

# The Second Shepherds' Play

## Coll

Lord, how these winter storms are cold 2.1  
And I am ill-wrapped;  
I am near hand-dead, so long have I napped;  
My legs they fold, my fingers are chapped;  
All is not as I would, for I am all lapped  
In sorrow.

We simple shepherds that walk on the moor 2.10  
No wonder, as it standis, if we be poor!  
We are so lamed, for-taxed and be-yoked;  
We are hand-tamed with these gentry-folk! 2.18

These lords of the land, they rob us of our rest. 2.19  
They cause the plough to tarry-and say "for the best".  
Thus are husbandmen oppressed, held under and starved -  
It were great wonder  
That ever we should thrive! 2.27

For if man gets a painted sleeve or a brooch nowadays  
Woe to shepherd that grieves him or against that man says!  
No man may reprove him, for lordship he claims  
Yet none can believe one word he may say - not a letter!  
He can make purveyance with boast and with bragance  
And all with connivance of men that are greater!

Comes a swaggering swain as a peacock proud - 2.37  
He must borrow my wane, my plough good!  
If I should forbid it, I were better hanged, so  
Thus live we, in pain, in anger and woe!

It does me good as I walk thus alone 2.46  
Of this world for to talk, in manner of moan.  
To my sheep will I stalk and harken anon.  
There abide on a stone more company full soon.

*(He removes himself some distance. Enter 2nd Shepherd)*

## **Gib**

Lord, this weather is spiteful and the winds full keen,  
And the frosts so hid'eus they water mine eeyn -  
No lie! 2.59

Now in dry, now in wet, now in snow, now in sleet.  
When my shoes freeze to my feet - it is not all easy!

We poor wedded men endure mickel woe 2.64  
Simple Capel, our hen, cackles to and fro  
But when she (be)gins to crow, our cock is fear-shackled!  
We men that are wed have not all our will  
God knows we are led full hard and full ill.

Now thus late in my life, here's a marvel to me: 2.82  
Some men will have two wives, and some men three, in store.  
Some are sad who have any, but as far as I see  
Woe is him that has many, for he feels sore!

This have I learnt on. 2.90  
Now be well 'ware of wedding, and think in your thought  
"Had I known" is a thing that serves you but nought -  
I know my lesson!

I have one to my mate as sharp as a thistle! 2.100  
She is brown as a bristle, with a sour-looking cheer.  
Had she once wet her whistle, she can sing full clear!  
She is great as a whale with a gallon of gall -  
I would I had run till I had lost her!

*(1st Shepherd joins him)*

## **Coll**

Gib, saw ye aught of that fool Daw? 2.109

## **Gib**

Yea, on a lea-land  
Heard I him blow his pipe. He comes here at hand.

## **Coll**

He will tell us both a lie 'less we beware.

*(They settle down to wait. Enter 3rd Shepherd from the field)*

### **Daw**

Who knows should take heed and let the world pass. 2.118  
It is ever in dread and brittle as glass - and slithers!

It is worse than it was and all thing withers!  
These floods so they drown, it is a wonder! 2.127

How God turn all to good, I say as I mean, and ponder.

We that walk in the night our cattle to keep 2.136

We see strange sights when other men sleep.

Yet me think my heart lightens: I see two men peep!

*(He comes up to the other shepherds)*

Ah, sirs, God you save and masters mine! 2.145

Drink fain would I have and somewhat to dine!

### **Coll**

Thou art a sluggish knave, Daw!

### **Gib**

He lists to dine, though he comes late!

### **Daw**

Such servants as I that sweat and toil 2.154

Eat our bread full dry and that stakes me boil!

We are oft wet and weary when our masters sleep take

Then our dame and our sire can nip at our hire -

And pay us full late!

For the fare that ye make, I shall work at my pace.

Masters, little and lacking!

### **Gib**

Peace, boy, I bid no more jangling! 2.174

Where are our sheep?

### **Daw**

Sir, this same day at morn

I left them in the corn - in pasture good. 2.181

**Coll**

That is right, by the rood.

How give us a song! *(Daw begins to sing. Mak enters)*

**Mak**

Lord, who made the stars, what is thy will? 2.190

Now would God I were in heaven so still

For there weep no bairnes there!

**Coll**

Who is, that pipes so poor?

**Mak**

Lo, a man that walks on the moor -

And has not all his will!

**Gib**

Mak, what has befallen? Tell us tidings. 2.199

**Daw**

Is Mak come? Then take heed to your things!

*(Here he takes Mak's cloak from him. Mak changes his accent)*

**Mak**

What, ich be a yeoman, I tell you, of the king!

The self-same sent from a great lording.

Goeth hence! from my presence! I must have reverence!

**Coll**

Mak, why make ye words so quaint? 2.208

**Gib**

He means to show off ... a boast he makes

**Daw**

I think he can paint! The devil him take!

*(They demonstrate aestheticism)*

**Mak**

Of what ye doeth, ich shall make complaint  
Ye shall all be beaten blue 2.211  
And confined close at my word in sooth!

**Coll**

How, Mak, is that 'sooth'?  
Now take out that southren tooth.

**Gib**

Mak, know ye not us? By God, I could thwang ye! 2.217  
*(He shakes Mak who relapses into his ordinary accent)*

**Mak**

Me thought I had seen ye all three.  
Ye are a fair company!

**Gib**

Thus late as thou goes, what will men suppose?  
For thou art ill news of stealing of sheep!

**Mak**

I am true as steel 2.226  
But my belly fares not well. It is out of its state.

**Daw**

"Seldom lies the devil starved by the gate."

**Mak**

Full sore I am and ill  
I eat not a needle this month and more!

**Coll**

How fares thy wife, Mak, how fares she? 2.235

**Mak**

Gill? She lies waltering by the fire, lo!  
With a house-full of brood by her, too.  
Eats as fast as she can  
And each year that comes to man  
She brings forth a lakan -

And some years two!  
I were eaten out of house and of harbour, 2.244  
And she's a foul dowse if ye come too nigh her  
None worse do I know!

*(Depressed with the sad state of the world, the shepherds become weary)*

### **Gib**

I wot so forwakid with watching is none in this shire!  
I would sleep!

### **Daw**

I am cold and naked and would have a fire!

### **Coll**

I am weary, forwakid with walking in mire — 2.253  
Wake thou! 2.257

### **Daw**

Nay, as good a man's son was I as any of you!  
But Mak, come hider. Between shall thou lie down! 2.262

### **Mak**

No dread!  
From my top to my toe "Manus tuas commendo  
Poncio pilato!" Christ cross me speed!

*(The shepherds settle for sleep. Mak hatches his plan)*

Now it were time for a man that lacks what he would  
To stalk privily then into a fold 2.272  
And nimble to work, but be not too bold!  
For he might pay for the bargain, if tales were told.  
Now were time for to do't  
With little spending to't!

Now about you a circle as round as the moon 2.280  
That ye lie stone still till I have done what's to do'n!  
Now I shall say some good words on high.  
Over your heades my hands I lift  
Out go your een and close up your sight!  
But yet I must make better shift 2.287

And it be right! *(Snoring is heard)*

Lord, what they sleep hard! That may ye all hear! 2.289  
Was I never a shepherd yet shall I nip near.

*(Mak seizes a sheep)*

A fat sheep by the morrow 2.294

A good fleece dare I lay

I'll pay back when I may

Now this will I borrow! *(Mak goes home)*

How, Gill, art thou in? Get us some light! 2.298

**Gill**

Who makes such a din this time of the night?

I am set for to spin; to rise I cannot. 2.300

**Mak**

Good wife, open the hatch; sees thou not what I bring?

**Gill**

I will let thee draw the latch. Ah, come in, my sweeting!

**Mak**

Yee, thou have no care of my long standing!

I am worthy my meat for I can get more 2.312

Than they that work the long day's chore!

Thus this fell to my lot, Gill, of grace a token! 2.316

**Gill**

It were a foul blot to be hanged for the deed!

**Mak**

I have 'scaped, Gillot, oft as right a need.

**Gill**

But so oft goes the pot to the water indeed

At last comes it home broken! 2.321

**Mak**

Well know I the token.  
Let that never be spoken!  
But come and help fast.  
I would he were slain, I list well to eat. 2.325

**Gill**

Come they afore he be slain, they'll hear the sheep bleat!

**Mak**

Then might I be ta'en; that were a cold sweat!  
Go, bar the gate door!

**Gill**

Come they at thy back?

**Mak**

I'll get the devil from that pack!

**Gill**

A good jest have I spied, for thou knows none: 2.334  
Here, shall we him hide till they be far gone!  
In my cradle abide and I lie beside in childbed - and groan!

**Mak**

And I shall say thou was made light  
Of a boy child this night!

**Gill**

Yet a woman's advice helps at the last!  
This is a good gyse; now again go thou fast! 2.343

**Mak**

If I come 'ere they rise, I'll get a cold blast!  
*(He returns and resumes his place in the midst of the shepherds)*

Yet sleeps all this company and I shall stalk privily  
As it had never been I that carried their sheep!  
I will go sleep! *(The shepherds rouse up)*



### **Coll**

Here, have a hold of my hand.  
My foot sleeps, by Jesus, I may not well stand. 2.352  
I thought that we laid us full near Engeland!

### **Gib**

Lord, what, I have slept well!  
As fresh as an eel  
As light I me feel as leaf on a tree!

### **Daw**

My heart leapt out of my skin, so it quakes! 2.361  
We were four - see ye ought of Mak - now wakes he?  
Me thought he was wrapped in a wolf skin! 2.370

### **Gib**

Yet went he nowhere!  
When we had long napped, me thought in a gin  
A fat sheep had he trapped, but he made no din.

### **Daw**

This dream is but phantom ...

### **Gib**

Rise Mak for shame, thou lies right long! 2.379

### **Mak**

Now Christ's holy name be us among  
I hope I be the same! Ah, my neck has lain wrong.  
I was flayed with a dream since yestereven.  
I thought Gill began to croak and travail full sad,  
Well nigh to first cockcrow had a young lad  
For to add to our flock. I be never glad  
To have many bairnes but little bread!  
I must home to Gill; I am loath you to' grieve 2.397  
I pray you look up my sleeve  
That I steal from you nought!

**Coll**

Now would I we sought for our flock. 2.400  
I will go before; let us meet!

**Gib**

Where?

**Daw**

At the crooked thorn.  
*(They part. Mak arrives at his house)*

**Mak**

Undo the door, it is I, Mak. 2.405  
What cheer this morn?

**Gill**

I may not sit at my work a moment, I ween!

**Mak**

She does nought but nag and claw her toes. 2.414

**Gill**

What! who brews, who bakes, why make me this hose?  
But what of these herdsmen? How goes that game? 2.423

**Mak**

The last word that they said when I turned my back  
They would look that they had their sheep in a pack.  
When they a sheep lack, they will cry out on my track  
Thou must do as thou said. 2.432

**Gill**

I shall swaddle him right in my cradle.  
I will lie down straight, come hap me!

**Mak**

I will. 2.435

**Gill**

Behind! Come Coll and his crew  
They will nip us full narrow!

### **Mak**

They'll make me cry "harroo"  
Their sheep if they find!

### **Gill**

Sing lullay thou shall for I must groan. 2.441  
Come now, sing on thine own!

*(Mak starts 'singing' a lullaby. Meanwhile, the shepherds gather at the crooked thorn)*

### **Coll**

Hey! A fat wether ram have we lorne! 2.451

### **Gib**

Coll, who should do us that scorn?

### **Coll**

Some shrew! I have sought with my doggis  
All Horbury shoggis  
And of fifteen young hoggis  
Found I but one ewe.

### **Daw**

I would say it were Mak or Gill  
Who did this sore ill, By St Thomas of Kent! 2.460

### **Coll**

Peace man, be still, I saw when he went  
Thou scandals him ill, thou ought to repent.

### **Gib**

I would say it were he that did this same deed!

### **Coll**

Go we thither I rede, the truth to track. 2.469  
*(They all run to Mak's house. Singing rises)*

### **Daw**

Will ye hear how they hack:? 2.478

### **Coll**

So clear out of tune heard I never none crack.  
Call on him! Mak!

### **Gib**

Mak! Undo your door on loft!

### **Mak**

O'er a sick woman's head I pray ye speak soft. 2.487

### **Gill**

I may not well breathe or wheeze  
Each foot ye tread goes through my nose!

### **Coll**

How fare ye, Mak, I say?

### **Mak**

Are you all in town today?  
Ye have run in-the mire and are wet yet. 2.496

I shall make you a fire, if ye will sit.

A nurse will I hire, if ye think fit.

A new bairn I have, my dream it is quit!

Well more than enough, if ye knew.

But we must drink as we brew!

Will ye dine 'ere ye go? Methink that ye sweat. 2.505

### **Coll**

Nay, our sheep are stolen as they ate.

Our loss it is great!

### **Mak**

Had I been there, some should have bought it sore!

### **Coll**

Some trow that ye were there!

### **Gib**

Mak, some men trow that it be ye! 2.514

### **Daw**

Either ye or your spouse, so say we!

### **Mak**

Now come rip our house and then may ye see.

*(The shepherds enter the house)*

As I am true and loyal to God here I pray 2.523  
That this be the first meal that I shall eat this day!

### **Coll**

Mak, advise thee, I say.

“He learns early to steal who cannot say nay!”

*(They search the house, disturbing animals and babies as they do so)*

### **Gill**

Out thieves, come to rob us. I swelt! 2.532

### **Mak**

Hear ye not how she groans! Your hearts should melt!

### **Gill**

Ah, my middle! If ever I you beguiled  
I shall eat here the child in this cradle!

*(The shepherds search the house.)*

### **Gib**

I trow our sheep be slain. What find ye two? 2.543

### **Daw**

All work we in vain

I can find no flesh, but two empty platters!

### **Gib**

No cattle smelled high as this boy! 2.550

### **Gill**

Nay, God of my son give me joy!

*(Gill cuddles him and they find nothing)*

**Coll**

We have marked-amiss, I hold us mista'en.  
Mak, friends will we be for we are all one. 2.568

**Mak**

Farewell all three! All glad were ye gone.  
*(The shepherds leave the house)*

**Daw**

Fair words may there be, but trust is there none.

**Coll**

Gave ye the child anything?

**Gib**

I trow, not one farthing. 2.574

**Daw**

Fast again will I fling! *(He returns to the house)*  
Mak, with your leave, let me give your bairn but sixpence.  
*(A dog barks)*

**Mak**

Nay, do way: he sleeps.

**Daw**

Methink that he peeps. 2.583

**Mak**

When he wakens, he weeps.  
I pray you go .hence!  
*(The other shepherds enter the house)*

**Daw**

Give me leave him to kiss and lift up the clout. 2.586  
What the devil is this? He has a long snout!

**Coll**

He is marked amiss. We wait ill about. 2.588

**Gib**

“Ill-spun weft, i'wis, aye comes foul out!”  
Ay! He is like to our sheep.

**Daw**

How, Gib, may I peep? 2.592

**Gib**

This was a fine fraud; thou'll be hanged as reward!  
Will ye see how they swaddle four feet in the middle.  
Saw I never in cradle a horned lad ere now!

**Mak**

I am he that begat and yond woman him bear! 2.604

**Coll**

Have ye made him your heir?

**Gill**

Ow! A pretty child is he, a dillydown yare!  
As ever sat on woman's knee,  
Fit for a lord's son is he!

**Daw**

I know him by the earmark: that is good token. 2.613

**Mak**

I tell you, sirs, hark: his nose was broken.

**Gill**

He was taken with an elf; I saw it myself!  
When the clock struck twelve was he mis-shapen!

**Gib**

Ye two are well-weft! 2.622

**Daw**

Since they maintain their theft Let's do them to death!  
*(They chase around after Mak. Animals are disturbed)*

## **Mak**

If I trespass more, gird off my head - With you let me be left.

## **Coll**

Sirs, do now as I say, indeed:

For this trespass let us toss him in a canvas!

*(They toss Mak in a blanket, a medieval method of hastening delivery in childbirth. He returns home helped by Gill. Shepherds laugh, rescue sheep and move off to the fold)*

## **Coll**

What! I am sore, fit to burst!

2.631

In faith, I may no more; to rest I mean!

## **Gib**

As a sheep of seven score he weighed, I wist.

For to sleep anywhere methink that I list.

## **Daw**

Lie us down on this green!

*(They lie down. The angel enters and sings a Gloria, the star appears above)*

## **Angel**

Rise herdsmen kind! For now is he born

2.640

That shall take from the fiend what Adam had lorn.

God is your friend now at this morn

He asks you to Bethlehem go see

For there he lies, the lord free

In a crib full poorly between two beasts!

*(The angel withdraws)*

## **Coll**

This was a marvel to knowen that ever I heard!

2.649

Of God's Son of Heaven she spoke up there.

## **Gib**

All the wood on a lightning methought she made appear!



### **Daw**

She spoke of a bairn born in Bethl'hem.

### **Col**

That betokens yond star. Let us seek him there.

### **Gib**

I am full feared for too long we tarry. 2.668

### **Coll**

Hie we thither, be we wet or weary!

### **Daw**

Lord, well were we for once and for aye 2.687

Might we kneel on our knee

Some word for to say to that child this day.

*(They set off for Bethlehem)*

...

*(The shepherds near the end of their journey)*

### **Daw**

The angel said in a crib

He would be laid

A child both meek and mild and poorly arrayed.

### **Coll**

When I see Him and feel 2.697

Then know I full well

It is as true as steel

What prophets have spoken:

To so poor as we are that 2.703

He would appear First,

as declared by his messenger.

### **Gib**

Go we now, let us fare.

The place is us near! *(They enter the stable)*

### Coll

Hail, comely and clean! 2.712  
Hail, young child! Hail,  
Maker - as I mean - from a maiden so mild.  
The false bringer of ill now goes he beguiled!  
Lo, the babe merry is!  
Lo, He laughs, my sweeting  
A welcome meeting:  
Have a bob of cherries!

### Gib

Hail, sovereign Saviour, 2.721  
for thou has us sought!  
Hail, full of favour that made all of nought!  
Hail, I kneel and cower.  
A bird have I brought  
To my bairn.  
Hail, little tiny mop!  
Of our creed thou art top,  
Little day-star!  
*(Mary takes the baby from the crib)*

### Daw

Hail, darling dear! 2.730  
Full of godhead!  
I pray thee, be near when that I have need.  
Hail, sweet is thy face!  
My heart would bleed  
To see thee sit here in so poor weed  
With no pennies.  
Hail, put forth thy hand:  
I bring thee but a ball  
To have and play thee withall  
And go to the tennis!

### **Mary**

The Father of Heaven, 2.739  
God omnipotent  
Made all in days seven;  
His Son has he sent  
And now He is born.  
He keep you from woe;  
I shall pray Him so.  
Tell forth as you go -  
Have mind on this morn!

### **Coll**

Farewell, lady, so fair to behold! 2.748  
With thy child on thy knee.

### **Gib**

But He lies full cold!  
Lord, well is we, now we go, thou behold!

### **Daw**

In truth, already it seems to be told  
Full oft!  
*(They leave the stable)*

### **Coll**

What grace we have found! 2.753

### **Gib**

Come forth, now are we won!

### **Daw**

To sing are we bound:  
Let us sound it aloft!  
*(Exit singing and rejoicing)*