Batable ground

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Bio note

I am a Phd Student in Creative Writing at Sheffield Hallam University. My PhD is entitled ‘Encounter before Imagination: towards a poetics for nonhuman animal encounter’. My blog is: cowyidentity.wordpress.com.

Title

A Pedestrian Way Around the Ramparts

Abstract

The poems that follow were written during and after a series of walks around the border town of Berwick-Upon-Tweed which has an architectural heritage marked by tension between England and Scotland. There is a medieval castle which changed hands fifteen times before falling into dis-use, Elizabethan Ramparts encircle the town and the Old Bridge was commissioned by James VI of Scotland whilst on the way to be crowned James I of England. These heritage features suddenly took on new significance during the Scottish Independence Referendum debate as submerged histories returned to the surface; I was in Berwick on the day voting took place, it was a quiet and misty day, the town seemed to be holding its breath. The poems are open form, composed by grid and field, making use of found texts and historical documents. They explore the entangled history of England and Scotland for those who dwell in the border.
Keywords

Open form
Found text
Grid poem
Scottish Independence
Berwick-Upon-Tweed
Batable Ground

All Englishmen and Scottishmen

to rob persons
after this
burn bodies
are and shall be free
spoils buildings
these are the laws
slay goods
to be avoided
murder cattle
that cannot be said
destroy remains
without any redress

any part of said

proclamation made
Old Bridge

cross
sixth
which

a stony couch

fair
divine
wrong

fat lolling tongue

carnal
fecund
dog

horrible Stygian smoke

wise
pen
drunk

peace of God they pass

bishop
plot
crossed

preposterous and strange

here
first
witch

a deep feather bed

foul
right
flesh

for the mouth

chaste
queen
master

that is bottomless

fool
sword
puritan

all understanding

king
double
saltire

procedure
Breakyneck Steps
‘in manner circular, but much dilapidated’

curtain wall with drawn passion forgotten

runs river red red runs river runs river ruins rue in reiver raids

ringing cattle rolling eggs hanging

in away cage swing

David Edward

Richard Lionheart Gloucester

had a great tumble

jumped where your uncle jumped where your uncle banquet hall unclear

rings down steps trips tips sold out

Elizabeth

a sharp break

bricks for station forgotten whatever passion

superceded feast

do something here

draw curtains
A pedestrian way along the ramparts

“All I wanted to do was remember my mother”
- Mrs Middlemass, local businesswoman, Berwick Advertiser. October 2013

of her dismay
lonely
mute swans bow to water
WANTED
daffodils wished for wandered
cloud scud dark lap
keep secrets dissipated motivation
out marauding Scots let’s meet
Italian style
last bastion

begin to peer dividing

town as cell ditches
startes at itself earth
worked tirelessly
set up dug up

striking masons

WARNING

sheer unprotected drop
let drop let drop let
preserved
English Heritage

gressed

neglected

over

love

affection

flag

do my

disposition

worried that flowers would attract children

caw drift across

whose side are you on

in

what’s mine is yours

dangerous to proceed beyond this point

certainly not against flowers a more suitable spot fight to get daffodils

threat subsided

who’s there

who’s there is there

there here
Running

toward

sea

looks for watch horizon

lost down sofa herself morning after morning pounds

uncertain

labour repeat her here

morning

steps push

walled reap

on

either heat

side there

narrow

hurt ankle

old trees reach
daren’t say a word
one passing remark

and what did you mean by that

something to pass the time

everything slippy frozen

bites lip clatter iron slides over under wear ground up deposit at estuary spit deposit at estuary spit

enlarged tongue clogs
the mouth

stretch    shadow    ahead

morning    silhouette    sea-glint

railway  bridge body    remembers
with mother    to see
sighing  steam point    say daddy

engine thunders under
through
away

tut too

say    sanatorium    pungent    steam

stains    running on    to morning
Cowy

panni ma teash
they’ve chured
right oot me fams
Our oorness
and wit fae
a couple o bar
they wis bary wee chavas
that came roond me keah
which wis a right tip
And clean’d up
costy eh chi
but mind to mang mair closely
if they knock on you
dinnie habbin them
gery castie chase em
before the mooli
call the muskie
gery yag on
by my castin sheerie
i’ve told ye
dinae nash
all ye
mang is me moody moy
me joulge on a string now I
peery roond the toon
A peevy paggered old gadgy
that cannit talk the bary
talk like them chi
The rain falls painfully upon my head [possibly colloquial metaphor]. They have stolen – from out of my hands – our distinctive collective identity. Why have they done this, for a few pounds sterling [possibly rhetorical]? Friendly young men came round to visit and cleaned up my house, which was very untidy. Doesn’t that sound great [possibly sarcastic]? But remember to look more closely if they knock on your door. Don’t feed them, get a stick and chase them. Before you get hurt, call the police. Perhaps light a fire to warn others they are within the area. I’ve warned you [note my hair standing on end] – don’t run away – all you see is my dirty mouth and my dog on a string now that I wander round town like a drunk, exhausted old man that can’t talk nicely like they could (Note: this extract ends with an interjection impossible to translate accurately).
As Da

taken for freezer push through heat
at the lady why weren’t you there last
hurling two for ten pound
as recovered energy in world’s greenest
seven hills seven nappies one
we’ll ghetto where we’re
on a bear hunt under the
loose change dunked in queue scowl self
for signs of any
causing sausages wrapped in carcinogenic
and send by first class or miss special
baby and toddler yoghurt half
per kilogram per gram per
republic per lick per tuck
past sell by date still
paper full of
DreamSkin polymer for dry and
by lack of any unsugared own brand
left clinging to the
or swim by reaching out for
let ne help you its quite easy
Sources

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