

SAMPLER

Ickerbrow Trig

ALSO BY MICHAEL HASLAM

Continual Song

A Whole Bauble

The Music Laid Her Songs in Language

A Sinner Saved By Grace

Mid Life

A Cure for Woodness

The Quiet Works

Scaplings

SAMPLER

Michael Haslam

Ickerkrow Trig

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Part One

From Birth to the Old Age Pension

16/2/1947–16/2/2012

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Snow fell from heaven while Aneurin Bevan thought to spawn the NHS. Mother had drunk her Guinness bottles on prescription nonetheless.

Snow fell cold and soft on fold and croft.

Snow fell on Halliwell. Snow drifted into windrow and an even swell. Snow overwhelmed the mill, the mine, the railwayline. The world was frozen in a shell of economic standstill. Snow blown over Smithills Moor and Winter Hill had heaped against the hospital, up to the window-sill.

Such beauty thrills that still receptacle, the unborn soul, a perfect hole. Snow fills (rare phrase this for Northern England), Shaly Dingle: Curl and cornice, turquoise light in ice crevasse. Each being singularly single and subject to chimes and tingle, such epiphanies as this'll once or twice happen have come to pass.

Snowfall bridges ridge and gable. Snow drifts up by Hollin Wood. Sub-zero air, a few lights twinkle, but the power cuts at night. The gate-stoup wind-side ice withstood. Snow fell on Havercroft and Heaton: White.

Blue, limply furled, cord-strangled, almost lifeless as the nurses thump and batter, I was beaten into breath: At last, some minutes old, I do protest about my own ejection into this cold world. I'm told it was a matter, simply, of my life or death.

Party Spirits (*third version*)

This game we call it *Guess the Name*
of what it is, that animated little gist
of something tickling in the brain; that impish
whatnot hidden in the verbiage disporting stuff---
Could it be *Spirit*? *Spirit*! I'd be just about
to shout out loud but stumble into doubt,
for it proliferates, with *Spurt* and *Sprite*,
or *Spurge* if verbiage means vegetation,
think of wrinkled wee green men.
Or look out *Spit* sits out upon my own tongues tip---
I could be wrong, and swallow my suggestion back.
Then *Roger Langley* calmly calls it *Jack*.
And we knew it was that.

The game's been won, and time winds down.
Hick fidgets. *Hob* looks to the clock,
while *Ken* and *Tom* begin discussing getting back.
Nan takes to washing-up.
Joan makes her face up.
Jill brews up for drivers on the hob.
All feel well-chuffed for *Roger*, his choice
bowl straight at the *Jack*. All but bar *Mick*
who might be drunk and half-way sick,
a good bit bitten by he should have won, cross
not to have come first: He sees his *Spirit*
is the Ghost that Lost its Voice.

Mick sinks in *Lull* with *Lub*
who drains the *Mug* and *Sobs*.
His *Grig* seems to have lost its *Giggle*
down the *Grid*. His Glum Wits felt as frail,
as fallen through the basement of
a sunken mill to soak with *Jenny Greenteeth*
in a muddled null of puddled mossy mould, industrial.
I've never seen a pastoral that looked so dull.

Hob groans, he should be home to grow
his long-attenuated *Tang* for comfort.
Here no thing'll tingle him.

Hick sticks his sticks in lumps of dampish sand
as if to say, *Pudding and Pie! This Odd Existence, I*
and my poor bucket! Guess who won
the shouting match twixt *Loud* and *Dumb?*
Thick may feel *Proud* but chuck it in
a *Plop* into the ponded scum or skim
a stone over the leader sea.

Yon sleepers could be stifled
in a lack of noise like this but for the slapping rough-cast
from a bucket with a trowel, on the wall.

More bad ideas get stranded in the bin.

Jack interjects his head:

It just pops in aslant across a door:

“Hey up lad *Mick*, thou looks so badly,
like thy mother’s mangled laundry drooped along
the wash-house floor. You should have seen me in
the poetry of *Roger Langley*, hanging out
with washing in a drying wind, or making up
wee selves within a veritable
scientific botany of verbiage
or *Flora* of the mind.”

Hodge hedges what so ever *Vetches*,
Clovers even under *Cleavers*, calling
Milkmaids Lady’s Smock in richer ditches
sprouting *Cresses*, *Stitchwort* meaning
far more words than thought
to water your *Wild Parsley*, *Hogweed*, *Parsnip*,
under-widths of all the *Umbelliferae*
with hay-shades in the shed where *Hedge*
takes *Bedstraw*, *Mustard*, *Parsley*: *Parsley!*
who so well combines

the hooked fruit spines with hairy style,
and petty *Spurges* exhibit their glands and horns;
where *Honeysuckle* sucks up *Rowan*, and the *Woodbine*
look enthralled with *Aquilegia*, as columbined
with *Jack the Hedge* as *Garlic Mustard*
doing herbal-verbal flustered says quite bold
that *Spirits* seasonally rise and fail though
lagging *Bindweed’s* ever yet entrained
about the lovely *Crumbling Fold* of *Running Wild*.

Postscript

What's that I read? Is Hodge
The Master dead? I thought I heard
what Peter Riley said rise from a simper
to a wail, and thought I saw the bird-like
spirit-imp of mischief, Man Jack ipse, sat
upon a doorstep with a spotted handkerchief
before his face, and a discarded hat.

How could a heart like Roger's fail
with such a knave as Jack to set the pace?
The case is grave, and yet it's not too glib to state
that through observant wit, throughout the poetry
of R.F. Langley, the spirit lives.

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The Quiet Works

The quiet works a treat. The water treatment works
through falling steps in placid air
on quiet walks by high top reservoir.

Aqueous eases
as a stallion stales in puddled mud.

A mare for me for equine equanimity
on flat slack hope, by small worth mere,
down rake head stair,

into a vale of deep deep air
love brooks despair.

I be prepared to de-aspire, no more
perspiring pair, no flood of hair,
no mind to mate or hope to share
the quiet works in disrepair.

Love brooks the falls endure.

Wet heat, the acid moor, peat sweat
is sourly sweet, before down-pour
whose gushes lust to groove the grove
in rushes. Puddles sate the graven delf.

Evacuate what must. Why can't I
disabuse myself, of lust?

Come off in downfall, outfall, service usages
assuaged in sewage.

Abstract issues from the surface
pipes and leaks, the sikes, the becks, the burns.
The bare clough well head springs induce
themselves through quartered arms.

A quiet motor moves, a solemn rotor turns
a slow swish carousel around a concrete drum
of gravel. Water travels through the mill to filter.

Working strips the water figures
down to naked dress.

Indigo running from the works, slips through
into the clatter,
voicing sources from course's flow.
Poor lad! What is the matter?

Disquieted poor lover stumbles in defeat
as yelping plover tips the tumbril, tumbles
from a troubled youth in mill-shed fumbles
through to elder's umbral gloom and grumbles
where the waters meet in derelicted darkness,
at a confluence of brooks: the spill of self disgorged
where goit-wall crumbles into streaming turmoil.

The quiet works thought to affirm a calm
but fiction, effervescent, fetches up a storm.

The billowed rooks over the bluff of oaken cliff
fall back to pick
the rich green fields of high worth farm.

Clock on. Clock off.

I went to quiet works on time, with poetry to paste.
I filled some jars with compound metaphoric glycerine
and mixed ecstatic graces in with mild disgrace
at the excesses, and sad intercourses past.

Brush up the flue. Shrug off the superfluity.
Exude the sublimate of waste. Ejaculate
ephemerality. Come off a seed-head puff.
Then lay thy own self's lime across dry moss.
And there I got laid off.

From long hard work on soft love song I broke and took
the wrong way down from rough top edge to landspit tongue.

The sike-spate sates the brook in flux,
light smacks as lips unstick.
My lover's mouth
is like a scrub of birches and a rivulet debouch.

Lit violet the eye-screen, blind bright lids
electric splits as sprit touches. Rivers
torn to shreds on rocky falls.

The real kisses were far less solipsistic.
Unreal as well the glum dub down the meadow bottoms.
Banking lapwings really wring the brain.
The spirit burns up bracken rough
 slips from the brink,
 dips for a drink
in a dark public house, in a forest of rain;
takes time to think of loving twists in nigh-on pain.
Come out, sweet art, in slapstick!

Lift up thy linen smock my love
and let me breathe on thee.
This would be quiet work.

Roll down thy tights, my gentle heart:
and let us introduce the gist to the
original vaginal ginnel, surreptitiously
in laps and slaps, light-sounding slurps
the elasticity of lips.