

shelley

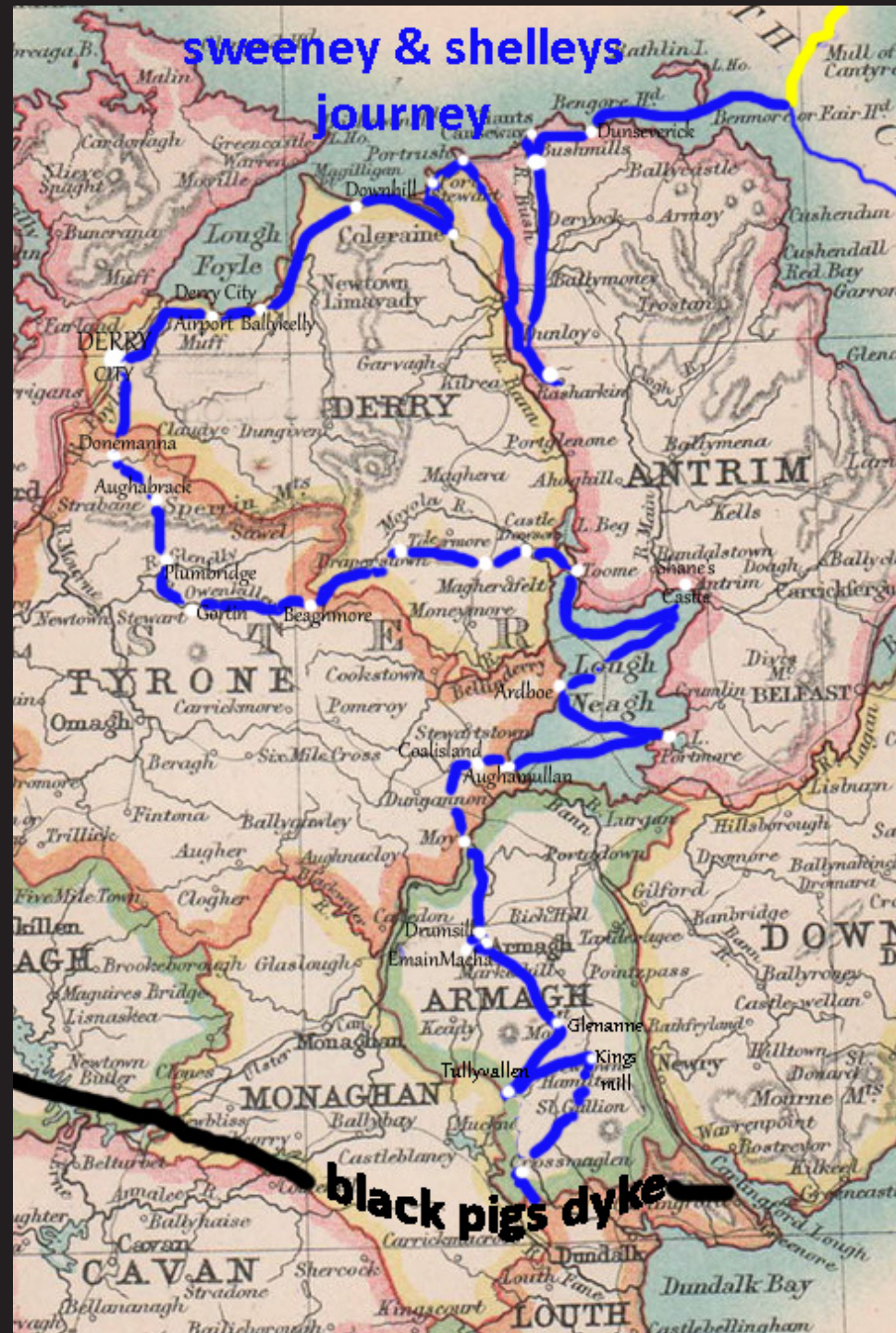
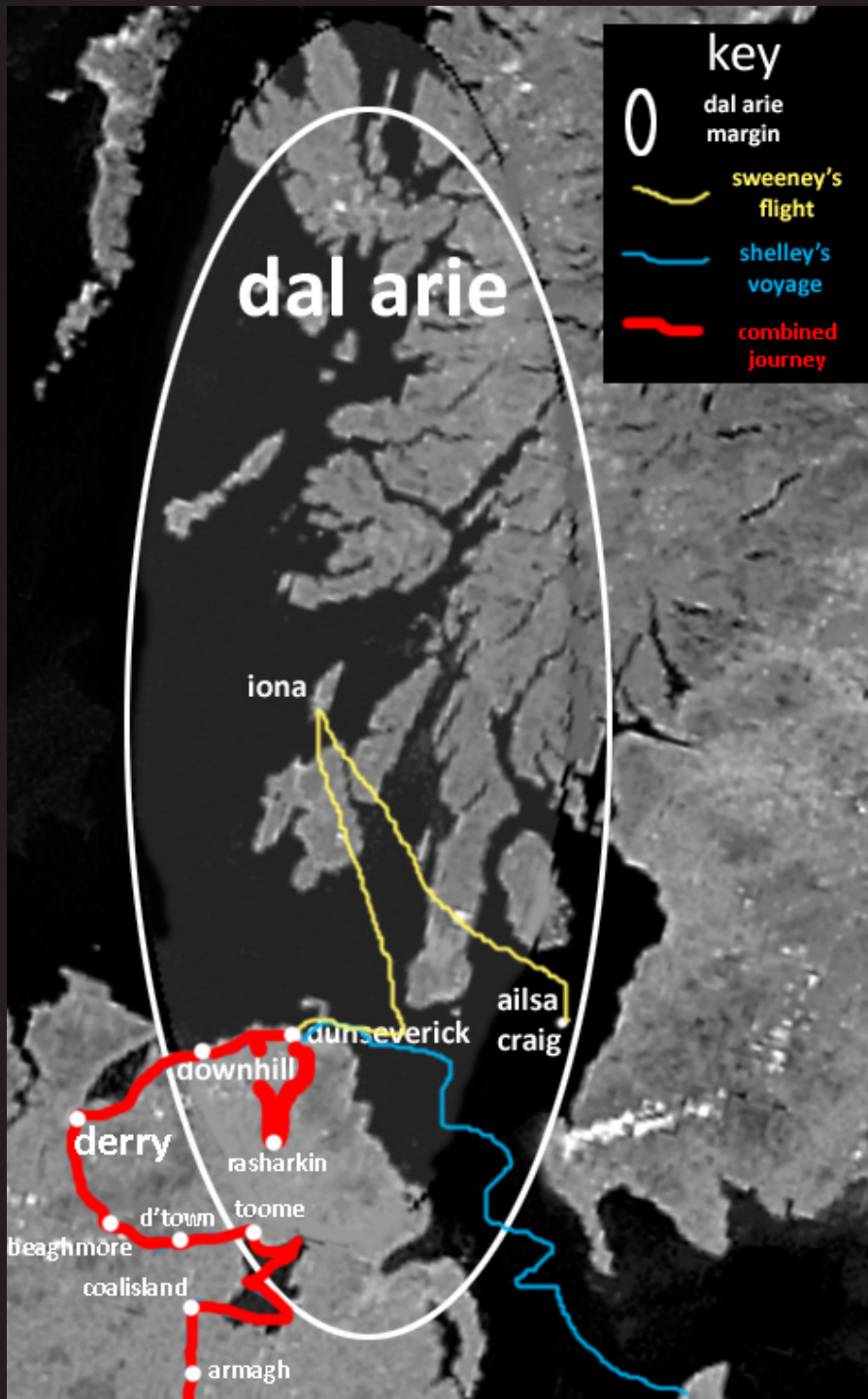
astray

sweeney



this book is dedicated
to the memory of percy bysshe shelley
who died by drowning 200 years ago
on july 8 1822 at age 29
when his sailing boat sank in a storm
off the coast of italy
10 years earlier he had sailed to ire land
for six weeks to start a peaceful revolution
it is also dedicated to the memory of victims
of sectarian violence in ire land
and elsewhere in the world





as i roosted on the mighty bell
of ailsa craig a voice did yell
across the deep but narrow sea
and with great power it forth led me
to fly in the visions of poesy

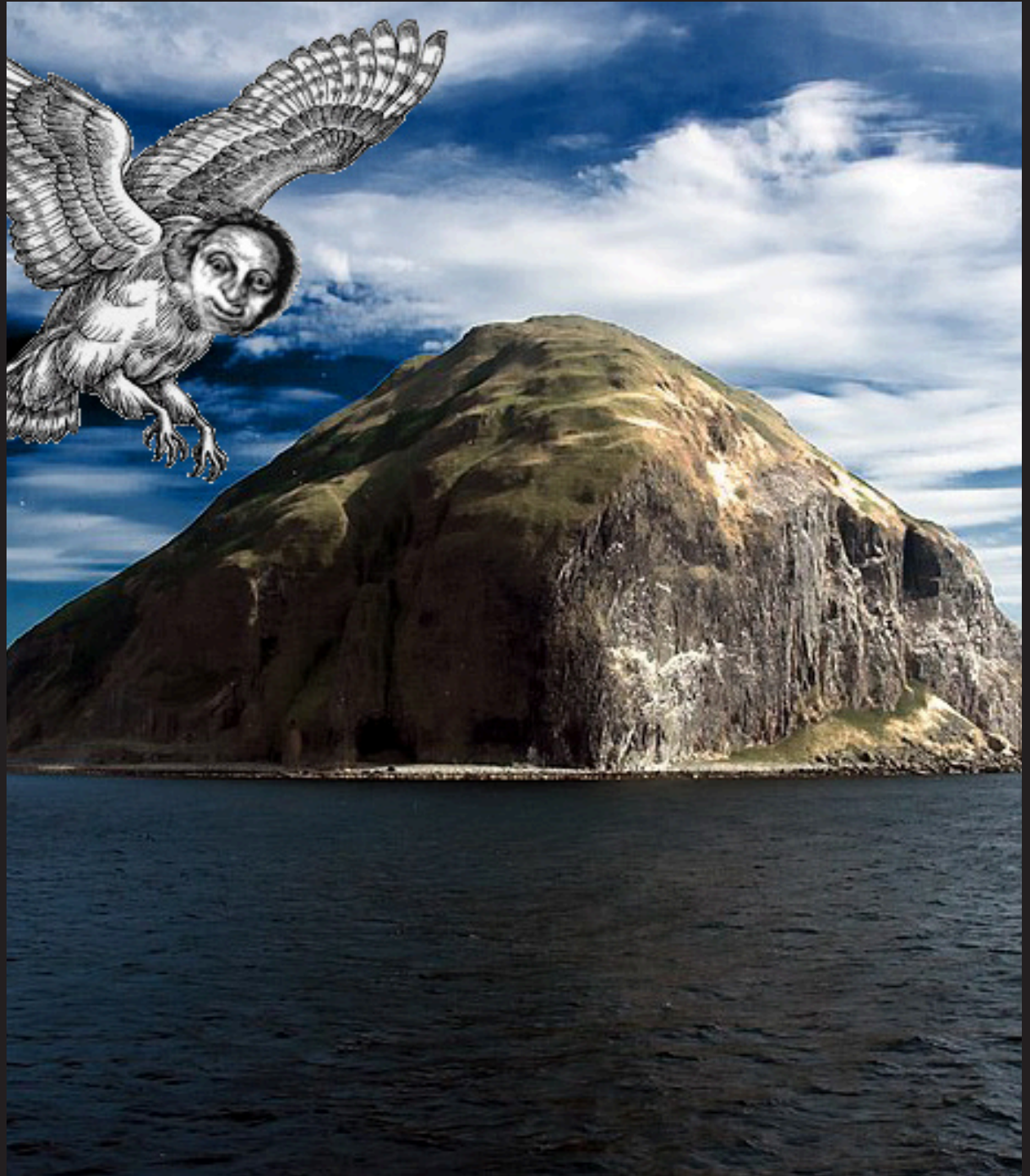
as king of dal arie i reigned
this sea and all the lands around
the isles the mull and over there
across the narrow sea north ulster fair

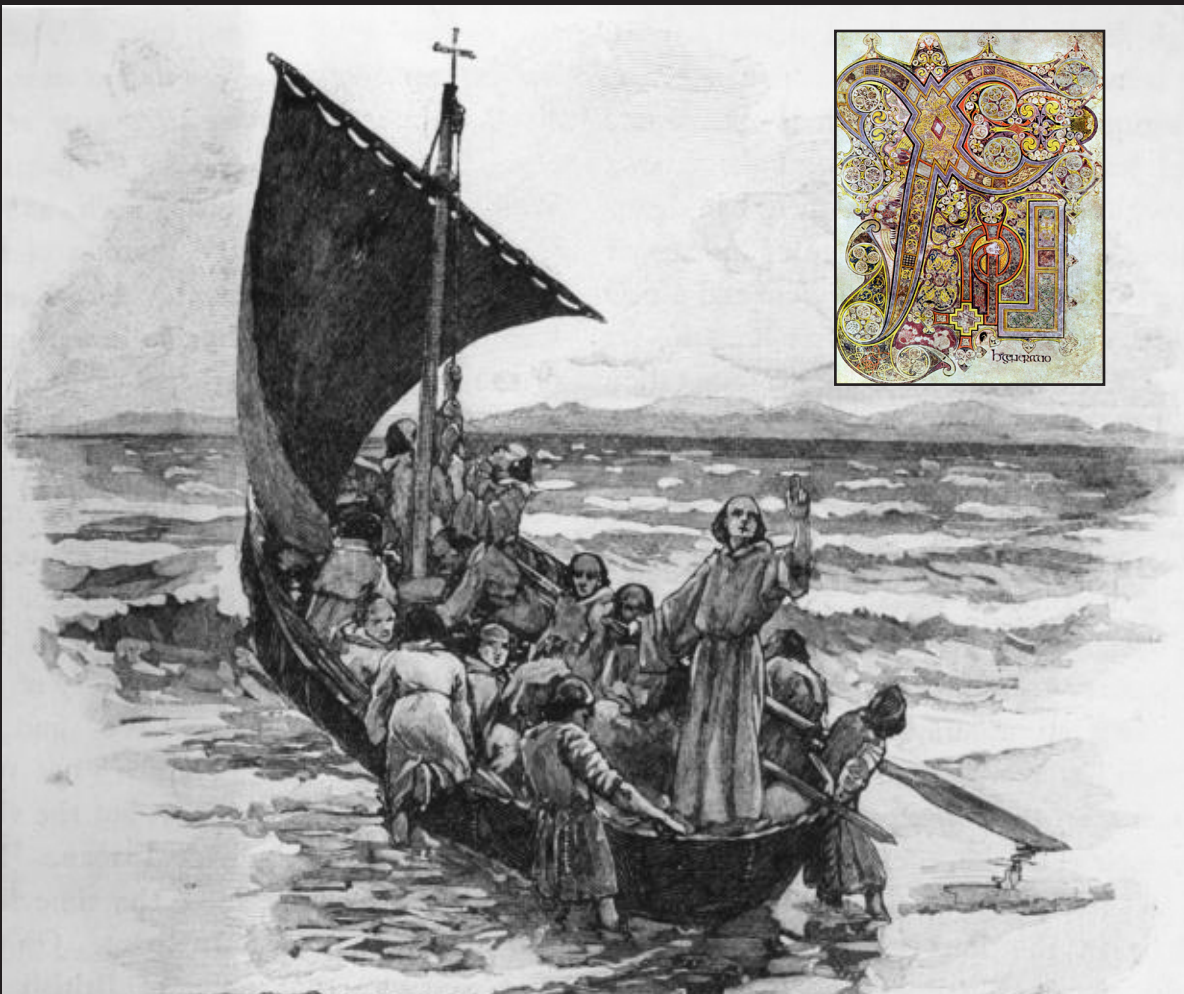
but i transgressed the rules of war
so saintly ronan cursed me far
changed me to a bird in flight
astray from human kind and sight

so here i am a migrant bird
with nothing to my body gird
naked but for scanty feathers
to see me thru wild wintry weathers

the story of my manic flight
was writ by monks but not quite right
they left out two time bending days
that made what this owl rhyming says
worth seven years of my cursd ways

hearing voices over the sea
a birdbrain madman they call me
but on this flight from ailsa craig
i feel a premonition vague





that something has begun to change
the way i see the space arrange
itself in this owl bird's eye view
a quantum leap in what i knew
of the dark side of where i flew

i saw iona on the way
for the wind blew me north astray
i landed on a rugged cross
and met the island's monkish boss

a big tall fellow colmcille
had been known to fight and kill
ere he built this monastery
as penance for his butchery?

i got cursed for mine as a bird
but here's its consequence absurd
i now see deep into the dark
recesses of the human quark
where time's not subject to the mark

colmcille's a migrant too
a banished ascetic who
with his scribes makes holy books
illuminated for their looks

so tho i too am shunned astray
compensations come my way
in skills that birds use every day
and endurance they display
in epic flights they oft essay

our sense of time is so much more
precise than your crude keeping score
we see events in motion slow
things stopped for you for us still go

most of all it's how we bend
our time you think will shortly end
but not for us the cares of time
we think eternally sublime

that is why this meeting can
take place between a long dead man
and me sweeney on iona
where time is but a chimera

these two days in dal arie
won't go down in history
which can merely note what's past
not what does forever last

tempus fugit so do we
time is of the essence free
flying relativity
mad as that may seem to be

colmcille is really at a loss
seeing me there upon his cross
he knows me from the moira fray
when he warned me of the way
we'd get crushed on battle day





now he's warning me again
he does not want a bird insane
roosting on his rugged cross
so insults at me he'll toss

*begone from here ye cursed bird
you're touched off your head absurd
quit your whinging without cease
leave us here in holy peace*

no respite here that i can find
no words of christian mercy kind
so i take off against the wind
that has me flying nearly blind
towards ire land time out of mind

i met a tempest on the way
that churned the seas to stormy spray
with waves of monstrous towering height
whereon i saw the strangest sight

below me in the billows blast
a ship was being tossed and cast
from crest to trough and near capsized
at every wave the sea devised

on its deck all hands were bent
on saving it from imminent
doom closing hatches dropping sails
tying down to thwart the wicked gales

all hands but one were so employed
and he as if this gale enjoyed
stood holding on to one rope tight
smiling up at me a bird in flight

a bird but with a human head
he saw now land on high masthead
and when i called he shouted back
as if he twigged my wind torn squaack

something in the youth's calm eyes
that swiftly made me empathize
with him and care that they survive
the raging storm and stay alive
until in ulster they arrive?

behind him on the lurching deck
two huddled maids are held in check
by bonds of love and good stout rope
as with the storm they bravely cope

three more fellows close to stern
seem deep in talk show no concern
for the chaos round about
as over howling winds they shout

one of these holds forth at length
but only snatches have the strength
to reach my ears in sounds like *faith*
and *love* and *hell* and *death*





dunseverick
by rachel giese

feeling like an albatross
i try to get the word across
to that one youth still looking high
at me to ing fro ing in the sky

hoping to lead them to the port
not far where i would them escort
if they but follow my flight path
and there escape the storm's wild wrath

somehow he the message got
and called the helmsman in earshot
to *steer where that strange bird will fly*
to save us all or we will die

they struggle hard to stay the course
but finally reach the promised source
of that calm shelter from the storm
which the youth i did inform
was dunseverick safe from harm

as they dock and disembark
i skim the waves and feel a spark
of joy for once in many moons
and laugh a manic laugh like loons

something in his manner on the boat
above it all unafraid remote
set apart like me itinerant
an outcast excommunicant
ostracized to roam a mendicant

this youth is shelley and the maids
two sisters the older one who aids
the young one shelley's wife to find
her land legs she had left behind

when they embarked from isle of man
dublin bound storms changed that plan
blew them north and as astray
as i am every flightfull day

i asked young shelley why he made
this voyage to our shores he said
*i've come to start a revolution
to free this long oppressed nation*

*i've met with exiles who had tried
to oust the english ire land wide
united irishmen who fought and failed
to bring their freedoms now curtailed*

i thought he might be mad like me
to think he'd conquer bigotry
that gives rise to treachery
and destroys the cause of liberty

and who are ye? says shelley then
who saved us from a watery end?
i am sweeney of rasharkin
forever flitting and embarking
always whinging mostly skulking





sometimes i rise up like the lark
full of joy and heavenly spark
but as the zeit returns anew
i plunge to earth a crazed cuckoo

hail to thee blithe spirit bird
says shelly we'll take you at your word
you seem to know the lie of ground
as long as we reach dublin town

am far from blithe more's the pity
this year has been bird shitty
first the curse and then the exile
an *anus horribilis* vile

but i will guide you thru this land
if you will feed me scraps by hand
these winter days am famished mad
without a baek am starving bad

by now we rightly understood
each other's gist in rhyming rude
how far is this from dublin town
says he *where we were erstwhile bound?*

as this bird flies? less than a day
by your shanks mare? two weeks i'd say
by coach? two days you're on your way
for that a hefty price you'll pay

first you'll need refreshment light
down there's the place to get a bite
where watercress and brooklime teem
in uisce round this bush rill stream

one stream that flows into the bush
is deemed miraculously lush
saint columb's rill where at its source
in slemish bogs begins its course

colmcille was well aware
of uisce uisce everywhere
he urged his people take good care
of rivers streams and little rills
keep them free of filthy spills

he saw uisce as a grace
a gift that we must not debase
but cherish for its purity
in its own simplicity
or in his *carpe diem* tea

i have tasted water every day
from streams and wells along the way
from bantry bay up to derry quay
but none can match the dark uisce
of saint columb's rill's sweet bouquet

saint columb's rill is vital key
to brewing *carpe diem* tea
it seizes time before it's gone
to savour it from dawn to dawn
and gives me strength to still go on



CHRIS IBBOTSON
PHOTOGRAPHY



as soon as shelley takes a drink
from columb's rill he starts to think
he is a bird himself like me
flying in the visions of poesy

i sweeney as his knowing guide
fly him to places ulster wide
where i had often hid and dined
since i'd been cursed time out of mind

one such place we flew that morn
was where this birdbrain had been born
near the village of rasharkin
in the townland of glen bolcain
where sweet cress is always certain

this was sweeney's home and refuge
my escape in times of deluge
where i could rest and seek repair
from desolation and despair

but this shelley wanted more
the causeway too he must explore
because he is a scientist
as well as rhyming lyricist

back up to the coast we fly
landing atop the columns high
among the seagulls hanging there
swooping and screeching in the air

when i told him of maccumhail
who threw these rocks in giants' duel
he laughed and said i was a gull
that such a tale was null and bull

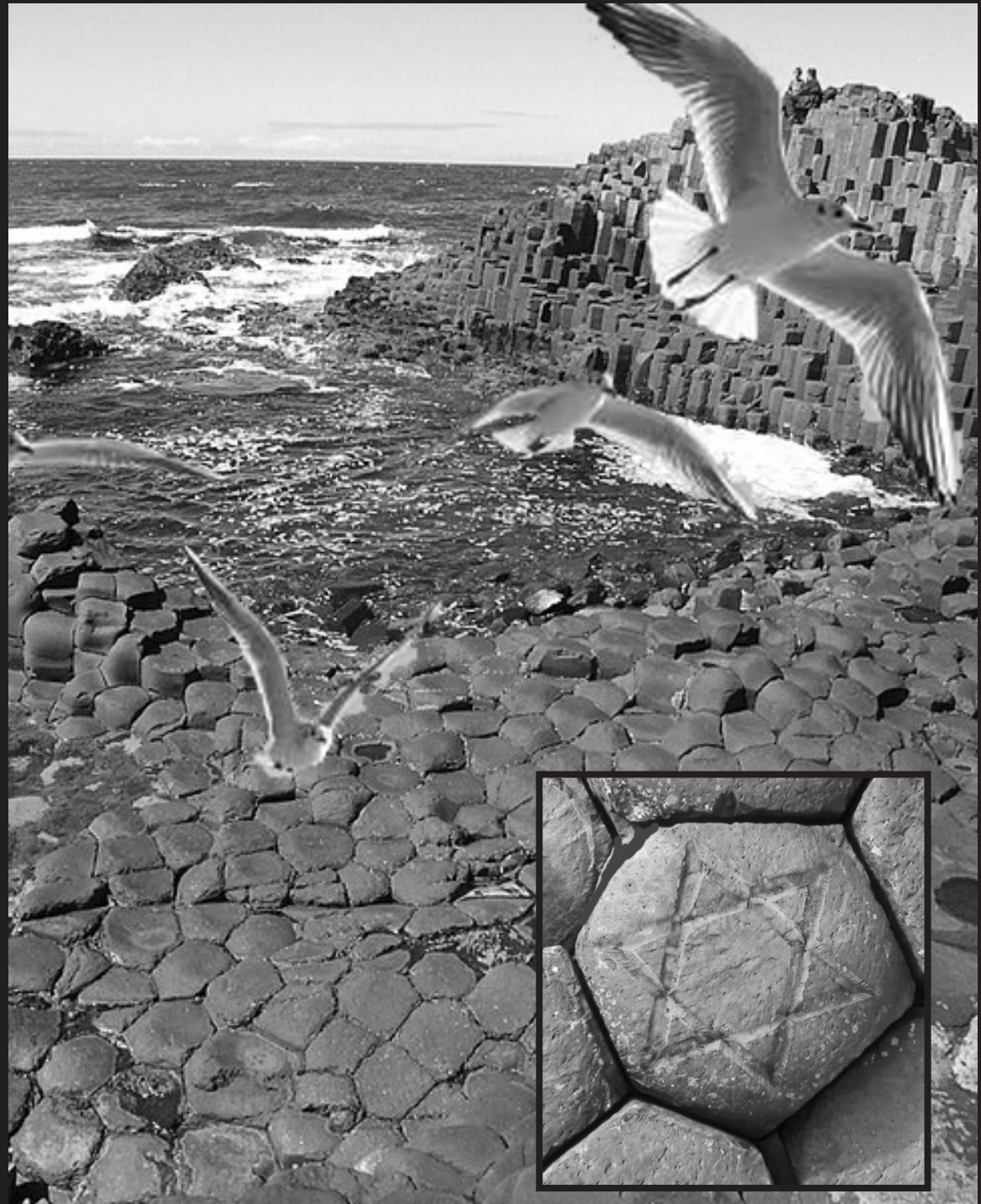
that *these columns are volcanic*
caused by nature's force titanic
i thought maybe he was manic
mad as me a crazed loon attic

all this time the two young dames
harriet and **eliza** their names
didn't notice we were gone
while time for them did not move on
we spent time on a hexagon

drink saint columb's rill uisce dram
while stepping on a hexagram
and time will time and time again
glimpse those past times now and then

but time too will take a leap
a flying leap into the deep
of what will be as yet to come
back and forth at minimum

the causeway's hexcitation
along with slight inebriation
cause this high kite levitation
causing space time aviation





all the way to sixtowns derry
to sixmilecross in high badoney
from six counties thru the air
to sixmilebridge in county clare

and back again to dear glen bolcain
within a sixth sense moment span
the dames did not detect a thing
nor did we remembering
because the way was on the wing

for the times they are a changing
past and future rearranging
what was before now way behind
what was now is what will in mind

this was but a test flight short
a flying visit just for sport
but sport would end now soon enough
when we see ire land in the rough

for now they had to find a chaise
to take them south from this dear place
but they must go to derry first
to catch a coach that south traversed

glen bolcain had one ass and cart
owned by one called con mac art
who happened by that very hour
and offered them a half horse power
lift to derry's famed long tower



tho asses have a reputation
for stubborn insubordination
our con had got his ass in gear
supplying her with bush rill cheer

three passengers as well as con
might have made the journey long
but no the burning bush sped
up the ass to thrice a horse's tread

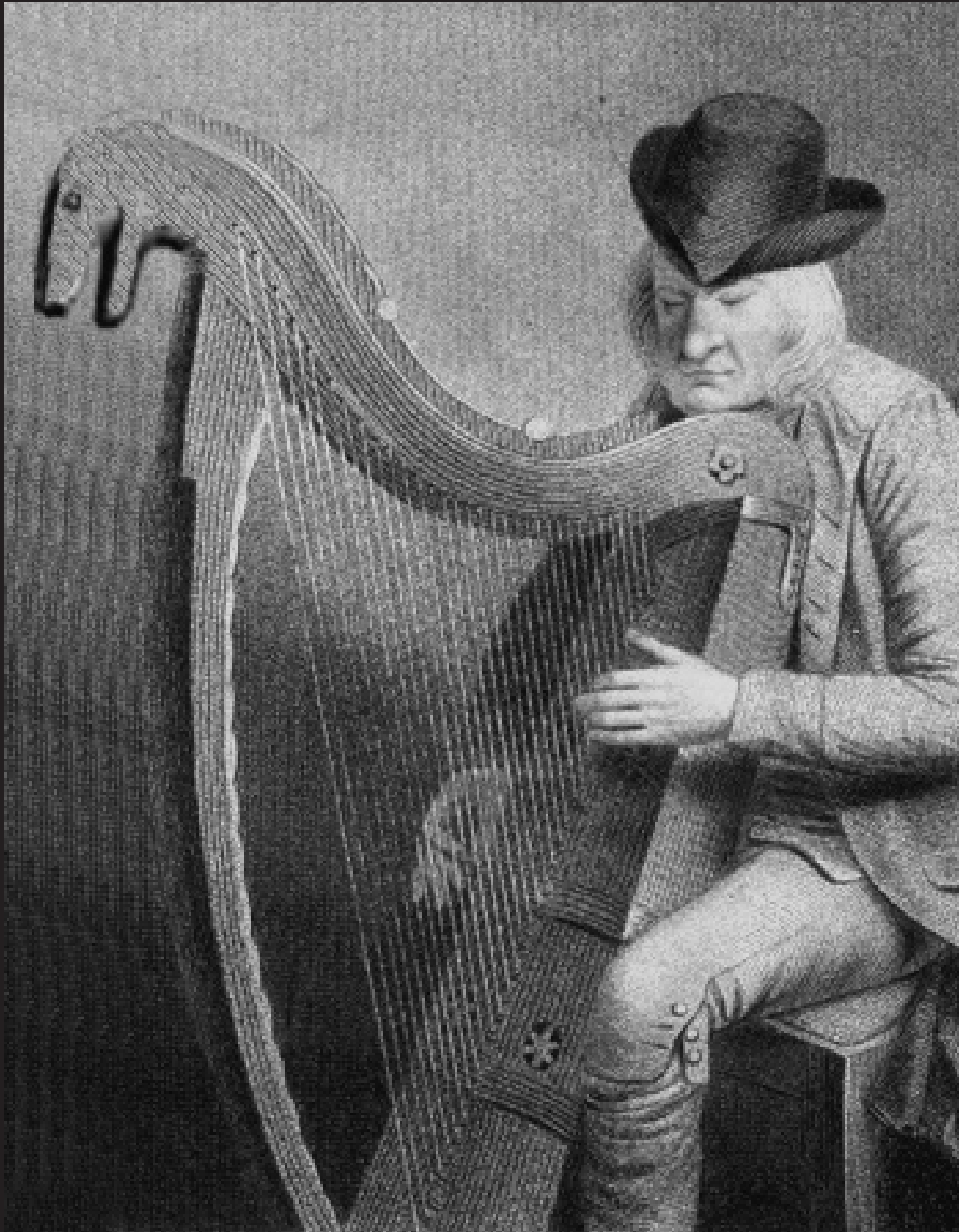
through time portals where many gulls
were riding big toy vehicles
bumping screaming loud excitement
in seafront wild amusement

on to downhill and its strand
below where sheep and temple stand
where i glide on cliffs updraft
and hear the temple muses waft
their chords in gentle harping craft

for this is where o'hampsaigh played
the dragon harp o'kelly made
in ballinascreen miles south of here
his *queen of music* without peer

shelley and the girls enchanted
by the tuneful sounds they're granted
follow them until they find
them emerging from behind
the door of a bothy unrefined





inside the ancient harper plays
the ancient lays of ancient days
sweeping down on memory's wings
to fingernails on metal strings

his two closed eyes would never see
beyond the infant age of three
when smallpox struck a blinding blow
the harp at twelve he learned to know
thru those who saw his genius grow

music compensating well
for his blindness would propel
him to a life of wandering
like me but entertaining
big house gentry for a living

the man with two heads they said
with his great wen a second head
a centenarian to boot
still playing on strong resolute

*he's a hundred but he's playing something
tight* each note conveying
precisely what the tune demands
from his swiftly moving hands

he plays all three the noble strains
lullaby $\sigma\upsilon\alpha\lambda\tau\rho\alpha\iota$ for waens
joyful $\zeta\epsilon\alpha\lambda\tau\rho\alpha\iota$ for lovers
sorrowful $\zeta\omicron\lambda\tau\rho\alpha\iota$ for mourners

then *the dawning of the day*
that would send them on their way
and finally he would improvise
a variation he'd devise

but then he stops and says no more
for these old tunes make me heartsore
too many memories all sharp
are brought to fore by dragon harp

as they proceed past benone strand
a few last notes drift over land
but then drowned out by breakers crash
as rising seas these beaches slash

for they have just now flown ahead
two centuries a time of dread
when polar ice is melting fast
and glaciers shrink that once were vast

even the temple on the cliff
is threatened by the climate shift
the mussenden muse will sink
into the drink from her high brink

till now the shelleys have been charmed
by what they've seen so far unharmed
but they've begun to feel a change
in climate nearing derry's range





and here's one reason for this plight
two portals for the kind of flight
that needs to burn great quantities
of fossil fuel oily grease

ballykelly built for war
brute raptor birds that spew and roar
raining bombs and spitting fire
delivering slaughter from the air

derry city's portal's next
built upon the peacetime pretext
of flying as a human right
despite its carbon farting blight

flying's for the birds like me
who can fly fossil fuel free
and shelley too inspiritly
no need for crude machinery

the maiden city is at peace
for now at least her assaults cease
tho violence is never far
beneath her calm exterior

i fly them now to derry's walls
the scene of many brutal brawls
says the guardian at the gate
remember sixteen ninety date

the river god that glares above
looks like he does not approve
this portal into derry's core
is also into time of yore

for shelley takes another drop
of st columb's rill to crop
two hundred years from his own time
to be in sixteen eighty nine
when derry's under siege confined

the first thing shelley notices
is the stench of rotting corpses
on the streets some being eaten
by dogs that will then be beaten
to death and in turn get eaten

on butcher street one shop not shut
is selling parts of chopped up mutt
corpse fattened for *five and six*
cat *four and six* rat *one and six*

a time of utter grim despair
when groans of hunger rend the air
or fever strangles every breath
fifteen thousand meet their death

fifteen weeks of forced starvation
no room left for inhumation
but maiden city won't give in
we won't let them papists win
no surrender for our kin





why did i fly shelley here?
thru this savagery severe?
to show him what a papish king
did to foes for their rebelling
his right divine their denying?

which gets young shelley thinking
these papists i'm supporting
embracing their emancipating
perhaps they're not deserving
of these freedoms they're demanding

but i assure him they will see
much worse than this atrocity
from good godfearing planter stock
when we turn back and forth the clock

another portal bishop's gate
we will now negotiate
to reach long tower papist church
outside the walls an easy search

for this is where owl con mc art
the pilot of the ass and cart
was headed for when he agreed
to get them here at near light speed

three centuries on we fly
when derry's hopes for peace are high
uisce from saint columb's rill
for this time trip will fill the bill
on the trail of colmcille

for we will here be in a place
where colmcille left many a trace
not just in saint columb's kirk
but where they carry on his work

even prods salute his fame
with grand cathedral in his name
just back there inside the walls
that separate these worship halls

two warring sides of colmcille
the dove of peace and hawk who'd kill
to keep his copy of the psalter
that he had scripted for his altar

long tower church is now the scene
of the funeral of one who'd been
a freedom fighting terrorist
but had become a pacifist
playing cricket like a unionist

he'd given up the bomb and gun
and for the assembly had run
became minister of education
as colmcille in his way had done

he befriended doctor no
an erstwhile bitter orange foe
the chuckle brothers act would grow
as ulster peace would too tho slow
he even shook the royal hand
of friendship with the queen as planned





now here he's in his box of pine
obsequied by priests divine
mourned by fellow politicians
praised by yankee owl patricians

a grand sendoff for mcguinness
when even prod first mistress
reaches long to shake the hand
of her deputess republican
over the heads of many a man

but why did he do what he did?
turn to murder in a bid
to oust the brits with violence
the answer lies in his defence
of bogside streets a short flight hence

where bloody sunday would occur
peaceful protest turned massacre
when paratroopers kill thirteen
unarmed walkers at the scene

as he sees these bogside streets
awash in blood and shattered peace
shelley hears these words arise
from somewhere back behind his eyes
as number thirteen bleeds and dies

***And at length when ye complain
With a murmur weak and vain
'Tis to see the Tyrant's crew
Ride over you wives and you -
Blood is on the grass like dew.***

***Then it is to feel revenge
Fiercely thirsting to exchange
Blood for blood and wrong for wrong
Do not thus when ye are strong.***

before we leave this derry scene
we find ourselves on college green
below saint columbs boarding school
where strapping priests lay down the rule
with colmille hide doaking tool

shelley thinks it's just like eaton
where some were sometimes sorely beaten
by fagging senior prefect stews
who snotty yaps would oft abuse

there is one fellow bird herein
whose mathematics often win
a doaking for both right and wrong
solutions to equations long

a daft dark bird gone raven mad
capricious trickster has you had
nought equals one absurdity
eliciting hilarity

***the owl triangle goes jingle
jangle*** as the bird will mingle
black humour with geometry
calculus with cruelty





out there above the green the coach
that's going south and will approach
at least part way their dublin goal
where he would set free ire land's soul

before they board this coach affair
the girls take in the derry air
and find it changed beyond compare
from all that grim and bloody fare
that first assailed their senses there

for down on bishop street they meet
some derry girls who gladly greet
the westbrook girls bid them welcome
to their fair maiden city home

for derry's all about them girls
who are its heart and crack and pearls
breadwinners of their families
from making shirts in factories
to convent girl screen comedies

the town these girls ***have loved so well***
despite its days of living hell
is poised to take the world by storm
with witty drama they perform

the westbrook girls are much impressed
with the spirit of this town so blessed
by women who have seen the worst
like me by troubles crudely cursed

climbing on the coach they find
it filled with youths of decent kind
quite unlike the ones at eaton
they give the shelleys greeting
even find the girls front seating

the south derry coach on its way
never before until this day
had girls on board for this time trip
it's always been male flying ship

for each young man now heading home
after weeks of head in tome
and weeks of being celibate
was ready to just celebrate

all this time i'm on the roof
resting roosting perched aloof
while under me there's ceol and crack
that starts with ***hit the road jack***

for westbrook girls they sing love songs
loud at the top of their lungs
put your sweet lips a little closer
pretend that we're together
until the twelfth of never

things like a walk in the park
things like a kiss in the dark
it was always you from the start
cause i don't have a wooden heart





photo
gareth mccormack

harriet westbrook shelley's wife
with only sixteen years of life
is serenaded by the boys
sweet sixteen their joyful noise
the lovely harriet enjoys

***you're my baby, you're my pet,
we fell in love on the night we met
your'e sixteen you're beautiful
and you're mine*** adorable

the coach's driver jack o'kane
head's turned by them songs insane
a wrong turn takes by scenic route
not thru glenshane his right pursuit
but thru tyrone they now commute

donemanna aughabrack
over sperrins by rough track
she'll be coming round the mountain
wearing ***all the gold in gortin***

thru plumbridge and gortin glen
rouskey and buninver then
greencastle and glenelly
where i have often filled my belly
with watercress and frogspawn jelly

in all the years that i've been cursed
through all the townlands i've traversed
on worn out wings in furtive flights
i've never seen such lovely sights
as those below great sperrin heights

as we near the county march
and davagh forest spruce and larch
i fly them off the beaten track
to where we will go way way back
thru a portal almanac

a broad expanse of standing stones
with one frail figure skin and bones
bent at work his troweling
unearths more stones discovering

i've seen him here sometimes before
at this owl site of beaghmore
digging deep into the past
geordie's legacy will last

it's all to do with time ye know
says geordie ***an almanac to show***
positions astronomical
these circles are calendrical

those circles i soon overflow
to get a better bird's eye view
and true enough they look like clocks
not just random rings of rocks

shelley gives his full attention
to this rhyming explanation
for geordie's archaeology
takes on the shape of poesy





*Ceremonial occasions
they often had here
They knew every day aye
and week in the year
For fifty two weeks
they had stones in a ring
Thirteen in line
for the time they call spring
But one thing i'll say
and it isn't to mock
They set up their time
by the very best clock
It's all sorted out
by the sun or the moon
And it can't go astray
to the last crack of doom*

as i was roosting round the site
a lark atop wan stone took flight
which shelley saw and watched it climb
so he in turn would turn to rhyme

*Hail to the blithe Spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from Heaven or near it,
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.*

*Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest
Like a cloud of fire,
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar,
and soaring ever singest.*

not to be outdone in verse
geordie would these rhymes disperse
revealing his respect for nature
and how we might its health ensure

***But the birds will build their nests again
and that in the old way***

***The mistle thrush upon the bush
and the lark upon the brae***

...

***So don't disturb the nesting birds
but let the work go on***

***Lest nature's balance goes astray
and everything go wrong***

shelley eyes the lark ascending
hears its song before descending
and adds to geordie's deep respect
for spirits that they must protect

***Teach us, sprite or bird,
What sweet thoughts are thine,
I have never heard Praise of love or wine
That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine.***

geordie ends their flood of words
with his own choice of spirit birds
in this friendly competition
sigtowns bard v bard patrician

***The lark may sing its very best
and soar upon its wings
Or the linnet or any bird that sings
Yet I'd rather have the swallow
as it skims along the green
Than any other bird that I have ever seen***



art victoria hamilton



neither thinks of me owl sweeney
who can verse as well as any heaney
so much so that famous seamus
translated my owl whinging thus

*the skylarks rising
to their high space
send me pitching and tripping
over stumps on the moor*

*and my hurry flushes
the turtle dove
i overtake it
my plumage rushing*

*am startled
by the startled woodcock
or a blackbird's sudden
volubility*

*i prefer the elusive
rhapsody of blackbirds
to the garrulous blather
of men and women*

*herons calling
in cold glenelly
flocks of birds quickly
coming and going*

when finished with the poesy
geordie invites the three to tae
at his abode in owenreagh
which is a good six mile away

he rides his bike to get him there
the shelleys take the coach and pair
the youths completely unaware
that shelley's time they did not share

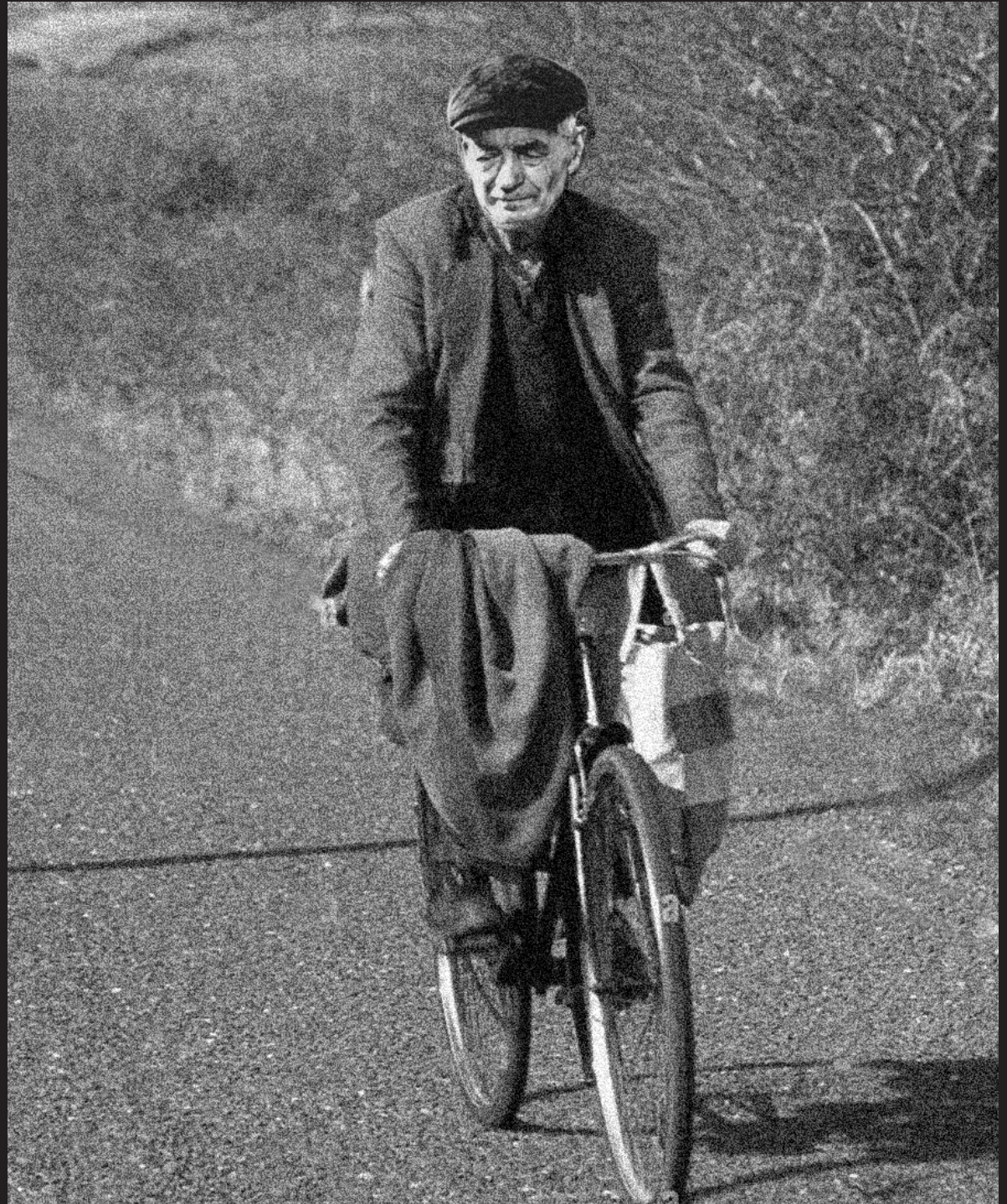
on the way thru sweet moyard
they meet a monk who's looking hard
to find a site for his new church
it's monk columba on the search

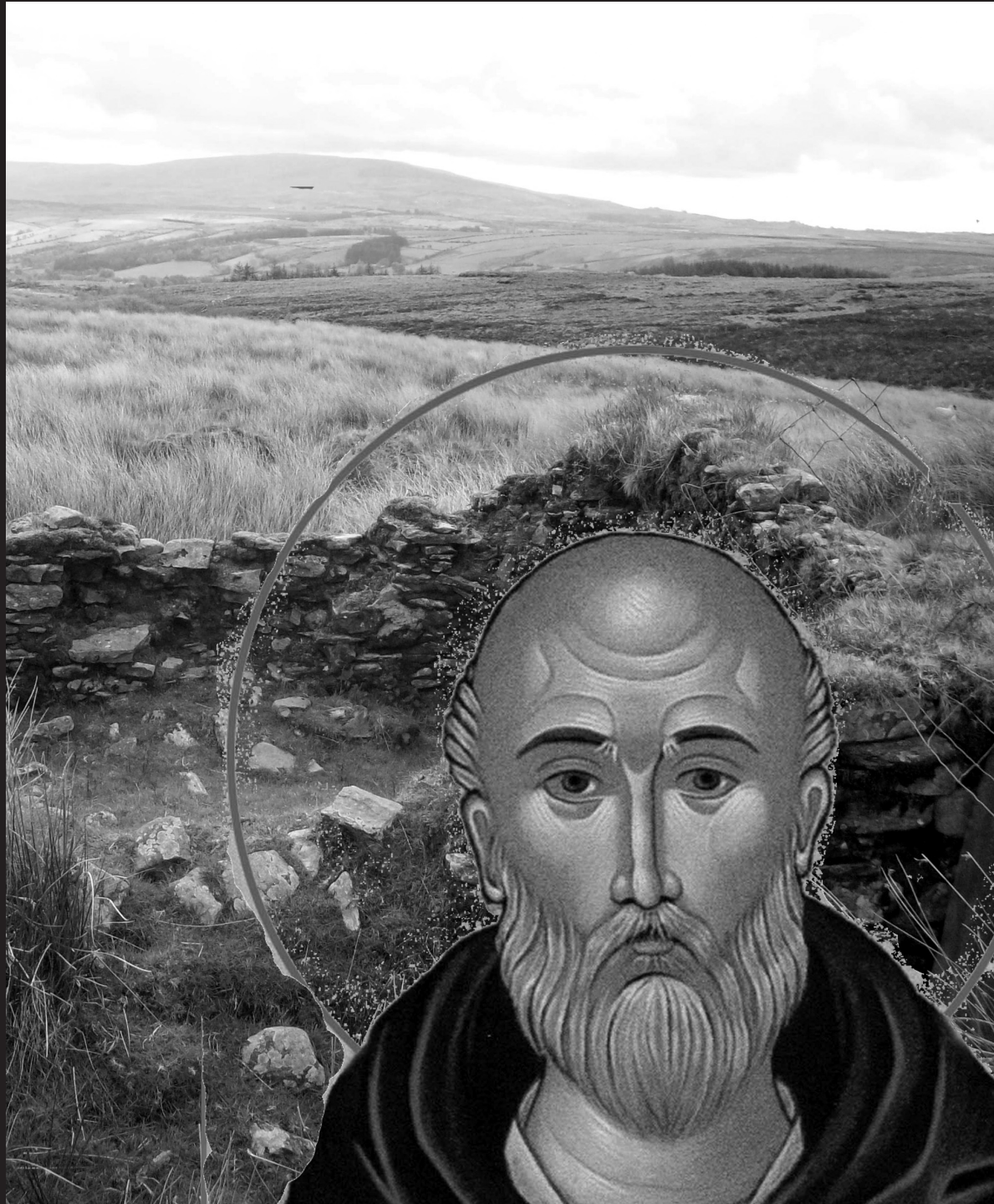
columba? columb? colmcille?
call him any name ye will
but he has left a legacy
round these parts in history
with help from some mythology

i met him before the battle
at moira he spoke this oracle
***all crossed the sea and here you stand
who'll never all return from ire land***

was he a seer or just a monk
spouting meaningless owl bunk?
he promised me i'd be the king
and salvation it would bring
instead i got a hammering

saint columb's rill shelley's drunk
so out he gets to meet the monk
fifteen hundred years back when
columba is wan angry man





for when he builds a chapel wall
a pesht at night comes wrecks it all
so he has to find a sacred site
to build on where the pesht can't light
or tumble walls by stealth at night

*the pesht he says is demon kind
some local druid with a mind
to keep good christians out of there
claims we have no dominion where
oak groves streams and meadows were*

*druids say we're driving them out
of their sacred groves with big stout
churches destroying oaks for beams
for our monastic building schemes*

*druids must then go therefore
to remote spots like beaghmore
where stone circles are the fanes
of their owl creed that still remains*

*there druids make their prophesies
that a time will come when these
our christian churches won't survive
but that stone circles will revive
that nature worship may then thrive*

*not if i can help it says the monk
them stone circles should be sunk
into the bogs round beaghmore
i've knocked them down myself before*

right then geordie on his bike arrives
just as columba contrives
to change the subject of his speech
to one more suitable to preach

for geordie is the closest thing
to a druid in his thinking
around these parts even tho
he might that title fast forego

bard ovate druid scientist
without the taint of egotist
self taught sharp and down to earth
knows her rhythms and her worth

columba is uncomfortable
with geordie's mien druidical
his rhyming lays satirical
on matters sometimes clerical

geordie's a presbyterian
but truly not sectarian
with friends of every class and creed
most ecumenical indeed

columba bids them all good day
starts searching moneyconey
as they proceed to owenreagh
and geordie's wee black tin of tae





geordie's home's a humble place
of luxury there is no trace
geology his stock and trade
with stones on every surface laid

for tae he has three mugs for guests
tho his own cup he thinks the best
the finest vessel in his kitchen
his lyles golden syrup tin

his life is rough a bachelor's
but welcomes many visitors
with tae and bap he plies them well
and plays his fiddle for a spell
one he crafts himself ye can tell

he shows them then his plot outdoors
stones again arranged like beaghmore's
a scaled down model of the clocks
with flowers growing round the rocks

well fed and entertained he sends
them on their way which now descends
into *the verdant braes of screen*
and *fastnesses of glenconkeyne*
where forests dominate the scene

oak ash and bonny rowan tree
birch and alder sanctuary
a refuge from the war disease
that plagued these lands for centuries

*the bushy leafy oak tree
is highest in the wood
the forking shoots of hazel
hide sweet hazel nuts*

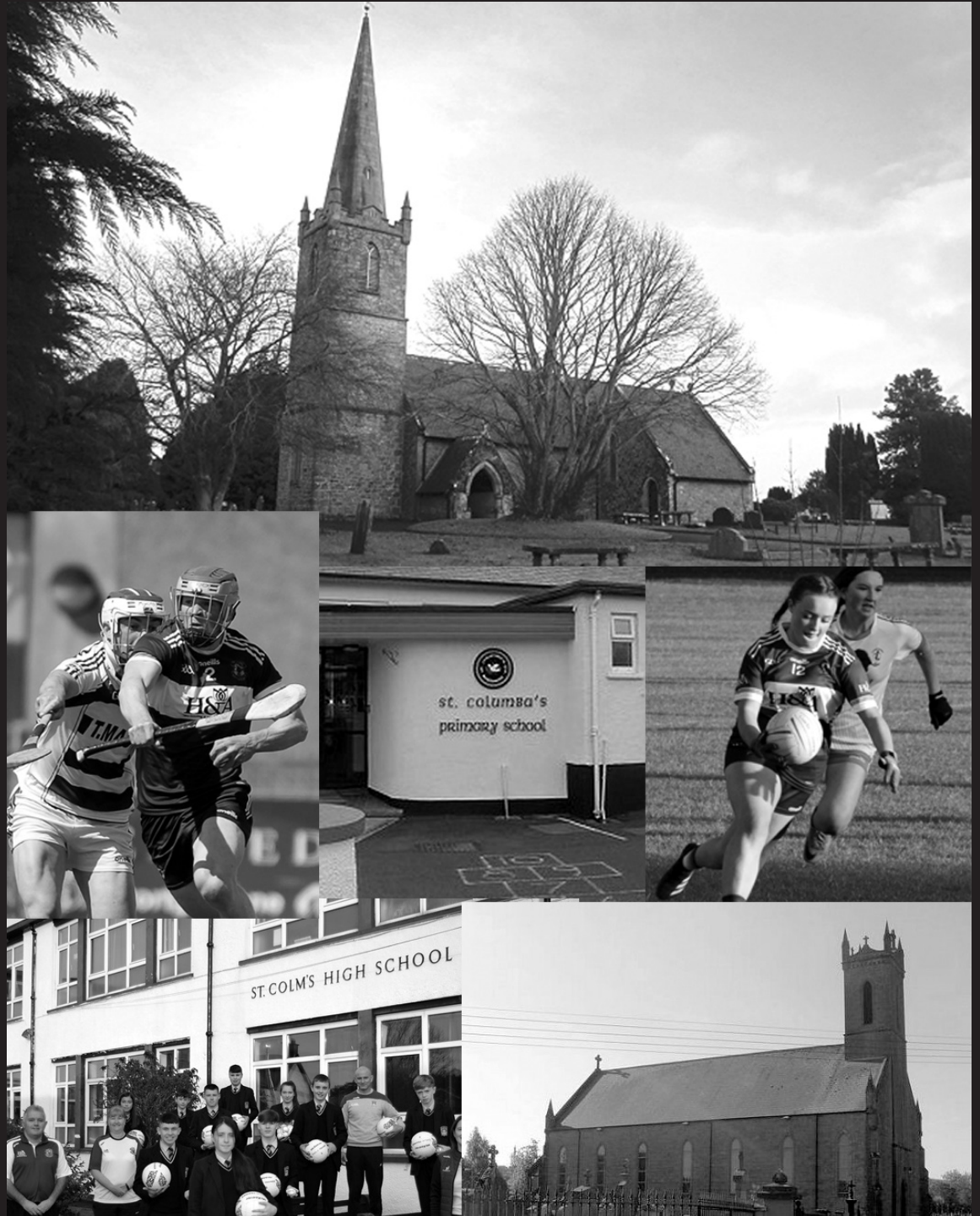
*the alder is my darling
all thornless in the gap
some milk of human kindness
coursing in its sap*

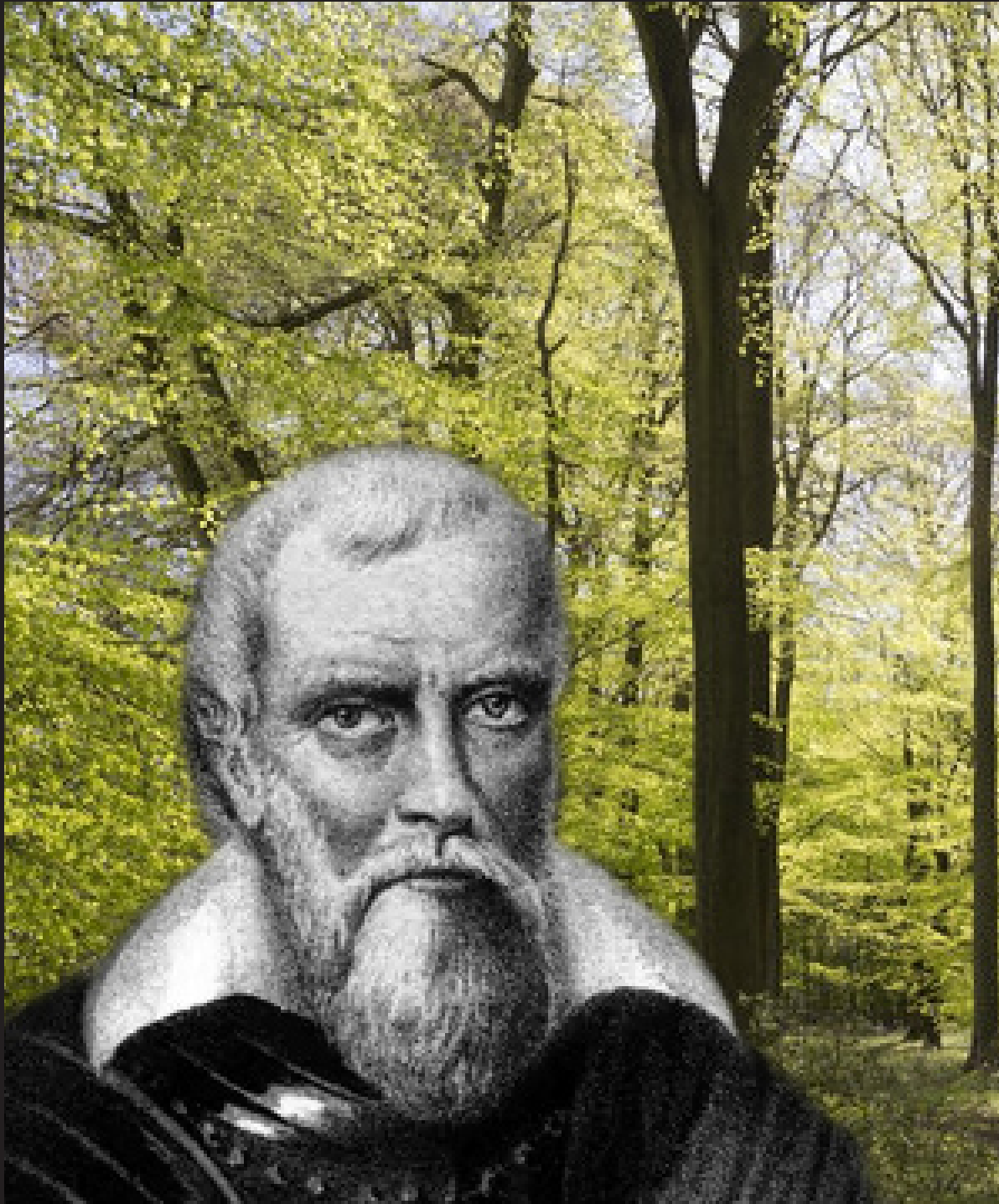
*birch tree smooth and blessed
delicious to the breeze
high twigs plait and crown it
the queen of trees*

outside of derry city's scene
on nowhere more than on the screen
has columba left his trace
on institutions in this place

saint columba's *church* in straw
saint columba's *school* in straw
saint columba's *kirk* for prods
its steeple high above the cross
saint colm's high school near the cross
and saint colm's gaelic sporting teams
columba owns the place it seems

mixed with geordie's tae content
more saint columb's rill has sent
shelley to a time when one
o'nail is hiding on the run
in ballinascreen among his kin





a fugitive from the crown
in these dense woods not yet cut down
shelley meets him at the cross
where onail laments the loss
of all tyrone where he was boss

he nearly is a broken man
a rebel and a veteran
of nine years war against his queen
whose court once favoured his demesne

now here he is a refugee
hounded and disgraced like me
at the mercy of his foes
closing in wherever he goes

*i have seen the scorched earth zone
he says in my own dear tyrone
crops destroyed cattle slaughtered
granaries burnt dwellings levelled*

*a man made famine stalks the land
to cleanse it for the system planned
infants suck on dead mothers breasts
children eat their parents corpses*

*chichester and mountjoy aim
to wipe us out with famine's flame
while scottish chancers wait to claim
our scorched land a dirty game*

*they are using mass starvation
to execute their brute plantation ...*

*but shelley interrupts the flow
to question what tyrone said so*

*i heard somewhere that you had been
a loyal subject of our queen
but then rebelled then were pardoned
rebelled again so she hardened
and your favoured status ended*

*says tyrone guilt i won't admit
she doesn't know the half of it
the queen's hard men are treacherous
their methods savage barbarous*

*shelley as a pacifist
thinks the best way to resist
the tyrant's bloody anarchy
is shaping in his poesy*

***Stand ye calm and resolute,
Like a forest close and mute,
With folded arms and looks which are
Weapons of unvanquished war.***

***And if then the tyrants dare
Let them ride among you there,
Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew,--
What they like, that let them do.***





*With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away.*

*tyrone grunts dismissively
their rage will never die away
till every one of us they slay
who might oppose their thievery*

*who are you to question me
anyway? a callow youth who'd flee
from the queen's own tyrant crew
fighting back is not for you*

*you've never faced the tyrants wrath
says tyrone and their fierce bloodbath
you are a privileged gentry son
who has no notion what they've begun*

*you are naïve in the extreme
to think that their plantation scheme
can now be stopped by peaceful means
these boys are ruthless rich gombeens*

*shelley answers did your own lies
bring about your sad demise?
that violent betrayal might
have led to this unseemly flight?*

*did you at one time not defraud
o'cadhan's clann and then maraud
the lands of your own allies
as now the english seize your prize?*

*tyrone says yes i fought vassal clans
some of them barbarians
with gallowglasses in their pay
mercenary butchers who slay
anything that moves their way*

*they needs must be kept in line
if we are ever to combine
our fractious clans and tyrants fight
for that we must first unite*

*there's you challenge shelley says
united irishmen could raise
themselves above the strife
were tribalism not so rife*

*and tribalism has one source
that sanctifies its use of force
religion and its discontents
breed bigotry and violence*

***god is on our side** brigades
use him to justify their raids
on protestant or papist tribes
ones the current crown proscribes*





all this time i listened well
and not a hoot from my throat fell
till tyrone spoke those words aloud
about that gallowglasses crowd

for my own owl mac sweeney clan
were gallowglasses to a man
so says i to the great tyrone
the gallowglass you can't disown

*you used us often too to fight
your wars to add our strength and height
to your own weaklink woodkerne ranks
we beefed up your feeble flanks
for that we get but little thanks*

*you could not have ruled tyrone
without our sweeney blood and bone
so don't insult us butchers so
we did your dirty work you know
with that tyrone decides to go*

back thru the woods of derrynoid
where o'cadhans are so annoyed
with tyrone he has to watch his back
that his own vassals don't attack
as english tyrants would ransack

shelley boards the coach again
destination desertmartin
then thru portal castledawson
to the future now departing
thru four hundred years they're darting

they notice that beyond hillhead
many vehicles that sped
so fast above the limits set
that man and beast are under threat

near one farm there called mossbawn
the coach stops something's going on
all traffic slowed down to a crawl
for a passing funeral

for some reason part devout
shelley and the girls get out
to join the cortege mourners pall
it's then they see the coffin's small

shelley finds himself beside
one young mourner who'll confide
to shelley that the youngster
in the coffin is his brother

shelley offers condolences
asks about the circumstances
and is told of the distress
with this restrained expressiveness





Mid-Term Break

*I sat all morning in the college sick bay
Counting bells knelling classes to a close.
At two o'clock our neighbours drove me home.*

*In the porch I met my father crying—
He had always taken funerals in his stride—
And Big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow.*

*The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram
When I came in, and I was embarrassed
By old men standing up to shake my hand*

*And tell me they were 'sorry for my trouble'.
Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest,
Away at school, as my mother held my hand*

*In hers and coughed out angry tearless sighs.
At ten o'clock the ambulance arrived
With the corpse, stanced and bandaged by the nurses.*

*Next morning I went up into the room. Snowdrops
And candles soothed the bedside; I saw him
For the first time in six weeks. Paler now,*

*Wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple,
He lay in the four-foot box as in his cot.
No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.*

A four-foot box, a foot for every year.

i sweeney know this youthful bard
who later took my cursd life hard
translating my sad story
into plaintive poesy

as i flew above the hearse
and heard the elegiac verse
i could not help but think this death
worse than any i had stripped of breath

foes i slew in battle rage
were fighting men not infant age
not like this wee lad meek and mild
an innocent an unarmed child
struck down by armoured power wild

it's called a tragic accident
not a crime no kill intent
armoured death machines inflict
a toll but laws will not convict
drivers or their speeds restrict

it's open season man and beast
take their chances we birds at least
just swift enough to avoid
the brutal carnage unalloyed
but we still often get destroyed

in order to accommodate
these tanks speeding at a rate
faster than the fastest predator
they need a smooth wide corridor





that means the hedges have to go
where our young nestlings used to grow
reckless habitat destruction
remember geordie's wise instruction?

***So don't disturb the nesting birds
but let the work go on
Lest nature's balance goes astray
and everything go wrong***

while we're at it let's fly back
to ballinascreen to hear the crack
from geordie about the kind
of woe the roadworks left behind
when tonagh hill was 'redesigned'

***O hone, O hone, for Draperstown
for she has suffered ill,
She ne'er will be the same again,
she has lost her Tonagh Hill,
The ancient clock may tick and strike,
upon the ancient Hall,
But gloom lies heavy on the place,
and troubles over all.***

***So mighty tools were brought along
to push, to dig, to swing,
No house or hedge could check their work
nor any other thing,
Paul Crilly's hedge went with the rest,
his heart is filled with woe,
For the road is high before his door
and his house is standing low.***

*The little break where stood the well,
is filled up good and high,
No sparkling water lies at hand,
to gleam before your eyes,
A sweeping grade is all that's left,
to take the water's place,
and the shine of cars as they pass by,
all at the greatest pace.*

around mossbawn was much the same
but there the changes early came
the busy highway thru to toome
brought life along it to its doom

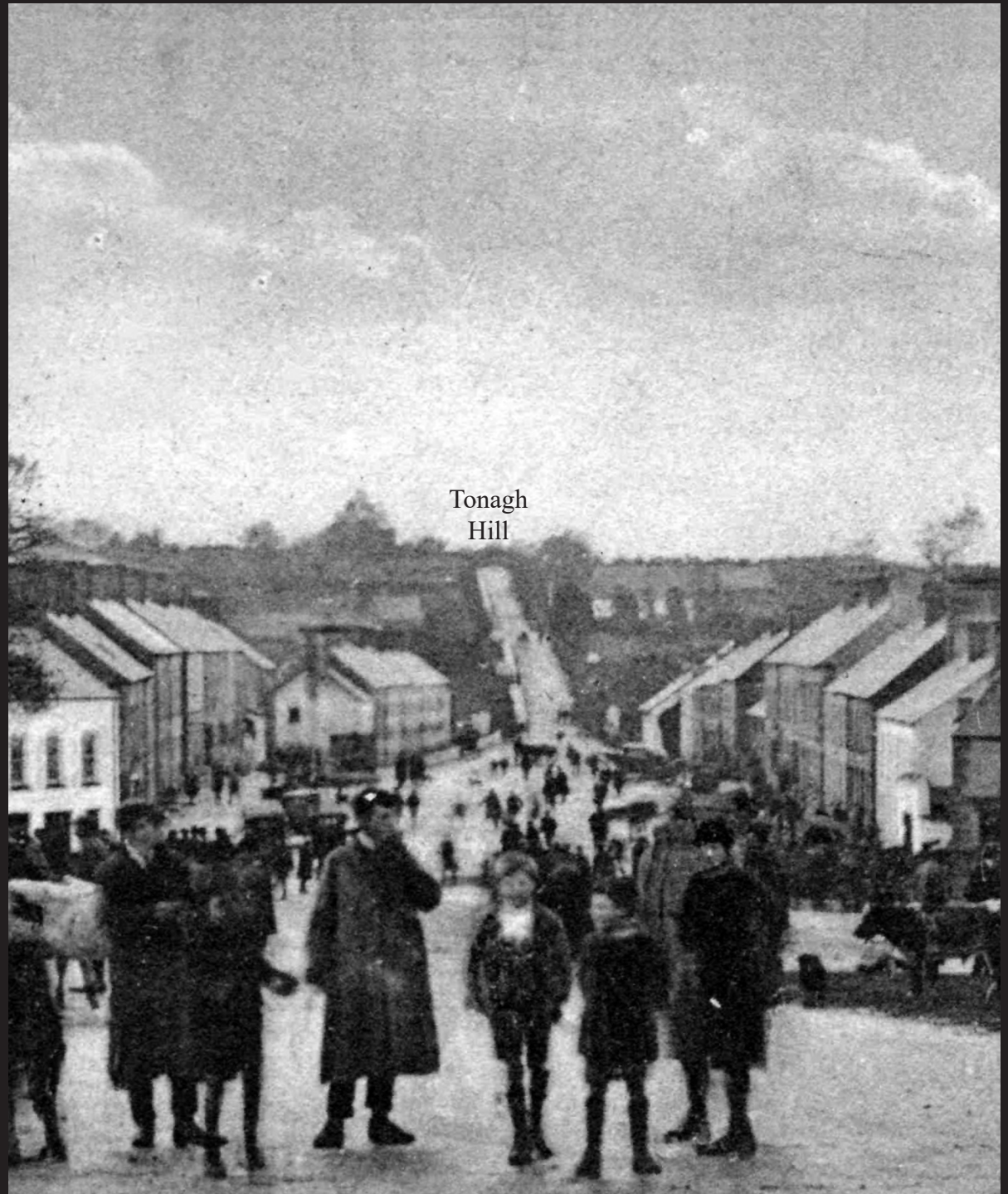
tho ire land's long been split apart
by those who take their creeds to heart
to a fanatical degree
in sectarian bigotry
that leads to foul atrocity

there is one cult unites them all
in killing numbers that appall
the cult of speed in armoured tanks
of vandals in their serried ranks

in thirty years of troubles terror
you'll think my numbers here in error*
twice as many killed on roads
than slain in terror episodes

*1970-2000 troubles deaths 3500

same period road deaths 6500





prods and papists both agree
on one religiosity
devotion to the sect of speed
is ecumenical indeed
regardless of one's native creed

they go to services en masse
filling stations of the cross
where grace is pumped by gallons in
an empty tank is mortal sin

vandals have their saints and gods
like henry ford who to the prods
is yahweh zeus jehovah jove
heavenly father they all love

for papists too ford's the king
but he's stern and unforgiving
spewing carbon and polluting
they need saving and redeeming

so hail electric messiah
the profit of utopia
jolts his jeeps with silent stealth
guaranteed to ruin health
while musketeer revs up his wealth

elongated battery life
assault and battery rife
mass horsepower beyond belief
greenhouse gases? no relief

bevs* just shift the shite elsewhere
away from streets but still foul air
the atmosphere still bears the brunt
of every vandal car cult cunt

you're thinking i have lost the plot?
you could be right we've lost the lot
the woodland plots that kept us hid
are now piecemeal since you undid
the forests wide for your road grid

your roads and trails cut thru our bush
squeeze us out of woodland lush
leave us on the edge to cope
with cats and other foes no hope

your deep wounds slash wide and far
long straight scabs of hardened tar
enclosure by a thousand cuts
every sanctuary shuts

while we are up there on the wing
back and forth skies navigating
our quantum and magnetic sights
are blinded by your satellites

looking down from lofty heights
seeing blazing city lights
or looking up to see a star
that guides our passage from afar
we're seeing nothing thru the **glar**

*bevs = battery electric vehicles





the *glar* of fossil fuel fires
the *glar* of particles of tyres
the burnt out *glar* of space x junk
our guidance systems *glarred* and shrunk

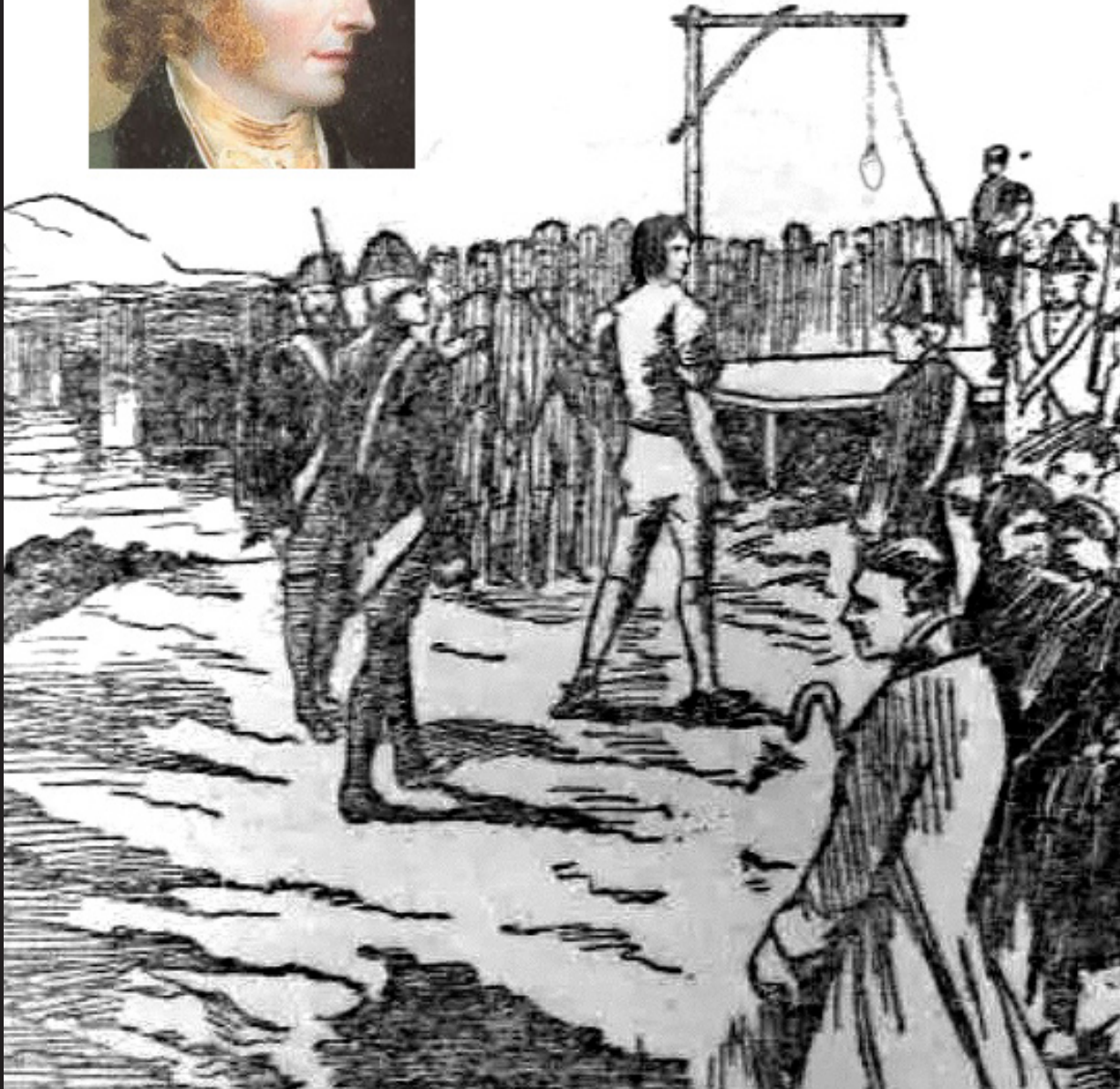
your urban lights are like a smog
thru which our flight becomes a slog
as millions die when we get lost
in your glass canyons holocaust

we're losing species at a rate
not seen since that asteroid hit
that wiped out all the dinosaurs
except our flying ancestors

when extinction then arrived
flying helped as they survived
to populate the skies again
with flocks of our winged species kind

now the sixth extinction's here
the silent spring it does appear
is falling mute on land and shore
where our numbers yearly lower

all my whinging must now pause
as the coach near lough neagh draws
where portal bridge of toome will send
us to a time when here will end
a life by noose it will suspend



when no doubt traitors sealed his doom
roddy mcorley's hanged in toome
he's likely presbyterian
like geordie non sectarian

not much is known about this lad
evicted from his farm his dad
and he had worked for many years
maybe their rent was in arrears

his response? he joins the ranks
of some insurgent phalanx
of united irish in toome town
to fight the forces of the crown

his apparition they can see
walking past them silently
here he is now being led
to the gallows head unbowed

and from across the bridge a song
is heard echoing loud and long
a woman's song* from future times
the strangled sound of freedom's chimes

***Up the narrow street he stepped,
So smiling, proud and young.
About the hemp-rop on his neck,
The golden ringlets clung;
There's ne'er a tear in his blue eyes,
Both sad and bright are they,
As young Roddy McCorley goes to die
On the bridge of Toome today.***

*song written by ethna carbery



shelley listens to the words
that wing across the bann like birds
stirring in him the keenest sense
of renewed purpose so intense
it banishes indifference

the south derry coach empty now
of all its youths so won't allow
the shelley three to travel on
as back thru derry it has gone

while they stand upon the bridge
wondering where they'll find a carriage
another apparition shows
below them where bann river flows

a longship from a distant past
with a crew of vikings vast
big hairy danes with horny helms
the sight of them so overwhelms
they seem like gods from heathen realms

lough neagh is famous for it shades
apparitions and viking raids
a potent combination
and this seems no superstition

toome raiders soon invade the town
looting pillaging burning down?
no not even a shakedown
shelley and the girls get dragged on board
the longship *they're* the looted hoard
along with eels and rusty sword

once on board and under sail
shelley starts to rhyme and rail
against the *skipra* of the crew
who laughs at shelley's ballyhoo
finds him brave but foolish too

the girls afraid that they'll be raped
by danes who look like they escaped
from some valhalla frozen *hel*
hold tight onto the taffrail well
ready to dive into the swell

but in charge is hrothgar the hulk
of prodigious height and bulk
not just a *skipra* but a king
of the royal line of *scylding*

*i'm not interested in dames
at least not now or so he claims
i'm on a peaceful mission
not an ulster demolition*

*i'm a non invasive dane
looking for help to kill the bane
of my life grendel the beast
who ruined my heorot feast*

*i'm looking for a beowulf
says he i've searched many a gulf
no luck but heard he was somewhere
here deep in the heart of ulster*





art k2creative

he looks at shelley head to toe
no sign of fear he seems to show
facing hrothgar's mighty size
there's that stillness in his eyes

i've seen that look before on board
the ship in the storm that roared
seems on water this boy is cool
he rides the waves as tho to rule

*you don't look much like a hero
too scrawny weak to overthrow
the monster who is plaguing us
unless your rhymes are murderous*
he laughs and shelley counters thus

*don't underestimate the verse
it can cajole coerce and curse*
**Be your strong and simple words
Keen to wound as sharpened swords**

i am the proof of that says i
in ronan's words a curse did lie
that turned me to a bird astray
words *do* have the power to dismay
if not to wound or downright slay

*grendel does not fear our words
not even axes spears and swords
can pierce his thick tough metal skin
tho ghosts and ghouls might do him in*

apparitions here abound
I tell him you'll soon hear the sound
of the spirits in the air
at that castle over there

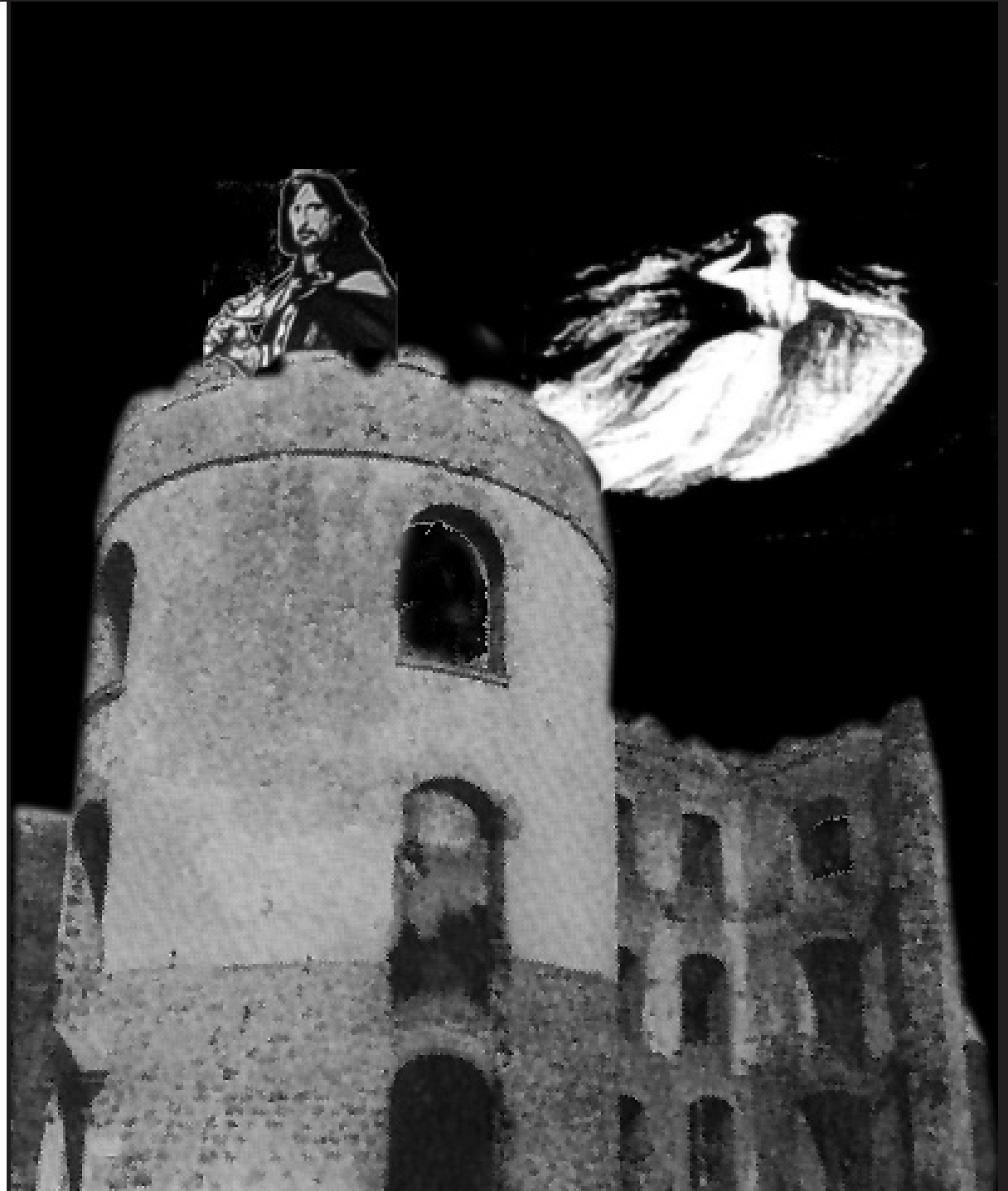
it's nearing dusk around lough neagh
where shane's castle rules the bay
already spirits murmuring
round its battlements are stirring

the castle keep of *shane the proud*
now echoes with the wailing loud
of banshee screams proclaiming death
of those who here drew their last breath

shane the proud hard vindictive
drunken brutal warlord active
in hands on slaughter from this place
where tyrone's name he did disgrace

and there his apparition roars
from the tower his big voice soars
across the lough drunk dissonant
huae tha fuzh do u cuncts uant?

shelley in his high pitched tone
a match for banshees screeching moan
cries out in answer to the shade
we wish to hear thy wild tirade





shane hesitates at first but then
begins his roaring rant again
don't belébh Δ fuzhin uoro
of huac u read abh me or huro
espehliqh from thon bluoigh burō

thon oul suibhnes Δf his heo
if Δi zet my hans on him hēs deo
Δill ring his bluoigh screaunigh nec
for paxotin thac inglīsh orec
me reputashun he ul rec

you might wonder how he knew
about my biased bird's eye view
of his savagery and slaughter
but he had spies in every quarter

hrothgar thinks he might have found
his beowulf in shane the proud
but here again shane's wily shade
anticipates the dane's crusade

Δn tel thon bhicin zo ta hel
his tribesmen raedeo us pel mel
for yers cilin lutin burnin
nou hér thae ΔR returnin
for help uich grenoel mournin

so buzer Δf the lot abh ié
let me rest in pés Δn flé
befor Δi sinc ur bluoigh ship
Δn end iour sucur sécin trip

he lets one final awful roar
that fills their sails with hot air power
and sends them down across the lough
at close to light speed by the clock

they tie up on the western shore
where ardboe portal has in store
an hallucinating vision
yet another apparition

lough neagh in darkness of the night
is a sparkling wondrous sight
when its waters calm and still
reflect the stars that seem to spill
into the lough and with light fill

down about the dark horizon
we see a maiden rising
in the constellation virgo
the lovely lady of ardboe

with a halo of bright stars
and radiant rays of hot pulsars
she bathes us in celestial light
of galaxies glowing bright

they sleep on board the longship now
in peaceful slumber stern to bow
while i am roosting on the mast
gently swaying sleeping fast





beneath the virgin's benign gaze
of countless billion light year rays
eternity to here she shined
from time so deep it's out of mind

gone is the day gone is the night
gone is the day gone is the night
we waken to a morning bright
a westerly now blows our way
that sails us back across lough neagh
to portmore portal's eastern bay

of all oak groves in ire land
none more revered than this at hand
a sacred site for druidry
with oak and water harmony
in sheltered woodland privacy

expecting woods of mighty oak
instead we find them cutten broke
round the wee lough just beyond
the mother lough a circle pond

along its desecrated shore
where stumps are left and nothing more
as before a woman sings
somewhere out there her voice rings

O bonny Portmore, I am sorry to see
Such a woeful destruction
of your ornament tree
For it stood on your shore

*for many's the long day
Till the long boats from Antrim
came to float it away.*

*All the birds in the forest
they bitterly weep
Saying, 'Where will we shelter
or where will we sleep?'
For the Oak and the Ash
they are all cutten down
And the walls of bonny Portmore
are all down to the ground.*

*O bonny Portmore,
you shine where you stand
And the more I think on you
the more I think long
If I had you now as I had once before
All the lords in Old England
would not purchase Portmore.*

tho her song it is a sad one
about the damage that was done
four centuries on the lough
half renewed a good place to flock
for swan robin swallow and hawk

but screams from that alder grove
just up the way do not improve
our nesting feeding habitat
with loud metal birds so big and fat
drowning singing we're often at





ulster folk must take their flights
from constant rain to see the sights
in foreign lands where fun and sun
and putting balls in holes is done
while burning fossils by the ton

back across lough neagh we sail
an easterly on our tail
to what is a busy portal
shipping coal dark mineral

we wish king hrothgar *bo vwa yaz*
and hope that better luck he has
with finding some brave warrior
to slay his grendel torturer

they catch a ride by horse and dray
one used to carry coal one way
on its return with goods on board
for coalisland's merchants stored

on their way they have to go
through the village of clonee
where celebrations are in place
for one local well known face

that she's o'nail is no surprise
for once again they're on the rise
ulster's long time royalty
republican their loyalty

she has overturned the order
on those who want the border
to remain *the black pig's dyke*
and keep out rustlers they don't like

she has put a pleasant face
on an outfit in disgrace
with half the population
who defend the old plantation

she's separated church from state
by ignoring priest and prelate
who oppose a woman's due
to use her womb as she wants to

why would sweeney give a hoot
what some politician cute
says she'll do when she gets power
and breaks her word within the hour?

i do rejoice that she has won
a victory without the gun
and shelley too is overjoyed
that so far both sides might avoid
their agreement being destroyed

on to coalisland now they ride
thru sooty smoke from fireside
from mine pithead and factory
a time of coal prosperity





this town is aptly named for coal
its only mines in ire land whole
to supply that fossil fuel
with consequences often cruel

cruel as in miners killed
by cave-in or mineshaft flood
silicosis or explosion
or at surface rank pollution

sir sam kelly is a name
well known here he lit the flame
of coal fires burning ulster wide
shipping coal to britain wide
sinking mines for fireclay beside

to complicate his legacy
as provider of necessity
he also was a uvee effer
running guns a weapons shipper
used to make them papists scitter

shelley and the girls now enter
the workshop of a carpenter
he and his brother working hard
on devices to bombard

both brothers have joined to aid
the cause in coalisland's first brigade
one making bombs one bearing them
that might be used *ad hominem*

this part of town called brackaville
one of the first for coal to drill
is also home to 'a' company
of rebels seeking liberty
from british rule and tyranny

this at a time of rising ire
at black and tans then setting fire
to towns and villages ire land wide
reprisal raids and genocide?

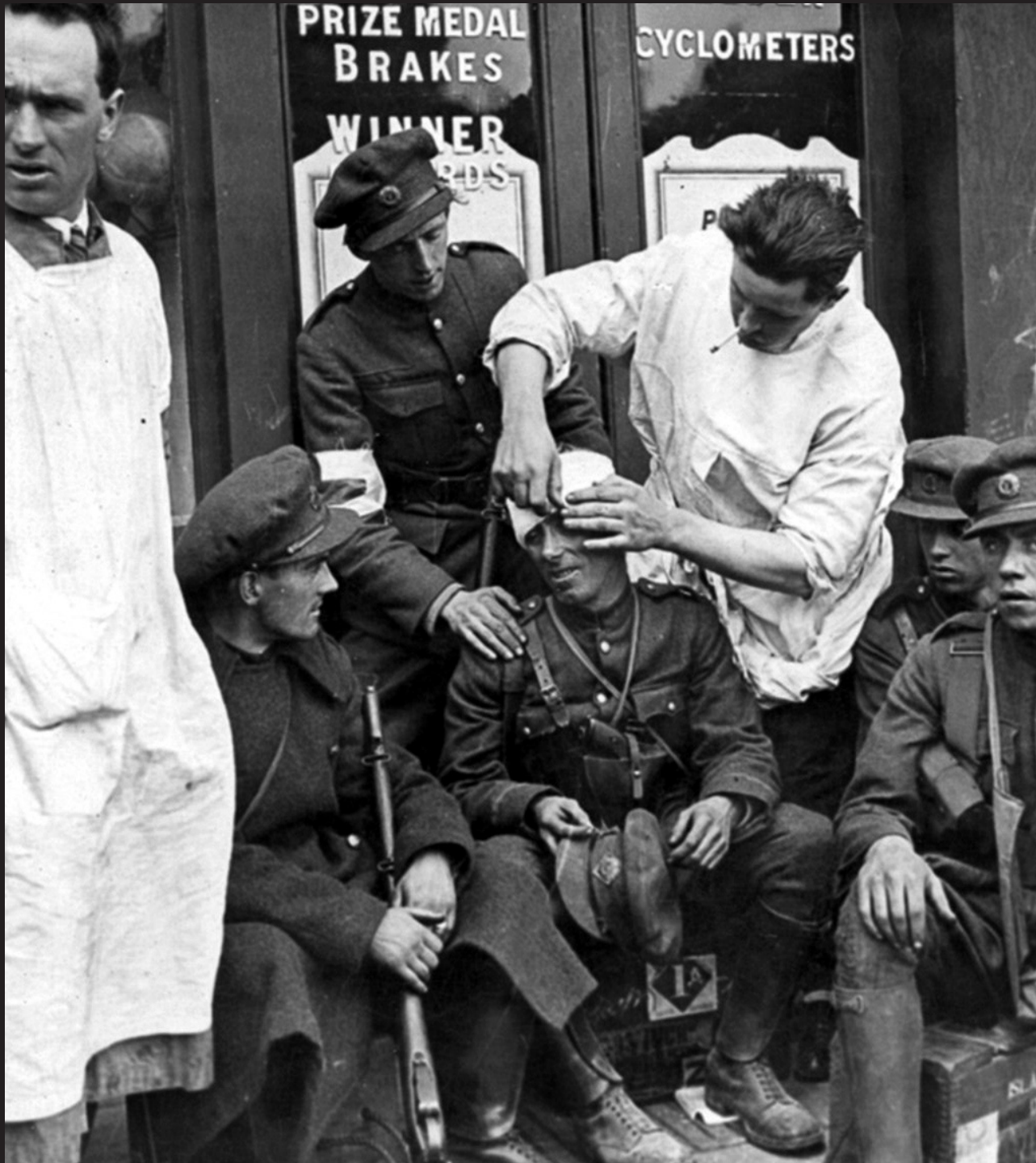
a few months on from this dark scene
of planning for a bombing scheme
the brothers will abandon it
disillusioned by the split
in the ranks of their outfit

for soon a vicious civil war
that ends in fratricidal gore
tears the nation limb from limb
to create a memory grim

fifty years go flying by
when those memories still apply
at nearby edendork outside
a local church a homicide
with a billhook slash is tried

it fails but this victim will
in time be followed shot and killed
in a wee coalisland bar
his crime? he was a lawyer
and a public prosecutor





even tho he did defend
eye array suspects to the end
it decided he was traitor
to the cause a comprador

and who was he but the son
of one of those two brothers one
who had taught his eight waens well
to fight injustice and truth tell

in thirty years of troubles spans
around coalisland and townlands
twenty killings poisoned peace
civilians gunmen soldiers police
all paid the price in this wee place

two of those assassinated
were cousins of her elected
she who back there we did show
being féted in clonoe

coalisland is a coal black hole
a pit of the sectarian toll
tho someday it may be the soul
of tolerance fit to extol
if she assumes her rightful role

all this flying round the pits
has given me the worst bird shits
am shitting on abandoned mines
on corner boys with guns in lines
on loud sectarian divines

we're sorry but time just flies
round this island paradise
but fly we must if we're to get
down to dublin by sunset

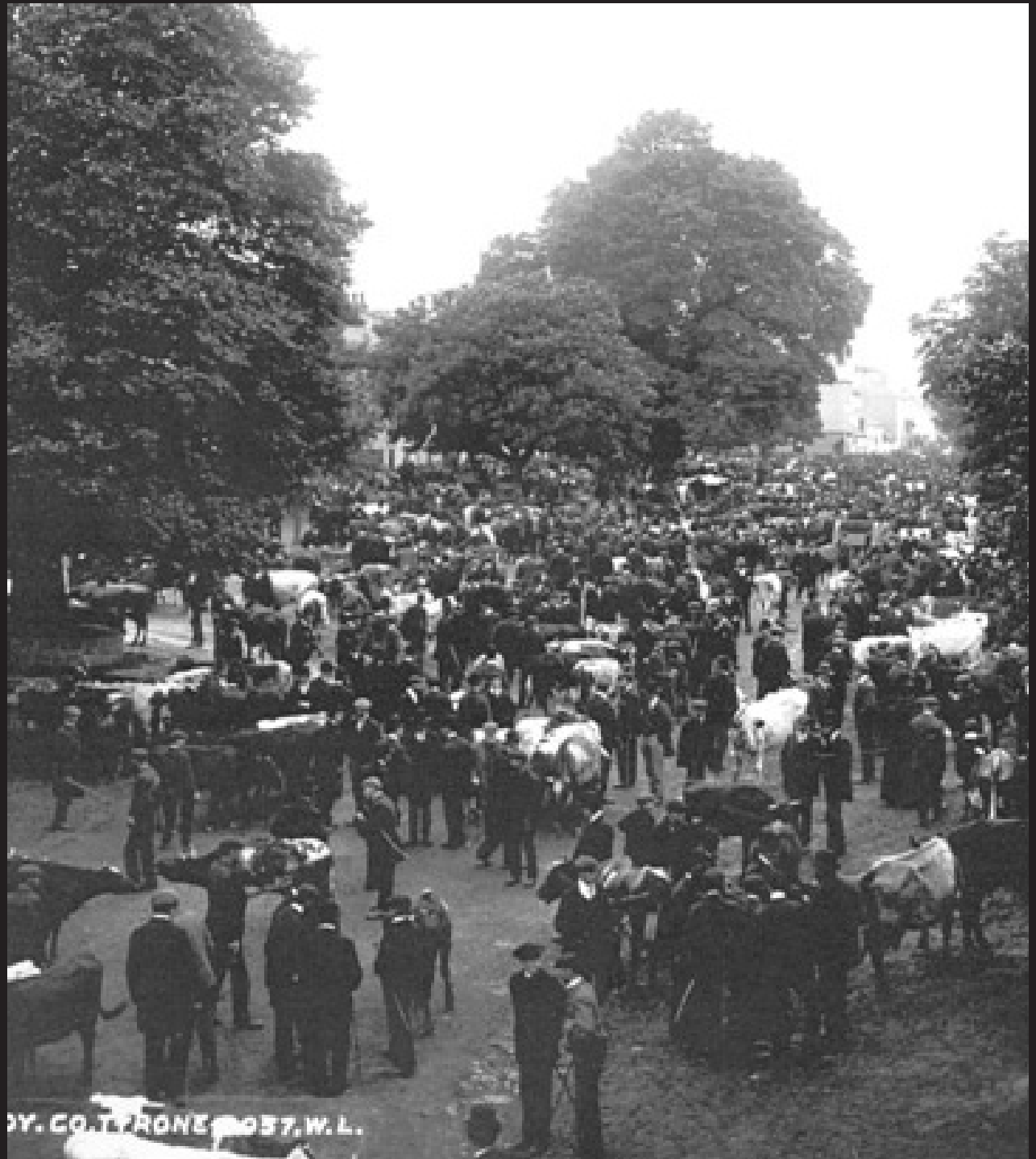
shelley and the girls will now need
to leave tyrone behind with speed
and reach armagh at least by noon
in order to just keep in tune
with that county's bardic boon

as they're walking towards the bush
there comes behind them in a rush
a string of horses on the trot
some riderless some not

one rider asks if they'd enjoy
a ride says *we're going to the moy*
where there is a big horse fair
eagerly they accept right there
and mount two stallions and a mare

they soon trot a lively pace
thru the bush and laghey race
they reach the moy in no time flat
where the banagher horse fair's at

a multitude of horses here
steeds cobs chargers hacks and nags
mules donkeys jennets ponies
fillies stallions colts and gee gees
a mad cacophony of whinnies



newly sold horses heading south
take them where a bridge alloweth
them to cross the wide black water
into armagh county proper

but on the bridge their way is barred
by a youthful local bard
who recognizes shelley
from paintings on the ulster telly

*I know you says he percy bysshe
and your poems heathenish
I love meeting the british
welcome to the moy don't you leave
before moy laurels you receive*

so back they go to tomney's bar
where young moy bard buys them a jar
and launches into quoofty verse
about the moy and it's not scarce

at first the shelleys are not sure
for this moy boy can be obscure
but as he loosens up a bit
they get the cryptic drift of it
and find therein a wicked wit

*the moy gives horse latitudes
says he we take steed platitudes
and make them yield nag attitudes
despite our equine multitudes*

THE GREAT HORSE OF THE WORLD

**The first thing i remember is being stepped on by a horse
while it paused to stale
paying me no more heed
than it would an upset pail
of water or feed
or a comb dragged through the coarse
hair of its mane and tail**



The great horse of the world stamps and champs at the bit
and lays back one ear
as i approach
from the rear
to hitch to the world coach
mindful of keeping at least one hand on it
so it knows i'm still here

*You can lead a horse to water
but but you can't make it hold
its nose to the grindstone
and hunt with the hounds.*

...

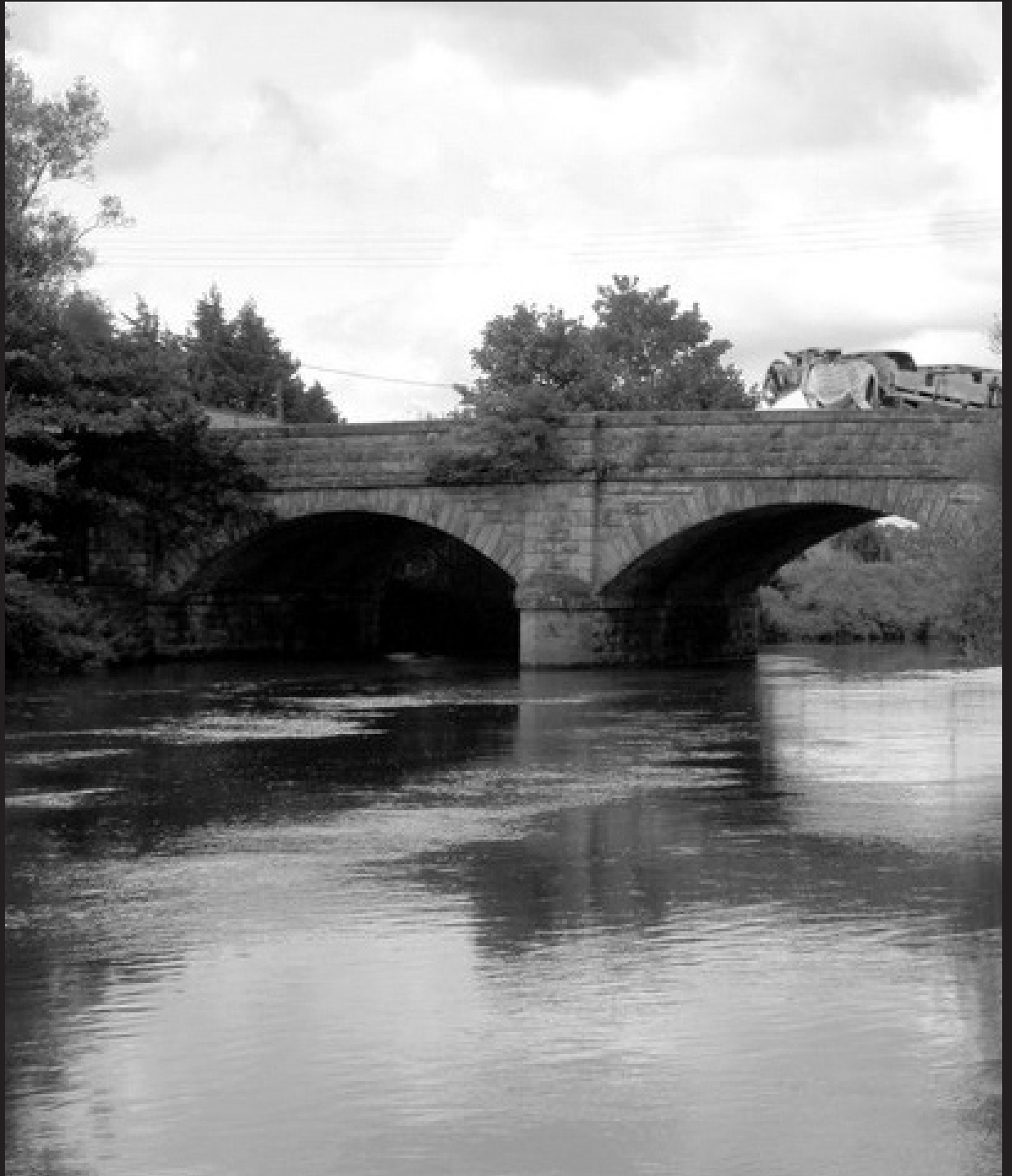
*The hair of the dog is a friend indeed.
There's no fool like the fool
who's shot his bolt.
There's no smoke
after the horse has gone.*

during all this horsing round
I was perched within the sound
of the moyboy's witty wordplay
and knew we'd found a bird astray
flitting back and forth away

moy sand and gravel drawn by *mules*
who *frolic and detour* like fools
eating *hay* while the sun still shines
a *howdie skelp* for such equines
to waken up their silly minds

much as we would like to stay
in the moy another day
we must be riding on our way
thru orchard county come what may

we bid the moy boy fond farewell
across blackwater's rushing swell
thru charlemont and down drumsill
where apple trees the drumlins fill





at drumsill house they hear applause
so they investigate the cause
to find a bardic contest there
with recitations in the air
from all across the known world
bards assemble young and old
to vie for laurels and for gold
a nod to phelim brady bold

*At a fair or a wake
I could twirl my shillelagh,
Or trip through a jig
with my brogues bound with straw.
And all the pretty colleens
in the village or the valley
Loved their bold Phelim Brady,
the Bard of Armagh.*

could shelley now participate
for this armagh laureate?
he knows he doesn't have a hope
when the fox sends up the pope

*I asked a lady about the pope
and do the people go to mass?
the pope? she says is what
they kick up the shankhill in belfast*
.....

*young people of err land
you are drinking too much sake
you are smoking too much hashish
cocaine n wacky backy*

makem laugh makem cry
with satire sharp and sly
these bards revered and maybe feared
for their parodies loudly cheered

but as the shelleys exit here
drumsill house will disappear
in a pile of bricks and rubble
this bardic bout had burst its bubble?

it would last a few more years
but gone from drumsill's muses spheres
to its new upscale armagh venue
they chose to end its public view

*every good thing has its time
in music dance or comic rhyme
it's best to end them on a high
and let good memories versify*

across the way from drumsill house
there lives a clan of cultural nous
this family has long been known
for the artistry they hone

they excel in every field
in fluting piping skills revealed
in painting sculpting all the arts
in CRΔOBH ΡΥΔΘH rare book marts
even opel auto parts





my bird's eye view takes in their farm
a flower garden of great charm
an apple orchard rich with fruit
and fields of maize and spud and root
market gardening their pursuit

the $\beta\epsilon\Delta\eta\ \Delta\eta\ \tau\iota$ of this abode
just off anaghmore side road
welcomes shelley and the girls
with ulster frys and wheaten farls

the farls spread with blackcurrant jam
homemade rich with tartness crammed
no wonder her bright family
is so creative currently

the $\rho\epsilon\Delta\kappa\ \Delta\eta\ \tau\iota$ was in his time
an athlete who reached his prime
vaulting to the greatest height
of any irishman in sight
and armagh football his delight

mostly he's an apple gent
long before that jobs boy sent
macintoshes round the globe
his armagh bramleys done the job

in drumsill the muse is strong
her presence here gives rise to song
in verse and melody sublime
traditional but for all time

before we leave the drumsill clan
they treat us to their flute elan
to keep us in a *roving rhythm*
gregorium uproarium

all the way *from ballinakil*
to ballinascreen thru drumsill
tootling to a *merrijig*
the maid of annagh makerrig

we bid the drumsill clan goodbye
and head for armagh town nearby
where all the weight of history
is felt in fact and fantasy

it's not the city that we want
with grand cathedrals and their cant
ecclesiastic seats of power
both prod and papist spire and tower

emΔin mΔchΔ's what we're after
just beyond the city proper
and the sound that we first hear
is the voice of some verse balladeer
ringing out both loud and clear

an ancient mansion is the source
of what seems a bard discourse
several voices joining in
the drama's versifying din





tho drumsill's favoured by the muse
the $\lambda\epsilon\lambda\lambda\lambda\eta\sigma\tau\omicron\eta$ does this site choose
above all others to inspire
at $\epsilon\mu\lambda\iota\eta\eta\ \mu\lambda\chi\lambda\lambda$ she's on fire

all immortal bards are here
from every place and time appear
for this event transcends all times
in a great assembly of rhymes

king niall og o'nail the great
is master of this grand estate
he's gathered round him all these bards
learned men and jester cards
warriors and bodyguards

niall og has been in wars
he's seen the worst and has the scars
but now retired from the field
it's words not swords he wants to wield

out he comes to meet the strangers
with his guards in case of dangers
he knows me from verses heard
by monkish bards my tale's been shared

*and how is sweeney? he inquires
still afeared of thon hellfires
waiting for ye when ye die?
hope to escape them now ye fly?*



*and who are these sweet friends of yours?
ah shelley and his paramours
come on and join the bardic throng
for you they have been waiting long*

i perch upon his shoulder broad
and on we go to see the god?
aye homer's being deified
by the ΛΕΑΝΑΝ ΣΙΘΗ who tied
the sacred laurel on his head

three times fifty bards stood by
to epic homer glorify
all spouting verses to the sky
from iliad and odyssey

who was there to laud the show?
horace hesiod and sappho
virgil juvenal ovid poe
dante khayyam chaucer pope

shakespeare milton blake now shelley
byron burns wordsworth keats southey
owen brittain brooke sassoon
yeats kavanagh hughes muldoon

thomas dylan pushkin tennyson
carlin carolan dickinson
wilde eliot duffy foley
service atwood mahon longley
pound joyce auden plath murphy



walcott hewitt bradley angelou
valley mciece montague
zephaniah brodsky rumi
hepburn geordie kelly heaney
mawhinney and me sweeney

you may talk of mount olympus
or of muses mount parnassus
but εΜΑΙΝ ΜΑΧΑ is the mount
where the muses really count

εΜΑΙΝ ΜΑΧΑ's reputation
as the centre of the nation
for the spirit and the poet
has been known since times remote

as a ritual site it filled a need
the heart of some dead ancient creed
that built a temple rich and grand
filled it up with rocks and sand
then burnt it down with firebrand

niall og may well have been
a warlord of a murderous mien
but like me he changed his tune
when he became a pantaloon
and brought armagh this epic boon

tho poor owl homer he was blind
he could see it in his mind
that he was **god and king and law**
hailed like this in great armagh

and one stage shelley takes the floor
in high shrill voice he tries to roar
that poets are **word warriors**
unacknowledged legislators
of the world not mere troubadours

***Be your strong and simple words
Keen to wound as sharpened swords,
And with targes* let them be
With their shade to cover ye.***

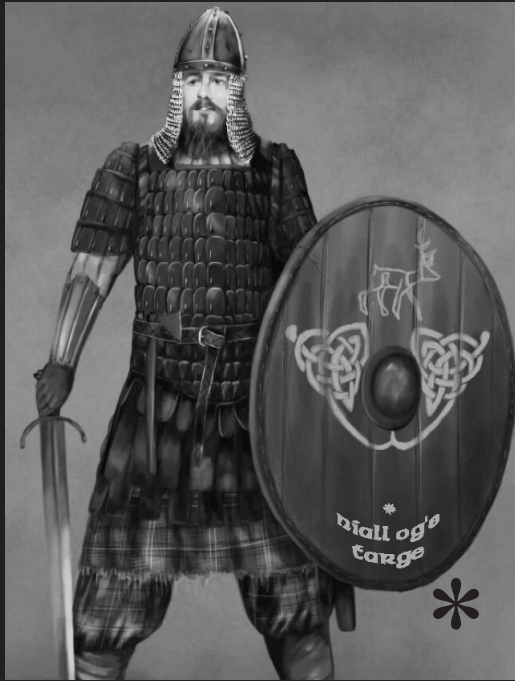
***And these words will then become
Like oppression's thundered doom
Ringing through each heart and brain,
Heard again - again - again***

***"Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number -
Shake thy chains to earth like dew
That in sleep had fallen on you -
Ye are many - they are few."***

tho his words were screeched high pitched
he had the crowd of bards bewitched
thinking they might change the world
if their words were rightly hurled

with that a cāmán crack we hear
the bardic scene will disappear
and in its place a hurley game
as if the bards would now reclaim
their youthful passion's ardent flame





three times fifty young boys playing
a hurley burly game of hurling
which one strong hurler dominates
hurling all his hurled playmates
some he near decapitates

as homer's young achilles did
σεταπτα cú chulainn as a kid
leaves a trail of hurt hurled waens
fair play and mercy he disdains

as homer in his youth had done
hurling insults just for fun
using words as weapons sharp
to praise or ridicule or carp

a year or two flash by and gone
are sporting games and carry on
for now the word comes thru the vine
that maeve is rustling once again

the connacht queen has set her eyes
on ulster's richest bovine prize
the great brown bull of cooley
that conchobair values dearly

king conchobair wants his warriors
to fight the connacht ravagers
cú chulainn in particular
is his most potent man of war



with his javelins and swords
cú chuḷainn has no time for words
and his ζαε βοζα has no peer
inflicting wounds so damned severe
right up opponents front and rear

with barbs and teeth it rips their guts
when he pulls it from their butts
a grisly gruesome end for those
who dare this warrior oppose

if only words could penetrate
so deeply and could lacerate
and amputate the bits of brain
that drive a warrior insane
the world might just be more humane

i have seen cú chuḷainn raised
to a battle frenzy crazed
a sight that will not quit your head
eyes and veins bulge face warped and red
demonic dark inspiring dread

I know the feeling well enough
but he must feel it deadly rough
shelley gets his wild up too
screeching loud as us birds do
squawking cock a doodle loo





his *mask of anarchy* he screams
rails against the tyrant schemes
and it does have some effect
his word are given great respect
by those who worker rights protect

but here in emain macha none
no words can stop what has begun
cú chulainn driving south
to fight maeve's armies now in louth

they hitch a ride for he'll protect
them from the bandits we expect
to meet in tullyvallen
or in glenanne or crossmaglen

cú chulainn's trusted charioteer
laeg lugs the shelleys and their gear
on board the car of solid oak
two swift horses in the yoke

on our way we hit glenanne
the home of the assassin gang
that plagued armagh and south tyrone
one hundred twenty gael's alone
murdered in its terror zone

from here on down it's all about
reprisals for that gang's blowout
by *action forces* who'll exact
revenge for every gael attacked

i land atop the flagpole
of tullvallen planters hall
and watch the balaclava masks
go about anarchic tasks

of vengeance tit for tatting
thru the windows rat a tatting
slaughter of black pigs inside
where half a dozen more just died

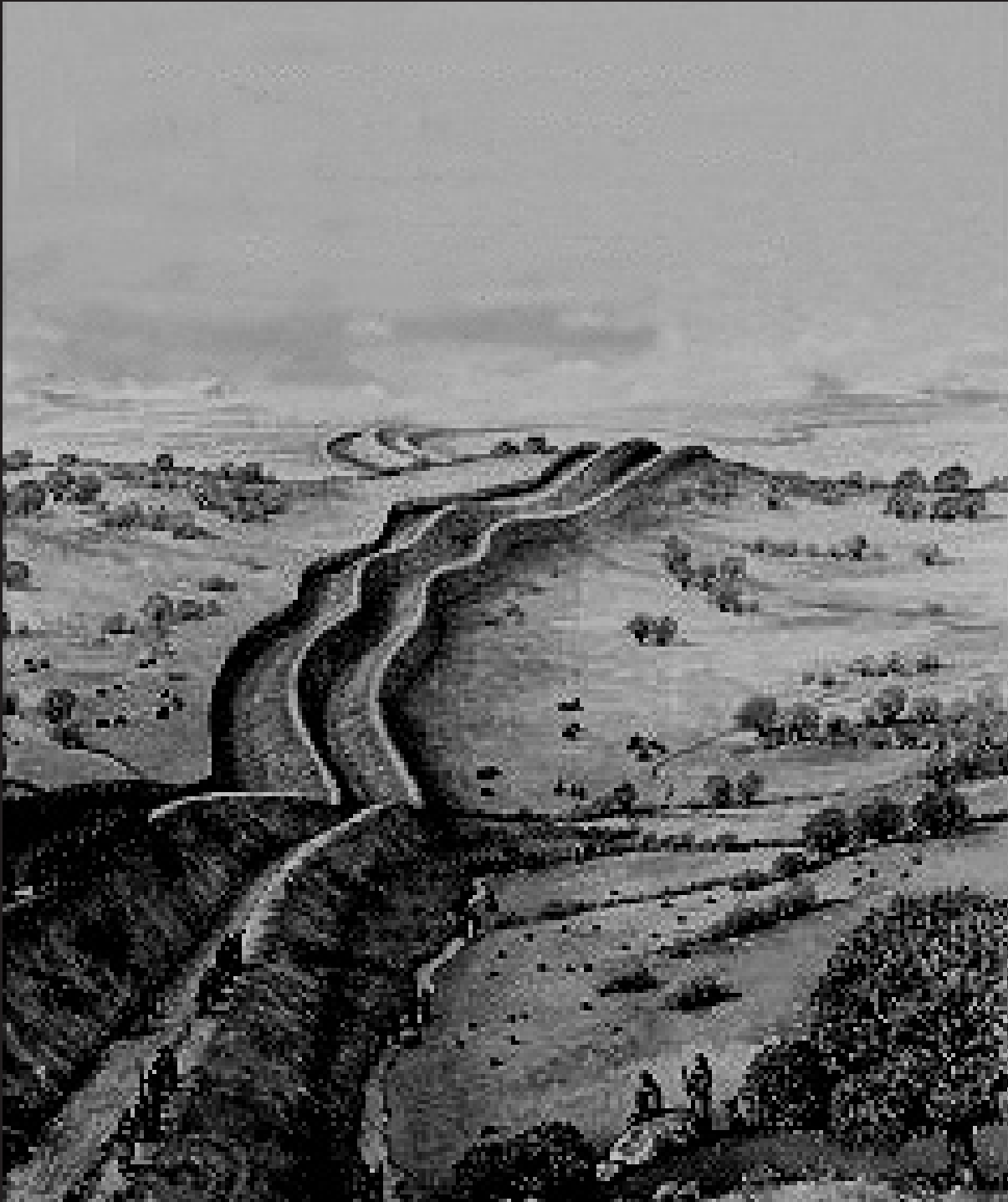
shelley beside himself enraged
shrieking like a jay bird caged
at how divisive creeds can be
thru faith inspired bigotry

next the village of whitecross
where i perch upon the minibus
that's riddled full of bullet holes
where near a dozen planter souls
are added to the vengeful tolls

this kingsmill bloody massacre
would be the last that would occur
on such a scale in south armagh
when warring sects declared a draw

but our last stop in ulster rough
would be the toughest of the tough
in the town of crossmaglen
where eye array and army men
would clash again again again





faction fights in crossmaglen
are mostly crude sectarian
coalisland it was bad but pales
in comparison with gaels
and planters killed here off the scales

i landed in its broad town square
where more than almost anywhere
soldiers police and citizens
have here ended their existence

all this will change when troubles end
and peace will on the town descend
except in gaelic football games
where local rangers fan the flames
as armagh champs near fifty times

at last we cross the black pigs dyke
where warring sides would often strike
cú chuláinn sees us safely thru
as new adventures we pursue

shelley and girls have seen their share
of ulster charms both foul and fair
two days of timeless strange events
which they'll forget for all intents
as off to dublin they ride hence

end of book 1

sweeney scripts

a history of ireland jonathan bardon
a history of ulster jonathan bardon
a narrow sea jonathan bardon
a world on the wing scott wiedensaul
buile suibhne trans james g o'keeffe
from eternity to here sean carroll
geordie editor graham mawhinney
percy bysshe shelley a biography james bieri
percy bysshe shelley the major works
editors zach leader & michael o'neill
poems paul muldoon
shelley and revolutionary ireland paul o'brien
shelley the pursuit richard holmes
sweeney astray & opened ground seamus heaney
sweeney's flight rachel giese & heaney
the mask of anarchy p b shelley
the plantation of ulster jonathan bardon
the song of the earth jonathan bate
the tain trans ciaran carson
the tain trans thomas kinsella

sweeney scenes

sweeney birdman images pages i,2,14,71,79 chris wormell
sweeney images p 11 & 78 artist unknown
shelley portrait cover and p73 by alfred klimt after amelia curran
k2creative rachel giese ingrid blixtr riastrad victoria hamilton
apologies to rembrandt for changes to *storm on the sea of galilee* p5
and to jean auguste dominique ingres
for changes to *the apotheosis of homer* p70
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sweeney leanan síthe

tonto the loan arranger tyronto graham m roisin bui
quercus betula acer the valley & the vallys pushkin
skinty fia sativa sacred threads sheenanigan strawdog



