

# Farming the Poems



by  
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*Farming the Poems*

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Gazebo Gravy Press

4 Thorne Cottages  
Cadhay Lane  
Ottery St Mary  
Devon  
EX11 1QZ

**Driving a Forklift Truck from the Field to the Barn with a One Ton Load of  
Freshly Bagged Potatoes on a Palette**

or

**Existential Spuds**

or

**Ewoopsistential**

slowly

oh

so

slowly

carefully

cautiously

forklift-truck-gingerly

judiciously

gradually

vigilantly

woops

still

so

very

slowly...

## The Keeper's Gibbet

is well strung

with

v

e

r

m

i

n

a relative term

and i remember birds and rodents

hung with baler twine

on a tree

not wire along fencing

but artistically

and grotesquely

speaking loud and silently *i am doing my job*

## Cultivating Q & A

**Q.**

What does everybody (that ploughs) use to break down in front of the drill and what do you pull it with?

**My A.**

*croming / croming a field after it is ploughed / croming a field before it is drilled / to crome vb. / a crome n. / rhymes with 'chrome' / 'crome' as Suffolk vernacular / crome attached to a tractor's three-point hitch / crome with replaceable tynes / a crome is a crome is a crome is a crome / [I never ploughed]*

**Found Other A/s.**

Nicely depends on the weather. If you only get one, go on its friable, then a cast double combi drill. I'm on medium land with roll in the spring if needed to plough, as dry out and flint soils - furrow press towed the plough if later sowing after p/h in the morning and at this land Simba Cultipress with surface roll with a flat roll and then leave to when leaving it firm enough, so only a few heavy bits roll after. Not far away, we use two shatter boards on the front links. Problem is catchy weather. By plough then Wiberg spring tines you want to be up close 11ish. One fetches the drill and p harrow combi, often straight behind ploughed. We left a day to Knight Triple Press which is 1.5t/metre. Prior to sowing with a p/h shouldered press rings on chalk & at a push 150 pulls it weather to do the rest or get spade rollers. After ploughing I soils. Need different approach. Heavier stuff or heavy Cambridge rolls; leaves the discs and trailed press. If but finding the press is often dash of glyp and ph/drill, medium drilling as well. Just use the rolls and paddle boards when chases, usually catch up by guard against drying out too much and leave for 24 hours to haze. Land broken up and consolidated to baked a bit, then a set press with leading tynes. When we had them and left with levelling boards. Straight in. Roll after if dry enough. I have a press with Rexus Twin and a bit of weathering on Heavy stuff. Pull or put stones in Different Rigid tines, levelling board then double haze over then ran over with heavy clay but plenty of OM furrows begin to dry on the 3. On the 3. 3 metres pulled with 120 Hp press behind the plough or else depending on sun and soil type drill on silty fen clay.

## Winter Potato Riddling and Swagger

Bragging rights / bagging rights / filled-to-the-top 110 lbs hessian sacks at the end  
of this conveyer belt / shifted to the right and flapped shut at their top / deftly sewn  
tight by a long silver needle and corduroy twine / heaved single-handed up – and  
over to the palette / stacked one ton high / back in time for the next /even Big  
Ricky who I taught how to disco-dance can't quite keep up / sack after sack after  
sack / bagged and folded and tied / Big Ricky too heavy to be lithe / sack after sack  
after sack / bagged and folded and tied / heaved single-handed up – and over to the  
palette / stacked one ton high / again and again and again / sack after sack after  
sack / going to show Big Rickie how to boogie tonight

## Croming Perfect Straight Lines

TAKE POIL IN E DI ANCE AND V TH EY ; FIXEI HEAD  
 STAR HT U) O IT ND W EN R ACHEL TURN A D HEA BACK  
 ALON THE RFEC STRA HT L IE ANI WHEN T THE OTHET  
 END RN A O HEL BAC ALON ; THE NE UP ND DC VN UP  
 AND OWN P ANI OOWI JP AI O DOV ALON THE F RFECT  
 STRA HT LI S TA A PC JT IN HE DI ANCE ND WI I EYES  
 FIXEI LEAD ARIG T UP O IT A D WH I REAC ED TU V AND  
 HEAL ACK ONG HE P: FECT TRAIG T LINE ND W EN AT  
 THE ( HER) D TU V ANI HEAD ACK A ONG TI ; LINE P AND  
 DOW JP AI O DOV T UP / D DC /N UP ND DO N ALO G THE  
 PERF T STF GHT NES KE A POINT V THE ISTAN ; AND  
 WITH YES F ED H D ST. IGH I JP TO AND V HEN RI CHED  
 TURN ND E AD B/ K ALO IG TH PERF T STR/ GHT LI E AND  
 WHE AT TH OTHE END RN A D HEA BACK / ONG T E LINE  
 UP A O DO V UP ND E WN I ' AND OWN P AND DOWN  
 ALON THE ERFE STR GHT INES KE A OINT I THE  
 DIST/ CE AI O WIT EYES IXED EAD S ARIGH UP TO T AND  
 WHE REAC ED T N AI O HEL O BAC ALON THE F RFECT  
 STRA HT LI ANI VHEN AT TH OTHE END T RN AN HEAD  
 BACK LONG THE I IE UF AND I DOWN I AND OWN I P AND  
 DOW JP AI DOV ALO G THI PERFEC STRAI HT LIN TAKE  
 A POI T IN T E DIS NCE ND W H EYE FIXED LEAD ST RIGHT  
 UP TO T ANI VHEN EACH D TU V AND EAD B: K ALO G THE  
 PERF T STR GHT I JE AN WHE AT TH OTHEF ND TU V AND  
 HEAL ACK ONG HE LI E UP ND DC /N UP ND DC VN UP  
 AND OWN P ANI OOWI ALON THE P FECT ; RAIGH LINES  
 TAKE POIL IN E DI ANCE AND V TH EY ; FIXEI HEAD  
 STAR HT U) O IT ND W EN R ACHEL TURN A D HEA BACK  
 ALON THE RFEC STRA HT L IE ANI WHEN T THE OTHET  
 END RN A O HEL BAC ALON ; THE NE UP ND DC VN UP  
 AND OWN P ANI OOWI JP AI O DOV ALON THE F RFECT  
 STRA HT LI S TA A PC JT IN HE DI ANCE ND WI I EYES  
 FIXEI LEAD ARIG T UP O IT A D WH I REAC ED TU V AND  
 HEAL ACK ONG HE P: FECT TRAIG T LINE ND W EN AT  
 THE ( HER) D TU V ANI HEAD ACK A ONG TI ; LINE P AND  
 DOW JP AI O DOV T UP / D DC /N UP ND DO N ALO G THE  
 PERF T STF GHT NES KE A POINT V THE ISTAN ; AND

## Fresher's Backbone

you can drag a horse to water  
and make it gulp

with a fresher's backbone

make it dance  
make it speak  
make it swear to you its fidelity

with a fresher's backbone

Arthur must have  
Arthur with his horse when they saw the elephant and its silence:  
*only puffs of wind from his feet*<sup>1</sup>  
Arthur who kept the milt and scented it  
Arthur who never told me about the toad bone's complex  
but maybe

made it move from others' stinking rings around hooves  
made it laugh out loud  
made it swear rudely

with a fresher's backbone

with a fresher's backbone

make it skilful  
make it loyal  
make it industrious  
make it pull anything from a hat

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<sup>1</sup> My English 'surrogate' father Arthur Brown in *Horse Power and Magic* – George Ewart Evans

## Showing Cow 979 Sonnet

Bright white coat with one of our Friesians on a rope lead,  
I'm dragging my heifer, surrounded by spectators, in a ring –  
Suffolk County Show, early 1970s – last-minute agreeing  
to help parade when no one else from the farm had agreed

with this exhibit, and no talent or experience for doing so.  
As I step up and step out on the catwalk-for-cows ground,  
a boy about ten is marshalling his giant muscled bull around  
while I semi-escort my gradually miscreant miss to and fro,

away from his solid straight line. Of course, a ringed nose  
helps the little boy tame his bull, and I at the end of a rope  
less tethered than hopelessly harnessed on a neck of hope  
foolishly hang on when the Holstein in a sudden jolt goes

racing away. I keep up, holding on, white coat flapping in its  
pace, until she breaks free, my trip landing me in pats of bits.





## Lunging Ring

What I despised  
having cromed my perfect straight lines  
was seeing the owner later riding his horse  
in that field and across my strict pattern  
of a work ethic.

He was no horseman,  
just a rider.

Still, Bob and I built him his  
lunging ring,  
weekend cash-in-hand,  
a perfect round and more perfect lines  
of posts and rails measured exactly  
by eye.

Woodmen's skills: felling trees,  
shaping posts, fencing, making corners strong  
with an axe to carve out grooves and insert an  
angled branch that buttressed and  
anchored.

Farmhand roots.

Moving in different circles.

## Farmers <sup>2</sup>

who

live the margins of day and night / know Ferguson is better than Ford / etch-a-sketch the moves of working dogs / search the inner depths of cows / crome in perfect rhyming lines / hear the crack of wheat and understand / are Solomon with runts / slow the world for a laugh / let cars get past / spray smiles on the sides of sheep / furrow their ploughs / listen for warnings in the wind / rely on their hammer, coin and twine / sense the limits of machinery / play the poker of sowing seeds / harvest the hand they're given / savour the sweet rot of silage / wear more than plaid or green / never read Seamus Heaney / can pronounce *tracter* / frolic their hay / have bullocks that love to play

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<sup>2</sup> first in *Professions* – The Red Ceilings Press, 2018

## **Doc Martens: Mucking Out to a Lifetime Guarantee**

It won't have been *my* letter of complaint back in  
1976-77 [writing with a faux-outraged diss

to explain the demise of soles on my Doc Martens  
after regular mucking out in pigs' straw-soaked piss]

that led to the scrapping of its lifetime guarantee  
as this was in 2018, and from my well-argued case –

about the harsh effects of ammonia in their pee –  
I was sent a new pair for my missive's coup de grâce.

## Farming Without Derrida

How hard work teaches you to be a man,  
perhaps,

but I'd say [and #MeToo] it's broader than that  
and a different kind of politics.

It is how Arthur and George [Boast and Scrivvy /  
foreman and workmate]

never had to educate to a lesson plan.  
And more than a natural instruction you

naturally followed to emulate,  
theirs was fundamental,

communal, sharing largesse like a library  
shelved with lived experience.

I learned more from them than listening to  
Derrida in a language I could not understand –

invited to attend – when they simply said  
without saying, you have already arrived.

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## *Appendix*

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### 1. PREQUEL

#### **Horse-Witch**<sup>3</sup>

Tom turns a spaded clod upside  
down and prods it to levelled crumbs.  
He grips the handle between thumb  
and palm while a laugh jerks his side,  
then stabbing at the crusty surface loam  
a booted step thuds it home.

His smiles are a unique arcana,  
mysteries to break the slow toil  
into rhythms – movements of compact soil,  
once turned, are finished like a coda.  
It's a simple talent. Using these secrets  
his arms work on through leather singlets.

On stopping, his fingers stretch to unhitch  
a clutch nine decades old. Tom stalls  
to review through eyes that can recall  
backwards as a Suffolk horse-witch  
when instead of taming this dark loam  
his skill with a dried fresher's back-bone

worked a different gardening.  
Pocketed in thick farmer's corduroy  
the thin frog-bone was a ploy  
to coax some Punch to its tugging  
charm. Sweating to the potion  
its great legs heeled tight at Tom's motion.

The plough-team's raven-feathered shine  
oiled itself through strange antidotes

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<sup>3</sup> *The George Crabbe Memorial Poetry Competition 1979 - First Prize. Adjudicators: Wes Magee, Marguerite Wood*

Tom brewed and added to blander oats.  
Each bait was mixed from some design  
of his own, or a Horsemen's select cabal  
whose shared magic suggest 'Paddock calls',

their witch-like exchange of ideas.  
Now moving the stubborn rich earth  
he is tending to a similar birth,  
and this is Tom's silently smiled panacea.  
Molding another cut turf to shreds  
he casts his spells into living beds.

## 2. POSTSCRIPT

### **Wheels**

[for Valerie]

Christmas morning 45+ years ago / having volunteered to feed the cows / thrill of  
you with me in the tractor cab / that surprise adventure when sliding at speed down  
the dewy hill / differential gone and a ton of pungent maize thrusting from behind  
/ wheels locked / ending unseen

Surviving intact / still together / the rush of wild movement remained

And now / as we still seek the existential / two of us and other wheels / thrusting  
the car beyond one hundred / past unknown fields / past the past / that last long  
burning bend / up the carriageway before turning / home only a mile away

It's OK / some things just OK / but the wheels still haven't fallen off

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[979 before she took flight]

[gravyfromthegazebo.blog/](http://gravyfromthegazebo.blog/)