Uainead|The Degree of Greeness

It is the night before the first performance of *Uainead|The Degree of Greeness* and I am still discovering more in Dwelly – the wonderful Gaelic English dictionary. Earlier, I looked up the definition of grey and cloud. So many, so subtle. There is *glas-shruthach* which means 'belonging to grey or azure streams'. There is *tom an ìonghnaidh* – a 'wonder-tuft', (otherwise known as a hedgehog which looks like a grey stone curled amongst the yellow corn). Or Seilistear, root of the iris, used to make a grey dye. Or *rhiabach* meaning brindled.

I found *is aobhinn d'anam 'ad neòil*- 'joyous is your soul in your clouds'. This feels like an apt phrase for the Gaelic exploration of the past few weeks. Wind-buffeted, joyous, amorphous, fluid. There are times when it has felt like my soul was a kite in those high blustery clouds straining and dipping on its string, not sure from one second to the next where the winds would blow. Everything melted into thin air, it all dissolved.

Cloud-capp'd towers, gorgeous palaces, solemn temples – they will leave not a wrack behind. So says Prospero in *The Tempest,* vexed and weak, his old brain troubled. Texts and themes from *The Tempest,* masterfully translated for us into Gaelic by Seonag Monk, have been a mainstay. Another source, traced in the titles of Noah's sculptures, again translated by Seonag, is from Psalm 104. And yet another source is *Carmina Gadelica* – the collection of Gaelic hymns and incantations collected by Alexander Carmichael in the Highlands and Islands, published in 1900. The protagonists, Rilke and Annabel, weave their boat while they chant *Setting the iomairt.* This rhythmic poem traditionally accompanies the preparation of cloth for weaving. The poem leads into a song XXXXXXX, which was sung by Annabel's own great grandmother, Kate MacDonald, in XXX [place?] in XXXX [time?].

It has been fascinating and challenging to work with both Gaelic and English texts. In the story, Noah prompts Rilke to embark on a journey because 'the Gaelic colour was getting lost in the cracks'. Noah was meant to turn up for the opening of his exhibition on the mainland but he doesn't show. Rilke feels responsible and wants to make amends. He believes the key to atonement lies in bringing a sculpture back to Noah, returning it to the island, back to its source. When he gets there, Rilke finds the island is 'full of noises, sounds and sweet airs'. He is woven into child's play which makes him see visions of storms and stars, spirits, utopia and the golden age.

At the end of the *The Tempest,* Prospero forgives his brother, lets the spirits free and promises his daughter to her beloved. The Biblical story of Noah shares a sense of promise. Both of these watery tales are at home, in their optimism, in the deep sea.

One of the Gaelic words that has stayed with me from my perusals of Dwelly is *stuadh-ghlas*. It's defined as 'Having azure or green graves, as the sea'. I love this idea: of the light on water, the particular hue on the surface. I think of it as always immutable and changing. I imagine ripples and currents shallow and deep that reflect the sky.

Rilke says that the keeping of the Gaelic language is vital to keep the Gaelic memory of green. He says that without the words, the ideas will vanish. What I feel I have learned through this process, this Gaelic exploration, is that the sense of a Gaelic aesthetic has sympathies with the subtleties of shifting light, that it sees that light as a path. When you have a path you have a way forward, and that feels full of promise.

Promise. Right, let's have another look at Dwelly… So should that be *bàgh.* Or *gealladh.* Or *airimidh.* Or *bòid*. Or *bang*. Or…

Kate Robinson, February, 2016