

What Remains

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I

Still Life

There is nothing significant
about the apple which rests, forgotten
on a stone plate on the table.

There is nothing significant
about the table either:
it is round and made of plastic.

The bruises on the apple
do not alter the appleness of apples;
the smudged whiteness of the table
does not alter the tableness of tables.

The apple, red-flecked and ripe,
is ripe for a time only.

The table is bare,
save for the apple, and the stone plate,
at its centre.

Habitat

To need nothing more, at times,
than this recurrence:

the afternoon sun, its light
drowsing in the bedroom

and some old leather shoes
supple in that light
at the foot of the bed.

Soon the mountain buttresses,
their day-time ochres,
will lose their dryness, powder,

And glow with the wetness
of metals freshly ored
in this old infusion of the sun . . .

To need nothing more, sometimes,
than this recurrence of light.

Listen (After Holub)

Go and sit by the river.
Tear out the day's appointments
and throw them to the polluted horizon.
Bring with you what you must,
but take only yourself to the water.

Perhaps someone will send you
a small paper boat you will retrieve
the same night in your sleep.
Perhaps you will see flags
like butterflies above your head
and a sky full of waterfalls.
Perhaps you will get sunburnt
and bring home nothing
but a net full of poisoned fish.
Perhaps you will grow thirsty
and scratch the air for mosquitoes.

Go, while there is time,
and make your way to the water.
If you don't want to do anything,
just lie there and listen.
At the very least, if you don't hear
any music, or if none of this happens,
you'll hear the sound of the river.

Punctuation

The wild mare gallops across the page.
In the wind the commas of her mane
brush up against the rider. He provides
direction with the reins, expertly guides
with semicolons and dashes – but as they reach
the open plain, he's really the mare
and she's the rider, and both are locked
in the parenthesis of one movement together.
Exclamation marks fall like lightning
as they cross the margin; her sudden cries
are the sound of the rain. Becoming fire
in the valley of quotation marks, he calls out
her name.

And even if later both mare and rider
(her flanks steaming, his skin full of salt
as they go down to the stream)
might sometimes wish to be free of each other,
and find themselves within the italics –
he again horseless, she again riderless –
they know they're bound together this way
just the same. Whether or not she throws him,
or injures herself against the boulder
of a question-mark in their way, they'll gallop
and ride through each full stop –
to where the horizon uncovers itself,
and the grass, ink-drawn, grows wild again.

Whiteness

He dreams of living
in a house with one empty,
white-walled room.

It could be the white
of a marble statue;
it could be the white
of an anesthetist's coat.

It could be the white of pillows and clouds;
the white masts of sailing boats;

It could be the white
of soft, white-petalled flowers;
the pristine white
of snow-capped peaks;

Just so long as one day
he'll live in a place

where there'll be a room for him
to consider everything,

to face those images
the mind might conjure
in a room that is bare

save for a mat, a window, a door;
in front of him:
the absolute whiteness of a wall.

Avian

Bird, canary-like, on the path,
you and I share this kingdom
of sky, sun and stone. From up here,
above the gorge,
the world is a wheel, curved
at its horizon; turned by the sun
and anchored, below this ridge of hills,
by the sea.

Small bird, pecking at the ground,
darting and hopping along the path –
it is this that you are and do. I'm face
to face with your curious eye, the reality
of my separateness, here,
in this kingdom where meaning, for now,
is the feel of sun on skin, the sky's purity;
is whatever I've learnt
in the company of rocks.

The Shape-Thrower

His face painted white,
his lips smeared red,
he walks alongside, becomes

the woman walking daintily
on high-heels, the man striding
past, self-importantly.

A latter-day Charlie Chaplin,
moving as they move,
expressing what they betray

on seeing themselves reflected
in the shifting mirror
of his face, his body.

Vigil

I

Something out there
in the blackness holds him.
Tonight, as on other nights,
seagulls go wheeling overhead,
clamorous above the roof of a warehouse;
tonight, as on other nights,
the shopping centre's lit up
like a temple, a constant passage
of cars in the parking lot.

But it's out there,
in the darkness across
and above the sea,
where the stars are just visible,
that he's wandering,
as if seeking to find
in all that space without name,
a centre.

II

Again walking, this late, along the pier,
he sees he's no different now,
to the person he once was.
He's still asking himself
sometimes, that question that has
no answer, that goes on unresolved
within him.

Only tonight, perhaps, it is enough
for him to be walking out here,
enough to be watching
the night sky, the lights, faint
but persistent, of those few ships
across the dark.
Tonight, though his question
still remains, there is again
this feeling he knows he hasn't
always known, has often lacked.
This feeling, tangible
as this wall of concrete he's standing on
extending out into the blackness, the waves,
that here, in himself, and in this place,
he belongs.

Winter

For years,
in her room behind a whitewashed wall,
a cellist plays.

For years her love,
like a creeper straining towards the sun,
grows back along the wall.

For whom does she play?
For whom does her love grow?

For years, she has been drinking in this sunlight.

For years, she has been drowning in this music.

Breathing Space

I

In the great lung of the forest,
a man is running.

In the silence, the light
that filters down through the trees
like smoke

he can breathe, feel as one.

In the vast maze of the forest
a man feels the ground
beneath his feet,

the texture of the ground
with nothing intervening,

knows he cannot escape
from himself, the earth where he runs.

II

Out against the mountainside,
the runner is moving through unknown
and familiar territory inside himself.
His breathing and the beating
of his blood sustain the movement
of his thoughts or what is there
in their absence. Sometimes he is the bird
hunting along the mountainside;
sometimes he is just movement or rest
within movement. He is another animal
moving along the mountain's surface,
following the paths of his thoughts,
returning to those quiet places
of which the mountain is made.

Ice-kingdom

No matter how often – or where – he moves to,
a part of him can always be found
in a place of ice and snow.

Sometimes the plains of ice begin to melt.
Sometimes he sends messages or letters,
even in Morse code. But most get lost
en route in snow-storms,
or on ships that hazard the sea beyond the ice.

Much of what he sees in that kingdom is illusory –
a trick of the snow and ice, or a trick of his own self.
He is constantly looking for cracks in the ice-sea,
a place of shelter in the cliffs of an iceberg or a warm lake
below the tundra. Doubtless there are others also looking
for cracks in the ice; and doubtless, sometimes,
they meet before drifting off again,

Forced apart, like pack-ice, by some inner pressure – so it seems.
Sometimes, he senses, there are too many
intervening blizzards, too many intervening
white distances, whatever the sleds, the dogs available.
But he is searching, always, for something
unlike his tongue. That will stop these things from sticking,
like stalactites, to the roof of his mouth, his teeth.

Of course he could act otherwise. There are
options open to him. To pitch his tent
right here, to close its door, lie down and let
the coldness come over, take hold of him, forever.
But, on scanning once more through his snow-goggles
the white horizon, he sees to his surprise
that he's come quite far north already;
he hears once more (and always with amazement)
some small voice inside of him, even in this wilderness,
that goes on speaking, sounding its own depths,
as if someone not his snow-shadow – someone
must be there.

The sea

is a fisherman
netting sunlight and shadow;

is home to sharks and seals,
the litter in the harbour;

is an army of one,
that surges, implodes against
the sides of the pier;

is a solitary traveller,
dividing as it joins, continents, lives;

is a scaled creature of old,
returning to its depths,
composing upon its borders

the march of its tides,
the sound of its unfailing appetite
for the land it devours.

Presence

I

That shift of light and shadow
in the forest of conifers across the river;
and then the shadow of my face,
gradually defined, brought into focus
against the open book –

Now to know it, fleetingly,
and beyond any thought of it,
that I am breathing, that I am here,
in this place of mountains, valleys and rivers –
I, who knowing nothing, today know this.

II

Now, late afternoon, I watch
a light returning to these mountains,
their knuckles raw against the sky.
I watch, till evening comes, how walls of stone
take in, absorb this light, until
they're saturated, their ochre molten, bleeding.

Here, in the valley, in this ancient theatre
of light now draining to dark, there is
only that continuous sound
rising, falling, through the trees,
that composes the silence.

The selves I've been lie shed
like rinds of fallen bark,
the sun-dried leaves on grass.
And, like the bee-eaters now
that flashing dive, catch insects
for their evening meal, I feast on light,
the slow clear honey of it,

And this other honeycomb
that I've never tasted quite like this:
the serenity of this emptiness, my nothingness.

On A Classical Theme

I

One by one, sometimes together,
the leaves fall down from the trees;

One by one, at times together,
they leave behind them
branches growing bare in the sun.

They do not say why it was
they flamed colour,
drownsed through a season;

why they offered themselves up
to the wind and the rain.

They do not say why

they yield to the breeze
which scatters them,
the earth which reclaims them.

They only go on falling,

as if weaving a path through the air
known only to them;

as if clearing the way
for those which will follow them.

II

Alone on the hillside
where it has chanced to grow

it offers strange consolation
on a day barren, polluted.

Alone with the changing sky, leaning
towards the light,

it tells only as it shifts and nods
in the breeze

of that which comes –
and goes.

A Study of the Object

Palm-sized, gathering dust
on the shelf, maybe you've travelled
from the molten belly of a volcano,

or spent whole lifetimes
underwater. At rest, you pass
through the intestines of time, unscarred

by human concerns, by history.
It's safe to assume, you have no crisis
of identity. And you'd never reveal

whether there are windows, kingdoms,
or an unconscious stored in your interior.
You are a mathematics of one –

an enigma from which nothing
can be taken or added, even if
you were to be endlessly divided.

Quite useless, then, to enquire
whether you have a sense of humour,
whether those cracks at your sides

are from laughter, or are the first signs
of some internal law
of decomposition. If you are

a miniature cosmos, a jigsaw puzzle,
or some unblinking,
reptilian eye, I can never know.

In your very being, and through such
passive resistance as you offer,
you disown all theories of geology –

evade from the outset, all attempts
at capture in nets of stanzas
and woven strands of language.

White-out

Waking up, you see it again:
a photograph, the same photograph
you first saw as a child
of that famous mountain,
beloved of tourists, chocolate boxes;

And how your gaze froze on something
that was forming under the snow,
that you did not want
to see, but could not help
but see revealed, eventually.

There, within the mountain,
a face with cheeks of snow,
was shaping itself slowly,
its mouth, half-smiling, unsmiling,
its eyes – more than two, than three –
all staring blankly, hollow
with a darkness not made of stone or snow.

Behind that famous basalt cone
the legions of Alpine peaks marched on,
and a field of clouds, at first
high up – it seemed a solid sheet –
was fast descending, gathering
a darkness as it came down,
obscuring as it fell the North Face, with its ice-fields,
the east ridge, its history of deaths.

And then you saw for one last moment
(or thought you saw) what, waking today,
you're seeing now – this thing without a name
that's been there all these years
though you thought you had escaped it –
this face of stone within a mountain's stone
and into which one day, as once before,
your staring eyes, your own pale face, will fall.

II

Beware of the Dog

The dog behind the fence
is barking at me.

Perhaps he barks because he
thinks I am afraid of him,
perhaps he barks because he
is afraid of me.

His ears are cocked.
His eyes follow my movements
through the trees.

Perhaps he barks because there
is nothing left to do in suburbia
but bark.

Bus Laureate

Upstairs, in the front end of the bus,
a man talking animatedly, speaking to those
beside and behind him, speaking to himself
or some imaginary companion;

A thick-set, pony-tailed figure, he's constantly
writing down lines of text
on the notepad he holds in front of him –
exclaiming, declaiming, like some mad
mathematician; holding up like a mirror

or a revelation those lines of text – the recurring
gestures of his hands now expressing,
like his face, agreement, satisfaction; now indicating
(his mood swings rapid) dissent, disapproval.

All afternoon, it goes on – more pages
of notes, more lines of text
held up for him or someone else to see;
more commentary – on what he's written
(mock-disgust, amusement, rage . . .)

A man seeking perhaps, in such fits and starts,
an audience, an ally –
though, whether or not he's aware of it,
his fellow passengers have long since
lost interest, pretend not to notice,
and don't understand what he's saying.

Getting Ahead

Fiona is a woman who likes to get ahead. Not for her the long slog with no promotion in sight, the currying up to the boss, taking home work from the office (staying up with it like a lover, till the small hours of night.)

It's not that she's not an efficient worker bee, she knows she contributes more than her share. Generally, she doesn't much like the concept of networking, neither does she care for the chatter at work – mostly she just smiles and keeps to herself.

But, being smart, she's quickly realized that Bill, her boss, has a weakness for her. Being Fiona, she's coaxed something out of him he let slip in an aside, and it happens to be one of the things for which, you might say, she has a good appetite.

Which means that Fiona, no longer worries like her colleagues about climbing a rung or two up the corporate ladder – that's well taken care of, since, when she's in the mood and Bill's interest with her own coincides, they'll step into his office and lock the door, and she'll give him – just in case he's forgotten – a gentle reminder who's in charge.

A Joymore Product

You stroke the keys
beneath your fingertips

& I am summoned
from the labyrinths of this programme
designed for pleasure
with an Other

I march onto the screen, in leathers,
& begin to teach you how
to use words which for some reason
you are ashamed of

You see me half-naked, now,
and then, your character's face close
to mine,
I watch his arrow-hands snatch
to seize my hands,
outstretched, reluctantly,
in virtual space:

I can see by his eyes that you're bored
with the infinite rotation of positions,
with the same old routines.

In the beginning, you couldn't
get enough,
but now you mutter
(under your breath)
that I'm just another
(Penthouse Pet.)

You switch off the machine
& storm out of the room
but I know you will return
to me

as you always do
when real relationships
(with or without leather)
fail.

Insurrection

Aboard the sinking ship,
the piano is playing
a funeral march,

An army of violins, all
out of tune,
is taking prisoners on deck.

Only the cello
murmurs its dissent,
while the drums

thunder and crash
down the stairs,
to where the ship's engineer,

lies motionless
under the swaying
chandeliers,

pinned to the floorboards,
by such strange music.

The chief navigator,
having found his bearings
in the linen room,

is swigging champagne
with a chambermaid.

The composer, in fitful sleep,
is still composing his concerto
for ninety-nine penguins.

The loudspeakers
on the beach, repeat
that the sun is shining.

The audience, as ever,
goes on rearranging
the deck chairs,

while complimentary tickets
are being distributed by the wind
to the choir of lost fish –

who'll be the only one's
to attend the next performance
beneath the waves.

III

Conundrum

In order that the sweet-singing birds
would not fly away, he put them in a cage.

In order that the moon would not be forgotten,
he caught its reflection in a jar.

In order that the sky would not tear,
he stitched the horizon with a knitting-needle.

In order that his heart would not burst,
he sealed off the valves with a soldering iron.

If only the birds would slip through the bars;
the moon return to its place of magic far above.

If only the sky would mend all its scars;
and his heart, so long a dead letter, open . . .

Only Once

I

He had wanted to kiss her,
he had wanted to kiss her without fear.

It was the most natural thing in the world,
it happened as she turned to face him,
it happened
at the slightest invitation:

Though they'd just met,
it was a kiss
both had been anticipating
for a very long time:

It was a kind of
falling, a delicious kind
of weightlessness;

It happened though he did not know her,
it happened just that once:

He had wanted to kiss her like that, again.

II

He had wanted to taste, anew,
the renewed pressure

of her lips against his;
to feel himself drawn, once more,
into the heat and heart of her.

It happened
just that once; it happened
as he turned and embraced her:

A kiss,
very slow and full
and deliberate,
in which they had confided

all they had wanted to say to one another,
without the muddle
of words.

Testing the Water

Her hands, as they sat facing each other
across a wooden table, lightly touched his.

Her eyes, very clear and level, looked into his,
but he didn't know what she wanted,
or what he himself wanted.

He was afraid, insecure; wasn't sure of her —
of himself with her, and she, as they talked
was sounding him out

with her eyes, her hands,
her carefully chosen words,
keeping herself intact, inside the skin of her life.

Bridge

The bathroom door now shut,
he breathes in deeply – out slowly.

Outside's a woman drunk as he is,
yet he stares at the stranger there,
who's always been there in the mirror,
eyes glazed with desperation, lust.

She's doing this for reasons
he'll never truly understand. For his part he knows,
that beyond the sympathy
and relief of touch,
his heart doesn't care for her.

And this bathroom is in chaos.
He can't believe what's happening.
Out there, there's nothing certain,
not since their hands just touched,
their talk became that kiss.

He knows he probably shouldn't be here.
And yet he knows, too, that nothing inside him now
can stop him from venturing out, along

this bridge their hands, their lips, have forged –
this frail structure he's hoping yet again, against hope –
he's seen his face in the mirror, its drunken pallor –
will ferry him across his old indifference.

Tren a Barcelona

Comfortable with each other
they've fallen
asleep together on the train:

He, large, lying within the harbour
of her lap, her thighs;
the fingers of one palm
open like a flower above her knee.

She, slender, head partly veiled
behind the thin film of the curtain –
it's apparent in the way
her arm's slung loosely
down his back, how well she knows him.

Occasionally, they shift, they touch anew.
But there's a moment when both stir
and her hands come to rest
in the relaxed, open space
of her thighs.

And then,
her body leaning slowly
as the train follows its
curved tracks, his arm
starts moving in its sleep, sliding
up across her midriff, brushing
against both breasts, pressing
as her crossed legs
re-cross.

Curtains have been drawn
against the afternoon sun.
In less than an hour, the train arrives in Barcelona.

In not much more, the poem
they do not know that they have been
will be complete.

Learning to Breathe

At dusk, there is bird-song,
and somewhere a telephone rings.

At dusk, there is bird-song;
and exhaust fumes mingle with memories.

Towards evening, she comes round,
and they don't talk of how long it's been.

Towards morning, he lies curled up against
the sun of her skin, and dreams.

With Words

Smiling & cross-legged,
you sit opposite me on the stairs.

We laugh and talk and laugh
and go places I've never been to
in the warm flood
of afternoon sunlight.

We laugh and talk and laugh
and grow afraid of what we want.

You can't be too careful,
I can't be too careless,

With words.

Relics

A drowned world in a folder,
one he seldom returns to –
her poems and drawings;

A cassette from another, lately not listened to:
the pain of encountering
the ghosts of past selves.

Whatever it was that breathed
between him and each of them,
no longer matters as it once did –

and if he is searching
beyond nostalgia
and the memory
of what each might represent
(might have represented),

it is to feel what, for him,
still has or hasn't
life and meaning
(though it belongs to the past)

and perhaps to find, at last,
in some part of himself,
thawing, grateful,
in part frozen over –

a way of saying, years afterwards,
goodbye.

Common Ground

The afternoon haze
fills the dusty corners of the balcony

where I lean back
against the wall,
while you smoke
both of us barely conscious

of the purr
of the traffic
& the days

that follow one another
as steadily
as the dust that always gathers
on our bookshelves,
clings to the window-panes.

The glistening shadows of starlings
dart across the roofs
& the cats blink
as you clasp your hands together
and stare out over the balcony

& we talk, freely, of things
I've almost forgotten
how to feel, and perhaps, like you

seem to be as far from this day
as the thin curve of the darkening horizon
is from us –

both quiet now, and thoughtful,
outside this rented room above the city.

Well-Hidden

That picture, enclosed in a silver wooden frame,
was something.

You said you painted it one afternoon after work:

the chains holding the swing,
themselves attached to nothing,
were so faint in outline they had almost
dissolved into the darkness

surrounding the tiny seated figure
of a clown on a swing:

a sad clown swinging silently
through a dark space

with a face at times like yours,
marked with lines of sadness
I'd never seen in yours.

Loverman

He drank in her beauty,
he drank in the pleasure she took
in the pleasure she gave him.

Whose eyes was he kissing,
whose hands was he touching
as he saw her near-perfect

as a photo-shoot model,
right there beside him?

He was sure in these moments
that she too would see him
as loving and handsome.

He was sure, in these moments,
that his performance would match up,
that – when it came down to it –

he would not fail
himself.

Reunion

She feels him in the way he
glances about the room.
He feels her
in the way she sits in the chair.
There's a look in her eyes:
warm yet self-possessed

He's restless.
Words flow and mingle,
freeze.

He's ill at ease
with his own attempts
at more conversation;
she wishes he'd relax –
she's really quite nervous.

They talk a while longer.
He confides in her like he used to.
She speaks less freely, about herself.

They exchange addresses, make plans
for some future arrangement

that neither feels sure
they will keep.

Attack

Darkness falls over hills and houses,
takes gradual possession of a suburban street.
In the silence the steady pitch
of a cricket's song, the sound of dogs barking,
traffic passing in the distance.

And always, when evening arrives,
the woman seated beside the window –
the curtains not yet drawn –
finds herself riding two tides of awareness:

One rising inside her like a wave,
the flickering of an old kind of panic:
the sense of being alone,
of her own mortality;
the feeling that the silence
around and within her oppresses,
that she is somehow unreal;

The other, she knows, will follow later:
a time when, in the cool night air,
her restless heart will find some kind of solace;
the sense that she has moved past
a recurring paralysis or affliction within,
a time in which she'll feel again,
the silent, enveloping calm of evening –

Though tonight, at this hour,
the street collecting darkness,
the clock ticking loudly in the room,
she knows she has no choice but to endure
the periodic shortness of breath,
the familiar struggle playing itself out
inside her.

Holding On

He's never sure if he wants her;
won't admit to himself that he needs her.

She drapes one leg across his,
slides onto his lap;
he kisses her, buries his face
in her hair, in the curve of her shoulder.

She's afraid to give herself to him fully –
there are too many things in the way . . .

but he knows as they touch,
as she leans against him,
that she wants him to stay.

Etching ('Of Another World Entire' by Christine Dixie)

A man and woman standing naked inside
a room's open doorway; body cradled, arched
against body, joined in the warmth, the tenderness
of their embrace. They hold one another, heads
close together, in the shade afforded
by the rough stone wall behind them. To one side,
the sun combs the grain of the door, the floorboards,

illuminates as it throws further into shadow
the two embracing. The doorway opens directly
onto the grassland outside. Already the grass
shoots up between the floorboards. A small, faded picture,
tacked onto the outside of the door – of a landscape,
tall swaying trees, two cows grazing – the details blurring,
indistinct at a distance – an old picture which hangs in the heat

or flutters in the breeze. And those wild dogs
that look on, seem to advance slowly from beyond
the door – for what is it they seem to be waiting?
And who is it who stands outside, unseen, whose shadow falls
across the sunlit door, the sunlit doorway?
Beyond the couple, the doorway – the shadow
that is death's or a voyeur's. Beyond the dogs, the grassland,

the slight, symmetrical apex of a hill in the distance:
a point where sides of the landscape have come together,
where the land has risen up to meet the sky –
like these two who hold each other close, though danger threatens
to untie them. Only they know what it is they each bring
to this moment of intimacy, theirs and not theirs alone;
what it is they each hold onto – and let go of in that embrace.

The Traitor

Already, in his mind,
he's kissed the lips of a stranger
as she smiles – a lovely smile.

Already, his lover, her legs
relaxed against his under the table,
noticing the woman that he sees,

is guessing at his thoughts,
is both amused and bored
with his infatuations.

She understands him well –
her gaze alone
tells him as much.

She knows all too well
this weakness of his
“this little weakness” –

it's a significant part
of what keeps him with her.
And it's why, at this moment,

she smiles almost warmly,
smiles in spite of herself,
her jealousy,

at this one who's so easily
distracted, a man like him
too transparent, too obvious to be

much more than her pet traitor.

Parting

He misses her already as she's leaving:

her eyes ablaze, catching the light;
the sensuality of a mouth – hers –

her soft cotton shirt: the way it draws forth
the cool blue and grey of her eyes.

It's what he needs most – to be alone for a time.
But now, as they embrace, he misses her touch –

the lightness of it, the warmth and feel,
the smell of her skin against his.

Their leave-taking,
this awareness that it's always possible,

that he might not see her again,
has become for him this sense

of her, loved, now leaving
through the opened door.

Somewhere Behind

In a corner of his mind – one he seldom visits –
lives a young woman – a young woman who works
in a small store selling essentials, in a dusty roadside town
whose name he can no longer remember.

Though she must be older now, he still remembers
seeing her, just once, in the kitchen beyond the counter
of the store where she was gathering, arranging,
meticulously slicing watermelon pieces.

He could not, at first, guess her age – she never once
looked up from her work. But then, a call for her,
outside in the store. She went to take it, did not
look his way, while the old woman behind the counter
handed him his order –

A young woman, light on her feet, but grounded,
at home with her body, at home with herself.
The imagined scent, the cool touch
of watermelon on skin. In a bone-dry town,
paralysed with heat. He no longer recalls

her voice, overheard, on the telephone –
just the sense of her he took with him, sheltered
and carefree, in her innocence, moving in the orbit
of her own confidence; although, even this –
what he remembers most
of that passing glimpse of her,
is steadily losing its clarity –
has become a feeling left somewhere behind.

IV

Tall Trees

Returning again
along the paths he walked as a child, a youth,

A man discovers the past he's buried
in memory, tattooed for an instant
on the surface of a lake.

He feels the breeze in the trees as a strange wind,

Feels the familiar lack
that has crawled out
from an empty corner of his heart –

And knows he has no voice
with which to cry that the old dreams

have fallen like tall trees in the forest of his past.

Imprints

i.m. Roland Burle (1937-1993)

Here again I conjure up your ghost,
as I slip on your shoes, do up the laces.
I see you walking ahead of me,
on the narrow path through the woods.
I picture you looking over this town as I do,
from the foot of a castle;
imagine what we'd say to one another,
here beneath a sky with no moon,
the first wandering stars –
you who, some years ago, were here before me
and who my words, once more, as before,
must go in search of . . .

Full Moon

Tonight the moon has come full circle
and I think I see, remember seeing
two figures, walking slightly apart,
a father and a son,
walking down the road under a full moon.

Not yet having said their goodbyes,
they walk slowly, no sound but wind
stirring through the trees, the surf,
its echo, emptying itself endlessly
up into the mountains, into the night.

They walk on. Between them, still,
the things they'd disagreed on.
But as always, like a friendship –
there as an accompaniment,
was the cool and brilliant moon
climbing steadily through the sky.

It was one of the last few times they
were to meet – like that, at any rate.
And, although they could not see it then,
from where they stood, a path of moonlight
must have laid itself across the sea,
shimmering restlessly then, as it does tonight.

Tonight, a path of light still shifts
across the water, beneath that moon.
And I, who was once that son,
am reaching back along it
to find a way back to that night.

But there is none; and you are gone.
There is only the moon, furious and cold,
the things I never said, but wanted to,
that now cannot be said.

There is the
moon which, though grown full once more,
carries more the memory of an emptiness,
of all that which was, which cannot be,
and out of which we make (or not)
this thing called poetry.

River

The broad sweep of the river, pollen drifting.
The shadows of trees on both banks
resting on its surface.

Faces that rise up through the water –
emerge, disappear.
Faces that rise up to meet yours.

The river's brown surface glides past.
A canoeist steers past
the arm of a dead tree.

Try not to forget, try not to remember,
all that's passed by, all that's sunk forever.

Cemetery

Above the graves, in rows,
trees nudge skywards;
flowers, being no more
than flowers, do what flowers do.

The traffic, because it is
relentless, surges past;
people, since they
are people, hurry by

the damp stone walls
of a cemetery.

The earth, having nothing else
to pursue, returns
to its old habit which minds
have long ago assigned it,

of waiting silently,
waiting patiently;
the earth, one could conclude,
builds no walls round death.