

George Mackay Brown (1921-96)

2 *A Ballad of Gow the Pirate*

One tree in the garden, Mister  
William Gow, merchant in Hamnavoe.  
*Water the apple-tree, John.*  
The boy hides among summer leaves.

One tree in the school, Mister 5  
Clouston, dominie: his desk.  
*Navis'-ship-decline that, boy.*  
Ocean branched, many streams, through Gow.

One tree off Sicily, Monsieur 10  
Ferneau, master: his keel.  
*The arms-chest key, keep it, John.*  
Smoke, flame, a ball in the Frenchman's skull.

One tree in the Bailey, Mister 15  
Justice Bigwig there: his bench.  
*Gallows, chains, tar at Wapping.*  
Night, tree of stars, over Marshalsea.

A bare tree at Thames-side, Mister 20  
Jack Ketch, gallowsman.  
Fiddles, broadsheets, bottles of gin.  
The boy bites on the salt apple.

*1999*

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