Dun-Eideann.
Sgoiltean Uige 's dòcha,
muilinn-chlò á Siabost,
giomadairean Bheàrnaigh,
factoraidh-feamad á Ceòs.
Ach, O chlann, na biodh eagal oirbh,
tha na bàtaichean-freiceadain gur dìon,
gheibh sibh adagan gu leòr,
mas e adagan tha dhith oirbh,
O adagan!

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29 RE-AWAKENING

Re-awakening!

Indeed there's need for it in this cemetery.
There's a man in that corner who made a name for himself
by his knowledge of the fires of Hell;
another who had Spurgeon's sermons
off by heart;
a man who brought home an outlandish creed
he found on Clydeside,
and another who went as far as Plymouth;
there's a talkative mannikin beneath that stone
who drank deep of the Gospel according to Marx—
never read a word of Gaelic in his life.
O for an evangelist
who would find a text on these ancient rocks,
in the brown peat,
in the flowers of the machair,
in our own tongue.

30 THE TRAWLERS

They say the trawlers sweep
the ground clean.
They were in Broad Bay yesterday;
who knows what will appear next week
on the quays of Aberdeen and Fleetwood—
or on the huge desk of the Secretary of State in Edinburgh:
the Uig schools perhaps,
a tweed-mill from Shawbost,
lobster-men from Bernera,
a seaweed factory from Keose.
But O, children, have no fear,
the Fishery Cruisers will protect you,
you will get plenty haddock,
if it is haddock you want,
O haddocks!

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31 OCHAN, A DHÒMHNAILL CHAIM

Ochan, a Dhòmhnail Chaim,

Nam b'ann an diugh a bha thu gleidheil beanntan Uige
cha bhiodh tu cho falamh 's a bhà thu aig a' cheann thall:
gheibheadh tu taigh bhon a' Bhòrd is subsadaidh bho Choimisean
nan Croitearan.

31 DONALD CAM, MY BOY

Donald Cam, my boy,

if you were to keep to the Uig hills now
you would have more to show for it than you had:
a house from the Board, and a subsidy from the Crofters Commission.

32 CUTHAG IS GOCOMAN

Hileabhag, hoileabhag, ho oro i
Chuir cuthag á nead m'òige mi.

Cuime réisd a mholainn cuthag,
b'fhearr gu mòr mi mholadh cathaig.

Cìod e 'n t-ainm a bh'air a' chuthaig?
Foghlam Beurla is Cion-diutha.

C'ás a thàinig an t-eun dona?
Taobh Dhun-Eideann 's mach bho Lunnainn.

'S tha 'n gocoman a-mach á sealladh,
ann am Bothan 's e gha dhalladh.

32 CUCKOO AND LOOK-OUT-MAN

Heelivack, holiivack ho oro west
a cuckoo's driven me out of my nest.

Why then should I praise the cuckoo,
why not some other bird from the zoo?

By what names was the cuckoo called?
English Schooling and Buggar-you-all.

Tell me where did the bad bird come from?
Embro Toun and up from London.

And the look-out-man struck off the list,
in a Bothan, absolutely pissed.

(The nonsense words in the first line link up with 18th-century songs,
put in the mouth of mavis, etc., in praise of particular
districts in the Highlands).

33 AIR CÙL SHUARDAIL

Gu h-àrd air a' chreig sin,
air cùl Shuardail,

os cionn a' chladaich
far na rinn sinn maorach
air latha samhraidh
bho chionn fhada,
shaoilinn gu faicinn gach ni soilleir;
tha an àile ciùin gun teagamh,
an t-ionad àrd, am muir sàmhach,
gràdh 'na mo chridhe, chan eil an t-eagal
a' cur sgàth orrm,

33 BEYOND SWORDALE

High on that cliff
beyond Swordale,
above the shore
where we gathered shellfish
on a summer day
long ago,

I would expect to see things clearly;
the air is mild, indeed,
the place high, the sea still,
love in my heart, no fear
casts a shadow on me,

tha Rubha na Circe bán,
tha na reubairean air teicheadh.
Ach cluinnidh mi 'n t-òrd aig Thor
fhathast a' cnagadh,
tha eud is murt is cràdh
a' reubadh 's a' sgathadh,
's an gràs a bheireadh sinn á diachainn
air a dhùnadh ann am broinn fiasgain.

34 NA CANADH DUINE

Na canadh duine gun do chuir mi cùl riut
ged a thionndaidh mi air falbh,
ged a leig mi às an còrd;
bha am bann sin domhainn
'nam fheòil. Na canadh iad,
ged a bha m'ùrnaigh balbh,
nach robh mi ag iarraidh rèite.
Glaiste ann an ùir mo bheatha
tha slighe a' bheathachaidh sin gam ionnsaigh,
an còrd a tha a' gleidheil a' chòrdaidh.

35 AN GLASCHU

Oidhche Shathuirn air Straid Jamaica
is feasgar na Sàbaid air Great Western Road,
a' coiseachd 's a' coiseachd anns an t-saoghal ùr;
sitheanan anns na gàrraidhean,
giobal 's an deoch air ann an doras bùthadh,
an Soisgeul a' tighinn rèidh às a' chùbainn:
“Eil fada bho nach d'fhuair sibh bhon taigh?”

Is gaoth nan clobhsaichean,
is fasgadh ann an oisinn,
gaoth an iar-'eas le teanga fhliuch,
buntáta 's sgadan,
tìormachd na mine an cùl na h-ambhach,
glagadaich ann an gàrradh nan soithichean,
a' chailleach a' gearain air pris an èisg:
“Bi 'g òl ruma 's na bi sgrìobhadh dhachaigh.”

Kirk Point is bare,
the reivers gone.
But I hear Thor's hammer
thudding still,
jealousy, murder, pain
rending and cutting,
and the grace that would save us in the tussle
shut away in the innards of a mussel.

34 LET NO ONE SAY

Let no one say I turned my back on you
although I turned away,
although I let the cord go;
that bond was deep
in my flesh. Let them not say,
although my prayer was dumb,
that I did not desire atonement.
Locked in the earth of my life,
that duct of sustenance comes to me,
the cord that preserves accord.

35 IN GLASGOW

Saturday night on Jamaica Street
and Sunday evening on Great Western Road,
walking, walking in the new world;
flowers in the yards,
a young fellow, tight, in a shop doorway,
the Gospel coming quietly from the pulpit;
“Is it long since you heard from home?”

And the wind in the closes,
taking shelter in a corner,
a wet-tongued south-west wind,
potatoes and herring,
meal-dryness in the back of the throat,
a clatter in the shipyard,
the landlady complaining of the price of fish;
“Drink rum and don't write home.”

An daorach air Stràid Jamaica,
 an traoghadh air Great Western Road,
 an Soisgeul anns a' ghàrradh,
 sìtheanan anns a' mhùilinn-fhìùir,
 a' chailleach anns a' chlobhs,
 is tìormachd ann an cùl na h-amhach;
 "BHEIL FADA BHO NACH D'FHUAIR SIBH BHON TAIGH?"

36 'BHEIL CUIMHN' AGAD . . . ?'

"Bheil cuimhn' agad . . ."
 —seo air bus ann a Sauchiehall Street—
 ars esan, "an là bha sinn anns a' mhòine . . . ?"
 Tha. "Na mo chuis-bhùirt ann am meadhon Ghlaschu,
 ann am meadhon mo bheatha,
 ann am meadhon Alba,
 'na mo shuidh air prugan
 a' toirt riamaichean calcais às a chèile.
 Taing do Dhia gu bheil teine 'na mo bhroinn fhathast.

37 A' DANNS'

A' danns' a' dannsa fon a' ghealaich,
 a' ghealach fhuar nach fhàg a faileas,
 a' ghealach chuireas sinne dhachaigh,
 danns' 's a' danns' 's an oidhche fada;
 's fhada leam a' ghealach fhuar,
 an oidhche bhuaireidh is am fallas,
 's fhada bhuan an ceòl a ghluais
 an crìdh 's a' chluais is mi 'nam bhalach.

Jamaica Street plastered,
 a dry throat on Great Western Road,
 the Gospel in the Garden,
 flowers in the meal-mill,
 the old woman in the close,
 and dryness at the back of the throat;
 "IS IT LONG SINCE YOU HEARD FROM HOME?"

36 "DO YOU REMEMBER . . . ?"

"Do you remember . . ."
 —this on a bus in Sauchiehall Street—
 said he, "the day we spent at the peats?"
 Yes. Making an ass of myself in the middle of Glasgow,
 in the midst of my life,
 in the midst of Scotland,
 sitting on a tuft of moor-grass
 teasing out peat fibres.
 Thank God I have fire in my belly still.

37 DANCING

Dancing, dancing under the moon,
 the cold moon that casts no shadow,
 the moon that accompanies us home,
 the night long and dancing, dancing;
 I long for the cold moon,
 the tempting night and sweat in the nostrils,
 far away is the music that moved
 the heart and the ear when I was a boy.

Tha do dhealbh ann an cùl m' inntinn
 gun sgleò air,
 daingeann, suidhichte
 a-measg nan iomhaighean briste,
 a-measg a luasgain,
 gun aois a' laigh air ach an aois a bhà thu,
 clàr mòr an aodainn mar ghleoc air stad
 air madainn Earraich,
 gam chur ri uair a' bhaile
 leis a' ghliocas sin
 nach robh an eisimeil leabhraichean,
 leis an àbhachdas, leis a' ghearradh-cainnt
 a bha a' leum á cridhe a' chinnidh
 mus deach a chèiseadh,
 mus deach a valve ùr ann
 a chumadh ag obair e anns an t-saoghal ùr.
 Siud iuchair mo mhuseum,
 an clàr air an cluich mi mo bheul-aithris,
 an spaid-bheag leis an dùisg mi fonn
 na linne a tha nise seachad,
 an iomhaigh tha cumail smachd air na h-iomhaighean-brèige.

Your picture is at the back of my mind
 undimmed,
 steady, set
 among the broken images,
 amid the movements,
 untouched by age except the age you were,
 the great round of the face like a clock stopped
 on a Spring morning,
 keeping me to the village time
 with that wisdom
 that flourished without books,
 with the fun, the cleverness-with-words
 that leapt from the heart of the race
 before it was encased,
 before it had the new valve in it
 to keep it going in the new world.
 That is the key to my museum,
 the record on which I play my folklore,
 the trowel with which I turn the ground
 of the age that is now gone,
 the image that keeps control over false images.

39 IS CHUNNA MI THU 'NA DO BHÀTA

Is chunna mi thu 'na do bhàta
 am meadhon na mara,
 na lin ann am pasgadh 's tu feitheamh ri cur.
 Shaoil thu gu robh an sgadan pailt
 romhad, ga shniomh anns a' chiàr uaine,
 caitean air cur is dlùth,
 ach bha thu ceàrr.
 Nuair a sheall thu a-rithist
 cha robh ann ach cnàmhan an èisg,
 's bha do làmh fuar fon a' phairilis.
 Nuair a thug mi suil eil' ort
 chunnaic mi d'ainm sgrìobht ann a litrichean mòra
 METAGAMA.

39 AND I SAW YOU AS A BOAT

And I saw you as a boat
 in the middle of the sea,
 the nets coiled ready for casting.
 You thought the herring were thick
 in your path, woven on the green,
 nap on warp and weft,
 but you were wrong.
 When you looked again
 there was nothing but herringbone
 and your hand cold in paralysis.
 When I looked at you again
 I saw your name written in large letters
 METAGAMA.

(The *Metagama* was the most famous of the emigrant ships to leave
 Lewis in the early 1920s).

40 NA LOCHLANNAICH A' TIGHINN
AIR TÌR AN NIS

Nuair thàinig a' bhirliinn gu tìr,
nuair a tharraing iad i
air gainmheach a' Phuirt,
ged a bha am muir gorm,
's a' ghainmheach geal,
ged a bha na sìtheanan a' fàs
air dà thaobh an uillt,
is feur gorm as na claisean,
ged a bha ghrian a' deàrrsadh
air bucaill nan sgiath,
air na clogadan,
is àite liathghorm an eòrna air na h-iomairean,
ged a bha sin mar sin
is sian nan tonn air an cùlaibh,
an t-sùlaire a' tuiteam á fànas,
is cop air bainne bliath na mara,
bha eagal orra.

Ach chaidh iad a-steach dhan an tìr,
is fhuair iad taighean,
is boireannaich,
is teaghlaichean,
is bhuan iad an t-eòrna,
is chuir iad an t-eòrna,
fhuair iad eun às a' phalla,
is iasg á faire,
thug iad ainmean air creagan 's air clann,
is lìon iad na saibhlean,
agus dh'fhalbh an cianaias.

40 THE NORSEMEN COMING ASHORE
AT NESS

When the galley touched the shore,
when they hauled her up
on the sand at Port,
though the sea was blue,
and the sand white,
though flowers grew
on both banks of the burn,
and green grass in the ditches,
though the sun shone
on the buckles of their shields,
on their helmets,
and there was a grey-green haze of barley on the fields,
though that was how things were,
and the roar of the waves was behind them,
the solan plunging out of space,
and foam on the warm milk of the sea,
they were afraid.

But they went up into the land,
and got houses,
and women,
and families,
and they cut the barley,
and sowed the barley,
took birds from the rock ledges,
and fish from the sea,
gave names to rocks and children,
and filled the barns,
and their homesickness went away.

41 MURDAG MHÒR

A' gluasad air rathad corrach
le ceuman troma,
cnap beag dubh,
sùil air bhiod am bodhaig sgith,
a' tighinn dhachaigh bhon a' chutadh,
's a' bhò ri bleoghan,
buntàta ri phriogadh,
norradh cadail 's a' bhò ri bleoghan,
is rathad Steòrnabhaigh a-rithist.

Bha thu fad air falbh
bho mo thuigse,
eadhon anns an là sin;
tha thu 'n diugh
mar dhuine bha beò ri linn Chrìosda,
a' feitheamh ri làmhan an lighiche,
ris an ol'-ungaidh,
a' coiseachd troimh do Ghilead,
troimh a' chàthair réisgte.

'Na mo thùr aolaichte
bidh uinneag troimh 'm faic mi an sealladh sin:
na biodh mo lámh ro chrìon fhad 's tha ol'-ungaidh agam.

42 AIG A' MHATCH

Gaith fhuar air cùl mo chasan
's fàileadh na fax 'na mo chuinnlean,
geansaidhean snàth;
bodach le peitean mòr,
's ceannaiche le seacaid;
gàir chlann-nighean;
'"Goal, a sheanmhair!"

Tha Blàr a' chanaich fo bhliath.
Dhùisg siud gluasadan 'nam fheòil
a bha mi 'n dùil a laigheadh sàmhach
fhad 's a leanadh peiteanan mòra,
is geansaidhean snàth,
is clann-nighean aighearach a' cnàmh.

41 MURDAG MHÒR ("MUCKA")

Trudging along a rough road
with heavy steps,
dark, small and stocky,
darting eye in tired body,
coming home from the gutting,
the cow to be milked,
the potato patch to be weeded,
a wink of sleep and the cow to be milked,
and the road to Stormoway again.

You were far removed
from my understanding,
even then;
now
you are like someone who lived in the time of Christ,
awaiting the hand of the physician,
the anointing oil,
walking through your Gilead,
through the black skinned peat-land.

In my lime-washed tower
there will be a window from which I can see that sight:
let my hand not be niggardly while I have oil to give.

42 AT THE MATCH

A cold wind on the backs of my legs
and the smell of cigarettes in my nostrils,
woollen jerseys;
an old man with a sleeved waistcoat,
a merchant wearing a jacket;
girls' laughter;
"A goal, Granny!"

The cotton-grass plain in bloom.
That wakened movements in my flesh
that I thought would be still
for as long as long-sleeved waistcoats,
and woollen jerseys,
and lively girls go on moultering.

Aon, dhá, trí,
 cailleach dhubh a' biogail,
 ceithir, còig, sia,
 boireannach a' sgiabhail,
 seachd, ochd, naoth,
 beucail nan laogh,
 deich, a h-aon-diag,
 tachais 'na mo chiabhaig,
 ad mhòr mhollach
 air Mùrdag Mhòr Shiadair.

Is Dòmhall Rodaidh a' togail nan salm
 ann am meadhon mo chunntaidh—
 ga mo chur ceàrr.

Is fann, fann dealradh na grèine
 air an t-suidheachan fhada sin,
 air an t-suidhe fhada,
 fann seirm nan salm
 fann sèis nan searmon:
 tha uidhe m'fhadachd an àit eile.

44 LÀMHAN

Làmhnan tha tigh'nn gu mo chuimhne a-nis:
 tana, tioram, is caic orr',
 pluitan plaomach le fallas,
 meuran odhar le nicotain,
 inean sgàrlaid air ighneagan.
 Iad sin air iomall na cuimhne;
 'na teis-meadhon
 làmhnan air amhaich coin,
 air ceann balaich,
 am muing eich,
 air cliathaich bà;
 làmhnan am picil a sgadain,
 an taois nan isean,
 air sine, air ràmh,
 air gruaidh naoidhein ris a' chich.

One, two, three,
 a black old lady chirping,
 four, five, six,
 a woman screeching,
 seven, eight, nine,
 calves bellow,
 ten, eleven,
 my side-burns tickle,
 a big hairy hat
 on Mùrdag Mhòr's head.

And Donald Roddy precenting the psalms
 in the midst of my counting—
 putting me wrong.

Pale, pale the sheen of the sun
 on that long seat,
 on the long sitting,
 faint the sound of the psalms,
 the rise and fall of the sermon:
 the goal of my longing is in another place.

44 HANDS

Hands are what I remember now:
 thin, dry, with chalk on them,
 flabby sweaty fins,
 fingers yellow with nicotine,
 girls with scarlet nails.
 These are at the edges of my memory:
 right in the middle
 hands on a dog's neck,
 on a boy's head,
 in a horse's mane,
 on a cow's side;
 hands in herring pickle,
 in the chicken's mash,
 on a cow's teal, on an oar,
 on the face of a child at the breast.

Tha feur a' fàs troimh na lámhan sin,
sàl ga suathadh,
ach fhad 's a mhaireas mise
bidh cuimhne ga sliobadh.

45 AIR OIÐHCHE SHAMHRAIDH

Air oidhche Shamhraidh,
's an loch le mheanbh ghluasad dubharach fo bhrèid a' bhaile,
chuala mi còmhraidh nan caileagan,
fada bhuam, a' falpanaich
air sgeirean a chaidh fodha aig tid a' chogaidh:
briodal anns an fheamainn,
stiom ga reubadh anns a' chladach,
is shuath mi a' ghaoir mhin mhilis
ri mo chluasan bodhar,
chuir mi sìoda do stiom
air craiceann rocach mo lámhan
a chur casg air a' bhàs dhomh.

46 NUAIR A BHA SINN BEAG

Nuair a bha sinn beag
bhiodh sinn a' cluich air saighdearan;
nuair a dh'fhàs sinn mòr
bha saoghal eil' ann.
Ach nan robh 'n cothrom againn,
nan robh tancaichean ri ar làimh,
is gunnathan, is gas,
nan robh am bom mòr fo ar comas,
's gun smachd aig Dia oirnn a-nis,
dè dhèanamaid?

47 TACHAIS AN T-SLÀNACHAIDH

Tachais an t-slànachaidh 'na mo chridh, a-nis,
thainig sreab air,
sguir e shùghadh;
chait mi bhuam plàs'd nam bliannachan;
tha mi dol a shreap a-rithist.

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Grass grows through these hands,
salt water rubs them,
but as long as I last
memory will stroke them.

45 ON A SUMMER'S NIGHT

On a Summer's night,
the loch with its sad micro-movements lying
under the kerch of the village,
I heard the girls' talk,
in the distance, lapping
on rocks that submerged during the War:
love-talk in the seaweed,
a snood being torn on the rocky shore,
and I rubbed the soft, sweet penetrating cry
on my deaf ears,
I laid the silk of your snood
on the wrinkled skin of my hands
to check death's coming.

46 WHEN WE WERE SMALL

When we were small
we used to play at soldiers;
when we grew up
the world was a different place.
But if we had the chance,
if we had the tanks to deploy,
and guns, and gas,
control of the big bomb,
with God no longer disciplining us,
what would we do?

47 THE HEALING ITCH

There is a healing itch at my heart now,
a crust has formed,
it has stopped leaking;
I have thrown away the plaster of many years' standing;
I am going out to climb again.

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48 AM MAC-STRÒDHAIL A' BRUIDHINN
RI TÌR A BHREITH AGUS ÀRAICH

Ma rinn mi ceàrr
na bi ro chruaidh orm,
na cuir do ghath a sàs,
na rèis mi air sailthean do ghiocais;
agus ged is mise 'm mac-stròdhail
na marbh do mhart dhomh,
na cuir m'fheòil-shaillt thugam a Ghlaschu,
oir chan eil mi dol a thilleadh air an t-Samhainn seo,
's na marbh do ghambhainn dhomh.
Agus ma rinn mi ceart
na leig guth ort.

49 AN GALAR

Tha 'n ceòl a-nis air rathad cian,
tha bhanaid anns a' bhail' ud thall,
an gad èisg gu taigh duin' eile,
an t-seòbhrach a' crìonadh,
an t-eilean 'na spot air gloinne prospaig.

Nuair a chaidh thu air falbh
leis a' chabhaig sin,
dhùin siud mo shùilean-sa cuideachd,
cha deanainn mo rathad,
bha 'n cathadh ga mo dhalladh,
cha tog aiteamh bho thuath mo dhòchas.

Chaidh mi mach á tarraing do phlanaid,
chan eil mo cheum trom, ged is trom am meadhon-latha,
air na ròidean eòlach sin,
tha mi seòladh ann a fànas leam fhìn.

Chan eil math bhith gearain:
tha greis on thòisich an galar,
's mura bitheadh an galar sin
bhiodh galar eil' ann.

48 THE PRODIGAL SON SPEAKS TO THE
LAND OF HIS BIRTH AND UPBRINGING

If I did wrong
do not be too hard on me,
do not turn the knife in me,
do not reest me on the rafters of your wisdom;
and though I am the Prodigal
do not kill your beast for me,
nor send my portion of salt meat to Glasgow,
for I shall not return this Hallowtide,
and do not kill your heifer for me.
And if I did right
pay that no heed.

49 THE DISEASE

The melodeon is now on a far road,
the wedding in yonder village,
the string of fish goes to another door,
the primrose withers,
the island is become a spot on the glass of the binoculars.

When you went away,
hurriedly like that,
that closed my eyes too,
I could not make my way,
the drifting snow blinded me,
no thaw from the North raises my hopes.

I escaped the pull of your planet,
my step is weightless, heavy though middle age may be,
on these well-known roads,
I float alone in space.

There is no point in complaining:
it is some time since the disease began,
and were it not that disease
it would be another one.

50 NUAIR A THILLEAS MI

Nuair a thilleas mi

bidh 'm bàrr-gùg air a' bhuntàt',
bidh 'n t-scillean a' crònan,
bidh bhò a' muathal gu eadrachd
nuair a thilleas mi.

Nuair a ruigeas mi,

a' breith air làimh oirbh,
bidh fuachd na fàinne
air deàrn' an dòchais
nuair a ruigeas mi.

Nuair a laigheas mi

an com do charthannais,
thig an gug-gùg
's an o-draochan maille ris
an uair a laigheas mi.

'S an uair a dh' èireas mi

air a' mhadainn ud,
bidh 'n fhàinne sgealbt'
is a' bhò gun bhainn' aice,
's an t-eilean riabhach mar bu chiad aithne dhomh.

51 NUAIR A THIG AN DORCH

Nuair a thig an dorch

ort, a' toirt air faibh Mùirneag
's Beinn Phabail is Hòl,
nuair a bhios do chaoraich 'nan laighe,
am feur dorch ann am brù na h-oidhche,
's a' ghealach ùr gun èirigh,
tuigidh mi 'n t-ultach mhònach-s' air an teine
's mi e solas.

50 WHEN I COME BACK

When I come back

the potato flowers will be out,
the bees humming,
the cows lowing to milking
when I come back.

When I arrive,

shaking you by the hand,
the coldness of the ring
will be on the palm of hope
when I arrive.

When I lie down

in your kind breast,
the cuckoo will come
and wailing with it,
when I lie down.

And when I rise

on that morning,
the ring will be shattered
and the cow dry
and the dark-brown island as I first knew it.

51 WHEN THE DARK COMES

When the dark comes

over you, taking Mùirneag away
and Bayble Hill and Hòl,
when your sheep are lying,
the grass dark in the womb of night,
the new moon not yet up,
I shall throw this handful of peats on the fire
and it will make some light.

52 GED A THÀINIG CALVIN

Ged a thàinig Calvin
cha do ghoid e 'n gaol sin às do chridhe:
thug thu gràdh
don mhòintich lachdainn, agus fhuair thu cràdh
nuair thugadh bhuat am fonn sin is am flùr,
's nuair chuireadh cist nan òran anns an ùir.

Although Calvin came
he did not steal the love out of your heart:
you loved
the tawny moor, and suffered pain
when that land and the flower were taken from you,
and a coffinful of songs was laid in the earth.

53 GED A THILLINN A-NIS

Ged a thillinn a-nis,
ged a chuirinn mo chas air tìr
air a' chidhe shùileach,
ged a shiùblaim sràid nan teanga,
cha bhiodh an tilleadh ann:
's fheàrr an fhirinn innse.

Though I were to go back now,
though I were to step ashore
on the eyeing quay,
and walk the street of tongues,
there would be no return:
as well to tell the truth.

Thàinig firinn thugam
mu innis na firinn;
chuirnich mi air Bean Lot,
's an dèidh sin, an dèidh sin,
tha mi gu bhith 'na mo charragh-cuimhne.

A truth came to me
about the righteous isle;
I remembered Lot's wife,
and yet, and yet,
I am going to be a memorial-pillar.

A' chuimhne ga mo bheathachadh,
a' toirt orm fàs
anns an uaimh dhorch seo,
a' feitheamh tilleadh mara,
's a' crùbadh fo m' eallach
anns an uaimh uaine seo gun ghealach.

Fed by memory
which makes me grow
in this dark cave,
awaiting the turn of the tide,
and crouching under my load
in this green cave without moon.

54 MO CHÙL RI MO CHEANN-UIDHE

Mo chùl ri mo cheann-uidhe
m' aghaidh ris na th' air mo chùl,
a' sineadh 's a' tarraing
air an tobhta-sa,
beò-neart sàile fodham
fèithean fo chraiceann na mara,
m' eathair is m' aighear air an aon ràmh.

My back turned to my destination,
facing what lies behind me,
stretching and pulling,
on this thwart,
live-strength of sea below me,
muscles under the sea's skin,
my boat and my joy pulling on the same oar.

52 ALTHOUGH CALVIN CAME

54 MY BACK TURNED TO MY DESTINATION

55 AN EILEATROM

Solas Airnis air mo làimh dheis,
Mùirneag fo bhrat,
cuibhrig air Beanntan Bharbhais,
anart air Hòl,
grèim againn air an eileatrom
's i tulgadh 's a' tulgadh air bàrr cuimhne.

55 THE BIER

Arnis light on my right,
Muirneag cloaked,
a coverlet on the Barvas Hills,
a shroud on Hòl,
we grasp the bier-poles,
rocking and plunging on the surface of memory.

56 AN CEANN THALL

Seo an ceann thall, ma tha,
thàinig mi mach às do theampall,
às a' cheò chùbhraidh,
à tùis na h-ùrnaigh,
le mo bhilean loisgte,
le mo dhrùis coisgte,
chuir mi orm mo bhrògan
is leig mi dhiom do phògan,
chuir mi a' chuibhle
air falbh fon chuibhrig,
is thriall mi maille
ris a' chridh a chailleadh.

56 THE FAR SIDE

This is the far side, then,
I have come out of your temple,
out of the fragrant smoke,
the incense of prayer,
with my lips burnt,
with my lust abated,
I have put on my shoes
and left your kisses behind,
put the prayer-wheel
away beneath the cover,
and gone on my way
with the heart I have lost.