

Winter, Street

Outside,
a young couple amble down this street with a small white dog
on a lead, the girl young and still thin, her boyfriend on a bicycle,
circling her in safety jacket and helmet, wobbling for her,
sketching circles round her, feeling his way, agog
or ashamed, silent with her laughter, his love for her strong
or fickle just now, we can't know, nor what he will do to her.
I am out under the weakening light in the slow street.
Their white dog trots past on its lead, its world full enough
and mine the slo-mo pyrotechnics of a street
of leaning fences, broken gates, scrappy trees and greasy concrete,
damp swirls of late leaves and these gritty trouser cuffs.
Two trees by my gate, giants, know the history of this experiment,
sigh in their old blind ecstasy as the white dog trots away proudly,
mindlessly.

Later,
with light peeled back to the night's dark self,
with birds subdued,
when it's dark enough we switch the light back on
so lines of print can spring from their page
black-bright, each letter deep in the shadow it possesses,
each serif a swoon on a precipice. Each dark word in a book
can unhitch street, mind, senses. A curved page shivers in the hand,
anxious and blind. The young couple will fall
into bed unaware of what my two great trees would have them know,
those two muffled pedants making their one leaf-shaped idea breathe
in shaky circles into air that swirls and turns with all of us,
that dog and girl and boy, what we have here, this winter, street.

The Sublime

at 86 and 91 they are still together
more or less
and greet me at the door
as if I am the punch line to a joke
they were just recalling

my mother staggers sideways in the drive
my father reaches for a wall, a rail, an arm
with the urgency telephones demand

they know what it is now
and do their best to hide this knowledge from us
agreeing to be forgetful and ever more frail
they can't help grinning at the picture they must make

they must be driven to appointments
my mother toys with the idea of a new knee
my father trembles to the tiny drum machine
beneath his ribs

and their eyes go cloudy, ears a solid silent blue,
their mouths half open to let out the unspoken
because they know what it is now

the small days come, flowers in the garden,
drugs delivered to the door, postcards in the box outside

she has a sturdy stick to hold down against this earth
tapping as if to wake someone down there

a warning they are coming

London

Summer, London, and the terror continues.
Union Jacks throw out their chests
pubs put out their tables and chairs
sirens squeal with the same old news
sunsets ripen in the languid West
over parks, shops, apartment blocks.
Railway stations buzz, taxis slide away
a double decker bus does the original tour again
and politicians are still taking bribes.
Christians stand outside their Parliament
saving marriage for the decent.
The terror is everywhere, you can feel it,
no one's safe, WikiLeaks just won't go away,
the world's pain is here, you can see it,
track it. Monuments gleam,
the Queen is still alive, her city will endure.
We are the ones who walk the streets
and ride the Tube, a guard at every door,
the river slides away grey, disgusted, fast,
dipping as if pursued beneath each bridge,
rolling muddy souls along its bottom.
It's summer and the old oak boats in Fens Creek mud
are raised, stinking, into the hands of puzzled archeologists
who might as well be poets
for all they know for sure about the past.
I slip my black shoes on without a plan,
panic at the sight of motorbike police screaming
through the streets, the air electrified
everywhere you go, barriers and walls,
the river high, the grass so warm
we lie out in the green day wherever we can,
heedless and terrified.

I am not myself, I know,
not the one I'd hoped to find.
We manage this destruction in the bones of the mind,
the butchered sinews of the self,
we march across the room to brush our teeth
and dress each day, mad men, crazed women,
children on a causeway made by giants.

This, Once

I loved her voice
before I saw her mouth,
I found her with a better plan
than I deserved.
We live now in the deepest caves
within each other.
The prophecies, always here,
have touched us.
The tired news is brighter every night.
Each life's invented once for this.
I loved her future self
before I knew her.
I found her with a better heart
than I could bear.
I bowed before her long before
I fell upon the path that found her here.

Salt

The boat is leaking on the waves that lift
it over seas of ethics, salt and horrors
of what lies defeated on the sand below.
Passengers are crowded on the deck.
No one here's the captain of their soul
and all the angels are out of sight.
Sirens sing a nightmare tinnitus,
an inked horizon circles round the passengers
just beyond the price they can afford to pay.
The boat is a leaking, drifting, blistered tub.
Its cracks are visible. The people, are they people,
whose people are they, their salty shirtsleeves
on fading bodies, night still in their eyes,
above them the ordered sky of heaven's border,
the people, they sway against each other.

Mehmet puts out his hand, dark and cold.
The deck's awash with grime and foam.
He's pleased to be above the waves, he says. The boat,
it is leaking, always leaking, its ropes untied,
its blunt, uncertain nose the last direction home.

The Church of Madonna dei Boschi Piemonte

(Outside the town of Boves in the Province of Turin)

The church is open for mass at eight-thirty
each evening, its altar a cloudy swirl
of bronze, plaster walls curved to the ceiling
covered in holy illustrations, every
inch an opportunity taken for a visual lesson.

Close to the altar: a pregnant teenage Mary,
her mother's hand on her daughter's womb,
their heads in towards each other, eyes unfocused,
no Veronese angel, no golden dove's coo
above this virgin shocked, reluctant, blessed:
this is the daughter confessing to the mother,
asking what she should do now, and what will
Joseph say—what will become of her—
and will her mother put her out, or will
she put one hand upon the child in there,
the other on her daughter's heavy waist
so that her daughter knows they both will share
what happens now, whatever happens.

After that, a donkey braying in the background
as a newborn child is laid upon the stable dirt.
There is a donkey that brays each morning
on these hills, I hear it, coarse and long, loud
and primitive, twice or three times it rings
then not again till early the next morning.

The painter has given the child's arrival song
no baby angels, trumpets, wise men, shepherds,
just this donkey, its neck stretched, mouth open,
lips straining. It is such a convincing donkey
the painter must have had one near to go by.

Then the brand new family escapes the slaughter
of the innocents, that donkey on the path,
Mary balanced on its back, her baby close.
The donkey's head is down in concentration
on its task.

Next, a priest holds up a knife. The knife,
painted white, is at the centre, everyone
is looking at this upright, gleaming knife:
the knowing infant Jesus naked on
his mother's lap, his genitals exposed
for the coming circumcision.
I see then that his sacred genitals
have been scratched away.

I go back to scenes of hell on arching walls
near the door, tattooists' dreams of naked
scenes in hell, our mortality done in skeletons
where blue-black demons toss pink-fleshed peasants
into the jaws of a giant snake
and a queue of worried, naked villagers
shuffle down to their abyss.
The genitals of every naked man are scratched
back to bare plaster. The high priest's knife will never
do its work in this church-cave in the Piemonte hills,
hills where partisans fought for freedom until
whole families and towns were slaughtered,
their old names listed on stones beside the roads
up to this church where the hills are green and wild
and locals now complain of wolves
returning to the mountainsides.

A donkey meditates against a wall,
farm dogs bark and bark along the valley,
some local children pass on bikes as three
or four parishioners arrive.
The priest, in cassock, puts out his missal
on the altar and I hear him sigh.

Walking,

we turn into a side street, turn again
into a lane, then
down a short dead end
to where rusted tin, a black cat and red wheel
barrow wait for us below a peeling date palm.
This is perfect, you say.
The cat turns its back but does not leave
us to the late light slanted straight at us.

We walk past a cramp of new apartments
where I tell you once
a warehouse burned all night
bringing locals out from dreams and fights
and late night televisions to watch this something
happen, its arcs of steamy water, smoke that
blackened the black night above sparks and thuds
of objects falling large as dinosaurs.

We walk to wooden steps above the rail track,
stand with broken glass, abandoned bottles
and strangely you bend low and reach out
like a priest or a scientist
towards thrown down cups and glass chips
to retrieve a perfect five dollar note.

Yesterday my drunken friend said he liked to talk
heart to heart but with his head still awake.
I'm relieved you don't want me to smile or talk.
Enough, the years of local weather at my face,
this late full light springing tears to my eyes.
Most poets, you say, have bloodshot eyes.

We turn into a side street, smell roasted coffee,
find shade that grips blank doors and factory walls,
out of the sun's last shot at its circus of the fiery.
Just behind Brunswick, as it always does, the old sun rolls
into that dark slot in the far horizon.

Australian Street, Summer

He noticed parrots were coming back into the street thanks to the new council policy of cultivating scrappy, stunted native trees along the verges of the streets around here. The trees attracted insects and many new birds. The native trees dropped their leaves, shed their bark, in fact acted as though they were on a forested slope of bush land, the houses mere temporary structures that would bake and crack and fall apart as everything does in the Australian bush. He noticed that people had begun putting out water bowls for the smaller birds and sunflower seeds for the parrots. Houses were becoming neglected, downpipes splitting, gardens left to become leafy, stony, lizard-infested forest floors. Rose bushes were overcome by new grasses. He expected wallabies any day. The trees had brought with them a new philosophy and a new dispensation, probably a new constitution too. The sky turned a deep still blue in the afternoons as time gathered to itself the forces of geological eons. It was an inhuman couple of hours each afternoon, hours that stretched a little longer each day. He wished he had a job to go to. No one should have to witness this kind of transformation in their own street. What had the council been thinking? The sun sat tightly over the street each afternoon, convincing those trees that they would be the last things standing here. He went out with a plastic bag in his hand and bought sunflower seeds at the supermarket.

Fawkner Cemetery

On the Hume Highway near the Fawkner Cemetery there is a hole in the ground. Toby says it's the beginnings of a volcano. This part of the country is a wide, mostly flat volcanic plain. The earth is mostly clay. The last volcano on these plains exploded 30,000 years ago, he said, the blink of an eye in volcano-time. Listening to him, I remembered climbing up the side of a volcano in Bali last summer, and I know that there would be heat, steam, smoke and a hollow feel to the earth if there was a volcano here. Toby wants to see these northern suburbs explode and sink into an enormous hole or disappear beneath bubbling lava. He is that kind of dreamer. Ann says the hole is a peep-hole. And people do peep into it.

The hole is there near the footpath between two bluestone rocks not far from a pedestrian crossing. Those who know about the hole visit it for its two remarkable qualities.

Firstly, the air that comes up out of it is pure, cool, and perfumed with a scent that makes you inhale and then inhale again. I have told Toby that this is one reason it could not be a volcano. He gives me that look, and twists the neck of his T-shirt. When you inhale the air moving up out of the hole you think of beautiful landscapes. I think of beaches with sand dunes behind, and on the sand dunes small, endangered birds at rest after flying across whole oceans. The grass on the dunes is bent but strong, the air prickles and the sun wants to rest on the horizon after working all day to keep us alive. The scent sparkles in your mind.

The second quality of the hole is its blackness. The darkness in the hole swallows the strongest torchlight. Nothing can penetrate it. The hole is now the size of a skull, maybe a basketball. It is slowly increasing, and we know this because we keep dropping larger and larger items into it.

Ann dropped a purple pencil case into it yesterday. She said she had stolen it from her best friend on her last day of primary school. She had always felt bad about keeping it. The hole seemed to widen a little after she dropped the pencil case in.

Difficult

It is difficult to choose the reader for this poem.
I have left its windows open
so you might as well climb inside
where you can be safe for now from weather,
and though your sudden presence feels intrusive
think of yourself as a museum visitor
to a reconstruction of a life now silenced.
The bed, I know, has not been made
but the silver cutlery on the formal dining table is meticulous.
You will not be roped out of any room
and you can be confident
the writer left before you and your party arrived.
The place is left as realistic as anything you might write yourself.
Dirty clothes (for instance) are piled into a predictable straw basket,
their odour not quite human,
though the stiffening socks were plainly meant for feet.
It is difficult to choose a visitor
who must arrive by chance.
Parents too are difficult to choose
though they're chosen all the same.
The plain truth is the bricks outside are wet with rain
and now you find yourself inside
the couch is sprinkled with the drops that just blew in with you
through the curtains of the open window.
Sounds of possums in the poem's ceiling must distract you,
a blackbird in the yard outside is startlingly alive,
the cat in here will stay asleep despite your tread,
and a green bin steaming with the evidence of wasteful life
in a corner of the kitchen is what you've come to expect from art.
The lived-in emptiness of every room
makes it difficult to choose a reader for this poem.
No meal has been prepared and no money has been left
in an envelope with your name on it.

The vases are all empty.
A man has written this you must suspect.
Blue sky outside presses down on us its single thought.
A green and oily ocean's creeping closer every century
and an ochre desert lies less than three thousand kilometres away.
It is difficult to know what is the greatest threat to this poem:
reader, silence, landscape, weather or its absent occupant.

A Week in Jamieson

After five days away we're drying clothes on all the chairs,
running out of fruit, bread, breakfast cereal, alcohol;
sleeping later, lying in our beds until our sleep-suspended limbs
match the trees that stand around outside all day
seemingly with nothing much to do.

We get up in the middle of the night to watch European soccer.
A dozen packs of cards and no tin to bake a cake in.

Taps and eaves drip. Wombats own the land.

Their tunnels curl down under the roots of these river trees.

We find ourselves on a map.

From this valley the thing to do is walk
until old injuries in hips and ankles tip us back to bed;
we shower under reluctant water;

wear thick socks, scarves and gloves to buy milk and
the shop is out of everything by the time we get there.

At night we toast each other. History is here in magazines
where everyone we know looks younger.

We spend hours translating into French and back into English
To Kill a Mockingbird until we realise it was not written
in English in the first place.

Somehow there are leaves across the carpet.

The house eats wood by the barrowful;
at the end of our stay we will spread ashes outside
under the trees, their lesson for the week;
we take more lemons, thick-skinned, juice-packed,
from the brittle dripping tree at the back.

The kookaburras watch like cops on a stakeout.

The wombats move so slowly we do not see them.

The stars are too close, too many, spilled everywhere.

The river runs like a perfect machine past us.

Mount Terrible waits for us, idly moving leaves about,
keeping its damp head in the clouds.

After a week away we cannot imagine a place
where the trees do not outnumber us.

David

Michelangelo's David is being restored by a 45-year-old single woman who adores the eyes of David and has examined but will not touch the genitals. 'Someone else will have to clean them', she says.

(The Weekend Australian, 14.2.04)

His flesh the last stone in his arsenal,
His soul its own solid cloud of marble,
In his hair dark globs of fallen wax
From those who covered him in candles
To see each detail of his human form,
The better to plug their hearts with this stone.

His heart is a model prisoner
Ringing its harmless knuckles on his chest.
His manhood barely begun, his thoughts
Just now take shape above his eyes
And in the crushing, passive hollow
Of his right hand that holds the future
Still and small as a bird or river stone.

This moment loose, airy, unbalanced,
As if extinction will be nothing,
And no giant a match for these details—
She cleans 40 square centimetres a day,
Her solvent rag and brush, her fingertips, her heart
Sending shots of heat into the body of the boy.

And now she is near his left nipple,
His hand large enough to cup her head.
Each night the marble weighs
Against her sleep: its pits, its cracks,
Its gaps filled with centuries of acid touch,
Black scum between his fingers—
He is a boy without a mother.

Each day his face is altered for her—
All the thinking here belongs to him.
He is everything he appears to be.
His eyes drilled into his own mind
Dream of lightning strikes and hammer blows,
Yes, and of those who crawl over him
Unexpected, curious as rodents.
Under her hand each day he keeps still,
Vast with the future, endless image of life—

She cannot imagine the giant above him
But must, for there is always a giant, for every child:
This lesson in memory, this boy waking
To his future son and love a form in air.
Her brushing touch a lover taking time into herself.

Negotiations

My eleven year old son asked for a pay rise today.
What does this mean?
Secretly, is he working for me?
Unknown to me, have I employed him?
Casually, permanently or on a short term contract?
He speaks to me as if I could be his employer:
everything's all right as long as the expected payments arrive.
Then there's little need for contact until the next instalment.
Is that right?
Meanings shift as quickly as the possible uses of parents.

Am I now to negotiate payment to my son to take the love I give
and ignore the cruelties I administer?
Is that the work he does?
When he asked for a pay rise I had to ask him
what he was being paid at present
and five dollars a fortnight did seem a pittance.
But then he was taking a good deal in benefits
I pointed out
and with an increase in wages he might be given responsibilities
beyond his ambitions.
I notice he keeps in his bedroom drawer a collection of wallets
and his pig grows fat with coins
telephone booths give up loose change to him
and gutters wash treasures up at his feet.
What is the silver flash I see in his blue eyes?
He talks to the bundled cat now, convincing it of something.

After Rain

There are six thousand languages still spoken on the planet
and within each one the word for rain makes people look at the sky.
As it rains outside the radio talks low in the kitchen,
those small dry voices going on, reassuring me.
When the rain is here the sound of it is better than thinking.
My son asks me if a baby could be taught to speak
every language on the earth and we agree it might be possible
if the rain keeps up to teach a baby anything we wish.
The rain makes pairs of us, it muffles wars and panics ants;
the rain gives all its knowledge to the earth;
and after rain the birds around here have much to say.
They're out there now like children let out of a classroom,
shaking themselves on Anna's roof and in the bottlebrush
where there must be mouthfuls of insects like lollies in the air.

Tulips

1

The tulip does not know the theory of tulips
not even the basic concepts.
No tulip can find a way in to the cup of its own head,
to the six black fingers in its mind.
The history and anthropology of tulips
must be left to insects.

2

Of ten tulips in a blue vase,
each petal a new wounded pink,
each stem curved against the planet's spin,
each thick science-fiction leaf curled
in chemic shadows back on itself,
—who is it first decided they must live
as if they are the world?

3

And if the theory is beyond the tulip
how is it still this thing dreaming,
this slow, slow candle burning
up from the water in a vase,
its head dipped in air,
its one tulip-shaped word unfolding?

4

Salvation is an urgent issue
the latest pamphlet in my mail box tells me
and as each tulip spells its name
by dropping flame by flame
its petals on the table
I am saved from seeking any other message.

The salvation of the tulip cannot be imagined.
If I could find the silence it has chosen,
take up its weight of dreaming shape and colour
and be loved like this for dying
I would lie beside you now and hold you
and it would not matter that no word is spoken.

The Afterthis

The dead are talking to each other,
they have lost interest in us and our opinion of them.
Their new adventure is now all-consuming
though they have arrived at it unprepared
and know it will have no end, unlike this place.
Its decay will be endless, its weather pointless.
To the dead we might as well be dead.
Yes, they have traffic problems, status anxiety,
hideous over-crowding in their cities
of filth and drift. There is too much of it, they say.
Who sends so many souls so quickly
to this oblivion without sleep?
Arrival, always arrival, always souls arriving
and no one leaves.
The new arrivals need to be shown the ropes, the maps,
they need to understand the housing problem,
the reason for the smell and the trick of waiting
forever until forever occupies an instant.

Cities of the dead spill across horizon after horizon.
(There is no end to them.)
Always the new arrivals must learn to speak again
and cannot at first grasp the magnitude of death,
the length of its freeways, the size of its shopping malls,
the way the air fills with kites on a rare uplifting day.
Wars fill suburb after suburb, and everywhere babies.

There are no earthly feathered angels,
only the kind that existed here before death came.
They're the ragged, weary, egg-shell angels
the dead try not to tread upon.
No one understands their tongue,
taught to them, they say, in a Heaven
beyond this only death we can ever have.

When you arrive at last and settle in
you will ask the usual questions over drinks
with old friends and new neighbours—
What is it all for? What does it mean?
Is this all there is? What now?
until like the rest of us you tire of talk
and turn to your own insubstantial dreams,
secret, strange and death-pale.

How to Read a Poem

is too modest and private an aim
when you could learn

How to build a home inside a poem

or *How to talk a poem into introducing you to her family.*

You might instead of merely reading a poem

wish to learn *How to bake a poem*

for months, then take it from its oven

with your burning fingers imprinted on it.

How to resist a poem is a hardback volume

invaluable to lachrymose and sentimental readers.

How to misread a poem is a necessary read

for the salvation of your own poetry,

as is *How to make a poem tell the truth*

and *How to be smarter than a poem.*

For those who understand the social occasion of the spoken word,

How to take a poem out to lunch

can become an expensive pleasure and a puzzle for the lips.

The book and video, *How to workout with a poem,*

comes with Rilke's Panther Brand leotards

and promises eloquent beginnings to new relationships.

You will be relieved to find still in print,

How to put a poem back on the shelf,

And that *How to get a refund from a faulty poem*

requires a standard form unavailable anywhere.

How to replace the batteries in a poem

should not take more than a minute to understand.

Forty-Five Years on a Bicycle

The bicycle-keel counterweights him as he takes a corner
more smoothly than the delivery van driver who rattles up the gutter
and blasphemes against his cyclist's devotion to a curving idea.

The bike beneath him is his insect double
humming plagues on cars and trucks.
It is all spokes and handlebars, subtle brakes,
an exoskeleton with silver guards and leather saddle;
this insect takes the man above it through unlikely gaps
sliding buoyant on the rim of death.

Under him the bike is in another element
translating wildly as it goes his legs and arms and torso
to the chirring speech of wheels and gears
that slice down waves of air,
a sciagraphy of shadows on stunned sunlight.

Its pencil lines barely needing three dimensions—
the bike is an idea that found us dazed, unwheeled,
it chained our legs to its ease, made speed
a fizzing ear-filled water-eyed human thing.

The bike is a dream of low flying,
deep diving in air against the bluff of wind,
it teaches us hills and timing, slides us into curves
like a poem that, at last, fits this world.
Even the map of our country is the outline of a rider
crouched over a machine of wind and motion,
a dragon shadowed by its jockey
whose shape strains to hold in the spin
and dip of the planet's waves, sand, ice.

A bird flew beside me keeping pace
waiting for the lift from my handlebar-wings
touching time with time, feather with frame,
until it was satisfied I was no fish of air
but a flightless bird or hapless insect overgrown,
or a hallucinated memory of the nineteenth century
and left me with this truth.

Morning

I teach them routines. In the morning it is breakfast
then piano practice followed by recorder
and don't forget to put your lunches in your schoolbags.
Habit is the tranquil discipline I hope they learn.
Then we walk to school. I wheel my bicycle beside them.
Sometimes we string out along the path
and bunch again at the railway crossing or the lights.
My eight-year-old son stops at a vandalised council bench
and finds a twenty-cent coin which he will hold in his hand
until we reach school, where he will ask me
to put it in my pocket because of the school rule
against children having money.
My daughter, eleven, strides ahead, swinging a book in her hand.
Legs now long enough to leave me behind,
she releases the world from sleep as she enters it.
Her blue eyes are brittle with sunlight when she turns to us.
I think of the round new O of a warm cake or a slow piano
she might walk her fingers over as she learns a new song.
Her piano teacher says her music is still inside her
and now she is good enough to send it out.
At school they kiss me, business-like as birds,
and leave me by the school fence
with other parents also suddenly at a loss
but wanting not to show it.
I want to shout a last message—
some kind of reminder to them.

From the school it is uphill to work,
pedalling as though to wind up my life
to make it go for another day.
Through a narrow gate into a cemetery
I ride down a curving drive
as workers grumble past on scooters
or trim the grassy edges of graves.

They sweep and dig to keep the cemetery alive.
Graves like fallen doors fan across the hillside.
I pass an angel who looks out over my head
to the flat grassland paddocks west of the city.
The angel has a sword in one hand and this worries me.
Marble tombs with photo-portraits of the dead crowd up
to the drive as if envy inches them daily closer to the roadway.
I lean over the handlebars and ride through my future here.
At the other end I risk my life to pick a gap in traffic
and cross to the university where a peppercorn tree
studded with cicada shells points the way
to another enclosed city of paths and doors,
to another form of stillness.

At the end of the day I will ride back past that angel
who has never seen a sunrise and will never raise that sword
against whatever is coming at us.
I will be taking with me a moving shadow, a fearful heart,
and in my pocket a warm coin my son might need.

What I Believe

(title of a book by Leo Tolstoy)

I believe the world is round like a ball and spins through space.
This belief helps me get along with neighbours and work colleagues.
Without it I would be mad or sick, I believe.
I believe there are human footprints on the moon.
This belief helps me to bear watching television news.
I believe that money is the shadow of infinity,
that I will die and know nothing about it.
I believe you are like me.
This belief, I believe, makes me a fool or an optimist.
I believe most of us mistake the present for the past,
and that the future is the past;
that what is right is nearly always obvious,
that belief works best as a necessity or a distraction.
I believe the universe is a dangerous place.
I believe that God is an elaborate and mediocre idea,
that panic is our companion,
and travelling through space will be the last of our tasks.
I believe the purpose of all this is the creation of memory.
I believe most beliefs are yet to be discovered.
I believe in what is most fragile and uncertain,
the paragraph for instance, or clouds; rain; leaves.
I believe death makes love possible,
and that if you do not train them at once your beliefs
will bark all night.

13 *Ways of Looking at a Beer Bottle*

1

After 18 months of drinking
we were inside, drinking,
when our backyard pyramid
of beer bottles rolled downhill
making us duck, automatically, for cover.

2

I have a friend who hides
one or two bottles in the front garden
before going in to a party.
Insurance, or ritual?
Time capsule, he says.

3

In the street
I was hit over the head with a beer bottle.
At the same time the woman I was with
had her long magnificent hair tied round a pole
and I kept shouting at our attackers,
Why? Why? Why? Why?

4

A used beer bottle inspector
will check for cigarette ash in the bottom,
butts, nail clippings, false eyelashes, syringe needles,
Tatts tickets, matches, tears,
and old stories with inarticulate endings.

5

I leave empty beer bottles at the flats next door
—under the stairs—
where they'll be collected by the old bottle-oh
who pushes a trolley through the streets.
As each bottle is emptied
I know I work for the last of the bottle shepherds.

6

The aluminium beer can resurrects the beer bottle
as a romantic object, reminder of the days
when life was softer on the lips,
when afternoons glowed tan, clinked gently
and rolled to the dipping corner of the room.

7

The beer bottle's assumptions:
either you're drinking with two or three others
or you have your own large thirst
or you don't mind finding your third beer flat—
while the can:
the can knows you're in the car, alone, guzzling,
and you'll need to toss it away before you get home.

8

On the bottle.

9

I was of no mind
like a row of forty
emptied beer bottles.

10

A man and a woman
A man and a woman and a dozen beer bottles
Twelve labels and two navels and another night pouring its darkness out

11

Somewhere in Australia I know
there is a giant beer bottle
constructed out of beer bottles
and inside this giant beer bottle sits a man
whose mind holds an image of a beer bottle
made out of thousands of smaller beer bottles,
with each beer bottle reflecting on its surface
images of other beer bottles until,
one day, that man will be the only soul
in Australia who truly understands
the meaning of eternity.

12

What a bottler.
Bottle it.
No, can it.

13

Oh pot-bellied men of Australia
why do you imagine golden bottles?
Do you not see how the bottles' shards,
barbarous and glamorous,
are smashed at the feet
of the women about you?