

## Advancing Waves Of Song

Verbal melodies flooded through my mind when  
I was a girl. It was as if my mind was flooded  
with surging waves of sound. Village elders frowned  
on me claiming that I brought shame upon

the clan but I went on composing in secret.  
I bent my ear to whispers of winds as they  
formed pathways through stoned fields of oats.  
Each stilled evening, streamered with peat smoke,

I caught tunes out of the sea salted air. The roar  
of lusting stags in autumn found its way into my verse.  
When advancing, then retreating waves left concentric  
rings on shell sand after a storm, I beachcombed

poems like salt sieved driftwood. I waulked  
words as my mother waulked the urine soaked  
wool when she joined her voice in folding wave after  
wave of song: one wave followed by a steeper one.

With a creel of seaweed on my back, chilled salt  
water, dried by sunlight, crusting around my neck,  
I hummed words like leaping salmon psalms  
under my breath. It was as if my people spoke

through me even though I was just a woman.  
I was the voice of love, exile and drowning;  
the voice of the curlew calling from bouldered  
moors with the bog cotton dancing licentious jigs

around the hill lochans that wore their necklaces  
of moonlight like shy brides. My brother joined  
me in this conspiracy of song. They would not teach  
me to form scrawled words on paper so I sang

and he regimented my silenced words in lines  
like soldiers on parade. I grew bold through time,  
I stood up in ceilidhs – they could not stop me -  
and cast my words like herring nets around the centre

circle of glowing embers. I spun out my years  
with the healing gauze of my poems until death  
dumbed my voice and now I lie with my shameless  
lips pressed to smothering wave on wave of sand.

If you look closer – come, look at me closer -  
you will see my lips still mouthing words,  
striving to speak for the dead as I spoke for  
the living: creating beauty out of loss and dirt.

*It was traditional for female Gaelic poets and song writers in the Scottish Highlands and Islands to be buried face down after death as a punishment for usurping the male role of Bard.*