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THE SHETLAND LITERARY TRADITION

An Anthology of Modern Shetland Poetry

Laurits Rendboe



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**THE SHETLAND LITERARY TRADITION
AN ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN
SHETLAND POETRY
by
Laurits Rendboe**

**Odense University
1985**

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INTRODUCTORY NOTES

The Original Texts and their Provenience

These have been taken from a variety of sources: George Stewart's poems are from the 1923-edition of his *Shetland Fireside Tales*, while Jane Saxby's "Bonn Hoga" is from the *Shetland Folk-Book*, vol. III (1957); John Nicolson's poems are from the 1933-edition of *Hentilagets*, and Tait's "By-Pass" is from his *Collected Poems* (1980). Vagaland's poems are from his *Collected Poems* (1975), while George P.S. Peterson's and Stella Sutherland's pieces are from *The New Shetlander*, Nos. 107 and 110; Mrs. Bulter's poems are taken from her books *Doobled-Up* and *Link-Stanes*, and the original drawings accompanying some of them are from the same sources. All other poems, that is, by Burgess, Anderson, Angus, L.J. Nicolson, Peterson, Milne, Stewart Smith and Renwick, have been taken from the anthology *Nordern Lichts* (1964), which has the advantage for non-native readers that the often somewhat personalized Shetland spelling has been standardized.

The Language of the Originals

As explained (Vol. I, pp.1-5), the original language of Shetland was Norse or Norwegian, the local dialect usually being styled Norn; however, after 1469, when the isles came under Scottish rule, the islanders gradually acquired Low Scots as a second language, especially after 1611, when the Scottish Privy Council abrogated the old Norse laws. The entire deplorable development led to the gradual abandonment of Norn in the 18th century, in favour of Low Scots. However, the Shetlanders spoke their new tongue with their own special pronunciation (no doubt they were often self-taught, schooling not being available in those days). Also, they transferred a great many of their own old specialized terms and idiomatic expressions to their acquired language, giving it a special flavour not matched anywhere else. Thus, it is basically Scots, but there still exists a large Norn element, which, however, is diminishing with the disappearance of the old type crofting and fishing methods, to which the old terms belonged. Presently, it has also begun to absorb quite a bit of standard English, especially in Lerwick, the capital, but many old-timers, and, of course, the dialect writers, strive to preserve the old, colourful terms, and the poems here presented have a liberal sprinkling of them, especially those written by people who learned their Shetlandic before the turn of the century, or, even before World War I.

The Translations

An old adage says, "Poetry is what is lost in translation", and some may indeed think of that when comparing my versions with the spirited originals. However, I have merely tried to say in English (to the best of my non-native ability) what the poets said in the vernacular, at the same time trying to preserve the structure and native flavour of the poems, also their rhythm and rhymes, whenever possible. The rhythm, however, often differs slightly from that of standard English, owing to the different intonation pattern, and some of the rhymes may not pass muster as perfect in strictly southern pronunciation; I have retained them, however, knowing that Shetland writers often use similar rhymes when writing in English, the reason being their own local pronunciation.

Arrangement on the Page

To facilitate easy comparison between the originals and the translations the poems have been arranged side by side on opposing pages, with the Shetland original to the left and the version to the right.

Notes

Whenever it has been felt necessary to retain some Scots or Shetland words, these are explained in the notes appended; at times other features have been commented on as well, if they were felt to be unknown to most readers generally. This should cause no inconvenience to readers used to study annotated poetry, in e.g. the Norton anthologies or similar study editions.

Illustrations

When working on Rhoda Bulter's poems I resolved to retain some of her delightful illustrations, and owing to that inspiration I decided to include a few of my own. Thus a much richer impression of many features of Shetland life could be given than could have been conveyed by mere words. The Shetland Map (also my own) was included to give an idea of the various parts of this northern archipelago referred to in some of the poems and the notes.

The Auld Wife's Fireside.

Da wind is roarin' i' da lun,
Dere's snawdrifts deep on every side;
Bit what cares shu for wind or snaw,
Wi' comfort at her fireside?

Chorus: Da auld wife's fireside,
Wir auld grannie's fireside;
Nae place in a' da world wide
Sae cosy as her fireside.

Her dog an' cat upo' da heart
In friendship dear dey aye confide,
An' puss purrs ower his waggin' tail
By da auld wife's fireside. (Chorus)

Her hoose as clean as ony preen,
An' things dat wir her midder's pride
Are dere, nae warr yet o' do wear,
By da auld's wife fireside. (Chorus)

Her wheel rins roond wi' muckle din,
Her fingers ower da yarn slide;
Da cairds, da wheel, da knitten wires
Ne'er slacken at her fireside. (Chorus)

Her teapot's mask'd four times a day,
Da truth she dusna need ta hide,
Fir a drap o' tae is just her life
An comfort o' her fireside. (Chorus)

Wi' airs o' meal, an teats o' 'oo
Shu says "da Lord will her provide;"
Fir aye shu fan' His promise true
Sin first shu hed a fireside. (Chorus)

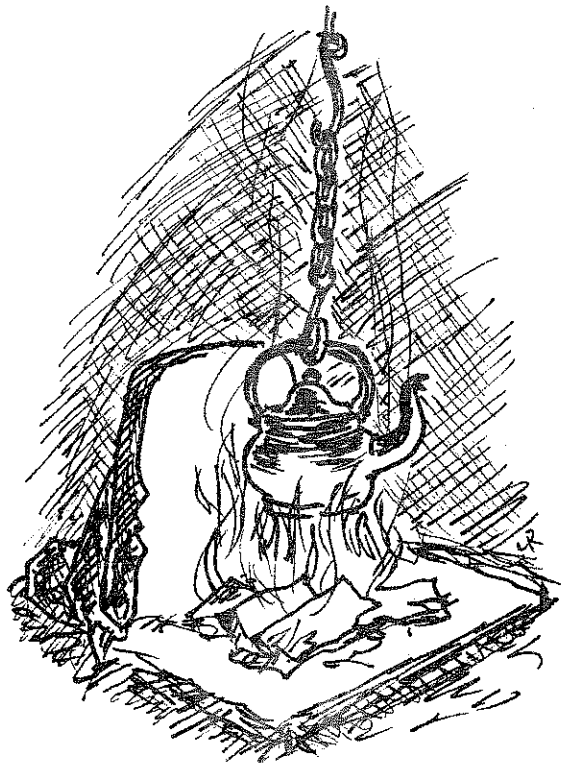
In winter nights aroond her fire
Da lads an' lasses laek ta bide;
Fir kind wirds aye shu hes ta say,
Ta a' dat's roond her fireside. (Chorus)

Sic fairy tales as shu can tell
An' giants dat tree miles cud stride;
Wi' ghosts an' goblins maks you grue
At nicht ta leave her fireside. (Chorus)

An' whiles shu tinks o' days gane by,
An' when shu wis a bonnie bride,
Sic tochts maks tears come trinklin' doon,
When lanely at her fireside. (Chorus)

Bit trials tho' mony shu hes hed,
At Providence shu does na chide;
Tho' a' are noo' laid i' da muld,
Dat ance wir roond her fireside. (Chorus)

Her Bible den her only joy,
In days whin shu wis sairly tried;
An' still shu seeks da "Promised Laand"
In it, oft by her fireside. (Chorus)



George Stewart

The Old Lady's Fireside

The wind is roaring in the lum (1),
 Deep snowdrifts are on every side;
 But what cares she for wind and snow,
 In comfort at her fireside?

Chorus: The old lady's fireside,
 Our old grannie's fireside,
 No place in all the world so wide
 So cosy as her fireside.

Her dog and cat upon the hearth
 In friendship dear they aye (2) confide;
 And puss purrs o'er his wagging tail
 By the old lady's fireside. (Chorus)

Her house as clean as well can be,
 And things that were her mother's pride
 Are there, and still no worse for wear,
 By the old lady's fireside. (Chorus)

Her spinning wheel now runs with din,
 Her fingers o'er the yarn slide;
 The cards, the wheel, the knitting pins
 Ne'er slacken at her fireside. (Chorus)

She brews her tea four times a day,
 That fact she does not need to hide,
 For a drop of tea is just her life
 And comfort at her fireside. (Chorus)

With grains of meal and tufts of wool
 She says, "the Lord will her provide";
 For aye she found his promise true
 Since first she had a fireside. (Chorus)

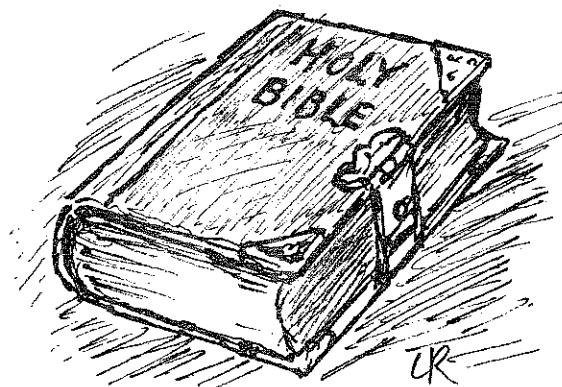
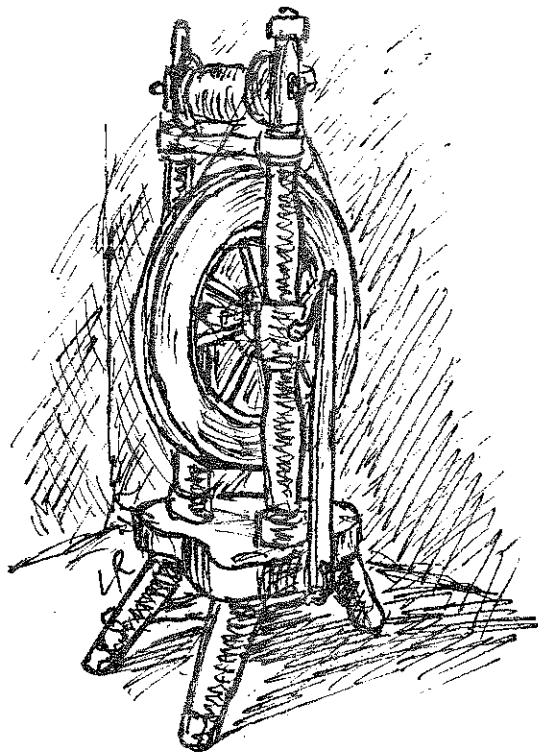
In winter nights around her fire
 The lads and lasses like to bide;
 For kind words aye she has to say
 To all around her fireside. (Chorus)

Such fairy tales as she can tell
 Of giants that three miles could stride;
 With ghosts and goblins makes you fear
 To leave at night her fireside. (Chorus)

And while she thinks of days gone by,
 Of when she was a bonnie bride,
 Such thoughts make tears come trickling down,
 When lonely at her fireside. (Chorus)

Though she has had so many trials,
 At providence she does not chide;
 Though in the grave now all are laid,
 That once were round her fireside. (Chorus)

Her Bible then her only joy,
 In days when she was sorely tried;
 And still she seeks the "promised land"
 In it, oft by her fireside. (Chorus)



George Stewart

1) lum, chimney.
 2) aye, always.

The Boatman's Song

Janny get my sea bread;
 I hoop du hes it clare;
 Da sky is saftly marled ower,
 A sign o' wadder fair.
 Fir I'm gaen ta da far haaf,
 Because da wadder's fair,
 An' a bonnie lock o' fish we'll hae
 Ta lay upo' da ayre.

Get me my buddie made o' gloy
 Dat hings ahint da door;
 My skinjup an' my sea-breeks,
 An' see dey're hale afore.
 Fir I'm gaen ta da far haaf, etc.

Pit in my mittens an' my dags,
 An' mind a keg o' blaand;
 Ta slock my trist, fir weel du kens
 Da wark we hae in haand,
 Whin we ir at da far haaf, etc.

My sea buits an' my kuttikens,
 Just see dey're in da buddie;
 My mussel-draig, my lempit pick,
 An' sae my lempit cuddie.
 Fir I'm gaen ta da far haaf, etc.

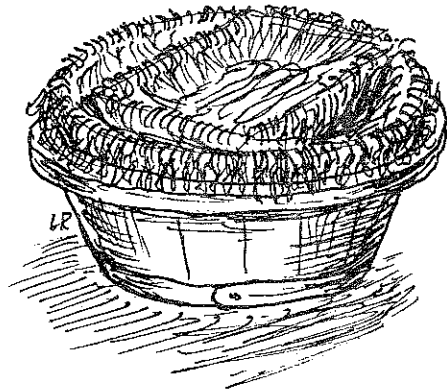
My snuids an' handlin rex me doon
 Dey're dere upon' da lame,
 An noo dat's a', Lord be wi' dee,
 Fir I maun geng fae hame,
 An' geng ta da far haaf, etc.

Da pirr o' wind is fae da wast,
 An' we'll heist up da sail,
 Until we come ta fishin' grund
 Whaur we can set an' hail.
 Whin we come ta da far haaf, etc.

Bit first geng out an' meet wi' me,
 Just as I leave da door;
 Fir weel I ken dy fit hes luck,
 As I hae fun' afore,
 Whin I gaed ta da far haaf, etc.

Sae Lord be wi' dee noo, an' keep
 Baith dee an' a da bairns;
 He kens dat baith fir dee an' dem
 My very hert it yerns,
 Whin I am at da far haaf, etc.

Keep up dy hert an' dunna greet
 As aft doos dune afore;
 Bit tink upo' da lock o fish
 We're shure to bring ashore,
 Whin we come fae da far haaf, etc.'



George Stewart

The Boatman's Song

Jannie, get my sea bread,
 I hope you have it clair (1),
 The sky is softly over-streaked,
 A sign of weather fair.
 For I'm going to the far haaf (2),
 Because the weather is fair,
 And a bonnie lot of fish we'll have
 To lay upon the ayre. (3)

Give me my basket made of straw,
 That hangs behind the door;
 My oilskin coat and breeches, too,
 And see they're whole afore. (4)
 For I'm going to the far haaf, etc.

Put in my mittens and my gloves,
 A keg of blaand (5) thereto,
 To quench my thirst, for well you know
 The work we have to do,
 When we are at the far haaf, etc.

My sea boots and my ankle socks
 Just in the basket place;
 My mussel-rake, my limpet-pick,
 And, too, my limpet-case.
 For I'm going to the far haaf, etc.

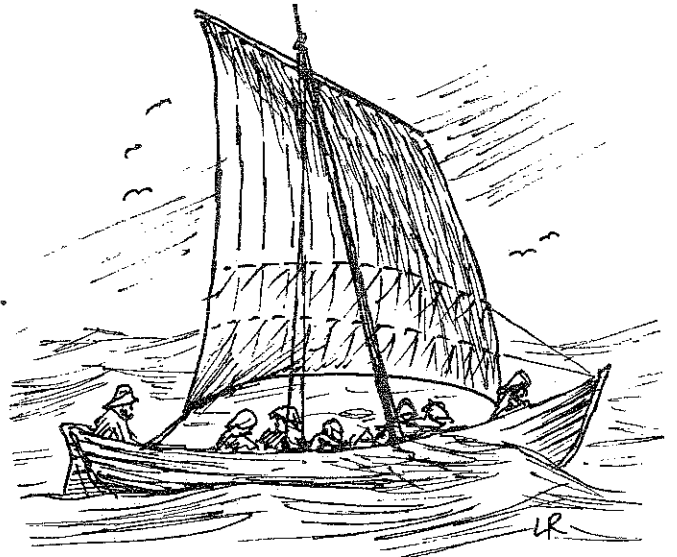
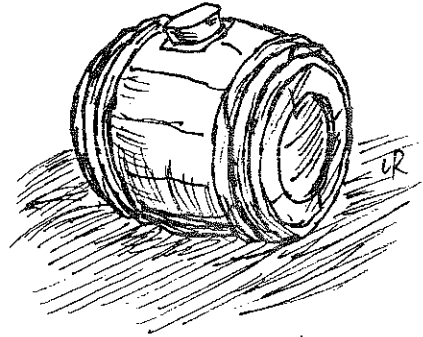
My snells and handline hand me down,
 They're there upon the shelf,
 And, so, that's all, God be with you,
 For now I'm off myself,
 For I'm going to the far haaf, etc.

It's blowing lightly from the west,
 So we will use the sail
 Until we reach the fishing grounds,
 Where we will set and hale,
 When we come to the far haaf, etc.

But first go out and meet me there,
 Just when I leave the door,
 I know full well your feet bring luck
 To me as aye (6) before,
 When I went to the far haaf, etc.

So God be with you now and keep
 You safe with all the bairns;
 He knows that both for you and them
 My heart so deeply yearns,
 When I am at the far haaf, etc.

So just take heart and do not weep
 As oft you did before,
 But think instead of all the fish
 We're sure to bring ashore,
 When we come from the far haaf, etc.



George Stewart

1) *clair*, ready.
 2) *haaf*, ocean.
 3) *ayre*, beach.

4) *afore*, first.
 5) *blaand*, whey mixed with water.
 6) *aye*, always.

Scranna

Da Deil he cam doon ta da hill-daek o Scranna,
 Bit grinnd, or sma openeen, or slap dere he saa na,
 An sae, wi a glumse, an a deevil's ain glower
 He spat on his löfs, an clamb tentily ower.

I wis sittin me laen be da sheek o da fire,
 Wi me een on da spunks as dey aye loupit higher
 Dan slokkit an fell - I tinkin, "Aless!
 Sae man an his glory, jöst ess, aye ta ess;"
 Whin Seemun gets oot wi da faersomist growl,
 It wis maistly enyoch ta pairt boady an sowl.
 Dan I hears on da brig-stanes da muvvin o cöts,
 An da fitsteps o someen wi neesterin böts.

An sae ta da door comes a aafil-laek bung,
 An someen spaeks up i da Engleeis tongue.
 Bit göd feth! Da but-end wisna ill ta be seen,
 So I sings oot, "Come in, an your clivviks be clean!"
 Next meenit I hears a grit scrapin an scerittin,
 Bit I never stirs oot o whaar I wis sittin,
 An Seemun I yoks be da slack o da lug,
 An says, "Haddi tongue! Wheesht wi dee! Doon wi dee, dug!"

Dan I sees, wi his haand on da sneek o da door,
 A jantleman, braa-laek an weel cled afore,
 Wi a lang taily cott an a black pair o breeks,
 A sylk hat, an side-lichts on baid o his sheeks.
 "Well! Rasmus, good evenin!" he says, wi a smile,
 An he oot wi his haand i da hameliest style.
 I kent no at first wha Ill-Helt it could be,
 So I says, "Feth! ye hae da advantage o me."

He maks me nae answer, bit smiles aa da mair,
 An sae withoot biddin he draas in a shair,
 An up ta da fire he gies ee fit a shiv,
 Wi a soond jöst da sam as da scrit o da cliv.
 I looks at his fit, an he cliks it awa,
 An sticks oot his knee till da breeks hoids it aa,
 Bit he was ower late, an tink I ta mesell,
 "An I wret ta dee, Boy, da address wid be Hell."

Bit he tink I saa naethin, and sae he begood,
 Wi a voice kind o pleasant, and no very lood,
 "I observe you don't know me, although we have met,"
 Wi dis on da creepie his sylk hat he set.
 "You are looking much older and rather careworn."
 "Yea," I says, "It's a while noo sin Rasmie wis boarn,
 An ye dönna growe young-laek wi followin da sea;
 Bit what, tink ye, wid ye be wantin o me?"

"Oh," he says, smilin saft, "I have dropped in along,
 Just to say as a friend, that I think you are wrong
 In some of your views about life and all that."
 An he sleekit da croon o his lang sheening hat,
 An hunkled himsell, fir his cott wis geen swint
 Wi a wecht at he hed i da pocket ahint.
 Dan he poos aff his glivs an his twa haands I saa,
 Wi da nails jöst da sam as da neb o da craa;



Scranna (1)

The Devil came down once to Scranna's dyke wall (2),
 But gate, gap or opening he found none at all -
 And so, with a snort and a scowl the old rover
 Just spat in his palms and climbed carefully over.

I was sitting alone by the side of the fire,
 With my eyes on the sparks as they flew ever higher,
 Then went out and fell - and I thought at the flashes,
 "So're man and his glory, just ashes to ashes!"
 Then Simon gets up with the fearsomest growl,
 'Twas almost enough to part body and soul.
 Then I hear on the flagstones some moving around,
 The stepping of shoes with a squeaking sound.

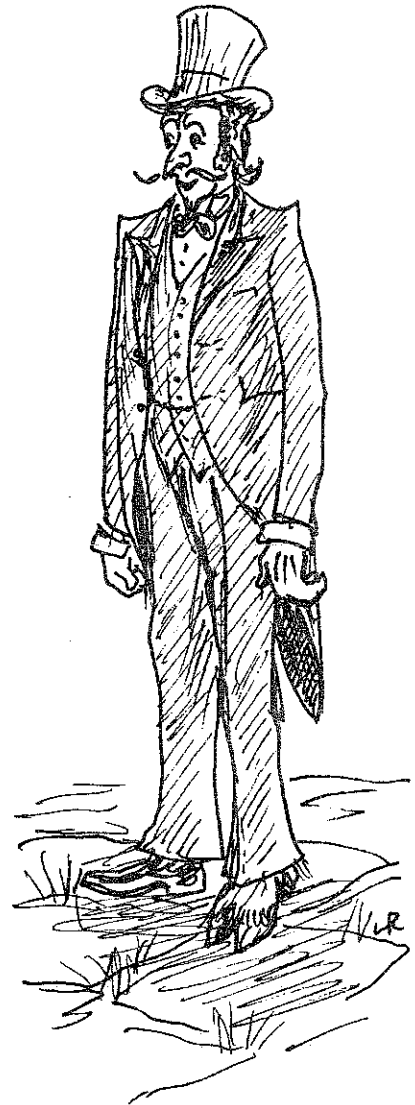
And then at the door there's a terrible bong!
 Then someone speaks up in the English tongue (3),
 But Faith! The room wasn't too bad to be seen,
 So I sing out, "Come in, if your hooves but be clean!"
 Next moment I hear a great scraping and gritting,
 But never I stir from my chair where I'm sitting,
 Then Simon I catch by the slack of his ear,
 And say, "Hold your tongue, dog, get down, do you hear!"

Then I see, with his hand on the latch of the door,
 A nice-looking gentleman, well-clad all o'er,
 In a long-tailed coat and a black pair of breeks,
 A silk-hat and sideburns on both of his cheeks;
 "Well, Rasmus, good evening!" he says, with a smile,
 Putting forward his hand in the friendliest style.
 I knew not at first who the hell he could be,
 So I said, "Faith! Ye have the advantage of me!"

He gives me no answer, but smiles all the mair (4),
 And then, without bidding, he draws up a chair,
 While near to the fire he shoves up his foot,
 With a sound as a hoof on a stone had been put.
 I gaze at that foot, but he jerks it aside
 And sticks out his knee, so the breeks may it hide,
 But he is too late, and I think with mysel',
 "If I wrote to you, Boy (5), the address would be Hell!"

But he thinks I saw nothing, and so he sets out,
 With a voice kind of pleasant and not very loud,
 "I observe you don't know me, although we have met",
 With this on the stool down his silk hat he set.
 "You are looking much older, and rather careworn."
 "Yes," I say, "It's a while now since Rasmie was born,
 And younger one grows not when going to sea,
 But what, do ye think, would ye want of me?"

"Oh," he says with a smile, "I have dropped in along,
 Just to say as a friend that I think you are wrong
 In some of your views about life and all that."
 Then he smoothed down the crown of his shiny long hat,
 And shrugged out his coat, for it was disaligned
 With a weight that he had in his pocket behind.
 Then he pulls off his gloves, and his hands, do you know,
 They had nails that were just like the beak of a crow.



So ta hoid dem, he faaldit his airms at eence,
 An his een lookit at me as sharp laek as preens;
 Dan he says, "Look at me, I've been years in the Kirk -
 I admit you may think I got in by a quirk -
 I dispense the Communion, I preach, I baptise,
 You can manage it all with a few handy lies,
 (As some people call them in vulgar parlance,
 Reservations we term them, we men who advance)."

"Yea," I says, "Der sma doot ye can shuffle da caerts,
 I warran ye'll be, noo, a Mester o Aerts."
 Dan he keekit a paet, wi his böt, inta flame,
 An said he felt caald whin he wisna at hame;
 An he taks frae his pocket a bit iv a flask,
 An says, "Rasmus, are you t-t, may I ask?"
 "Yea," I says, "i da meantime I hae sma desire
 Ta swee wi yun mixter o blöd an o fire."

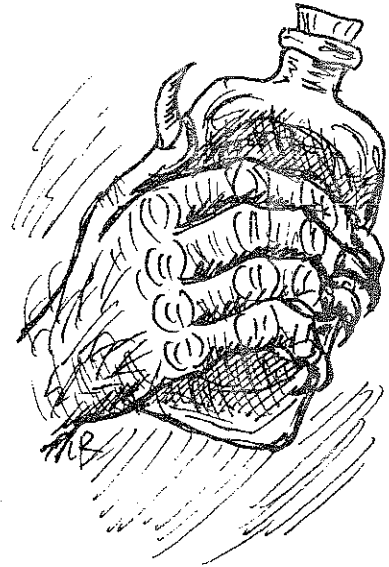
"Oh! it's fine, have a wet." "Na," says I, "no a sipe,"
 Dan he pits it awa, an he draas oot his pipe;
 An he shörly foryat, fir doon his haand gengs,
 An he lifts a haet coll without takkin da tengs.
 "Ye're at haem wi da fire," dan I says wi a girn,
 An wi dis, heth! he slips it an looks kind o tirn;
 Bit he smiles da neist meenit an nods trowe da smok,
 An he says, "You are rather a humorous bloke;

"Don't you think now that you are a little adrift?
 Don't you think now you'd like to succeed - get a lift?
 To be something decent - some big reverend don?
 To distinguish yourself, man, in fact, to get on?
 You're as simple to-night as you were in your youth;
 The thing that pays best is what I call the truth;
 That is the view which I wish to reveal."
 Says I, "Feth! I doot, honest man, ye're da Deil."

Dan he smirkit at me an he sleekit his hair,
 Fir his hoarn wis cockit a grain i da air,
 "Well, supposin I am, now," says he, noddin trice,
 "Tho it comes from the Devil, it's still good advice;
 I'll tell you what, Rasmus, just listen, keep cool,
 You're a great many different kinds of a fool."
 "Ye seondril!" says I, an I raise ta me fit,
 "Oot o dis wi dee! Hent desell!! Heckle noo! Flit!"

Dan I gies his sylk hat a grit rise wi me clug,
 An slips noo me grip apo pör Seemun's lug.
 Wha, tinkin it time fir ta gie him a seg,
 Sank his yackles fair inta da baa o his leg:
 Sae he springs til his feet, an, makkin a claa
 Fir me gansey, he cloors baid da shooders awa.
 Wi ee haand I grips dan da breest o his cott,
 An I yoks wi da idder da slack o his trot;
 Dan his face comes as black as da very ill-Helt,
 An he aims me a lick jöst anunder da belt.

"Wid du! du villain!" I yalls, gettin mad,
 An sae bi da cuff o his neck taks da lad;
 An dere on da flör as we stöd i da mids,
 I shaks him da sam as da buggie o sids,
 Till I feels me aald airm beginnin ta tire,
 Dan awa he goes fair on his saet i da fire;
 Bit he up, an sae oot o da pooch o his cott
 Cam da tail at he hed dere rowed up in a knott.



So, to hide them he folds up his arms and he grins,
 While his eyes stared at me, as sharp as two pins,
 Then he says, "Look at me, I've been years in the Kirk -
 I admit you may think I got in by a quirk -
 I dispense the Communion, I preach, I baptise,
 You can manage it all with a few handy lies,
 (As some people call them in vulgar parlance,
 Reservations we term them, we men who advance)."

"Yea," I say, "I am sure ye can shuffle the cards,
 I warrant ye'll be, now, a Master of Arts!" (6)
 Then he kicked a peat into flame with his boot,
 And said he felt cold not at home but en route,
 So he takes from his pocket a small-sized flask,
 And says, "Rasmus, are you t-t (7), may I ask?"
 "Yea," I say, "and meanwhile I have no desire
 To be burned with that mixture of blood and of fire".

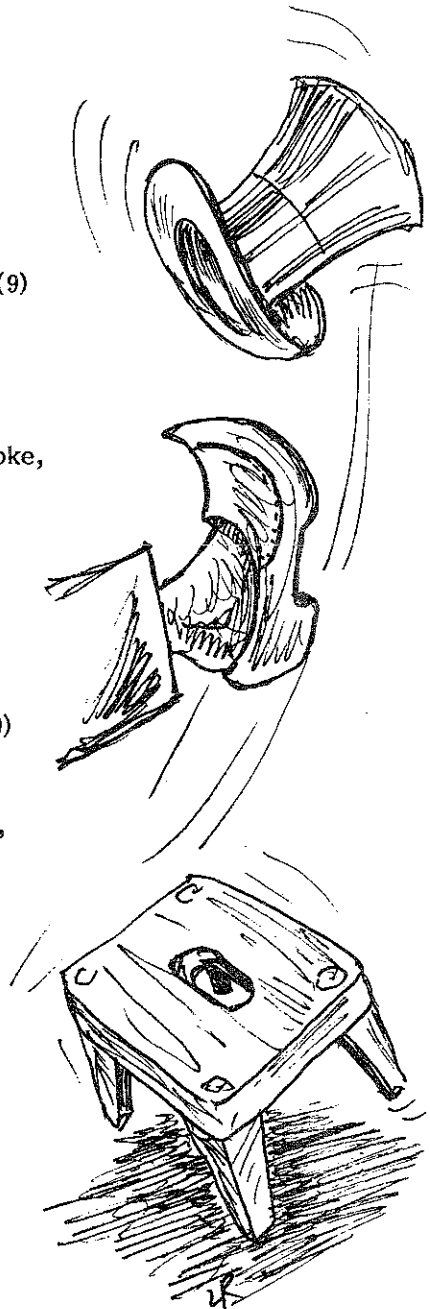
"Oh, It's fine, have a wet." (8) "No," says I, "not a sipe." (9)
 So he puts it away and draws out his pipe,
 And he cleanly forgets, for then down goes his hand,
 And, using no tongs, he takes out a hot brand.
 "Ye're at home with the fire," then I say with a grin,
 With this, Faith, he drops it and shows his chagrin,
 But he smiles the next moment and nods through the smoke,
 As he says, "You are rather a humorous bloke."

"Don't you think now that you are a little adrift?
 Don't you think now you'd like to succeed - get a lift?
 To be something decent - some reverend don?
 To distinguish yourself, man, in fact, to get on?
 You're as simple tonight as you were in your youth,
 The thing that pays best is what I call the truth;
 That is the view which I wish to reveal."
 Said I, "Faith! I'm sure, honest man, you're the De'il!" (10)

Then he gave me a smirk as he smoothed down his hair,
 For his horns were now getting too high in the air,
 "Well, supposing that I am, now," he says, nodding thrice,
 "Though it comes from the Devil, it's still good advice;
 I'll tell you what, Rasmus, just listen, keep cool,
 You're a great many different kinds of a fool."
 "Ye scoundrel," says I, as I rise to my feet,
 "Get ye out of here, get going, be fleet!"

Then I aim a great kick at his silky headgear,
 And my grip I release on my poor Simon's ear,
 Who, thinking it time to attack this bad egg,
 Sinks his teeth very deep in the calf of his leg;
 So he jumps to his feet and he comes very rough
 For my jersey, and rips both the shoulders clean off.
 With one hand, then, I grip the lapels of his coat,
 As I sieze with the other the slack of his throat,
 So his face goes all black like the most evil night,
 Then he punches my stomach, beginning to fight.

"Now then, you villain!" I yell, getting mad (11),
 And so by the scruff of his neck take the lad,
 So, there, as we stand in the midst of the floor,
 I shake him as huskbags are shaken, but more,
 Till I feel my old arm is beginning to tire,
 Then away he falls with his seat in the fire,
 He quickly gets up, though, and forth like a shot
 Comes the tail he had rolled up behind like a knot.



It lies on da flör fir a meenit and smoks,
 Dan spoots ta da lent laek da jeck-i-da-box,
 An Seemun, he yoks da sma end i his jaas,
 An scrirts at it, faerce-laek, wi baid o his paas.
 Dan we wrassles agen, an göd trath! A'll be boond
 Fir a wharter-a-oor ye'd a no heard a soond
 But da crackin o shairs, an da clump o a clug,
 Da scrit o a cliv, an da yalp o da dug,
 As he strak noo an dan i da crook-an-da-links
 Whin da lad swang his tail ita een o his jinks -
 Fir Seemun, pör trow, wi his legs in a bing,
 Geed hirslin aroon laek da stane i da sling.

Dan I draas him wi force öbdee by ta da door,
 An wi dis he comes oot wi a oondömious roar,
 An oot o me hair, feth! he clachters a gyoppen -
 Noo, da door, sin he left her, wis still a grain open -
 Wi mi clug-tae I reesles her clean ta da back
 An a yok fir da slack o his breeks dan I mak,
 An taks him a hyst wi a mention o strent,
 An sae on da brig-stanes I laands him his lent;
 An dads tö da door, maistlins layin in coom
 Da pairt o his end at wis still i da room;
 Dan he sprikkles laek sin, an he plöts wi a wail,
 "Ah! look oot, min, Rasmie, ye're brukkin me tail!"
 So efter a meenit I aedges da door,
 An he rives his tail furt trowe da crack wi a snore,
 An Seemun, pör wirm, still rowed in a knot,
 Striks da jamb o da door wi a dooce laek a shot,
 Sae at he's strypit aff, an he yikkas an growls,
 An dan whin he canna win oot sits an yowis.
 I da meantime, da Black Boy he breaths him a bit,
 Dan he comes fir da door wi a rip what he's fit,
 An he hunches wi pooer, wi his cliv tül a stane,
 Bit da maist at he hairmed wis his ain shooder-bane;
 For dere as I stöd, heth! I steekit her fast,
 Wi da tae o me clug laek da step o da mast;
 Dan, efter a start, wi his mooth at da holl,
 He says wi a soond at wis maistlins half droll,
 As he twisted his face up an girned an shammed,
 "Nee! Rass-moos! A'll get dee! Du's sure ta be damned!"
 "Na! feth I!" I says, "Boy! aald Rasmie is feft."
 Dan he hankit his tail ower his elbik an left.



J.J. Haldane Burgess



It lies on the floor for a moment and smokes,
 Then straightens full out in a few jerky strokes,
 Now Simon, he seizes its end in his jaws
 And scratches it fiercely with both of his paws.
 Then we wrestle again, and in truth! I'll be bound,
 For the next quarter-hour there was nary a sound
 But the creaking of chairs and the clump of a clog,
 The screech of the hoof and the yelp of the dog,
 As he struck now and then on the crook-and-the-links (12),
 When the lad swung his tail into one of his jinks,
 For Simon, poor thing, with his legs in a bing,
 Got hurtled around like a stone in a sling!

Then I draw him with force all the way to the door,
 And out there he goes with a terrible roar,
 But out of my hair a large handful he ripped -
 Now, the door is ajar, since through it he slipped -
 But I with my clog-toe kick open it full,
 And then at the slack of his breeks take a pull,
 To hoist him aloft with a showing of strength,
 So, there, on the flagstones he measures his length;
 Then I bang shut the door and I crush with that clout
 The end of his tail which he hadn't got out;
 Then he writhes like the sin and he whines with a wail,
 "Ouch! Rasmus, Watch out! You are crushing my tail!" (13)
 So, after a moment I ease up the door,
 And he jerks out his tail, which is now pretty sore,
 While Simon, poor worm, still rolled up like a knot,
 Strikes the jamb of the door with a thud like a shot,
 But, stripped of the tail, he snarls and he growls,
 And then, when he cannot get out, sits and yowls.
 In the meantime the Black Boy has got back his breath,
 And he comes at the door with a spurt, and my faith!
 He heaves with his might, with his hoof 'gainst a stone,
 But the most that he harmed was his own shoulderbone;
 For there, as I stood, I closed it so fast
 With the toe of my clog like the step of the mast;
 Then after a while, with his mouth at the hole,
 He says with a voice that is mostly half-droll,
 As he twisted his face up and grinned and shammed,
 "Nay, Rass-moos! I'll get you, you are sure to be damned!"
 "Faith! Not I," I say, "Boy, old Rasmie is feft." (14)
 Then he coiled up his tail o'er his elbow and left.



J.J. Haldane Burgess

- 1) *Scranna*, the name of Rasmie's croft (ON *skrana*, poor, skinny, scrawny).
- 2) The *dyke wall* or *hill-daek* (-*dyke*) was a dry-stone wall built around the township to separate its land from the common grazing. Strictly speaking, there was not a wall surrounding each croft, but they had it in common (Fenton 1978:89-100).
- 3) The Devil speaks standard English until he is evicted; then he forgets himself and lapses into dialect. So, in this translation, his English-language remarks are Burgess' own all the way through. Rasmie speaks dialect all the time.
- 4) *mair*, more.
- 5) *Boy* is still a common mode of address to grown men in Shetland, corresponding to the use of ON *drengr*, Icel *drengur* ("boy"), which was and is still used in the same way.
- 6) The Scottish ministers usually held this title, M.A.
- 7) *t-t*, "tee-totaller", i.e., someone totally abstaining from the use of alcohol. Very few, if any, Shetland crofters were that in those days, when "Hamburgh

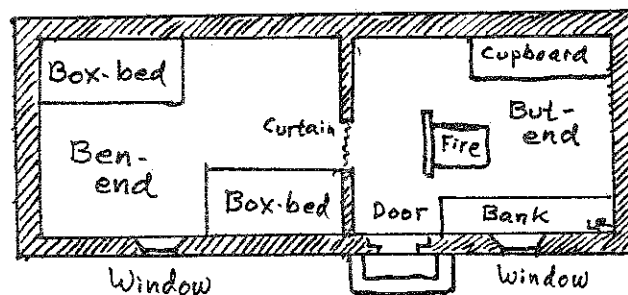
(or, Holland) waters" (brandy of various types, aqua vitae, gin and genever) were a standard item at most festive occasions.

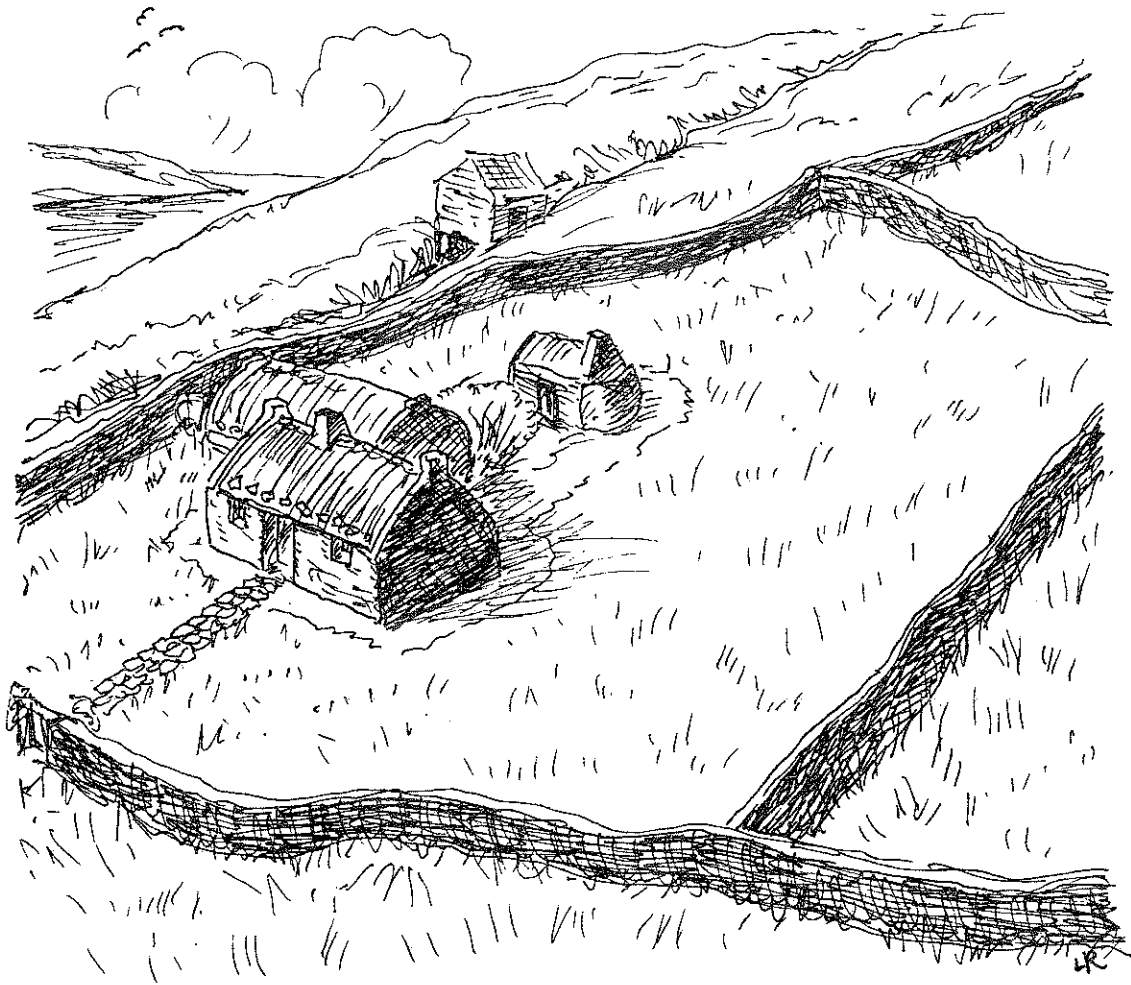
- 8) *Wet*, a drink (slang, not specially Scots).
- 9) *sipe*, a sip.
- 10) *De'il*, Devil (Low Scots).
- 11) Here Rasmie exchanges his polite "ye" for the more common "you".
- 12) *The crook-and-the-links*, the iron hook and chain on which pots and kettles were suspended over the open central fire in the old croft houses in Shetland. Very much like the equipment used in a Norwegian "årestue", and no doubt derived from it.
- 13) Here the "Black Boy" again forgets himself - this time he reverts from his polished standard English to dialect, which he also uses in his final words.
- 14) "*Feft*, *ppl. adj.* put in legal possession; claimed by might or long possession" (Warrack 1911:169). The word is cognate to *fief*, *feudal*, *infestment* and other similar legal expressions having to do with the old feudal arrangement in Scotland. In effect, Rasmie is saying that he already belongs to some other feudal lord or is bound up elsewhere with so strong ties that even the Devil himself cannot break them.

Note on the setting:

The little drama here enacted is set in a standard Shetland croft of the 19th century, which usually consisted of a single house, from which a passage was built into the adjacent byre, where the cows were kept. The house itself was divided into two rooms, called respectively the but-end and the ben-end, meaning the outer and the inner room (*but*, contracted from *be-out*, "outer"; *ben*, contracted from *be-in*, "inner"). In the but-end there was a central fire under a primitive chimney-hole in the roof (the lum), and from a beam was suspended the above-mentioned crook-and-the-links. This room was the usual living room of the family, while the ben-end usually contained what better furniture the crofter possessed, also the bedsteads. The door of entry was in the but-end, and there was no corridor or the like, one just went straight into the living room. Outside the door were the "brigstanes", here rendered flagstones, flat stones used for a pavement, often going all the way to the stone wall surrounding the entire croft.

Lay-out of typical old-style croft-house:





Scranna

This is a typical lay-out of a 19th century Shetland croft, as envisaged in Burgess' poem "Scranna": Situated on a hillside, and surrounded by the dry-stone walls or hill-dykes of the township, it was well placed to withstand the weather, which, in Shetland, is often inclement.

In front of the house are the "brigstanes", flagstones to ensure that people did not sink in the mud during the wet season; it was on those that Rasmie heard the visitor's hoof grate before he entered the house through its only door, which led into the but-end. Behind the house, and built into it, is seen the byre, where the cattle were kept, and behind that is seen a kiln of the old type, used for drying the corn after threshing (Shetland weather almost never allowed for air-drying it), and to the far side of the hill-dyke is an old watermill, situated astride a little brook in the hill.

Auld Maunsie's Crö

Part I

Oot-ower apon a weel-kent hill,
Whase watters rise ta grind a mill,
Auld Maunsie biggit him a crö,
Ta growe him kail fir mutton brö, -
Fir Maunsie never tocht him hale
Withoot sheeps' shanks an cogs o kale.

Noo Maunsie's wis as göd a tongue
As ever psalm o Dauvid sung.
It fittit weel a gödly mooth,
An said few wirds at wirna truth,
An never swöre by Göd or Deil
Excep' whin kyunnens ate his kale.

Maunsie never muckle fashed wi schule,
Aye wroucht by random mair dan rule;
But, drew he plan or drew he no,
He set da steead an honest O;
An shön da neebors roond aa saw
Rise up a stanch sheep-hadden waa;
While, laek a man inspired wi hope,
He clappit on da hidmost cope,
An as he sew da seed an söt,
Wi touchts o kale he schowed da cöt!

Auld Maunsie's crö wis fair ta see,
A toer an landmark ta da ee.
Whin Nickie soucht da fardest haaf
He pointed wi da huggy-staff,
"Noo Erty keep her ta da Nord,
Tak Maunsie's crö on Byre o Scord."
An whin a schooner took da soond
Lat eence her head be heilded roond
Deil oucht da skipper hed ta dö
Bit hadd her fir Auld Maunsie's crö.

Mair noted far dan clock or schime
Auld Maunsie's crö proclaimed da time:
Jöst as da sun raise ower da crö
Auld Lowrie o da Liogue raise tö.
Whin ower da crö da sun wis high
Oot staagin cam da Setter kye -
What hed na folk ta truck an dö
Afore he heilded aff da crö.
Fae Gaapaslap ta Swartagerts
Da crö wis kent dat mony erts
Dere wis nae oer in aa da twall
Bit in some place some tongue wid yall
Ta langsome legs an elbucks tö,
"Da sun is by Auld Maunsie's crö!"

Whin Betty Bunt at bedd in Virse
Wis riskin reeds an gorsty-girse,
Auld Maunsie's crö below da sun
Said "Hame an see da denner on!"
Noo, if her limmer o a lass,
Ne'er heedid hoo da time wid pass,



Old Maunsie's Crue (1)

Part I

High on the top of a well-known hill,
Whose waters swell to drive a mill,
Old Maunsie built himself a crue,
To grow there kail (2) for mutton broo (3), -
For Maunsie ne'er felt sound and hale
Without sheep's shanks and crates of kail.

Now, Maunsie's was as good a tongue
As ever psalm of David sung;
It fitted well a kindly mouth,
Which said few words untrue, uncouth,
And never swore by God or De'il (4),
Except when rabbits ate his kail.

Old Maunsie, little troubled with school,
Would work at random, not by rule,
But with or without plans he though
Would form the crue just like an "O".
And 'fore his neighbours rose a wall
To keep out sheep and creatures all,
And Maunsie, as inspired with hope,
Then clapped on the final cope; (5)
And, sowing seeds with ash combined (6),
He chewed the cud with kail in mind!

Old Maunsie's crue was fair to see,
A tower, a landmark at the sea.
When Nickie sailed out on the "haaf" (7),
He pointed with his "huggy-staff" (8),
"Now, Erty, keep her to the North,
With Maunsie's crue on Byre of Scord."
And when a schooner in the Sound
Had got herself turned right around,
Her skipper had but this to do,
To steer her straight for Maunsie's crue. (9)

More noted far than clock and chime,
Old Maunsie's crue proclaimed the time: (10)
Just as the sun rose o'er the crue,
Old Lowrie of the Liogue rose, too.
When o'er the crue the sun stood high,
The Setter cows came stalking by -
And folks their work would simply do,
Before it set behind the crue.
From Gaapaslap to Swartagert
All people were to that alert:
There was no hour among the twel'
But in some place a tongue would yell
To slowpoke legs and elbows, too:
"The sun is by Old Maunsie's crue!"

When Betty Bunt who lived in Virse
Was cutting reeds and ridgegrass furze,
Old Maunsie's crue below the sun
Said, "Home and set the dinner on!"
Now, if her hussy of a lass,
Ne'er heeding how the time would pass,



Sat purlin wi her lazy taes
 Among da ess, afore da aze,
 Shō'd stamp, wi sic an angry fit,
 "What! no a tautie washen yet?"
 An swear sic oaths baith sma an grit
 As weel micht mak a crö ta flit.
 "Hing on da kettle ida crook
 Or, troth, A'll flatten laek a fluke
 Dy sweery carcage whaur du sits!
 Gōd fegs! Du'll pit me by me wits!
 Da sorrow sead dee in his brö -
 Da sun is by Auld Maunsie's crö."

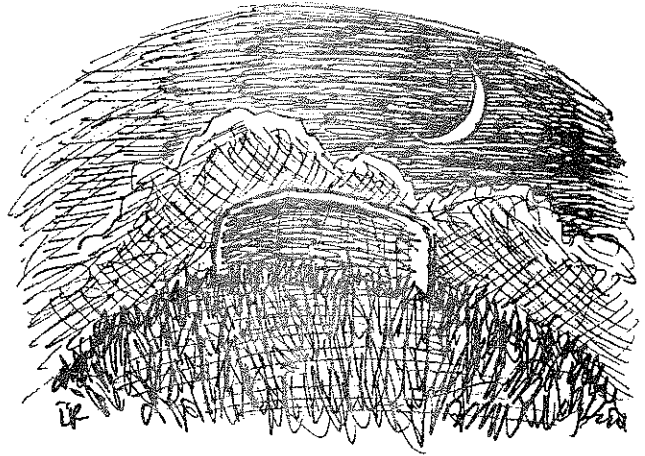
An whin at last da sun gaed doon,
 An, bricht an boanie, raise da mōn,
 Auld Elder Rasmie o da mill
 Grew restless as shō neared da hill,
 Gaed twar-tree casts aboot da floor,
 Dan, solemn, soucht agen da door,
 But never crossed his smuk da goit, -
 Jöst nose an nicht-kep gae a scoit,
 Fir shōre as A'm a sinner tō
 Da mōn wis heildin aff da crö!

So stappin inby i da neuk
 He haarled oot da muckle Beuk,
 Spread wide his naepkin ower his knees
 Ta keep da holy brods frae grease,
 Lickit his toom ta turn da laef,
 Said, "Lord, da baess hae got dir shaef,
 We look ta Dee, laek aalie sheep,
 Ta gie wis schowins frae da Deep."
 Da schapter read he bood him doon
 An prayed at He wha rules abōn,
 His haund roond dem an dīrs wid keep -
 Fir He wid wauk tho dey sood sleep -
 An gaird dir herts lack stocks o kale
 Fae dat black kyunnen ca'd da Deil,
 An staund a waa aroond dem tō
 Far shōrer dan Auld Maunsie's crö.

Part II

Whin winter skies gae ne'er a flame
 An lads wir linkin oot fae hame,
 Or whin da mists lay ower da hill
 Till raikin dogs wid even will,
 Auld Maunsie's crö, set on da heicht,
 Wid tell da rodd ta left or richt,
 An whin da snaw wis driftin deep
 Da crö was soucht by cruggin sheep,
 Whaur safe and snug dey'd buried lie
 Till fanns wir seoomed, or drifts wir by.

Whin simmer took cauld winter's place
 An aa da hills wir run wi baess,
 Here mares, an foals, an pellit röls
 Wid come at nicht ta mak der böls,
 An wheygs and calves wi "moo" an "mö"
 Wid bliss Auld Maunsie fir his crö.



Sat poking with her lazy feet
 Into the ashes, near the heat,
 She'd stamp, in such an angry fit,
 "What! No potatoes washed yet!"
 She'd swear and fair with fury spit,
 Which well might cause a crue to flit,
 "Hang up the kettle on the crook,
 Or, faith! I'll flatten like a fluke
 Your lazy carcass where it sits!
 Good God! You'll drive me from my wits!
 The Black One scald you with his broo -
 The sun is by Old Maunsie's crue!"

Then sunset came, and very soon
 So bright and bonnie rose the moon;
 Old Elder Rasmie in the mill (12)
 Grew restless as it neared the hill,
 He strode a bit about the floor,
 Then, solemn, sought again the door,
 But ne'er his slipper stepped out here,
 Just nose and nightcap did appear,
 For sure, as I'm a sinner, too,
 The moon was leaning o'er the crue!

So, stepping inside, in the nook (13),
 He struggled down the mighty book,
 Spread wide his napkin o'er his knees,
 To keep the holy boards from grease,
 His thumb he licked to turn the leaf,
 Said, "Lord, the cows have got their sheaf,
 We look to thee, like thine own sheep,
 To give us victuals from the Deep."
 The chapter read, he bent his knee,
 And prayed to Him who all can see,
 That He His hand round them would keep -
 For He would wake while they would sleep -
 And guard their hearts like stocks of kail
 From that black rabbit called the De'il,
 And be a wall around them, too,
 Far stronger than Old Maunsie's crue.

Part II

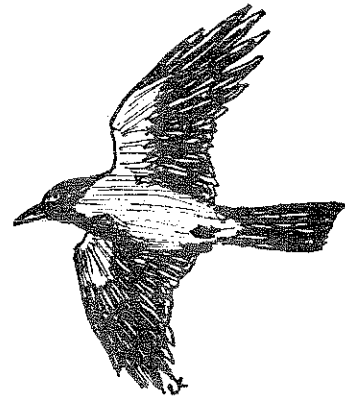
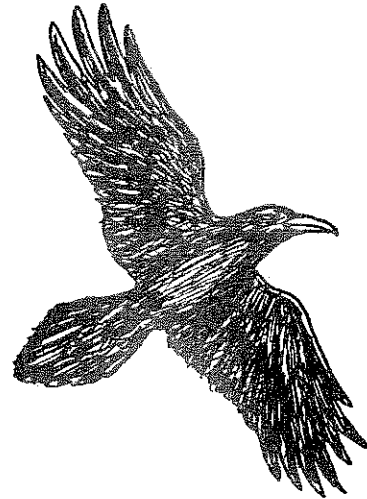
When winter skies gave ne'er a flame,
 And lads from home out romping came (14),
 Or when the mists o'er hillocks lay,
 So even dogs would lose their way,
 Old Maunsie's crue, set in the height,
 Would tell the road to left or right.
 And when the snow was drifting deep,
 The crue was sought by crouching sheep;
 There safe and snug they'd buried lie,
 Till drifts were cleared or blue the sky.

When summer took cold winter's place,
 And cattle filled the hilly space,
 Then mares and foals and colts for rest
 Would come at night to make their nest;
 And heifers, cows and calves with "moo"
 Would bless Old Maunsie for his crue.



At last, despite baith sheep an kale,
 Maunsie an his crö began ta fail.
 Time bood his rigg, an shöre his tap
 An laid his crö in mony a slap;
 Snug-shorded by his ain hert-stane
 He lost his senses een by een,
 Till lyn helpless laek a paet,
 Nor kale, nor mutton he could aet;
 So dee'd, as what we aa maun dö,
 Hae we, or hae we no, a crö.
 An strange ta tell, da nicht he dee'd,
 His crö, in raubin ta da steead,
 Laid stiff an stark his yearald rö,
 Aa mangted in a blödy bö;
 An sae da corbie, an da craw,
 At flapt der wings ower Maunsie's waa,
 Wi mony a "corp" and "caw" did say,
 A sowl wis flit fae aert dat day,
 Dan aff on roosty wings agen
 Ta hock da ro an tear his een.

Bit years gaed by as aye der geen,
 Da winter white da simmer green,
 Da voars aye sawn, da hairsts aye shorn,
 Aye some een dead, aye some een born;
 Auld Maunsie's name an fame wir spent,
 Bit still his crö-steead wis eart-kent.
 Bit, less! its name trowe time wis lost:
 Folk aye wir fey ta raise a ghost;
 So efter bein named by aa:
 "Da crö o him at's noo awa
 (Lord rest his sowl!)" - it cam ta geng
 By da föl name o "Ferry-ring."
 An so wi age an moss grown grey
 It waddered mony a heavy day,
 But o da waas at eence wir seen,
 Da mark an guide ta mony een,
 Deil stane wis left bit een or twa
 Upstaundin whaur hill-baess could claw.
 An later folk hed mair ta dö
 Dan mind Auld Maunsie or his crö.



Basil R. Anderson



At last, despite both sheep and kail,
 Old Maunsie and his crue would fail;
 Time bent his back and shore his top (15),
 And dealt his crue full many a chop;
 He was laid up, when almost gone,
 And lost his senses, one by one,
 Till, lying helpless like a peat,
 He could not kail, nor mutton eat.
 Then died, as all of us must do,
 Whether or not we have a crue.
 And, strange to tell, the night he died,
 His crue fell down, began to slide,
 And killed his yearling colt, alas!
 It lay there crushed, a bloody mass.
 And so the raven and the crow,
 Who o'er his wall flapped rather low,
 With many a "corp" and "caw" would say,
 A soul was taken up that day.
 Then off on restive wings each flies,
 To wreck the carcass, pick its eyes.

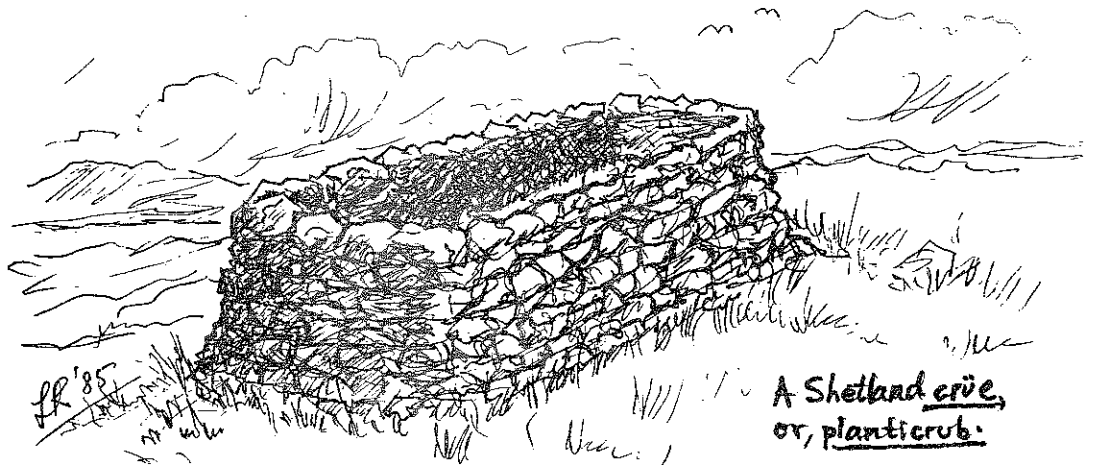
But years went by, some fat, some lean,
 The winters white, the summers green,
 The voars aye sown, the harvests shorn,
 E'er someone dead, e'er someone born.
 Gone was Old Maunsie's great renown,
 Though still his crue-stead was well known.
 Alas, its name in time was lost,
 Folks e'er are loath to raise a ghost;
 So, being named by everyone
 "The crue of him that now is gone (16),
 (Lord rests his soul!)" - it got the name
 of "Fairy Ring" - what foolish shame!
 And so with moss and age grown gray
 It weathered many a heavy day;
 But where the crue-walls once did rise,
 A mark and guide to many eyes,
 Now stands a stone, or two, besides,
 Where cattle stop to scratch their hides.
 And, later, folks had else to do
 Than mind Old Maunsie and his crue! (17)



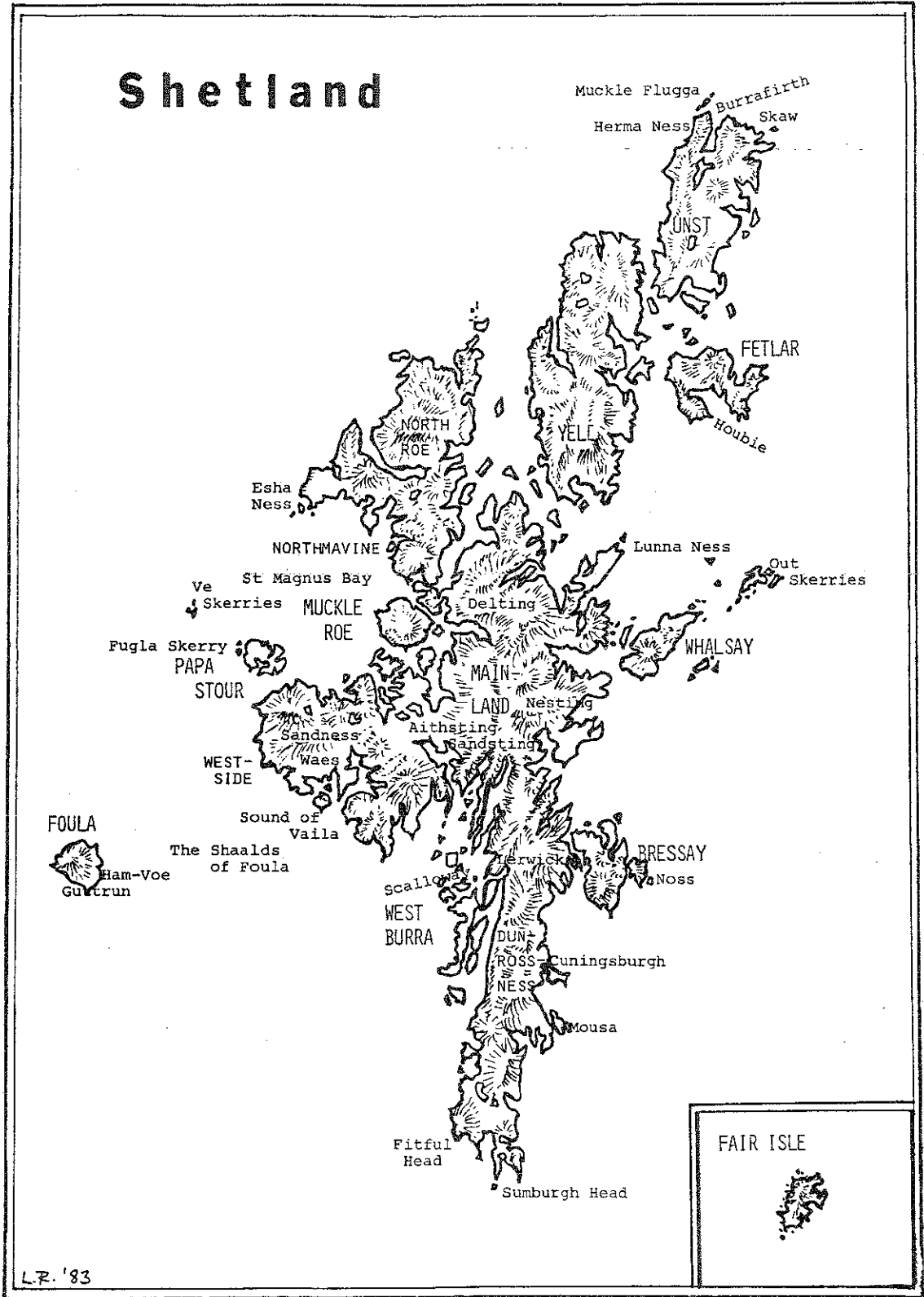
Basil R. Andersson

- 1) *crue* (or, *crü*, *crö*, from ON *krá*, "nook, corner"), is the name used in Unst for what elsewhere is called a *planti-crub*, a small enclosed nursery for cabbage plants, mostly surrounded by a stone-wall, which may rise to a height of 6 feet. It was never built high up on exposed hills, however, but rather "on the flattest part of the shore, close by the sea, where the frost is best avoided" (Fenton 1978:103).
- 2) *kail*, cabbage (Low Scots).
- 3) *broo*, broth, soup (Scots).
- 4) *De'il*, Devil (Scots).
- 5) *cope*, copestone, the final stone.
- 6) "Red peat ash was sometimes spread over the seed as a fertilizer." (Fenton 1978:104).
- 7) *haaf* (ON *haf*, the sea), sea or ocean; in Shetland it usually signifies the deep-sea fishing grounds.
- 8) *huggy-staff* (ON *höggstaf*, "beating-staff"), a gaff used to hook the fish from a net or a handline.

- 9) In Shetland the hill tops and prominent rocks and other landmarks have from time immemorial been used to navigate by in inshore sailing, even quite far out to sea.
- 10) Such landmarks also served as time-pieces in an era when clocks and watches were too dear for common people. When the sun was over some such landmark, it would be noon, or evening, or morning, and the crofters would know what to do.
- 11) The crook (or, hook) hung in a chain (the links) and there the pots, kettles or other cooking utensils were suspended over the open central fire in the old croft houses.
- 12) Rasmie is a church elder, a presbyter, i.e. an official of the local church.
- 13) "The nook" (or, "chimney nook") was the cosy place near the fire.
- 14) The reference to these "romping" boys is to courting, which was done in the wintertime, when there wasn't much to do on the farms anyway.
- 15) In Shetland to *shear* refers to harvesting, that is, to the cutting of corn or of hay, and not to the cutting of wool from the sheep. Wool is "rooed", that is, plucked from the sheep, when it is near falling off anyway.
- 16) In Shetland deceased people were rarely, if ever, mentioned by name - they were usually referred to in the way shown in the poem.
- 17) In modern Shetlandic to *mind* means to remember, so that if one says, "Minds du dat?" it means, "Do you remember that?" (Cf. Danish "Mindes du det?").



Shetland



Da Kokkilurie

Dey wir ee peerie white Kokkilurie at grew
 At da side o da lodberry waa;
 Hit wid open hits lips ta da moarnin dew,
 An close dem at night whin da caald wind blew,
 An rowe up hits frills in a peerie roond clew
 As white as da flukkra snaa.

Hit grew frae a clift o a caald grey stane
 At da göt o da celliar door,
 Hits head rekket up ta da shaarlpin,
 Sae't whinever I opened da door ta geng in
 I hed ta tak tent, fir I toucht hit a sin
 Ta brukkle da sweet ting o flooer.

Dey wir no a flooer bit hitsel ta be seen
 In aa da wide yard sae bare,
 No a peel o girse, or a blade o green;
 An hit got no da göd o da warm sunsheen,
 Fir dat aald grey waa rises up laek a screen
 Full twenty feet heich or mair.

Dey wir plenty o flooers i da parks ootby
 Whaar da air is open an free;
 Whin dey liftet der faces ta look at da sky,
 Or boo'd doon dir heads whin da wind wis high,
 Or böl'd i da girse whin da stoarm wis nigh,
 Dey wir truly a plaesir ta see.

Bit dis peerie moot, wi a look sae kind
 In hits patient, meeklaek ee,
 Hits tippet o kurkie an shaela combined,
 Hits sklender croopeen an fainly vynd,
 An always I toucht at hit pat me amind
 O dem at's awa frae me.

Oh, dis is a world o sorrow an sin,
 Whaar life in commotion is passed!
 Bit wi aa da vexation an aa da din,
 "The fightings without and the fears within,"
 An aabody kyempin wha heichest sall win,
 Death settles hit aa at last.

In October, ee nicht he cam on ta blaa
 Wi a odious tömald o rain,
 Da spöndrift cam in ower da aest sea waa
 An drave trowe da yard laek da moornin snaa;
 Neist moarnin my peerie white flooer wis awa,
 An never wis seen again.



James Stout Angus

The Daisy

There once was a little white daisy that grew
 Near the wall at the rock-quay below;
 It would open its lips to the morning dew
 And close them at night when the cold wind blew,
 Rolling its frills in a little round clew
 As white as the driven snow.

It grew in the greystone, from a cleft therein,
 At the cellar door's threshold so neat.
 Its head reached up to the hinge and its pin,
 So whenever I opened the door to get in
 I had to take care, for I thought it a sin
 To crumple the flower so sweet.

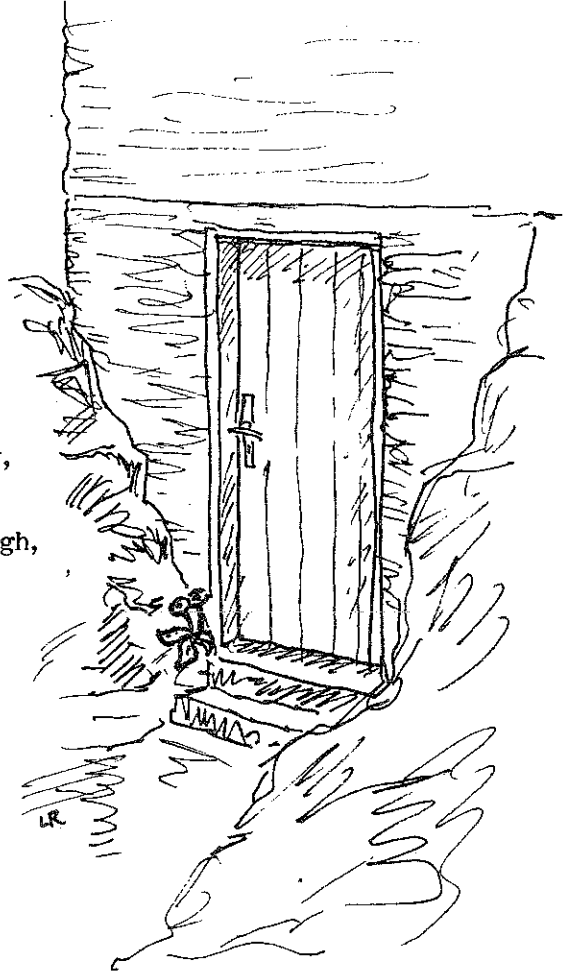
There was not a flower but this to be seen
 In all the wide yard so bare,
 Not a tuft of grass, nor a blade of green,
 And it got no sunshine in all that scene,
 For that gray old wall rises up like a screen,
 Full twenty feet high or mair. (1)

There were plenty of flowers in the parks nearby,
 Where the air is open and free;
 When they lifted their faces to look at the sky,
 Or bowed down their heads when the wind was high,
 Or hid in the grass when the storm was nigh,
 They were truly a pleasure to see.

But this tiny thing, with a look so kind
 In its patient and humble e'e (2),
 Its tippet of purple and hoarfrost combined,
 Its slender body and manner refined,
 I always felt that it could but remind
 Me of those who are lost to me.

Oh, this is a world of sorrow and sin,
 Where life in commotion is passed!
 But with all the vexation and all that din,
 The fightings without (3) and the fears within,
 Where the one that battles the hardest shall win,
 Death settles it all at last.

In October, one night there came down a squall
 With a terrible downpour of rain,
 The spindrift blew in o'er the eastern sea wall,
 And drove through the yard like the snowy fall,
 Next morning was gone my flower so small,
 And never was seen again.



James Stout Angus

-
- 1) *mair*, more.
 2) *e'e*, eye.
 3) *without*, outside (Scots usage).

Da Lad at wis Taen in Voar

O Sailors at sail da sea,
 Far nort at da Labrador,
 Or oot whaar da icy barbers flee,
 Aboot Greenland's frozen shore;
 O tell me, an tell me true -
 Bit A'm no tinkin ye wid lee -
 Ir ye ever seen ocht o my boanie young laad
 At wis hustled awa frae me.

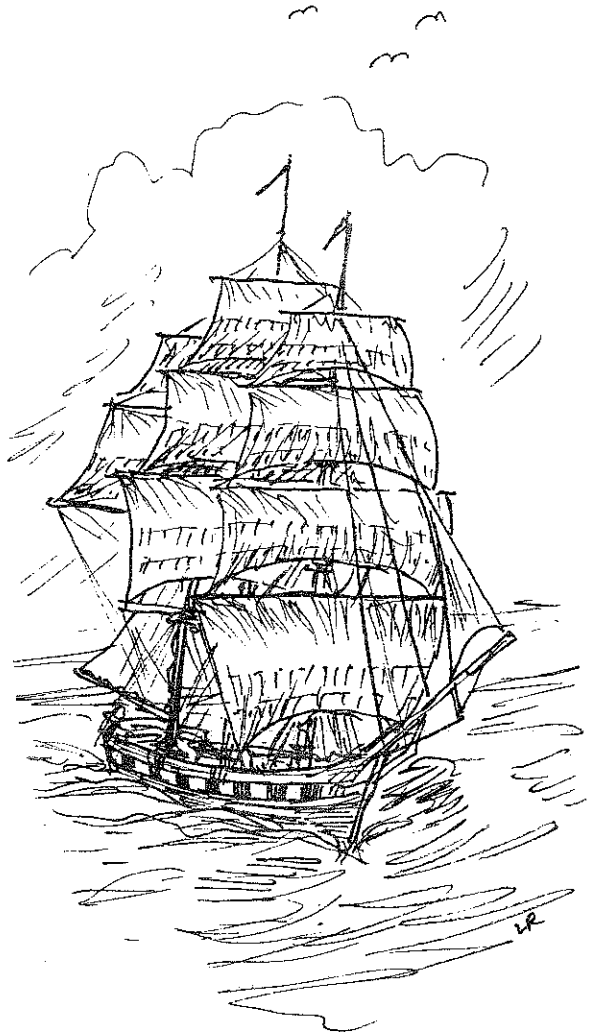
Hit wis i da first o da voar
 Wi da towe o da hidmist snaa,
 Whin a ship cam sailin in ta wir shore
 Frae some place far awa;
 I sat at da window dat day,
 An I stöd i da open door,
 An I heard da rinkle o her iron shain,
 Shö anchored dat near da shore;

An shö sent a boat ashore -
 Dey laanded doon at da Hwi -
 An every man hed a glitterin gun,
 An a swird apon his tigh;
 An dey took my laad awa
 Frae his faeder an midder an me,
 An dan dey hystit der sheenin sails
 An sailed awa ta da sea,

O sailors at sail da sea,
 Far sooth whar da sun is high,
 Ye shörly see mony a boanie laand
 Whin ye geng sailin by.
 O tell me, an tell me true,
 Whinever ye göd ta da shore,
 Saw ye onything dere o my boanie young laad,
 At wis taen i da first o da voar?

Der twa men in love wi me,
 Baith gödly an weel ta dö,
 Dey hae hooses an fairms an boats at da sea,
 An sheep inta mony a crö.
 Dey gie me da time o da day,
 Sae kindly whin dey geng by;
 Bit dey look, an dey smile, and dey winder at me,
 'Cas I mak dem nae reply.
 O sailors, at sail da sea,

Far aest at da world's rim,
 Or up trowe some unkan midland sea,
 Or wast at da day-set dim,
 O tell me, an tell me true,
 If ever ye happen ta see
 Or meet wi, ta speak til, my boanie young laad,
 Will ye tell him dis wurd frae me:
 At A'm livin, an lippenin, an still hae a hoop
 At A'll see him afore I dee.



James Stout Angus

The Lad that was Taken in Voar (1)

O sailors who sail the sea
 Far north up to Labrador,
 Or out where the icy blizzards flee
 Around Greenland's frozen shore,
 O tell me and tell me true -
 Ye would hardly lie, would ye?
 Have ye ever seen aught of my bonnie young lad,
 Who was hustled away from me?

It was in the early days of voar,
 As the snow was melting away;
 A ship came sailing near to our shore,
 From afar it came to our bay;
 I sat at the window that very day
 And went out to stand at the door
 When I heard the clanks of her iron chain,
 She anchored that near the shore.

And then they sent a whaleboat ashore -
 They landed down at the sty -
 A glittering gun had every man
 And a sword upon his thigh;
 Then they took my lad away
 From his father, his mother and me,
 Whereafter they hoisted their bright, white sails
 And set their course for the sea.

O sailors that sail the sea
 Far south where the sun is high,
 So many a bonnie land ye see,
 As ye go sailing by;
 O tell me and tell me true -
 Whenever ye might go ashore,
 Did ever ye see my bonnie young lad,
 Who was taken early in voar?

There are now two men in love with me,
 Both kindly and well-to-do,
 They own houses and farms and boats at sea,
 An sheep inside many a crue. (2)
 They greet me with courteous words
 So kindly when they pass by,
 But they look and they smile and wonder at me,
 'Cause I give them no reply -
 O sailors that sail the sea,

Far to the east, at the earthly rim,
 Or over some unbeknownst sea,
 Or far to the west, where the day grows dim,
 O tell me and tell me true -
 If it ever should happen to ye
 To meet or to speak to my bonnie young lad,
 Will ye give him this word from me:
 That I am alive and wait with the hope
 To see him before I dee! (3)



James Stout Angus

-
- 1) voar, spring (ON vor).
 2) crue, sheep pen (ON krá, nook, corner).
 3) dee, die (Low Scots).

Da Last Noost

A sang, anidder sang, ye say,
 An if it be da last,
 Need I be wae? A'm hed my day,
 An noo dat day is past.
 My day is dōne, what need I care?
 A'm hed him foul, A'm hed him fair;
 An sae, aald boat, fir dee an me
 Nae mair, nae mair, da heavin sea.

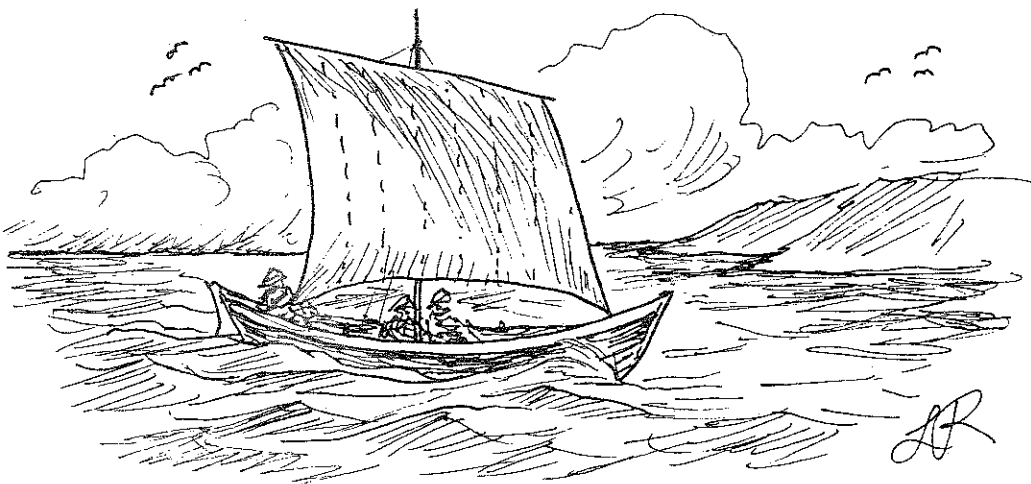
Du wis a boat o boats da best,
 Trowe mony a storm we drave;
 Noo in da Noost, du taks da rest
 We never mair will laeve.
 Last haven, freend, fir dee an me,
 Fir we're crossed ower Life's changin sea;
 We set oot wi nae little trust,
 An noo it ends in dael an dust.

Whin dee an me, dat day in June,
 Broucht hame my boanie bride,
 My hert sang oot a blyde, blyde tune,
 Du danced apo da tide.
 Ah! Life an Love wis young, an den
 I hed a happy but an ben;
 Du wis my pride apo da sea,
 An shō wis da very hert o me.

Dan cam a day o dōle an care,
 Da lift abōn wis lead -
 Across da dreary sea we bare
 Ta her last hame my dead.
 My fecht is ower wi wind and wave,
 Da Noost is noo da quiet grave;
 An sae, aald boat, fir dee an me,
 Nae mair, nae mair, da heavin sea!



Laurence J. Nicolson



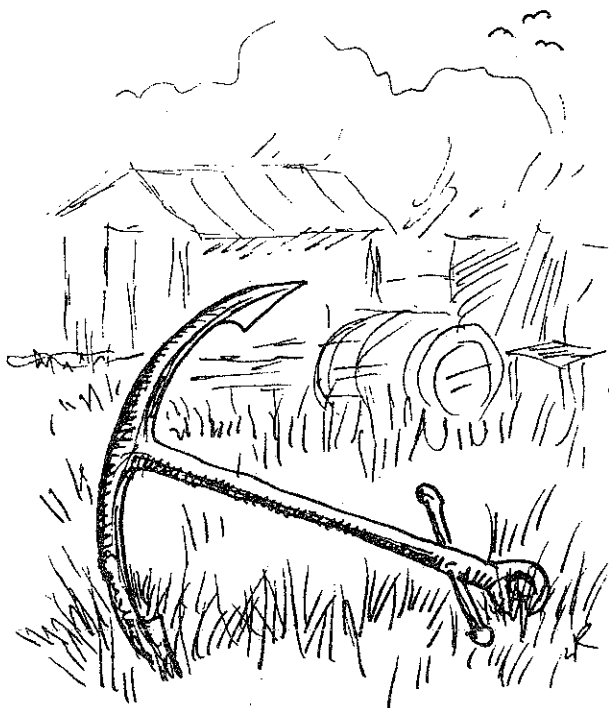
The Last Noost (1)

A song, another song, you say,
 And if it be the last,
 Need I be sad? I've had my day,
 And now that day is past.
 My days are done, what need I care?
 I've seen them foul, I've seen them fair;
 And so, old boat, for you and me
 No more, no more, the heaving sea.

You were a boat, of boats the best,
 Through many a storm we drave,
 Now in your noost, you take your rest,
 No more we'll ride the wave.
 Last haven, friend, for you and me,
 For we have crossed Life's changing sea;
 We set out with no little trust,
 And now it ends in deal (2) and dust.

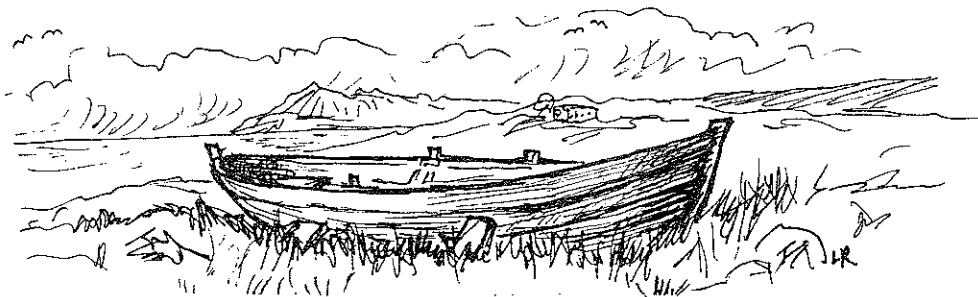
When you and me, that day in June,
 Brought home my bonnie bride,
 My heart sang out a happy tune,
 You danced upon the tide.
 Ah! Life and Love were young, and then
 I had a happy but-and-ben (3);
 You were my pride upon the sea,
 And she the very heart of me.

Then came the day of döle-and-care (4),
 The air above was lead -
 Across the dreary sea we bare
 To her last home my dead.
 My fight is o'er with wind and wave,
 The noost is now the quiet grave;
 And so, old boat, for you and me
 No more, no more, the heaving sea!



Laurence J. Nicolson

-
- 1) *noost*, ON *naust*, resting place (or, shed) for boats.
 - 2) *deal*, planks, here in the sense of loose planks, as the old boat slowly deteriorates.
 - 3) *but-and-ben*; here in the sense, "a home". The but and ben are the two rooms of an old-style croft house in Shetland (but = be-out, the outer or front room; ben = be-in, the inner room).
 - 4) *döle-and-care*, Scots for "sorrow and grief".



Shetlan

Du may waander on fir ever,
 An seek idder laands dee lane,
 Bit someday du'll come driftin
 Ta da laand o laands agen.
 Shō's a laand o faeries dancin
 In a ring o snaa-white scöm,
 Whaar da grit, grey sea lies skulkin
 I' da dim, saft simmer höm.

Dere, A'm pluckin kokkiluries,
 An gadderin paddick-stöls,
 Or guddlin tricky skeeticks
 I'da clear saat-watter pöls;
 A'm rickin peerie sillicks
 Wi a preen an dockin-waand,
 Or pokin efter smislins
 I'da ebb-stanes i'da saand.

Shō's a laand whaar winter's souchin
 Trowe da spöndrift an da squaal,
 An da smorin mooricaavie
 Fills da Nort-wind's oobin waal.

Dere, I look alang da tide-line
 Among da tang an waar,
 Fir baarrel-scows, an battens,
 An bits o brokken spar:
 Fir da muckle seas is brakkin
 In stoor laek clouds o snaa,
 An der tales o vessels wrackin,
 Wi dir saills aa blawn awa.

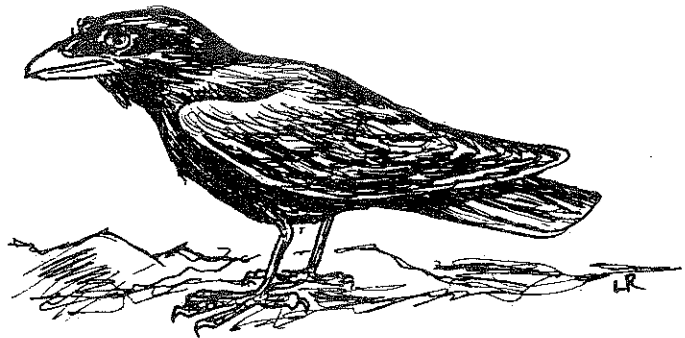
**HJALTLAND**

John Peterson

Da Corbie

Supraeme sits he,
 His fedders prinkin,
 Sun-bricht,
 Ita da grit sun's glinkin,

A lowin flame
 Wi black een blinkin -
 Nor deevil een
 Keens what he's tinkin!



John Peterson

Shetland

You may wander on for ever,
 Seeking other lands with yen;
 But some day you will come drifting
 To the land of lands again.
 It's a land af fairies dancing
 In a ring af snow-white foam,
 Where the great grey sea is lurking
 In the dim, soft summer gloam!

There I'm plucking lovely daisies,
 And I'm gathering toady-stools,
 Or, the squids I will be teasing
 In the clear and salty pools.
 I am catching half-grown coalfish
 With a pin and dockweed-wand,
 Or for shellfish I'll be poking
 At the ebb-stones, in the sand.

It's a land where winter's sighing
 Through the spindrift and the squalls,
 And the blinding snowfall's drifting
 Fills the north-wind's moaning calls.

There, I search among the seaweed
 And the ware, both near and far,
 For some barrel-staves and battens,
 And for bits of broken spar.
 For the mighty seas are bracking (1)
 Into flying clouds of spray,
 And there's word of vessels wracking, (2)
 With their sails all blown away.



John Peterson

-
- 1) *bracking*, breaking (Scots)
 2) *wracking*, becoming wrecked.

The Raven

Supreme sits he,
 His feathers prinking,
 Sun-bright
 In the great sun's glinking. (1)

A blazing flame,
 His black eyes blinking -
 No devil knows
 What he is thinking!



Huginn
 and
 Muninn

John Peterson

-
- 1) *glinking*, Scots for glinting, gleaming.

Bonn Hoga

Wir peerie hoose strae tekkit staands
 An' ljuiks oot ower de sea,
 Sweet willims grow beside de door
 'At haes nae bar or key.

A lowin fire on wir hert-stane
 Ne'er slokkit nicht or day,
 Juist constant laek de wilcome geen
 To aa' 'at passed wir way.

De solemn clock hings on de waa'
 Oot by de restin shair,
 De boannie lame sheens in de rack
 Abüne de table bare.

Afore de door de auld brig-stanes
 Is brokken noo an' woarn,
 But oh de joy 'at fills me hert
 Whanever I return.

For hame is hame, nae place sae dear
 Or boannie is ta me
 As wir strae tekkit peerie hoose
 'At ljuiks oot ower de sea.



Jane Saxby

Da Storehoose

Da haeds o wir laand say supply an demaand
 Is somethin we aye sood be heedin;
 Noo supply, I wid say, is da stuffs 'at we hae,
 An demaand, da things 'at we're needin.

An if we look roond, we'll see, I'll be boond,
 Foo touchfil is been da Creator;
 He's pirvided a stock ta saer aa da folk,
 An it's dere i da storehoose o Naiter.

Der somethin for aa, da grit an da smaa,
 An naethin 'at seems ta be wantin;
 Dan why sood it be 'at we baid hear and see,
 'At bairns ir staervin an fantin?

Yea, bi mi sang, der somethin geen wrang,
 An da grittest mistak seems ta be;
 Though da storehoose is foo, it's only da few
 'At hae da comaand o da key.



John Nicolson

IN MEMORIAM J.J. HALDANE BURGESS, M.A. (died 15th January, 1927)

R AREST o neebors, du's a sad miss fae Scranna,
A NIDDER may com, bit fill dy place dey canna.
S OCIABLE, giftit, an a hert 'at cood feel,
M ONY a sair wassle hed du wi da deil
I DA shape o oonjustice, bit de we aye fann
E VER true ta da caase o da pör wirkin man.

John Nicolson

Bonn Hoga ("Child's Pasture")

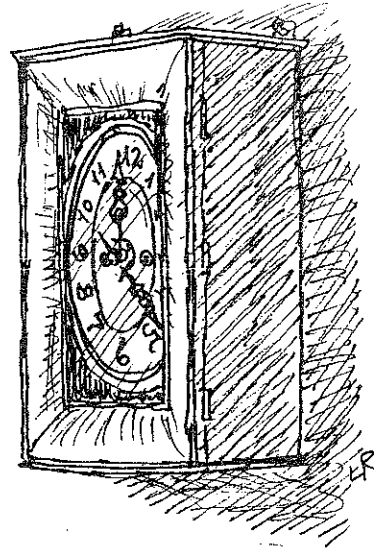
Our little house straw-thatched stands
 And looks out o'er the sea,
 Sweet-Williams grow beside the door,
 That has no bar or key.

A blazing fire on our hearth-stone
 Ne'er dies, by night or day.
 It's constant like the welcome given
 To all that pass our way.

The solemn clock hangs on the wall
 Near to the resting-chair,
 The bonnie crocks gleam in the rack
 Above the table bare.

Before the door the flagstones now
 Are broken down and worn,
 But oh the joy that fills my heart
 Whenever I return.

For home is home, no place so dear
 Or bonnie is to me,
 As our straw-thatched little house
 That looks out o'er the sea.



Jane Saxby

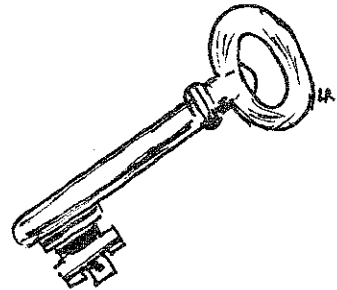
The Storehouse

The heads of our land say supply and demand
 Are things that we aye should be heeding;
 Now, supply, I would say, is the goods that we ha'e,
 And demand all the things we are needing.

And looking around, we'll see, I'll be bound,
 How thoughtful has been the Creator:
 He's provided a stock, to serve all the flock,
 It's there in the storehouse of Nature.

There is something for all, the great and the small,
 And nothing is lacking or failing:
 Then why should it be, that we both hear and see,
 That children are starving and ailing?

Said with words rather strong, it is all going wrong,
 And the worst of it all seems to be,
 That the store overflows, but only for those
 Very few, who have taken the key.



John Nicolson

IN MEMORIAM J.J. HALDANE BURGESS († Jan. 15th, 1927)

Rarest of neighbours, you're a sad miss from Seranna.
Another may come, but replace you he canno'.
Sociable, gifted, with a heart that could feel,
Many a joust you have fought with the De'il
In the shape of injustice, you fought in the van,
Ever true to the cause of the poor working man.

John Nicolson

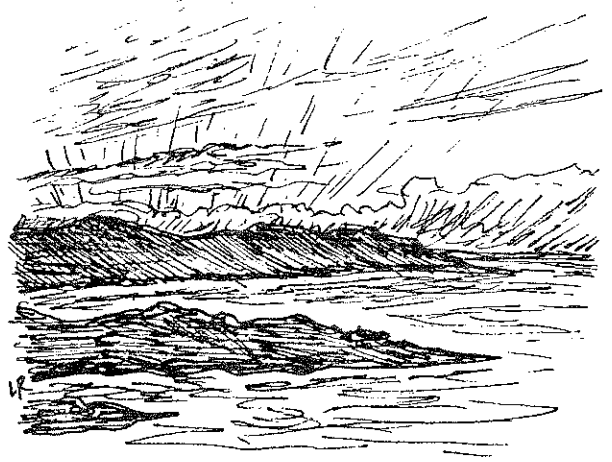
Isles Asleep

Da wind faan tired begins ta neeb,
 An sighs awa ta sleep,
 Da sea smooths oot his toosled bed,
 Sae saft an wide an deep.

Da weary sun fae his gowlden kyist
 Oonfalds his coloured goon,
 An quietly draas da coortins roond
 Afore he lays him doon.

Da tired aald hills boo doon dir heads,
 Dir baerds aboot dir knees,
 An da peerie cloods, lang soond asleep,
 Lie cuddled, twas an trees.

Aald Midder Mön hings up her lamp
 Ta be a gairdian licht
 'Nless een o her sleepin bairns
 Sood waakin i da nicht.



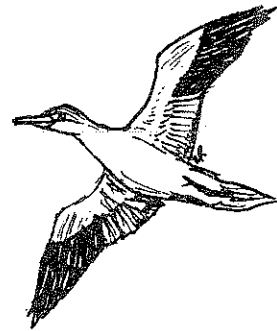
Emily Milne

Winter Comes In

Grey dawn brakkin ower troubled watters,
 Da Soond laek a burn, wi da rip o da tide;
 Da Mull, black an grim, i da first o da daylight
 Wi da sea brakkin white on his nortmost side.

Yowes kruggin closs i da lee o a daek-end,
 Creepin frae a chill at bites ta da bon.
 Solan an scarf aa wirkin inshore,
 A sign at da best o da wadder is dōn.

Hail sheetin doon wi a nort wind ahint it,
 Blottin oot laand an sea frae da scene.
 An iron coortin closin ower aa thing:
 Winter has come ta da islands ageen.

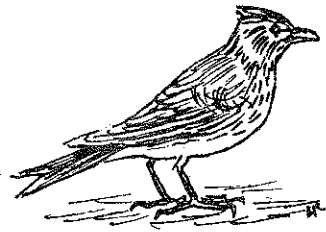


Jack Renwick

Spring

Come, Laverick, noo, an clear dy pretty trot
 An sing, an sing until du's laek ta spret,
 Fir Spring is come, an life tifts ida grund;
 We're blyde ta see cauld winter tak da gaet.

Yea! Laith be's he ta slip his wintry grip
 Even toh dry tautie-möld turns ower laek ess.
 Bit Spring is come at last ta quiet his reel,
 An kōsh him furt an key his muckie press.



Stewart Smith

Isles Asleep

The wind, now tired, begins to nod
 And sighs away to sleep,
 The sea smooths out his tussled bed,
 So soft and wide and deep.

The weary sun from her golden chest
 Unfolds her coloured gown,
 And quietly draws the curtains round
 Before she snuggles down.

The tired old hills bow down their heads,
 Their beards around their knees,
 And tiny clouds, long sound asleep,
 Lie cuddled by twos and threes.

Old Mother Moon hangs up her lamp
 To be a guardian light,
 If any of her sleeping bairns
 Should wake up in the night.



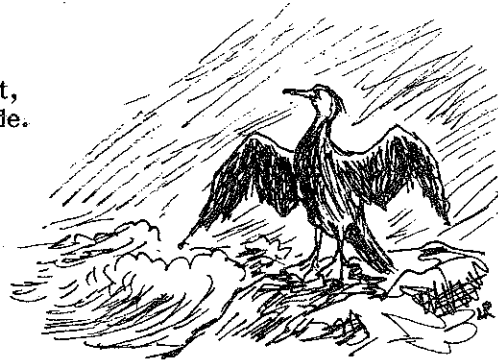
Emily Milne

Winter Comes In

Grey dawn breaking over troubled waters,
 The Sound like a brook, with the race of the tide;
 The Mull, black and grim, in the first of the daylight,
 With the sea breaking white on the northernmost side.

Ewes sheltering close in the lee of the dyke-end,
 Creeping from a chill that bites to the bone.
 Gannets and shags all working inshore,
 A sign that the best of the weather is gone.

Hail sheeting down with a north wind behind it,
 Blotting out land and sea from the scene.
 An iron curtain o'er all things is closing:
 Winter has come to the isles again.



Jack Renwick

Spring

Come, skylark, now, and clear your pretty throat!
 And sing, burst out in song against the sky,
 For spring has come, life throbs in all the ground,
 We're glad to see King Winter say goodbye.

Yea! Loath is he to slip his wintry grip,
 Though dry potato-mould like ash is turning o'er.
 But Spring has come at last to quiet him down,
 To throw him out, and lock to him the door.



Stewart Smith

By-Pass (1949)

I walk wi my back ta da moen
 Doon da stroadie at rins
 Bi da by-pass rod.
 Dir flags led for da fit
 Bit da frush o girss,
 Laek oakum oagin its wy
 Oot o gaizened saims,
 Shaas little boet-leddir is lost
 On dir hard hides
 An few feet bit my ain
 As foelish as follow
 A gaet gyaain nae wy
 An gyaain dere strecht.

Noo an dan dir a rod
 At rins aff, an da flagstanes
 At flank hit, I warran,
 Ir slycht an smooth at da joins;
 For da peerier gaets
 At taise aff, left an rycht,
 Aa end in a goit
 Wi a lycht ower a door
 An a tin bit a gaaze
 Ower a window's gloed
 Whaar a haid turns or boos:
 Or da rod itsel curls
 Roond a lychtsom howf
 At shines trow da laives
 Laek a hairst moenrise,
 Wi a brod on a post bi da door
 Sayin: "Come your wys in";
 Or, upatoh maybe,
 Da rod waanders awa
 Whaar a tree hings lack a clood
 An a spire is a shedow
 At faas on da staars,
 An at da coarner
 A lass an a boy
 Wi da moen ta demsels.

Bit da moen shines da nycht
 Ower da Staney Hill
 An da staars skyle doon
 Apo Bressa Soond
 An I walk wi my back ta da moen
 Doon a hard strecht rod
 An for staars I hae street lamps
 As da rod pines awa,
 Laek ebb-whaaps new-lifted
 An frozen i da air.



William J. Tait

By-Pass

I walk with my back to the moon
 Down the pathway that runs
 By the by-pass road,
 Flagstones are laid for the feet,
 But the growth of grass,
 Creeping forth like oakum
 Out of shrunken seams,
 Shows that little boot-leather is lost
 On their hard hides,
 And few feet but mine
 Do foolishly follow
 A path going nowhere
 And going there straight.

Now and then there's a road
 Branching off and the flagstones
 That flank it, I warrant,
 Are even and smooth at the joints;
 For the smaller paths
 That diverge left and right
 All end at a threshold
 With a light o'er the door
 And a thin bit of gauze
 O'er the window's glow
 Where a head turns or bows;
 Or the road itself curls
 Round a pleasant resort
 Which shines through the leaves
 Like an autumn moonrise,
 With a sign by the door,
 Saying, "Please come inside";
 Or at last maybe,
 The road wanders off
 Where a tree hangs like a cloud
 And a spire is a shadow
 That falls on the stars,
 And at the corner
 A lass and a lad
 With the moon to themselves.

But the moon shines tonight
 O'er the Staney Hill (1),
 And the stars look askance
 Down on Bressay Sound (2),
 As I walk with my back to the moon
 Down a hard, straight road,
 And for stars I have street lamps
 As the road pines away,
 Like curlews just raised
 And frozen in the air.



William J. Tait

-
- 1) Staney Hill lies west of Lerwick, overlooking the town.
 - 2) Bressay Sound is the sound at which Lerwick was built; it is to the east of the town.

Shetlanrie

Some döсна lack wir dialect an dis is what dey say:
 "We ocht ta dö awa wi it - hit's truly hed its day.
 An hit's no wirt a boddie's while ta speak it, onywye:
 Hit's brokken English, brokken Scots, an idder bruk firbye."

Dis view I döнна favour, an der wan thing very clear,
 We're hed dis Shetlan dialect fir twartree hunder year;
 An if you geng ta study it, A'm shöre at you'll agree
 Der Norn wirds atil it, jöst as plain as dey can be.

Noo, if a boat you mention, dan der mony a Norn name
 Fae da tilfers ida boddim, ta da stamreen at da stem.
 An hit's Norn wirds you're spaekin whin you wirk ita da hill
 Wi da tushkar at you cast wi an da kishie at you fill.

An you couldna dö withoot dem whin you're scrapin möldiebletts,
 Or aandooin fir piltiks roond da baas an at da kletts;
 Ya, da Norn still is wi wis, an hit's waddered mony a baff -
 We öse it still apo da laand an fram apo da haaf.

Der little doot da dialect haes loks a English wirds,
 An if you look fir Scots eens, dan you fin dem dere in mirds.
 An I winder wha could tell me if der onything at's wrang
 Wi wirds at Scott wret mony a time an Robbie Burns sang.

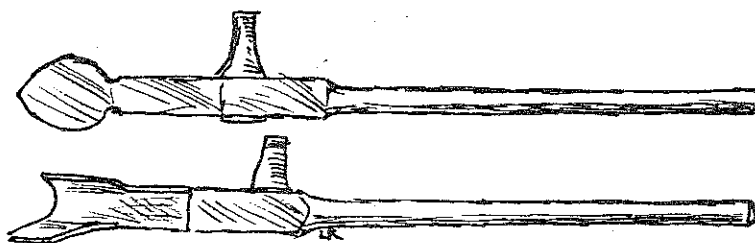
An as fir brokken English, dey wid laekly less be said
 About it if dey tocht what wye da English speech wis med.
 What is dis English, onywye? Dey took da wirds dey fan
 In Latin, Greek, an idder tungs, an altered every wan.

Der naethin wrang wi dat, you kyin, what sood dey idder dö?
 Bit if dey altered Latin we can alter English tö.
 Da English is a aacht ta hae whin you're awa fae haem;
 You haeta meet wi uncan folk an you maan spaek wi dem.

Bit here ita da Isles hit's laek a pair o Sunday shön,
 Ower weel ta pit apo you whin your daily wark is döne;
 Dey're no what you'd be wearin ta geng buksin trowe a mire,
 Or rowin oot apo da voe, or kyerryin fae da byre.

Sae ony een at wants can knap as muckle as dey laek,
 Bit lat wis keep da Shetlan wirds at we're bön wint ta spaek.
 Dey're maybe no perskeet, you kyin, dey're maybe haem-aboot,
 Bit what we're aalwis hed we widna laek ta dö withoot.

T.A. Robertson (Vagaland)



Shetlanrie (1)

Some do not like our dialect and this is what they say:
 "We ought to do away with it - it's truly had its day!
 And it's not worthwhile speaking it, it nowhere really fits,
 It's broken English, broken Scots, and other broken bits!"

This view I do not favour, let me speak this in your ears:
 We've had this Shetland dialect for two-three hundred years;
 And if you but will study it, I'm sure you will agree,
 That Norn (2) words still are found therein, as plain as they can be.

Now, if a boat you mention, then there's many a Norn name,
 From the "tilfers" (3) in the bottom to the "stamreen" (4) at the stem,
 And Norn it is you're speaking when you labour in the hill,
 With the "tushkar" (5) that you dig with and the "kishie" (6) that you fill.

And you cannot do without them when you're scraping "möldiebletts", (7)
 Or "aandooin" (8) for "piltiks" (9) round the "baas" (10) and at the "kletts". (11)
 The Norn we still have with us, it has weathered many a "baff", (12)
 You use it still upon the land and "fram" (13) upon the "haaf". (14)

There is little doubt the dialect has lots of English words,
 And if you look for Scots ones, you'll find them there in "mirds". (15)
 But I wonder who could tell me what is really very wrong
 With words that Scott wrote often and which Burns put into song?

And as for broken English, there would likely less be said,
 If people knew in detail how the English speech was made.
 But what is English, anyway? They just took words they found
 In Latin, Greek and other tongues, and altered every sound.

There's nothing wrong with that, you know, they nothing else could do.
 But if they altered Latin, we may alter English, too.
 It is good to know some English when one has to go away
 To meet with unknown folks abroad, thus knowing what to say.

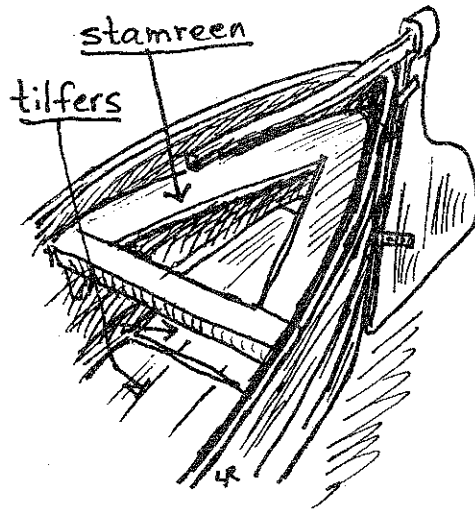
But here, in our own islands, it is like the Sunday "shoon", (16)
 To put such on when work is o'er we think of as a boon,
 But you would not be wearing them when tramping through the mire,
 Or rowing out the "voe" (17), or when cleaning out the byre.



So, those who really want it, may just e'er to English seek,
 But let us keep the Shetland words that we are used to speak.
 Maybe they are not perfect but a little "haem-about", (18)
 But what we've always had to use, we will not do without.

T.A. Robertson (Vagaland)

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- 1) The poet's own note to the title goes like this: "SHETLANRIE - After the Norman Conquest English was considered to be an inferior language. However, in 1362, the Law of Englishrie was passed, after which English displaced Norman-French as the official language."
 No doubt he has something similar in mind for his beloved dialect, but thus far no law of this kind has been passed for Shetland.
 - 2) *Norn* is the name of the old dialect of Shetland, contracted from ON *norræn*, i.e., "northern", the name used for the West Norse language in Iceland and Norway since the 13th century. Norn was spoken long after the passing of Shetland into Scottish hands (1469), and did not die out entirely until in the latter half of the 19th century.
 - 3) *tilfers*, ON *pilfar*, deck of a ship; in ModSh loose bottom boards in a rowing or sailing boat.
 - 4) *stamreen*, ON *stafnröng*, knee-timber in the stem of a boat; it has the same meaning in ModSh.
 - 5) *tushkar*, ON *torfskeri*, "peat-cutter", a special peat spade used in Shetland (also in Orkney and in the Faeroe Islands).

- 6) *kishie*, ON *kassi*, "box", a straw basket usually employed for carrying peats.
- 7) *möldiebletts*, ON *moldarbléttir*, "soil spots", bare spots in a field, with no vegetation. In ModSh used about bare spots where peat mold has been taken.
- 8) *aandoin*, ON *andæfa*, to keep a boat in position against wind and wave, by rowing slowly.
- 9) *piltiks*, ON *piltungar*, "boys", used about young coal-fish, which are usually caught from small boats "aandoin" near the shore.
- 10) *baas*, ON *boði* (-ar), hidden rocks in the sea whose existence is revealed by the breaking of waves over them.
- 11) *kletts*, ON *klettur*, rocks (mostly near or in the sea).
- 12) *baff*, Low Scots, "beating" or "stroke".
- 13) *fram*, ON *fram*, "far out", forward, in ModSh mostly used to refer to the deep sea fishing grounds far away from land.
- 14) *haaf*, ON *haf*, sea, ocean; retained in ModSh about the sea far from land and the fishing grounds out there.
- 15) *mirds*, Low Scots for myriads.
- 16) *shoon*, Low Scots for shoes.
- 17) *voe*, ON *vágr* (Icel *vogur*), a narrow inlet of the sea, a fiord or bay. Shetland is characterized by such voes.
- 18) *haem-about*, from ON *heim*, "home", and Sco-En "about" (*about* in the original), homely, not sophisticated in the eyes of the outsiders.



Word	Where heard	Meaning or use
a'	n Br. Sa. Fo.	all; the lot; one's world
aacht	n Br. Sa. Fo.	something possessed which is of great value, or highly thought of
aáber	adj Br. Sa. Fo.	eager; keen; jealous
aándu	v Br. Sa. Fo.	To row gently
aaslo	n Br. Sa.	money given to bind a contract or engagement of employment
ádnaseid ⁿ	Fo.	a two year old (female) sheep
aers	n Br. Sa. Fo.	ears
aesle	n Br. Sa. Fo.	a big fire
aess	n Br. Sa. Fo.	ashes
aéssibrod	n Br. Sa. Fo.	A wooden board or shovel for raking back ashes 
aekers	n Br. Sa. Fo.	ears of corn (Scotch) <small>of Burns a famous writer in a poem</small>
aéshins	n Br. Fo.	The wall head
aessie-bakkit	n Br. Fo.	A wooden box for ashes 
áffbend	v Br. Sa. Fo.	To disconned (take up) tackle
áff-biddin'	adj Br. Sa. Fo.	repulsive; cold; reserved

The above is page 1 of *Shetland Dialect Words, As Heard in Bressay, Sandwick, and Foula, 1934-1944*, by the native schoolteacher Mrs Elizabeth J. Smith (mother of the poet Stella Sutherland, and herself a poet and very able writer). About half of the words are of Norn origin: (1) aáber, ON apr, "keen, sharp"; (2) aándu, ON andæfa, "to row against wind and tide"; (3) ádnaseid ON annars vetrar, "of the second winter"; (4) aeshins, No æsing, "inner roof-beam"; (5) áffbend, ON afbenda, "remove, take off"; (6) áff-biddin', ON afbjóðandi, "repulsive".



A Skyinbow o Tammy's

("While you sat and played toccatas, stately at the clavichord." - Robert Browning).

Oh, man, Tammy, dis is vexin,
 hearin what du haes ta say;
 Boy, I tink du'll tak da fiddle -
 I wid laek ta hear dee play
 As du played at rants an haemfirs
 mony a time afore dis day.

Yun's "Da Mirry Boys o Greenland",
 bit da Greenland men is geen;
 "Underhill", fae first I heard him
 mony a heavy day A'm seen.
 Whin du plays "Auld Swaara" ta me,
 boy, da taers comes ta my een.

Minds du, whin we baith wir younger,
 foo I ösed ta sit an look
 At da muckle yatlin kyettle
 hingin rampin ida crook,
 An du played dy liechtsome skyinbows
 inbee at da shimly-neuk.

"Dat's aa geen noo" - Ya, I kyin it;
 mony a thing is geen fir aa.
 Nooadays der very little
 o da aald wyes left ava.
 Tinks du, wid da folk be better
 if dey cöst da rest awa?

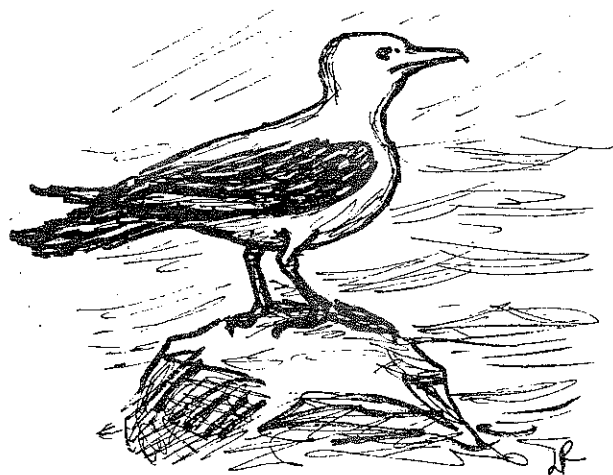
Trowe wir minds wir ain aald language
 still keeps rinnin laek a tön;
 Laek da laverik ida hömin,
 sheerlin whin da day is döne;
 Laek da seich o wind trowe coarn
 at da risin o da mön.

Hit's da skriechin o da swaabie,
 an da kurrip o da craa,
 An da bulder a da water
 in aboot da brakkin baa;
 Hit's da dunder o da Nort wind
 whin he brings da moorin snaa.

Hit's da soond da sheep maks nyaarmin
 whin you caa dem on afore,
 An da noise o hens, aa claagin,
 layin Paece-eggs ida voar;
 An da galder at da dug gies,
 whin a pik comes ta da door.

Wirds laek Freddie Stickle's music
 whin he played "Da Trowie Burn",
 Wirds wi fire an frost ita dem,
 wirds at nearly maks you murn.
 Some we hae, baid coorse an haemly,
 nane can better dö da turn.

Things at maks dis life wirt livin,
 dey're jöst laek da strainin-post;
 Whin he's brokken, hit's no aesy
 gettin new eens - an da cost,
 Hit'll shön owergeng da honour
 if da aald true wyes is lost.



One of Tammy's Shetland Reels

("While you sat and played toccatas, stately at the clavichord." - Robert Browning.) (1)

Oh, man, Tammy, this is vexing,
Hearing what you have to say,
Boy, I think you'd take your fiddle -
I would like to hear you play,
As you played at balls and weddings
Many a time before this day.

Here's "Da Merry Boys of Greenland", (2)
But the Greenland men are gone,
"Underhill" (3) - since first I heard it,
Many a heavy day I've done.
When you play "Auld Swaara" (4) to me,
To my eyes the tears will run!

You recall, when we were younger,
How I used to sit and look
At the iron pot so heavy,
Hanging, boiling, in the hook,
While you played your tunes so pleasant,
Inside, in the chimney nook. (5)

"That's all gone now" - yea, I know it,
Many things are lost today,
There is little now remaining
Of the old beloved way.
Do you think the folks were better,
If they threw the rest away?

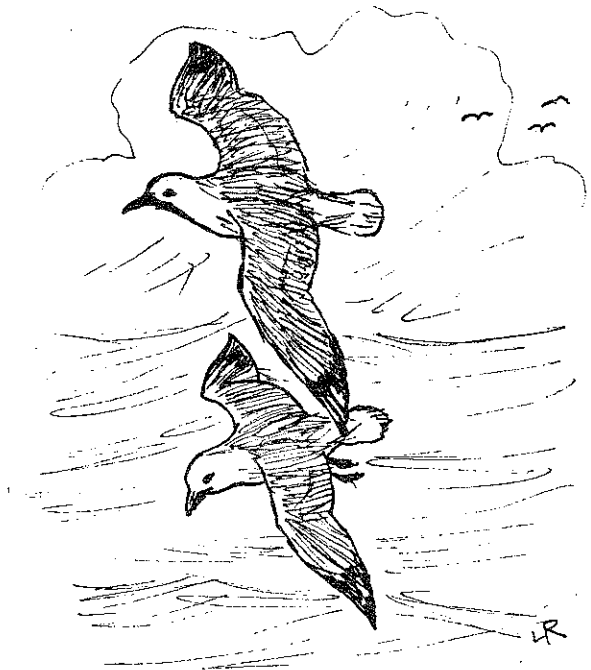
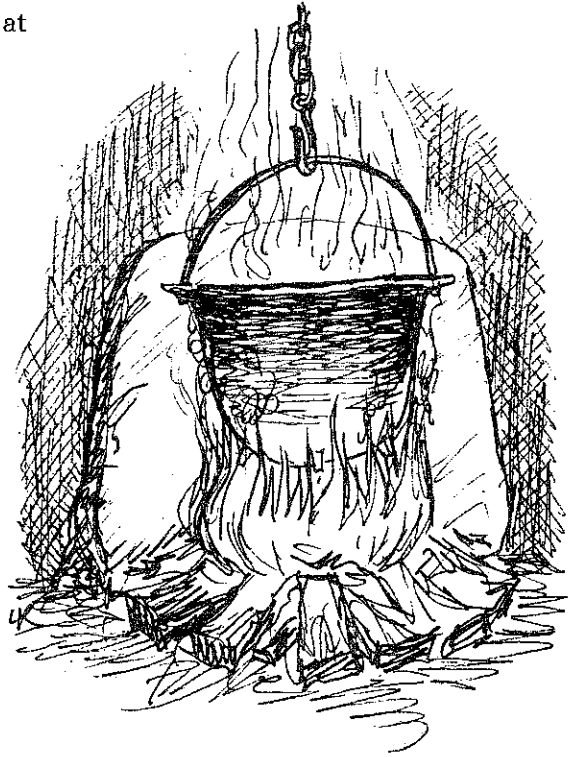
Through our minds our own old language
Still keeps running like a tune; (6)
Like the skylark in the twilight
At the end of day will croon,
Like the sigh of wind through corn
At the rising of the moon.

It's the screeching of the sea-gull,
And the croaking of the crow,
It's the thunder of the water,
When the breakers billow, flow,
It's the rushing of the north wind,
When it brings the blinding snow.

It's the sound of sheep all bleating
When you drive them to the fore,
And the sound of chickens clucking,
Laying Easter-eggs in voar. (7)
It's the barking of the sheepdog
When a knock comes to the door.

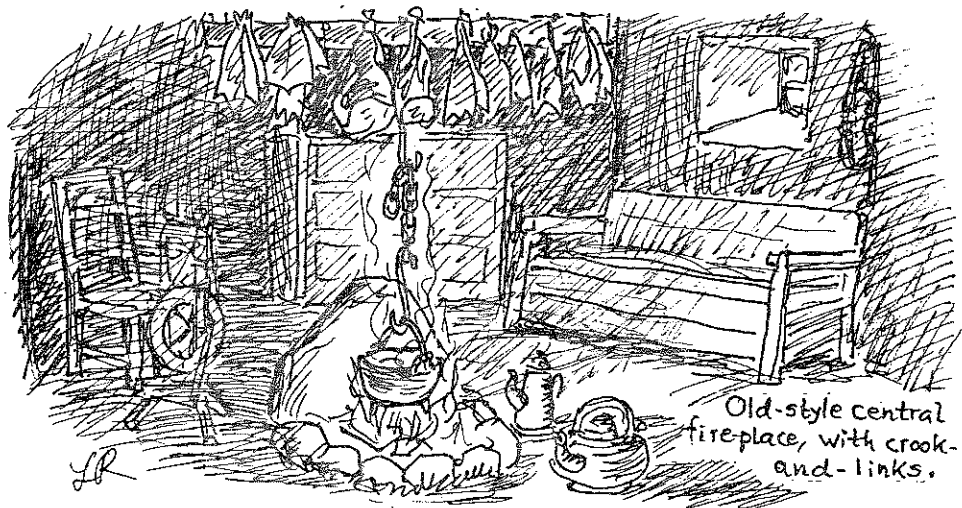
Words like Freddie Stickle's music, (8)
When he played "Da Trowie Burn", (9)
Words with fire and frost within them,
Words which cause you grief, concern,
Words we have, both coarse and homely,
None can better do the turn.

Things which make this life worth living,
Are just like the straining-post, (10)
When it's broken, it's not easy
Getting it replaced - the cost,
It will soon go way beyond us,
If the true old ways are lost.

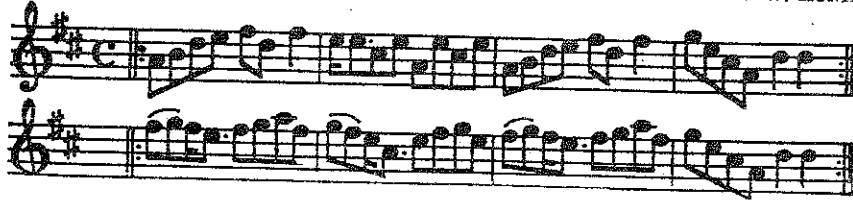


T.A. Robertson (Vagaland)

- 1) From the last line in stanza 6 of Browning's "A Toccata of Galuppi's" (1847). The poet takes his cue from a similar situation, using some of Browning's lines as a pattern to go by.
- 2) "The Merry Boys of Greenland" is a reel tune recalling the time when several hundred sailors from Shetland served aboard Greenland whalers, in the 19th century.
- 3) "Underhill" is a local reel tune.
- 4) "Auld Swaara" means "Old Woolly" and refers to clothing made from Shetland wool, warm and pleasant in winter.
- 5) The setting is at the cosy fire place in an old-style Shetland croft house.
- 6) "Our own old language" is not ModSh, which is a comparatively recent formation, being Low Scots with a peculiar Shetland pronunciation and many old Shetland words from Norn, the language which the poet has in mind, the original language of Shetland; it was derived from Old Norse and resembled Faeroese and the West Norwegian dialects, also, to some extent, Icelandic. Like Norwegian, it was said to have a very melodious intonation, a marked "sing-song" not found in standard English or Scots. This has almost been lost in ModSh, but the Orkney dialect has preserved more of it, and it has been described as "a slow rich wondering lilt, the sentences rising and breaking off at the crest: a good language for narrative and dialogue" (George Mackay, quoted in Melchers 1983:16). My own observations confirm this, and, one might add, that is also an extremely good language for poetry, and no doubt the original Norn was that, too.
- 7) *Voar*, spring (time).
- 8) Fredamann Stickle was a famous fiddler and composer of fiddle tunes living in Unst. He was believed to have been of German extraction.
- 9) "Da Trowie Burn", "The Brook of the Trolls", another fiddle tune.
- 10) "The straining-post" is the Scottish term for "Queen's post", the technical term for the part of a truss designed to take the strain in a wooden roof construction. If that post broke, the entire roof might cave in, and the house be completely ruined.



TRADITIONAL DA MERRY BOYS O' GREENLAND AS PLAYED BY W. HUNTER



TRADITIONAL UNDERHILL. ARRANGED BY P. FRASER.



DA WHEENA BURN
By Fredamann Stickle
As written down by Robert Stickle.



Unfortunately, it has not been possible to locate notes to all the tunes mentioned in the poem, but here are two traditional Shetland reels, and one by Fredamann Stickle, as published in the *Shetland Folk-Book*.

Kwarna farna?

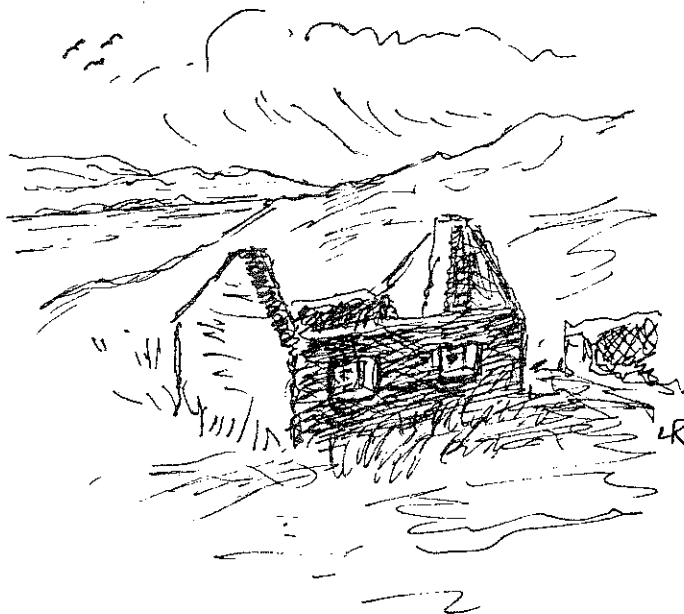
A laar o Wast wind blaain
Keeps doon da waarm ön;
I hear da Baas o Huxter,
An hear da laverik's tön
Ita da lift abön.

Da lochs, trowe bricht daals lyin,
Spreads wide dir sheenin net;
Da simmermil is mirrlin
By skerry, stack, an klett;
Bit shön da sun will set.

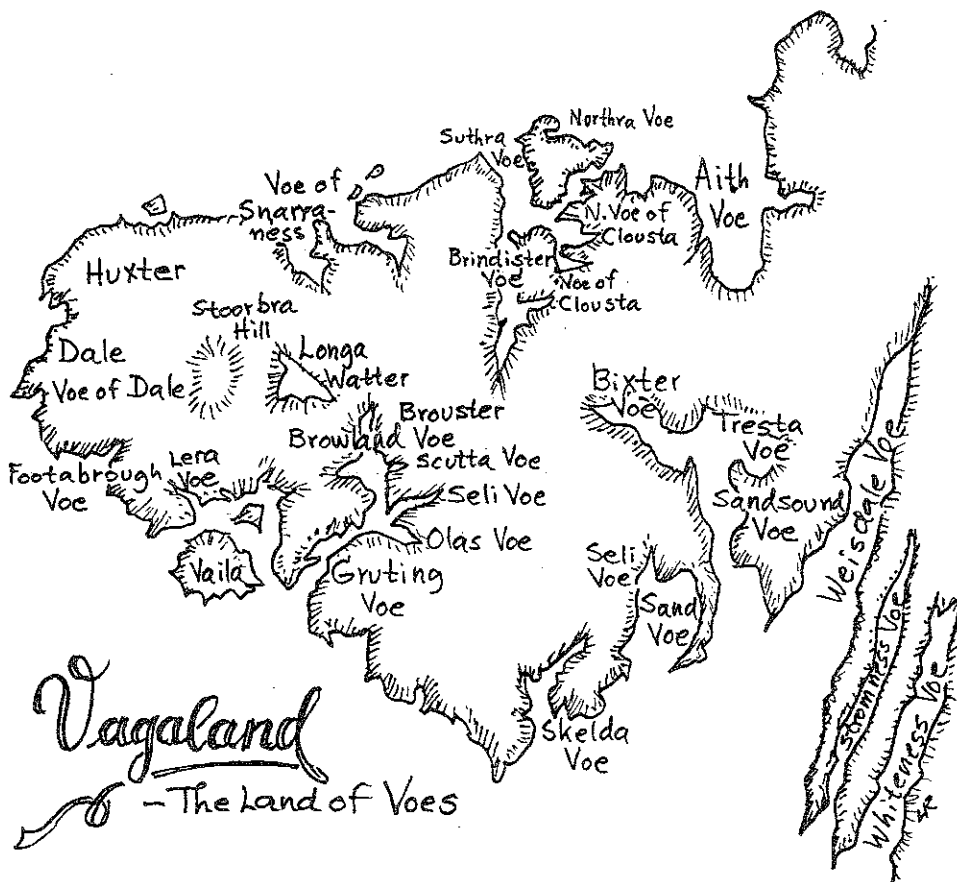
You see noo, every saison,
Run waas o barns an byres,
An riggs an cuts fast shangin
Ta burra an ta mires,
An little reek fae fires.

Eence Dale ta Brouster mustered
A thoosand folk an mair
Ta dell, an draa da boats doon,
An cast, an maa, an shair;
Bit noo da laand is bare.

Kwarna farna? - Where are you going? (Old Norn).



T.A. Robertson (Vagaland)



Where Are You Going? (Kwarna farna?) (1)

A western breeze is blowing
 Away the sultry heat;
 I hear the Huxter breakers, (2)
 The skylark's tune and beat
 Into the air so sweet.

The lakes so bright in valleys
 Spread out their shining net,
 The summer heat's vibrating
 O'er skerry, (3) stack (4) and clett (5) -
 But soon the sun will set.

You see now every season
 The fallen barns and byres,
 The fields and acres changing,
 To moorland and to mires,
 And little smoke from fires.

Once Dale to Brouster (6) mustered
 A thousand folks and mair, (7)
 To dig the fields and launch the boats,
 Cut peats and mow and shear -
 But now the land is bare.



T.A. Robertson (Vagaland)

-
- 1) *Kwarna farna?* is taken from an old Norn sentence noted down by Jakobsen (1928-32:XCII), which is supposed to mean "Where are you going?" (ON *Hvert ert þú farinn?*).
 - 2) *Huxter*, a place name on the west coast, from ON *haugsetr*, "hill-farm". The breakers there can be heard far and wide.
 - 3) *skerry*, ON *sker*, hidden rock near the shore.
 - 4) *stack*, ON *stakkr*, high, solitary rock in the sea.
 - 5) *clett*, ON *klettr*, rock in or near the sea.
 - 6) *Dale to Brouster*, an area on the west coast of Shetland, near the poet's birthplace. *Dale* (ON *dalr*, valley) and *Brouster* (ON *Brúarsetr*, "Bridge farm"), are well known place names in that area.
 - 7) *mair*, more (Scots).

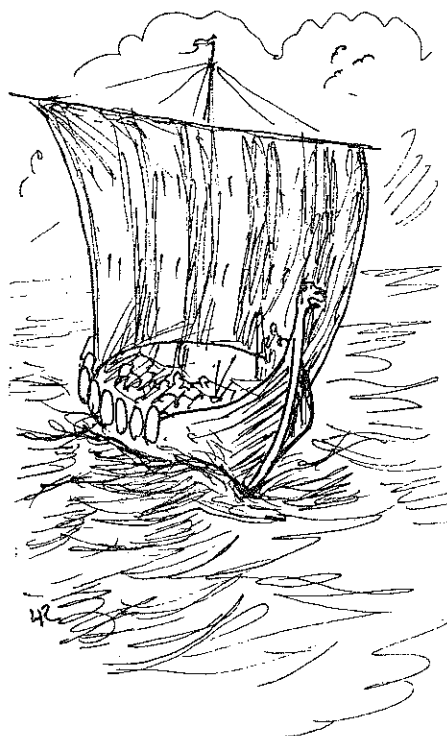
Dale, in Vagaland, on
the Atlantic Coast.

Da Shetland Tongue

Listen ta wir neebir nations -
 Listen ta der diff'rent gab;
 Lapps an Norskies, Danes an Germans -
 Whit a upsteer cabbie-lab!
 Whit dan marks an stamps each people -
 Maks dem diff'rent, ane fae each?
 Nedder shape, nor dress, nor creed does -
 Hit's der indeewidwel speech!

We're a people here in Shetland
 An we hed a speech aince too;
 Noo hit's splintered an fragmentit
 Laek da shoormil-broken droo.
 An der comin fae da suddert
 Swarms an droves, wi pipes an proil.
 Can wir twartree wirts sirvive dis -
 Or be smoared, at last, trow oil?

Dem at loves da Shetlan culture -
 Dem at loves da Shetlan tongue -
 Hing you in ta whit belongs here,
 In parteeclear taech da young.
 Why sood we no pride wirsells in
 Whit wir faeders passed ta wis?
 Why dan sood hit be abandoned?
 Why sood we skjimp whit is wirs?



George P.S. Peterson

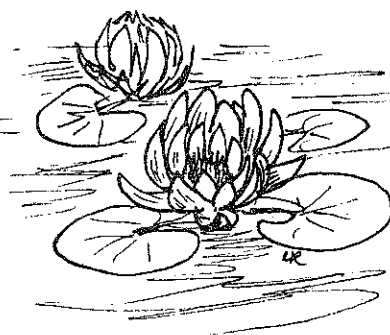
Ta da Memory of Vagaland

A waarm ön blaas saftly ower da Laand o Voes -
 Da Huxter Baas dey rumble faint and far awa;
 Ahint da lee o daeks ye see da first green shows,
 An moaderate wadder bids you seek da bank and flaa.

An laek a kummelled boat, dere lies grett Stoorbra Hill,
 An Lunga watter spread wi watter lilies green;
 An so I staand, and tink, and aa da world is stilled -
 For him at wrett aboot, and loved aa dis - is geen.

Dey wir nae ocht about dis Shetland life o wirs
 Bit whit he loved, and chiefly fae da far Wast Side.
 Da simplest things gae him a seemlie for a verse,
 In tones baith kind, or gently chidin, sad, or blyde.

I hae nae hert to write, for hit's dat lonnlie noo -
 No only me, bit Shetland murns for him as weel.
 An dem oonboarn will love, respect, admire him too -
 An so fareweel! My göd an true aald freend - Fareweel!



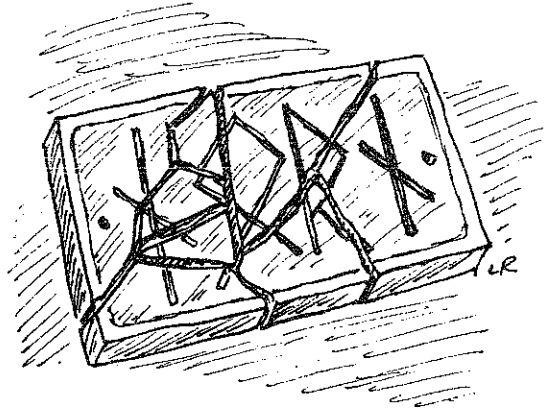
George P.S. Peterson

The Shetland Tongue

Listen to our neighbour nations -
 Listen to their different gab:
 Lapps and Norskies, Danes and Germans,
 What a noisy blabber-blab!
 What, then, marks and stamps each people -
 Makes them different, one from each?
 Neither shape nor dress nor creed does,
 It's their individual speech!

We're a people here in Shetland,
 And we had a speech of yore,
 Now it's splintered and fragmented
 Like the seaweed on the shore.
 From the south now folks are streaming,
 Swarms and droves, with pipes and spoil,
 Can our two-three words survive this -
 Or be drowned, at last, in oil?

You who love the Shetland culture -
 You who love the Shetland tongue -
 Please hang on to what belongs here,
 In particular teach the young.
 Why should we not pride ourselves in
 What our fathers to us gave?
 Why, then, should it be abandoned?
 Why should we our own deprave?



George P.S. Peterson

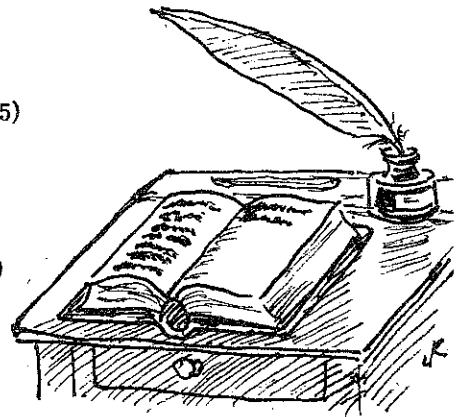
To the Memory of Vagaland (1)

A warm breeze blows softly o'er the Land of Voes (2) -
 The Huxter (3) breakers rumble faint and far away;
 Behind the lee of dikes you see the first green shows,
 And moderate weather bids you seek the banks to flay. (4)

An like a boat turned o'er, there lies great Stoorbra Hill, (5)
 And Longa Water (6) spread with water lilies green;
 And so I stand, and think, and all the world is stilled -
 For he who loved and wrote of this - has left the scene.

There was not aught in this our Shetland life
 Which he loved not, and chiefly from the far West Side; (7)
 He wrote about the simplest things, in verses rife
 With tones both kind, or gently chiding, sad or blide. (8)

I have no heart to write, I'm lonely without you -
 Not only I, but Shetland mourns for you as well.
 And those unborn will love, respect, admire you, too -
 So, now, fare well! My good and true old friend, Fare well!



George P.S. Peterson

- 1) *Vagaland*, pen name of T.A. Robertson.
- 2) *Land of Voes*, the meaning of Vagaland in ModSH; *voes* - narrow inlets, ON *vágar*.
- 3) *Huxter*, a place on the west coast of Vagaland, facing the Atlantic (ON *haugsetr*, "hill-farm"), with mighty breakers.
- 4) This refers to peat-cutting, the banks being the area where the peat is taken, and to flay is to remove the topsoil.
- 5) *Stoorbra Hill*, a prominent hill in the west of Mainland (most likely from ON *Stórborgarhóll*, "great broch hill").
- 6) *Longa Water*, a lake in the Vagaland district, uniquely covered in water lilies every summer (ON *Langa vatn*, "long lake").
- 7) The Westside is the area of Vagaland.
- 8) *blide*, blithe, happy, glad (Scots).



Awa Fae Time

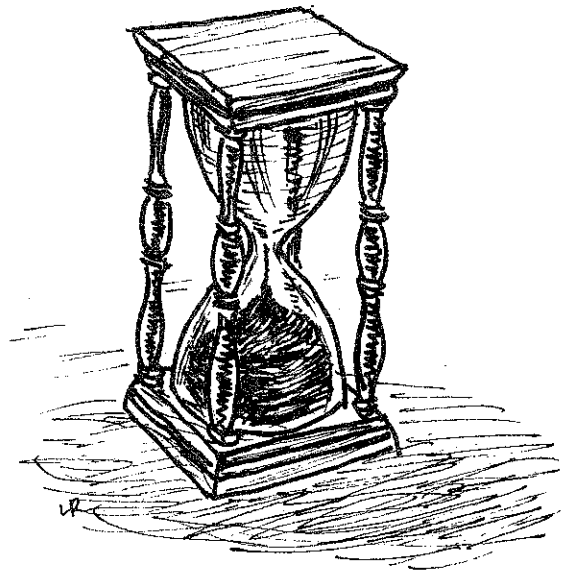
(In Memory of T.A.R.)

So, Vagaland, du's geen awa fae Time,
As what we aa mann dö.
Dee at wid mak wis mony a boannie rhyme,
Du'll mak dem nae mair noo.

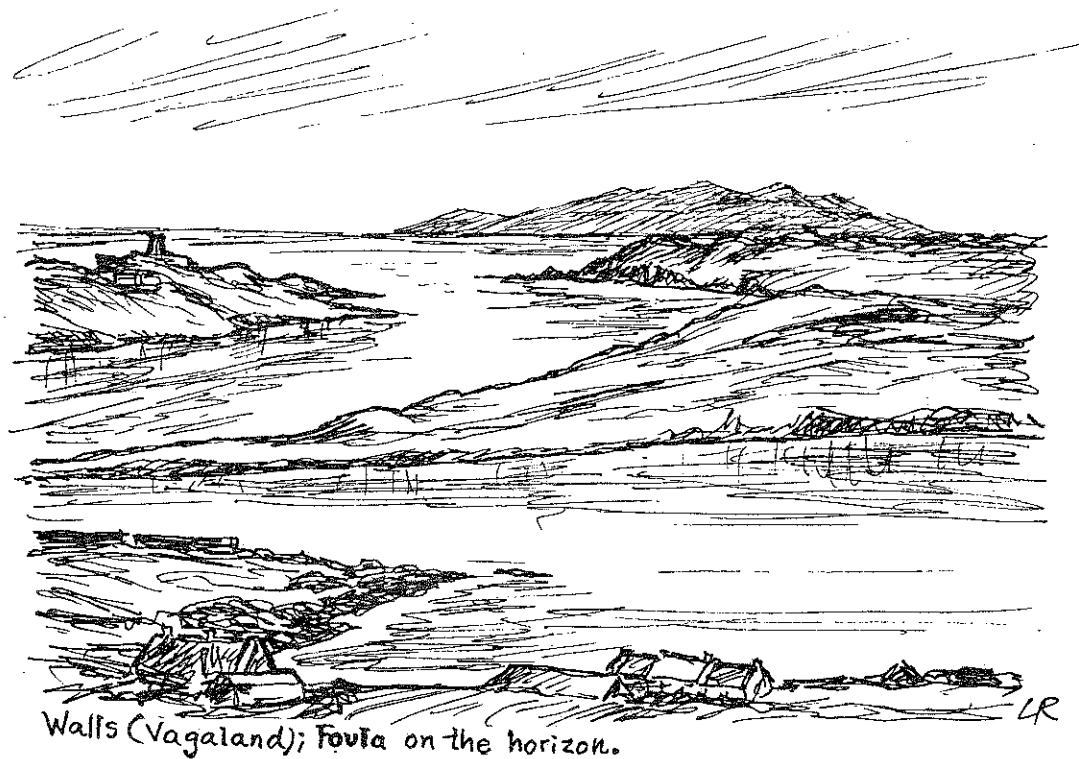
Aa at wis fine, lightsome an innocent,
Wis what ran trow dy mind.
Du wraet life plain, bit wi a dacent slent,
An naethin o ill-vynd.

We canna rös dee, boy, as we wid wiss,
Nor yet begin ta tell
Da wirt o what du's left wis, an da miss
We feel o dee dysel.

Da gift laid up for dem o muckle wirt
Is dine, bi aa at's just:
Da boon at's promised tae da pure in hert.
So! Blissin apo dy dust!



Stella Sutherland



Walls (Vagaland); Fovta on the horizon. LR

Away From Time

(In Memory of T.A.R.) (1)

So, Vagaland, you've left the World of Time,
As all of us must do.
You, who would make us many a bonnie rhyme -
We'll get no more from you.

All that was fine, lightsome and innocent,
Was what ran through your mind;
You wrote life plain, with a decent bent,
And nothing bad behind.

We cannot praise you as we ought for this,
Nor yet begin to tell
The worth of what you've left us, or the miss
We feel for you yoursel'.

The gift laid up for worthy ones, that part
Is yours, by all that's just:
The boon that's promised to the pure in heart,
So, blessings on your dust!

Stella Sutherland

1) T.A.R., Thomas Alexander Robertson, the poet who became one of Shetland's most beloved dialect writers, under the pen name "Vagaland" (1909-73).

Psalm 46, v. 10

Listen ta da ocean ebb an flow up ower da saand,
 Or brak wi an explosian ower da high banks an da laand.
 See da fedders in a bird's wing;
 Waatch da snail, da fleein klock;
 Look at peerie bairns' faces;
 Tink o helpful neebor fok.
 See da bee oot gadderin honey fae da flooers along da rod;
 An da saesons niver faelin.
 Dan tell me dir nae God.

Rhoda Bulter

Da Mirry-Begyit

Wha is dis pritty bairn I see
 Wi smilin face look up at me?
 I waatch her playin ower da green,
 Resembles nane A'm ever seen.
 Wha is it haes da love an care
 Ta darn da knees in whin dir bare?
 Wha listens ta da things shū says,
 Da tales o woe - da games shū plays?
 Wha comfirted whin bairns said
 Her faider wisna really dead?

Rhoda Bulter

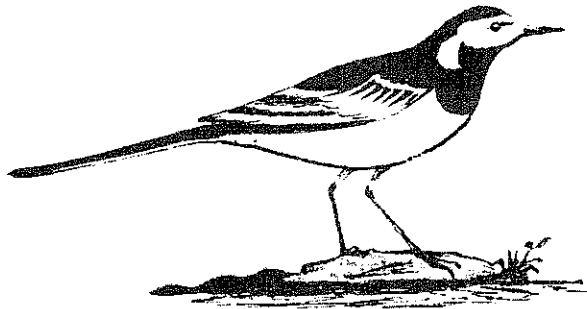


This is an original drawing by Mrs Bulter, from the cover of her latest book, *Link-Stanes* (1980). In the following, several other drawings of hers have been included with her poems.

Psalm 46, v. 10

Listen to the ocean's ebb and flow up o'er the sand,
 Or its breaking explosively o'er the cliffs or on the land;
 See the feathers in a bird's wing,
 Watch the snail, that beetle there,
 Look at little children's faces,
 Think of helpful neighbours' care.
 See the bees that gather honey from the flowers along the ro'd,
 And the seasons never failing.
 Then tell me there is no God.

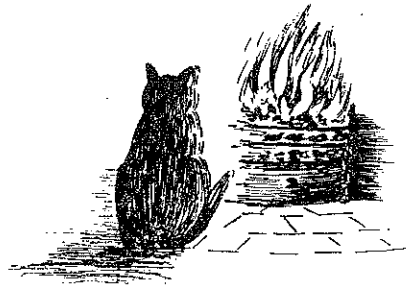
Rhoda Bulter

**The Love-Child**

Who is this pretty child I see
 With smiling face look up at me?
 I watch her playing o'er the green,
 Resembling none I've ever seen.
 Who shows to her the love and care,
 To darn her socks when knees are bare?
 Who listens to the things she says,
 Her tales of woe - the games she plays?
 Who solaced her when children said,
 Her father was not really dead?



Rhoda Bulter



Hame Grund

Da first braeth at I drew wis wi dee;
 A helpless, sprechin infant, new ta life,
 Keenan nowt bit da instinct boarn athin it,
 Ta fend for itsel trow aa da varg an strife.

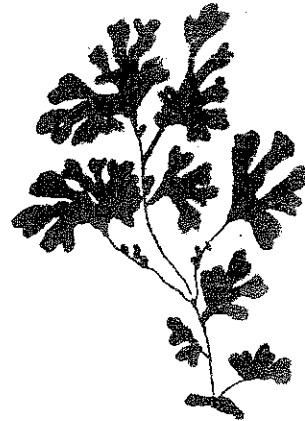
My first twartree teeterin steps wir tane ower dee.
 'Twis dee at first blue-melit me whin I fell.
 I tink du heard da first wirds at I said,
 An mebbe kent whaat I wis tryin ta tell.

Whin spleetin fae confinement idda skule,
 An dan da bell wid geng, an I wis free,
 It wis ta dee I ran juist halligit,
 Ta wirk aff aa my heltered energy.

Dan I, oot coortin on a simmer's night,
 Waatchin da sun sink, sizzlin idda sea,
 Ever felt at aa I did an said
 Wis no atween da twa, bit shared wi dee.

An whin I ower-geen, no keenan whar ta turn,
 Boo'd twa-faald wi anxieties an faers,
 I'd huf me doon apu dee as I gret,
 An drew strent as du sokkit up me taers.

An whin da soomans comes for me ta geng,
 An da lock is turned ta set da speerit free;
 Dan faald what's left o me attae dee skurt,
 Sae it can tak da hidmist sleep wi dee.



Rhoda Bulter

Love Sang

A'll love dee till da sheep's gaet mizzers fifty yairds wide,
 A'll love dee till da shoormal lies a mile below da tide,
 A'll love dee till dir nae doonflan whin du oppens da wadder door,
 A'll love dee till da Hairst mün is seen ta rise in Voar,
 A'll love dee till da muckle haaf reks ta da highest hill
 An ebbs oot ower da waari grounds.
 A'll love dee still.

Rhoda Bulter

Home Ground

The very first breath that I drew was with you,
A helpless, crying infant, new to life,
Knowing nought but the instinct in it born,
To fend for itself throughout the toil and strife.

My first few steps I tottered upon you,
'Twas you who bruised me blue when first I fell,
I think you heard the first words that I said,
Maybe you knew what I was trying to tell.

When fed up with confinement in the school,
And when the bell would sound and I was free -
I ran to you without the least restraint
To work off all my pent-up energy.

When I, out courting, on a summer's night,
- The sun was sinking, sizzling in the sea -
I always felt that all I did and said
Was not just for us two, but shared with thee.

And when I, overwrought, not knowing where to turn,
Bent double with anxieties and fears,
I'd throw myself upon you as I wept,
And draw your strength, as you sucked up my tears.

So, when the summons comes for me to go,
And the key is turned to set the spirit free,
Then fold up in your bosom my remains,
So I can take my final sleep with thee!



Rhoda Bulter



Love Song

I'll love you till the sheep's path will be fifty metres wide,
I'll love you till the shoreline lies a mile below the tide,
I'll love you till no smoke comes out when open louvres swing,
I'll love you till the harvest moon is seen to rise in spring,
I'll love you till the ocean reaches to the highest hill
And ebbs out o'er the seaweed beds -
I'll love you still.

Rhoda Bulter

Lookin Back Alang

Comin hame ower da hill wi da dugs fae da caa,
 I linned me alang da gavel waa
 O an aald vod hoose, an closed me een,
 An pieterred whaat laek hit wance hed been.

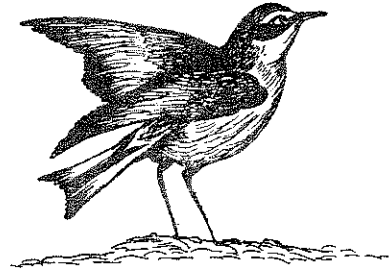
Da brig-stanes lyin aboot da door
 Wir nae langer burried an aa girsed ower,
 An da sonlight cuist a boanie sheen
 Idda gless o da peerie windoo peen.

Da rüf snuggly taekit fae lum can ta lum,
 Could lach at da wadder whaatsoever might come,
 An da rigs led oot evenly ta da banks broo,
 Growen tatties an neeps, an shaves ta da coo.

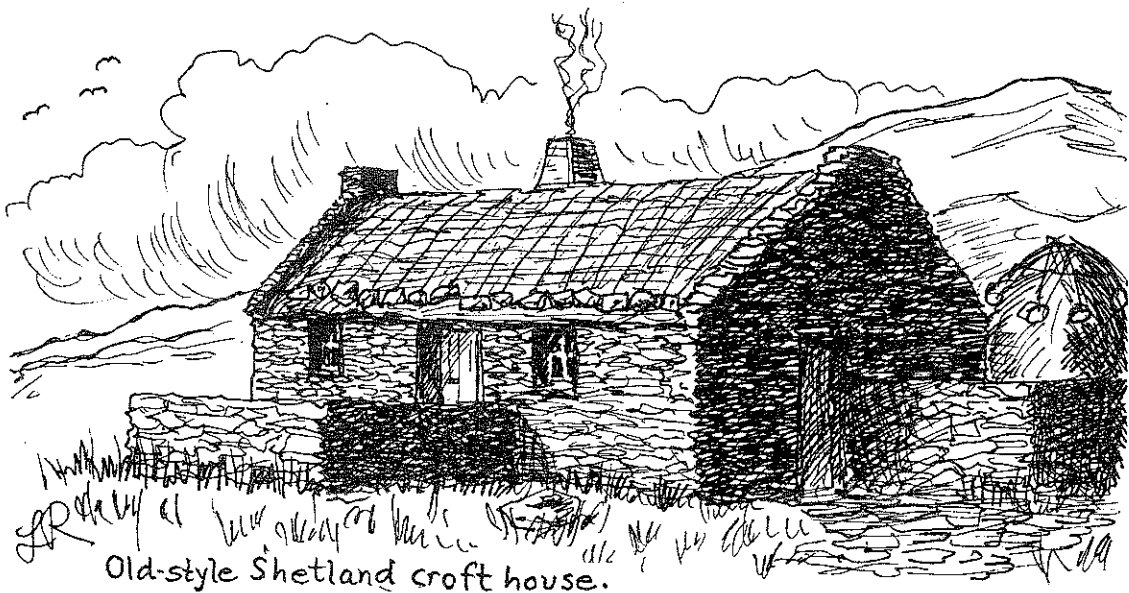
A white cloot wis spread ower da stack, for ta say
 Dat da men at da hill could come hame ta dir tae.
 Wi new baken bannocks at da guid wife wis med,
 An kirn mylk brünnies, an fat aetmell bred.

Twa büdies an piltick waands lay awa high
 Apu da rüf o da barn, oota peerie bairns' wye;
 I heard a pell rinkle, an da clatter a lem,
 An da kye wir begennin ta aet dir wye hame.

Dan da dugs began barkin, da pieter aa guid,
 Left me lüf alen idda ruins I stüd.
 Bit it'll niver geng fae me, aa da things at I saa
 Whin I linned me dat meenit at da aald gavel waa.



Rhoda Bulter



Looking Back

Coming home from the drive (1) with the dogs o'er the hill,
And reaching a house, old, empty and still,
I leaned 'gainst the wall and closed up my eyes,
To picture the life here, before its demise.

The flagstones that rested in front of the door
Were no longer buried with grass growing o'er,
But sunshine now threw so bonnie a shine
On the glass of the window-pane tiny and fine.

The roof snugly thatched from chimney to wall
Could laugh at the weather, whatever might fall.
And the fields were laid out from the hill to the brow (2)
With neaps and potatoes and sheaves for the cow.

A white sheet was spread o'er the stack for to see,
So folks in the hill could come home for their tea,
With fresh-baked bannocks the goodwife had made,
And buttermilk rolls and fat oatmeal bread.

On the barnroof two baskets and fishing rods lay,
High up, very safe, out of little bairns' way.
I heard a pail clatter and the clink of a pot,
And the cows were beginning their homeward trot.

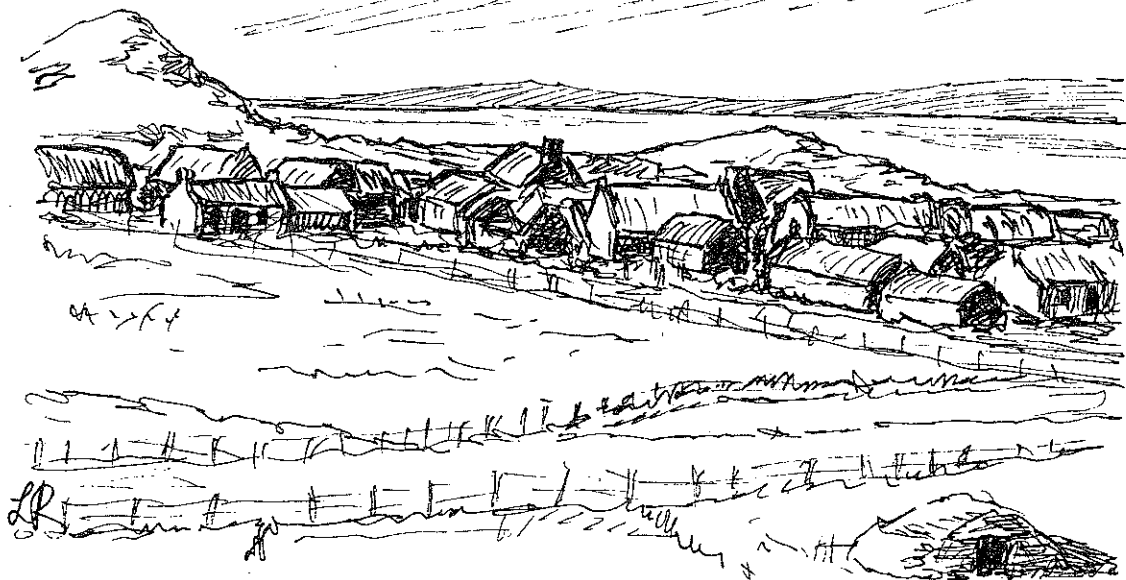
Then the dogs began barking and the vision was flown -
It left me just standing, so empty, alone -
But ne'er I'll forget what I saw - life and all,
When I leaned for a moment to that old gable wall.



Rhoda Bulter

-
- 1) *drive*, in ModSh a *caa*, that is a sheep drive, to gather the sheep from all the hill country in the fall, to get them home before winter sets in.
 - 2) *brow*, ModSh *banks broo*, the "brow" of a ridge or the edge at the coastline, often along the rocky part of the shore.

Fiaddabister (ca. 1930).



Fladdabister

Whin da sun clim's higher idda sky,
 An da hidmist fans trow da ditches lie,
 Dan comes da time I feel dat I
 Man geng an see
 Da place, whaar nedder kith nor kin
 O mine is ever bidden in,
 Yit every time A'm dere I fin
 Dearer ta me.

Whin idder laand is lyaan weet,
 Dere da aert is springin aneath me feet,
 An da laverick's singin, fit ta spleet,
 High up abün.
 An whin fok ir delled whaat dey hae ta dell,
 An da aerly lambs can maet demsel,
 Hit's dan you can fin da mayfloors' smell,
 Laet efternün.

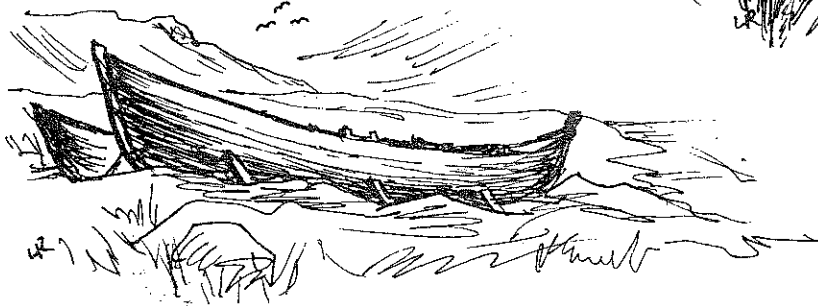
Dey kline da knowes an banks an rigs,
 An roond da kiln whaar da blackbird bigs,
 An sproot fae da sides o da burn brigs
 Fornenst da green.
 An laek peerie bairns sayin dir graces,
 Da cockiloories lift dir faces,
 An growe far bigger dere dan in idder places
 Whaar A'm been.

Bit da time I tink I laek da maest
 Is whin da maa'in girse is tae me waist,
 An dir aye a rabbit or twa ta shaest
 Up ower da braes.
 Da scent o hay, an da smell o waar,
 Da swish o da sye o da busy maa'er,
 Fat bees dat flit fae swaar ta swaar,
 Waarm, simmer haze.

Dan whin hairst is hintin idda air,
 Da coarn head's heavy an ready ta shaer,
 Shun rigs o stubble, aert dow'd an bare
 Whaar simmer blissed er.
 Boats ir draa'n up ta da head o da noost
 Whaar da dockens staand laek bolts o roost.
 Noo da aert can sleep, for da hairst is coosed
 At Fladdabister.



Rhoda Bulter



Fladdabister (1)

When the sun climbs higher into the sky,
 And the last of the snow in the ditches lie,
 Then comes the time that I feel that I
 Must go and see
 The place, where neither kith nor kin
 Of mine is ever bidden in,
 Yet, each time I feel that it has been
 Dearer to me.



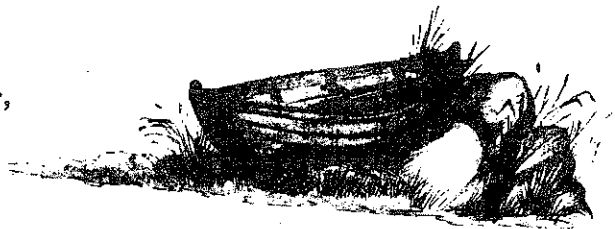
When other lands in water fleet, (2)
 Its soil is bouncing beneath my feet,
 The skylark is singing, a real treat,
 High up, its croon.
 And when the people in delving is spent, (3)
 And the early lambs are feeding, content,
 It's then that you can feel the mayflowers' scent,
 Late afternoon.



They grow o'er hills and knolls and crests,
 And round the kiln where the blackbird nests,
 And sprout o'er the burn bridge where it rests
 Against the green.
 And like small children saying their graces
 The sweet little daisies lift their faces
 And grow much bigger than in other places
 Where I've been.

But the time I think I like the best
 Is when the grass has reached my waist,
 And there's a rabbit or two to be chased
 Up o'er the braes.
 The scent of hay, the seaweed's smell,
 The swish of the scythe in the grassy dell,
 When flitting bees with honey swell,
 Warm summer haze.

Then, when the hairst (4) can be felt in the air,
 The ears of corn heavy and ready to shear,
 Soon fields of stubble, the earth'll be bare
 Where summer blest 'er.
 The boats are drawn up and firmly shored,
 Where rusty docks rise above the sward;
 Then the earth may sleep, for hairst has been stored
 At Fladdabister.



Rhoda Bulter

-
- 1) *Fladdabister*, ON *Flatabústaðr*, "Flatlands Farm", a small community a few miles south of Lerwick, where the old croft houses still stand and where old Shetland ways persisted longer than in other places.
 - 2) *fleet*, float, be filled with water.
 - 3) *delving*, digging. In Shetland the Norwegian custom of digging the fields instead of plowing them also persisted for a long time. Needless to say, it was hard labour.
 - 4) *hairst*, harvest; both the season (autumn) and the harvesting of crops.

Wir Inheritance

I stüd be mesel at da fit o wir toon,
 An waatched as da sun creepit slowly doon
 Ahint da hill, aa dark an broon,
 Fornenst da sky.
 Da sea below me wis quiet an faa'n,
 Laevin froad roond da kletts whaar da wind hed blaa'n,
 An no sign o a livin thing wis shaa'n
 Ta be left bit I.

Time stüd still. Na foo could dat be,
 Whin back trow da years hit kerried me,
 An every thing shenged idda blink o a ee
 Aa roond about.
 Blue reek rase laek taatit trums,
 Fae near on a score a peerie lums,
 Aa snuggit an ready for winter comes,
 Baith in an oot.

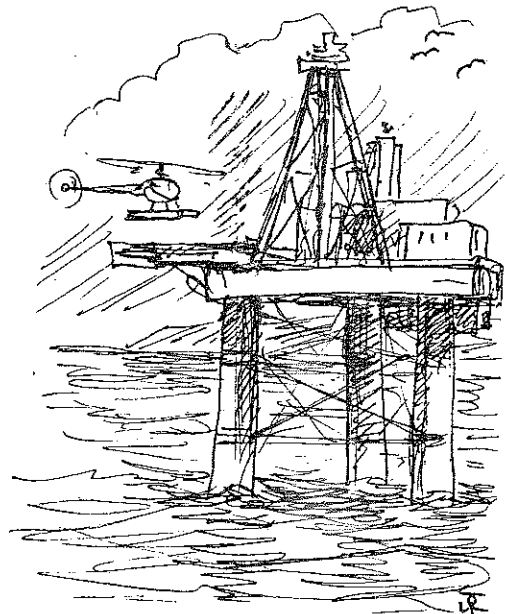
Aa da fok's yerds an dir rigs hed been maan,
 For every avellable rig hed been saan,
 An da sheep still clubbit fae an aerlier caa'n
 Idda face o da hill.
 An wi da aald claith kep an da blaeched dungaree,
 Da boys med for da noost, gjaan aff wi da flee,
 An da grund wis juist fleckit wi kye idda Lea,
 Aa aetin dir fill.

Sae lightsome in numbers it haaved aa da wark,
 An a body wrowt oot till sent in wi da dark,
 Dan come da moarneen wis up wi da lark
 Ta start ower again.
 Whidder caa'n or castin or neep rigs ta weed,
 Or saa'n or hirdin or gadderin seed,
 A neebor wis wan ta be helpit in need,
 An niver complain.

Dan a caald braeth blew across me face,
 An I lookit aroond at a different place,
 Back ta da hertless gidly race
 O life da day.
 Ley crofts wi juist a yowe or twa,
 Wi nane ta wirk an nane ta maa.
 Whaat wis it at gluffed da fok awa,
 An left caald clay?

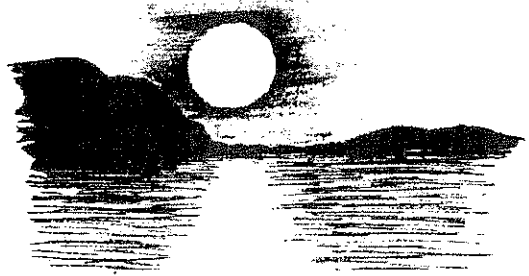
Could it be dem wi da might an means,
 At cam here wi dir muckle machines,
 An ruined da place as we kent it eence -
 Baith mine, an dine?
 Nae towf for da hame at anidder med,
 Nae towf for da life at anidder led,
 Nae towf for da laand in beauty cled,
 No lang sin syne.

Juist bore an dreel an gurm an shap,
 Roog in da siller athin dir lap,
 Dan birze da aert for da hidmist drap
 Dey tink is tane.
 An sae up anchor an pit ta sea,
 Rubbin dir oily haands wi glee,
 Laevin da brucks ta da twa or da tree
 At widna geng.



Our Inheritance

I stood all alone at the foot of our town,
 And watched as the sun sank slowly down
 Behind the hill, all dark and brown,
 Against the sky.
 The sea below had gone quiet, serene,
 But froth-lines showed where the waves had been,
 And not a sign of life was seen
 To be left, but I.



Time stood still. Now, how could that be,
 When back through the years it carried me,
 And everything changed in the blink of an e'e, (1)
 All round about.

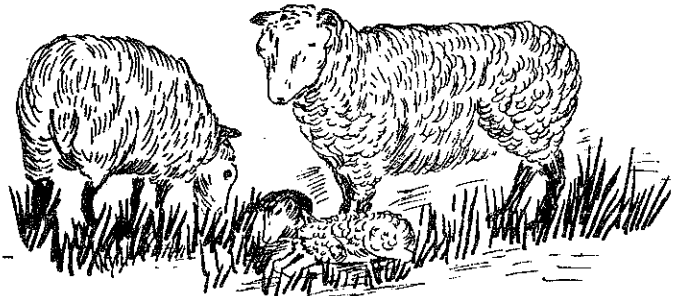
Blue smoke rose high like wool from a ball
 From nearly a score of chimneys small,
 For winter's arrival made ready and all,
 Inside and out.

The fields and the strips had all been mown,
 For all the available land had been sown,
 And the sheep had been placed in a pen of their own
 High up in the hill.
 And wearing old cloth caps and bleached dungaree
 The boys had gone down to fish in the sea,
 While the ground was spotted with cows in the lea,
 All eating their fill.



Working nicely together sure halved all the wark, (2)
 As all worked outside till sent in with the dark,
 Then early next morning were up with the lark
 To start over again.
 Whether driving the sheep or the neap fields to weed, (3)
 Or sowing or harvesting, gathering seed,
 A neighbour was one to be helped in need,
 And never complain.

Then a cold breath blew across my face,
 And I stared around at a different place,
 Back to the giddy, heartless race
 Of life today.
 Ley crofts with just a ewe or two,
 With no one there the work to do,
 What was it that scared the people off, too -
 And left cold clay?



Could it be those with the might and the means,
 Who came up here with their mighty machines,
 And ruined the place and its lovely scenes,
 Both yours and mine?
 No thought for the homes which others made,
 No thought for the life which others led,
 No thought for the land in beauty clad,
 Not even a sign!

Just bore and drill and toil and chop, (4)
 With gold and silver the only crop,
 Squeezing the land for the utmost drop
 They think will flow.
 And then up anchor and put to sea,
 Rubbing their oily hands with glee,
 Leaving the bits for the two or three
 That wouldn't go.



Dir aye da twartree at hae da care
 Ta bide an bigg up what lies wasted an bare,
 Ta lave somethin livin for idders ta share,
 Laek dey hed wance.
 Tho da gaet might be herd an da night be lowng,
 Lat it be lightened wi wurd an sowng,
 Aye uttered idda midder towng -
 Wir inheritance.

Rhoda Bulter



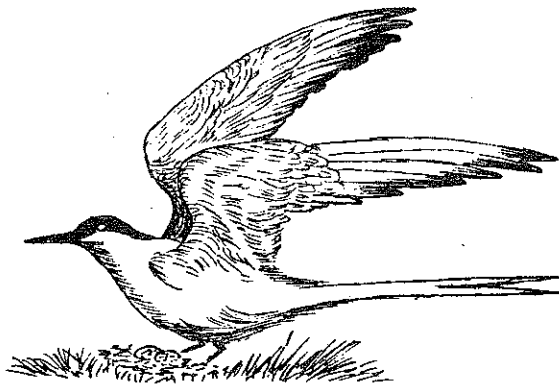
Shetlandic

Sometimes I tink whin da Loard med da aert,
 An He got it a pitten tagidder,
 Fan He still hed a nev-foo a clippins left ower,
 Trimmed aff o dis place or da tidder,
 An He hedna da hert ta baal dem awa,
 For dey lookit dat boannie an rare,
 Sae He fashioned da Isles fae da ends o da aert,
 An med aa-body fin at hame dere.

Dey 'lichted fae aa wye, some jöst for a start,
 While some bed ta dell rigs an saa coarn,
 An wi sicca gret gadderie a fok fae aa ower,
 An entirely new language wis boarn.
 A language o wirds aften hard tae translate,
 At we manna belittle or bö,
 For every country is prood o da wye at hit spaeks,
 An sae we sood be prood a wirs tö.



Rhoda Bulter



There are always a few that have the care
 To wait and build up what lies wasted and bare,
 To leave something living for others to share,
 Like they had once.

The way may be hard and the night may be long,
 So let it be lightened with words and song,
 Aye uttered in the mother tongue,
 Our inheritance.

Rhoda Bulter

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- 1) *e'e*, eye, (Scots).
 - 2) *wark*, work (Scots).
 - 3) *neaps*, turnips.
 - 4) The reference is, of course, to the oil industry which invaded Shetland in the 1970s and which many Shetlanders opposed - both for environmental reasons, and because they did not want their quiet community disturbed by big business and all its inevitable consequences.

Shetlandic

Sometimes I think when the Lord made the earth
 And he got all the things put together,
 He found himself with a fistful of bits
 Trimmed off of some place or another -
 Not having the heart to just throw them away,
 For they looked so bonnie and rare,
 He fashioned the Isles from these ends of the earth
 And made folks feel at home with their share.

They came from all over, some just for a stop,
 While others took land to grow corn.
 And with such a mingling of different folks,
 An entirely new language was born.
 A language with words often hard to translate,
 And at which no one ever should boo!
 For every country is proud of its tongue,
 So, let us be proud of ours, too!



Rhoda Bulter

