

# Eemis Stane



ISSUE 2, 2023

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# Editorial: A Twa Wey Street

Thomas Clark

Sae we're agreed, then. A language has kenmairks that set it aff frae a dialect. We at Eemis Stane like tae think a literary zine is wan o them, but o coorse there are ithers – a literature, a media, an educational system.

Owersettins intae the language in question. Owersettins oot o it.

That last yin is sowt Scots hasnae really had – at least, no properly. Richt eneuch, we've aw seen the bowdlerised Burns that gets haunded roond frae January tae January, aw the haird wirts taen oot an glossed, aw the indigestible lumps squashed tae semolina – but ye couldnae caw thon 'owersettins intae English', could ye, or if ye could ye'd hiv tae wunner if English is even a real language at aw, or jist upmairket slang for radio presenters an minor aristocracy...

But ah'm rinnin awa wi masel. Point is, if, as a language, we've the literature we think we dae, it cannae jist be oors alane. We cannae jist be singin tae suit oorsels. Ah mean, whit maks a literature a literature, raither

as a collection o pairty pieces wheeled oot for waddins an wakes, is shairly some aspiration taewards the international commonweal, a contribution tae oor shared vision o humanity. There's nae point us rockin up tae the pairty wi a bottle o rid biddy if we're the anely wans that are gonnae drink it.

Sae we're gey chuffed tae present in Eemis Stane #2 a genuine landmairk for the leid – an excerpt frae Joana Roselló Jurado's Catalan owersettin o oor ain Matthew Fitt's kenspeckle cyberpunk tour-de-force, *But n Ben A-Go-Go*.

In mony weys it's tae Catalan, raither as Gaelic, that Scots spikkers maun luik for a guid steer in their – oor – strauchle taewards recognition. The parallels wi Catalan are clearer, and certes less likely tae hae us at each ither's thrapples, the wey ony comparison o Scots an Gaelic is apt tae. Catalan, like Scots, is a 'minority' language wi a hale jingbang o spikkers,

an uneasy linguistic an political relationship wi its hegemonic big brither, an a purportit thirlin-tae wi nationalist shibboleths that's aw perception an nae reality. As a linguistic an creative community, we can staun tae learn a hale lot frae whit Catalan gets richt – an wrang. Thon's no a lesson ah'm proposin tae extract frae the day's sermon, mind. The linguistic infrastructure that uphauuds the Catalan leid is a thing o wunner an envy tae me, but there's no awfie muckle ah can dae tae bring aboot its Scots equivalent. Nor yersel, maist like. The howkin oot o faithless yird, the layin-doon o causey-stanes – whitever Seamus Heaney nicht think, these are modes o darg ower honest for yer ilkaday scriever. A shooder tae the wheel's a byspiel thing, but a makar's lungs are makkit for mair than pechin.

Whit ah'm gettin at is this. Tae hae a language is wan thing, but tae hae onythin wirth sayin in it is anither thing awthegither. We could hae awthin the Catalans hae, an mair – signage at train stations, leaflets in Pairliament, a dedicatit radio channel rinnin on 810 medium-wave – an it'd mak hee-haw difference, if aw thon Scots wis daein wis distantly echain somethin in English. Yer makar, yer scriever, or raither, the things they produce – thon's whit maks a leid a leid. They are the killer apps o Scots, its USP. Withoot them, oor mither tongue is nae mair as a

shooglie auld rickshaw, a thing that jist aboot nicht get ye frae A tae B, as lang as ye're no fashed how muckle it costs, or whit ye'll luik like wance ye get there.

The difficulty, as aye, is in wirkin oot if we're ever sayin onythin that's wirth ither fowk hearin. The warst judge o the sangster's vyce is the sangster's lugs. Sae let's be pragmatic aboot it, for a chynge. Let's assume that, if a thing's wirth sayin, it's wirth repeatin. An let's see wha's repeatin us.

In Catalonia richt noo, they're repeatin *But n Ben A-Go-Go*, a buik aboot climate chynge, societal drift, an livin through disaster. Ah dout it maun soond kind o relevant tae them, Scots leid or no. The message o the novel has transcendit the medium o its language. An there's nae dout in ma mind that ony an aw o the follaein pieces in Issue #2 o Eemis Stane warrant the same treatment. There's naethin here thae disnae want tae be heard ower aw the mony inches o the warld, in Catalan an in Czech, in Inuktitut an in – how no? – English.

Efter years o shoutin the odds intae Plato's cavern, here it is, the dwaumie echoes o oor ain vyces cairryin back. Whit wey it's happened is ayont aw science o mine, but sae whit? We dinnae hae tae ken how the thing wirks. Aw we need tae dae is tae keep roarin.

# But n Ben A-Go-Go

Owerset intae Catalan by Joana Roselló Jurado, frae the Scots o Matthew Fitt



## Capítol 1 - Nadia

*Càpsula 624 Centre mèdic Imbequi  
15:07 h*

És de matí.

No estic segura si és de matí. No sento els porters. El noi jove de veu bonica i amb accent que parla fluix amb el seu cap cridant-lo perquè es calli. Encara no hi són. Segueixen al tren. Badallant amb el diari. Posant-se gomina al cabell. Amb una mà entre les cames.

A fora.

No sento la necessitat de fer-ho. Aquell petit so d'electricitat que passa per la xarxa elèctrica mentre va arribant-hi. És l'energia suficient per fer bullir una olla o per passar l'aspiradora pel passadís. Els porters i els advocats no se n'han adonat. No si porten les Ray-Bans i els vestits del Sang. Però aquí, sense nit ni cap crepuscle que t'indiqui quina hora és, aquella onada imperceptible que està programada és tan forta i tan aguda com el cant d'un

gall.

A fora.

On és el meu noi maco? On és? Era a les catacumbes l'últim cop. Lluny, al passadís, preparant una estàtua per a cremar. Tot i això, la seva veu arribava fins aquí. Parlava nerviós, però el seu so traspassava els blocs de ferro i de plàstic. Vaig estar plorant una estona fins a parar. Aquella dolçor del jove em provoca tristesa.

Tristesa.

Declan. No l'anomenaria Declan. Seumas és un bon nom. Estany i fort. Però no té cara de Seumas. No ho sé. Mai no l'he vist, encara que ell de segur que a mi sí. Whiles, és un guerrer d'espatlles amples. Finbar o Miles. O potser ve de més a prop. Un d'aquells nois atractius i amb el cabell llarg de Lanarkshire. Rab. Graham. Geordie. No ho sé. Sempre divaga al meu cap i se'n va, com si fos un lladre.

Un lladre.

Una feina tan fàcil com aquesta. El petit lladre ha d'estar ben connectat. Un comissari talòs per a un pare. Un conseller de mandíbula curta evitant portar el seu fillet a l'exèrcit. Al costat que no era bèl·lic del front est. Zowie. Star. Loola. Ametist. Escollit d'entre un ventall d'estúpids noms cristians que se'ls hi va ocórrer als seus pares adinerats mentre estaven col·locats

fins a dalt o al llit de la lluna de mel. Pobret meu. L'anomenaré Pavel.

Pavel.

Sent-ho. El fantasma del temor passant per la càpsula. L'electricitat arribant. Aquí dins, un cos creix molt. Acostumat a la foscor. Batega al mateix ritme que aquest lloc. Quan una infermera hi passa pel costat, puc escoltar els tubs i els bisturís sobre la safata. Quan el cap de virologia fa un tom per les càpsules, puc esbrinar pel soroll dels passos quants encantats i observadors professionals ha portat. Puc saber amb el canvi de l'electricitat si hi ha cap llum que necessiti ser canviat al passadís. Sé pel so metàl·lic de l'electricitat quan una càpsula s'ha apagat.

Apagada.

Aquesta càpsula és la meva oïda.

Pavel.

En Pavel ara mateix passeja per les instal·lacions, parlant sol. A aquestes hores del matí. Les aloses i les gavines. Estaran cridant i xerrotejant a les places de les ciutats. I el sol escalfant les palmeres i les fulles que pengen dels salzes. Les parelles encara arraulides al llit fins a l'últim moment càlid abans d'anar a la feina. Ha de ser un dia estrany al port perquè el jove Pavel ja estigui cantant. O això o té un rellotge. Una parella. Alguna noieta que va

conèixer ahir a la nit. No li haurà explicat encara a què es dedica.

Aquesta càpsula és la meva oïda.

És al passadís. Avui porta les sabates còmodes, en Pavel. El seu cant és alegre. Més alegre. Torna a casa com jo de petita. Silenci. Ja no noto la seva presència.

Silenci.

Escolta't a tu mateixa. Em cau la bava per un xaval. Igualment, no sé si és un noi. Pot ser un vell amb un gep a l'esquena o una noieta que encara no té pits. Tampoc hauria de ser un humà. Un d'aquells robots de servei podrien fer aquell soroll. I a mi que em cau la bava com un gos o un adolescent. El Sang deu estar dormint. Em deixa pensar per mi mateixa una estona. Però no trigarà a despertar-se. Quan tingui gana. Pobre desgraciada.

Pavel.

Què fas, Pavel? De què tracta la teva feina? Vés a veure el pare. I els dos germans. Es troben als Urals. L'Stobb. És el meu germà. No gaire més gran que jo. És un ciberpilot. I el Bonnie. És l'altre germà. És un franc tirador dels boines vermelles. Al front de Carpathia. Què fas tu, Pavel? En quin

regiment estàs? Que estàs de llicència militar? Que està el teu uniforme a casa? Els nois en uniforme són una debilitat. Quan en veig un gallejar pel carrer gairebé em fa caure de cul. Va, Pavel. Dignes-m'ho. Què fas?

Ai, Pavel. Vinga, dignes-m'ho.

No ho va fer.

Pavel.

No volia dir-ho.

Ets un covard. Explica'ls-hi què fas quan xiules les teves cançonetes.

Em dic Pavel i trec les bosses d'excrements dels morts.

Oh, Pavel!

## The Ploom

Owerset frae Brecht by Neil Rhind

The ploom that's in the gairden's wee.

Oermuch tae cry it tree.

Yet there it stauns, circlit wi rails

Tae keip it hail.

Peer craitur. It will grow nae mair.

It wad grow, if trees wad grow there.

Naethin can be done

Far we're starvit o sun.

There arenae ploom spied on yon tree.

Tae cry it ploom-tree taks belief.

But a ploom's aa it can be.

Ye ken it by its leif.

## Bairns

James Robertson

There's hungert bairns that canna eat  
and huntit bairns that maunna greit.  
There's waukrife bairns that winna sleep  
and wantin bairns that daurna threip.  
There's honest bairns that hae tae steal  
and hurtit bairns that niver heal.  
There's bairns weel-luv'd but dinna ken  
and oolit bairns that haud it ben.  
There's some bairns blocked fae gaun tae schuil  
and ithers jouk the maister's rule.  
There's jimpit bairns in chauffeured cars  
and hameless bairns that rax for stars.  
There's frichtit bairns that steek their mooths  
and ill-less bairns that speak oot truths.  
There's bairns that dwine and bairns that thrive,  
there's some bairns dee and some survive.  
But bairns are bairns and niver yin  
that ocht tae bear original sin.

## Animula, vagula, blandula

after Hadrian

John Glenday

Cheeky, switherin wee soul,  
ma harns' guest, ma hert's pal,  
whaur awa noo? Some dour place  
a dout – dreich, tuim, cauld. That'll  
fair dicht the smirk frae yer face.

# Late Efternuin in the Hermitage

Reyzi Grace

A brin o licht comes throu a heich windae,  
pale and prood as the unmentionables o Saint Mungo,  
the whilk war sain bi his hagiographer tae hae remeent  
“lily-white” in thair disuiss. A'mna shuir whit's myndin me  
the mair o Kentigern—the bein alane in a hermitage,  
or the bein unalane wi the lily-white limms  
o a nakit quine kerven bi some Frenchman  
whase name, like mine, anely comes pronoonceable in Cyrillic.

A ken this licht weel. It's howtiest in the simmer,  
whan the sun is somehou still cauld and awthing  
leuks a bittock unreal, as tho colour  
war the cantrip o a Cartesian deil haein a pynt  
wi Kant. In thir latitudes, be the sky apen  
as it micht, the shafts faw nairae. Aw lines come  
parallel, and anely a meestic or a fuil  
can conceive the eternitie whaur thay meet. A winner  
whilk this sculptor wis and, aither wey, A peety him  
for haein tae expleen this tae the French. A can hear thaim nou,  
twa hunner year aff, “Oh, thare he gaes again,

the auld lecher! Mebbes gin he haedna spent his last sou  
on thon ciseau, he cud spot a bottle of wine for a real wumman.”  
But A daurna titch her, no hen the invisible cordon o the signs,  
but acause A knaw ma haund wad pass, in this licht,  
juist as easy throu stane. Insteid, A hauld ma haund  
in the brin and leuk throu cauld fingers intae a strinden burn o dist,  
whaur white is a thoosand colours and aw else is bleach.  
A watch the swimmin specks like fishes, wishin  
A war some Novgorodian paisant wha cud crave a boon  
tae seelence the auld vyces. A cud exoner him, gin anely  
A cud catch the leamin siller o the richt fish and pull Áine's ring  
frae its belly—mak the hecklers leuk throu it and see the fairies flee  
like quickened birds, ilka ane hauldin a hazel brainch  
for thaim whit find their faces in a miskent sel-limn.  
Auld Mungo, bride o Christ that his saul wis,  
wad belike hae unnerstuiden. For the rest o us it comes clear  
anely in thir yonder airts, whaur Sadko cam no tae hause the marmails,  
but throu a fair-farrant form shiftin intae river  
tae retour tae his aither hauf. Aye, her legs are lang,

# The Covenant o the Pieces

Reyzi Grace

but thay're the short lot left on deck—the knippt strings

o a gubbed *gusli* whit waits in seelence

tae gar the fairies' haund for a transformation.

In the south she war an object, but bi this licht she's whit remeens

o a man wi nae left haund wha's pit doun the wecht

o the ceety o men, and nou haes naething mair

tae play. Than and awa, thare wis a bell whit jowed for us,

A'm shuir, in waves cuisten thru the simmer air

like the scent o lilies. Peter melted doun the bells for cannons,

tho, and aw thir are anely reproductions, yit younger than Glesga's.

Still, thay knell murnfu eneuch, and A'm myndit hou lang A've stuid  
heir.

It's fine. A'm juist waitin for the licht tae lat me gae.

A wisna fauchelt whan the gloamin cam.

A haedna wunnert whaur the muin haed gaed.

A haedna draimit yit o yowe nor ram.

A haedna shairpenit the blade,

nor tellt the wean mair than whit he prayed

afore he slept sae deep, wi me asyd him.

The caumel knaw, as daed the date paum's shade,

lang cuisten 'neath a starn shynen

heich an hell, as wi the nuin-tyme rhyman—

a bonnie makar, Venus, like a kist

o ills in apen lugs afore the jynin

o haund tae haundle, haund tae wrist,

an ma name tae ha-Shem. But A wist

naething yit o that whan the mornin starn

said, 'He wulna leave yer fit tae be kisst

anely bi a stane. Th'ither bairn



wulna be sae blisst, tho he is yit dern.'

A startelt straucht in a cauld sweit, 'Whit than  
o Ishmael?' 'O him is nocht tae lairn;  
A spik o Japheth, wha ye'll ken

na in this warld.' An she wis gaed. A tried tae send  
the thocht awa but aye it cam, like a bricht spring,  
A cudna seal—a burn A cudna bend  
nor beir at day's daw tae hear sing.

When the sun's sweir  
tae rise an gleg tae dern  
his licht ablow a bowie  
he juist kittles the lift  
syne yirds his braivity

whiles the mensefu mune  
wi nae sic fause blateness  
busks hersel an taks  
the road she's used wi  
tentless o day or nicht

or whether she's hailly  
or ainly hauf hersel  
till, jimp an dwynin,  
she kens it's lows in time  
an syne she's brand new.

# 7 Haiku for Devorgilla

Miriam Sulhunt

kent ootthru the laund  
the leddy o Galloway  
guidwilt and sauntly

Devorgilla's bridge  
buildit ower the watter  
o the Nith; her gift

ane o her childer  
weirdless, eik-named Toom Tabert  
wiz King o Scotland

made for ilk ither  
hersel and John Balliol  
o Barnard's Castle

for monie a year  
they war happily mairriet  
ere his suddent deith

howkit oot his corp  
keepit in a siller kist  
her luvie's beater

a last restin place  
Dulce Cor, Sweetheart Abbey  
twa herts thegither

## (I)

Whit dae ye mean?  
An how dae ye ken  
that whit ye think ye mean  
is onythin ither than  
a rehash o the wurds o ither folk,  
when ye heard thum  
tryin tae say  
whit *they* mean?  
An onywey,  
how can ye even hope  
that whit A tak yir wurds tae mean  
is onythin like  
whit ye meant thum tae mean  
in the first place?  
So ye better face up tae the fact  
that whit ye mean  
is jist whit A tak ye tae mean  
an nuthin else.  
See whit A mean?

## (II)

Who dae ye think ye ur?  
Two faced disnae even start  
tae describe ye.  
Nivir the same wey twice.  
A nivir know how tae tak ye,  
It's like ye're somebody else  
every time A meet ye.  
Ye've goat me so that  
A cannae be sure  
whether A'm comin  
or gaun,  
or where ye staun  
about onythin.  
Ye're that  
damned  
inconsistent,  
ye're aw ower the place.  
Fur God's sake,  
pu yirsel  
thegither!

# Season av thi Witch

Gerry Stewart

Mid thi gowd an blush,  
mirk creeps in thi yird,  
whisperin threits  
av rot an winter.

Threids av claik stitch thi lift.  
A loop or twa falls ahint,  
drappin ill chance at yer feet.

A carline chaps yer door  
wi a crummie cake av ettercaps  
or poisoned aiples.  
Wizzent lips speirin if ye're weel.

Ye've seen her face  
reflectit i thi gless,  
crynin skin an gaupin banes  
spinnin yarns ye huv nae wish tae hear  
av lang nichts an langer years.

Thi cauld buffles past inby,  
thi weans ir fechtin up thi stair,  
thi hoose willnae clean itsel,  
but her blearie een watter  
an thin airms shoogle  
aneath thi ashet.

*Come ben,  
ye're a seelie sicht.*

# Tounheid wi Joan Eardley

Gerry Stewart

Fowk scurry hame  
wi thi day's scraps  
    av yesterday's blether,  
along bandy-leggit streets  
straddlin Parliamentary Road  
    tae thi Rottenrow.

Thi tenement rises  
fae this scratch av toun,  
a keep av stories biggit up  
    brick by family  
stacked on top anither.

Raw-patched an weathered,  
knockin heids  
    an banes thigither,  
sair Glasgae daurk.

But life wins oot  
on a bogie bumpin  
    doun thi front close,

fae windaes open  
    tae thi lift av blue,  
in a lauch that tugs at its neebour,  
wi a wean waitin  
    for a sweet when she paints him  
    afore her stove's wairm belly.

An she hears thi sea  
    thrum, thrummin,  
sees thi liltin fields  
    bright wi wildfloers  
    like a bairn's smile,  
aw bickerin and tummelin  
ootwith these waws,  
  
yet she bides.

**Wiegenleid**  
(i.m. Aidan Michael Philip)  
**Amy Jo Philip**

Strauchle, wee man, strauchle for yer braith.  
Ilka buddie strauchles wi the lave.  
Strauchle, wee man, strauchle for yer nemm.  
It isnae ever wrang tae quit the gemm.  
Strauchle, wee man, strauchle as I beild ye.  
Strauchle as ma hert braks and I yield ye.  
Strauchle as ma heid and back are bent.  
Ilka buddie strauchles tae be kent  
but syne there is nae strength for strauchle left.  
Dinnae strauchle mair: for ey ye're luived.

**Mrs W**  
**Tom Hubbard**

She'd flittit across frae us, the talky weedow,  
But said gey little aboot her umwhile years;  
There wis some son or dochter in poshest Embro,  
And mebbe some myndit joys brocht her ti tears.  
Her ear-rings micht hae sunk a haill damn fleet;  
Her gowden necklace wis mair likely bress;  
I'd try ti get a word in – but wis beat -  
I kent na hou she votit – but I cuid guess.  
'Ay, she's a snob,' said mum, 'but she's her lane.'  
Come Christmas: ti her door, there came by nane,  
Baur the local cats, the postie, us; nae pittin  
It aff, we tuik her oot ti denner:  
Ower smiles and wine, frae then, we got ti ken her,  
And I mynd her kindness ti my sister's kitten.

# In Scotland in the Gaidhealtachd

Donald Goodbrand Saunders

There was a gless o golden wine,

There was a sheath an a knife therein.

O never I saw sic a bree

As in the gless that passed me by

An had I that blade tae my hand

Its siller sang wad gled the land,

But they hae tint the stubborn knife

That I luv'd better than my life

An they hae kept a lesser thing—

The gildit sheath that it was in

An aa the wine they've sauld or spilt.

What worth a crack't gless wi nocht intil't?

# Taen In

John 7:53-8:11

Beth McDonough

Efter the auld yins went, thon thrang jist meltit free.

Naw, yon Mannie wisna feart o ony loon there,

bit d'ye mind foo aa they Meenisters glaared?

Richt snell. They waakkit oot fan He speired up fur me.

Aye gled. Bit fit or *fa* ist still ye willna see?

Ah wis jist meat, smirkin Priests' whettit bait.

He wis the gweed catch. Nae me. They cam prepared.

Yet screivit in laa, *twa* o us were meant ti dee.

Sharely it wis eneugh tae gaither fit wis left,

yon rottit goon, nurse loupin bits, aa hackit raa,

Mony fistit chuckies *did* faa, ken, bit Ah felt

richt shaakit, tae see ma blod sae thicked wi glaur.

The verra lest o him, syne rinnin doon ma leg.

Ah saa thon wee futrat een o his, fu he waaked awa.

Partick Thistle v Fleetwood Rangers in the FA Cup 20th  
November, 1886 at Inchview Park, Whiteinch

Angus Lauchlan

Horse shite, dug shite, human shite, bird shite, fresh sweat, stale sweat,  
honest sweat, fear sweat, pipe smoke, fag smoke, cigar smoke, factory  
smoke, hoose smoke, midden smoke, train smoke, beer breath, whisky  
breath, kale breath, stale breath, sweet breath, dying breath and rain-  
soaked corduroy, leather and wool.

Bowler hat, toorie, derby, flat cap, flat cap, flat cap, flat cap, bare heided  
nae hat, nae hat, nae hat, nae hat, nae hat, polis hat and topper.

Tackety bits, fitba bits, welly bits, ankle bits, calf bits, gum bits, bits that  
leaked, bits that hurt, steel toed and nae toed.

Caulkers curse and riveters rage as welders watch the labourers laugh at  
joiners' jokes. Auld plumbers and pasty painters pine for pints in  
Partick as boilermakers barney wae visitin English clerks.

When it's daurker than a foreman's haunshake when it's turned away  
and never met, it ends and men wash oot wae fleetin cheer aware that  
wind and rain will cease but time will trundle oan.

Trowes at bruckit borders

Chris Tait

Skies summon aboot da waddir  
Ram's scarves ir knotted teddir  
Da shore is laek shewed leddir  
Tyin da islands tagidder

Dere is coarns o muld poodir  
Ower da scabbed rock shoodirs  
Rummelled stons ir geddir  
Lambs roar fir dere midders

Prince sheep come tae be faiders  
Brochs wreckit by rock leddirs  
Lassoos spun by da speedirs  
Coins rowl trowe da heddir

Fir a dowry tae a dowter  
Signed papers fae a ogre  
Across swittles o waatir  
Sprikklen wi sleekit otters

So dey gae da spiked quaarter  
Foo o slaves an martyrs  
Windoos apo da horrors  
Wi trowes at bruckit borders



He's takin his time the nicht,  
him i the mune, stoppin an stertin  
aneath thon tousie bunnle heised up on his heyfow.  
It's a wonder he's no come skitin doun  
– an ye'd think he's feart he nicht  
when ye see him pauchlin aboot. Chitterin, tae, wi cauld  
an the thorns aa snaggin his claes.  
There's naeb'dy here kin tell whaur he gets a sit-doon  
an naeb'dy – bar the hedgie – sees  
whaur he fund thae togs he's wearin.  
Mebbe he snaffled them.  
he nicht be the Arnold Lane o the derksome luft.

An whaur in the name dis he think he's gaen?  
He pits the ae fit eftir the tither aa richt  
but I dinna see nae progress.  
He's the warld's maist ditterin bugger, yon.  
Like his hedgin wark  
– fur ivry rent i the thorn he fettles  
anither girns, an there's fowk suspeck his aix.  
A chiel wad be sweir tae dae himsel

aathegither oot o employment, ken?

Wheniver ye spy him yonder  
heigh up-by in his element, ye kin see him  
leant on's fow, an comin the auld auld man.  
The crookit wee nyaf, he's hingin back.  
He's no been seen this whilie;  
an whaur he's stravaiged, I sair misdoot  
he hisna dune ower weel for himsel.  
He'll hae liftit a laid o somethin,  
an some fule's taen his wurd he's guid tae deliver it  
an is beelin nou.

If that's the wey o it,  
best fit furrin, ye eejit! – get yersel doun that road.  
Nae sweit: we'll hae the chiel roond tae oors  
*cry, Mak yersel richt at hame,*  
ken? We'll gie him a drap o the guid stuff;  
Big Ag'll gie him the glad ee.  
When he's guid an pisht  
we'll *borrow* his hauf o the nickstick

## Refarmation

Kevin Cormack

an that's you affa the heuk. Nae fash,  
ye can easy shauchle inby  
an leave him nane the wiser.

He's nae

hearin a word o this:  
deef as a stob, the Deil tak him!  
Naethin I say will gar him get a shift on  
- he's nae respeck, the scunner,  
nae sense o duty.

Ach,

move yer erse, ye sleekit auld craw in breeks!  
I ken damn fine ye've had a guid skinfu.  
I kin risp my teeth at the limmer until they aa brak  
– he's nae comin doun til day-daw.

*(after the Middle English lyric "The Man in the Moon" in MS Harley  
2253)*

I signed up fur the gaerdeens, no this:  
resurrectan yanked ower gravestanes,  
cement mixer chowan away  
like a guttery coo, girnan skywird.  
Gravel churns like voices  
o pished internet trowies, self-vandalism,  
the promeese o the 'dustman damned'  
thit gouges the hackid faces.

Let the heidstanes sunbathe fur noo,  
me blate wirkmate. Proppan up Death  
wae raa, rain-froze, breeket fingers  
nivver that glamorous a proposition.

Enskonced in the cooncil larry,  
boiler suits wuppid doon aboot wir waists,  
we clatter oot through the cathedral's  
kirkyerd getts, like a smokker's hoast —  
cool air oan the erms, me faded  
Nirvana T-shirt soft as a moth.

His playground collision  
wae Peter Malcolm did more  
than dislodge a day, or half o Peter's  
front teeth. Hid marked  
the first stirreens

o a fascination wae wirkeens:  
*whitwey this wey and whitwey that?*  
Hoo traama, imbalance  
or the peediest fluctuation kin aalter

the entire man.

A place

o pented pebbles — whar freend  
becomes stranger, gentle sowl turns  
tae murder; whar omen and talisman

brew in the bruck.

He tucked  
the misseen day under his pillow,  
amazed at hoo kinfock err fixed  
in such treacherous flux.

Hoo, when they oppen the door tae us,  
efter that long journey,  
wir glad —  
and kinna be convinced itherwise.

# The Curse

Andy Murray

yon simmer's day the king's  
dragoons hung three men  
frae the gibbets fur no renouncin their hatred o bishops,  
an the twae mairgarets wur mairtyred  
tae the ocean – fixit ticht tae stakes  
tae droon as the tide rose  
abune the bay o wigtown.

they were aw merkit oot as malaperts, troublemakers whae listent  
tae  
kirk fowk preach frae beneath  
their blankets in amang the hills  
o gallowa,  
loth even in the face o daith itsel  
tae stoap bein the foot sodgers o god:

freedom fechtors railin  
agin episcopalian.  
mairgaret maclauchlan an mairgaret  
wilson wur laid oot on the mudflats  
at bladnoch, clingin oan tae their

crates like crabs.

yin o them sang hymns but the sat  
watter dried them in her mooth.  
an offeecial pu'd her heid up  
fur a last chance tae recant  
her creed

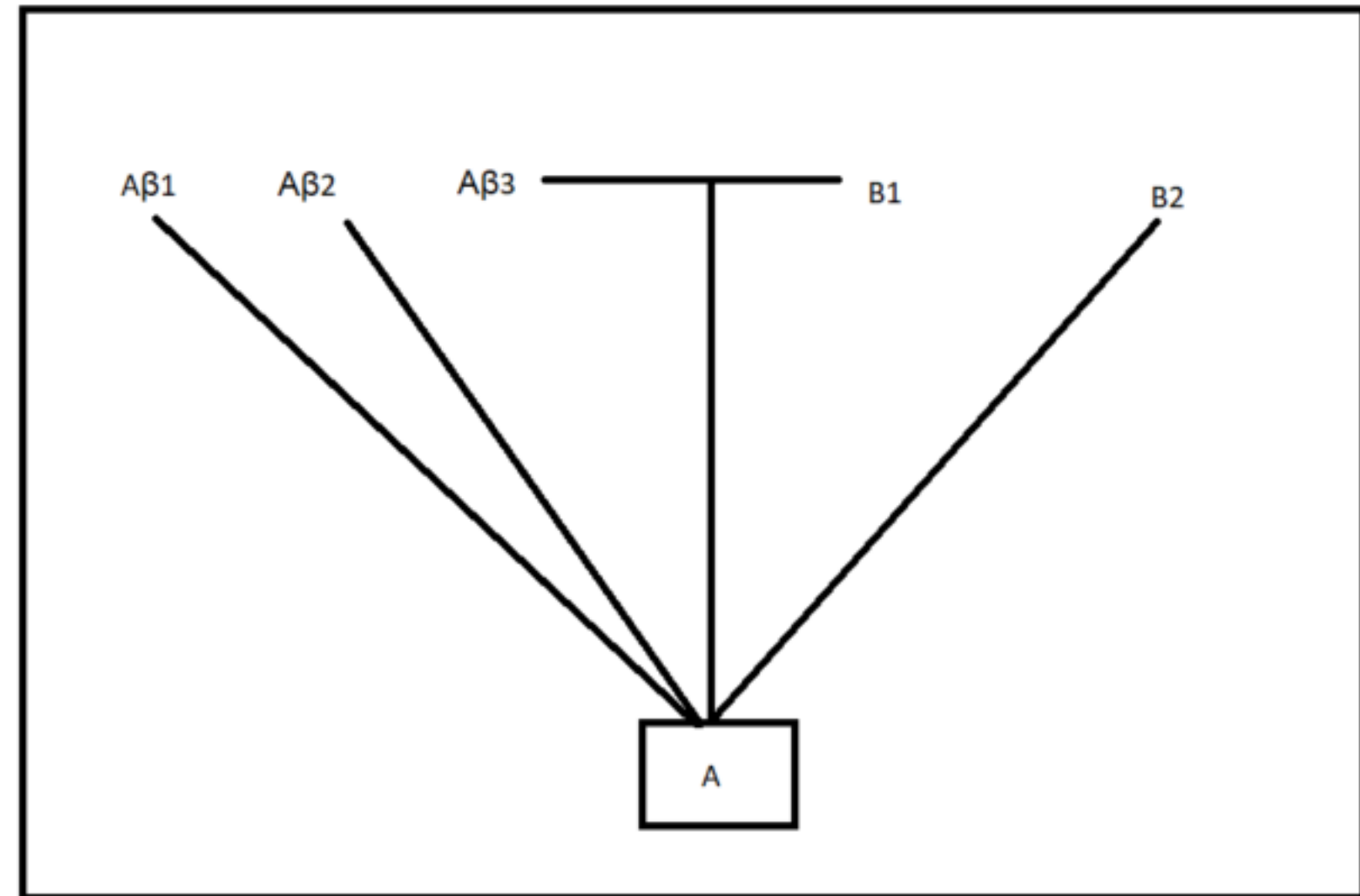
but she speired instead  
fur a gless o watter.  
there's plenty o watter there fur ye, said he, an pushed her back unner.  
it's said he'd a son, whae wuz born  
wi webbed feet.  
luckin fittit his hale life, he wuz,  
an aye thirsty forby.

# The Malagrugous Pantaloons: A Tale o the Comte de Zâreque

Tam Crichton

## Pairt the first

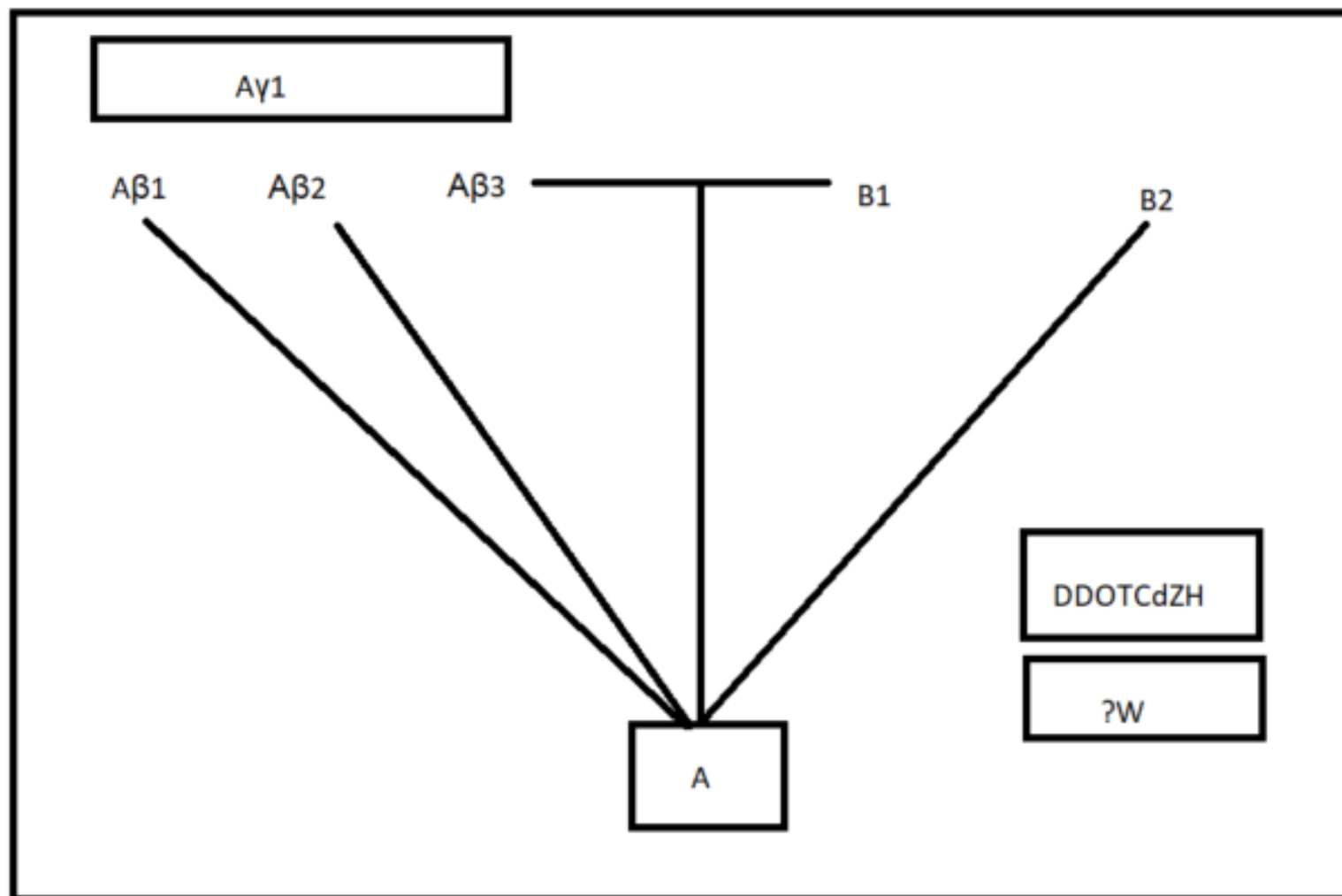
The immediate cause for ma gaein ben thon place wis that the axle o ma coach haed been dung on a stane and brakken in twa, and it needit replaced. This cause we may cry A. But there were twa ither causes, baith at some remuive frae thon immediate cause, but nae less relevant for it. The tane (B1): I wis young and naïve and possessed o the belief common tae siclike fowk that naething *aw that bad* could raelly happen tae me. The tither (B2): Gothic novels were aye a novelty and no yit weill eneuch established in the general cultural consciousness for the sicht o a daurk castle on a crag by a moontain pass in the gloamin whan *ma coach juist happened tae hae brakken doon richt there* tae hae seemed oniething ither nor gey convenient indeed for me, the third son o the umquhile Laird C-. There were ither causes that relatit tae A but no tae the B causes, and we may coont amang thaim the follaein: Aβ1: the aforementioned gloamin meant ma driver couldna see the stane, richt in the middle o the gate though it wis; Aβ2: the speed at which the stane wis struck; Aβ3: relatit tae the youthfulness mentioned in B1 wis a relative lichtness o ma sporrان, for which reason the coach I haed hired wis raither aulder and shooglier nor could be desired, and therefore prone tae producin situation A should it ding itsel agin a stane which, as we hae noo ascertained, it indeed did. Sae faur we can represent the causes that led tae the *The Adventure o the Malagrugous Pantaloons* and ma first encoonter wi the Comte de Zâreque thus:



But ither causes maun be adduced as weill. For instance, Aγ1, the want o the development o the centralised state in thon airt at thon time leadin tae a failure tae develop modren transport infrastructure in general and in this particular case the proper maintainance o the gates could weill be said tae be the reason there wis a muckle great stane there in the first place, wantin which nane o the ither factors individually or thegither could hae brocht about A. Wha kens but that the mair rapid development o bourgeois pooer in the burghs wi the consequent remakkin o the state in their ain image – *viz.* wi a professional civil service o managerial specialists – wad hae saufed me frae the haill dreidful adventure? As it wis, the management o the actual institutions o the state, sic as they were, wis aye in the feckless haunds o the hauf-cut gets o the nobility, the wittier o the coort sycophants and sic ambitious clergy as haedna managed tae get thaimsels a bishopric yit. Tae this we maun eik twa ither, daurker, mair inscrutable factors: the dreidful designs o

the Comte de Zâreque himsel (conveniently designate *DDOTCdZH*) and that michtiest mover o the gates o oor lifes, that pooer that guides oor steps for its ain ends, Weird (designate ?W).

Oor simplest wey tae express whit led me there that dreidful nicht is noo therefore:



Which is tae say: *In thon gloamin, pregnant wi storm, as the clouds gaithert and the gate wis kest intae shaddaes, as the mirk shiftit and the trees pressed in ticht and daurk on baith sides, the horse – skelpin along the gate at a mad speed, the driver mutterin tae himsel and sweirt tae byde a meinute langer in this pass nor he haed tae – swung the coach ahint as it roondit a bend and dung the axle on a stane. The horse skraiched, faem at its mooth, nicherin and fykie as the driver and masel hunkert doon and saw there wis nocht we could dae tae repair it oorsel. Frae the heid o the*

*bend I could see lichts frae a castle no hauf a mile awa, and though the driver leukit dootsome – they are a superstitious fowk hereabouts, o coorse – he saw we couldna byde oot the haill nicht. The horse’s een were wide wi fear and it wis clear it wis ower sweirt tae come wi us, sae we decidit that I wad gae tae the castle and send help back, and the driver wad byde on the gate wi the beast in the meantime. I could see that he wis happy, gin happy is the richt wurd, tae at least pit aff gaein tae the castle himsel for a bittie langer, though o coorse he said his care wis aw for his horse. As I heidit awa, I could hear the driver mutterin tae himsel as weill as tae the beast, though he grew quate efter a whilie and fawed intae a thrawn silence afore I wis a stane’s thraw awa. Whan I cam til the airn yetts the nicht wis heidin on tae fully daurk – it faws fast in the mountains – and a deid silence pressed oppresively upon me. There were nae birds, nae sheep, nae kye comin tae the byre or lassies singin tae thaim, there wis no a souch o wind or onie plash o watter frae a burn. It wis as though I wis happit in a bleck mantle o soondless nicht that admittit ainlie the nicherin and frichtit breathin o the horse. Even while I leukit for a bell-pull, the yetts – soondlessly – opened.*

The path ran through the yetts and taewards the castle. I ventured forrit on the licht that cam frae the windaes, for the hour haed by this time fully taen the regular verb *tae gloam* and convertit it tae the past perfect.<sup>1</sup> The nicht air itsel seemed tae regaird me, and I scarce daured tae breathe lest the soond ring oot like the dingin and ringin o an auld bronze kirk bell. At length I crossed the stane brig ower the daurk cleuch that gaped richt afore the muckle aik doors, bleckness pourin furth frae its open mooth, and I leukit aboot for a knocker or bell-raip – for siclike places dinna mak dae wi tirlin pins, o coorse. Nae knockers or bell-raips – or indeed tirlin-pins – were tae be seen. The doors were studdit and bandit wi bleck airn, the stane about it wis entirely smuith, but the lintel abuin the door bare upon it ainlie the letter *Z*. Maugre o a total want o statues or gargoyles – or hoolets and corbies, tae say naething o onie apparent human een – I felt that I wis bein watched, by a presense I couldna see but could certainly perceive. The tooers and battlements stuid afore and abuin me, silent as the tomb, the wan lichts frae the windaes

<sup>1</sup> The actual past itsel is nivver perfect, and it is a reactionary delusion tae imagine that it ever wis.

kestin drumlie shaddaes aroond me that filled ma hairt wi a dowie mirk nae less than they filled the nicht itsel. In short, the hail thing pit me in mind o the grey and grim stanzas o *The City of Dreadful Soup*. It fair gart me grue.

I stairtit tae wunner whit I could dae aboot gettin the aforementioned dreid portal open. This didna seem the kind o place whaur ye could juist fling chuckies at the windaes until a bodie cam doon tae let ye in. No indeed. I wis juist stairtin tae clear ma thrapple tae gie a cry o *Halloooo!* whan o a suddentie, silent as the maist pious contemplatiounis o a kirkmoose, the great door swung open. It wis than that I first set ma een on the Comte de Zâreque.

He wis a bittie tawer as masel, pale, wi languid een and a mooth that seemed awmaist turned tae a fent and even sarcastic smile. He wis happit in a lang, bleck cloak that reached near tae the grund, and bleck were his claes unner it, and bleck were his baffies. “Please forgie the delay,” quo he, handsomely. “I am ainlie juist up the noo, as ye can see.” Here he ran his haund handsomely through his exquisitely dishevelled hair. “It is ma custom tae rise whan... ithers... are takkin tae their beds.”

He *maun be a student*, thocht I tae masel. “I beg yer pairdon, sir,” quo I. “Ma coach haes dung its axle on a stane, and I wad beg ludgins for the nicht for me and ma coachman, and a stable for oor horse, gin ye can tak us in.” Aware that nae sic coachman or horse were tae be seen, I explained that they were back on the gate ayont the yetts. “O coorse, o coorse. Ye are walcome here for no juist the nicht but for as lang as... ye... wad wish tae byde. The hospitality o the Comtes de Zâreque haes lang been kenspeckle, haes it no? Spoken o faur and wide, aye?” he gied a handsome laugh, but there wis a cauldness in it. “Come! The nicht is cauld, and I’m no peyin tae heat the hail forest, as ma faither wad say. I will send for yer coachman and horse, and they will be weill-providit. But ye maun come wi me. Kenspeckle hospitality or no, it is lang syne I hae haed a guest and a chance o learned conversation, and I can see frae yer bearin that ye are a man o letters. Come! In my *salle à manger* there is hake and there is absinthe, and a wabbit traiveller nae less nor a man brakkin his fast may

find baith pleasant.”

He turned, and gestured handsomely tae me tae gang efter him, and sae it wis that I crossed the threshold intae Castle Zâreque, and, though I didna ken it at the time, intae a hailly new, and hailly unco and hailly frichtsme life the like I couldna hae dreamed o even the day afore.<sup>2</sup> As we passed intae the castle I saw a bauchle o a bodie comin taewards us. *Ane o the Comte’s servants*, I jaloused. The Comte noddit tae him, he noddit tae the Comte and squelched his wey tae the main door, I jaloused tae fetch the coachman and horse. As he passed, the bauchle leukit up at me – though he maun hae been tawer as masel he wis thon aw hunched ower-wey (“Aw ower tae the wan side like Gourock,” as ma grandmither wad hae said) – an gied me a queer-like leuk wi een that leamed wi an orra brichtness. He smiled, his thin, bluidless lips no pairtin ava, and passed on tae his errand wi no a wurd tae me.

Gin I kent than whit I ken noo, then nicht or nae nicht, I wad hae turned and skelpit aff back tae the yett, and greetin and pechin I wad, gin ma luck wis better nor howp could mak it, hae stachert intae a village some wey doon on the ither side o the pass by the dawin, and swuirn as monie hae duin nivver tae pass by even the shaddae o thon place.

But I didna ken, and sae follaed the Comte tae jyne him at his hake and absinthe.

<sup>2</sup> See B2, abuin.

# Skint

Deborah Leslie



Ah'm only here cause Ah'm desperate. There's a raa o raindraps hingin fae ma hood, ma beets are luttin in, an Ah feel like shite on the sole o the warld.

The banner outside the Hoose o God says, 'All Welcome Here', an Ah've tried te ging in fower times bit ma feet's pluntit te the pavement.

*So fit ye gaun te dee noo, Linda?* Ma mither's wirds draps in fae farivver she is.

Truth is, Ah dinna ken. Ah'm mebbe nae on the streets, bit Ah'm still beggin

an Ah'm black affrontit. Ah've donated te food banks masel, haivin a fyow tins inte a basket on ma wye oota Tesco. An noo ess voucher in ma han's tellin ma aat Ah'm the needy een.

Aat kirk brae wis a fair clim an ma glaisses are aa stemmed up - ye dinna hiv te weer masks fir the Covid noo, bit Ah'm jist keepin on wi mine till things feel a bittie safer.

Foo the hell did Ah get in a sotter like ess? Aa Ah've got in the fridge is an egg, a bit o green cheese, an a bottle

o reed saace wi a crusty lid. The shame spulls ower an rins doon ma chiks. Ah've nivver bin weel aff, an Ah've ayewis tried te bi independent, bit aat wis the aul me...the me aat hid a job (an sometimes twa) ...the me aat hisna hid a stroke...the me wioot a funny han an a gammie leg. The voucher's gettin weet, so Ah push it inte ma pooch an crunch, crunch, crunch ma wye back doon the chuckies.

\*

Ah hing up ma weet jaicket an lean against the lobby waa. Ma hairt's gaun ten-te-the dizzen, ma heid's spinnin, an ma airms an legs are aa preens an needles. Ess pandemic's made ma anxiety waar. Ah jist need te breathe...

There's a hole in ma airmcheer an it sighs as Ah sit doon. The laddie fae Community Service says he can get ma a new suite - weel, new te me. He's jist young an stairtin oot in life, bit he's bin richt kind an aat means a lot. He even hid time fir a cuppie an a news file the 'unpaid wirkers' cairtit in the furniter an aa ma stuff.

The cairdboard boxes are still sittin on the bare fleer. Ah canna bi ersed unpackin them. The Cooncil maks ye lift aa yer cairpets afore ye pit yer keys back. Far the hell's the sense in aat? Mind you, it's mebbe jist as weel - the wifie it wis in here last wis a smoker an the place is stinkin. The

windas are muckit, the blinds are twistit, the curtains dinna meet, the skirtin boards are scuffed an there's a fool fitprint haufwye up the waa.

Fin me an Davie wis thegither, wi'd a hoose at the Brig o Don - nae fancy bit presentable. Ah mairret the first lad aat smiled at ma. Ah thocht he'd look aifter ma. He didna. Aifter wi pairtit company, Ah flittit te een o the skyscrapers aside the beach wi its dodgy lifts an pishy staircases. Ye get eesed te onythin, though, an Ah'd a rare view oot te the sea. Sometimes fin the haar come in ye could imagine ye wis sittin on a plane lookin oot ower the clouds. Bit free flights or no, a stroke an a high-rise jist dinna mix.

So here's me at the heid o Holburn - hine awa fae ma pal Pat fae ower the lobby fa wis ayewis poppin in fir a bletcher an a fly cup. Ah even miss the boy aat played his music at ma throwe the waa. Dunt. Dunt. Dunt. An Ah've thocht a lot about the young couple on the same fleer. Their wee loon spens his aifterneens stottin his baa aff the lift door. The mam's on nichts an the dad's on days. Ah've heard them rowin, an Ah ken they're strugglin. S'affa aat ye can baith bi wirkin full time an still bi skint.

Bit ess is hame noo, so Ah'd better get eesed till't. Ah'm a kick in the erse fae retirement, bit nae close enuch - sixty



disna cut it ony mair. Wirk's nae an option, an Ah get so scunnert an ill-naittered. The peer quine at the hoosin office got it in the neck last wik, an aat's nae richt - neen o ess is her wyte.

The rain's batterin against the winda an the claes-horse is strung wi socks an punts. There's a bag o peels on the table aat wid fear ye an a page o exercises fae the stroke clinic wi pictirs aat show ye fit te dee. Ah've hid wurd ma benefits are chyngin an the paperwirk tellin ma the gas an leccie's gaun throwe the reef is stappit doon the side o the settee. The chancellor's spikkin the morn an there's wurd o help wi the bills, bit fit about the rest? Ma shoppin's gaun up an up...ma mobile's oota credit...Ah canna get ma hair deen or ging te the picters ...Ah canna buy new claes... an Ah'm jist wytin fir the 'Fit for work' letter te land on the mat.

Ah wisna brocht up te feel sorry fir masel, bit Ah sometimes think it'd bi easier if Ah wisna here. Bit if Ah canna afford te live, Ah definitely canna afford te dee. A shiver rins up ma back - the knees o ma jeans are weet an the hoose is caal. The meter's as hungry as me an Ah canna afford the top-ups. Ah pull on anither jersey.

An Aiberdeen City Council minibus slows doon outside an there's the rattle o a door bein pullt open. Michael fae Community Service an his wirkers get oot ower. Ah clean firtot they war

comin. Ah mak it te the front door jist as the bell rings.

"Foo's you, Linda?" Michael hauds up a tin o pint an a roller. "Wi're here te pit up yer bed, an wi'll get goin wi the decoratin the morn. Aabody's back fae bein aff wi the Covid noo, so it's all systems go."

Ah smile an stan oota the road. Michael's charges fir the day come in humphin a matrass an the base. The first lad throwe the door's jist a rickle o beens. A hoodie's hidin his face, his trackies are tucked inte his socks, an he looks like he's left his erse at hame. The mannie at the ither eyn o the matrass is dressed decent an ye can see yer face in his beets. His sark buttons are strainin wi the liftin an he looks like he's awa te explode. The quine's like Amy Winehouse afore it aa gid wrang. She's aa black hair an eyeliner, jangly bracelets an tattoos. Ah canna help winnerin fit ess lot's pyin back te society fir, bit fa Ah'm I te judge? Ah'm jist glaid o the help.

"Waatch ma fuckin taes!" Trackie Boy shouts at his wirkmates. Shiny Sheen looks offendit. The lassie lachs, maks the wanker sign an luts the base bang against the waa.

"Ess'll keep ye gaun till ye get yer supplies." Michael ignores fit's happenin, follaes ma into the kitchen and hauds oot a broon bag wi a wee plastic winda - there's a cheese an

ingin sannie, salt an vinegar crisps an a chocolate biscuit. Ma belly gies oot a great rummle.

"Foo did ye get on at the foodbank?"

"Ah hivna bin yet." Ma face is on fire, bit Michael disna say ony mair an disappears into the bedroom te check on his squaad.

"Ah've jist left them te get on wi't." Michael looks tired an leans up against the sink.

"They're wirkin ye ower hard."

"Aye, wi've bin flat oot, Linda. Wi're gettin hooses riddy fir the Ukrainian faimlies aat are comin ower. The kirk's bin takkin donations an the volunteers are makkin up packs te get them stairtit. Ye shid look in by - they're aye needin helpers."

Ah decide te bi deaf. "Ye'll hae time fir a coffee, though?"

"Definitely." Michael hauds up a paper bag wi a greasy stain. "Ah'll need somethin te waash doon ess buttery."

"Ah've nae milk." The coffee's nearly deen an the speen clatters roon the jar. "Accordin te aat money mannie on the telly, the kettle's een o the biggest power

surges in the hoose." Ah find twa mugs an poor het watter fae the flask Ah fullt in the mornin.

"Hiv ye ony faimly, Linda? Or onybody aat can help?"

"Nae really." There wis ayewis jist me an Mam." Ah look awa - Ah canna cope wi sympathy. "Ah've a fyow pals, bit they've aa got their ain crap gaun on."

"Stick in." Michael nods at the free lunch on the coonter.

The sandwich tastes as gweed as it smells. If the laddie wisna here Ah'd stap the hale thing inno ma mou an be hammin into the crisps bi noo.

"Did yer GP phone ye back about the eConsult, Linda?"

"Aye, thanks fir helpin ma full it oot. The doctor thinks Ah'm nae weel again, bit Ah telt her Ah'm nae depressed, Ah'm jist pissed off an there's a difference."

There's a crash fae the bedroom an somebody's roarin about an Allen Key, an, ower seen, they're packin up an Michael an his crew are on their wye.

"See ye, Linda. Ye'll get a fine sleep in aat new bed."

Michael's helpers file oot gruntin their fareweels. Trackie Boy's got his hood aff an he gies ma a smile aat tells ma he's nae a bad loon.

"Wi'll be back the morn." Michael lifts a han as the wirkers clim in ower the minibus.

The front door rattles in its frame an Ah'm aa on ma ain again.

Ah turn on the TV fir company an it looks like the world's gaun mad. Folk are roarin an greetin. Bombs fussle an bang. Ah press the remote. Anither channel's nae ony better - Covid's aul news noo, an there's a panel o folk discussin the wik in politics. Some MP boy's bin tellin folk te buy value brands...anither een's said aat wi need te learn foo te cook and budget better...an some bam thinks ye can mak a meal fir 30 pence. An, appairtly, aa folk need te dee is te 'Get a better job. Work longer hours. Make more money'. Aabody's argeein an spikkin ower een anither: 'Cost of living crisis. Energy price caps. Fuel stress. The working poor. Heat or eat. Partygate. Celebrate the Jubilee on a budget'. Wirds. Wirds. Wirds. Aa the big questions ging unanswered. Ah turn doon the soun.

Ma mam's photie's lyin on tap o een o the packin boxes - she's smilin up at ma an lookin like she could jist spik. Twa o ess boxes belanged te her an noo they're mine - an inheritance o aul claes an crappy ornaments. Mam wirkit hard aa her life an fit did she hae te show fir it? Bugger all. Pyin oot rent fir a Cooncil hoose aat wid nivver bi hers an wirkin three jobs on low pye - she jist nivver got oota the bit.

Mam wisna the kirkie kine, bit she wis as gweed a bodie as ony prayin pew-sitter. She jist got on wi fitivver life dolled oot an she ayewis said, "There's helpers aawye, Linda - ye jist need te look. Help fa ye can an lut ither folk help you. It's nae complicated."

She wisna een fir bosies, ma mam - it jist wisna her wye. Bit there wis nae shortage o affection. Ye saa it in her een an in aathin she did an said.

An siddenly Ah'm a bairn again. Ma wee han's in her big een. She's stickin a plaister on ma skinned knees, dichtin ma bibbly neb an wipin awa ma tears. She's haudin ma han on aat first day at the skweel, pushin ma throwe the gates an stannin wavin till Ah'm inside. The mynin's makkin ma braver.

The clock says If Ah nip on Ah can

can mak it te the foodbank afore it closes. Ah'm gaun te pit ma name doon fir sortin oot fitivver's needit te mak the Ukrainian faimlies feel welcome. Ah'm nae sure foo muckle eese Ah'll be, bit there's bound te bi somethin Ah can dee.

\*

The pavement's a disgust o dog shite, fag eyns, an blobs o flattened chuddie. Cars flee by an folk pass wi their heids doon. There's a crash o recyclin an the beep beep o a scaffie cairt.

The gate groans on its hinges an Ah leave the soun an steer ahin. There's a fair

heat in aat sun an the air's earthy aifter the rain. The kirk's up ahead an the thocht o gettin somethin fine fir ma supper spurs ma on.

The step's shiny an weet aneth ma feet. Ah pull ma mask up ower ma nose, fish oot ma voucher, an tak a deep breath.

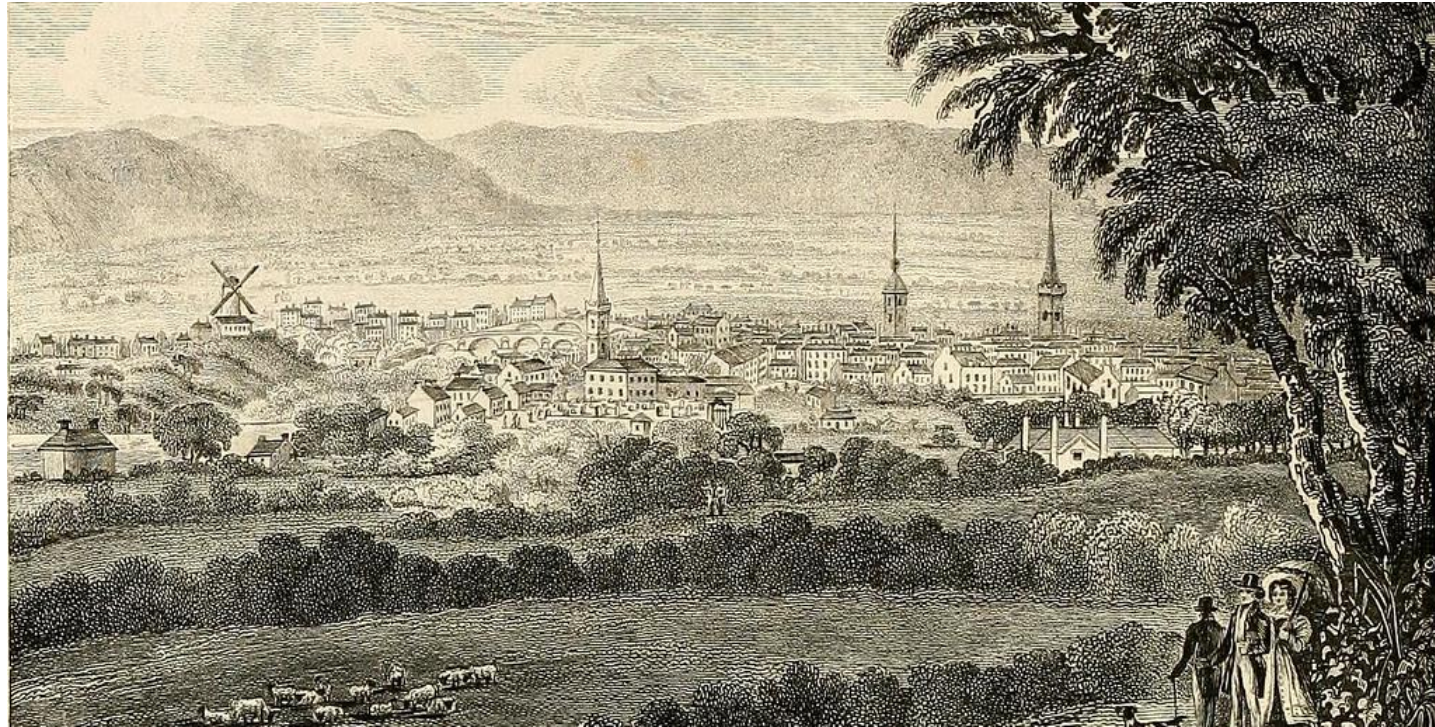
*On ye go, Linda.* Mam's voice again. *It's nae complicated.*

Anxiety rises. Ah force it doon.

The doorknob squeaks. Turns. Ma mither's ahin ma. Twa hans on ma back. A firm push. An Ah'm in.

# Jamie Orr's Bonnie Hobble UP Hame

Alan Millar



*March 1797 – shoortly efter Lieutenant-General Gerard Lake issued his Military Proclamation raulin oot tha sae ca'd 'Dragooning o Ulster'. Features a young James Orr o Ballycarry, noo kent as 'tha Burns o Ulster'. A United Irishman in tha 1790s, he warked in tha linen trade aal his life.*

Thursday March 23

DREICH efter rane, heapit waggon lays Banbridge broon market along tha Dromore road. Jamie on his ain; shouldnae bae, Mr Munce took seeck, couldnae bide. Needs hame. Lake's Edict or no; needs by Mackey's Shebeen afore dailygaun.

Byordinar mood aboot; kintra teamin wi English sodgers; thoosands flittin tae tha United Irish cause. Syne tha French fleet aff Cork in November, an afore it. Pouter keg.

Naw an oure afore bhoys rin up, maugre sodgers stannin nearhan.

*"Mr McCleaver, Mr McCleaver, mak us UP?"* Naw wise.

*"Ye hae tha wrang boadie!"* Ony man swings at Knockagh ketched this wai has axed for it. Gaein tha Test, noo a capital offence; guid men lik Orr o Farranshane in Carrick dungeon. Botany Bay for takin it. Gars him grue; nae soort o politics, this fly wai o't. Belfast Directory shouldnae wait. Noo is tha time.

Draas up fornenst tha three rid tunicked Cavalrymen; bawsie nickers, warhorse tae; muzzles a yerd apert. Twa militiamen, mair irregular clabber, hunkered doon in a slap on his richt han, muskets in crook o airm; anither hauls tha bridle o a donkey heiched tae a tumbrel.

*"State yer business?"* tha lieutenant barks. Englishman his ain age! Gye sideburns, slouched ower, elbas on horse's mane, nae heid pied tae tha hunner odd broon linen wabs bigged up unner canvas ahint him. Jamie mins him? 'Cracknell' aiblins; frae some Armagh stramish a year syne? Tither twa crimson peas frae a Dragoon pod.

*"James Orr, o Broadisland. Linen buyer wi a cargo o three quarter, seven eighth; an*

yard-wide broons, tha lawfu property o Mr Robert Gilliland o Ballyclare, noo bound for his bleach-green nearhan Carrick!"

*"Weel, Master Orr, by order o General Gerard Lake we maun search yer bonnie yock o 'broons'."* Militiamen breenge farrit. *"Registrat gun unner sate,"* he says sherp, as hans rax up; ruch pult tae tha road; hat faals aaf. Ticht grippit bae wan! Tither rummages; raxes pistol up wi a skreich; lays it on tha road.

*"I hae tha paper!"* Jamie insists. Disnae maitter. Tha sodger speels lik a rat ontae tha load louses cover, hokes for mair; tither gaes tae help. Weel practised.

*"Ye're 'UP' aren't ye?"* tha lieutenant axes provocatively. Jamie lifts his hat, taks account book frae poket o his lang coat, raxes it up.

*"I'm doon on them that's UP, lik ony loyal man, Captain."* ticht moothed. His wabs noo tost pell-mell tae tha road; stid on or punched for onything stiff; guns or pike heids. Stap, some nicht o said; naw Jamie. Kens poustie; kens tae, tither 'peas' studyin his ilka move.

*"Naw Captain, – Lieutenant Eugenius Cracknell,"* he retorts, "seditious linen traders peregrinate along this road

administering illegal oaths; inciting fowk tae rebel agin their lawfu King.” Twathree mair wabs ruch keeked tae tha road.

“Mr Gilliland 'ill scribev tha Coonty Inspector!” Jamie says. Cracknell lauchs.

“An if damage is proven, he’ll bae duly compensated, Master Orr.” Keeks throu Jamie’s book; bhoy on tha wagon looks at him, lauchs; keeks wab intae sheugh. Badness. Jamie thick gettin; jundies it doon.

“Naethin, Sor,” boyo louns doon; grins at Jamie; lifts gun for tha tumbrel.

“How dis a boadie protect himsell frae tha Defenders, noo?” sae spakes tha humble honest chiel; guid Protestant birkie. Cracknell studies him! Gaes book an gun bak. Nae han re-biggin.

Dailygaun, Lisnaward toonlan, Mackey’s Shebeen weel ahint. Raps dure o wee cot loost in a wid; snottery wean keeks oot.

“Sawney McCleaver o tha Coorseheid.” he says. Still sweetin efter horsin bawsie doon tha narra loanen, han scart fennin aff busses.

“Blunt as a clock?” she axes, big blue een sherp on him.

“Heavy as lead!”

“Aye, aye Vulgar as a beggar, stricht as a resh....” anither voice cuts in ower tap; disnae haule wi tha fly wai o’t ither.

“Philemy Freebairn *is anim dom!*” he declares. Big man, rid baird, barl kist, claes in tartles.

“Ye’re late, whars Munce?” jooks oot tha dure by them baith. Nae gettin inbye for a sup first.

Jamie raxes unner waggon, dunts holla burd, draas oot tha papers; his bonafides as an

Irish democrat. Follas tha ither man intae tha nicht; ower fiels, dykes, sheughs an mair fiels tae a resh lit byre; ten men or mair, kebbed in ticht as bastes; ‘rabble’ some ca’ them. Scart jook an keek aboots; naw lik them at tha Fair.

“Meeshter McCleaver o Belfast,” ‘Freebairn’ guldens withoot ado, “for UP twice is aye better nor wanst when there’s Englishmen need a blatterin!”

Jamie, gleg, disnae gae his poleetical

taak. Reads oot tha Test; they repeat efter him as wan. Sodgers aboot, or Orangemen, or baith; ilka boadie wants awa.

Efter midnight bak in tha cottage. Freebairn hunkers anent a spinnely aule woman sated at tha ingle, leadles victuals intae a bowl, gaes it tae Jamie.

“Milk, pratas, a morsel o troot, it bein lent.” Bitter lauch. Jamie slurps it doon; nae troot, nor salt, nor butter, nae maitter. Gye guid.

“I hae bin nae soort o host,” Freebairn confesses, “aboot time for an Irish *míle fáilte*.” Pult oot a clai pitcher nearhan whar tha wee girl slept on tha pallet. Chipped crystal tae. Sits on tha stool anent; pours three nips; gaes them roun. Tha woman haules up her gless.

“*Sláinte!*” says her an Freebairn thegeither.

“Cheers!” Jamie prees tha potchen gledly; a lang dai. Syne a drouthy big slug; an anither! Wunnerful; churns ruch as lichte peat in tha moo; skitters doon tha thrapple settin licht tae snatters scudin tither wai; for muckle snatters there noo was. Baith aule poleetical hans; frae Mr Munce an tha business wi tha sodgers tae wider maitters.

“Militia Act; Convention Act; Gunpowder

Act Insurrection Act. Noo Lake’s Edict,” Jamie lists tyranny aff on his finngers, “tha last tartle o richts pult awa; nae mair habeas corpus,” his smeddum UP, “men lik Wullie Orr rot in jail withoot trial. Reform bae whatever means! Rents, tithes, cess an taxes halved for them puir fowk in thon byre; for us aa!”

Freebairn mair blate.

“Will lan staule bae tha Protestant ascendancy iver bae gaed bak tae its rightful owners?” he axes, “dinnae see it!”

“It will!” says Jamie, saft drap, an oure kilt.

“Tha French are on tha sea, keb them plunderin settlers intae tha sea!” Noo a sang frae tha aule woman aiblins; an a dicht forbye.

“*Cuinas mammy,*” Freebairn barks; “niver listen tae her,” he taule Jamie; “tha granwean o a Gaelic princess an her a crone, disnae tak it gye weel!” Ruch lauch nae funny. Disnae feel lik a comrade but is wan; affen tha wai. Disnae fash Jamie! Noo! Kens Catholic pane; tha poleetical fechter disnae waver.

“My bouk is a broke aule resh, but am thrapple strang as tha *Sean Bhean Bhocht*, Cornelius Magennis, though *spailpín* is aal I could mak o ye!” she bust oot crabbit,

“descendants o ancient tribes leevin in toonlans afore tha aule stories was taule; pit oot withoot a steek, nae beild nor buss tae cope unner, nor hertsome reek!”

“There’s nae sang ye can sing ‘ill fash me!” Jamie taule her. She lets skreich frae tha pits o hersell aboot French ships, Irish freedom; some poor aule limmer. Steeks baith men’s bakes, naethin for it but een on peat embers.

“We pit a Catholic femly up,” Jamie says at sang’s en, “Fencibles wracked Carrick, micht need pit up tae.”

“Ach!” Freebairn spat, rose, “yer horse maun come inbye; Orange hooses aal aroun.”

Friday March 24

Collin speels up on tha left han efter Lisburn; first o tha lang raw o Belfast hills; Knockagh at tither en. Nearhan Malone turnpike tha toon spires appeart. Military aboot, muckle fowk forbye; but nae bother; staps on High Street ootbye tha Noarth Starr offece mid-efterneen. Will Templeton ahint counter, keeks up afeart; sees Jamie, gaes bak tae his customer. Inbye tha prent room; prenters stid idle; shouldnae bae on prent dai. Thick thouchts. Press wracked agin? Naw. Bill Kean ainst a clerk, noo a

compositor, efter tithers arrested, comes stricht ower.

“Jamie, tha vera man,” raxes a han tae newspapers stacked nearhan tha heicht o a man, anent tha press. Prented on wan side.

“Dr Porter is tae saft; he maun get thon bastard oot an get tha Editor’s scribevin daun. Afore lang tha kerriers ‘ill lan, they dinnae thole waitin.”

Jamie gaes oor nearhan tha apen dure. Dr James Porter, Meenister o Greba sits ahint tha Editor’s desk; han on chin; calm tholin mien; listenin tae this finnger waggin chiel, auler; dung on breeks, cut o a fermer.

“...deil a gun tha English sodjers hae left us; naked as tha dai we wuz boarn, exceptin potsticks an leadles,” he thrapes, “if Defenders come doon on us noo, they’ll mak minced meat o us. Mae guns is staule! What’re ye daen aboot it, Mr Newsman?”

“We dae oor gye best, Mr Lyttle!” Porter taule him, “we hae mair Editors in state custody than ony newspaper on earth at tha present time!” Lyttle naw impressed.

“Ye dae naethin fur kintra fowk in Coonty Doon,” he retorted, “I maun tak up tha screivin maesell!” Porter strikes.

“A gye guid idea Mr Lyttle,” stans, raxes oot an airm tae Jamie.

“Mr Orr, ye wouldnae bae guid eneuch tae scribeve me a letter...?” Jamie taken abak; wasnae even sure Porter kent he was there.

“Er, o coorse, what aboot Dr Porter?” he axed.

“Yin in guid Scots leid for Mr Lyttle here,” says Porter, “yin wi muckle gree; aboot tha dragoonin o Presbyterian hames, naw a gun lifted aff Orangemen, an dinnae forget tha gye guid alliance wi Catholics.”

Porter shows Lyttle tha dure; “can I lay ye in tha eydent hans o Mr Orr? He’ll set yer letter alicht wi wit, irony, impudence, irreverence an sarcasm,” he paused, finnger tae chin; “aiblins ye’d prefer tae dae it yersell?”

“Naw, naw!”

“Ye’re sure?”

“Aye!” didnae look it.

“I hae read ilka issue, syne tha first in Herdman’s Tap Ballycarry in January ’92,” Jamie taule him, “didnae stap efter tha first military riot in March ’93; scribeved mae ain first piece twa year syne, this simmer.”

Prent room gye quiet. Dr Porter heed doon ahint desk, eydent scribevin an scribblin oot, scarts heid, scribeves agin. Keen stans nearhan; fit tae be tied. Prenters awa outside. Porter taakin tae himsell tha hale time. Ootrage! Military bust up a Newry

toon meetin; thon scoundrel Higgins at tha Journal boasts aboot it; a standin army stappin respectit gentlemen assertin indisputable richts.

Efter a lang, lang shoort time Porter hans Kean tha paper; wha louns ower tae his table an sterts wheekin type on his composin-stick lik wan possessed. Jamie lays Lyttle’s letter on tha desk.

“Things a bonnie hobble a thegeither,” Porter scarts heid, lifts it, draps it, lifts it again, “swords, staves an bludgeons maun rane doon on us agin at ony time.”

“Ye did weel!” Jamie respectit Porter; nae Editor but a gye guid satirist; scientist forbye.

“Aye, Mr Neilson was aye a stooshie biggin boadie when we had him; we maun try oor best as weel. Mr Simms, a dour string o misery. nae doot, but him an tha brither ketchin tha Post Chaise tae Dublin was maist selfish.” Jamie lauched, types confiscated efter them arrests.

“Why did ye drap in?” Porter axes.

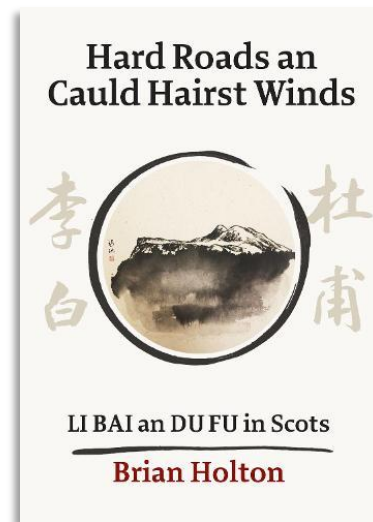
“Mr Neilson aye lik’d a report on tha state o tha kintra, Mr Simms tae; oddtimes I’d drap aff bits o correspondence, poetic epistles an tha lik; naethin tha day.” Jamie axes aboot Broadislan; Porter shook his heid, naethin byordinar. Strikes.

“Och, ye’re frae ayont Carrick, aren’t ye! Ye wouldnae drap aff Mr Cuthbert’s papers?” Couldnae say naw.

## Review: *Hard Roads an Cauld Hairst Winds*, by Brian Holton

Thomas Clark

Brian Holton's owersettins frae Chinese hae lang been Exhibits A-Z in the defence o Scots as a livin literary language. Mair - the sangs o Du Fu, Li Bai an ither sic maisters o the Tang Dynasty spik tae us yet across the intervenin centuries, but it's in Holton's Scots that they best find their tongue.



For although Holton's background is in teachin an the universities, his productions in Scots owersettin are faur frae academic. Whit emerges frae *Hard Roads an Cauld Hairst Winds* isnae jist a picture portrait o a time lang syne, hauf a hemisphere awa – for aw the dream-like qualities o the imagery, Holton brings immediacy tae these poems. The skein that connects us in eternity tae the makars an ordinar fowk o 8th century China is wan o luve an loss, the search for peace inside an oot. It's here an noo, an onybody delvin intae this kist o treisurs micht weel be bumbazed tae find they hae a lot mair in common wi Li Bai than they dae wi mair, weel, *contemporary* figures. The average 21st century politican has a lot less tae say tae us, as humans an fellae mortals, than Holton's Du Fu on a bad day.

If ye're awready acquaintit wi the wark o Brian Holton, aw ye'll be needin tae ken is whether this new volume matches up tae the likes o *Staurin Ma Lane* an *Aa Cled wi Clouds She Cam*. It daes. If ye're no awready acquaintit wi the wark o Brian Holton, aw ye'll be needin tae ken is if ye can get this in maist guid buikshops. Ye can.

# Eemis Stane

## Scrivein that maitters

Eemis Stane furthsets poetry, fiction, essays and polemics in Scots o ony and ilka variety, frae ilka airt and pairt. The kind o Scots ye scribe in is faur less important tae us than the thing ye're yaisin it tae say.

Eemis Stane is rin by Thomas Clark, Ashley Douglas, Sara Clark, Matthew Fitt, Paul Malgrati and Eilidh Douglas.

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