

TAM O' SHANTER

A TRANSLATION
INTO ENGLISH IN VERSE

(for everyone who struggles to understand the old Scottish words)

By
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DEDICATED TO

my good friends

BOB STEWART

(Past President of the Robert Burns World Federation)

and

ERIC SUMMERS

(Former Rector of Webster's High School, Kirriemuir)

for their unfailing support and encouragement
throughout the process of compiling this book
and for inspiring me to think, double-check, amend,
and think again before finally putting it to bed.

FOREWORD

This fine translation of Burn's famous poem is a labour of love. It is by a man whose association with Tam is almost as close as Souter Johnnie's. I must have heard Jim Smith recite Burns' masterpiece at least thirty times, a small fraction of the total number of performances he has given. And performance it always is, for Jim quaffs the ale, puts his arm round some unsuspecting female in the audience, teases some grey beard when describing the knife that a son used to murder his father, has a "volunteer" dress up as the devil, and gallops round the hall on his very own Meg. His is one the great Tams and one never tires of seeing and hearing it again.

But, in truth, there is vocabulary in Tam O'Shanter which can puzzle the modern reader or listener, and elements in the story which can leave someone completely unfamiliar with the Scots language very confused. Jim, I know, will never abandon the original, but here he has produced a carefully-crafted English translation which will greatly increase its accessibility – and enjoyment – for those who live furth of Scotland and - whisper it – maybe also for quite a few who still live in their native land. It will certainly be very helpful for school teachers.

Jim has worked hard on this project, determined to stay as close as possible to the original, always retaining the Bard's words when they are well-known and keeping Burns' rhythm, metre, similes and storyline. The delightful vignettes of jolly pub evenings, the sometimes harsh side of rural life, and the ups and downs of domestic relationships are still there; so too are the humour, excitement and sheer energy of this timeless, epic poem.

Jim is a Glaswegian, long resident in Kirriemuir, after an RN career which took him around the globe. He is a stalwart of the local Speakers Club (and a past winner of its national speechmaking competition), a founder member of the Kirriemuir Literary Society, the organiser of enormously popular tea-dancing afternoons and, perhaps inspired by Burns, Jim is himself a published poet who has written poetry since he was a boy.

Indeed, a man of many parts, but a word too about his wife, Muriel. No Kate she, left at home nursing her wrath. She accompanies Jim on all his many outings, his very best critic and support, and she is a fine public speaker in her own right. She will have been through this translation with a fine-tooth comb, we may be sure.

Enough! It is time to visit Ayr, just as market day is coming to its close....

*Eric Summers
Rector (rtd)
Webster's High School
Kirriemuir*

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THE CHARACTERS

Tam o'Shanter (Tam, Tammie)

A lovable rogue of a farmer from Shanter Farm in Ayrshire who liked nothing better than 'getting fou' with his friends at every opportunity.

Kate

Tam's long-suffering wife, whose best advice – often given - was always despised by him.

Kirkton Jean

Landlady of 'The Leddie's House' Inn at Kirkoswald.

Souter Johnie

An affable local shoemaker/cobbler who was Tam's most faithful drinking companion.

Meg (Maggie)

Tam's grey meare, the faithful horse that carried him all over the County on his business and always brought him home safely, fou or sober.

Auld Nick (The Deil, Satan)

The Devil himself.

Nannie (Cutty-sark)

The souple jad with the shortest sark of all, whose frantic dancing caught Tam's ale-fuelled imagination and caused him to roar out.

THE CHARACTERS

Tam o'Shanter (Tam, Tammy)

A lovable rogue of a farmer from Shanter Farm in Ayrshire who liked nothing better than getting drunk with his friends at every opportunity.

Kate

Tam's long-suffering wife, whose best advice – often given - was always ignored by him.

Kirkton Jean

The Landlady at one of Tam's favourite 'Watering Holes'

Cobbler Johnny

An affable local cobbler who was Tam's most faithful drinking companion.

Meg (Maggy)

Tam's grey mare, the faithful horse that carried him all over the County on his business and always brought him home safely, drunk or sober.

Old Nick (The Devil, Satan)

The Devil himself.

Nanny (Cutty-sark)

The supple witch with the shortest shirt of all, whose frantic dancing caught Tam's alcohol-fuelled imagination and caused him to roar out.



Tam and his cronies in the pub

THE GEOGRAPHY

AYR

Ayr is the market town of the County of Ayrshire on the south-west coast of Scotland. This is where the story starts with Tam having spent too long enjoying himself with his cronies in the Pub and setting off for home on horseback at 'the witching hour'.

DOON

The River Doon flows 23 miles from Loch Doon, joining the Firth of Clyde just south of Ayr. Its course is generally north-westerly, passing near to the town of Dalmellington, and through the villages of Patna, Dalrymple, and Alloway. The source is Loch Enoch, high in the Galloway Hills. This river is also the setting for another of Robert Burns' poems "The Banks O' Doon", which is still very often sung at Burns Suppers.

ALLOWAY

Alloway is a small town on the banks of the River Doon a few miles south of Ayr on the route to Shanter farm in the Carrick district of Ayrshire. At Alloway you will still find the old ruined church in which Tam has the encounter with the warlocks and witches. Robert Burns was born in a small thatched cottage in Alloway on the 25th of January 1759.

CARRICK SHORE

This is where Shanter Farm was situated, in the Carrick district of Ayrshire.

PAISLEY

Paisley is the largest town in the west Scotland county of Renfrewshire. A centre for weaving and textiles, it was famous for fine quality linen.

TAM O' SHANTER A Tale

Of Brownie and of Bogillie full is this Buke,
GAWIN DOUGLAS

When chapman billies leave the street,
And drouthy neebors, neebors meet;
As market-days are wearing late,
An' folk begin to tak the gate;
While we sit bousing at the nappy,
An' getting fou and unco happy,
We think na on the lang Scots miles,
The mosses, waters, slaps, and stiles,
That lie between us and our hame,
Whare sits our sulky, sullen dame,
Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

This truth fand honest Tam o' Shanter,
As he frae Ayr ae night did canter:
(Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses,
For honest men and bonie lasses.)

Oh Tam, hadst thou but been sae wise,
As taen thy ain wife Kate's advice!
She tauld thee weel thou was a skellum,
A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum;
That frae November till October,
Ae market-day thou was nae sober;
That ilka melder wi' the miller,
Thou sat as lang as thou had siller;
That ev'ry naig was ca'd a shoe on,
The smith and thee gat roaring fou on;
That at the L---d's house, even on Sunday,
Thou drank wi' Kirkton Jean till Monday.
She prophesied that, late or soon,
Thou would be found, deep drown'd in Doon,
Or catch'd wi' warlocks in the mirk,
By Alloway's auld, haunted kirk.

TAM O' SHANTER A Tale

When weary pedlars leave the street,
And thirsty neighbours, neighbours meet;
As market-days are wearing on,
And folk begin to head for home;
While we sit boozing at the beer,
And getting drunk and full of cheer,
We think not of the long Scots miles,
The bogs and pools and gaps and stiles,
That lie between us and our house,
Where sits our sulky, sullen spouse,
Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

This truth found honest Tam o' Shanter,
As he from Ayr one night did canter:
(Old Ayr, which not a town surpasses,
For honest men and bonny lasses.)

Oh Tam, had you but been so wise,
As taken your own wife Kate's advice!
She told you well you were a dabbler,
A blethering, blustering, drunken babbler;
That from November till October,
No market day did you stay sober;
That each meal-grinding with the miller,
You drank till you could get no fuller;
That for every horse was nailed a shoe,
The blacksmith got roaring drunk with you;
That at the pub, even on a Sunday,
You drank with Kirkton Jean till Monday.
She prophesied that, late or soon,
You would be found, deep drowned in Doon,
Or caught by warlocks in the mirk,
By Alloway's old, haunted kirk.

Ah! gentle dames, it gars me greet,
To think how monie counsels sweet,
How monie lengthen'd, sage advices
The husband frae the wife despises!

But to our tale:- Ae market-night,
Tam had got planted unco right,
Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,
Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely;
And at his elbow, Souter Johnie,
His ancient, trusty, drouthy cronie:
Tam lo'ed him like a very brither;
They had been fou for weeks thegither.
The night drave on wi' sangs and clatter;
And ay the ale was growing better:
The landlady and Tam grew gracious
Wi' secret favours, sweet and precious:
The Souter tauld his queerest stories;
The landlord's laugh was ready chorus:
The storm without might rair and rustle,
Tam did na mind the storm a whistle.

Care, mad to see a man sae happy,
E'en drown'd himsel amang the nappy.
As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure,
The minutes wing'd their way wi' pleasure:
Kings may be blest but Tam was glorious,
O'er a' the ills o' life victorious!

But pleasures are like poppies spread:
You seize the flow'r, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white – then melts for ever;
Or like the Borealis race,
That flit ere you can point their place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form
Evanishing amid the storm.
Nae man can tether time or tide;
The hour approaches, Tam maun ride:
That hour, o' night's black arch the key-stane,
That dreary hour Tam mounts his beast in;
And sic a night he taks the road in,
As ne'er poor sinner was abroad in.

Ah! gentle dames, it makes me cry,
To think how hard you ladies try;
That all that lengthy, wise imploring,
The husband from the wife's ignoring!

But to our tale:- One market-night,
Tam had got planted truly right,
Fast by a fireplace, blazing finely,
With foaming pints, that drank divinely;
And at his elbow, Cobbler Johnny,
His ancient, trusty, thirsty crony:
Tam loved him like a very brother;
They had been drunk for weeks together.
The night drove on with songs and clatter;
With every pint the ale got better:
The landlady and Tam grew gracious
With secret favours, sweet and precious:
The Cobbler told his tallest stories;
The landlord's laugh was ready chorus:
The storm outside might roar and rustle,
Tam did not mind the storm one whistle.

Care, mad to see him full of cheer,
Even drowned himself among the beer.
As bees fly home with loads of treasure,
The minutes winged their way with pleasure:
Kings may be blessed but Tam was glorious,
O'er all the ills of life victorious!

But pleasures are like poppies spread:
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white – then melts for ever;
Or like the Northern Lights that race,
Then flit ere you can point their place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form
Evanishing amid the storm.
No man can tether time or tide;
The hour approaches, Tam must ride:
That hour, of night's black arch the key-stone,
That dreary hour Tam mounts his beast in;
And such a night he takes the road in,
As ne'er poor sinner was abroad in.

The wind blew as 'twad blawn its last;
The rattling showers rose on the blast;
The speedy gleams the darkness swallow'd;
Loud, deep and lang the thunder bellow'd:
That night, a child might understand,
The Deil had business on his hand.

Weel mounted on his grey meare Meg,
A better never lifted leg,
Tam skelpit on thro' dub and mire,
Despising wind, and rain, and fire:
Whiles holding fast his guid blue bonnet,
Whiles crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet,
Whiles glow'ring round wi' prudent cares,
Lest bogles catch him unawares:
Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,
Where ghaists and houlets nightly cry.

By this time he was cross the ford,
Whare in the snaw the chapman smoor'd;
And past the birks and meikle stane,
Where drunken Charlie brak's neck-bane;
And thro' the whins, and by the cairn,
Whare hunters fand the murder'd bairn;
And near the thorn, aboon the well,
Whare Mungo's mither hang'd hersel.
Before him Doon pours all his floods;
The doubling storm roars thro' the woods;
The lightnings flash from pole to pole;
Near and more near the thunders roll:
When, glimmering thro' the groaning trees,
Kirk-Alloway seem'd in a bleeze,
Thro' ilka bore the beams were glancing,
And loud resounded mirth and dancing.

Inspiring bold, John Barleycorn!
What dangers thou canst make us scorn!
Wi' tippenny, we fear nae evil;
Wi' usquabae, we'll face the Devil!
The swats sae ream'd in Tammie's noddle,
Fair play, he car'd na Deils a boddle.
But Maggie stood, right sair astonished,
Till, by the heel and hand admonish'd,
She ventur'd forward on the light;
And wow! Tam saw an unco sight!

The wind blew as 'twould blow its last;
The rattling showers rose on the blast;
The speedy gleams the darkness swallowed;
Loud, deep and long the thunder bellowed:
That night, a child might understand,
The Devil had business on his hand.

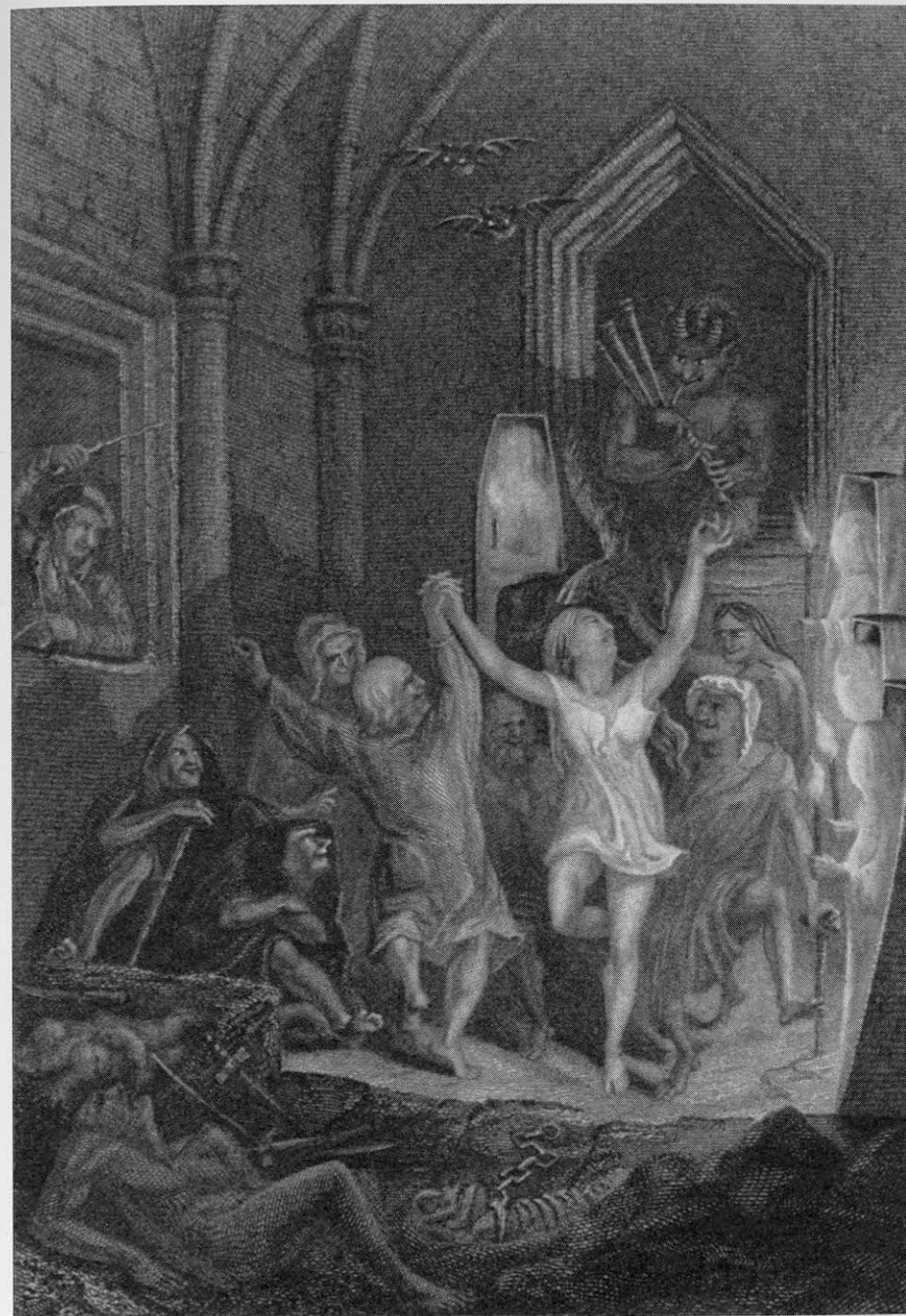
Well mounted on his grey mare Meg,
A better never lifted leg,
Tam spanked along through dub and mire,
Ignoring wind, and rain, and fire:
Now holding fast his good blue bonnet,
Now crooning o'er some old Scots sonnet,
Now glaring round with prudent cares,
Lest goblins catch him unawares:
Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,
Where eerie ghosts and night-owls cry.

By this time the old ford he'd crossed,
Where pedlars in the snow were lost;
And past the birch and giant stone,
Where drunken Chay broke his neck-bone;
And through the gorse, and by the cairn,
Where hunters found the murdered bairn;
And near the thorn tree, o'er the well,
Where Mungo's mother hanged hersel'.
Before him Doon pours all his floods;
The doubling storm roars through the woods;
The lightnings flash from pole to pole;
Near and more near the thunders roll:
When, glimmering through the groaning trees,
Kirk-Alloway seemed in a blaze,
Through every chink the beams were glancing,
And loud resounded mirth and dancing.

Inspiring bold, John Barleycorn!
What dangers you can make us scorn!
With two-penny ale we fear no evil;
With whisky in, we'll face the Devil!
The ale so fizzed in Tammy's head,
He feared no Devils, it must be said.
But Maggy stood, right sore astonished,
Till, by the heel and hand admonished,
She ventured forward on the light;
And, wow! Tam saw a startling sight!



The Auld Alloway Kirk



Warlocks and Witches in a dance

Warlocks and witches in a dance:
Nae cotillion, brent new frae France,
But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,
Put life and mettle in their heels.
A winnock-bunker in the east,
There sat Auld Nick, in shape o' beast;
A tousy tyke, black, grim, and large,
To gie them music was his charge:
He screw'd the pipes and gart them skirl,
Till roof and rafters a' did dirl.
Coffins stood round, like open presses,
That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses;
And by some devilish cantraip sleight,
Each in its cauld hand held a light:
By which heroic Tam was able
To note upon the haly table,
A murderer's banes, in gibbet-airns;
Twa span-lang, wee, unchristened bairns;
A thief new-cutted frae a rape –
Wi' his last gasp his gab did gape;
Five tomahawks wi' bluid red-rusted;
Five scymitars wi' murder crusted;
A garter which a babe had strangled;
A knife a father's throat had mangled –
Whom his ain son o' life bereft –
The grey-hairs yet stack to the heft;
Wi' mair, of horrible and awefu',
Which even to name wad be unlawfu'.

As Tammie glowr'd, amaz'd, and curious,
The mirth and fun grew fast and furious;
The piper loud and louder blew,
The dancers quick and quicker flew,
They reel'd, they set, they cross'd, they cleekit,
Till ilka carlin swat and reekit,
And coost her duddies to the wark,
And linket at it in her sark!

Warlocks and witches in a dance:
No cotillion, brand new from France,
But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys and reels,
Put life and mettle in their heels.
A window-seat adorned the East,
There sat Old Nick in shape of beast;
A shaggy dog, black, grim, and large,
To give them music was his charge:
He squeezed the pipes and made them wail,
Till roof and rafters all did quail.
Like sentry boxes, coffins stood guard,
That showed the dead in funeral garb;
And by some devilish magic sleight,
Each in its cold hand held a light:
By which heroic Tam was able
To note upon the holy table,
A murderer's bones, in irons imprisoned;
Two infant corpses, never christened;
A thief new cut from hangman's noose –
With his last gasp his jaw hung loose;
Five tomahawks with blood red-rusted;
Five scimitars with murder crusted;
A garter which a babe had strangled;
A knife a father's throat had mangled –
'Twas his own son that took his life –
The grey hairs still stuck to the knife;
With more, so horrible and awful,
Which even to name would be unlawful.

As Tammy stared, amazed, and curious,
The mirth and fun grew fast and furious;
The piper loud and louder blew,
The dancers quick and quicker flew,
They reeled, they linked, they crossed, they set,
Till every hag was wreathed in sweat,
And cast her clothes off to the work,
And danced like crazy in her sark!

Now Tam, O Tam! Had they been queans,
A' plump and strapping in their teens!
Their sarks, instead o' creeshie flannen,
Been snaw-white seventeen hunder linen! –
Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,
That ance were plush, o' guid blue hair,
I wad hae gi'en them off my hurdies,
For ae blink o' the bonie burdies!

But wither'd beldams, auld and droll,
Rigwoodie hags wad spean a foal,
Louping and flinging on a crummock,
I wonder did na turn thy stomach!

But Tam kend what was what fu' brawlie:
There was ae winsome wench and wawlie,
That night enlisted in the core,
Lang after kend on Carrick shore
(For monie a beast to dead she shot,
An' perish'd monie a bonie boat,
And shook baith meikle corn and bear,
And kept the countrie-side in fear.)
Her cutty sark, o' Paisley harn,
That while a lassie she had worn,
In longitude tho' sorely scanty,
It was her best, and she was vauntie.
Ah! little kend thy reverend grannie,
That sark she coft for her wee Nannie,
Wi' twa pund Scots ('twas a' her riches),
Wad ever grac'd a dance of witches!

But here my Muse her wing maun cour,
Sic flights as far beyond her power:
To sing how Nannie lap and flang
(A souple jad she was and strang);
And how Tam stood like ane bewitch'd,
And thought his very een enrich'd;
Even Satan glowr'd, and fidg'd fu' fain,
And hotch'd and blew wi' might and main;
Till first ae caper, syne anither,
Tam tint his reason a' thegither,
And roars out: 'Weel done, Cutty-sark!'
And in an instant all was dark;
And scarcely had he Maggie rallied,
When out the hellish legion sallied.

Now Tam, O Tam! Had they been queens,
All plump and strapping in their teens!
Each sark, not just a greasy vest,
But snow-white shift, the very best! –
These trousers here, my only pair,
That once were plush, of good blue hair,
I would have given them off my chassis,
For one blink of the bonny lasses!

But withered creatures, old and droll,
Hags that by fear would wean a foal,
Leaping around on a crooked stick,
I wonder they didn't make you sick!

But Tam knew what was what full well:
There was one winsome wench from hell,
That night enlisted in the corps,
Long after known on Carrick shore
(For many a beast to dead she shot,
And perished many a bonny boat,
And ruined crops both far and near,
And kept the countryside in fear.)
Her cutty-sark, of Paisley yarn,
That while a lassie she had worn,
In longitude though sorely scanty,
It was her best, and she was vauntie.
Ah! little thought your gentle grannie,
That sark she bought for little Nanny,
With two Scots pounds ('twas all her riches),
Would ever grace a dance of witches!

But here my Muse her wing must lower,
Such flights are far beyond her power:
To sing how Nanny leaped and pranced
(Supple and strong, oh! how she danced);
And how Tam stood like one bewitched,
And thought his very eyes enriched;
Even Satan vied to be her swain,
And jerked and blew with might and main;
Till first one caper, then another,
Tam lost his reason altogether,
And roared out: 'Well done, Cutty-sark!'
And in an instant all was dark;
And scarcely had he Maggy rallied,
When out the hellish legion sallied.

As bees bizz out wi' angry fyke,
When plundering herds assail their byke;
As open pussie's mortal foes,
When, pop! she starts before their nose;
As eager runs the market-crowd,
When 'Catch the thief!' resounds aloud:
So Maggie runs, the witches follow,
Wi' monie an eldritch skriech and hollo.

Ah, Tam! Ah, Tam! thou'll get thy fairin!
In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin!
In vain thy Kate awaits thy comin!
Kate soon will be a woefu' woman!
Now, do thy speedy utmost, Meg,
And win the key-stane of the brig;
There, at them thou thy tail may toss,
A running stream they dare na cross!
But ere the key-stane she could make,
The fient a tail she had to shake;
For Nannie, far before the rest,
Hard upon noble Maggie prest,
And flew at Tam wi' furious ettle;
But little wist she Maggie's mettle!
Ae spring brought off her master hale,
But left behind her ain grey tail:
The carlin clought her by the rump,
And left poor Maggie scarce a stump.

Now, wha this tale o' truth shall read,
Ilk man, and mother's son, take heed:
Whene'er to drink you are inclin'd,
Or cutty sarks run in your mind,
Think! ye may buy the joys o'er dear:
Remember Tam o'Shanter's meare.

As bees buzz out to swarm and dive,
When plundering herdsmen raid their hive;
As out dash hounds, the wild hare's foes,
When, pop! she starts before their nose;
As eager runs the market-crowd,
When 'Catch the thief!' resounds aloud:
So Maggie runs, the witches follow,
With many a fiendish screech and holler.

Ah, Tam! You'll get your fair comeuppance!
"To roast in hell" will be your sentence!
In vain your Kate awaits your comin'!
Kate soon will be a woeful woman!
Now, Meg, your speedy utmost run,
The key-stone of the bridge to win;
There at them you your tail may toss,
A running stream they dare not cross!
But ere the key-stone she could make,
Her very tail she had to shake;
For Nanny, far before the rest,
Hard upon noble Maggy pressed,
And flew at Tam her score to settle;
But little was she Maggy's mettle!
One spring from her saw Nanny fail,
It saved Tam's life, cost Meg her tail:
The harpy seized her by the rump,
And left poor Maggy scarce a stump.

Now, who this tale of truth shall read,
Each man, and mother's son, take heed:
Whene'er to drink you are inclined,
Or cutty-sarks run in your mind,
Those joys may cost too much, take care:
Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare.

BACKGROUND TO TAM O'SHANTER

Captain Francis Grose, artist and author of "The Antiquities of England and Wales" began a series of tours of Scotland in 1788 to gather material for the production of "The Antiquities of Scotland".

On the second of these tours, in the summer of 1789, he met Robert Burns while he was staying with Robert Riddell at Friar's Carse. They formed a lasting friendship, and Burns suggested to him that he should include Alloway Kirk (where Robert's father is buried) in his Scottish Antiquities. Grose agreed on condition that Burns provided a tale of witches to go with his drawing. In June 1790, Burns sent him three possible stories in prose and followed up with a rhymed version of one of them – his poem "Tam o' Shanter". Grose included it in the second volume of The Antiquities of Scotland in April 1791, just one month after it had appeared in the Edinburgh Magazine.

It is described by Maurice Lindsay in his Burns Encyclopedia as "Burns's most sustained poetic effort, and by common consent, one of the first narrative poems in a European tongue."

"Tam o' Shanter" is recited at every traditional Burns Supper and the performers generally take great pride in being able to remember all of the 1,490 words as well as giving it their own personal touch.

Inspired by the poem, the name Tam o' Shanter, or Tammy for short, has been used since the mid 19th century for a round Scottish cloth or woollen cap with a bobble in the centre. The poem also inspired the name Cutty Sark given to the only surviving British Tea Clipper, launched in 1869, which is now a fascinating Museum at Greenwich in London.

BACKGROUND TO TAM O'SHANTER

It is important for readers to appreciate that the poem was written two hundred and twenty-five years ago, when things were very different. People were totally dependent on the horse for transport, whether on horseback or in a carriage. There were few good roads and no street lighting, so making a journey at night, with only the light of the moon or the stars, was a precarious business. There was also a great deal of superstition and a widespread belief in ghosts, fairies and witches, so people would be afraid to go far in the dark.



Auld Brig of Doon

BACKGROUND TO THE TRANSLATION

Over the years I have performed Tam O' Shanter in public more than 150 times. In private I will have rehearsed it over 300 times. I have also studied the meaning of the Scottish words and expressions used by Robert Burns which are no longer in every-day use. So it would be fair to say that I know the work's meaning, its cadence and its humour intimately, and as a poet myself, I respect and admire it tremendously.

I have been asked on many occasions by people of all nationalities (including Scots) who don't know what the Scottish words mean, whether there is a simple English translation that would allow them to understand and enjoy the story without having to stop repeatedly to refer to a glossary. I have seen several versions that simply substitute English words for the Scottish ones. In my view that does not work because it destroys the rhyme and metre so important to the flow of the poem and makes it stilted, which just detracts from the enjoyment of the story.

So I set myself the task of translating Tam O' Shanter into simple English in verse form which will be easily understood by any English-speaking person. In doing so, my main concerns have been:

To keep as much of Burns' original wording and punctuation as possible.

To substitute English words for Scottish words no longer in common use.

To make it a simple and enjoyable read.

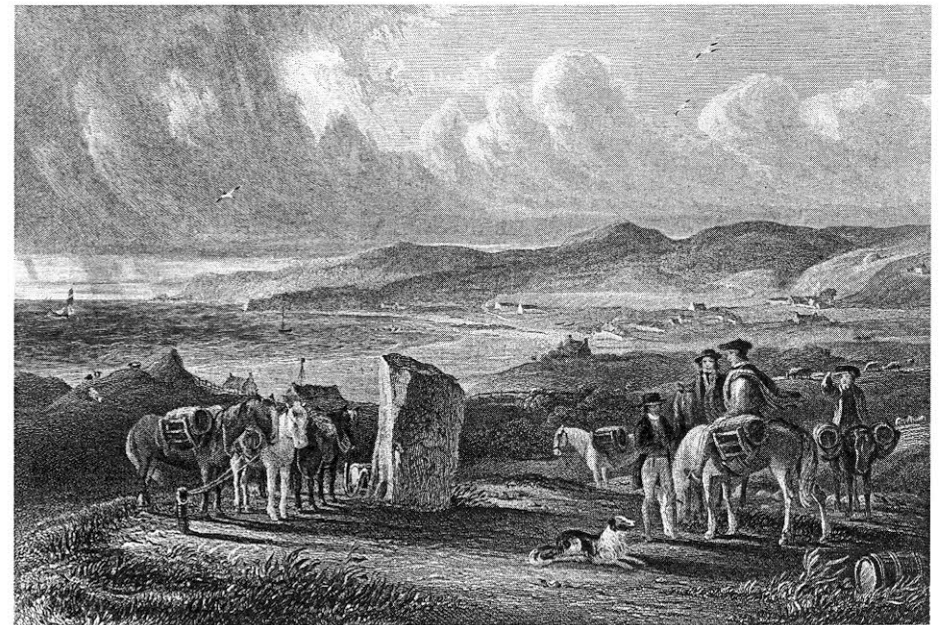
In some cases I have reverted to English words used by Burns in the Kilmarnock Manuscript which he later changed to Scottish words. I have also created some new rhymes where necessary, without changing the general sense of any couplet or the rhythm of the whole poem.

BACKGROUND TO THE TRANSLATION

I have deliberately kept in the following words used by Robert Burns which may not be instantly understood by some, but are included in both the Oxford Dictionary and the American College Dictionary (in some cases described as "Scottish & Northern English" words):
Bairn, Cutty, Kirk, Mirk, Old Nick and Sark.

I sincerely hope this "translation" achieves all I have set out to do. I have no wish to change the way that Tam o' Shanter is traditionally performed, and I will continue to use the original words. That said, I make no apology for offering a version which I feel sure will connect with a whole new audience of readers and extend even further the fame of Robert Burns' epic narrative poem.

*Jim Smith,
April 2016.*



Shanter Farm and Bay



Meg loses her tail

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OTHER BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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Robert Burns