

POEMS BY KATHLEEN RAINE

Deserted Village on Mingulay

(From a photograph by Margaret Faye Shaw Campbell)

Not far had men's hands to raise from the stony ground
Blocks the ice and rain had hewn.

The dry-stone walls of the houses of Mingulay still stand
Long after the sheltering roof is gone.

Not far had the heather thatch to blow back to the moor.

Children were born here, women sang
Their songs in an ancient intricate mode

As they spun the wool of sheep on the hill

By a bog turf fire hot on the swept hearth-stone.

Earth's breast that nourished and warmed was near

As cow-byre and lazy-bed

Made fertile with sea-wrack carried up from the shore

In creels of withies cut in a little glen,

Near as shelter of hill-side, fragrance of clover-scented air.

Not far had the dead to go on their way of return,

Not far the circle of the old burial-ground

Whose low wall sets its bound to encroaching wild

That never has put on pride of human form,

Worn face of maiden or fisherman, mother or son.

Never far the washer of shrouds, the hag with gray hair;

Yet those who here lived close to the mother of all

Found, it may be, in her averted face, little enough to fear.

Bleak these native mountains rise on earth
Long ago as heaven.
Returning I hear your name
By a stranger spoken.
You are remembered among these cold hills.
In silence I keep faith,
Having no title to confess your life
My life, your death my death.

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Polluted tide,
Desecrated earth destroyed:
Yet one green leaf opens for the heart
The shelter of a great forest.

Oval the golden moon
Hangs in the evening sky
Filling the bay with light,
So near,
If I could clear my sight,
Cast body away,
I would be here.

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Banked winter cloud,
Clear Northern sky
And the flash of Oighsgear light:
One far star
Poignant as joy
Signals for ever.

Kore

Once more
The yellow iris on the wrack-strewn shore
Bloom in our midsummer
Whose root is in that realm
Where the dead are
Everywhere underfoot
Where the salt of the sea makes sweet the grass of the
land.
Among the roots of the turf the fine sea-sand
Of innumerable broken shells
Makes fertile root and flower.
Bright forms return:
Not once, but in multitude is shown
In signature of living gold the mystery
Of immortal joy.

It was our solitude we shared,
Contours of far hills, ferny lynn,
Grain of lichen on wind-worn stone,
Creviced flowers, birds on the wing,
A country where there are no names
For the one being of living things.

It seemed that I had known you long,
That, meeting, we had each come home.
I did not think how all in time
Must hurt and harm, must hate and fear,
But found our parted selves betrayed.

A rainbow, beautiful and clear light
Whose span, at certain times, a way
Opens, I saw today,
On your far grave its radiant foot.

And that was all his life,
His share of days,
Says the grave;
You need not fear he lies
With another,
For him no more
Than the one life I spoiled for him,
And I live on.

Crossing the sound I summoned you in thought
To look out of my eyes at sea and sky,
Soft clouds sheltering those hills that once you knew
And sea-paths where you sailed,
The white birds following your boat from isle to isle.
Would it have seemed to you still beautiful, this world?
Or from that other state
Do you discern a darkness in our light,
The cloud of blood that veils our skies,
And in the labouring wings of hungry gulls
The weight of death? If it be so,
Dear love, I would not call you back
To bear again the heaviness of earth
Upon the impulse of your joy.

Eider afloat in the bay,
Cloud-capped isles far out,
This thyme-sweet turf I tread,
Real under my feet.

These were your world,
Your loved and known;
Can you recall to mind
Wrack-strewn shore and tide-wet stone?

I seek you in wave-wrought shell,
In wild bird's eye:
What country have the dead
But memory?

We who travel time
Call past and gone
Remembered days that those who dream
Call home.

Sandalphon

I call your name,
But if you should reply
How shall I know your voice
In sound of wind and wave,
In sea-bird's cry?

Or if from sleep
Some image rise
Though angel-bright, how know
Among the mingling currents of the dreaming deep
It tells of you?

Or does my doubt impede
Those messengers
Whose footsteps everywhere and always come and go,
The world a single thought
Wherein the one love seeks, and in a thousand ways
Answering, the one love replies.