

### ***Circa Instans (Adv. MS 72.1.3)***

#### **Liosta ìocan sa Ghàidhlig**

Chaith mi samhradh le *Circa Instans*  
's mi nam oileanach, a' tionndadh nan duilleag  
is miotagan geal' orm, Tadhg Ó Cuinn  
a' tighinn fom aire, a chruinnich a liosta  
sa chòigeamh linn deug am Montpellier,  
is Giolla Pádraic a ghabh briathran  
Hippocrates is Dioscorides,  
Avicenna is Platearius  
gu misneachail an Gàidhlig,  
gun fhaileas den tàmailt a bha ri tighinn.

Dh'aithnichinn làmhan nan sgrìobhaichean  
a shoilleirich na h-iocan an dearg;  
is mar a dh'fhuasglainn na giorrachaidhean,  
nochdadh faclan às na sreathan a sgrìobhadh  
gun bheàrn gus craiceann-laoigh a chaomhnadh.  
Dh'ionnsaich mi dleastanas nan lighichean:  
fuil is reum, lionn dubh is domblas  
a chothromachadh le àile is uisge,  
talamh is teine,  
is far an iarr iad, bheannaich mi an anam.

Dà fhichead bliadhna bhon uair sin,  
tionndaidhidh mi na duilleagan air loidhne,  
is mi strì a-nist ri na leigheasan a leughadh –  
lìontan damhain-allaidh dha casgadh na fala,  
coireal ruadh an aghaidh dealanaich is bàthaidh ...  
's mi dol am measg Clann Mhic Bheatha am Muile –  
Seumas a chomharraicheas na thug e do Chaitlín,  
is an t-Urramach Eòin a shònraicheas  
solasan na gealaich  
a bu shealbhaich do ghearradh chuislean.

Ma thug seo gàire orm cheana  
chan eil mi cho cinnteach is brèid-beòil  
's miotagan gam dhìon on bhìoras  
a thog sinn san fhàsach, cho math  
ri ialtagan, a' phangalainn 's adharc an raidhno.  
Chan iongnadh ged a fhuair sinn banachdach  
oir is innleachdach ar cinneal, ach guidheam  
gun cuir sinn umhail air cothrom nan dùl  
nar n-àite fon ghrèin  
mus tèid sinn gu dall leis a' charraig.

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#### **a Gaelic Pharmacopeia**

I spent a summer with *Circa Instans*  
as a student, turning its folios  
in white gloves, imagining Tadhg Ó Cuinn  
in the fifteenth century, gathering his list  
from other lists in Montpelier,  
and Giolla Pádraic who quoted  
Hippocrates and Dioscorides,  
Avicenna and Platearius  
confidently in Gaelic  
without a shadow of that language's shame.

I came to know the hands of the scribes  
who illuminated each entry in red,  
and as I unraveled their ligatures,  
words emerged from the lines  
written without gaps to save calfskin.  
I came to understand the doctors' task:  
to balance blood and rheum,  
bile and choler with air and water,  
earth and fire,  
and where they ask, I blessed their souls.

Forty years on, in Covid times,  
I turn the manuscript's leaves online,  
no longer so quick to read the remedies –  
spider's web for the staunching of wounds,  
red coral against lightning and drowning ...  
and I join the company of the Beatons in Mull –  
James who notes the potion he gave Kathleen,  
and the Reverend John who marks  
the phases of the moon  
most auspicious for the opening of veins.

If it made me smile before  
I am not so sure now, masked  
and gloved against the virus  
we've lifted from the wild  
with pangolins, bats and horn of rhino.  
We were bound to get a vaccine  
for our species is inventive, but I'm praying  
we'll heed the balance of the elements  
in our place below the sun  
before we stumble blindly off the edge.

Meg Bateman

This work was commissioned by the National Library of Scotland as part of Neu! Treasures!