

SCOTTISH ANTHOLOGY POEMS

The Bonnie Earl o' Moray (traditional ballad)

- Murder of Earl of Moray
- Themes: betrayal, politics, tragedy
- Techniques: ballad form, repetition, plain diction

About the poem:

Tells the murder of James Stewart, the "Bonny Earl," killed by Huntly in 1592 during a real political feud. [\[en.wikipedia.org\]](https://en.wikipedia.org)

Key Quotations

- **"They hae slain the Earl o' Moray, / And laid him on the green."**
→ Simple, stark announcement of murder. [\[contemplator.com\]](https://contemplator.com)
- **"He was a braw gallant, / He might hae been a king."**
→ Praises his nobility; supporter-made ballad. [\[en.wikipedia.org\]](https://en.wikipedia.org)
- **"Now wae be to thee, Huntly!"**
→ Makes the killer the villain; expresses political anger. [\[en.wikipedia.org\]](https://en.wikipedia.org)
- **"I bade you bring him wi you, / But forbade you him to slay."**
→ The King's alleged response included to avoid treason accusations. [\[en.wikipedia.org\]](https://en.wikipedia.org)

Themes: betrayal, political violence, grief, folk memory.
[\[gla.ac.uk\]](https://gla.ac.uk)

Mini Essay — *The Bonnie Earl o' Moray*

Question: Show how the ballad presents betrayal or political tragedy.

The Bonnie Earl o' Moray presents betrayal and political violence with stark directness, turning a real historical murder into a lasting piece of folk memory. The ballad opens with the plain, devastating announcement: **"They hae slain the Earl o' Moray, / And laid him on the green."**

This simple, unembellished phrasing reflects the blunt horror of Moray's death and mirrors traditional ballad style, which favours clarity over ornate description. [\[en.wikipedia.org\]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Moray), [\[jstor.org\]](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2339000)

The poem's tone is openly sympathetic toward Moray, portraying him as noble and admired: **"He was a braw gallant, / He might hae been a king."** The praise reflects the perspective of Moray's supporters, who likely composed the ballad; it elevates him as a figure of charisma and promise. The grief expressed is personal as well as political, as the loss is framed not merely as a death, but as the fall of someone who embodied leadership and honour. [\[en.wikipedia.org\]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Moray)

The sense of betrayal intensifies in the condemnation of Huntly: **"Now wae be to thee, Huntly!"** The poem casts him unequivocally as the villain, emphasising public anger at his actions. Even the King's voice appears within the ballad — **"I bade you bring him wi you, / But forbade you him to slay"** — a detail included historically to shield James VI from accusations of complicity, as contemporary sources suggest his political motives were questioned. [\[en.wikipedia.org\]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Moray)

By combining political commentary, personal lament, and the stark economy of ballad form, *The Bonnie Earl o' Moray* preserves a moment of Scottish history as collective tragedy. The poem becomes not just a retelling of a killing, but an act of folk remembrance — condemning injustice, honouring a fallen figure, and ensuring the story of betrayal remains alive in cultural memory.

The Twa Corbies (traditional ballad)

- Two crows discuss eating a dead knight
- Themes: death, indifference, loyalty lost
- Techniques: dark humour, irony, stark imagery

About the poem:

Two ravens discuss eating the corpse of a knight whose hawk, hound, and lady have all abandoned him. Brutal, existential, and macabre.

[\[english-studies.net\]](https://www.english-studies.net)

Key Quotations

- **"As I was walking all alane / I heard twa corbies making a mane."**
→ Lone wandering sets bleak tone. [\[english-studies.net\]](https://www.english-studies.net)
- **"In behint yon auld fail dyke, / I wot there lies a new-slain knight."**
→ The ravens find the unburied corpse. [\[english-studies.net\]](https://www.english-studies.net)
- **"His hawk and his hound and his lady fair"**
→ All have deserted him — ultimate betrayal. [\[english-studies.net\]](https://www.english-studies.net)

- **“I’ll pike out his bonny blue een... Wi’ ae lock o’ his gowden hair we’ll theek our nest.”**
→ Gruesome imagery; nature’s indifference. [\[english-studies.net\]](https://english-studies.net)
- **“O’er his white banes when they are bare / The wind sall blaw for evermair.”**
→ Stark existential ending; nothing remains but bones and wind.
[\[allenginsberg.org\]](https://allenginsberg.org)

Themes: death, betrayal, the indifference of nature, anti-romantic realism.
[\[blackpearl...blogfa.com\]](https://blackpearl...blogfa.com)

Mini-Essay — *The Twa Corbies*

Question: Show how the poem presents a bleak view of death.

The poem presents death as brutally indifferent, rejecting any romantic ideal. The speaker overhears two crows casually discussing where to feast, establishing detachment from human suffering: “Where shall we gang and dine today?”. The knight’s abandonment — “His hound... his hawk... his lady fair” have all deserted him — reveals betrayal even in death.. The imagery grows grotesque as the birds plan to “pike out his bonny blue een” and use his hair to thatch their nest.. The final line, “The wind shall blaw for evermair,” shows nature continuing coldly over his remains.. Through stark imagery and unemotional narration, the poem depicts death as lonely, inevitable, and stripped of heroism. [\[english-studies.net\]](https://english-studies.net) [\[allenginsberg.org\]](https://allenginsberg.org)

Lochinvar (Scott / later versions)

- Romantic hero rides to rescue his beloved
- Themes: bravery, romance, heroism
- Techniques: galloping rhythm, narrative drive

About the poem:

Romantic ballad of a heroic young knight who rescues his beloved Ellen from an unwanted marriage.
[\[britannica.com\]](https://britannica.com)

Key Quotations

- **“O young Lochinvar is come out of the west.”**
→ Heroic entrance. [\[poetryfoundation.org\]](https://www.poetryfoundation.org)
- **“So faithful in love and so dauntless in war.”**
→ Defines the chivalric ideal. [\[britannica.com\]](https://www.britannica.com)
- **“He rode all unarmed, and he rode all alone.”**
→ Shows courage and self-reliance. [\[britannica.com\]](https://www.britannica.com)
- **“The bride kiss’d the goblet... with a smile on her lips and a tear in her eye.”**
→ Ellen’s conflicting emotions. [\[poetryfoundation.org\]](https://www.poetryfoundation.org)
- **“She is won! we are gone...”**
→ Dramatic elopement moment. [\[poetryfoundation.org\]](https://www.poetryfoundation.org)

Themes: chivalry, bravery, love, freedom, rebellion against social constraints.
[\[poetryverse.com\]](https://www.poetryverse.com)

Mini-Essay — *Lochinvar*

Question: Show how Scott creates a heroic figure.

Scott crafts Lochinvar as a romantic hero through bold imagery and decisive action. His entrance alone — “O young Lochinvar is come out of the west” — marks him as a figure of legend. He rides “unarmed” and “alone,” reinforcing courage and integrity. At Netherby Hall, surrounded by hostile kinsmen, he remains controlled and charismatic, claiming only to “lead but one measure.” His escape with Ellen is described as effortless: “She is won! we are gone.” The community’s reaction — the father fuming, the groom humiliated — further elevates Lochinvar’s daring. The poem frames heroism as confidence, movement, and defiance of unjust constraints.
[\[poetryfoundation.org\]](https://www.poetryfoundation.org) [\[britannica.com\]](https://www.britannica.com) [\[poetryverse.com\]](https://www.poetryverse.com)

Auntie — Nadine Aisha Jassat

- Love and admiration for a strong woman
- Themes: empowerment, identity, cultural pride
- Techniques: affectionate tone, imagery of strength

About the poem:

A gentle, sensory celebration of an aunt who represents cultural heritage, safety, and belonging. [\[scottishpoetry.org.uk\]](#)

Key Quotations

- **"My Aunt's hands are soft and brown and they smell like cumin and coriander."**
→ Cultural identity through sensory imagery. [\[scottishpoetry.org.uk\]](#)
- **"She is a gardener in the kitchen."**
→ Metaphor for nurturing and creativity. [\[scottishpoetry.org.uk\]](#)
- **"I remember your skin the way some people remember the bus route."**
→ Auntie as a route home — metaphor for belonging. [\[scottishpoetry.org.uk\]](#)
- **"I would rather wake... to your softly whispered duas."**
→ Gentle spirituality, emotional safety. [\[scottishpoetry.org.uk\]](#)

Themes: family, diaspora identity, comfort, memory, love. [\[gla.ac.uk\]](#)

Mini-Essay — *Auntie*

Question: Show how the poet uses imagery to present comfort and belonging.

Jassat uses rich sensory imagery to create a portrait of comfort. The aunt's hands "smell like cumin and coriander," immediately placing the speaker in a world of familial and cultural warmth. The metaphor "a gardener in the kitchen" depicts the aunt as someone who cultivates nourishment and care. The speaker memorises her skin "like some people remember the bus route," a striking comparison suggesting that Auntie herself is a path home. Spiritual tenderness appears in the "softly whispered duas," which make the speaker long for a gentler start to the day. The imagery conveys love, safety, and heritage woven into domestic detail. [\[scottishpoetry.org.uk\]](#)

Little Girls — Len Pennie

- Commentary on misogyny, girlhood, danger
- Themes: feminism, vulnerability, rage
- Techniques: direct voice, Scots language, repetition

About the poem:

A fierce feminist poem depicting the dangers, expectations, and silencing girls face growing up.
[\[gla.ac.uk\]](http://gla.ac.uk)

Key Quotations

- **"The little girl stands on a knife-covered ledge."**
→ Metaphor for danger and hypervigilance. [\[scottishpo...ary.org.uk\]](http://scottishpoetry.org.uk)
- **"And the men chime in, 'Silence girl, don't make a fuss.'"**
→ Societal silencing of women. [\[scottishpo...ary.org.uk\]](http://scottishpoetry.org.uk)
- **"Don't bite the hand groping you."**
→ Brutal exposure of misogyny masquerading as "banter." [\[scottishpo...ary.org.uk\]](http://scottishpoetry.org.uk)
- **"Being smaller... being meeker... remembering her place."**
→ Internalised oppression. [\[scottishpo...ary.org.uk\]](http://scottishpoetry.org.uk)
- **"We are the little girls you couldn't scare."**
→ Defiant final line; generational empowerment. [\[scottishpo...ary.org.uk\]](http://scottishpoetry.org.uk)

Themes: misogyny, patriarchy, survival, empowerment, trauma, reclaiming voice.
[\[gla.ac.uk\]](http://gla.ac.uk)

Mini-Essay — *Little Girls*

Question: Show how Pennie exposes the dangers facing women and girls.

Pennie exposes pervasive danger through striking extended metaphors. The girl dances on a "knife-covered ledge," symbolising the constant risk built into everyday life. Predatory figures appear as "fishermen hiding their net" and "wolves that deny they're a threat," representing covert and overt male violence. Society then gaslights her: "Silence girl, don't make a fuss... you're imagining things." Pennie's blunt line "Don't bite the hand groping you" reveals the normalisation of harassment. The pressure to be "smaller... meeker... remember her place" illustrates internalised oppression. Yet the ending transforms fear into power: "We are the little girls you couldn't scare," asserting generational defiance. The poem blends rage and resilience to challenge misogynistic culture. [\[scottishpo...ary.org.uk\]](http://scottishpoetry.org.uk)

COMPARISON GRIDS — ANTHOLOGY POETS

Grid 1 — Theme: VIOLENCE & DEATH

Poem	Quotation	What it Shows
The Twa Corbies	"O'er his white banes... the wind sall blaw for evermair." [english-studies.net]	Nature indifferent to death; stark realism

The Bonnie Earl o' Moray	"They hae slain the Earl o' Moray, / And laid him on the green." [contemplator.com]	Public political violence; communal grief
Lochinvar (contrast)	"They'll have fleet steeds that follow." [poetryfoundation.org]	Violence implied but romanticised

Commonality:

All poems depict conflict, but *Twa Corbies* is bleak, *Bonnie Earl* mournful, *Lochinvar* heroic.

Grid 2 — Theme: WOMEN & POWER

Poem	Quotation	Insight
Little Girls	"Silence girl, don't make a fuss." [scottishpo...ary.org.uk]	Systemic silencing of women
Auntie	"She is a gardener in the kitchen." [scottishpo...ary.org.uk]	Positive, nurturing feminine power
Lochinvar	"A smile on her lips and a tear in her eye." [poetryfoundation.org]	Women constrained by romantic conventions

Commonality:

Shows a spectrum of female experience: oppression, comfort, and romantic idealisation.

Grid 3 — Theme: LOYALTY & BETRAYAL

Poem	Quotation	What it Shows
The Twa Corbies	"His lady's ta'en another mate." [english-studies.net]	Abandonment of the knight
Bonnie Earl o' Moray	"Now wae be to thee, Huntly!" [en.wikipedia.org]	Betrayal through political murder
Lochinvar	"The bride had consented, the gallant came late." [poetryfoundation.org]	Social betrayal (forced marriage)