

Theocrates – Greek Pastoral Poet

Idyll XX1 - A Poem of 300-200 BC

Converted from Greek into Scots (Lallands)

by John Buchan – Lord Tweedsmuir

A poem about two fishers at Manor Water

English variant by Charlie Brown

(It was difficult to retain acceptable rhyme in places)

The Twa Fishers.

'Tis puirtith sooples, heid and hand
And gars inventions fill the land;
And dreams come fast to folk that lie
Wi' nocht atween them and the sky.

Twae collier lads frae near Lasswade,
Auld skeely fishers, fund thir bed
Ae simmer's nicht aside the shaw
Whaur Manor rins by Cademuir Law.

Dry flowe-moss made them pillows fine,
And, for a bield to kep the win',
A muckle craig owerhung the burn,
A' thacked wi' blaeberry and fern.

Aside them lay their rods and reels,
Thir flee-books and thir baskit creels.
The pooches o' thir moleskin breeks
Hid a' unlawfu' things like cleeks,

For folk that fish to fill thir wame
Ir no fasteedious at the game.
The twae aye took thir jaunts thegither;
Geordie wis yin and Tam the ither.

Thir chaumer was the mune-bricht sky,
The siller stream thir lullaby."
When knocks in touns were chappin' three,
Tam woke and rubbed a blinkin' e'e.

It was the 'oor when troots are boun'
To gulp the May-flee floatin' down,
Afore the sun is in the glens
And dim are a' the heughs and dens.

The Two Fishers (English)

It is poor reflections, head and hand
that makes inventions fill the land;
And dreams come fast to folk that lie
With naught between them and the sky.

Two miner lads from near Lasswade,
old skilful fishers, found their bed
one summer's night beside the shaw - (wood)
Where Manor runs by Cademuir Law.

Dry flow-moss* made them pillows fine, (*sphagnum moss)
And, for a shield to break the wind,
A massive crag overhung the burn,
All thatched with blueberry and fern.

Beside them lay their rods and reels,
Their fly-books and their basket creels.
The pockets of their moleskin breeks (heavy cotton trousers)
Hid all unlawful things like cleeks,

For folk that fish to fill their wame - (stomach)
are not fastidious at the game.
They always took their jaunts together;
Geordie was one, and Tam the other.

Their charmer was the moon-bright sky,
The silver stream their lullaby."
When bells in town were tolling three
Tam awoke and rubbed a blinking eye

It was the hour when trout abound,
To gulp the mayfly floating down,
Before the sun is in the glens
And dim are all the crags and dens.

An' walloped in a shallow crook.

Tam's Dream (Lallands)

TAM: "Short is the simmer's daurk, they say,
But this ane seemed as lang's the day;
For siccan dreams as passed my sicht
Ah never saw in Januar' nicht.
If some auld prophet chiel wis here
Ah wad hae curious things to speir."

GEORDIE: "It's conscience gars the nightmares rin,

Sae, Tam, my lad, what hae ye dune?"

TAM: "Nae ill; my saul is free frae blame,
Nor hae Ah wrocht ower hard my wame,
For last Ah fed, as ye maun awn,
On ae sma' troot an' pease-meal scone.
But hear ma dreams, for aiblins you
Micht find a way to riddle't true....

The Dream

"Ah thocht that Ah wis castin' steady
At the pule's tail ayont the smiddy,
Wi' finest gut an' sma'est flee,
For the air wis clear and the watter wee;
When sudden wi' a rowst an' swish
Ah rase'd a maist enormous fish . . .
Ah struck and heuked the monster shure.
Guidsakes! tae see him loup in air!
It wis nae saumon, na, nor troot;
To the last yaird ma line gaed oot,
As up the stream the warlock ran
As wild as Job's Leviathan.
Ah got him stopped alow the linn,
Whaur verra near Ah tumbled in,
Aye prayin' hard ma heuk wad haud;
And syne he turned a dorty jaud,
Sulkin' far doun among the stanes.
Ah tapped the butt to stir his banes.
He warsled here and plowtered there,
But still Ah held him ticht and fair,
The water rinnin' oaxter-hie,
The sweat wis drippin' in ma e'e.
Sae bit by bit Ah wysed him richt
And broke his stieve and fashious micht,
Til sair fordone he cam tae book

Tam's Dream (English)

TAM: "Short is the summer's dark, they say,
But this one seemed as long as day;
For such dreams as passed my sight
I never saw in January's night.
If some old prophet man was here
I would have curious things to speir." (ask)
GEORDIE: "It's conscience makes the nightmares run,
So, Tam, my lad, what have you done?"
TAM: "No ill; - my soul is free from blame,
Nor have I worked too hard my wame, (stomach)
For last I fed, as you must own,
On one small trout and pease-meal scone.
But hear my dreams, for maybe you
May find a way to interpret it true....

The Dream

"I thought that I was casting steady
At the pool's tail beyond the smiddy, - blacksmiths)
With finest gut and smallest flee - (fly),
For the air was clear and the water wee; - (small)
When sudden with a rush and swish
I raised a most enormous fish . . .
I struck and hooked the monster sure.
Goodsakes! to see him jump in air!
It was no salmon, no, - nor trout;
To the last yard my line went out,
As up the stream the warlock ran
As wild as Job's Leviathan.
I got him stopped below the linn,
Where very near, I tumbled in,
As praying hard my hook would hold;
And then he turned a sudden twist,
Sulking far down among the stones.
I tapped his tail to stir his bones.
He wriggled here and settled there,
But still I held him tight and fair,
The water running armpit-high
The sweat was dripping in my eye.
So bit by bit I played him right
And broke his will and fractious might,
Till sorely done he came to book
And threshed about in a shallow bend.

Ah had nae gad, sae doun ma wand
Ah flang and pinned him on the sand.
Ah claucht him in baith airms and peched
Ashore—he was a mighty wecht;
Nor stopped till Ah had got him sure
Amang the threshes on the muir.
"Then, Geordie lad, my een Ah rowed:
The beast wis made o' solid gowd!-
Sic ferlie as was never kenned,
A' glitterin' gowd frae end to end!
Ah lauched, Ah grat, my kep Ah flang,
Ah danced a step, Ah sang a sang.
And syne Ah wished that Ah micht dee
If wark again wis touched by me....

"Wi' that Ah woke; nae fish wis there—
Jist the burnside and empty muir.
Noo tell me honest, Geordie lad,
Think ye yon daftlike aith will haud?"

GEORDIE:"Tuts, Tam, ye fule, the aith ye sware
Wis like yir fish, nae less, nae mair.
For dreams are nocht but simmer rouk,
And him that trusts them hunts the gowk....
It's time we caught some fish o' flesh
Or we will baith gang brekfastless."

I had no cleek, so doun my wand - (rod)
I flung and pinned him on the sand.
I clutched him in both arms right tight
Ashore — he was a mighty weight;
Nor stopped I till I had him sure
Among the thrushes on the muir.
"Then, Geordie lad, my eyes I rolled:
The beast was made of solid gold!
Such creature as was never known,
All glittering gold from end to end!
I laughed, I cried, my cap I flung,
I danced a step, a song I sung.
And soon I wished that I might die
If work again was touched by me....

"With that I woke; - no fish was there!
Just the burnside and empty muir.
Now tell me honest, Geordie lad,
Think you my daft like oath will hold?"

GEORDIE:"Tuts, Tam, you fool, the oath you swore
Was like your fish, no less, no more.
For dreams are naught but summer rouk,-(fog)
And him that trusts them hunts the gowk
(trusts the fool)
It's time we caught some fish of flesh
Or we will both go breakfastless."