

SEÁN HALDANE

The Leverock, Licht as Wun: The Poems of James Fenton

Blue-a-knowe

Bing'd sticks bleezed roon dulled troots an blues ill-fun,
Whar Roabin bowl, Lang John, Hakeye lay a',
Wae blid-wat seggan bled an het esh gun;
The ither worl sae mony worls awa.

Dark boortries flured an clouded whuns bleezed bricht,
Whun hizzies cried frae lang aheid gien in;
An graipin fing'rs trimmled in the nicht
Whun Brock riz oot: dark nichts o darkest sin.

They shaped bricht wies they'd trevel yince they leed,
An thon dark pads they sweeted wat tae tak,
Far empty wies, quait-waitin oot aheid,
They'd flee alang, nae thocht o luckin bak.

Noo yin, gan by, maks bak tae luck ower in,
Bak ower the scroag an strippit knowe; ower whar,
For bleezin wies an blid-rid dreams, they'd fin
Blak birns, grey haggit stumps, a roostin car.

—from *Thonner and Thon*, 2000

Blue Knoll

Piled sticks blazed round snared trout and blues ill-found, *blue potatoes*
 Where Robin bold, Long John, Hawkeye all lay,
 With blood-wet iris blade and hot ash gun;
 The other world so many worlds away.

Dark elders flowered and clouded gorse blazed bright
 When young girls cried from long ahead giving in;
 And groping fingers trembled in the night
 When Brock rose out: dark nights of darkest sin.

They shaped bright ways they'd travel once they left,
 And those dark paths they sweated wet to take,
 Far empty ways, quiet-waiting out ahead,
 They'd flee along, no thought of looking back.

Now one, gone by, makes back to look over in,
 Over the thicket and stripy knoll; over where,
 For blazing ways and blood-red dreams, they'd find
 Black burns, grey chopped-up stumps, a rusting car. *Burnt-over gorse
 or heather*

THIS IS A POEM IN ULSTER-SCOTS WRITTEN by James Fenton—not the Englishman of that name who was once Professor of Poetry at Oxford, but Jim Fenton, born in 1931 and still going strong, living in the outskirts of Belfast.

Translating the poem is quite difficult, although Ulster-Scots (or any Scots—that of Garioch, for example) “should” be easy to translate, especially if you think it is merely a dialect of English. Fenton argues in his dictionary *The Hamely Tongue* that it is a language in itself. It not only has a distinct vocabulary (though overlapping with English) but a distinct grammar—for example, in the above poem “bleezed” and “riz” with their Germanic sound change in the past tense, mainly lost in English. Actually the vocabulary and pronunciation are so substantially different from English that I have managed to reproduce only some of the rhymes. The metre is easier to preserve, as it is in translation from any Germanic language.