

## The Butterfly

### On the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Robert Fergusson's Death

In Russian cemeteries, I've seen  
empty vodka bottles and butt-ends left  
where the living had updated the dead.  
We too want to meet on your unmarked grave -  
for, though Burns paid tribute with a stone,  
we still speak to you as one who died alone  
on a madhouse straw bed  
and was buried almost unknown.  
When you left the High School at twelve,  
you were already halfway  
through your life, the last years  
buckling beneath the weight of what you -  
with such relish – asked of them.  
And now, on this October day,  
we're at the edge of you again -  
the earth of your grave pulsing  
with the energy of your rhymes.  
We are close enough here to reach through  
the clods to the imagined roots of you,  
to grasp your long, slim fingers  
and to pull you into the firelight  
of your favourite howff – the one squeezed  
between the property developer  
and the five-star hotel.  
The bracketed television is showing  
there's aye glaikit fools  
*dippin their spoons in ither's kail* -  
nothing to surprise you in that,  
just life, beguiling and ephemeral  
as the butterfly. Of it all,  
*wheesht*, Rob, *wheesht* -  
we already have the poems,  
so can't you just sup with us  
for a little bit longer – and *live*?

Tom Pow

['O'er a' my labours sey your skill': poetic responses to Robert Fergusson](#) / edited by Rhona Brown & Amy Wilcockson. With Gillebride MacMillan. Edinburgh: Taproot Press, 2025. pp. 89-90.