

Neil Gunn Writing Competition 2016/17: Secondary school section

Commended: Tomos Dargie, Fortrose Academy

The Spirit of the Mountainside

He walked, balancing himself on the edge of the crag.

His hair was wild, wrapped in a cloak,

He had no fear, no worry or sorrow.

He was the spirit of the mountainside.

Plainly dressed as he ran over the moor skipping

And prancing over each rock.

He knew each mountain like the back of his hand

As he ran in the mist, over bog.

He loved the darkness and the moon that pierced it

As it carved a silvery path through the land.

He loved the darkness and the noises he heard;

The stag by the river and the eagle on the stack.

He loved the day and sights he saw;

Suilven, Cul Beag and Cul Mor.

He loved the day and the hues he saw;

The purple of the heather and the grey leaden rocks.

He loved the mist and the cloud that came

As it covered and shrouded Stac Pollidh.

He loved the sun and the warmth he felt

As it gave life to the world he knew.

He loved to dance with the spirit of the water,

The queen of the rushes of Loch Assynt.

He loved to dance with the spirit of the weather,

Whose drum was both thunder and rain.

Now he has gone, disappeared
As greed descended on mountain, loch and stream.
As people were replaced by sheep he fled
The scouring of the Highlands.

Who may I ask? Who is to blame?
For the destruction of his land by the sheep?
Who may I ask? Who is to blame?
But the landlords who prized guineas over his land?

It was they who let the sheep destroy
A land that for millennia had been fertile.
Now there is nothing, nothing that grows,
Since even the old pine trees did wither.

So where has he gone? That wild mountain boy,
Who kept and watched the people and his land.
But away in the depths of Annwfn's feasting halls,
Is the Spirit of the mountainside.