

Five Subversions

from the Scottish Gaelic of Sorley MacLean

1. ALBA SAOR

I'm a protoMarxist
and utterly opposed, therefore
to the monarchy *à la* Dave Spart
but if Scotland obtained its independence
and we then had a society demonstrably
multicultural, tolerant and pluralistic
without inequality or exploitation,
an *Alba Saor* as the SNP says,
I would abolish the monarchy with great alacrity
and all its repugnant smugness
and proclaim you queen
in spite of the new republic.

2. ORAN EILE

Say, William Ross,
what'll we have to say
when we meet up on Judgement Day?
I'll puff up your Oran Eile.
What'll you have to say about my *œuvre*
which I let loose with an arty-farty
bridle, a posse of wild horses
for the boys in the Poetry Library?

3. HOUNDS AND WOLVES

In my dreams, in the snow out there,
I see the poems I've not yet written.
I see the track
they leave in the snow, pure and white,
rabid and bloodthirsty,
this pack
of hounds and wolves
clearing deer-fences, running under
the trees on the moor,
jumping across the burn
down there in the glen,
running up the mountainside,
barking and baying in a frenzy
across the Highland landscape
I see all the time,
feral ridgebacks and wolves chasing their prey
through the woods and mountains, on and on.
These are the specious canines of my verse,
chasing physical and spiritual beauty
which is a white hind
over the mountains and woodland
and you, my precious,
are the deer
and it never ends, never.

4. WARFARE AND CARNAGE

In spite of all
your biological warfare and carnage
on the streets of the West Bank and Kabul,

what I'll always mind
is the pool table in this holiday cottage
and the two nights I spent on it:

in 2000
the sallow-skinned
Scottish brunette

and, in '98
the blonde
former Miss Ireland.

5. CREAGAN BEAGA

I'm passing Creagan Beaga
in the dark on my own
as the surf in Camas Alba
soughs on the smooth shingle.

The curlew plover
are crying down by the Cuil,
to the southeast of Sgurr nan Gilleann
is Blaven and the moon is full.

The light strikes the surface, flat as a pool table,
from Rubha na Fainge jutting out north of here
as the current in Caol na hAirde
flows on south with a fast sparkle.