

## *National Bird for Scotland*

National Bird for Scotland?

Of Gaelic provenance with a classical prosthesis  
going back to the Jurassic *Sinornithosaurus*,  
I'm going for *Lagopus mutus*, the ptarmigan,

endemic to Highland Region,  
surviving on shoots and sprouts and seed  
in scrapes in the forest glens in January  
and survival woods in cryptic plumage,

low-growing, and, after the last issue  
of snow and ice melt, summering between  
the mottled grey and buff-brown on rugged outlooks  
below the tree line with support sparse

and visible only rarely  
and its guttural, slightly alien vocalisation  
among the swales and scree  
in the higher elevations of Coir' an Uaigneis.

## *Nitromorsing*

Kathleen a whole week dead,  
I'm back in her house with my mother,  
laying it out for sale  
in another week's time—

*Nitromorsing* the tables at first,  
clearing the shelves of their  
contents, packing them all  
into old boxes, buried

under all the dust;  
Mother working every hour God sent;  
the paint coming off the wall;  
the only sound the mixer tap

in the kitchen still  
dripping; her Hoover bag full  
to overflowing; the flex under our feet,  
for all our care, still tripping us up.

## *The Deserted Village, Achill*

To the north of the clachan, malachite,  
azurite, rare  
deposits of tourmaline;

a golden eagle above  
a cairn on the north-west face  
of Slievemore, scarred by a corrie;

Sweeney's cave;

a nunatak above the Midlandian ice;

Lennon's drowned drumlins, the submerged coastline  
in the glacial sea,  
eroded beaches, vanished continent of Tir Thingome.

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On cuttings in blanket bog and where the road  
widens, *Gunnera tinctoria* spreads fast,  
seeds carried far from the parent plant  
(one thinks of Kirkintilloch or Cleveland).

On indifferent soil over the brae,  
*Chongia*, Dooagh, "largest village in Europe" once,  
by the machair, Keel and Sruhillsbeg Lough, damned  
by shingle and sand,

stunted shrubs, *Erica caulon*, *Erica mediterranea*,  
relict flora  
from Lusitania.

# *The Salmon Carol Ann Duffy, Cliffs of Moher*

The Gourami Sujata Bhatt, Kazimierz Dolny  
The Wahoo Kamala Das, Ijebu-ode  
The Pirarucu Lavinia Greenlaw, Kpiri Mposhi  
The Curimbata Vona Groarke, Ste Marie de la Madeleine  
The Vieja Carole Satyamurti, Maksimkin Yar  
The Bichir Patience Agbabi, Dayr az Zawr  
The Arvana OluYomi Majekodunmi, General Paz  
The Zander Debjani Chatterjee, Ivano-Frankovsk  
The Jaraqui Zsuzsa Rakovszky, Árhús Amtskommune  
The Mako a-dZiko Simba, White City  
The Tarpon Moniza Alvi, Quombatook  
The Opah Suniti Namjoshi, Kabambare  
The Nile Mouthbrooder Sudeep Sen, Harz  
The Xiphophorus helleri Darvwall Mahapatra, Zigui

## *The King*

Beside me in the front seat  
only the other day,  
Seumas pointed out  
his grandfather—"What was his name again, Dad?"  
"Tom" "Oh yes, Tom"—died on the toilet  
in the same way as Elvis Presley.

And although, unlike The King,  
the old boy wasn't actually eating  
a hamburger—ever the traditionalist!—  
at the time, we wondered  
if his final words might not have been:  
Thakavermuchlaiesngnlnmn!