Five Iona Poems

Hannah Lavery
Iona Holiday House

Through a borrowed window, I look out at the sleepy harbour, the still summer sea, the wild-flower field, the ferry returning with yet more pilgrims, watch their slow progress up from jetty to abbey, to hotel, to B&B, to hostel, to house like this and imagine myself permanent here, dreaming of walking on empty beaches, stopping by the bar, pausing at Celtic Cross, at still abbey, at the gate to the North Shore, in the off season, in the quiet time before the rosy cheeks, the walking booted, the bible savvy coming in with the Cal Mac, followed by all the holiday folk laden with those Tesco jute bags, bucket and spade, fancy bread,

I am dreaming of patterned calico in deep blue and a climbing red rose to frame the view.
An Iona Beach Walk

He is tired now, I am just beginning to breathe.
White sand turns to pebble before the break
and I send him off collecting, put out a blanket of our coats,

his pockets are soon full and he returns.
Sitting close (sweetfeathersoftbubblegumbreathhearfullsuddenlybursts)
he shows me with ceremony
each pebble, shell, Iona marble.

And I pull him in, look back at the sea,
in his small hands he turns a crab claw over and over,
leaving the pebbles, shells and green stone in perfect circle.

I am like a wave coming in,
broken,
and he gives me back
like sea air.
Rosa and the Corncrakes

A wild field of elderflower
and nesting corncrakes
leads my eye down to the sea
moving on the horizontal.
Rosa’s voice finding middle place
between the rasping crack, crack
and the high song of the finches
and we could spend a life here
pressing flowers for cordial, jelly, wine,
and watching for those migrating birds,
for Rosa to fly high
over all the rushing tides.
Sràid nan Marbh (The Street of the Dead)

I am always, 
have always been, 
that girl who threw it down 
to be a challenge to the world. 
Now I pick it up 
whilst walking along this street of the dead 
to lay it down at the feet of the saints, 
at the base of the stone cross of Oran, of Columba 
and listening for that angels’ chorus, 
I hear instead the ewes in the neighbouring field 
and the calls of my own 
running with whoops and shrieks, a squall of my own making, 
running from me, away to the white sand 
and to the pebble-strewn shore.
Iona Boy

You met Iona in utero,
a slip from boat to jetty
meant you were baptised before birth
in Iona sea,
blessed from the beginning,
swimming in your mother’s waters
before break of membrane,
thin veil pierced,
forever tied.
Hannah Lavery

Hannah Lavery lives in Dunbar with her husband and their three children, a former Secondary English Teacher, she has been a freelance writer since 2013 with residences with The Scottish Book Trust, The Whole Works in Edinburgh and Bleachingfield Centre in Dunbar.

She has had recent commissions from Edinburgh University and Greater Glasgow NHS and is currently working on new play and has been awarded a Tom McGrath playwriting grant.

She is Creative Director of CoastWord festival and founding member of Appletree Writers.

Her play Close Speaking to the Girl Stopping was first performed at Spoken Word Sundays at the Edinburgh Fringe 2014 and again at The Waiting Room in February 2015.

Her debut pamphlet of poetry, The Drift, has been recently published by Appletree Writers Press. She has had stories, poems and blogs published by The Scottish Book Trust, The Fat Damsel and other publications and has had two short plays read at the Traverse Theatre as part of Words, Words, Words.