

The Hugh Miller Writing Competition 2019-2020

Under 18 Prose 2nd Prize

The Isle of Staffa: Daisy Stewart Henderson

The Hugh Miller Writing Competition carries the name of one of Scotland's most endearing geologists, Hugh Miller (1802-1856), and aims to honour his legacy by inspiring new, original prose and poetry on the theme of Scotland's geoheritage. The competition is organised by the Scottish Geodiversity Forum and The Friends of Hugh Miller.

Further details of the competition, and all the winning entries, are available at www.scottishgeology.com/hughmiller/

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The Isle of Staffa

By Daisy Stewart Henderson

Born from the earth on a darkened day, clouds of sulphur blanketed a silver horizon. Sculpted by fire, with all her imperfect edges silk rubbing against nature's maternal kindness, she set the ocean alight. Ebony black, spawn of molten lava succumbing to an icy sea, the island was born of beautiful conflict. With a burning touch which left the recipient cold, she spoke in the melancholy keys of an organ, with a body forged from its pipes. Mysteries inside, soft songs of things they could almost understand, her truth was deep buried.

Birds flew, rested in her arms. The currents flowed warm, reminding her on winter's bitterest nights with a soft embrace that the world was harsh, but not cruel.

Years leapt with the dolphins, the tranquility of warmer waters leaving their glistening fins pointed to the south. The winds outgrew their playful dances around the island, wrestling with winter, until they carried only cold. A gown of mottled grey cloud cloaked her unwillingly, leaving her tripping over lightning and rain.

The warmth of the earth grew ever more distant, a hint of anger in her waiting magma. The flow of life lessened, veins severed. From darkened lava, drying blood, she formed lungs.

Lost at sea, with stars which at times seemed afraid of the moon, she waited. Strange beauty, entrancingly austere. An arrow fired to the depths, gannets hunt around her shores. The ocean's secrets rush over their icy eyes, her dying heat pulsating in the water. Shipwrecked, she waits for the call of her kin. Across the earth, volcanic sisters rise. Bathed in tropical sun, white sands disguise their rugged form. Why must solitude sting more when it's all you've ever known?

Singing with a howling gale she finds hope in a minor key. The fire of youth dims, she faces it with dignity, not childish rage. Years wasted mourning the things she never had. She never felt the peace of warmth. She watches the birds fly in from the north. Puffins with faces painted like porcelain dolls of a fading era land in great numbers. Grass sprouts from her troubled soils, slowly growing green. A new generation of dolphins plays, drawn back by the winds of change.

Within her, crystal waters lap at pillars, the notes of an ancient song. A cathedral of the earth, strange solace hums in her hollow heart. Ring across the oceans as they tumble and find their way. The truth rings in an eerie tone, unexpected, entrancing awe. Can the beat of her heart echo across a turbulent sea, leaving it calm like a sheet of glass?

Peace is easily shattered. But the birds fly on gentle wings. And we should too. Listen in silence which entralls you with its emptiness. Hear her echoes. Hear her truth.