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Fray



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An Tobar and Mull Theatre  
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## HANDWOVEN HANDMADE BUTTON

At first glance, it's the tiled floor  
of a cathedral viewed from above  
(squints can't sharpen the blur,  
or breaths counter the vertigo).

Brushed left, the nap is peat-  
pelted, a sheep's soiled snout;  
brushed right, a shoal of mackerel:  
darting, slipping, veering.

Up close, the yarn marches  
in ranks, shoulder-to-shoulder,  
with orders to slip through  
holes disguised as cloth.

In the end it's only tartan,  
and my skirting words  
betray a native fraudulence,  
lay bare my lowland legitimacy.

MOHAIR SILK IONA WOOL

Here, in blowy mid-Sound,  
a line where Mull water's  
drape turns to knotted tufts.

I grab the deck rail,  
expecting a disturbance,  
a pitching and yawing,

but the ferry glides smoothly  
over the sea's fleecy crimp,  
like a brush through kid fibre.



## DARNING

I saw two birds darning a tree,  
with winged eye and point,  
in looping swoops, using invisible  
thread flown through branches  
left unwoven by winter.

It happens fast, this job:  
anchor points, intersections,  
reclaimed fabric tufts pierced  
and sutured at the leaves till  
the tree is fixed for nesting.

*Our* ellipses were longer that day,  
called out, as we were, by sunshine,  
like the birds—my circuit out  
to the coast, yours inland,  
both of us flying the knot.

True, our orbits had diverged  
recently; we'd dragged curved  
messages about the house,  
towed them like aerial banners,  
but it was a joy to tie the bow again.

## DOBCROSS POWER LOOM

Empire's old machinery  
goes like the clappers,  
clattering as ancient hooves  
once did over the River Tame.

Now driven by an organic wind  
and a sustainable light,  
the din lives as a hermit  
—frugally, at the holy margins—

paying penance in a cowshed  
for incursions into broadcloth  
territories, only to hear again  
the old flannel rolled out,

and the deafened cloth  
taken in and shafted—  
conned by the Crombied,  
diddled by the double-breasted.

TOBERMORAY RIVER

A tumult, course as tweed,  
heard as if through the fingers.

Water's glossary brooks  
no tag for this hubbub,

no fitting term for a skein  
of noise or a twill in spate.

## IRIDESCENCE

Violet is obligated to orange,  
as pink is beholden to white.

Without yellow and blue,  
green won't materialise.

Thus, colour theory yields  
to the eye in apparitions

of fabrics transfigured  
by disorderly crystals,

mirrors and diffractions  
in cuts of meat and suchlike.

For synesthetes, this lustre  
is warped and hide-bound

to oil-spills, soap-bubbles  
fish scales and glitter nails:

a phase-shifting music  
edged with 2-tone teeth

and picked up by guitars  
—all spinning, all spun.

## TAPESTRY WALL HANGING

More lip surgery than island idyll—  
these stitched-in twists (smiling weakly)  
can't wriggle free, still less spin.  
Imagine all that elastic energy  
lending motion to the straggly strata  
and sending the nectarine sun rolling  
back and forth across the sea's slipway,  
the plosive yarn catching the catapult  
leverage of a click beetle and the amplitude  
of battle ropes to unravel and generate  
waves of soil and furrows of water.

## DOUBLE WEAVE

Yarn is measured out  
anew and wound  
about a wooden shuttle  
bound like a splint  
in bright bandages.

And you, a hieroglyph  
—elbow drawn towards  
your upright body,  
head bowed down,  
feet aligned—

uniting with every throw  
of the boat, two beaten  
faces, each to witness  
the other's making—  
warp and weft

mimicking the world,  
sky and earth in slippage  
(where x goes, y follows)  
—and in this cross-purposing,  
I see us, meshed together.

LOGCABIN PATTERN (ARDALANISH WOOL)

It's not my ears that are mesmerised  
by these verticals traversed (in turn)  
by in-turn traversals. Nor my fingertips,  
though these may discern the felt  
porpoising of belts threaded  
in loops secured less with a "click"  
than a quiet compacting, a gentle  
compression, a beaten compliance.

## SELVEDGE

What's with islands and their edges?  
A refusal to follow folds, that's what.  
Nature's ripping so wedded  
to the runaway logic of newsprint,

its deviations and reversals,  
too-late-to-fix, unnavigable,  
too-late-to-neaten-up, let alone  
undo the geological disorder

with last-ditch efforts to mend  
using tools (eg. scissors),  
a strategy that risks retaliation  
—an uprising in the material—

because when yielding  
to the blade's edge,  
hemlines often pucker,  
and thus thwart the snip,

yet produce ever more ragged  
perimeters whose haunted  
locations (following tradition)  
are often given place-names

with bilingual signs erected  
to indicate those sites  
of cartographic outlandishness,  
where cockerel crests, armpits,



crag-hags and lewd prominences  
(home to malign forces)  
ignore that larger form  
languishing nearby

and cry foul at the waves  
from  $56^{\circ} 30'N$  and  $6^{\circ}W$ ,  
where Mull narrowly  
escaped decapitation.

## TRESHNISH

Looking down over Treshnish,  
a question arises: *What is this fabric?*

Surely not the work of a hobbyist,  
or an artist or drag queen.

Those Mardi Gras beads mislead,  
as do the silk tassles, glitter,

swirls of colour, frou-frou  
hodge-podge of treasure trash,

safety-pinned concoctions  
(minus the obligatory driftwood).

I venture it is durable Khadi  
—woven symbol of resistance—

made late in the day, after the humid  
pre-dawn that belongs to muslin.

## SHEEP FANK RUIN

Embroidered insignia or clan brooch?

You choose.

Fields beyond the gathering are over-brushed,  
ironed to a scorch.

A nearby thread lies un-needed.

The devoré (insubordinate in shrinkage)  
is left out for heather-steppers to weather,  
and now lies too flat even to ease  
the strains of double basses in their cases.

SPRING WOODLAND PROTECTED BY  
DEER FENCE

Repurposed granny-squares  
cultivated for soft toy innards,  
sewn in clumps and tufts  
on hessian now grown dry.

This blanket is pulled up  
till it scrapes my cloth ears:  
an arpillera marking the site  
of cochlear destruction.

## VISIBLE MENDING

Samurai warrior stitchwork.  
Armour needlecraft in denim.  
Crisscross orthopaedics.  
Plastrons for wranglers  
(around the knees mainly):  
gaping mouths, smiling suns,  
applique squares (silkie  
where injury is less likely).

On my haunches, the kneecaps  
meet running stitch reinforcing,  
the attendant tug on my t-shirt  
(at the cervical vertebra) ripping  
an earlier repair for which I am  
no less grateful to the seamstress  
of my dreams, whose visible mending  
inspires my Sashiko poetry.

## CONTRAIL

A contrail, tightly  
spun by Rolls Royce,  
pulls taut dawn's slack sky  
—London to Calgary.

Blown eastward,  
the frayed fibre  
is reclaimed:  
first to shoddy,  
then to raw fleece.

## DIAMOND PATTERN

Gongs, cymbals, bell trees, wind chimes...  
when struck, these create mysterious  
patterns, like ripples in water.

The musicians cease their playing  
and watch as the royal oscilloscope  
is wheeled out by the *mufti* and readings

are taken in the presence of the monarch  
(the puzzling shapes have not yet faded  
with the decaying of the Zildjian noises,

but have endured, become fast, like dye).  
The deaf attendants perform hand gestures  
as we scholars peer down through telescopes

from the royal balloon, searching for gaps  
in the weave, flaws in the indigo-quercitron,  
bleed in the alum and turmeric, lest an aperture

should appear and be exploited by those courtiers  
seeking illicit liaisons amid the many-twilled  
avenues of the *padishah's* new diamond maze.

## SUNSET

Separated roving in horizon-wide lengths,  
arranged light to dark, gradient spun  
and Navajo plied, each handful pulled:  
three parts cherry to one part peach.



MILL SOUVENIR

In the bubblewrap weave  
is a gathering of harbour waters:

a square of ethical cloth,  
pinked to limit the tourists' hand,

like the hemming pier with its tackle  
and buoys and early white vans

—built on the bias  
to disrupt the sea's grain.

My mind indulges these fraying  
games, takes them to extremes

till seabirds arrive and intervene  
with their curved flight:

too artful to be rendered  
by water or yarn.

## ARACHNE

It was having a big frame,  
comes over the other side,  
about three metres long.

They have to hang the comb,  
these threads, crossing over,  
and it was looping somehow.

I used to be from the comb side.  
I put the blade of a knife in,  
and I get the thread.

And my mother got it at the back,  
because you have a technique,  
and I pull it at the front.

And she used to say to me:  
*Don't miss the tooth.*  
*Don't miss the tooth.*

My mother weaved the wool,  
and she sent it to the factory  
with a big washing machine.

And they beat it to thicken it  
(it was uncomfortable,  
you couldn't put it on your bed).

She sheared the animals.  
She washed the wool.  
She had two big combs.

They have nails in, the combs.  
The combs have nails,  
and you do like that, fluff it up.

And she spin it by hand,  
and when the spindle come full,  
she have to wind it up, the balls.

And the balls, they go to the hanks,  
and from the hanks, we put in  
another round spin there,

and we put it through the comb  
to the frame, and she make it to a plait  
—thick like that!

You've got cotton coming in,  
wool coming across.  
Pull it tight and weave it.

## RAINBOW PALE

fibres are light  
light is a coat

coat is a boy  
boy is a voice

voice is a dream  
dream is a vine

vine is a child  
child is a loaf

loaf is a sheep  
sheep is a yarn

yarn is a gift  
gift is a flood

flood is a coin  
coin is a slave

slave is a soul  
soul is a lens

lens is a book  
book is a weave