**16-19 Creative – Highly Commended**

**Aidan Tulloch, Thirsk School and Sixth Form College: 'Lament in A Minor for Fiddle and Great Skua' in response to 'Do You Speak Persian?'**

**Lament in A Minor for Fiddle and Great Skua**

You were a decrescendo, not an end stop.

You faded, and withered,

sneaking out at half time,

your ripple cushioned on the riverbank.

*'s nam faicinn sluagh agus taighean suas ann* I see people, houses

*gum fasainn suaimhneach mar bha mi òg*  I am happy, young

The wind over the shore like a verb,

The thrift in the heugh, as nouns are,

and lives that are conjunctions, waiting for

fossils of words to be excavated from birds, sea noise, road signs,

surnames.

*We must protect the Gaelic language*  sing white papers,

punch drunk on statistics, singing censuses to royalty-free bagpipes,

*no monolingual speakers since 1971*  or

*restricted to the Outer Hebrides* or

*fifty seven thousand—*

And escape. To where

tops of trees exhale and grieve against

the hundred tundra greys of a Northern sky,

and that comforting languageless sibilance, that will still be there at night,

and a crisp, cold mist that gives way, and gives life.

**Reflective commentary**

Languages are ensigns. We wave them with our voiceboxes, screaming ‘this is my heritage, this is my identity’ each time we speak. In *Do You Speak Persian?* Akbar deftly articulates the guilt of neglecting your mother tongue, crafting an almost metonymic conceit, where a societally-driven detour to English represents an overall separation from Iranian roots. Is this the cost of modern speed?

Akbar’s individual story compelled me to investigate a parallel narrative in my own heritage. With a Scottish ancestry that lingers in my surname, I feel embroiled in the tragic demise of the Scottish Gaelic language. So rich in poetry and song, yet powerless against the candid simplicity of global English.

Like Akbar, snippets of the vernacular are presented to the reader, enhancing the authenticity of the bicultural poetic experience, but also inviting audiences to briefly experience life in an exotic land.

But I decided to take this one step further… in the fourth stanza, the italicised snippets are not of Scottish Gaelic, but of bureaucratic legalese. They represent the series of tepid government action that has repeatedly feigned solidarity with Scotland’s Celtic history. I wanted to reinforce the sad truth that so much linguistic study and policy is sterile, overly scientific, and bereft of the vigour of culture and heritage.

And, at the end, we seek solace. As Akbar yearns for such universal comforts as ‘the moon’ and ‘the night,’ I look upwards. To the trees, so powerful, and so uncluttered, and yet so unhuman. Separated from the ephemeral caprices of language, and heritage, providing a wholesome carnal sanctuary that elevates the poem to a higher plain. Perhaps readers will be able to consider their own dilemmas around heritage and background, and join me in enjoying the robust support of trees and mist.