

Grim Grizzel is a Mighty Dame – presented in October 2016

This poem by Burns was written in 1795 and can probably fall into the category of one of Burns' 'bawdy poems' as it contains language that contrasts sharply with some of his other works about love and patriotism. The poem consists of twenty-stanzas, in ballad form, and parodies the language and conduct of a rich proud landowner (Grim Grizzel), who considers herself so important that even her farm animals should obey her very commands. An example being getting her cows to defecate to order (that's shit to you guys!) She then confronts her herdsman (John O'Clods) on why this cannot be achieved. John's response goes from timely silence, hesitation and finally into defiance. Of course, the poem ends with a celebration of her inevitable downfall.

Burns starts off by telling us how high and mighty she is, 'a mighty Dame'. She is placed on a pedestal, full of pride and power, but even then there are subtle or maybe not so subtle touches, which suggest that she is actually not so noble and perfect e.g. why would you describe this professed lady of the nobility, to be 'loudest' in the hall? And when she is striding unharmed through scenes, where 'Beauty durst na gang' is it bravery or ugliness which is her major protection?

Burns then goes on to describe her with some quiet irony:

But she had skill, and meikle skill,
In barn and eke in byre.

As the poem progresses, she is shown to be small minded and vindictive complaining to John O' Clods, her herdsman about how much manure is wasted every time her cows shit 'o'er hill and dale' and blaming him for it.

And sair it grieved Grim Grizzel's heart
Sae muckle muck to tine.

Ultimately, her absurd notions contrast sharply with John's common sense and quiet dignity.

Then John o' Clods he looked up
And syne he looked down;
He looked east, he looked west,
He looked roun' and roun'.

He naething said at a'.

Finally, she loses it and the poem ends with her manipulating Hawkie, her favourite cow's tail, like a pump, while vainly screeching '**Shite --, shite-- , ye bitch**'. These final expletives echo around Lincluden Abbey, which being a place of God, of course reminds us of the ultimate power which alone determines such things.

GRIM Grizzel was a mighty Dame
Weel kend on Cluden-side:
Grim Grizzel was a mighty Dame
O' meikle fame and pride.

When gentle met in gentle bowers
And nobles in the ha',
Grim Grizzel was a mighty Dame
The loudest o' them a'.

Where lawless Riot rag'd the night
And Beauty durst na gang,
Grim Grizzel was a mighty Dame
Wham nae man e'er wad wrang.

Nor had Grim Grizzel skill alane
What bower and ha' require;
But she had skill, and meikle skill,
In barn and eke in byre.

Ae day as Grim Grizzel walked forth,
As she was wont to do,
Alang the banks o' Cluden fair,
Her cattle for to view.

The cattle shat o'er hill and dale
As cattle will incline,
And sair it grieved Grim Grizzel's heart
Sae muckle muck to **tine**.

To lose, be deprived of

And she has ca'd on John o' Clods,
Of her herdsmen the chief,
And she has ca'd on John o' Clods,
And tell'd him a' her grief:----

"Now wae betide thee, John o' Clods!
I gie thee meal and fee,
And yet saae muckle muck ye tine
Might a' be **gear** to me!

possession

Ye **claut** my byre, ye sweep my byre,
The like was never seen;
The very chamber I lie in
Was never half sae clean.

“to free from (dirt, etc.) by scraping

Ye ca’ my kye adown the loan
And there they a’ discharge:
My Tammy’s hat, wig, head and a’
Was never half sae large!

But mind my words now John o’ Clods,
And **tent** me what I say:
My kye shall shite ere they gae out,
That shall they ilka day.

heed, care

And mind my words now, John o’ Clods,
And tent now wha ye serve;
Or back ye ‘se to the Colonel gang,
Either to steal or starve.”

Then John o’ Clods he looked up
And syne he looked down;
He looked east, he looked west,
He looked roun’ and roun’.

His bonnet and his rowantree club
Fra either hand did fa’;
Wi’ lifted een and open mouth
He naething said at a’.

At length he found his trembling tongue,
Within his mouth was **fauld**:-----
“Ae silly word frae me, madam,
Gin I **daur** be sae **bauld**.

dare bold

Your **kye** will at nae bidding shite,
Let me do what I can;
Your kye will at nae bidding shite
Of onie earthly man.

cows

Tho' ye are great Lady **Glaur**-hole, **mud**
Fo a' your power and art
Tho' ye are great Lady Glaur-hole,
They winna let a fart."

"Now wae betide thee, John o' Clods!
An ill death may ye die!
My kye shall at my bidding shite,
And that ye soon shall see."

The she 's ta'en **Hawkie** by the tail, **favourite cow**

And wrung it wi' might and main,
Till Hawkie **rowted** through the woods **bellowed or roared**
Wi' agonising pain.

"shite, shite, ye bitch," Grim Grizzel roar'd,
Till hill and valley rang;
"And shite, ye bitch," the echoes roar'd
Lincluden wa's amang.

So how did Burns come up with the idea for this poem? It now seems likely that the source for the poem originates from when Burns was traveling through Dunblane and came across an epitaph on the grave of a Mrs. Young of Youngfield, formerly Mrs. Grizzel Craik, the widow of Thomas Young of Lincluden College. The epitaph read:

Here lies with death auld Grizel Grim

Lincluden's ugly witch

O death how horrid is thy taste

To lie with such a bitch.

Definitely words to get your mind racing and to wonder what on earth she had done to deserve such a memorial!