



WOAD: A Fashion-Opera

Seven Scenes from the Tale of Tam Lin

- I. Everything is Always Possible
- II. Superposition
- III. Scene
- IV. Tam's Speech
- V. Interim: The Painted Ones
- V. The Light That
- VII. The Transformation of Tam Lin

In the medieval Scottish Borders, a boy is bewitched - into an ape, an adder, a speck of dust. But is it his shape that twists and churns, or that of the world around him? *WOAD* is a fashion-opera about metamorphosis and parallel worlds that re-reads the Scots myth of *Tam Lin* to ask: in a multiverse of endless possibility, what becomes of our potential, our regret?

Tam Lin is a traditional tale of transformation which, through its imagery, regards the mutable nature of the body: how, in adolescence, our bodies are recast and divided through time as a series of separate versions of ourselves. In *WOAD*, these ideas are used to explore the implications of the multiverse: where versions of events coexist in different areas and types of space. How could such knowledge allow us to re-imagine music, society, even ourselves?

WOAD engages these themes by further developing ideas devised in the fashion-opera cycle. For this particular piece, we wanted to create a sense of material objectivity in the listener's experience. This is achieved through the overlay of different compositional methodologies that each imply mutually exclusive ways of listening. It is hoped that this interpretive complexity allows for a series of different paths and perspectives: a constantly changing experience that is marked by the collapse of other possibilities. This was expanded throughout the process to radically incorporate contingency into every aspect of the work. *WOAD* seeks a way of dramatising absolute change, and the potential this implies, without it being neutralised to mere indeterminacy or simply another signifier within the work's limits.

Adaptation becomes a method for considering how fear of translation manifests an anxiety of limitlessness. That, on the one hand, scores persist through any interpretation; on the other, the endlessness of space rests upon pinpoints of quantum particularity. *WOAD* appeals to models of annotation within older artworks: Lear's fool; Gibbon and Eliot's footnotes; more recently, Gonzo and Rizzo in *The Muppet Christmas Carol*. Here, this becomes a double focus that brings the work out into the world with edges intact: unstable fragments from the characters' lives are encircled by a commentary that - like the writhing backdrop against which Tam is caught - obscures and merges.

Created during 2020, the work contextualises itself against the social change foregrounded by that year's health crisis, relating its themes of metamorphosis and quantum 'flickering' to socio-historical revolution and the possibility of a break with the horrors of multinational capitalism. We know that cosmology teaches us: everything is always possible. Even tomorrow, the world could change utterly, into a beautiful, wonderful thing for all.

shoulders coiling as a spell
arms lengthened by keys
and polythenes' shining yellow.

Tamlane's in love

and a semi-detached.

On Sunday he pulls weeds from the rosebed,
known for silver, ridiculous glasses.

Last year we heard he survived a bypass.

...never know another's heart beats blood...

Just a word to Janet as she went out the back,
"Glorious, just to live."

Even sun upon the window dyed pink by petal-gauze.

Against his skin: pressure, and the cooling stone of rose quartz.

She dusts him like a broken pot, an antediluvian comb

poking through years' rubble. Dumb, he writes upon his phone:

"I dreamed I was an adder slack against your palm.

*A moment between the black ape and the naked, greetin' knight;
the plump man - both - and the poison's ancient witchcraft."*

3) Scene

The thing that changes -

The thing clutching hold -

The table frames the dice roll.

Illegal lives encircle suffrage.

The coin that ages -

Its symbolic gold -

Innumerable exchanges

between the bank and the kermode.

Reams of rotting pages -

Their cipher and code -

Unending transformations

in the same iambic odes.

Algorithms' fleshy, human nodes

preserved by habit and chlorination.

Arranged columns, identical abodes

project difference, interminable phasing.

Time maintains its own unchanging.

History keeps itself from ageing.

Like gerund rhymes and perfect cadences:

Content, structure. Goad, then continence.

Contents, tucked in form and common sense.

The shuttered dance of quanta -
foaming infinity -

behind the canyon range
blacklit bowl
by light
 universes old.

4) Tam's Speech

of course I read the poem who doesn't
google themselves from time to time I don't
remember exactly how it happened but sure it won't
surprise you it's not the way it went at all look if it wasn't
my glasses my nose my hair this shirt of course my ears I know you wouldn't
believe me I used to be blackberry eyed a dancer even and free Jenny couldn't
keep her hands off me the cinema's damp the diner's leather and heather she shouldn't
've picked have pulled have clasped have lain have laughed 've held on have changed I shan't
ever feel that way again I expect but can't
complain you get your lot beer and Roxburg and not
dead yet what did you say the treespell the spell of change I daren't
speak of it just that I was beautiful to say I am I am I am not
the stonespell and spell of bark and hell yet what we dare not
speak of is beautiful still to say I am I am I am not I am I care not
dead yet or not what did you say what what do we dare not speak of it not
that I was not
speak of it just that I was beautiful to say I am not I am I am not I I am not I am

getting a little carried away with myself.
The spell was never meant to about change,
whether the knight, the adder or the hooting ape.
From the wand of that bonny, callous elf
came a curse far stranger than hell or shape.
See, Tamlane is Tamlane when Tamlane's made strange.
He's stone, adder, knight, faery-ape, again, him.
But *where the fuck was he in the interim?*

5) Interim: The Painted Ones

Wallace paints himself with woad.
Gibson paints himself with Wallace.
Tom Church paints the stone with Gibson.
Stones split and smoothed to bowls.
Bowls crush Glastum-pulp to colour.
Gorm ceilteach pasted on the skin.
Wallace dressed in love and leather,
leather that rents and splits the body.
Pink, body-sundered pieces.
Pieces sent to myth and legend.
Legend paints itself with woad.

Woad paints itself with Wallace.

That same blue is painted on the skin
of some sorry child, huddling in the heather;
his spleen pierced and boyhood friend
lying in bits; nearby, a snail crawls across a piece of tongue
naive to the lays and pictograms.

That same blue shows the snake, bear and ape's
flux of an endlessly mutable world
the boy finds as he becomes the heather,
becomes dumbness of the crawling snail
slime that paints the earth with woad.

6) The light that

lights the canyon comes from stars
predates the internet and dinosaurs.
Neither light nor stars are fixed and steady.
The universe expands because it's stretchy.

So the stars are wheeled back into space
as the universe blows up at a pace
that would scare the bejeebies out your daddy
because adults think such things are silly.

(They'd rather talk about the news
or which bottle of red wine they'll choose
reeling off a list of names
even though they taste the same.)

What this means is the bush's flame
holds lodestar to the spinning vane
of everything that is and was:
Glasgow, gods, *Gilmore Girls*, effect - both - and cause.

All in thrall to something strange:
that everything can always change.
Weirder still, like the stars' black shelf:
this rule applies even to itself!

7) The Transformation of Tam Lin

Yellow petals'
bells. Blue paint.
Bread baked
in red metal.
Whitening albumen.
Lightning flares
bark, a red glare:
sparks like halogen.
One made a wish

I see you, Tam, beneath the word's, the spell's evil.

The Adder.

I see you, Tam, beneath the wicker ring of willow.

The Ape.

Before the strangeness of the dayspell that warps all what's now lost, Tam, see you I?

The Iron.

Fur, paw and scale and stone-skinned heaviness, through eyes of the adder and ape, dust-mote, iron and shamed undress, Tam, see you I?

The Dust-mote.

I see you, Tam, churning.

I see you, Tam, see a thing within another.

The Man, naked and crying.

I see you, Tam, beneath the white paper, the stone, before the

nine silver bells.

Silk.

Green

leaves.

A needle. A

green

kilt.

Yellow hair. A rose.

A

tree.

Caterhaugh. A milk-white hand.

A

grass-green

sleeve.

Faery-earth.

A green, green

kilt.

Sickness.

A

ball.

A

garden wall.

Father.

A green

kilt.

Yellow hair.

Caterhaugh.

A

well.

A horse. A rose. A beautiful child between.

A cold day.

A

hunting party.

A horse.

The

Queen of

Faeries.

The hill. A green fairy land.
Hell's tiend.
Hallow een.
Hallow
day.

Midnight. A plea.

Miles Cross.

A black horse. A brown horse.
A black horse. A milk-white horse.
A rider. A glove. A bare hand.
A hand. A bonnet.
Your arms.

An esk.
An adder.

*Your bairnie's
father.
bear.*

A lion.

Love.
Red hot iron.
Burning coal.

Well-water
The naked knight.

The Night. green mantle.

A green mantle.

Miles Cross.
Midnight.
Bridles.

A green mantle.

A bird in spring.

The Queen of Faeries.