

## Ee wird or twa

Dey wir a good gjoppen o towts rinklin about i me head, be da time at I wis feenished readin Robert Alan Jamieson's *Da Happie Laand*. Een o dem wis about da usefulness, tae a writer, o haein twa clossly-owerlappin languages ta wirk wi.

It wis da title o da book medd me tink about dat. Among da first at I windered about, as I started ta read, wis da spellin 'happie', instead o da standard English 'happy'. Da English wye wid a med nae difference ta da pronunciation. An yet, I couldna tink at Jamieson, een at's braaly careful about his choice o wirds an spellin, widna a hed a raeson for pickin a different wye o it.

Da clue turned up awa oot trow da book, i da transcript o een o da interviews aald Mimie Jeromsen gies tae a researcher in New Zetland. Among da laeve, Mimie haes ta explain ta da lass at da Shetlan wird 'hap' means da sam as English 'shawl'.

It wis only dan at I realised what Jamieson wis dune. He wis medd his adjective oot o da Shetlan noun – an be makkin his imaginary laand 'happie' instead o juist 'happy', he's created a dooble meanin at opens up a whole kistfu o nuances an associations, far mair as da English wird on its own ever could a kerried.

Dat led me on ta tink about idder Shetlan wirds at puns wi English wans, wirds at's similar in look or soond or baith, bit different in meanin. Een at cam early ta mind is 'fur'. 'No a fur turned' says naethin tae a Shetlander about ill-cured hides, bit a bra lokk about late voars or lazy crofters.

Anidder een is 'grind'. In me midder's poem ta her midder, shu haes a line at reads 'trow narrow grind o bane set free'. Somewye – I canna mind whaar – someen writin about dat poem interpreted 'grind' as da English verb.

Dat mebbe makks sense o a kind, in da context o childbirth. I'm braaly sure, though, at it wis raelly intended ta be read as da aald Shetlan wird for 'gate' – da sam as da 'grind or sma openin' at Haldane Burgess's deil huntit for, alang Scranna's hill daek. (I see at da Graham bridders' *A Shetland Anthology* spells da wird in baith poems wi a dooble 'n'. Dat marks da difference in pronunciation fae da English, bit also takks awa da ambiguity in 'Midder'.)

Da daek at Scranna hed nae slap, eddir. Dat's no ta say at it wisna hed a wallop - for aa wi ken, Aald Nick might a geen it een i da passin. Hit juist means at dey wir nae bit o it faan doon.

Again, dat's twa braaly different meanins – though wi a peerie stretch o imagination I suppose you mebbe could say at een wis caase an da idder effect. I daarsay, tø, at if an ootfaa (no da kind at needs pipes) wis fierce enoff, an a English-language slap wis applied hard enoff, it is juist possible at a boddy could end up wi a face laek a run daek-end. (An dat wid be naethin for a boddy ta preen demsels ower, especially if dey wir hed ta get A & E ta preen da bits tagidder.)

Dan dir a wurd at I'm never heard outside o wir faimily, though me midder tells me at shu hed it fae Jeannie Gray o da Daeks in Foula. Da wurd is 'rezoled', an hit means somethin laek 'content' or 'satisfied' or, possibly, 'refreshed'. Although hit's pronounced wi a 'z' an no an 's', hit aye makks me tink o a pair o aald shòn at's been resoled, an is ready ta takk you trampin anidder twartree mile.

Spaekin o wurd at I'm no heard ony idder wye –dis is a bit o a side-track, bit I'll tell you onywye – dey wir ee day, awa back i da late 1960s, at we aa wir sittin i da keetchin o da Noss hoose. Yarnin awa ower a cup o tay, we happened ta come a spaekin aboot someen at wis parteeklarly good at da wark dey did for a livin. Me faider said at dis boddy wis surely juist a 'nee twoag'.

Da rest o wis lookit at him. Dan, mair or less aa tagidder, we said "A *what?*".

Noo, I see at Jakobsen's dictionary (look under 'tog') gies baith a pronunciation an a meanin at's different ta what me faider telled wis. Whidder dey always wir more till it as Jakobsen kent, or whidder usage an understandin o da phrase evolved differently across different places or times, I dunna ken. Bit onywye, da answer at we got, dat day in Noss, wis at a 'nee twoag' meant somethin at wis naiterally grown tae a shape at medd it ideal for a parteeklar use.

If I mind right, he said – be wye o giein wis an example – at if da aald men wis makkin or repairin a boat, dey wir fine plaesed if dey could fin a piece o wid taen fae whaar ee branch wis grown at a right angle tae anidder, or tae da trunk o da tree. Dey wid use dat instead o makkin kabe an rooth oot o twa separate bits, for it wis stronger as onything wi a man-medd joint athin it.

Roother a boat mann hae, of coorse, for – ta get back on da track o Shetlan / English puns - da oars o a rootherless boat wid hae little mercy apo da gunnels o her. Dey wid scar dem mair as a peerie scar, I doot.

An dir mony anidder Shetlan wurd at you could play wi laek yon. Flans at's no a piece o cake; shairs at earn nae dividend; rinklin at doesna crease you up; wrecks at rekks da laand mair hapless as happy. Bit dis page'll no rex ta mair!