

Nairnia

Dusk pushing gently at wardrobe doors
slip through a haar of fur coats
to a solitary lamp-post in King Street.

Where a snow queen awaits on her sled
with the allure of Turkish delights
at the harbour is a great rigged ship with a minotaur at the wheel
prepares for a voyage beyond the silver seas of Moray.

Night evaporates and with it the dream
but on walking through the High Street
mundane and dreich as Monday's rain
I could swear I saw Tilda Swinton
carrying her messages in a plastic Co-op bag
as she passed with a faint but enigmatic smile.

A Round of Golf with Charlie Chaplin

Teeing off at Nairn

Chaplin struck his ball westward

watching the backspin of his years

clouds, slowing as fleeting memories on distant bens

the Moray Firth an ocean

the immigrant boy would cross

with renewed hope, the torment of loss in his wake

the Kessock Narrows a Hudson and gateway to a New World

from Vaudeville stage to Keystone Studios.

At the fourth tee piano music

the Little Tramp materialising

bowler hat, walking cane and bag of clubs

coaching the stout forkbeard on his swing

crowning a moustachioed dandy at the fifth

while in some distant space movie theaters rocked with laughter.

Stopping for halfway respite at the Bothy

Chaplin viewed pine-clad ridges

the heights of Beverley Hills

and an industry he would master.

Then struggling on incline

tangling in gorse

between twelfth and fourteenth

the hazards of scandal and political exile

yet a master of satire emerges with speech on his lips
momentarily elevated to the summit of Ben Wyvis
the Great Dictator spinning the Earth on his finger.

Until, the graceful man on tiring legs
with time inexorably turning on Nairn's townhouse clock
on putting for the eighteenth
sees a waiting pavilion packed with thousands of his peers.
The five minute standing ovation
the likes of which had never been seen
before or since.

Swimming on the East Beach at Nairn

When I swim here
the world stops turning
I push against tidal flow
the stump from the old stake net
appearing stationary on the sand
or creeping past at best
no matter how hard I thrust into the cold brine.

Even the merganser is unperturbed by my presence
preening itself
practically within arm's reach
the old red Sutors across the Firth
holding evidence of mass extinction
time itself trapped in stone.

Still I swim on
happily going nowhere
thinking of the basking shark lying offshore
content to dwell in the current with jaws apart
like a giant purse
accepting the gift of sustenance from the sea.

If only we could be like that
instead of biting off more than we need
from every resource we can plunder

always running

running

and going where?

The berries of Wester Hardmuir

We pick the berries at Wester Hardmuir
a tablecloth of field and forest spread around
bite into sweetness
of long summer days
and I taste the memory
of another time another place.

A Clydeside allotment
between tenement back and railway line
a few square feet
patiently tended by a father's hand
conjuring strawberries
from unlikely but generous soil.

I return to the view of field and firth
all the richer for the taste.

Cormorants at Nairn

Where the river tastes the sea
cormorants perch on stobs
their plumage
in mourning black of fishwives
still waiting.

There is only a purr of diesel engine
durr of halyard on metal mast
holidaymakers on the footbridge
voices around Basil's café.

But still they wait
as if this illusion might dissolve
and triangular sails of the drifters
be seen hovering in
growing into fulness on the waves.

Society Street

On Society Street

fishers rows turn their backs to the firth
the windless vennel capturing
a memory of lamp-lit windows in salt air
lingering reek of smoke-hooses
a lilting of psalms from the mission hall
like bountiful waves from the sea.

Seagull Wars

There's a dark cloud forming and it's coming this way
Like a Hitchcock movie like a biblical plague
Cause they're roostin on the cables
And they're lurkin on the gables
And they're perchin wae intent aroond the picnic tables
Black back, little gull, herring gull and common gull
Sittin on the chimney taps
Standin on the windae sill
Lurkin by the cash machines
Spatterin yer windscreens ...
So be fearful of the gathering storm
I read on the Nairn Rocks forum
Keep yer wits about if ye're oot for a stroll
Cause the skorries o Nairn, are out of control.

Black back, little gull, herring gull and common gull
Swoopin on a pensioner
Terrorise a little girl
Wee boy runs away
Naebdy's comin oot tae play
Four fit wingspan
Steal the scrans frae oot yer hand
Winged pirates frae the sky
Commandeer yer Asher's pie
Saw wan fly away wae a baldy man's toupee

Had it there tae look his best
Noo it is a seagull's nest
Hoppin on the pavement slabs
Wae the remnants of kebabs
An auld man told me, wae trembling lips ...
The skorries o Nairn, are stealin ma chips

Batten doon the hatches, fasten up the latches
The Seagull Wars are comin
And A heard it in dispatches
Somedae wants tae shoot them
Somedae wants tae save them
Pro-cull, anti-cull

Let's all Save the Seagull!

Gulls Oot!

Gulls In!

Get them aff the wheelie bins!

Leave them be! Gulls have rights!

The place is plastered wae ther shites

Cannae sleep by day or night, caw, caw, skirl, caw

No a moment's peace at aw

Gulls oot! Gulls oot! Risin in a chorus

Somedae wants tae net them aw and let them loose in Forres

Get this menace aff oor streets!

No! ... Someone send for Greenpeace!

What do we want? Save the Gull!

When do we want it? Now!

Naw! Whit dae we waant? Cull the Gull!

When dae we waant it? Noo!

Save our species, save our flocks

Time tae ban the shitehawks!

Batten doon the hatches, fasten up the latches

The Seagull Wars are hottin up

A've heard it in dispatches

Black back, little gull, herring gull and common gull

Four fit wingspan steal the scran frae oot yer hand

There's a dark cloud forming and it's coming this way

Like a Hitchcock movie like a biblical plague

Are you ready for an avian invasion?

Are you ready for the feathered devastation?

Cause I saw on the Nairn Rocks forum ...

Be fearful of the seagull swarm.

How many more Isabel Gowdies?

The Auldearn kirk rings out its bell

How many more Isabel Gowdies?

The bell sounds out across the world

How many more Isabel Gowdies?

The storm-clouds of power are unmoored in the sky

How many more? How many more?

Repentance is measured in brimstone and fire

How many more, how many more?

A sermon of forgiveness is drowned in the storm

How many more, how many more?

The voice of reason is being strangled and burned

How many more Isabel Gowdies?

The flames of rumour, the black smoke of shame

How many more, how many more?

They baited her mind with perdition and sin

How many more Isabel Gowdies?

And held up a mirror to their own tortured minds

How many more, how many more?

She took off for Elfland and flew through the night

Isabel Gowdie, Isabel Gowdie

How many more

Isabel Gowdies?

Wullie Gordon (1780 - ?)

Wullie Gordon had a dream
he dreamed a dream wi ootstreetched airms
wi feet detached frae terra firma
soared wi burds
and kissed the sky
channelled his inner Leonardo
and wondered how a man might fly.

How a man might fly frae Bunker Brae
if calculated tae a tee
he'd clear the links and Fishertoun
tae win the lift abune the sea
tae win the lift, the lofty sky
where herons, swifts and clouds set sail
and claim the prize of that first flight
where Deforges and Damiano'd failed.

Nae hot air frae Wullie
nane o yer Lunardi balloon
that'd cast its shape ower Enbra toon
Wullie wis a tinsmith tae's trade
and dreamed o sleek—lined metal blade
an thocht in tairms o structural mechanics
Pythagoras theorem, aerodynamics
then worked wi anvil, snips and shears

wi hammer, scribe, rules and squares
a timmer frame tae bear the load
then soldered plates frae nod tae node
devising wing-lift, tilts and spans
frae the stuff o pots and pans.

Frae the stuff o pots and pans
tae owercome Universal Law
he made his way tae Bunker Brae
tae soar wi burds and kiss the sky
and show the crowd assembled there
a mortal man maun surely fly!

Whiles calculatin elevation, aeronautic navigation
wi ootsteetched airms on wings o tin
Wullie's taen a mighty rin
a mighty rin and leap o faith ...
Wan! Two! Three!
and as his feet lowsed frae the earth
t'was if the world had held its breath
for wan
brief
moment
his heart sang
until
Crash! Wallop! Blooter! Scud!

The pull of gravity pruned him wrang
while in the twisted wreckage lay
a passing voice was heard tae say:
Aye. That's whit ye get for disputin Newton ...
and claimed his plans were misbegotten
he lay there bruised, but not forgotten.

And let's no forget Wullie's vision
of how he thought on impossible things
and saw whit naebdy else could see
how wan day man wid fly - on metal wings
and if there be a moral tae the tale
then mebbe it's this;
tae try yer best is not tae fail
for aw his flaws and hare-brained schemes
Wille Gordon dared tae dream
and the man himsel wis a sum o parts
tradesman, poet, inventor, cooncillor
and a wheen ae ither noble arts
so if ye dauner in the toon
remember Nairn's Renaissance loon
William Gordon – the man who tried to fly.