

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

(From *The Collected Poems of George Mackay Brown*. Ed. Archie Bevan and Brian Murray. John Murray, 2005)