

The GHAISTS, A Kirk-Yard Eclogue

Where the braid planes in dowie murmurs wave,
Their ancient taps out-owre the cauld-clad grave,
Where Geordie Girdwood, mony a lang-spun day,
Houkit for gentles' banes the humblest clay,
Twa sheeted ghaists, sae grizly an's sae wan,
'Mang lanely tombs their douff discourse began.

WATSON

Cauld blaws the Nippin' North wi' angry sough,
An' showers his hailstones frae the Castle Cleugh,
Owre the Grayfriars, where, at mirkest hour,
Bogles an' spectres went to tak their tour,
Harlin' the pows an' shanks to hidden cairns,
Among the hemlocks wild, an' sun-burnt ferns,
But nane the night, save you an' I, hae come,
Frae the drear mansions o' the midnight tomb.
Now when the dawnin's near, when cock maun crow,
An' wi' his angry bougil gar's withdraw,
Ayont the kirk we'll stap, and there tak bield,
While the black hours our nightly freedom yield.

HERIOT

I'm weel content: but binna cassen down,
Nor trow the cock will ca' ye hame owre soon;
For, though the eastern lift betokens day,
Changing her rokelay black for mantle gray,
Nae weirlike bird our knell of parting rings,
Nor sheds the cauler moisture frae his wings.
Nature has chang'd her course; the birds o' day
Dozin' in silence on the bending spray,
While owlets round the craig at noontide flee,
An' bluidy hawks sit singin' on the tree.
Ah, Caledon! the land I ance held dear,
Sair maen mak I for thy destruction near:
An' thou Edina! ance my dear abode,
When royal Jamie sway'd the sovereign rod,
In thae blest days, weel did I think bestow'd,
To blaw thy poortith by wi' heaps o' gowd;
To mak thee sonsy seem wi' mony a gift,
An' gar thy stately turrets speel the lift.
In vain did Danish Jones, wi' gimgrack pains,
In Gothic sculpture fret the pliant stanes;

In vain did he affix my statue here,
Brawly to busk wi' flowers ilk coming year:
My towers are sunk; my lands are barren now,
My fame, my honour, like my flowers, maun dow.

WATSON

Sure, Major Weir, or some sic warlock wight,
Has flung beguillin' glamour owre your sight;
Or else some kittle cantrip thrown, I ween,
Has bound in mirlygoes my ain twa een:
If ever aught frae sense cou'd be believ'd
(An sennil hae my senses been deceiv'd),
This moment owre the tap o' Adam's tomb,
Fu' easy can I see your chiefest dome.
Nae corbie fleein' there, nor croupin craws,
Seem to forspeak the ruin o' thy ha's;
But a' your towers in wanted order stand,
Steeve as the rocks that hem our native land.

HERIOT

Thinkna I vent my well-a-day in vain;
Ken'd ye the cause, ye sure wad join my maen,
Black be the day, that e'ere to England's ground,
Scotland was eikit by the Union's bond!
For mony a menzie o destructive ills
The country now maun brook frae mortmain bills,
That void our test'ments, an' can freely gie
Sic will an' scoup to the ordain'd trustee,
That he may tir our stateliest riggings bare,
Nor acres, houses, woods, nor fishings spare,
Till he can lend the stoiterin state a lift,
Wi' gowd in gowpins, as a grassum gift,
In lieu o' whilk, we maun be weel content,
To tyne the capital for *three per cent*; -
A doughty sum, indeed; when now-a-days,
They raise provisions as the stents they raise;
Yoke hard the poor, an' let the rich chiels be,
Pamper'd at ease by ithers' industry.

Hale interest for my fund can scanty now
Cleed a' my callants' backs, an' stap their mou.
How maun their wames wi' sairest hunger slack;
Their duds in targets flaff upon their back;
When they are doom'd to keep a lastin' lent,
Starvin' for England's weel at *three per cent*!

WATSON

Auld Reekie, then, may bless the gowden times,
When honesty an' poortith baith are crimes.
Sae little ken'd, when you an' I endow'd
Our hospitals for back-gaun burghers' gude,

That e're our siller or our lands should bring,
A gude bein livin' to a back-gaun king;
Wha, thanks to Ministry! is grown sae wise,
He downa chew the bitter cud o' vice:
For if, frae Castlehill to Netherbow,
Wad honest houses bawdyhouses grow;
The Crown wad never spier the price o' sin,
Nor hinder younkers to the deil to rin;
But, if some mortal grein for pious fame,
An' leave the poor man's prayer to sain his name,
His gear maun a' be scatter'd by the claws
O' ruthless, ravenous, an' harpy laws.
Yet shou'd I think, although the bill tak place,
The council winna lack sae meikle grace,
As let our heritage at wanworth gang,
Or the succeeding generations wrang,
O' braw bien maintenance, an' wealth o' lear,
Whilk, else, had drappit to their children's skair;
For mony a deep, an mony a rare engine,
Hae sprung fae Heriot's Wark, an' sprung fae mine.

HERIOT

I find, my friend, that ye but little ken,
There's e'en now on the earth a set o' men,
Wha, if they get their private pouches lin'd,
Giena a windle-strae for a' mankind.
They'll sell their country, flae their conscience bare,
To gar the weigh-bauk turn a single hair.
The Government need only bait the line
Wi' the prevailin' flie – the gowden coin!
Then our executors, an' wise trustees,
Will seem them fishes in forbidden seas:
Upon their dwinin country girn in sport;
Laugh in their sleeve, an' get a place at court.

WATSON

E're that day come, I'll 'mang our spirits pick
Some ghaists that trokes an' conjures wi' Auld Nick.
To gar the wind wi' rougher rumbles blaw,
An' weightier thuds than ever mortal saw:
Fireflaught an' hail, wi' tenfauld fury's fires,
Shall lay yird-laigh Edina's airy spires:
Tweed shall rin rowtin down his banks out-owre,
Till Scotland's out o' reach o' England's power,
Upon the briny Borean jaws to float,
An' mourn in dowie soughs her dowie lot.

HERIOT

Yonder the tomb o' wise Mackenzie fam'd,
Whase laws rebellious bigotry reclaim'd;

Freed the hale land o' covenantin' fools,
Wha erst hae fash'd us wi' unnumber'd dools.
Till night, we'll tak the swaird aboon our pows,
An' then, when she her ebon chariot rows,
We'll travel to the vau't wi' stealin' stap,
An' wauk Mackenzie frae his quiet nap,
Tell him our ails, that he wi' wonted skill,
May fleg the schemers o' the Mortmain Bill.

NOTES

Fergusson spells many of his words in common with English, as was the case in Older Scots, so it is not always apparent to the modern reader – schooled only to read and pronounce English - as to how they should be pronounced in Scots. In Fergusson's day it was clear to people in Scotland how to pronounce them as they only heard these words in Scots.

OU and OW spellings

These can be the cause of much confusion today. Most of these are pronounced with an 'oo' sound in Scots, as in the following used by Fergusson –

Bougil, bound, course, down, endow'd, hour, house, now, our, out, owlets, pouches, round, showers, sough, thou, tour, tower.

So, for example, **bound, down, house,** and **round,** are pronounced as boon(d), doon, hoose and roon(d).

Other spellings with an OW are pronounced as they look, with an 'ow' sound. In particular **gowd, grow, howkit, pows, rowtin, scowp.**

One or two with an OU spelling are pronounced with an 'ow' sound, such as **croupin** and **douff.**

GH spellings

Sometimes called the 'guttural' (from the French for 'throat') or 'fricative' (meaning a sound produced by friction) it can be easy to forget the Scots way of pronouncing these words. In Older Scots – and Scots today – it is usual to spell these words with a 'ch' (same sound as in 'loch') but in the 18th and 19th centuries many writers in Scots used the spelling 'gh' in common with English.

Note that Fergusson uses the spellings **aught, laugh, night, rougher, sight, sough, weightier** and **wright.** These were/are pronounced in Scots as aucht, lauch, nicht, raucher, sicht, souch, wechtier, and wricht with a sharp 'ch' as in the word loch.

For particular items of Scots vocabulary please refer to the standard reference work *The Concise Scots Dictionary* published by Scottish Language Dictionaries.