

A Poem by Edwin Morgan

For the Opening of the Scottish Parliament, 9 October 2004

Open the Doors!

Open the doors! Light of the day, shine in; light of the mind, shine out!

We have a building which is more than a building.
There is a commerce between inner and outer,
between brightness and shadow, between the world and those who
think about the world.

Is it not a mystery? The parts cohere, they come together
like petals of a flower, yet they also send their tongues
outward to feel and taste the teeming earth.
Did you want classic columns and predictable pediments? A
growl of old Gothic grandeur? A blissfully boring box?
Not here, no thanks! No icon, no IKEA, no iceberg, but
curves and caverns, nooks and niches, huddles and
heavens syncopations and surprises. Leave symmetry to
the cemetery.
But bring together slate and stainless steel, black granite
and grey granite, seasoned oak and sycamore, concrete
blond and smooth as silk – the mix is almost alive – it
breathes and beckons – imperial marble it is not!

Come down the Mile, into the heart of the city, past the kirk
of St Giles and the closes and wynds of the noted ghosts of
history who drank their claret and fell down the steep
tenements stairs into the arms of link-boys but who wrote
and talked the starry Enlightenment of their days –
And before them the auld makars who tickled a Scottish king's
ear with melody and ribaldry and frank advice –
And when you are there, down there, in the midst of things,
not set upon an hill with your nose in the air,
This is where you know your parliament should be
And this is where it is, just here.

What do the people want of the place? They want it to be
filled with thinking persons as open and adventurous as its
architecture.

A nest of fearties is what they do not want.
A symposium of procrastinators is what they do not want.
A phalanx of forelock-tuggers is what they do not want.
And perhaps above all the droopy mantra of 'it wizny me' is
what they do not want.
Dear friends, dear lawgivers, dear parliamentarians, you are
picking up a thread of pride and self-esteem that has been
almost but not quite, oh no not quite, not ever broken or
forgotten.

When you convene you will be reconvening, with a sense of not wholly the power, not yet wholly the power, but a good sense of what was once in the honour of your grasp.

All right. Forget, or don't forget, the past. Trumpets and robes are fine, but in the present and the future you will need something more.

What is it? We, the people, cannot tell you yet, but you will know about it when we do tell you.

We give you our consent to govern, don't pocket it and ride away.

We give you our deepest dearest wish to govern well, don't say we have no mandate to be so bold.

We give you this great building, don't let your work and hope be other than great when you enter and begin.

So now begin. Open the doors and begin.

Edwin Morgan