**UHI WRITING COMPETITION 2019– HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS**

**1.**

**Highlands and Islands**

Scottish Highlands and Islands

There's nae place the same

I'm sure we’re aw proud

An lucky, tae call it oor hame

These lands are so pleasant

Fae the east to the west

Munros, Lochs and Rivers

Amongst the world's best

Loch Ness in it's splendour

And Ben Nevis stands tall

Skye, Lewis, Harris and Orkney

Gorgeous islands them all

Those meandering rivers

Feshie, Earn, Isla and Tay

Could just sit and gaze

An admire aw day

They come here for whisky

An they come here tae fish

They come to see Faerie Glen

So they can make a wee wish

Gavin Mcdonald, NQ Access to Humanities, Perth College

**2.**

**The Unsung Heroes of the Crofting Community**

Craggy knolls of fading green,

A site of struggles yet unseen

Crofters on their laden way

Farewell their homes ‘neath skies of grey

Yet some will stay, and some will fight

And show the Laird their fearsome might

They hoist their skirts and take their stand

Strong of heart, with stone in hand

Women of the Highland life

Brave were you amidst the strife

You rose with strength and fervent valour

Triumphant in the watchful hour

Violent clashes on the brae

Let them see another day

On crofter’s land, on crofter’s hill

It was always theirs, it’s theirs now still

Jan Lloyd 18018685, Culture and Heritage BAH, Orkney College\*

3.

**Time of nature**

The ancient stumps of pine

Reminding me of a time

When this land

Vast and unmanned

Was inhabited by trees

And with every gentle breeze

Spread its pollen wide and far

Creating birch and alder carr

Growing together

Were hazel and heather

Pine needles on the forest floor

Trampled by wild boar

Blossoming rowan trees

Providing nectar for bees

A willow by the river

Showing a gentle shiver

Trees that did once grow

Oh, what they didn’t know

Was the changing of time

Caused trees to decline

And peatlands to cover

The pine stumps we now rediscover

Jasmijn E. Sybenga, UHI postgraduate, Orkney College

4.

# **ODE TO THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS**

To walk amongst the heather is a pleasure to behold,

To hear the whispers on the wind of stories to be told.

The mountains high that touch the sky,

The Monarch of the Glen,

The liquid gold that warms the soul and heart of every man.

The burns that trickle over stones and through the rich dark peat,

That stokes the fires of Celtic charm and bids you take a seat.

The walks along the coastal paths, down to the glistening sands,

Let us raise a dram and celebrate this great and bonnie land.

Sylvia Gibney, NPA Administration, Inverness UHI,

5.

# **Home**

This place I call home

has nurtured and grown

me in so many ways.

It’s hard to remember

when I was a stranger

in this strange land.

But stranger I was

an ‘in-comer’, of course

from ‘down the road’.

I spoke with an accent

a course Ayrshire dialect

like gravel and stone.

I tried to fit in

changing my twang

mimic to belong.

As time has passed by

I no longer must try

my tongue forming words

like a local, of sorts

I guess you could say

I’m now from round this way

at long last.

I am home.

Hazel Urquhart, Creative Writing in the Highlands and Islands BAH, Inverness College

**6.**

**Lost Gem**

A tear shouldn’t roll down her cheek;

as she holds her daughters’ hand.

But they remind her of the life she lost,

all those years ago.

Bellies bared towards the sky;

pups carelessly dream,

of the seas embrace.

Waves push against the cliffs;

towards the rocky shore.

Salt disperses into the air,

settling on the tongue.

She’s reminded of the days,

when she would bathe in the sun;

with the pup she was torn from.

A mother lets out a bark,

the harem turns and stares.

Their gazes fixed,

on a long-lost friend.

She belongs to the sea.

Ashleigh Tucker, Creative Writing in the Highlands and Islands BAH, North Highland College Thurso

7.

**Tent with a Sea View**

Stinking, limp, mouldy as hell, grimy, tiny, fits us well

The tent

The tent is half made, with holes, the poles are squint

Who took the drink?

Plastic cups, film wrapped food

Sleeping bags, pillows, everything’s good

Collapse

Drift wood and match

Raw hand, light a fire

Sharp stones beneath

Stolen, broken folding chairs

Playing cards, making dares

Bright green emotions, urgent and crude

Fiercely, personally misunderstand

Hear

The camaraderie in fear

The ghost car, the gunshot, the shed

The black eyed women, the severed head

The brutal hurricane of youth, brilliantly masks one truth

The stars, the sea view

Susan Pearson, First Year Fine Art degree, Shetland College UHI

8.

**Drumnadrochit (Loch Ness)**

after Xie Lingyun

*‘A last bleed of gold in the west, like a Shan Shui painting’*

John Burnside

There where I lived,

river to the south, loch peat-dark deep to the east,

you canoe past an islet, follow the shore back

to meadows spread out, glen beyond.

Hills rise and with coils piled high,

they worm-charm with warm hollows,

hump over and arch down, playful,

slither and heather into horizons,

stones worn smooth by basking.

Notes:

Xie Lingyun (385-433) was progenitor of Shan Shui poetry in which mountains and rivers are prominent.

The epigraph is from Burnside’s poem *Travelling South,*

*Scotland, August 2012*.

Kate Fereday Eshete, Creative Writing in the Highlands and Islands BAH, Orkney College

9.

**The Bothy**

Daylight. Gas stoves hiss. Aroma of coffee. Eyes rubbed free of sleep. Clothes pulled on. Breakfast. Packs eased onto tired shoulders. Dreich. Boots squelch through bog. Rocky path rises. Conversation. Rough boulders. Fresh water. Lunch. Scramble up to ridge. Vast expanse of rugged mountains stretch emptily to infinity. Sunbeams slant through clouds. Summit cairn. Wind. Peace. Zig-zag descent between grey slabs. Companionable silence. Tired, wet feet. Evening sunlight sparkles on loch. Stone structure exudes reassuring squat solidity. Naked. Ice-cold, deep, dark water shocks breath away. Laughter. Fire crackles and sparks. Warmth. Food. Contentment. Cards. Whisky. Darkness. Stars. Sleep.

Jamie Macmanaway, Geography BScH, Inverness College.

10.

**The Hills Are Healing Places**

I used to escape in a haze of smoke, lines of coke, acid tabs into oblivion. A distorted reality, barely living. Music floods my veins now. The mountains with their shoulders nestled to the horizon, awaken in me a primordial instinct. I get lost in their midst. Towering high above the clouds, a sense of urgency and belonging overtakes me. Cailleach, goddess of creation. Her ice that shifted rocks, carved the landscape and bore the valleys that man now walks. The sadness thaws again. Hills of my homeland, I was not born but thrown into. The hills are healing places.

Micah Nye, Audio Engineering BScH, Perth College

**11.**

**Impermanence**

The mountains that we see around us are but pale shadows of their former selves. Once they stretched skywards. Enormous. Magnificent. Snow mantled peaks that rivalled the Himalaya in stature. These Caledonian mountains extended from what is now North America, through Scotland, and onwards into Scandinavia. Broken up by slow tectonic movements and reduced inexorably by weathering and erosion; their lofty aspirations have been humbled by the passage of time. Now what remains are merely the roots. The rotten stumps of teeth once strong and white and proud. In time, even they will be gone. Nothing stays the same.

Jamie Macmanaway, Geography BScH, Inverness College.

**12.**

**HIGHLANDS AND ISLAND IN REFLECTION**

These beautiful mirrors are opposite to the other

And life on each is a reflection to the other

These great friends eat a balanced diet

By judging time one during the day and the other at night

Their sweet form nimbus

Either cyclonic or conventional

Living being smile

The wishes cant live alone of being one of the greatest highlands on showers of Indian ocean

I would exchange my perfumes for the ever talked of beautiful mermaids sailing across

In broad moon and be honoured

But surely I always beg I cant ride any horse

I must stay in reflection

Kelvin Thumuni, Hospitality Management HND, Perth College.

13.

Like the curtain lifting, dawn. Begin.

Does the grass smell differently? Watching his nose go into twitching overdrive is wondrous. Even in winter.

Every smell is a message. Everything is new to him.

A morning greeting from a dolphin is another surprise. He sits down and looks at me for reassurance.

This is his world. A world viewed from the level of my ankles. But he is level with the beauty of these lands.

I am his world. He is my world. This is unconditional love.

Winter on the Beauly Firth. The first one for wee Angus, three months old.

Rona Campbell, AUTOMATIC EXTERNAL DEFIBRILLATOR (AED), Moray College

14.

**Heather on the Hill**

Shamrocks, Roses, Daffodils, Thistles, they all share a crown

Yet still

The heather on the hill, sways wee and proud

Throughout the world it attracts the greatest crowds

High above the village, roofs and all,

They rarely notice it now

The heather on the hill once planted high above the clouds

Lonely but hardy, it makes no sound

Walk in its shadow, you will never walk alone

Lush greens, blue and violent tones

But wait!

The heather on the hill asks for nothing but a vow

When you visit its home, you watch your step now!

Carys Maclean, History BAH, Perth College

15.

**In the Moonlight**

She took a seat in the upper deck of the ferry. The waves were strong, and the wind was bitter, but she would get sea-sick inside. It was a quiet trip, only the driver of a Tesco lorry and some visitors. They left Burwick on the left and approached Mainland slowly. A yellow sparkle lighted up her eyes. In the moonlight that night, she would dance around the Stones of Stennes. In the moonlight that night, the rite would take place, the sacrifice would be made. In the moonlight that night, the coven would gather again. She shivered with excitement.

Cristina Fernandez, Literature BAH, Moray College

16.

**Puffin-sonnet**

Cold wind blows from the Caithness shore

where birds nest on a clifftop steep.

Winter is coming, frost bites deep.

In the Highlands stay they can no more.

A little puffling stares sadly to the sea.

Mother puffin enquires from her shiny beak:

“Peedie puffling, what is it you seek?”

“The sea’s so deep, and I am but wee.”

“Ach, bairn, don’t worry too much,

for that we have a special trick.”

By now the wee puffling, worried sick,

feels mama puffin’s gentle touch.

A push, a shove, wings spreading free –

relieved, the puffling soars up cross the sea.

Andrea Freund, RESEARCH COURSE, Orkney College

17.

**What broke my homeland**

A poet I met told me of his romantic homeland

Of entrancing odysseys dripping in faith and blood.

His recited song told of a people lost and expelled

A culture forgotten speaking a ghostly tongue.

He told me of clans broken by honour,

The children’s cries and the clashing of swords

His words painted a deep canvas of a ridge bending to the sky

Of old gods bound to the land, great, grand and no more.

“Finally,” he sang, dancing about the room,

“The greatest jest of all, a southern plague of education and civility;

That’s what broke my homeland.”

Euan Macdonald, Gaelic and Media Studies BAH, SABHAL MOR OSTAIG

18.

It is hard to distinguish what is right and what is wrong about the Highlands.

Is it dreary weather, always raining, and populated with more animals than people?

Is it lush, rolling hills of green, with stunning views from the cliffs, looking out on the sea?

Are its people loud, brash and kind-hearted all at once, friendly and fiercely fun?

Are they dour and hard-hearted, refusing to let go of the past, caring more about whiskey than wisdom?

Any of these things could be said for the highlands and its people, but if you ever ask a highlander?

It’s home.

Brogan Mclean, History BAH. North Highland College Thurso

19.

**The Highlands and Islands, a view from Space**

Peering through the cupola, I gaze down through clear skies upon the sprawling mass of the Highlands and Islands. Passing over the Western Isles, huddling together as they move briskly under. Towering stoically above a conjured courageous walker, Benn Eighe; standing beneath me flattened on a single lush plane, its Cambrian age dwarfing my own. Moving along its shallow path like the sun on a cold winter’s day, the Shetland archipelago, slides passed the edge of my mechanical eye. Many separate lands, joined as one, connected by the deep blue of the waters of life. Whisked away, ‘til next time.

Dr Tom McCallum, Digital Pedagogy Med, Lews Castle College

20.

The Highlands and Islands have been voted by Lonely planet as one of the top destinations for 2019. The “raw beauty and deep-rooted culture “, were recognised as drawing points to global travellers.

The sheer beauty, diverse scenery and richness in biodiversity, as well as a colourful and interesting past, bring tourists from all over the planet, to receive inspiration and a sense of belonging as they explore this ancient land.

The population exude warmth, hospitality and patriotism like no other place on earth, to outsiders longing to belong to this exquisite refuge.

COME AND EXPLORE THIS JEWEL OF RECREATION!

Jacqueline Johnstone, Environmental Science BScH, North Highland College Thurso

21

**Highlands and Islands**

Beauty and splendour. Words fail to describe this breath-taking landscape which gives rise to beating hearts and vivid imaginations.

High rise mountains greet the weary traveller. The mystery of Ben Nevis awaits. Her footpath is full of history. She takes those who travel her to new heights.

Stunning sunsets give rise to hope. Those whose gaze travels from Laig Beach on the stunning Duirinish peninsula on Skye; a glimpse of heaven awaits them.

Hope is renewed, and troubles are all but forgotten as the soul breathes in and treasures the wildness and mystery of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

Caroline Stewart, Course- Access to Christian Theology

22.

This is the place where sky and sea form the edge of my conscious self as waves gush forth to caress these shores with unfurling secrets on frothy lips.

Until you found me I was awake, yet asleep, brought into being on the breath of winnowing grasses and the quiet roar of whispering tides.

You speak to me without words about things I already knew and yet did not know, liberated on the drumming wings of courting snipe and the whirring murmuration of starlings…

…and I begin to see with senses attuned to seeing what my eyes alone cannot see.

Sue Whittingham, Fine Art BAH, Orkney College

23.

**Red Rag to a Bull**

Meteorology’s my passion, especially polar vortex anomalies – rare, sudden, deadly. When one strikes, I’m tidying our garage. I dive into my drysuit – seven life-saving millimetres of signal-red neoprene.

‘Steve?’

White rime coats the Christmas tree. He sits, Roses chocolate between frozen finger and thumb. One mournful caress: his statue topples, shatters into pink shards.

Out I bolt – along the Caledonian Canal, sliding past frigid corpses. Frost clouds billow from my mouth. Am I the only living thing left?

I find Loch Ness glaciated. Urquhart Castle looks picturesque.

The monster charges at me across the ice. My perfect storm.

Kate Fereday Eshete, Creative Writing in the Highlands and Islands BAH, Orkney College

24.

**The Incomers**

In the light of the patterns

From the lines in the sand

In the waves that come bubbling messages to land

Wet words from white horses that come galloping to me

I stretch my wired arms out and listen tenderly

No photographs to tax my hearth

I have images stronger than doors

No memories floating on hops and grains

My heart is always with yours

If heather should falter

And lose her grip in the wind

And return to the lowlands with her bristling grin

Kraken will waken

And men will drown

Lyngbakr was the island

Sinking down

Luke Constable, SQA Emergency First Aid, Orkney College

25.

**Crust**

Peanut butter on toast. The taste of grief and of scavenging. I dip my knife into a jar marked with someone else’s name and slide it over a slice of bread I didn’t buy. I gobble down the guilt. In the December heat I picture the ritual of farewell being performed without me in the winter of a Highland church. The crust gone; today’s meal over. No money until pay day. No food to put in the hostel’s fridge. No granny.

Home, half a lifetime later. My livelihood gone, and uncles lost, the remembrance of a taste fills my mouth.

Lynne Bradshaw, Literature BAH, Inverness College

26.

'Where else can you live with such beauty and mystery on your doorstep, where the land is steeped in history and the nature is stunning? Where else can you study  at the UHI and gaze out the window upon mountains and lochs? Where unique culture, food and art are sought after worldwide? Where you can travel an hour and find deserted sandy beaches or exhilarating mountains to climb? Whose inhabitants are fiercely patriotic and proud, yet warm and friendly to all. In this land you'll fall in love... always having a place in your heart for the Highlands and Islands.'

Sophie Henderson, Nursing BSc, Highland Health Sciences Library

27.

"I don't understand, there’s not even a MacDonalds" she exclaimed, laughing, "And it’s soooo cold!" I looked at her, brow raised. She sighed, "Seriously, it's beautiful, but it's so isolated. Why do you love it so much?" I shrugged, she obviously hated the place, how could I even begin to explain why Orkney was so special? I hadn't realised how much I’d missed the place until I'd moved back, but now I found beauty in every view, in every breath of air.

The birds' calls, the sea views, the sunrises and sunsets all soothed my troubled soul.

I was home.

Kirstie Moar, SVQ in Social Services and Healthcare at SCQF Level 7, Orkney College

28.

Cò ris a tha i coltach,

a bhith a’ fuireach air an eilean?

Ceist dhoirbh dhomhsa

Chan eil fios agam air dad eile

Tha i cho diofraichte ann an coimeas

Ris an tìr mhòr

Tha sinn uile eòlach air a chèile

Agus chan eil ann ach ceithir busaichean gach latha

Tha i cho sàmhach

A’ fuireach ann an Uibhist

Chan eil sìon ri dhèanamh

Ach ‘s e mo dhachaigh a th’ ann

A bheil mi deiseil airson fhàgail?

Tha mi a’ creidsinn gum bi.

Gu bhith ochd-deug bliadhna,

‘S e inbheach a th’ unnam

Ach an caill mi cò th’ unnam?

Mo chànan ‘s mo ghuth?

Macisaac, Maryrose, NC Art and Design SCQF 6, Lews Castle College

**TRANSLATION**

*What is it like,*

*Living on the island?*

*A difficult question for me*

*When I know nothing else*

*So different when compared to*

*Say, the mainland*

*We all know one another*

*And there are only 4 buses a day*

*It is so quiet*

*Living in Uist*

*There is nothing to do*

*But it is my home*

*Am I ready to leave?*

*I think I will be.*

*Almost 18 years old*

*I’m an adult*

*But will I lose who I am?*

*My language and my voice?*

By Macisaac, Maryrose, NC Art and Design SCQF 6, Lews Castle College