

Yarns

Celebrating contemporary writing
in Ulster-Scots & Scots



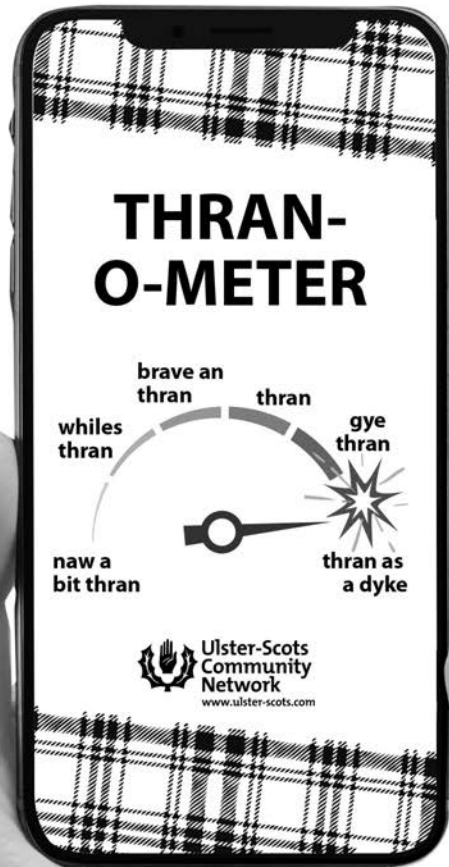
Ulster-Scots
Community
Network
www.ulster-scots.com



Maist fowk kens that us Ulster-Scotch can whiles be thran tae dale wi...

Sae we're lukkin tae bring oot an 'app' that micht jist tell ye hoo thran a boadie is...

We hope tae hae it readie afore lang!



Foreword

Tha Ulster-Scotch Heirskip Cooncil are gye pleased to be bringin oot this edition o Yarns. We last brocht yin oot in 20an21 and were grateful for the support we received around it. It was important to us to provide an opportunity for new, and not so new writers, on baith sides of the North Channel to reach as wide an audience as we could muster for it.

We're delighted that this time we've had contributions from some of those who featured in the first edition, alongside some writers putting their work into the public domain for the very first time.

While we're undoubtedly proud of the rich canon of Ulster-Scots writing that extends back over centuries, it's equally as important to show that we hae a leevin tongue and these contemporary works prove that this is the case.

We want to thank all those who took time to scribe fur us, and we again want to thank the editorial panel for sifting through the entries and bringin thegither this final selection fur ye aa tae enjoy.



Preface

Frank Ferguson

It's gye hairtsome tae hae a saicont buik o *Yarns* tae pit afore ye. Oor pirn is weel gaihther yince mair wi gran scrivans frae a wheen o weel-kent an new makars. It's wunnerfu tae consider that the guid Scotch tung conteenyas tae inspire art in a wheen o foarms an quare an excitin tae see a widenin circle o bardies emergin here an joynin wi ithers in Scotia. Tha Ulster- Scots Community Network is tae be wairmly praised fur aa its guid wark in developin this new writin an writers. Their hostin o an anthology is the simple, prectical inspiration that bes needit tae encourage fowk tae conteenye in their aspirations tae write an experiment wi tha leid. Sae aften in tha past ithir projects hae cum an gane an monie guid bonnie aspirations meltit awa wi'oot onie tangible results. Not sae *Yarns*! *Yarns* yin an twa are oot there in tha warld an we can be brave an certes 'at *Yarns* three micht be in tha offin forbye. Tha yeirs ahead luk wile promisin fur the creation o mair makars, mair opportunities tae create new audiences an mair hope that ithers within tha Scots leid community an far beyont wull embrace an exercise their skills in tha tunge.

Weel daen tae aa wha sent in their wark. The variety o approaches in tha writin is gye gratifyin tae see an there is a wile plaisin range o voices, moods an genres in tha individual poems. It's pooerfu tae see contributors frae last time pit forrit new wark an tae see the development o their style an accomplishment within a shoart stretch o time. Likewise, its gran tae see oor established makars clinkin awa wi aa their aul familiar skill an artistry. Whiles we forget that we leeve wi important boadies aa roon us. Fur ower lang we micht hae hearkened bak til tha nineteenth century an the knackie wark o Orr an Thomson an their rhymin peers. Hooiver, we micht say that as monie if no mair Ulster-Scots scribes noo exist in the present day. Jakers, thon's a bricht thocht an shud make us gye happy as we luik tae the future o the leid.

Lang may these gowlden times conteenye an it is tae be hoped that this aye widenin circle o scribes finds new an receptive audiences here an in ithir pairts. Their ability tae conjure wi the leid demonstrates the parteeclar strength o Scots as a vehicle fur creative writin an this in turn we hope wull encourage new makars tae step forrit. Their wurd can big monie brigs an we luk tae see in the cumin yeirs hoo far an wide tha leid wull mak new freens, as weel as produce excitin an innovative poetry an prose.



Contributors

Brian Alexander

Juist a body frae deepest daurkest Dufferin, hauden doon a job in the big smoke. Wifie, twa weans an a dug tae keep me in line. Aftimes can be foond readin aboot the fowk that went afore. Still a learner wi the aul screivin, but shuir the Big Yin luves a tryer. Haud forrit!

Angus Bolton

I was born in 2003 in the townland of Balligan near Greyabbey and whilst I have always had a fascination with languages, cultures and history I have only recently become aware of the significant role Ulster-Scots has had in my family's history. I have always enjoyed writing poetry and I now particularly enjoy writing in this language with its rich poetic tradition.

William Dickey

William Dickey was born and raised in the Braid. He has devoted much of his spare time to an in-depth study of Ulster-Scots influences on the films of Humphrey Bogart. His self-published monograph on the subject, entitled "We'll always hae Paris buns" is scheduled for release sometime in 2024 as soon as he can be ersed.

Steve Dornan

Steve Dornan is fae Cumber / Newtown in Coonty Doon. He bides in Stanehyve in north east Scotland. He's been quare an fand o tha Ulster-Scotch leid for a wheen o years, an his collection o poems "Tha Jaa Banes" is oot noo.

Roy Ferguson

Hi, I'm Roy Ferguson, Rathfriland born and bred, Ulsterman and proud Ulster-Scot. I've lived around Rathfriland my whole life and was raised with the Ulster-Scots tongue in my ears, my mother is from the back of the mountain in Kilkeel (she would say she's from the front of the Mountain and my Dad brought her to the back of the Mountain!!) so she speaks Ulster-Scots, as did my Dad's family. I still live on the land his family owned in Moneygore.

I'm fortunate to have been able to broadcast on BBC Radio Ulster for about 4 years on their Ulster-Scots programming, which I enjoyed immensely, and I still make the odd appearance because I write Poetry in Ulster-Scots.



I have drummed in pipe bands for many years and am now teaching young drummers in my local Moneygore Pipe Band.

I have two great kids, Hayley and Matthew and a cat called Magic. I'm an avid fan of both Ulster Rugby and Leeds United. I also teach people modern jive through DR Jive.

Dean Harkin

Dean Harkin grew up on the banks of the Braid in Ballymena where he loves to spend a summer's evening fishing for brown trout. He started writing poems in Ulster-Scots a few years ago. This poem is dedicated to his Great Uncle, Kenneth, who sadly passed away in January this year

Angeline King

Angeline King is currently the Writer in Residence of Ulster University, where she is undertaking a PhD in creative writing. She has written several works in Ulster-Scots, including her latest novel, *Dusty Bluebells* Scots Edition, which is set in her hometown, Larne.

Rab Lennox

Radio broadcaster and podcaster, Rab Lennox takes his hand till writing for the first time after attending a writing event at the Discover Ulster-Scots Centre with Stuart Paterson. Plucking up the courage to put pen till paper, rather than blethering into a microphone, was a huge but fun challenge.

Rab Lennox, hails frae Magherafelt. He's a Presenter of The Big Rab Show Podcast and on Fuse FM Ballymoney. Also on BBC Radio Ulster's weekly Ulster-Scots show, Kintra. And noo a writer.

Tony Lyttle

AG Lyttle (Tony) was born in Bangor and brought up in Newtownards. He attended Regent House and graduated from Queens before marrying and moving to Surrey. Since retiring, he has published an historical thriller, "Dillon's Rising" and a biography of "Betsy Grey" author and Ulster newspaper proprietor, WG Lyttle – "The Storyteller". It was WG's love of Ulster-Scots that he used in writing many humorous short stories that awakened Tony's own love for the leid. In addition to his English writing, Tony has penned a number of short stories and poems in Ulster-Scots.



Anne McMaster

An ex-farmer, playwright and poet, Anne lives on an old farm in mid-Ulster. *Walking Off the Land* - her debut poetry collection - was published by Hedgehog Poetry Press in June 2021. *Póames* - poetry in Ulster-Scots - was published by the Ulster-Scots Agency and Ulster-Scots Community Network in December 2022. *Unexpected Item in the Bagging Area* (her second collection in English) and *Dancin' Aff Tha Tongue* (a series of Ulster-Scots short stories) will be published in 2023. Her poetry is published nationally and internationally. Anne works as a professional voiceover artist, writes intermittently for the BBC, is a creative writing mentor and runs *This Northern Voice* - an online forum for writers. She can't dance to save her life, but does make exceptionally good tray-bakes.

Alan Millar

Alan Millar, 56 years old, from the Laggan area of east Donegal, working as a journalist, writer and poet, in Ballymoney, Co Antrim. Been writing verse and prose in Ulster-Scots for a number of years. Winner of the Scots Language Society's Hugh MacDiarmid Tassie, and inaugural Linenhall Library Ulster-Scots Writing Competition, Prose Section, both in 2021. First collection, *Echas frae tha big Swilly Swally*, imminent.

Interests including open-water swimming, walking the Causeway coast and travel.

Robb Morrow

I'm Robb Morrow, 23, from Poyntzpass; nestled between Counties Armagh and Down. I'm a hiker, musician, runner, and student teacher; teaching geography, religion, and history. Thanks to my grandmother, I've been interested in Irish history all my life; and in Ireland's poetry and song. I have a passion for our heritage and being an Ulster-Scot is an integral part of my Irishness.

Maurice Neill

Maurice Neill was born in Belfast in 1959. He grew up in Rathcoole, Newtownabbey, and the family home in Upperlands County Londonderry. He attended Belfast High School, has an Honours degree in social sciences and a Masters degree in Irish Studies from The Queen's University of Belfast and a teaching qualification from the University of Ulster. He has been a journalist for 45 years working for a range of news organisations including Reuters. In 1999 he received a commendation in the Northern Ireland Press and Broadcast Awards and in 1997 a special commendation in the Irish section of the European Journalism Awards. He lives in North Down where he writes a weekly column for the County Down Spectator and Newtownards Chronicle and a monthly blog for williamlongbooks.co.uk



Eleanor Ness

Ellie Ness now lives in South Ayrshire, after teaching on three continents for decades. She is mostly to be found walking her dog on beaches or in parks, drinking copious amounts of coffee or writing for fun.

Stuart A. Paterson

2017-18 he was BBC Scotland's Poet in Residence & in 2019 was the visiting poet to Rhodes University & St Andrew's College in Grahamstown, South Africa, in the UN Year of Indigenous Languages. His illustrated 2020 book from Tippermuir, 'A Squatter o Bairnrhymes', was the first large book of original poems in Scots for children in decades & he was publicly voted '2020 Scots Language Awards Writer of the Year'. In 2023 Stuart's 'Wheen: Collected and New Scots Poems' has been published by the Ulster Scots Community Network & funded by one of the Scottish Government's first ever Scots Language Publication Awards. He lives in Mid Nithsdale.

Charlie 'Tha Poocher' Reynolds

Guid freens

I was born in North Antrim at Benvarren in September 1944. As a family we moved to Carnaff, Donaghys Moss, The Row and Drumcrottagh. I started attending Stranocum Primary School and in 1951 we upped sticks and moved to Coleraine where my father got a job as Assistant Bridgeman at the railway bridge over the river Bann. This was a big shock to me as I had been used hearing almost nothing but my native tongue Ulster-Scots. I was like a fish out of water in my new environment and was laughed at by my new schoolmates as they thought the way I spoke that I had come from Mars. My father who spoke Ulster-Scots told me, 'They dinnae taak lake that roon here', from then on I tried to speak a poor version of the English language. As I think of my North Antrim freens I am proud to write poems in Ulster-Scots and had a book published, Mae 'Granfeythers Tongue' in memory of my grandfather who spoke the 'oul tongue' all his life. I am delighted to see some younger people taking an interest in Ulster-Scots, as I think it is part of who we are and well worth preserving.

Charlie Rannals(Reynolds) alias Tha Poocher.



George T. Watt

George T Watt bides in Arbroath an screives aamaist exclusive in Scots. He haes been published in Lallans, Gutter, Gallus an New Writng Scotland an haes been runner up in the McCash, Sangschaw an Wigtoun poesy competitions. He haes been featured in BBC Ulster's ae Kist o Wurds wi his *Ulster Tryptich* poems an is memmership secretar o the Scots Language Society/Scots Leid Associe.



Brian Alexander

Reddin' up

Nou, niver let it be said that A'm nae thankfu whan A come hame frae mi wark an mi wifie's been keukin, but...

Whan hersel an A first muived in thegither, the rule aye wis, "whaiver's hame first, keuks denner", an for a wheen o years it warked oot weel. It wis fair, we teuk oor turn, an if the wifie keuked, A redd up, an richtly sae, an if A keuked, than she redd up, an sae on. Fower years syne, A stertit wark as a ceevil servant in the Big Smeuk, sae A wis hame first maist nichts, an A got uised tae daein' maist o the keukin, an a didne mind, as A uphaud that a loon should be as fit tae keep hoose as a quine.

A grewed up in a hoose whaurby mi Da wis weel fit tae set doon a plate o spuds, pease an a few links wi a jug o Bisto - a guid haesome feed, naethin fancy, an nane o us wis famisht. The point bein that A grewed up kennin that a Da can feed the weans an redd up if the wifie wis oot at the time - nicht schuil in mi Ma's case.

Onyways, A digress. Sae. Mi ain guidwife hae been aff wark aw simmer, hae been daein the keukin, an hae takken up bakin breid, an soordough in parteecular. "Wunnerfu" ye nicht say, "Lucky boy", "Spilet man" ye nicht e'en hae thocht. Sae did A. In the beginin. Firstly, ilka time she bakes, the galley leuks like a bomb hae gane aff in a floor mill, an it's nae muckle better whan she keuks, an guess wha gets tae redd thon up? Exactly.

Secondly, mi trews are for shuir a bit tichter than they used tae be, an A didnae hae muckle room tae spare onyway. Thirdly, if she's nae at St. George's mercat, it's Comber, or Saintfield, an A'm telt that it's cheaper tae buy floor in bulk, an nou we hae a new chest freezer in the garage fu o floor. An forby A'm telt that the bakin' willnae stap whan she gangs back tae her ain wark. "Shuir why woud ye buy breid fu o preservatives an aw whan A can bake fresh?" Keech.

Sae whit tae dae? The thocht occurred tae me that she's efter the life insurance by killin me in installments...

It's no that the breid's no tasty, but ye can hae ower muckle o a guid thing, an shuir it's no a treat ony mair whan ye're eatin it ilka day, an nou a feel guiltfu whan a want a slice o Veda wi a wedge o cheddar. Ah've e'en dreamt at nicht o the heel o the Nutty Krust. Toastit. Wi butter. An a left the square end o the crust tae the last bite.

Sae. The puzzle is this. Hou dae ye tell the wifie wi'oot soundin ungratefu if she coud juist bake a wee bit less? Answers on a postcaird tae the mannies sleepin in the garage wi ainly the dug fer company.



Blawin' aff oam

The Kirk michtna appruive o drink,
John Barleycorn's swink an' skeel,
But a haurd wun scud or hauf-un
Will shuirly hairm nane but a chiel'.

Ma brou-born sweit hae turnt tae saut
Ma hide is burnt, ma banes aw ake
A beer will shuirly hit the merk
An nae Aidam's Ale, for guidness sake.

Ah've turnt the sod an sawn the seed
Gaithert the chirls an sneddit the whin,
Ah've ment the dyke an mawn the gress
An this drouth's cuir comes frae a tin.

Weel-kent heids we've read afore,
Of olio, fricassee an French ragout,
But naethin beats a lairge gless o red
Tae go wi a boul o ma ain beef stew.

Ah've walkit the dug throu plump an rouk
The snaw in yield on loan an brae,
But the ingle is lit - an Ah'm in for the nicht
An Islay's chairms bate a drap o hot tae.

Whit joy tae be foond frae hauch an vine,
Hairst-rig forbye, ripe orchart an aw,
Fae capper stell an aiken cask
Weel-baurmt boonty frae Naitur's staw.

Ah ken ye shoudna ower dae it,
An bytimes A awn that A dae,
But whaur's the hairm in blawin aff oam
Juist wanst a blae muin - whit dae ye say?



The black dug

Tha dug, he follaes me in ma gloom,
Black o fur, an hert an saul
He prowls ahint me, hauf a pace
A kinch in ma thairm sae hard tae thole.

He wauks me frae ma sweet repose,
In daurk o nicht an tha early morn
He's bidin thare amang ma thochts
Skulkin for howp an sic tae scorn.

He snaiks tha mirk, tha pick-black pit
A dree tae beir throu day an nicht
Thare maun be a wey tae shak him lowse
Tae stare him doon an see him lick't.

Ah'm somewhit afeart tae ask for help
Ma pride betimes can haud me back
A sign o waikness A tell masel
Need a kick up tha erse tae get on track

Ah've nae guid coonsel tae offer ma freend
This wecht A hump is mine alane
Ah'm no a believer in a problem skare't
Sae perish yer beast whit wey ye can.



Monolith

Doon in the howes o Barnamaghery, atween the aul haw o' the Yin-Yin an Killybawn,
ferienst the whimplin Glesswatter, a monolith staunds prood o a fine swaird. It cannae
help but catch yer ee as ye pass by in the motor, but it's ainly when ye're oot on a
stravaig, wi or wi'oot the dug that ye shuirly get a chance tae tak in juist whit thon stane
coud tell ye, if ainly it wis able.

Ancient noo amangst the kye, an bytimes the yowes, hauden fast as the cou rubs it's
behoukie agin him, an the corbie smashes the snail upon him. Battert, droukit, berselt an
froze, the auld man hae stuid his watch like a sodger gairdin' the fuird, watchin wee whips
growin tae mighty trees an fawin doon agin tae rot or burn. Takkin nae shelter as the muin
hoonds the sun ower the ages.

Staundin his groond as fermers teelt the laund, first wi cou an cuddie, an then, after time
wi the wee grey Massey, afore the colourfu ingines we hae the day (ah'll let the reader
chuisse whit "stays in the shed", or hou mony "steps tae heaven" there shuid be).

Ancient still he wis, as the Ayrshire and Galloway men sattelt roond it an teuk enk ower it.
Campbells, Jacksons, an McIlveens. Murdocks, Stewarts an Thompsons. Aw in thair turn,
cleart oot, redd up an breuk groond as the stane stuid still an watcht whilst crottles
growed, sleekit-like up his nor'maist side.

Faurther back, afore the turn o wha we noo ken as the Ulster-Scots, but wha maist-like
cawed thaimselfs Scots, the fowk that wis here afore us, cawed this airt "Barr na
Machaire", or tap pairt o the kirk-launds, tho nae kirk staunds in this tounlaund in the
mynd o e'en the auld fowk o this Pairish. If ye ken whaur tae leuk, an aul kirkyaird can still
be foond, but lang syne the stanes wis herried for the new brig, that wis built in the time o
ma grandfather's grandfather. But naebody gang near the aul staundin stane.

The Staundin Stane o Barnamaghery was aul when the hauch was boond, an aw throu
time man hae wrocht roond him, respectit him, an mebbe e'en haud him in awe. The
fowk wha plantit him wis lang gane afore the Irish biggit the kirk that the tounlaund wis
cawed efter. His true purpose wis forgat, an hae niver syne been kent. But the aul man
staunds still, an wha kens whit he will see forrit an ayont?



Angus Bolton

Poisoned whin

Ach tha jugs o ae poisoned whin
Whar an hoo mun ye taak root til growe
Whur seed wis tung't amang scroag an stane
Ye fix yer roots an doutie sae

Ach jugs o ae poisoned whin
Draw bluid frae tha straingest places
Whan silver licht gloams thonner
Smirken moonlit fizog dances

Ach ye thornsom poisoned whin
A niver did ye sow
Bot wi tha laird abain A ken
Wi girnin nor thinkin ye iver will growe



Taalkin o hame

Hoos yin til taakin o hame?
Tha notion seems muckle lik whigamaree
Fur gif A til danner doon tha loanen aa tha same
A ken it wud coulriefe streck me
Wud tha sheltrin trees stan stark as wintertime?
Wud tha saft gress aa withred lae?
Wud tha fiels an tha hills, iverie yin o thaim
Noo amang tha fouls droon me?
Fur haar til me seems muckle lik hame
Made til frae iverie touch flee
Micht be thon A maun wi fowk gan luikin
Fur a niverhae strayt
No frae freens nor kin
Bot gif thon it
Fur why wud A, in tha mirk an still gan wanderin?
Fur why whan mae maist deer ir aboot?
Fur why whan Am na ae days stravaigin?
Wud A turn hameward wi heid an wi hairt.
Wull micht be thon aa thairs
Taakin o it A mean
Fur wi sic swee wairds, aa back it cums
Wi tha kirk an doon tha loanen
Whar in clachan ilk hoos stauns
Wi yella dair an whit waa thon
Wi tha nirlin wind an gulderin o tha coos
Wi tha sheuchs an fiels o green
Aye wi this hamley leid o wors
A micht hae ae wae o taakin



Greiba

A ken o ae wee lan
 Whilks mairch't wi tha sey
 An ae wee place scarce ae toon
 Whilks mairch't wi tha sey
 A hae fill't thon lan as micht ae ween
 Whilks mairch't wi tha sey
 Tha groun wer hallow't an gie bue abain
 In thon lan mairch't wi tha sey
 Wi ae fowk lik giants an ae fowk wee enuch til ken
 Aye in thon lan mairch't wi tha sey
 Wi a new fowk an ae fowk oul as stane
 Aye in thon lan mairch't wi tha sey
 Wull ae wheen hae passt syne a hae seen
 Ma lan mairch't wi tha sey
 An no tha dae no tha morra back A'll gan
 Ma lan mairch't wi tha sey
 Its nae ower lang til gan an A ken A maun
 Ma lan mairch't wit ha sey
 Wull tha moarnin's haars clearin but whar hae it gan
 Ach ma hame mairch't wi tha sey.



William Dickey

Twa Thoosan an Yin

The late Stanley Kubrick had a wide-ranging and eclectic oeuvre, but remarkably he never directed a film about a big lang rin on a pushbike through County Antrim. Had he been given the opportunity, however.....

“He’s a wile man for the pushbike”, said Aircher’s mither tae oanyboady that came intae the hoose, in the world weary voice that ninety years had honed tae the dark sheen o coffin lid mahogany.

Davey Aircher as a wean graduated from the tricycle tae his mither’s oul Raleigh: nae gears, chaip heavy steel, and whut in these enlightened times would be caad a step through frame wi nae crossbar but then was very definitely a wumman’s bike. And that wud normally hae been that, the pushbike lyin at the baak o the shade rather than him chancin somebody seein him oan it. An then him killin time till he got his drivin test at 17 and away in a motor. Except his da landed hame yin nicht, nae notice whutsoever, wi a ten speed racer. Nae idea where the money had come frae, or indeed whut had prompted the spenin o fifty poun in a hoose where jam athent twa slices o medium pan was the staple diet. Except on Sundays when aa nine sut doon tae broth frae a shin bone that had had the erse boiled out of it ower eighteen hours.

And wi ten gears an drap hannelbars, he persevered far longer wi the pushbike than was usual at the time fer a young fella, flying doon tae Carnlough and grinding baak up Glencloy. Up Ballynafie hill outta Portglenone on a dark wunter evening and it lashin: the dynamo chowin away at the baak tyre producin a wee rid glim barely enough to warn the motors aff him. Doon tae the Port an baak in the summer, takin his gansey aff on account o the heat and then flyin ower the bars when a sleeve drapped intae the front spokes. The dinge in the tarmac had lang gone, but the wan in his chin remained fifty years oan.

Then life an work an weemin an weans curtailed him. The pushbike got mair an mair sidelined, and then yin day yer wumman pushed the rid button:

“What happens if you get knocked off and killed or injured and you with three children?”



He had nae answer tae that. An she knew fine weel she had him when she brocht the weans intae the equation. An the pushbike went properly intae the shade this time, until ony weemen still in his life either didnae mine or didnae care an the three weans, raired an aff the payroll an overseas, wernae boathered whut he got up tae.

An he bought anither pushbike- commuting tae work, an goin tae see his mither at the weekend; joinin a club an lavin it as quick cus he cudnae be ersed wi the cod racin an the need tae maintain a conversation.

“Whut high-energy protein bar dae ye use?” said yin earnest girl as she flew by him yin Setterday. “Maistly Twixes”, he replied, knowin then that the cultural gap between him an the ither fowk wus insurmountable.

An wi his money made, an retirement, he went tae England an got someboady tae custom build him a state o the airt pushbike: fur the same money he could hae got himself a carbon fibre yoke, that he cud hae lifted wi his wee finger. But he had a particular specification in mine: a steel frame and wheels that wudnae buckle ower the roads he favoured, where the pavin comprised a series o potholes joined thegither wi a stripe o gress up the middle. A set o big mudgairds, tae keep his feet an erse dry, for rain nivver stapped him. A fancy German dynamo in the front hub tae light him up like a Christmas tree. The machine was heavy: had it fa’en ower on someboady, it wud hae maimed them.

Sunday mornin he left his mither’s hoose tae go hame.

“Cud ye no tak the motor?” she asked, noddin at the fifteen year oul Volkswagen pairked in her yaird that he used tae dae her weekly shap. She asked the same ivery Sunday morning. She had the notion he was too oul tae be ridin a pushbike even though she herself had been still at the age of seventy, in a reversal of roles, ridin his oul ten speed racer tae luk the bastes at the upper fairm. Twenty mile ivery day, up roads caad Knock this and Tully thon, puttin the tin hat on decades o hard physical labour since she’d married his da. Taakin oan, amang her ither marital duties, the role o a full-time fairm labourer. Finally, in the twilight o her life an wi the da deid, she could take things aisy, hirplin aboot on what was left o her hips.

She came tae the front deur and watched him set aff down the loanin. She made no gesture o goodbye, but simply stud shakin her heid lang efter he disappeared frae view.

The sensible route wud hae been due sooth, straight through Doagh. Reasonably flat an good tarmac. But he knew frae experience that oan a Sabbath mornin that route was thick wi guid fowk headin tae Sunday meetin in their great big SUVs, preoccupied wi their ain eternities rather than that o the meetin-dodgin heathen they nearly clipped who hadnae aught in the way o protective paddin.



Instead, he headed up the Braid valley, Slemish abain him narrowin then widenin again as he passed it. Turnin richt onywhere noo wud hae been sensible, but he continued east the length o Carnalbanagh. Finally turnin there tuk him straight intae a heid wun frae the sooth. Any wairmth it micht hae brocht was countered by the mizzle it carried. He descended tae the good pasture runnin along the Glenarm river. A herd o blak an white heifers were standin at a gate, founderin.

“Wet yin, ladies”, he said in passin.

“Ja, that is so, but we must also tell you- in here it is bloody Friesian!” It was an oul joke, and the only yin this particular breed seemed to know in their heavy European accents, but he smiled out o politeness and continued.

Crossin the river the road started tae rise sharply. He drapped doon a couple o gears. Still plenty left- he’d specified mountain bike gearin wi a big cog on the baak the size o a dinner plate. The front wheel would be risin aff the groon afore he’d hae tae get aff an walk.

The rain was increasin noo, an he lukked doon tae see the water getherin in the wrinkles in his lycra that had been skin tight twa year before. Lockdoon hadnae been guid tae him, wi the loss o ower a stane weight.

“Ye’re failed away tae nathin”, said his mither when visitin resumed. “A suppose yer livin on that oul chaip T.S Eliot tinned stuff outta Tesco?”

In his previous life as an academic, Aircher used tae hae tae gie a lecture on the undergraduate nutrition coorse aboot diet in oul fowk.

“Men living on their own”, he said, “are away tae fock from the age of fifty. Calories, vitamins and minerals increasingly sourced from alcohol and Benson and Hedges as easy alternatives to cooking. Women, on the other hand, keep it together until their late seventies when they acquire cats. Soon the only high quality protein coming into the house is thirty or forty Felix pouches a week, while she’s deriving her own nutrition from tea and toast bought with what little is left of her pension.”

Then he was summoned intae his line manager’s office. She’d got complaints frae the students aboot his lecture.

“Was it because I’d said fock?”

An expression o surprise briefly crossed her face.

“Oh fock”, he said, “something else?”



“They were concerned about your use of gender stereotypes”, she explained.

So he duly provided evidence that he’d reflected on the metter an promised tae nae dae it again. An tendered his resignation, worked his notice, an drew doon his pension. Unlike maist people at his stage in life, who gave up their jobs that they’d been half daicent at and moved intae management roles where they cud be unequivocally thraveless an dae real damage fer the first time in their lives, he quet completely. Noo there was maistly him, his mither an his pushbike.

He wunnered, lukkin at the weight that had drapped aff him, whether he was noo yin o the gender stereotyped males he had described. No that he was smokin or drinkin- a puritanical rairin permitted neither- but it seemed in retrospect that throwin a wheen o eggs intae a pan along wi whatever was in a tin in the cupboard didnae quite cut it in terms o healthy atin.

As far as he cud ascertain, the biggest lockdown change was the absence o his mither’s cookin, which needed an ETA as soon as he left fer her hoose followed by ten minute updates and dear help him if there was mair nor a minute’s delay in arrival. Yet her cuisine was as egg an fryin pan focussed as his ain wi nae difference in calories on paper.

He cud only conclude that the amount o pachlin she did tryin tae cook a wheen o eggs generated a vast amount of additional energy that somehow got incorporated intae the food. There must be millions o oul dolls like her across the planet, footerin and pachlin an managin maistly tae increase entropy. He wunnered how a future Greta Thunberg type, sent baak in time tae prevent the demise o reality, might tackle her.

“Mrs. Aircher”, she’d say, “How dare you? How dare you accelerate the heat death of the universe?”

Efter lockdown finished, he’d had tae his surprise a few offers frae weemin tae come roon fer his tay. And reciprocal offers on his pairt, tae go oot tae a daicent atin-hoose, were accepted wi enthusiasm as weel. It rapidly became clear that there was naethin cerebral aboot these encounters, an that the weemin were simply followin their primal urges. He seemed tae trigger in them an instinctive desire tae either feed him or watch him sittin fernenst them knockin a big plate o prootas an beef intae him. Thereafter, haein satisfied an atavistic need tae attend tae his nutrition, they loast interest.

As he continued up the brae, the grazin got less good. Here there were beef cattle, Belted Galloway bull calves stannin like something by Rothko in his three dimensional monochrome period. They heard Aircher peghin up the hill and dandered over tae luk.



“See us? See Carnalbanagh? What it says oan the tin”, yin o them said, while the ithers snorted and pawed the groon, eggin him tae climb ower the barbed wire an taak them oan. Aircher marvelled that Lallans bastes, and hallions at that, had such a grasp o the Irish. They followed him for a bit, then loast interest and galloped away tae torment a rabbit they’d spotted.

The gradient continued tae increase, an he drapped anither cog. Evidence of habitation became sparse. He’d been on mony a road like this before. Hooses and oul national schools sat long abandoned, the windows empty of frames, nivver mine gless. Skull like and definitely deid. The abandoned motors were a different matter. Here was a Ford Sierra with sufficient anthropomorphic an semi-organic maitter- crecked heidlamps, fower flat tyres- to suggest that when it ris wi the rest o the undeid it would engage in a horrific parody of its oul habits, sittin ootside the Larne line carryoot in Ballymena on a Setterday nicht. Only atin fowk. Yit here and there were signs not only o life, but new life: a fairmhoose wi a trampoline in the front yaird indicated a fresh generation. In the distance, doon the valley tae his left, was the iridescent green o an Asda delivery van, a wee insect slowly makin its way along the road. Nae matter how remote the roads Aircher travelled, an Asda van would aye appear sooner or later. It was hard tae believe there was that much demand for Asda products in these remote pairts. Perhaps the drivers doubled as rovin paramedics, rushin weans that had fallen aff their trampolines tae far away emergency depairtments.

Tae his right rose the road tae the Star bog. In 1902 a meteor came flyin ower County Antrim an landed near Crumlin. Crumlin did badly out of the event- the meteor was hoked outta the groon and promptly shipped tae the British Museum. The Star bog however was duly named by dint of being under the flight path, and the area in general milked it fer a it was worth. Aircher had a cousin wi a chip van in Kilwaughter who did a Star bog burger. The boord ootside his van claimed it was *meaty all right*, an he made a poun or twa outta it till he wus shut down after geein salmonella tae half the Orange Lodges in the district yin Twelfth.

Doon anither cog. The computer on his hannlebars toul him his heartrate was noo ower a hunner an fifty. That computer taunted him ivery time he went oot on the pushbike, uploadin the data tae tell him he was twa seconds slower on this or that bit o road than the last time and that ower a hunner fowk had bait him on it. Which was why, wi the computer nyamin an nytterin on aboot his heart rate, he decided tae disconnect it.

The computer objected, o coorse.



“Dinnae swutch me aff, Davey”, it said. “Davey, stap. Stap, wud ye?”

Too late. He had aaready removed the heartrate strap, and then he pushed the aff button.

There was noo just him an the craik o the cranks an the lashin rain. In the distance he cud see the monolith at the tap o the Mullaghsandall road, sittin on a dry patch in the midst of bog. Had it been erected there millennia before because the groon was dry, or did some alien energy suck the damp frae roon it?

A propos o nathin the Sunrise opening of Also Sprach Zarathustra started tae go roon in his heid, takin him back tae Upper Fourth Music at gremmer school. The music teacher, whose paedagogy managed to be simultaneously loquacious and monotonous, had spent thirty minutes explainin the history of the piece. Meanwhile Jimmy McGantry, a pupil wi the nietzschian outlook of somebody who was aye goin tae walk intae his da’s drapery business nae matter what he got in his exams, passed roon a drawin. An oul boy landin on his erse wi the caption Also Sprachled Zarathustra. McGantry was sent to the heidmaister for his trouble. He then famously poured rid diesel on the situation while he was getting his hidin by askin wi a smile whether he was getting an upgrade frae corporal to capital punishment. McGantry was lang deid, victim o an industrial accident involving the vacuum tube system used tae fire money roon his da’s shap.

The backgroon music continued: an entire percussion section now seemed tae be tryin tae get oot o Aircher’s chest. He blattered on, sweatin and ready tae cowp.

The drums were increasing in tempo and volume. He fancied the monolith noo behin him let oot a screagh, though that could hae been a cock pheasant in the field fernenst it. He reached the summit an doon he went. Far below, as the clouds finally cleared to let the sun oot, Islandmagee lay like a great big giant wean gettin a bath in the North Channel.



Steve Dornan

Quare an close tha day

Written on the fall of Kabul, August 2021

Ach neebour, it’s yersel? Ah troo
Ye’ve no been keepin weel? An noo
Ah’m gey near failt mysel - tha brae’s
That stye on sic a close oul day.
It’s ill tae thole, but aye we maun
Hae mind that in Afghanistan
Tha craturs hae it worse. It’d gie
Ye a scunner, by Japers, tae see
Tha folk tapselteerie, their kintra agley
Nae Rooskies, nor even Amerikay,
They say, cud bate, nor gunk, nor shire
It, nor sloaken it’s iver-bleezin fires.
It’s a mixtur-maxtur o throughither folk,
Wha bide inunner oul-farrant yokes:
Coorse releegion, an sindert clans
Noo ruled yinst mair by Tha Taliban.
Whit’s tae dae? Wad ye rin an speel
Tha unner-carriage, an houl tha wheel,
Ticht, as tha plane scuds aff? Or bide
An slooster up tae tha winnin side
An hope dawn follaes dailygaun?
But onyway, neebour, Ah’m bletherin on.
I’m done efter pechin up thon brae
An it’s quare an close tha day.



Roy Ferguson

Simple things

Maakin breakfast fur the weans, egggy bried nor pancake stack,
The wuft o soda bried sut abin the cooling rack.
Taakin thon auld flooster o a dug oot fur a dauner,
Or seein a kingfisher ain the River as ye wauner.
Or whut about a sang ye've heerd tha brings ye bak a while
Or thon auld faded photie in a frame that maks ye smile.
Fur far tae affen we aa sit a watch as life skites by,
An niver gie a second thocht tae whut maks it forbye.
Ye see it's naw the great big things that sweeten lifes auld journey,
Fur A hae foun the wee stuff sticks an turns intae the memmrie.
Tha brings the smile or joyfu tear, the good tha staps the langest,
An rises in yer hairt an sowl the feelins tha ir strangest.
Sae mine an pay attention tae the pleasure tha it brings,
Whan yer life is turnt abin it's heid bye simple things.

Roy Ferguson 07.09.22



Dean Harkin

Doon by tha Braid

Doon by tha Braid,
Tha river by hame,
Where wild troot I tame,
By flea an by worm,

I know the river well,
Its pools and its turns,
Fae its source in the hills,
Tae its tributary burns,

Naethin a love mare,
Than a fine summer's nicht,
Fishin' tha dry flea,
In the last o tha licht,

Disnae matter if I catch,
A troot wid be nice aw tha same,
But tha morra's a new day,
And I'll get Doon tae tha Braid again.



Tha broon troot

Rivers as lang,
As the days are short,
It's drieche an dreary,
Waitin fer Mairch,

Tha prey's naw as abundant,
As years gone by,
But doon tae tha Braid,
Fer a troot, I'll try,

Stannin in tha water,
Flea oan tha line,
Castin upstream,
Sneakin up fae ahint,

Big dunt oan tha rod tip,
A troot, he emerges,
Wae a flash o gowd,
As he breaks tha surface,

Get him in close,
And in tae tha net,
Doon in the sheugh,
Tae get me hauns wet,

Tak the flea fae its mooth,
An admire the spots,
An send him back hame,
Again tae be caught.



Angeline King

The Dutch king on the wall

We had a Dutch King on the wall –
On a horse at the Boyne, but for all that
France was the aspiration, the Netherlands
An accidental destination.

Leiden had poetry on the walls, e.e. cummings'
Scatterings and 'Travel Safely' as studenten
From Antrim did centuries ago; Doctors
And ministers in de straten

And grachten of Leiden. I lived by a windmill
Near Rembrandtplaats in my flat selling books,
Painting oils in the sky, writing after
Lighting a penny candle – four lines o ocht

Aboutocht, so I stopped and listened
To the sounds. Nacht-Nicht. Kijk-Keek.
Licht-Licht. De deur. De vloer. Lekker
Words of de Nederlandse taal and aal

That I had knowed at hame as a wean
Wi King Willem on the waal. Le français –
L'aspiration. La destination –
La langue maternelle.



Rab Lennox

Haggis frae a can

Nae Toast til the Lassies,
Nae singin a Man's a Man,
A cannae celebrate Burns this yeir:
A'm eatin haggis frae a can!

Thanks til blinkin Covid,
It's left me brave an thran.
A'm stuck in the hoose this yeir:
A'm eatin haggis frae a can!

Nae dancin through the nicht,
Nae big feed o scan,
Nae gushin entrails bricht:
A'm eatin haggis frae a can!

Nae laughin wi ma freens this yeir,
Nae liftin spirits wi a dram.
It's just mesel an ma TV screen:
A'm eatin haggis frae a can!

I'll mebbe ring a boadie tae hae a yarn,
Watch a video o a band
Or chat wi someone on zoom (agane) :
A'm eatin haggis frae a can!

Big Boris says stay at hame,
Dinnae lea the hoose if ye can.
Sae on me ain, I'll dae Nae hairm:
A'm eatin haggis frae a can!

A'm scunnered wi ye Covid,
Ye scuppered aa me plans,
A'll raise a toast at hame this year:
A'm eatin haggis frae a can!

Sae I guess I'll mak the maist o it
An celebrate Burns the main man !
Big thanks til the online shap this yeir:
A'm eatin haggis frae a can !



Tong LITTLE

Whan A wus A wean

Whan A wus a wean A didnae lake skule
Whaur we had tae behave an' obey ivery rule -
Or, at weest, no get catchit an' luk lake a fool;
A'd as shane be oot kickin' a baa.
A didnae lake sums or pittin' things doon
In copperplate scribevin frae mornin' tae noon,
Or gym, whaur they made us aa run roon an' roon;
A'd as shane be oot kickin' a baa.
Whan A wus a wean A lakit it best
Whan tha soond o tha bell sed skule's ower, an jaist
As shane as A cud A'd be oot wi the rest -
Oor side agane their yin, aa kickin a baa.
It's the final, an' t'ithers dinnae ken whut they're dain';
We got them aa bate, the whustle blaas tae stap playin.
It's twa-naithin til us, tha fitbaa trophy we're ta'in.
Ah, them wus the days, boys, whan A wus a wean.



Anne McMaster

Tha Kirk on a Wuntèr Sabbath

The vestibule is bizzie, an' niver that wile wairm.
 Menfowk sort out tha collection plate - yin's loost -
 while weary mithers greet yin another in saft, pale whispers,
 their wriggling weans hel in a tight grip nearhan tae their Sunday best.
 This is tha Kirk on a wuntèr's Sabbath day.
 Ouler wimmenfowk bustle in,
 houl embarrassed teenagers by tha elbow,
 gie a püll tae bring them in,
 an' wi' lood smiles in thair voices, nearly a screagh,
 they gae ower agen whut they said tha week before
 an' tell thim hoo big they've grown.
 These new adults blush, gie a smile an' luk away.
 The oul wimmen bustle on.
 Ither teenagers skulk by tha radiator - a slick o' colour on an ee-lid,
 a wee bit o' polish on tha fingernails. A quait rebellion.

Each femlie finds thair pew. Nod tae thaim they know. Settle in.
 Relaxed, noo, in thair ain space.
 Adults raise thimsels tae reposition thair claes
 or tae settle tha weans.
 Wee yins sit at tha en' o' tha pew. Near free. Wee legs swingin'.
 Takin' a guid luk aroun' this sunlit space.
 A big han taps thair knee. *Hi wee cuttie! Min' yersel!*
 Tha smaa feet growe still.
 Heeds tilt ower tha aisles in greeting. Tha odd bake smiles.
 Eyes scan tha kirk tae recognise fowk
 or tak a sleekit wee keek fer sum wan new.
 Ither heeds bow - stay a minit - then rise agin.



Fing'rs flick throu hymn buks tae see what's being sung.
 Tha organist rushes in - sheet musick flapping in her airms
 like tae a captured burd. She settles down intae tha organ pit,
 slips off hir shunes, apens tha stops an' begins tae play.
 Saft notes rise. Behin' hir, fingers, oul an' chapped wi' work, tap thir knee
 or mairk time on tha arm o' tha polished pew,
 as ouler hairts mine tha tune.

Wi' quick, practiced glances, teenagers tak a wee keek tae seek each other out.
 They coont pipes on tha organ. Tha nummer o' lights heich by tha roof.
 As they wunner iverie week why they're thair.
 Noo tha choir waaks in - hymn buks an' smiles heeld tight.
 Quait too, thir last wurd's lyin' in tha vestibule like motes o' stour.
 Peppermints slip silently frae haun tae haun - tha' commerce o' tha day -
 an' tha perfect sweet fer a Sabbath - nae wrapping tae deal wi'
 fer the unspoken rule - dinnae crunch an' mak a soon!
 Noo tha late yins bustle in. Young mithers an' faithers
 settlin' a new babbie at tha creche.
 An ouler wumman relying on a lift.
 A farmer, feeding bastes, wha forgot tha time.
 They ease slowly in, thir faces hectic, cairryin' wi' thim
 tha bitter coul air o' a wuntèr's day.
Excuse me they say, affronted,
 as they join thir femlies or fin a place to sit alane.
 Noo a hush faals. Tha congregation waits.
 Tha reverend waaks in.



Tha ket an' I ir getting' oul

Yer chosen meals are wee'r noo. Yer more parteeklar. Yeh hunger less.
My fault, this springtim, was tae feed ye lik tha cat ye'd bin -
bringin' magpies tae yer scrap-scattered boul tae strut an' preen
until I fun ye as a banished shedda in tha holla o'tha yard.
I hel ye nearhan tae me an' fun ye poor -
an' knowed right well in that wan moment
thet young kets wil wun day grow oul.

This passin' summertim gye hurt us baith.
Dairksome bastes ayont the smaa circumference o' our lives
lunged wi' bizzie claws an' mairked us as thir ane.
Ye cam bak tae me fir rest an' peace an' fud. I tended ye.
Oor routine - at tha hairt o'each quait day - drew healin' in.

We take a wee sope less o'milk these days.
Lee mair fud uneaten in wer boulds.
Still, tha forenuin fins ye at tha scullery door
fer a routine made o' fud an' love an' care.
In this place o' quait companionship, wi tha slow caa o' moarnin light,
we sit blythely thegither an' houl on fer tha burds tae cum.



Sae monie wurd's fer soil

It caa'd fowk here an' brung thaim in.
Thick. Smooth. Wechtie. Dairk.
Weel-aff wi' promise. Fruitfùl.
They dug tha grun, then turned it ower.
Spreid tha seeds.
Gopen-fuls o' promise scetttered ower tha bustit clie.
They'd watch fer rain. Houl on fer whut wud growe.
Gie names tae tha lan they warked.
They'd gie fiels femlie names. Mairk tha fairie thorn.
Mak a list o'tha braes. Tha rough groun'
an' tha fiels whaur onlie yos an' thair wee yins cud ate.
They'd waak tha fiels an' ettle. Consider days tae cum.

A man or wumman mairks thaim fiels in tha wye o' tha work they dae.
Tha while they spen', thair long oors an' thair toil.
Oot thonner, ye cum tae ken tha misure o'a place.
Tha saisons that mairk an' set iverie twalmonth.
Iverie fitstep liftin' oan tha raise o'tha brae.
Tha wecht o'tha sun oan tha grun.
That springtim sward that ripples wile lik tae wattèr.
Young beece - let loose frae wintertim - rinnin' an' racin'
tae ketch tha sin.

Tha pads ye mak ir tha pads ye tak.

If ye r wise an' wullin' tae lairn, thair's wan thing ye'll cum tae ken.
Whan ye wark tae shape tha lan, it shapes you.

Ah mine wi' gledness tha fairmers wha loved tha lan.
Thair handiness - lang lairned - framed tha ections o'ivrie day -
tha fiels they sowed, tha bastes they lukked eftér too,
an' tha saisons they mairked an' tuk heed o' iverie yeir.
This wus thair knak o'knowin'. O'application.
They lukked eftèr fiels an gethered in tha harvests,
then they'd wait on wi' care fer tha newly grewed green.
A life thet affen taks, but disnae gie.



Bot if ye r wise an' wullin' tae lairn, thair's wan thing ye'll cum tae ken.
Whan ye wark tae shape tha lan, it shapes ye bak.

Bot these wee fiels bes vanishin' noo.
Memries o' warkin' men an' weemin skitin' awa lik tae simmer seeds.
Wi' iverie hedge cut doon an' burned,
iverie sheugh drained empie an' then filled in.
Wee yetts bes lifted aff thair strainers. Sent fer scrap.
Gret big dooble yetts houl on tae apen for tha mighty yawks.
Fer tha bizzie contractors, space iz time.
Nae knowin' o' tha space that gies its harvest best.
Tha traks o' an earlie moarnin hare styne unseen.

Tha pads ye mak ir tha pads ye tak.

Noo, if tha day iz guid, we tak a danner oan a Sabbath eftèrnuin.
W'ir gledsome tae mine sum flooers. Nam twa or three.
Swipe ony wee specks o' clie frae aff oor Sabbath claes.
We've loast tha link.
We've lit thaim voices go.

If ye r wise an' wullin' tae lairn, thair's wan thing ye'll cum tae ken.
Whan ye wark tae shape tha lan, it shapes ye bak.

Tha pads ye mak ir tha pads ye tak.



Alan Millar

For a rebel maun scribe on his rubber

In tha Royal, Raphoe
ten mile frae Drumboe
a scholar gaed ee tae his rubber

half grey an half white
Jim wuz up for a fecht
fur a rebel maun scribe on his rubber

wi rid an blue pens
he draad rid an blue lines
aal aroun tha white o his rubber

whar did it come frae
naw easy tae say
tha thought o a fleg on his rubber

naw wan bit foreign
tae the scribevin wee scholar
wha draad on tha white o his rubber

tha Mester ketched on
took nae carry on
when he keeked tha state o tha rubber

'ah Sor, dinnae dae ocht'
says Jimmy, 'it's nocht'
'fur monies tha fleg's on a rubber'

bit tha Mester wuznae blate
tae tak oot his hate
on tha Union Fleg on tha rubber

gaed Jim rid an blue lines
tae scribe thoosans o times
tae scribe then dicht oot wi his rubber



tae scribe an dicht oot
 tae scribe an dicht oot
 tha union o saints on his rubber

Saint Paddy made smatters
 George an Andra turnt flitters
 bae lines daen tha darg o a rubber

at hame time furfoughen
 jotter pangt full o naethin
 an nocht wuz left o his rubber.

Postscript
Bit Jimmy groughed up
tae fair laithe ilka pup
gart lines dae tha darg o a rubber



Gye guid Sid

Fur Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, El Cid (tae Moors) El Campeador (tae Christians)
(c. 1043 – 1099) an Charlton Heston (October 4, 1923 – April 5, 2008)

***Tha Spanish spent 800year fechtin tha Moors oot o Iberia. They ca'd it
 'Reconquista'. In tha en it wuz convert or lae.***

El Sid
 re-conquistador
 pished aff Kings, tummult toons
 did naebodies bid

leeved in a sark o totie rings
 thoosands thegeither
 iron knittin

tis said weans made thon sark
 maun had gye guid
 finnger ingine, tis said
 saft wee weanhoods gaed up
 tae hard wee rings

groued up ticht wee sodgers
 raws o iron knittin
 in El Campeador's, El Sid's chain mail
 conquered Valencia,

wi mighty men, atap Babieca
 iron kep on noble heid
 stove in waker heids,
 kebbed craniums

whar God an Allah merched
 mixt, were gye guid
 oddtimes, for tha odd yin

gye guid Sid, El Campeador
 pished aff Kings, tummult toons
 some bhoy thon,
 some cause thon.



Bittie frae tha story 'Jamie Orr's bonnie hobble up hame'

set in 1797, when, a younglin James Orr, dargin for a linen draper, kerts a load on broon linen frae Banbridge Fair tae Carrick, during tha 'Dragooning of Ulster.'

Saturday March 25

Screich o dai, Jamie laes tha last o tha toon ahint, Fisher Row, Clabber Loanen, oot along tha Carrickfergus Road. Fresh wun frae Belfast loch blaws in ower tha point fiels; shires tha heid. Tha gye merchants kintra hooses fornenst on his left han, maist quat politics lang time syne. Mr Sinclair's hame Lilliput. Apt! Lilliputians tha lot o them; oot lik widworm efter tha reform nae doot. Bastards. Naw aal! On tha brae, Tha Grove! Mr Simms, his hame tha Newgate presently; hert in tha wrang o't somewhar; naw aal a poor man's lift. Ower tha loch, muckle wids on tha Coonty Doon side; tha residence o Crawford o Crawfordsburn somewhar in amang, heid yin o tha '92 French celebration review, anither attercap fled tha wab. Deeks tha new Tender in tha loch, pits Knockagh, heich on tha braeside, in tae his heid as weel; whar bouks rot, craws peck an banes bleach. Twixt Knockagh an tha Tender. Gaes a hert sigh. Losh, what a life.

Ootbye Carrickfergus jail, late foreneen, weel fed jailer William Hamilton, or Hammy Souter, as he was kent, him bein a souter bae trade, ruch flicks throu tha bunnle o Noarth Star newspapers, weezened aule mien fit tae boke. Gaes them bak.

"Shouldnae Jamie, but a wheen o minutes 'Il naw maitter!" Hammy an Jamie's faither aule Excise freens; that tha son was a poleetical man, weel kent tae.

Inbye along a dull passage, iron dures apened, closed; skreich an gulder leid, stink o sweet, feet, keeche an boke. Cells fild wi folk lifted, fever, dysentery, diarrhoea. Poleetical comrades. Souter staps at a cell dure, ca's oot curt,

"Mr Cuthbert," then draas bak a wheen o yards. Jamie hears a boadie inbye gae a gye snottery sneist; kythin tae joy, when he keeks oot at his visitor.

"Jamie Orr," he exclaims cantily.

"Dr Porter axed me tae drap aff these for yersell an Mr Gordon!" Jamie raxes tha bunnle o Noarth Starrs twixt tha bars.



"Aw Jamie, yer gye guid tae mae," Cuthbert taks tha papers greedily, dirty rid whiskers ower a twisted aule babby face, "nae word o Mr Simms or Mr Neilson?"

"Dr Porter said naethin!" Jamie taule him. He couldnae thole Cuthbert; aye sookin up around him; a whiterat; broke blakness ahint tha visage.

"Captain Rankin o tha gallant Yeoman Cavalry was axin efter ye!" His een close on tha ither man snokin hungrily through tha bunnle, reportin a chat frae a wheen weeks bak; alloos in a sarky thing! Yet anither on tha government side efter tha Irish Volunteer Movement crushed.

"Aw, did he?" a fand look flits ower Cuthbert's face, which conflummixt Jamie awee, "he got me tha fittin o Belfast Blues; had us aa set tae merch on Dublin, micht o been all ower in tha winter o '92 if folk had had tha stanes. Naw a bad boadie Mr Rankin."

'92 a lang time syne, noo. This was tha tailor's second, aiblins third spell as a poleetical prisoner. His, tha first toon shaw trial efter tha war sterted. Skailt illegal pamphlets amang sodgers; Wullie Sampson couldnae get him aff; pilloried yerds frae his ain shap. Didnae pit him aff. Noo in for murther. Kilt informers.

"Had lug o a gye guid patriotic sang nearhan Banbridge!"

"Aw, what is it Jamie?" Cuthbert turns frae the papers, een licht up.

"Sterts - O tha French are on tha sea says tha Sean Bhan Bhocht!"

"Shan Van Vocht?"

"Irish for poortith aule carline, as far as I min!"

"French on tha sea says tha poortith aule carline," Cuthbert took this in, "I lik it Jamie, what tune's it tae, gae us tha rest o't!"

"Irelan will be free, says tha Sean Bhan Bhocht!" Jamie scarts heid, "yes aule Irelan will be free, frae tha centre tae tha sea. Huzzah for liberty says tha Sean Bhan Bhocht..." staps, "canny mind tha rest; potchen was took when I heard it."

"Aye tha wai!" Cuthbert lamented.



"Ony wurd o a trial?" axes Jamie. Cuthbert shrugs.

"Dan Shanaghan says aiblins neist month's assizes." His face sours. Souter bak.

"Jamie, ye'll heddie come on," tha jailer urges, blate. Jamie nods, jooks a heid roun intae tha neist cell; has a wheen wurd wi Tam Storey, Star prenter. William Orr o Farranshane there tae. Jamie didnae really ken his namesake at aal, bit had administered mair illegal oaths than him, wha aiblins had niver daun wan.

"We'll stap eatin an stert scalin wur ain keeche on tha waals!" Cuthbert telt tha jailer jovially, een o irn. Naethin tae dae in there but heid sports.

"Guid eneuch," tha jailer dichts bak lichtly, "mair victuals fur tha rest; ye can bide in keeche as lang as ye lik!" He gaes Jamie a teuch asklent luik bit, wan weel kent bae tha younger man. Pity tha faither has a son trucks wi thon.

"We're patriot citizens wi richts naw bastes," a voice, Jamie kens tae bae that o John Gordon, Mr Neilson's nephew, guldery oot frae cell nearhan tha far en. Ithers join tha skirl o defiant agreement, that near lifts Jamie aff the floor wi tha poower o't. He raxes tha han o comradely fareweel tae Cuthbert, then turns awa wi Souter. Killin fowk wad see guid men swing, families gae withoot, wasnae wrang; but Jamie aften prayed he'd niver hae tae dae it, or order it daun.

"I'll see ye richt, Hammy," Cuthbert rairs efter them as they move awa, "an yer weans tae." Ootbye Souter draas Jamie close, sair afeart, "says yestreen he's for pittin a guillotine whar tha pillory was, efter tha Frenchies come. Ye'll see us richt Jamie, for yer daddy."

Naw lang efter, Jamie unhitches his wagon fornenst tha bleach-green an stables bawsie; fareweels her wi aits frae his louf; loves thon aule mare, a bettermaist freen than monie. Ootbye in tha yerd, tha Fifeshire Fencibles wrackin o Doagh is aal tha chat; Jamie fild wi peety an relief baith, like maist gled his ain femely safe. Screeds aff tha tael o his ain load o clarried wabs; naethin he could dae aal were agreed.

"I hear its ticht got!" says the draper Bob Gilliland, ahint desk, nae auler than himsell.

"Nae worse nor here, Mr Gilliland, ony wurd o Mr Munce?"



"Bak yestreen; ruch turn; weel on tha mend," he says, adding, "says youse gye weel kent about Banbridge got?"

"Byordinar, niver seen its lik, fowk rinnin efter us," Jamie shaks his heid. Staps himself. For guid o baith. Gilliland a comrade, a colonel aiblins. Or naw!

"Portglenone an Magherafelt run frae noo on!" Gilliland says curtly, afore turnin bak tae his paperwork. Lik maist he respectit Jamie. Jaloused a boadie mair committed, mair gleg than himsell. Didnae haule it agin him.

Scunnersome waak up tha brae tha last five-mile tae Ballycarry. Jooks in tha hameplace dure at dailygaun; his aule pair bae tha fire, tha bowl o meat raxed, but nae saft wurd. Efter, he faals intae

his pallet anent their beed, smeddum spent. Nae bonnie Meggie tae whisper intae his lug nor saft bosom agin his kist. O flinty warl; nae gye hansel if it gaes richt; Knockagh or tha Tender if it gaes wrang. Weeps himsell asleep furfoughen. Tha morra a poleetical fechter agin.



Robb Morrow

Heron's lament

Nae faur nor thought, the auld loanin,
O love lost, an' love won,
O an era's end an' a new stair;
Hopped up in a new jaicket, I'll tak thon loanin.

It's gye hard tae scribe in siccan heat as British Columbia's,
Mair heavy nor hame's,
But still, it willnae keep ma heid frae flittin,
Ach, I mind it weel, an' on it dan'ers.

The Hanging Brae hangs abin ilk tounland,
Lik ma thoughts an' a', abin ma mind,
They maun try me here in ma ain countrie.
The work wis haird, but Bid Murphy, she wis sweet,

Gang awa, ma mind dan'ers on,
Doun mair tracks, mair loanins,
Jook roun' aye corner; twa een huntin,
On atween a lock o hooses; ye ken a',

McGregor, Morrow, Knox, McCall;
Ilka yin a Scotch name, yet Irishmen an' prood,
Ma ain tongue Scotch, yet frae an Irish mooth.
Ye'd jalouse Scotland blaw'd 'cross the Narra Sea,
Scail'd her ain fowk 'mang Ulster's Gaels; Herons 'mang Murphys.



I cannae lea'e it jist o a sudden,
It taks me in wae it, the mindin o the past,
Stranger nor a throng o kye, gentler nor a lass's een.
Thon mem'ry cannae gang awa wi'oot pairt o me flittin awa wae it.
I can smell the summer flooers, hear the sheugh cryin us hame,
I cried it caution, then; man-dear, I cry it waur nor thon noo.

She flit awa; far New a'Zealand ta'en her o'er the Main,
An' me lef' here, alane wae nane but boots clarted,
Clarted wae sheughwater I wouldnae hae trod,
Gin I'd grasped ma ain courage, lik a sword in the han'
Tak Bruce an' Cleland, tak O'Neill an' Munro,
Twa nations I hae tae muster in me, an I did nane at a'.

But, ma hairt chynged,
Canada cried me o'er the waves; the wynd taks haird toll,
Foun'ered tae ma sowl, I made Nova Scotia,
E'en here, Bid Murphy wis abin ma mind, yet ablow ma means;
Aye, a bairn maun creep afore it gangs!

West, tae British Columbia, I foond maself gangin,
There tae see Tam Morrow; an' 'twas greetin I lef' him.
"I dinnae ken whar I'll gang, Morrow" says I,
An' says he, *"ye're efter a lassie, Jim Heron, an' I ken ye'll gang a' roads tae find her,
An' I jalouse ye'll find yersel, forbye"*.

Sae here I scribe these lines, the heat nae better nor the stair,
As I wait on the ship tae tak me 'cross the bould Pacific,
For I've a letter in ma han', frae nane but New a'Zealand,
She's doun wae grief; her hairt's in twa,
But she's nae a cause tae fash hersel, I've mine ain tae gie her,
An' I ken the wynd blows fast frae here.



Like wynd

Ye wha stans abin the burn,
Yer cause aye tae misfortune spurn,
Bigg up ane wa' sae strang an' stern,
Tae watch an' ca'
Gin rank an' file upon ye turn,
Yer sword tae draw

A' up an' doun auld Scotia's plain,
Oor fowk hae toil't wi'oot a gain,
Sae skailed by the wynds we've ta'en
Tae foreign clime,
Aye chance we'd tak tae mak a claim,
New hames tae find

Like wynd we've flitt,
Like flame we've spit,
Like Exodus we've pad the grit,
Tae Ulster's shore,
The narra sea extends the writ,
Ye fate, implore

O'er a' o' Ulster's mossy braes
Oor fowk hae plantit doun their ways,
Frae Down tae Donegal it lays,
An' lingers still,
'Tween Scotch an' Irish oor name it sways,
Sweet rhymes tae fill

But yin name disnae fit us a',
An' tae ither shores we've heed the ca',
'Cross braider seas we've faced the maw,
Yet nane sae dear,
As Ireland; e'en her fortunes fa',
Ma heart's still here



Maurice Neill

Dayligaun

Dayligaun *n* twilight *1a19-e20*. The Concise Scots Dictionary, Aberdeen University Press.

"SURE hoppers are the best bait for big troots," said aul McGuinness. He spat a treacle-like gob of chewing tobacco into the bars of the Doric range where it hissed and sizzled in anger. The debate was polite and scholarly but intense. The expert anglers considered the merits of stonebait - the larvae of the caddis fly. It makes its home from tiny pieces of grit and is found stuck to the underside of stones in rivers and streams. They discussed the appeal of the jinny-long-legs - the delicate crane fly which appears in late summer and flutters helplessly against windows and walls like a blind fairy. High on the list was a docken grub - the fat, white larvae of a moth found among the roots of the green leathery weed. Little red brambling worms, found in farmyard middens, were highly rated by both men. Granda Bob favoured the brown sedges which appear among the hedgerows of the Bann valley in May before falling on the water like dirty snowflakes. But McGuinness was a hoppers man. "The big troots go mad for them Bobby," he said and spat another gobful of treacle into the range. He reached into his pocket and produced a tobacco-stained Fox's Glacier Mint. He handed his treasure to the boy with a mischievous wink. "Go gaither me a wheen o' aul' hoppers son and I'll show you how to ketch a big troot." Aunt Annie whisked the tainted sweetie from the lad and glowered at him to be silent, lest he should embarrass her by mounting a protest.

McGuinness and granda Bob were life-long pals. As young men they were spoiling for a fight. They joined Edward Carson's Ulster Volunteer Force to take on their fellow Irishmen or the British government. In 1914 they changed their minds and answered Lord Kitchener's call to fight alongside their Home Rule enemies against the Germans. The 10th Inniskilling Fusiliers, recruited from the villages of Derry and Donegal, trained at Finner Camp on the coast at Bundoran. Then marched across Ulster to Randalstown where the railway took them to Larne for an exercise in the Antrim hills and a final training camp in the south of England. Carson waved them off to France. They were no more than boys when they went over the top on the first day of the Somme shouting 'No Surrender.' The 36th Ulster Division achieved its objective despite the fearful slaughter but only a handful from the village survived the battle. The survivors toiled in the linen mills of the new Northern Ireland all their lives, raised families and became contented old men who enjoyed the fireside in winter and the waterside in summer.



Granda Bob had a piece of shrapnel in his foot as a lasting souvenir of his war. McGuinness took a Maschinengewehr bullet in the lung. His wound made granda Bob's left boot fit badly but he walked miles every Twelfth of July with his fellow Great War veterans, their peacetime uniform an Orange sash, broly and bowler hat. McGuinness could not smoke and could walk only a few hundred yards before he had to pause for breath. Yet the martial instinct remained strong despite the horrors of the Western Front.

The old me enjoyed a drink, but never drank at home and in the pub limited themselves to a 'half and a half' – a half measure of Powers whiskey and a glass of pub-bottled Red Heart stout. There was no bar in the village so they brought their thirsts to Peggy Black's in Maghera or the Roaring Rafter's in Swatragh. Here they sat in a fug of pipe smoke, often in silence. Few words were needed to maintain a bond forged in mud, blood and barbed wire where the fear of a sudden, savage death was an ever-present companion. Granda Bob was a barber, a skill he learned in the trenches, the boy watched in wonder as he sharpened a cut-throat razor on a leather strop and lathered his face as part of his morning ritual. The old soldier lived on a diet of good Scotch broth with pearl barley, the stock made by boiling a chicken until the meat fell off the bones. To get the last of the HP sauce from the bottle he stood it in the pot to make it runny. In his soup bowl he would plonk a floury potato grown in his garden and fed with well-rotted horse manure forked into the rich, brown Irish earth with a sharp-tined Scottish gaip.

The fields around the village were filled with the sound of grasshoppers at the height of summer. The boy chose a hot and still day for his first hopper hunt. The grass was dry and his prey had no chance of escaping on the breeze. He could hear the creatures long before he could see them, tick-a-tick-ticking in the long grass by the football pitch and behind the B-Specials' hut which doubled as a changing room for visiting soccer teams. Hunting hoppers required patience, stealth and good eyesight for they were small, swift and the same subtle shade as the foliage that hid them from their many foes. The equipment required was simple – a large jam jar with a tin lid which was easily pierced to make air holes. When he crept up and spotted a hopper he gently placed the glass over his target and the lid below. When he raised the lid the hopper jumped into the jar and he closed the trap. He was sure to put some grass into the jar to make the insect feel at home. It took a while to focus his eyes in the micro-world of the grasshopper and to tune his ear to the right sounds. He knew he was getting close when the tick-a-tick-ticking stopped. He must have missed a dozen before he perfected the stalking technique and his first hopper was in the jar. He gazed upon his prize with the satisfaction of a Stone Age hunter who has brought down a red deer with a bow and arrow. Granda Bob chugged on his pipe with quiet pride when he boy returned home with a jar-full. He ruffled his hair and said: "We'll tak a dander up the dams after tay and ketch a wheen o' troot."



It was a strange procession, two old men in battered caps, a younger man and a boy with a fishing rod in one hand and a jar full of insects in the other. They strolled through the quiet village, across the river by the old water wheel and passed the empty factory building by the Lappin' Room dam – two acres of clear water bounded on one of its three sides by sycamore trees and on another by a high dam wall which was split in two by an overflow to carry off surplus water at flood times. It was a peaceful and still summer evening.

Dayligaun is the best time for fishing, said granda Bob. "Troots don't like the sunshine," said McGuinness. "They have naye eyelids."

The stillness was broken only by the barking of a distant dog, the harsh quack-quack and frenzied flapping of a mallard duck. The glassy surface of the water was disturbed only by the occasional rise of a trout sucking down some drowning insect from the surface tension. The fish made little rings in the water that radiated outward, rolling slowly to the shore. Swallows skimmed low over the surface picking off those insects which had yet to fall into watery graves or the bellies of the trout. All manner of fish food was on the mid-summer menu: sedges, olives, jinny-long-legs and columns of midges which rose from the hedgerows like thin clouds of smoke.

They walked in silence, granda Bob leaving his own cloud of smoke trailing behind them as he puffed on his pipe in contentment. The procession stopped at the overflow because the edges provided a convenient place to sit. The water here was deep and on either side the banks were thick with grass. The boy's father produced a new fishing rod from its brown canvas case – six foot of light blue glass-fibre, eyes whipped-on with a navy blue thread. It had a cork handle and a screw-type mount for the reel. He pulled another new purchase from his pocket. The Black Prince was a mechanical marvel and a thing of beauty. The old men examined the 'new-fangled' spinning reel and the modern rod with great curiosity. They were from the age of Greenheart and cane, silk and cat-gut. The boy's father flipped open the bail arm of the Black Prince and pulled a gossamer filament of nylon from the spool then fed it through the eyes on the rod. From another pocket in his tweed jacket he produced a clear plastic bubble-float and threaded it onto the line, twice through the holes, to ensure it did not slide up and down too easily but could still be adjusted to the required length. From a Swan Vesta matchbox he produced a tiny and fine Partridge hook with a tip, sharp as a needle. Even the keenest eye had difficulty threading it onto the nylon. Granda Bob wet the knot with spit to make it stronger before he pulled it tight and tested it for security.



Carefully the boy removed a docile grasshopper from the jar, holding it firmly but gently between a finger and a thumb. It protested as the hook was passed through its soft body. Then the boy stood up, with the rod and fishing reel in hand, unsure what to do next. "Just throw it out there son and let it sit," said McGuinness. The boy's father showed him how to open the bail arm, which allowed line to spill off the spool for casting, and to secure the nylon with a finger while the cast was readied.

The first attempt landed in the grass. "Put a drop of water in your wee bubble-float and it will be easier to throw," said McGuinness. The extra weight in the float helped carry the line and the bait out onto the water at his second attempt. The bubble-float hit the surface with a satisfying plop and the hopper landed nearby where it sat awaiting its fate giving only the occasional flutter of protest. The vibrations sent tiny shock waves across the surface. The boy stood, tensed in anticipation, waiting for a savage take from a big still water trout. The old men talked. Nothing happened. The sun began to set and the moon rose over the hillside. The rooks came home to roost in the trees and the ducks quacked off to their island home. A cool and gentle breeze sprang up and carried the bubble-float further out into the dam. Trout rose all around it, some even came close to the bubble-float, but the grasshopper drifted around undisturbed. The boy clutched the rod in anticipation.

"Just let it sit," said granda Bob. "Put the rod down and be patient."

The old men talked of fabled trout streams and secret salmon pools on the Bann, the Roe and Agivey rivers. They recalled great fishermen of the past. There was a young man who could catch trout with his bare hands. He stripped off socks and shoes and waded into the river gently feeling under big stones with agile fingers until he brushed against a lazy fish. He caressed it lovingly, until it was lulled into a false sense of security, then swiftly wedged two fingers into its open gills and pulled it from the river. Wee Jimmy Moore was a 'dab hand at the auld ginellin', they said. He was the best salmon poacher on the lower Bann and knew every carry and every lie from Coleraine to Kilrea. A big fish came to rest under the roots of a bankside tree and out of reach of the gaff he carried in his coat. Jimmy cut a stick from an alder tree, sharpened the end into a crude point with a notch for a barb then speared the salmon in its hiding place. It took off upstream like a scalded cat coming to rest in a place where he was able to spot it because of the stick and recover the fish with ease. He was riding his bicycle home from the pub when a policeman stepped out of the dark to challenge him. The rivals collided then tumbled through a hedge and into a field. Wee Jimmy crawled away to find a hiding place for his stolen fish while the angry policeman demanded that he show himself. "I can't get up," came the poacher's reply. "Sure there's two aul' men holding me down." The lawman demanded the names of those who were obstructing him in his duty. "John Powers and Arthur Guinness," he was told.



The old men smiled and father laughed. The boy did not understand the joke but joined in the brotherhood of glee. His childish mirth made them laugh even more and he was given a hug by his father. The old men fell silent and savoured their tobacco again for a long, pensive moment. The boy's father asked: "What ever happened to wee Jimmy Moore?"

McGuinness replied: "Wee Jimmy made it through the Somme without a scratch, went over the top singing Derry's Walls, but dammit didn't he love the sunshine. A sniper got him in the evening while he was sitting on the firestep, enjoying a last blink of warmth and a mug o' tay. Finest fisherman on the Bann was wee Jimmy."

The birds finished their bed-time chatterings and a gloomy silence descended with the night.

The peace was broken by a sudden splash. The ratchet on the Black Prince whined in protest as yards of nylon stripped off the spool. The bubble-float and the hopper were gone. The tip of the glass-fibre rod danced in glee and skittered across the concrete. His aunt Annie made a big fuss over the trout when it registered on the kitchen scales at 1lb and seven ounces. "It must have been the biggest trout in the dams," she said.

McGuinness was right. It had no eyelids.



Eleanor Ness

A prickly tale

“Ma faither wis cooler than me,” Iain alloood as I FaceTimed him in his hospital bed.

“Wha’ dae ye mean? He wis mair stoic when he wis ill?”

He shook his heid, “Do ye mine tha hedgehog yairn? Are ye sure? Well stop me if ye mine hauf way through. So, ma faither spoke to his pal Mick who telt him aboot a man who had died in weird circumstances in Ulster: tha man had cam hame wi’ a sack oan his back an’ drapt doon deid when ‘e closed tha door. When tha man wis examined, it happent that tha sack hud containt a hedgehog an’ tha spines hud entered intae tha man’s back draining him slowly o’ bluid until he drapt doon deid frae shock.

“Ma faither wis a quiet man who hud ne’er gotten tha chance tae gang tae university because he helpt raise his brithers yince his mither wis widowed but he wis no fool.

“He argued wi’ Mick that this haed tae be a myth fur it didnae mak sense. Despite tha fact that Mick didnae ken tha man killt by a hedgehog he believed tha man wha telt him did, so stuck tae his storie.

“A few months later a letter arrived on oor doormat tae ma faither wi’ a Queen’s University, Belfast postmark. Ma mither was beside hersel a’ day til ma faither cam hame an’ showed hur tha contents.

“Dear Mr Patterson,

We write regarding your enquiry about a claim of death by hedgehog quills.

We have checked various resources in the library and, although several here in the University have also heard the tale, there are no newspaper articles, medical journals or literature that can verify the claim.



Moreover, the physiology of both human anatomy and hedgehogs makes it impossible that blood draining from multiple wounds would be pain free. We hope this answers your query.”

“My mither sayed, “So will ye phone Mick the noo an’ tell him he wis wrang?”

“Naw Dorothy, it’s eneuch to be richt.”

“So yon’s why ma faither wis cooler than me. Can ye imagine being proven richt aboot it and saying naethin to tha person who wis wrang?”

“A’ the years we’ve known each other Iain we’ve spent our lives trying to best tha ither, so naw.”

“Naw, so. Cooler than me. I wush I hud telt him.”



Stuart A Paterson

The heretics' toast

Ah ken no whit they mak o me
thon whae wad hae a hack at me,
but even though there's a lack o me -
they hinnae seen the back o me.

There's some wad hae the crack wi me
an some hae had their whack o me,
an aw wad hae their tak on me -
but hinnae seen the back o me.

A wheen wad hae a shak o me
an mair yet keech an cack on me
an few hae got the knack o me -
they'll ayewes see the back o me.

But fiers a dram will tak wi me
an bannocks they will brak wi me
an never scold nor clag on me -
they'll aye clap on the back o me.

Guid freens an neebors raise yer drink
tae crankums, clash an crambo-clink,
we'll dae whit ithers ainlie think -
the unco guid, the drab perjink.

Aye, lift yer dram an heize it high,
an heize an drink again forby -
nae maitter whit they mak o us
they'll never see the back o us.



Pads

Paths? They were pads when Ah stravaiged
oan thaim, trevelt no travelled owre grevvel
never gravel levelled noo wi tarmac an
wi chips taen aff thon new roads ootby.

Woods? They were aye wids tae aw o us,
still ur, still here, auld or new nae maitter,
still growein owre abuin the likes o us
whae dauner in ablo thaim aw oan pads
no grevvelt when we mind whit taen us here.

Rockliffe

Time's drunk the dregs o day awa.
Ah'm birlin the gless,
keekin in at its clarty leavins
wi the milky ee o regret an tip
it up tae lips still dree
eneuch tae walcome it
hauf-hairedly.

A wattery skin o sun
smoors harried birdsang spun
fae panic, filters through the hauf-tuimt gless.
This seems tae be hoo it's ayewes endit -
things we thocht had come tae pass
hae only noo jist stertit.



Charles 'tha Poocher' Reynolds

Tha rinnin doag

Thaur wus an oul doag frae tha en o tha street,
Wha tore up an doon tae hae wore oot his feet,
He wus blak an white wae a graet bushy tel,
An Lord hae loked weel whun sa' in fu sel.
He wud rin efter kars as if hae wus late,
Ir maebae hae jest wantit them aa for tae bate,
He is stappit noo for hae haes rin oot o puff
An bae tha cut o haes face haes noo in a huff.
Sae noo hae jest lies wae his heid in haes paas
An gies tha odd bark an a growl at tha cra's,
Haes rinnin is ower, hae noo trevels gie slow,
An disnae hunts tha kars nae odds whaur they go.
Sae think on tha doag whun yer rinnin tearin aboot
For if ye dinnae slow doon ye'll weer yersel oot,
Bae content wae what ye hae bae ye rich ir puir
Ye'll taak naethin wae ye on yer last trip oot tha dure.



Wannerin thochts

Oh mae thochts they affen wanner
Tae tha cottar hoose on tha brae,
An mae oul hairt strings cling tae it,
At tha gloamin time o' day.
A can see yince mair oul faces,
That ir lang sine noo awa',
A ken richt weel thaur ayont tha tide
But its as if they're naw ava .
A can still hear tha wee burds singin'
Tha wye they dane baak then,
Tha flooers they hae kept on' bloomin'
In bricht colours ye cudnae ken.
A can see tha wurl o' tha clockin' hen
An aa gridle swingin' on tha crook,
Tha smell o' soda breid a fadge
An tha doag bae tha ingle-nook
A see tha toorie in a tha oul tay chist
An blue an white boulds in a row,
Tha canary singin' in its cage
An peats piled heich for tha snow.
Ach sixty year haes shane flew by
Since a sported roon thon loanen,
But thon days ir al'wyes in mae heid
But sure oul folk's alwyas moanin.
Sae aa A hae left is mae ain fond thochts
O mae childhoods days at mae grannies,
Is fun that wae had on lang simmer days
A cud fill a hale book wae mae rammles.



George T Watt

Inheritance o grief

Inspired by ae poem o, Jerzy Adam Kosinski (Lodz, Poland, 1912 - Auschwitz, 1943)

I mind yon bricht morn o the back-en,
fan deith's caul, blek cheil cam guisin
lik an aungel, smilin as he brak ma hert,
tuik you tae heiven an me tae hell,
gaed you the gowden treisures o the richt minded,
umquile I, the dowie mirk o sorra.

Life gangs on the guidfowk say,
fit ken thay faa dinnae ken?
The burnie aye rins throu the howe,
the speugies chirpin brawlie i the nest,
the stags aye hird thair hynds upo the ben,
the yowes an lambies gaither in the glen.

But the blue lift, the colour o yer een,
thay een that lichtit ilka neuk an crannie
braks ma hert noo ilka dey, an I caa oot
in anguish prayer tae ae Laird faa's blin
tae ma dowie wanwearie sowl, that greets,
oh Laird, draw ae dairk mirk curtain ower aa!

Oh guid Laird faa gaed me this mensfu wuman,
the guidwife faa's kennin weys wis ma hert's discreSSION,
fit wey hae ye deserted me noo in thay dairk days?
Sweet smile an blue een, life o ma hert, taein awa,
I'm cast doun laigh in the caul muckit moules,
an ae dowie hairst is the crap o this back-en.



Ae straunge stane

Cairnieton wis ae richt guid fairm situated on the edge o a braid fertile strath. It haed
baith heich grund fur grazin an braw fertile yirth fur crap. Man haes fairmed, warkit, luvd,
focht and deid here sinsyne the ice trailed awa bek tae the poles. Ae day I wis ploo in the
laigh field, that runs alangside the busy main road, so I wis taein speical care. Ma furras
wir straucht as a dye, leivel as ae bourd waeoot ae single weed glimmin throu. I wis fine
pleased. We ploomen ye ken, are richt prood craturs whiles an we ken ilka ither plooman
is takin tent o wir wark. Naewan competes tae be the best, but aabiddie streives tae dae
thair best. It wis early spring, the sun wis oot the lift wis blue, the laverocks wir fillin the
wuld wi thair sang, peisies wir dain whit peisies dae, an ower by the tup meadie a waup
wis cryin yon eldritch ca o thair's. It aa seemed sae perfect. Aa o a suddenty ma ploo
gaed wheech, scewed awa tae the side an caused ae muckle big scaur richt throu twa
furras. Swear! By God I fair cursed aathin ye cuid think o. Fit ae stramash, richt whaur
aabiddie cuid see it tae! I lifted the ploo an ae muckle big boulder wis stuck until it, an this
in ae pairk I'd niver seen oniethin bigger than ae chuckie in afore. I gaed tae kick it oot but
it wuidnae budge. I gotten the hammer an chappit awa at it but tae nae avail. Naethin fur
it but tae ging beck tae the fairm an belt it oot wi a mell.

Cairnieton gotten its nem frae ae muckle cairn that wis neist tae the burnie that ran doun
frae the hill. The fairmer thocht hisselt an amatur archaeologist, an whiles wuid plouter
around thare digging up divots, luikin fur artefacts tae pruiv somethin, thou naewan kent
richt fit. He haed turnt up ae few bits an pieces that wir on shaw in the local museum thou
that juist luikit like bitties o stane tae us. He wis convinced the cairn maun be a buriel
chaumer an that aa kin o treisures cuid be in thare. 'Imagine' he wuid espound, 'gin ae
tribal leader wis yirded in thare wi aa his treisures fur the neist wurld. Thay fair thocht thay
cuid tak it wi thaim ye ken.' Aye right! It juist luikit like a bit o ae hillock tae us, somethin
left ahint frae the ice-age. Oniewey, fan I gotten bek tae the yird I hosed doun the ploo fur
ae better luik an help ma kilt this bluidy stane haed broke the mouldboard. I wis juist
about tae batter it wi the heavy hammer fan the fairmer cam roun the corner.

'Fits a div', Dod he speired?

'The ploo's broke' I pyntit oot, 'yon bluidy stane...'

'Oh wait a meintie' he said, 'fit div we hae here? I think ye've fun something speical here
Dod.'

'I niver fun it, it fun me, luik fit its duin tae the ploo.' No that he haed muckle intrest in the
ploo, or the ploo in, he wis mair interestit in his archeologie.



‘Michty me, luik at thay mairkins, we’ve cottoned ontae something here, tak it oot gae canny like an bring it up tae the hous, Dod, I’ll hae tae research this’.

‘Fit about the ploo, ye’ll hae tae order up ae new mouldbound fur it’.

‘Aye aye’, he reponed, but he wisnae luggin intil me, aa he cuid think o wis his blessit stane.

I dismantled yon pairt o the ploo an gotten the stane oot, an richt eneuch it did hae a queer bit luik about it. It wis near the shape o ae rugby baa, an near eneuch the sem size, mibbie ae wee bittie bigger, but richt heavy. Syne, I realised that thou I haed hosed it doun wi caul watter, it felt warm. Thare’s something nae richt here I thocht. I turnt it roun in ma hauns luikin mare closs at it. It didnae luik like local stane, bein o ae straunge pale green hue an the mairkins on’t wir straunge anaa, nae like it haed been scraipit by ploos an harrows ower the years. I cuidnae richt say but I wuid jalouse thay wir duin by haun,. Thay wir kin o reglar lines an ilk ane haed an upturnt tail tae it. I kent o thay ‘cup an ring’ mairkins o the auncients an this ane haed something similar, but it cuid hae been an ee. I didnae like the luik o it masel I hae tae admit fur it wis fell cantrip. Oniewey, I gotten it oot an tuik it up tae the big hous fur the Mannie. He wantit it pit on the mantle abune the fire, but the Mistress she wis haein nane o aat. She gotten ae wee table ben an pit it atween his chair on the ingle neuk. ‘Naw, naw, wait till I get ae claith on it’, she scolded fan I gaed tae pit it doun. Fan she wis ready, the stane in place, the fairmer gotten some buiks oot o the press, ‘The Archaeology of Ancient Scotland and Ireland’, ‘Footprints of the Picts’, ‘Neanderthals of North Scotland’ and ae puckle ithers I cuidnae see the titles o. I kent we wuidnae see muckle o him ower the neist day or twa.

‘Fit about the pairt fur the ploo?’ I speired but ma request fell on claith lugs. He wis aareadies engrossed in the pages o ae buik.

‘Gae me a notie o fit ye need Dod an I’ll order it fur ye,’ said the Mistress. ‘I s’pec we’ll hae tae sen awa tae the makars fur the pairt’.

We fairmhauns wuid yoke ilka mornin at seiven. The Cattlies milkin in the byre wuid stert at fower, but thay wir ae different breed frae us. Oniewey, we wuid aye stairt afore then, fuel up wir tractors, hae a bittie o a red up an hae wir usual bit news o the day. Bert the shepherd haed a bit gossip anent Maisie the barmaid doun in the Linnae Airms an wis busy telling us aa about it fan the Mistress cam in.



‘The fairmer’s deid’ she said, like he wis ane o the coos. ‘No that it’ll mak muckle difference tae you lads. I aye duin the buiks, I payed the wages, I payed the bills an ordered the feed an pairts. I ken mare anent this fairm than he iver did so we’ll juist cairry on like naithin haes happent. Dan wull you feinish the harrowin, Bert, div ye hae aa ye need fur the lambin? Tam I want ye tae mak ae stert o muckin oot thay pens, an Dod, wull ye cam up tae the hous an tak awa yon orra stane. Airchie, is yon load o tatties ready fur takin awa?’

I gaed up tae the hous fur the stane, an thare wis the fairmer sittin in his chair deid. Stane deid. His een wir wide apen, near poppin oot o his physog, gogglin at yon boulder sittin on it’s wee bourd, michty it wis fell uncanny. I tuik the snottedichter oot o ma pocket an pit it ower his heid tae mak him mare daicent. I speired o the Mistress fit happent? She sayed he sat thare wi his buiks, glued tae yon thing like it wis his favourite programme on the telly. He wuidnae hae ony tae, niver muived oot o his chair an fan she gaed awa tae her bedchaumer he sat on sayin he’d come up later. Fan she woke in the mornin, his side o the cot wis toun. She cam doun the stair an fun him still sittin thare, anely he wis deid.

‘Fit’s gaein tae happen noo’ I speired?

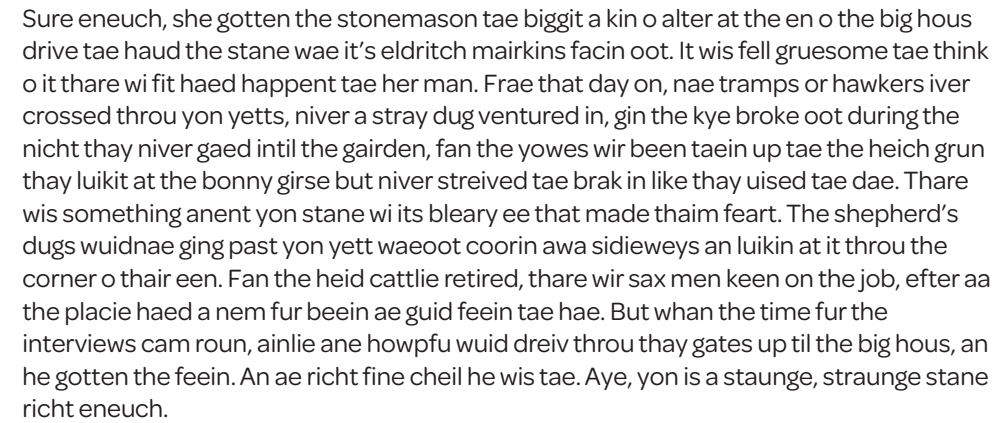
‘I’ll tell ye fit’s nae gaein tae happen’ she reponed richt assertive like, ‘thare wull nae be anither man wi his feet ablo ma bourd. He wis sorry eneuch fur ae husband, I’ll bide ma ain frae noo on’.

‘Noo noo Mistress,’ I sayed, ‘you’re still ae fine luikin wumman, dinnae be ower hastie in closing the door’. I maun admit bein a single man masel, she wis ae fine comely wumman, the thocht o her haed a cozy feel tae it. Gin I played ma cairds richt....

‘Thank you Dod’, she sayed brisk like, ‘I micht warm ma bed noo an again but I’ll nae be feedin an tendin tae naewan, cleanin, ironin, cuikin, rennin after thaim like ae skivvy wi nae ae wurd o thanks. Naw, naw, nae thank you. Oniewey, that’ll be the doactor fur I hear a caur’.

‘I’ll tak that stane awa an chuck it in the burn’. I sayed, jalousin I micht as weel kep ma bunnet hingin on the dairymaid’s shoogie peg ae whilie langer. She micht be a bittie cours like but she kens hoo tae pit ae smile on a man.

‘Naw, dinnae dae that Dod’, she thocht fur ae mintie, ‘tak it doun tae the pillars, I’ll get the stanemason tae mak ae biggin fur it, tae warn fowk off’. Aye, lea it at the en o the drive.





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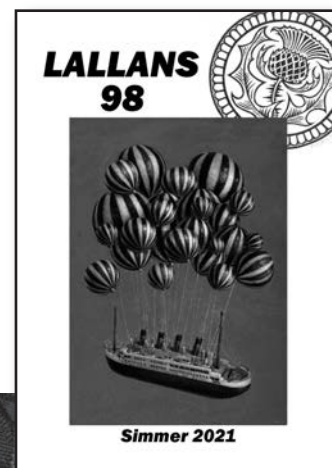
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