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 The poems are open form, composed by grid and field, making use of found texts and historical documents.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_

dead

_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 hanging
ing in eggs cage
in away swing

David Edward
Richard Lionheart Gloucester

had a great tumble

jumped where your uncle jumped where your uncle banquet hall unclear
runs 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

WANTED

WANTED daffodils wished for

bowed to water wandered

cloud scud dark lap

keep secrets dissipated motivation

out marauding Scots

Italian style let’s meet

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

neglected

over

love

affection

flag of 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

to ward

sea

looks for watch horizon

lost down sofa herself morning after morning pounds un certain

labour repeat her here

morning push

steps reap

walled

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
coosty eh chi
but mind to mang mair closely
if they knock on you
dinnie habbin them
get yer castie  chase em
before the mooli
call the muskie
get yer yag on
by my castin sheerie
i’ve told ye
dinae nash  all ye
mang is me mooty moy
me joggle on a string now I
peery roond the toon
A peevy paggered old gadgy
that cannie 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
wave
week
disposables
city
day
going
sofa
scan
cancer
package
event
price
banana
perishable
edible
George
troubled
sweetcorn
sink
ducky
really
Sources

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