Clay

I

A cudden howl on til a’d harden’ te even the softest a day
Hazes a rains make soft a me clay
Not akin te the faces tha’ harden’ te grey
They’d rinse ye a silt te ye were hardent as they.

A cudden howl on te the dears through the mire
Cudden keep them from slippin’ te till te briar
Cudden summon the sense te credit the ire
Dears frayd a wisps a te the yoe te barbed wire.

A cudden howl on te the han’ tha’ fed me
The beatin’ han’ a me heart’s trigeminy
The hunger the hanlin the shiverin’ set a ye
A cast a stone casts clay a the memory.

A wudena howl on but a the softest a day
The sky a rivers thawed bare a me clay
The tufts a the lamb tha’ flittered te pray
Aye the mud a me silt ha’ me slip on away.

II

The sledge a the fencin’ foun’ work in the muck
Oul posts decayed a the clay a the sheugh
Heavin’ and hoin’ rotten pine w’ pluck
Til the groun’ a the periphery was empty-struck.

The sledge a the fencin’ beat uprisin’
Tuk howl a the halla a clay devisin’
Howl tight a the post a fear despisin’
The splinters the toll a violent wisin’.

The sledge a the fencin’ stoked up the air
If a swing cud scream the steel beware
Fresh posts han’held then groun’ ensnare
An’ the scream thuds o’er the lan’ its heir.

Red run a hans an’ black run a muds
The fencers the butchers a earthen bloods
On home the hammer te the steam a spuds
An’ the clay laid in te its time-thrift floods.
Back agin the bank a clay out yonder
Neath the height a the quarry me sily ponder
Neath the misty showers a skies tha’ maunter
A fella caught eyes an’ prayer did wander.

Back agin the bank a clay a quake
The fella stopped under a shelter’s sake
Bodies tha’ flitter w’ the way they spake
Bodies fin’ wile the ways words ache.

Back agin the bank a clay liquecent
Rains a clay a the kisses ferment
Silt wound round a gilded assent
The fella walked on w’ a wake a lament.

Back agin the bank a clay expended
The clay didn’t howl as the silt intended
A harden’ a bit as tha’ sof’ day ended
A cast a kisses is a cast amended.

The breath a the herd made a steamy gale
O’er a hundred hooves an’ a trampled trail
The roars a wanin’ vexed a chillin’ wail
Hooves beat clay eyed the fencin’ frail.

A unsucked milk udders fat te the brim
Madden’ leppin’ an’ fury a clay’s cruel whim
The clouds a their cries drew the fieldlight dim
They boun’ an’ bolted the herd run hymn.

A dozen black heads led charge te the fence
A dozen black heads lept barbed defence
The barbs drew blood a the udders’ expense
Galloped the lanes tha’ weans incense.

Hoofprints left puddles a the field they fled
The marsh gurgled gently w’ a fallow head
Knittin’ an’ stitchin’ neath the rushes’ shred
The breath a the herd billowed miles ahead.
V

Samhain saw drought so rock-splittin’ rare
The sheugh the stream the rivers bare
The strans a me heart willed grip a the air
The heifers the fellas a grazed earthenware.

Samhain saw drought tha’ harden’ te grey
The hooves an’ their prints a hardent clay
A fieldful a statues ‘cross the arid brae
A dandered an’ hoked round the fencin’ way.

Samhain saw drought a tha’ weanlin’s gasp
Blood slow an’ thick a the farmer’s rasp
A the height a the quarry me fingers clasp
The clay cements til a freedom grasp.

Samhain saw drought til straight out a me tongue
Trickled silt an’ mud an’ moisture wrung
The clay gave way te quare waves unstrung
A flung o’er the fence an’ soft day sung.

Cían McAlone
Notes and glossary:

The language of *Clay* was inspired by the dialects of rural Fermanagh and Donegal. Where abbreviations were insufficient in simply conveying the sense or pronunciation of the word, new words were created phonetically.

I

A – I, of, for, at, abstract preposition
Cudden – Could not
Howl – Hold
Te- To
Me- My
Ye – You
Hardent – Hardened
Yoe – Ewe
Han’ – Hand
Hanlin – A tough situation

II

Foun’ – Found
Sheugh – A ditch, furrow
W’ – With
Pluck – Concerted effort
Tuk – Took
Halla – Hollow, a dip in the land
Wisin’ – Discerning, a way of living
Cud – Could
Han’held – Handheld
Lan’ – Land

III

Agin – Against
Neath – Beneath
Fella – Fellow, man
Spake – Speak
Fin’ wile – Find wild, sense keenly

IV

Wanin’ – Waning
Leppin’ – Leaping
Lept – Leaped
Weans – Wee ones, children

V

Samhain – (Sow-in) November, gaelic festival celebrating harvest’s end
Strans – Strands
Brac – A hillside
Dander – To walk idly
Hoke – To search
Weanlin’ – Weanling, a newly weaned animal
Quare – Rural pronunciation of queer, commonly used to mean very, extremely, or notable