

Collier

He lies side on, man-foetus in the two-foot seam,
Half naked, hacking out the fires of ancient suns.
A mile above the laughing children dam the stream,
The hedges hang their flowers, the river runs.

Coiled in the Davy lamp dark he hews the coal, cuts
The black diamonds that power the dreadnought's screws,
That smelt the bullets' lead, that forge the iron boots
That police the Empire's bounds. Hunched

In the halo of the lamp's pale glow, curled,
Bent, he chops the boles of forests from a time
When giant lizards walked the world.
A mile above him in the summer sunlight

The rulers of a new world walk the links,
Gauge where their balls will fall. Belly-down, ink black
Below, the small man naked but for rags hacks on,
The weight of armies and empires on his back.

Mike Harding

Written earlier this year, after passing Agecroft where there was once a flourishing pit, the last in Manchester. Mike Harding's new book of poetry, Strange Lights Over Bexleyheath, is published by Luath Press.

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