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Julia Donaldson kens hou tae scriewe braw buiks fur bairns, an there can be nae mair skeely transcrievers nor Sheena Blackhall an James Robertson. *The Doric Gruffalo* (‘Fit’s a Gruffalo, then?’), rumbles alang ahint the Scots an the Dundonian anes, an it’s geyan upsteerin tae see sik buiks, no juist in a bairn’s ain leid, but in a bairn’s ain tune. It isnae easy tae transcrieve verses an hau aw the rhymes an rhythms, but Sheena Blackhall daes a skinklin joab:

“For will ye tryst wi him?”
“Here, by thon steens,
An his favourite maet is roast tod’s beens”

Sin the Gruffalo stories hae lang been a favourite o bairns, nae glossary is necessaire. Unkent Scots vocabills suin cheynge tae kent anes, an kent anes are legeitimised bi bein prentit oan a page. Whit better wey is there fur bairns tae leart tae yaise their ain leid undoutandly?

*Whit the Clockleddy Heard* is anither pure delight, fu o repeteetion, beasts’ grunches an squaiks an hoos, coamic seetuations an baddies that are sae glaikit they hae tae git made a ned o. Ilka page has a clockleddy wha is whiles deefficult tae fin, but sic braw fun tae luik fur gif ye’re a fower year-auld! An the clockleddy, the ainly craitur that disna mak a soun, is the seelent ‘hairt heroicall’ o the hail ongauns:

“BLEAH!’ said the yowe
“WOWFF” said the dug
And the fermer cheered, and baith cats purred
But the clockleddy didnae sae yin wee wurd.

Wi buiks lik thae twa, we micht een stert tae howp that Willie Soutar’s wuiden cuddy can brek intae a binner.

Ann Matheson


At the back o *Cheerybye Eden* is a wheen o reviews o Sheena Blackhall’s wark. Alan Spence cries her ‘probably the most prolific poet in Scotland, and one of the most rarely talented’, while Joy Hendry claims that
she has ‘the lyric voice of the early MacDiarmid’. There’s nae doot that, as Derrick McClure says, she has extended ‘the scope of Doric poetry’ and also ‘enlarged its literary range by using it for short stories and novellas…’. In the abuin-mentioned pamphlet is ‘The Arching Scythe: A Biography of a Scots Childhood’, which gies a fair insicht intil the makar, wha was born in 1947 at Cuperstone Nursing Home and wis, according til her mither Winifred, ‘the ugliest bairn on the ward’. It’s a bittie sad that Winifred, a ‘highly intelligent woman’, didna fufill her ambitions tae be a publisht author or a teacher. Her faither, Charles Middleton, didna get tae extend his education either. Par for the course in thae days, mair’s the peetie. They’re o byornar interest, the 22 pages that bring her til Primary 7 and the dreided 11+, and there are fine poems amang the prose. At the end we hae this laist verse o ‘Homage to the Ancestors’:

Many wombs opened before my coming.
Quiet door in the spirit house on the moor
Where grandmother’s ghost is weaving a wooden cradle
So she may nurse my bones

Lovely stuff.

I dinna hae eneuch room tae gie muckle mair. As a matter o interest gin ye’d read aa o her poems they are noo available at www.poemhunter.com and her website is http://smiddleton4.wix.com/sheena-blackhall. I’ll feenish wi the first stanzas o the eponymous ‘Flashback (Barn door Fadlydyke)’, tae shaw hoo fine her touch is in the Doric, in case ye dinna already ken:

Forkit lichtnin cracks the Heivens in twa
Lichtnin the pit-merk ferm, celestial fire
Aa nicht the storm dinged on…a hard doonfaa
Ram stam the rain, stottin aff barn-cum bye

Flashback, afore the snawy hoolet screeched
Laird o the teem derk crannies o the barn
Afore the chaumer rikk deed in the lum
Far jackdaas reest noo, sentinels o sharn

A rare talent indeed.

Raymond Vettese

Scottish Spleen, eds.Tom Hubbard, James W. Underhill and Stewart Sanderson, Tapsalteerie, Alford, 2015, 33pp., £5.00.

Ye’ll no be disappyntit wi a keek at Scottish Spleen (2015). It’s like ane o thae fantoush boxes o gulsochs, craftit by maister chocolatiers: sma, delitesome an gausie, wi a strang gust o a Cadbury’s flake; aye wi a preein o the fameeliar. If aa the worthies in ane o Brueghel’s landwart pentins hud a soond track, Scottish Spleen is whit, I imagine, wid be the clatter. Fae Belgium o the 16th century, tae Paris o the 19th century, an oan tae Scotland
the-day, fowk, by fegs, haena cheenged muckle at aa: ‘... Baudelaire still speaks to us, here, today ...’ (‘A word aboot the originals and refanglin them’, James W. Underhill). This translation intae Scots o Baudelaire’s *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869), sets the poetic prose alight; it draws ye in, getting a sicht o the innermaist myndin o fowk kent weel. The auld wifie in Derrick McClure’s ‘The Carlin’s Wanhope’ (‘*Le Desespoir de la Vielle*’) maks yer heart sair: ‘Ach, wae’s me for us auld dune carlins, the days o our pleasing is aa gane by, e’en tae saikless bairns; an we jist gie the grue tae the littleens we ettle tae luve’.

In ‘The Jampher’ (‘*Un Plaisant*’), translatit by James Robertson, ye can feel the cauld air, and sense the thrang o the streets oan Hogmanay: ‘... a bourach o glaur an snow, crossed by a thousand caurs, skinklin wi trantlums and whigmaleeries, heezin wi wants an waes, a toff beglovit and buffed up ...

The McFables (2015) by Glenn Muir is a gessarant yairn awa o the fables o Aesop in the Scots leid. Muir’s Scots brings the tales tae life an maks them even mair gleg an bricht tae tice in awbody wi the wyse yairns. Readin them oot loud in yer heid or tae ithers is whaur the magic lies; as they screed aff the page, fou o life, aye findin relevance tae the wey we speak the-day. In *The Dunkey’s Shadie*: ‘...The Owner said ‘Ye are a sado, [’]... (p.18)

I wis fair disappyntit at the lack o drawins or pentins tae accompany the text, but mebbe Muir will hae thon in mynd for his neist buikie, an I for ane, cannna wait! Muir haes got the grip o Aesop’s fables an baith young an auld will git a hantle o pleasur oot o it. Ye cannna help but feel for Andy and the lion in this tale o bravery, loyalty an freendship whin aa is lost an agin them, in the likes o *Androcles and the Lion*:

... ‘Jings’ said Andy tae the Lion

Lisa Simmons

‘Thon limp is awfie bad.
‘I can see a muckle hawthorn spike.
‘Here, I’ll get it oot yer pad … ’ (p. 6)

Fowk are no suir wha Aesop wis, bit his story will appeal tae mony, as a slave
wha wis flung aff a cliff for chorin some piece o siller, appairently. But whit is
niver in dout, is the stories he telt at haes hauden oan efter aa this time; aye
bidin true tae the spirit an lair o aa fowk, nae maitter whaur they come fae.
This buik cairries oan in the tradeetion o story-tellin, wi yairns at disnae tire.
Glenn Muir is a true talesman, for the 21st century, in the Scots leid.

Lisa Simmons