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Fray

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An Tobar and Mull Theatre
Druimfin, Tobermoray
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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-neededled.

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—silkier
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.

CLOTH

hey let's live on cloth
let's go on holiday on it

let's go shopping on it
and feed animals with it

and when we all die
let's go to a woolly heaven

and take selfies
of ourselves drowned

OVERSHOT

Picture an animated graphic—a dancing line,
with peaks and troughs that seem to respond
to the sound of my voice reciting these words.

Imagine discrepancies arising that cast doubt
on this correlation, and consider alternatives
that say the line registers the motion of seawater

on the shores of Iona, or Pacific quake tremors,
or global mean temperatures recorded since 1880.
Consider too that it mimics the sound of a loom

housed in a Bunessan weaving shed, its duple
rhythm echoed in the Gaelic “lilp” *Brochan Lom*
and its ritual threading-shuttle-winding dance.

Now, reflect on the intensity of the bouncing line;
notice its increasing amplitude, crazy distortions,
then run a hand over something you’re wearing:

a jacket or skirt, and enjoy the feel of the fabric;
relish the floatwork of your palm moving up-down,
left-right, the gentle friction of skin against cloth.

Now rub harder...faster...keep going...*more*...
rub till you create a *beatwave* and your skin burns.
OK, ease off now, we don’t want to ruin the fabric.

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