

# **Unbox Your Words: Writing Muscle Workout 6**

**Sun Apr 12th 2026 – 7-8pm**

## **Materials**

**Tania Hershman  
Unbox Your Words**

**<https://taniahershman.substack.com/>  
<https://taniahershman.com/>**

## Cawdor Castle (What 3 words: uptown.beaks.nightcap)

A traditional Scottish Castle in Nairn, near Inverness, built and inhabited by the Cawdor family for over 600 years. Room Notes:

### *The Yellow Room*

The layout of this room is peculiar. The fireplace is hopelessly off-centre, the windows are irregular, the walls are out of square, the plaster is floated directly onto the rough masonry, the bold Restoration cornice is uneven and yet, for all that, it makes a rather charming sitting-room.

Starting at the doorway which you have just come through, and looking around the room widdershins (Scots for anti-clockwise): the pink plates are Chinese famille-rose. The writing table is mid-17th century, and made of English oak like most of the other furniture. The unusual Chest-on-Chest is the same sort of date, and above it is Keeley Halswelle's *Birnam Wood* painted in 1889 and dedicated to the star actor Sir Henry Irving who visited Cawdor in August 1887 with his leading lady, Dame Ellen Terry, to 'absorb the atmosphere' for their production of *Macbeth*. The bell-shaped pot is a Bronze Age funeral beaker (c. 1500BC) ploughed up, by chance, near here in 1976. The large portrait of the 2nd Earl Cawdor, wearing the kilt, is by Frederick Say. The oval gatelegged table is William & Mary. The longcase clock is by Jeremiah Johnson, made about 1680; like many old clocks it has been much altered, and has a quirky inscription engraved on the backplate, 'Spoilt by W. Cran'. On top of the Dutch tallboy stands a huge stoneware jar which is Cizhou, Chinese Sung Dynasty, AD 960-1297.

The handsome lady in the saucy brown hat is Mrs Jane Philips, affectionately nicknamed 'Aunt Glum', painted by Enoch Seeman. The cream earthenware jug with a Liverpool transfer is from the Herculaneum works, c.1815, and the blue and white bottles and plate are Ming dynasty. The pastel drawings are of John Campbell of Cawdor (1717), and his wife Mary. The 18th century cupboard conceals a television set. The battered oak armchair is Charles I. The extensive landscape of Dordrecht is attributed to Aelbert Cuyp, c.1640; underneath, on the Charles II table, is a small watercolour of cows, by T.S. Cooper, with a copy painted on a Minton dish.

Over the mantelpiece hangs a portrait of John Vaughan of Golden Gove, in Wales, by William Williams. On either side of the fireplace are paintings of cottages: the one on the left is by John Varley, and the one on the right is a copy by Lady Caroline Cawdor who was a fair amateur artist, and whose picture by Sir William Beechey stands on an easel, which is really an old fire-screen, in the corner of the room. Over the arched doorway is a cartoon in oils by Henry Bunbury of the artist and the 1st Lord Cawdor as peasants shifting, er, manure. The widow is Lady Caroline Cawdor in old age, by Edridge. The drawing of the 5th Earl Cawdor is by Douglas Anderson, done in 1960.

The set of water-colours of family properties are all by John 'Warwick' Smith; the landscape with a boat is by John Varley, again with a smaller copy by Lady Caroline. The moss-green velvet chairs are Stuart revival; the Savonnerie-style carpet, with the family cypher, was woven in Ireland in 1965.

The bronze statue of a girl is 'Agura' (1972) by the sculptor Churyo Sato. In his home country of Japan, where art is deeply respected, Sato is styled as a Living Monument, which is more than can be said of most of us.

## *The Modern Kitchen*

This was once a dark and dreary place known as the School Room and may have been responsible for turning some of the Campbell ladies into confirmed spinsters and professional invalids.

Cawdor is most unusual, in that it never seems to have had a proper kitchen within the Tower, except for makeshift cooking arrangements for a garrison at the extreme top of the building in the capehouse. The earliest kitchen was probably situated on the ground floor near the great hall (now the drawing room). In the 17th century, a large kitchen was made in the basement below this room which was used for three hundred years. The next kitchen was sited in the furthest possible position from the dining room, to make certain that the soup was not served too hot. This modern kitchen was converted in 1971, panelled in local larchwood, and has most conveniences; the copper extractor hood connects direct into the old chimney, removing the smell of haggis.

The strange steel object on the worktop is not a thumbscrew, it is a French duck-press for extracting the gravy from meat.

## *The Old Kitchen*

In stark contrast to the last room you visited, this kitchen was in active use between 1640 and 1938. It is a beautiful room rather than every housewife's dream.

The well is dug straight into the Old Red Sandstone rock on which the Castle is founded and out of which it is constructed. The rock strata dips towards the west, and through it, both summer and winter, the water permeates - keeping the well charged within six feet of spring water.

The amazing cooking range is 19th century, and the contraption above is the gearing for a spit: a rotator (one of the few English words, Madam, that is a palindrome) was moved by a fan in the flue. In 1760 it was the very latest thing and was, at least in theory, automatic because the hotter the fire became, the quicker the meat turned.

The cabinet is an old ice-box, and there are flat-irons, smoothing-irons, a clothes Peggie, a trivet, a warming-pan, a circular knife-grinder, butter-hands, a Lazy Susan, a pestle and mortar, a bucket-yoke, a butter-churn, a cruise lamp, earthenware jars and other priceless junk, some of it defying identification.

The kitchen table was constructed in the room. All these pots and pans were once regarded fondly: so much so that the last cook to hold supreme sway in this kitchen - when told that she was to be provided with less antiquated equipment - gave in her notice on the spot.

The larder beyond had a bakehouse; the next vaulted rooms were originally stores and later stables, and were then used as cellars for wine and whisky.



## The Woodcock Room

This range of the building is part of the 17th century addition to the castle and this elegant chamber, dating from the 1670's, was probably intended for use as a sitting room; it subsequently served as a dining room (1748), as 'The Young Ladies' Bedroom' (1860) and then, some twenty years later, it was partitioned to form two bedrooms. This alteration spoilt the original design which was carefully set out on a plan as a Golden Section – in the proportion of one to the square root of five plus one divided by two, a formula that so easily slips the mind. The room has recently been restored to its old and subtly pleasant shape.

The splendid Sheraton four-poster is Lady Caroline Campbell of Cawdor's marriage bed of 1789, and the soft bedroom furniture is in that same series. Lady Caroline's portrait, by Beechey, hangs over the mantelpiece. The large portrait by Cotes is Eustacia Campbell, Lady Caroline's aunt. The botanical pictures are from Thornton's Temple of Flora.

The Woodcock Room takes its family nickname from the improbable gamebird painting, by Stephen Elmer, which hangs over the central door, although to generations of crusty butlers the room was always firmly called Number 7 – the number that came up on the bell-board. The old bell pulls operated mechanically: a tug on the cord jerked a wire that zig-zagged downstairs, via bell-cranks, to jangle a sprung bell, to summon hot water for hip-baths and for the shaving of whiskers; for assistance with ringlets and bodice askew. Battery-operated electric bell-pushes were installed in 1891.

Beside the bed are two little watercolour paintings. The larger view of Caernarfon Castle in North Wales is by John 'Warwick' Smith. The smaller picture of Cawdor Castle is by Lady Caroline – both painted in about 1810.

The elderly carpet is Turkish.

The little French writing desk was Sarah Mary Cawdor's (Lady Caroline's grand-daughter) favourite, and made by the master craftsman Stockel. The slender side-chair at the desk is Italian, by Gaetano Descalzo, and is made of cherry-wood, weighing only 1.6kg. The porcelain clock case is Meissen of the Marcolini period. The pastel is a portrait of Pryse Campbell by William Hoare, c.1745. The unusual mahogany serpentine-fronted dressing-table dates from the time of George II.

The large plain cornice-moulding is Regency, and the curiously suburban fireplace was constricted with brickwork in 1910 as the last desperate gasp to prevent the fire from smoking.

Please mind your head as you go into the next room.



## The Pink Dressing-Room

This small, romantic, room can either be used as an over-flow from the bedroom next door, or as a separate singleton.

The curtains and the bedspread are modern palampores reproduced from original designs preserved amongst the collection in the Royal Ontario Museum in Canada and skilfully manufactured by the firm Brunschwig & Fils, of the USA. Originally these chintz cotton panels were made on the Coromandel Coast of India, around the year 1725. Is this boring you? Of course not.

On the left of the doorway there is a quaint little coloured print of Lord Nelson in admiral's uniform and highlighted at the epaulette with silver paper. Beneath this is a glazed frame containing snippets of the embroidered silk, sentimentally believed by heroic aunts to have been remnants of the actual waistcoat worn by the 1st Lord Cawdor when he sat, or rather stood, for his portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds. Opposite, there is a cartoon by John Leech of The Mermaid's Haunt.

To the right of the bed, the flower painting, by George Elgood, shows how little the garden here has changed since 1905 when the watercolour was done.

To the left of the bed is a picture of the castle (perhaps an enlarged study of a small print of the castle) painted by the Edward William Cooke. The pair of ink and colourwash studies of the castle are by Robert William Billings, painted in the 1840's for his monumental work, the Baronial & Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Scotland. Billings was an able architect, so his accurate sketches are of great interest. However, he tended to let rip once he had meticulously drawn in the chimneys – smoke heading one way and flaps withersoever.

In the corner, to the right of the bed, there is a miniature portrait in triptych by Miss Annie Dixon of Edith, Countess Cawdor. This sort of portrait was called a cabinet piece. Beside the fireplace, on the left, are drawings by John Boaden, of Elizabeth, Countess Cawdor and her daughters.

Over the mantelshelf is a painting of Fitzroy Square in London by Lord Methuen. The ceramic plate (on top of the wardrobe) was made by the celebrated potter James Campbell, the late Lord Cawdor's brother. Beside the bedroom door are two sketches of the castle by John Skelton: the top one he drew as a student in 1942 and the other, forty year later.



**Chateau d'Oiron, Plaine-et-Vallées, France**

What 3 words inscription.crammed.elevate



Mafra Palace, Portugal

What 3 words: edit.saloons.deprive

Palácio Nacional de Mafra, Portugal

