

# Scales Dog

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# Deep - Tap Tree

*'he is called the heron of oblivion'*



## To Freyja

I

Lady of linen cloth  
blue flax flower

give me the girdle of a languid beast

II

Bone fitted sinew fitted  
tongue to tongue-tip

III

Fire-slit rider of the golden pool  
and bristled field

IV

Straddled-in-blood  
keep me from the wounds of distance

## Mr Scales Walks his Dog

The dog is so old dust flies out from its arse as it runs;  
the dog is so old its tongue rattles in its mouth, its eyes were changed  
in the 17th century, its legs are borrowed from a Louis Fourteen  
bedside cabinet.

*The dog is barking with an antique excitement.*

Scales dog is so old its barks hang in the air like old socks,  
like faded paper flowers.

It is so old it played the doorman of the Atlantic Hotel in *The Last Laugh*,  
so old it played the washroom attendant too.

Scales dog is so old he never learned to grow old gracefully.

Scales dog bites in stages.

Scales dog smells of naphtha.

Scales dog misjudges steps and trips.

Scales dog begs for scraps, licks plates.

Scales dog is seven times older than you think:

so he runs elliptically; so he cannot see spiders; so he is often distracted;  
so he loses peanuts dropped at his feet; so he has suddenly  
become diabetic and drinks from puddles; so there is bad wind  
in his system that came over with the *Mayflower*; so he rolls on his back  
only once a week.

Scales dog is Gormenghast, is Nanny Slagg.

Scales dog is Horus, is Solomon Grundy.

*His body makes disconnected music.*

He is so old his eyes are glazed with blood;

so old wonders have ceased; so old all his diseases are benign; so old  
he disappoints instantly; so old his aim is bad.

*Scales dog is so old each day Scales urges him to die.*

Scales dog puts on a show like a bad magician.

Scales dog squats as if he was signing the Declaration of Independence.

Scales dog is so old worms tired of him.

So old his fleas have won prizes for longevity.

So old his dreams are on microfilm in the Museum of Modern Art.

So old he looks accusingly.

So old he scratches for fun.

Scales dog was buried with the Pharaohs, with the Aztecs; draws social security from fourteen countries; travels with his blanket; throws up on the rug; has a galaxy named after him; Scales dog runs scared; would have each day the same, the same; twitches in his sleep; wheezes.

## Political Digression

I saw two go by  
like dragonflies  
    joined

a kind of  
    intercourse  
from tail  
to thorax—

the dry whisk  
of eight beating  
wings

## Climacteric

This time something threatens to give way entirely:  
Ridgepole, roof-beam, whatever you imagine as lasting  
This time will fail to remember words that fell so bright  
and fast about we found no shelter but the storm itself.

Burning branches in stoves and stalls, juniper burning  
And the place thick with the smell of it. Star-bane;  
Lesion in the thew of space.

Even the confidence of God at knell of the hardest season  
Withers and rots away.

These purposes splinter in a rented room;  
Intention, surface, prospect before, behind  
Is all some thriftless illusion  
Drawn down in a trough of queer air.

I can guess at it—tailing, diminished,  
Acknowledge a thread of worn profit,  
Even an infection slowly taken—

Nature scourged by sequent effects:  
No lamp of bronze, no drum  
At the cross-tree—

Appetite  
And intelligence and little else:  
Blood loop on a dry beaten run.

## Of Akbar

I render the catalogue  
of Akbar: of Iskandar's horse  
washed in the fountain of life;  
of Amber Head, his tasselled bridle;  
of courtiers astounded by the lingam of ice;

further of a bauble—a bound man thrown  
to dogs; of enclave; of ambit; of mustering  
fancy; as demons pound chick-peas for tiffin  
along the torrent side.

I give you the red woman  
spinning before her tent; leopard  
and lion silent at the tomb  
of Bahram Gur.

I would set this down by  
close particulars: each hummock  
and fold of land; of trees the tamarisk  
and grey-skinned sycamore; of birds  
assembled the ring-dove and egret  
and crested finch.

Laila languishes  
and the stream runs clear; the pricket  
tumbles to scent-spattered ground.

## The Dead-Carn Shifting Slowly in the Drift

Within limits of his competence which is love  
Man makes a thing to demonstrate inheritance,  
Assert the roots; draws stock from strength  
As love draws breath from love's own kindling.

So in my mind-stem wakes this river  
And mountains backing a coastal plain:  
White Ash, the Bin, Ben Rinnes in calendar;  
Wakes self, wakes county, established line,  
Marked as the valid topography of mind  
And changing matter, a judgement,  
Whether larch-tassels crimson at shroving,  
Whether dust at the door of an earth-house laid.  
Wakes Badenoch the Wolf, skin webbed at his fingers;  
Wakes fish from standing stones; wakes Culbin bells  
Below marram and shore.

Flood cut open the bank;  
Red clay and out-cropping sandstone  
Curdled the silt-rust current,  
Broke brimming in the firth  
Like an opened vein.

Heraclitus pieced flow change and fire;  
Heart and will at the river of desire.

## A Slate Rubbed Smooth

Chronicle of the hunter of forms:  
Of the white stag killed in the off-eye; grain struck  
dropped from the husk.  
Given the distinction between what one does and what one is.  
Between the world ignored and reckoned new;  
Between perfect technique and perfect attunement;  
Between this here now and everything else.

Willow and river-sand, rain-bangled water.  
By Grantown fleet and Rothies to Fochabers' iron bridge,  
And bothies tar-streaked by Tugnet at the mouth,  
Sheer the Spey shifts.  
Wind flattens grey-headed grasses,  
Gulls lag or lapse to a sable sea.

Looking back to real beginnings, felicitous,  
When the mind goes like a skipping stone across the water,  
Planets at each dip, sun and simple air at every rise—  
That man the master of hawks enjoyed his land free,  
Had a hand-breadth of wax-candle to feed his birds  
And light him to bed.

When he hunted, hawk and hunter shared the prey.

*Riguarda*

So let me set down  
the wonder that begins  
one glance from love  
to love

how lightly we danced

a young girl gay  
so grave and winsome

*jeune pucelete*  
*je sui sadete*

*joliete plaisans*

learning to please  
myself and my sister

so let me set out  
one step from love

.

So let me set out  
one step from love

not distant  
not curious

in thrall  
to that or this

but liable  
ardent

intending

careless of graces  
we labour to be clear

.

So let me set down  
the wonder around  
the one loving laughter

a smile so winning  
on the fairest  
face of calm

stone light ferry light  
light off the water

at each place  
my heart stops

to look at you

.

## The Death of Odinn

*Ominnis hegri heitir*

The skerry stark, the sky  
black-lead, the land's life  
buckled hard in ice

nine days then hung  
nine darks hung ganched  
hung deadly down  
the gallow's lord

horseman high in the thudding wind  
the deep-tap tree a skittish ride

nine days nine darks  
his own blind offering  
wergild for the father fell

thirsting, fasting  
hovering for wits of men  
nine darks swept down  
heart-stormed

howling at the root of light  
rendering the deepest dark

more bitter than death  
between his teeth  
nine mighty songs  
and the life to come

The skerry stark  
the sky black-lead  
landstream unfettered  
weaving, sinuous

word flows on word like water  
heart buoyant as a bird

and each thing done  
built up from seed  
          unfolds  
to deep-tap tree.

## The Moon Calf

*'Tis happy therefore that nature breaks the  
force of all sceptical arguments in time.*

—DAVID HUME

*Besides, error of judgement is not moral  
obliquity. Weakness of understanding is not  
depravity of heart.*

—RADHAKRISHNAN



## The Moon Calf

Confute  
confess

confound  
confuttle

sell posters  
for picnics

get fitted  
with springs

.

Conjobbling  
in the kitchen

or settling  
down to conjobble  
*al fresco*

cuts little  
difference

either side

.

In a cosy  
wee cubbyhole

malice  
and avarice

clanging  
like conkers

.

Ruminate  
on that

she used  
to say

.

Pressed  
in a corner

they'll come up  
with anything

beans dogs  
knots in clothes

.

Remember  
those spiders

that dropped  
in the tropics?

mantids too  
like birds

dissemble

.

Agrippa's hound  
ran howling  
away

.

No good  
I guess

however you  
arrange it

connexity  
gone and no

contrivance  
.

The bittern  
booms

the bishop  
plummets to  
the floor  
.

Beyond knowing  
what it might be

nothing in practice

(foul smoke  
up the flue  
pipe)

some don't have  
the courage

some don't have  
the craft  
.

The baker below  
bereft of bread

the butcher

clean out  
of bacon

.