

# Yes But What Is This? What Exactly?

Ian McMillan

smith|doorstop

# the poetry business

Published 2020 by  
Smith|Doorstop Books  
The Poetry Business  
Campo House,  
54 Campo Lane,  
Sheffield S1 2EG

Copyright © Ian McMillan 2020  
All Rights Reserved

ISBN 978-1-912196-37-1  
Typeset by The Poetry Business  
Printed by Biddles, Sheffield

Smith|Doorstop Books are a member of Inpress:  
[www.inpressbooks.co.uk](http://www.inpressbooks.co.uk)

Distributed by NBN International, 1 Deltic Avenue,  
Rooksley, Milton Keynes MK13 8LD

The Poetry Business gratefully acknowledges the support of  
Arts Council England.



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

## Contents

7	Tone Found in Sonnet: a Murder Mystery
8	A Financial Crisis in Three Parts
9	Between Junction 35a and Junction 36
10	In the Bookshop: a Poem in that Ol' Plain Style
11	TEN DER
12	Adult Audio
13	The Fallen Christmas Tree at the Museum
14	The News
15	Three Flat Caps at the Bottom of the Stairs
16	Yes But What Is This? What Exactly?
19	Lighter
20	Seeing a Goal Scored from a Passing Train
22	Lighthouses
23	Summer Dreams Ripped at the Seams
24	The Puddle
25	Where Was Your Ghost Before?

## *Introduction*

Hello, and welcome to a collection of poems written in the depths of history, almost at a time before Time as we know it began. Yes, these poems were all written before the Coronavirus Crisis. I hope, though, that they speak to us about the concerns we had before The New Normal and will probably have when the New Normal becomes the Normal and then the Old Normal. Enjoy this glimpse into a contested and open-to-nuance past.

*Tone Found in Sonnet: a Murder Mystery*

Body found in suit.

Horse found in shore.

Hope found in hoopoe.

Man found in woman.

Foot found in sock.

Bats found in stab.

Wig found in wigwam.

Man found in Manchester.

Head found in hat.

Routers found in trousers.

Beast found in breast.

Man found in Godmanchester.

Ache found in heart.

Man found in Manitoba.

*A Financial Crisis in Three Parts*

1.

They smile before  
They start the waterboarding  
And so do we.

2.

I suddenly found  
I lived in this house  
But I didn't know  
How I did it.  
The instruction book:  
I need the instruction book.

3.

He felt an almost overwhelming urge  
To eat pound coins.

*Between Junction 35a and Junction 36*

The truck pulled up on the hard shoulder  
And a curtain at the back opened theatrically  
And they tumbled out, running  
Into the evening-scribbled bushes like

Scattered chess pieces  
Verbs cut from random magazines  
Pepper ground onto cold soup  
Marbles rolling across your grandma's yard  
Billiard balls rushing somewhere over the baize.

Even the bushes were frightening  
In a language nobody knew.

## *The Puddle*

I'll tell you what writing a poem is like:  
It's like this ...

Just the temptation to jump and splash  
In the puddle at the end of the lane;  
Like I was Ian McMillan aged seven,  
In a knitted balaclava and shorts so long  
They could have been a waterfall.

I stare into the puddle. A straw from  
A McDonald's cup draws my eye. I grab it,  
Raise it to my lips. I am tempted to suck  
The entire puddle up and swallow it  
But then I decide just to suck a portion

Of the puddle up, spit it out, and then  
Suck it up again, and spit it out. The younger  
Ian McMillan wouldn't have done this,  
He'd have just splashed but as I've got older  
I've realised the power of the redraft.

## *Where Was Your Ghost Before?*

Taps chest. He was under this jacket,  
This best jacket. Funerals, interviews.  
That best jacket. He sizzled away  
Like a tinnitus-riddle, waiting,  
Waiting his moment. Taps head.

Sometimes he was here, brain area,  
Humming because he didn't know  
The words, just waiting, waiting.  
That last shuddering breath: he'll know  
And then, well, he'll blossom, shine.

Taps mouth. He sits in here, soaking.  
He just waits for me to keel over  
From underuse and rust. My mouth  
Will open slackly. His song will emerge,  
Keening, a high tenor. Tuneful? No.

Taps poem. He's in here. Always.



