

The Butterfly

On the 250th 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 labourssey your skill': poetic responses to Robert Fergusson](#) / edited by Rhona Brown & Amy Wilcockson. With Gillebride MacMillan. Edinburgh: Taproot Press, 2025. pp. 89-90.