

# SAMPLER

*New & Selected Poems*

ALSO BY IAN DAVIDSON

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*From a Council House in Connacht* (Oystercatcher 2021)  
*On the Way to Work* (Shearsman Books, 2017)  
*Gateshead and Back* (Crater 2017)  
*In Agitation* (KFS 2014)  
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*The Patrik Poems* (Amra, 1991)  
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Ian Davidson

New and  
Selected Poems

SAMPLED

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*This book is for  
Gruffydd, Liam, Cai and Anya.*

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Coming and Going

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## Cuckoo sounds

swallows skim trees

far out at sea waves curl

### *Crests hanging*

Addicted to restriction  
in love with lockdown  
I tap my arm say, later  
as along the way  
lambs slither into the world  
and begin breathing

### *The colours of sheep*

Wild blue sheep come  
down from the commonage  
for the summer. Left on rough  
pasture at the coast and  
easily startled they turn  
red and green as  
marks of ownership  
are slowly added until  
they are all colour and  
no sheep remains.

In the heat of summer their  
heavy coats are worn off the  
shoulder or left to hang  
on ancient trees and free  
of fleece their branding  
temporarily absent  
the sheep in just their skin  
admire themselves  
in rivers and pools

or stare deep into  
each other's eyes

*The song of the hen*

With smart red comb and  
double yolk the hen can  
clear rough ground  
and lay eggs, some things  
come in packages, the hens  
have no fear  
a hen can fold her wings and  
legs and flatten  
as in spatchcock to bathe  
in the thin dust that rises

A hen is like a  
dinosaur but smarter

*Sheet music*

The sheet flaps  
demanding entry

behind the sheet  
the sky a startling blue

Life is like that the  
flap of the sheet only  
the beginning the  
blue sky beckons  
the land an  
unsolved mystery

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*The song of the tractor*

Coming and going  
between holdings,  
land defined by  
acts of survey and  
distribution, acts to  
establish an exact price

*The song of the landworker*

Leaving behind without a  
backward glance  
our slow walk across  
a yard or sodden field  
full buckets banging  
on our knees  
or the weight of  
a sack of feed  
on our shoulders

Land is not a parcel  
passed from hand to hand.  
Land is not revealed  
with each torn layer.  
There is no final prize  
on which to feast your eyes.

Land lives in fields,  
different every day.  
unpredictably

Land gives no guarantees  
but springs eternally  
clouds bubble up  
rain spits, weeds  
wither and die

there is nothing like  
knowing a  
field for ever  
in its unreliability

*The song of the plasterer*

We should have stayed home  
and honed language like a  
knife blade or a chisel  
or given it the weight  
of a sledge, or loaded it  
onto a hawk to even out  
a wall gone haywire,  
or spread it so thin that  
every grain of sand  
impeded the even stroke  
where words have a  
gritty resistance  
between the thin metal blade  
and the rough  
concrete background

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In the wilderness of  
teaching and administration,  
held back from the  
precipitous edge of  
thinking,  
kept in security and distraction,  
tools rust

*No way out*

The way of the world  
is not the highway to the east  
but the boreen  
at the side of the house that  
peters out in the bog

Where John Clare went crazy

Where Patrick Kavanagh cut and ran

Kittens taken too young  
become natural born killers  
their crazy dichromatic eyes.  
like little birds that collect  
along the fence,  
like clouds on the horizon,  
the quad cruising  
the boundaries.

Language too will let you down  
its ponderous diction,  
its second-rate facility.  
On land, language  
must take its turn.

*Song of Itself*

So language is a virus so,  
readily transmitted and  
you is the host  
and the orders of syntax  
conceal the fertile chaos  
of the word, planted  
like an idea,  
and in the headlong rush  
to fill a sentence  
words get forgotten  
the word and what it is

Words must be  
king and queen,  
at the points where  
farms meet and

fences transmit lambs  
looking for fresh pasture  
and grass as green as  
words that emerge  
from the mouths of  
babes and weanlings.

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