

# FETCH

*for Nick McInerney*

Of course, you say, we have heard this story  
before  
but have forgotten. Tell it again, fetch it up.  
I can see you now, present and  
quick –  
sixteen, all bluster, you carried your canoe to the river  
and capsized quickly, your  
open life-jacket snapping up to pinion and  
drown you.  
Hopelessly, radically embodied, you thrashed  
sucked water and began to die and suddenly  
knew  
how to receive your  
suddenly expected release. Somewhere above  
wings  
had ceased to beat and all your parts  
jigsawed  
into the whole, cured flesh of a corpse.  
You conjured yourself solely into the world's mind  
into the river – a white, still, fetch.  
And present and quick you smelled with your new  
fresh heart  
coffee, morning, a girl's hair.  
And of course it can all be explained you say –  
some brain impulse, an electrical trick



## PASSENGERS

i

*Arachnologists know*  
*most species 'balloon' at least once in their life-cycle:*  
gripping leaf or stem the spider lets spin

from its abdomen a length of silk; a sail  
streams onto air and the creature lets go  
closing its genetic deal

with thoughtless probability: soaring,  
spider head not wondering  
if it will dive into the sea or desert or an eye –

no hope, but a good chance –  
it bides a drop into new habitat:  
some temperate archipelago.

And those other passengers, those seeking  
legal death, sex, contraband, illegal work  
in empires far from birth – all travel thousands

of kilometres on unseen  
transnational winds: insects, spores, seeds,  
algae: slave, fugitive, refugee:

*aeolian plankton*: the naturalists' happy name  
for steady rain: tens of millions  
alive and dead – tiny bodies

fill the troposphere, observed  
and hypothesised. *Though many die* this is how  
*the charred remnant of Krakatua was revived.*

## DAILY

Desire and action are the same  
just confess  
The one inclines into the other like  
Faith dives into Works

In the dream I killed the horse  
and left on the man  
My teeth dissolved into my  
shut mouth a hidden pulp

I want to tell the truth  
about myself or someone  
to find me out  
There is neither man nor woman slave

nor freeman in Christ Jesus  
said the dark alley to the train  
I admit it feet up  
reading in my free paper

*Tourist Rolled By Crocodile*  
*Dies Quietly Of Surprise*



## STRUCTURE OF THE HORSE'S EYE

Under the sun, the horse's eye  
is a glass dome over a petal, the pupil a raised bud  
of pollinated velvet, bisected;

the horizon in it. Almost 360 –  
a narrow corridor behind  
and one spot in front of her nose, are blind.

Curious about the wolf? Find a fat horse  
grazing at dozey noon her home paddock;  
try to creep up.

In the waking night her eyes are flat opals  
bouncing your torch as you pan the black  
like a river for green-gold flakes,

or better; go sightless to hear  
the known rhythm coming out the dark.  
Within, the *tapetum*, mirrorlike, reflects all

available light back through her retina –  
*Homo sapiens*, one of few mammals  
lacking this useful aid, to nocturne,

mostly sleeps. *Equus* watches on her feet.  
Sometimes a night visit sets them off –  
swilling around you like surf in a tide pool

pushing the long bones  
of their heads at you. The honest creature  
investigates with her face, magnolia

nostrils cupping the scent  
of palms up empty at arms length. Your image  
shone back on the convex surface of the eye-pool

is macrocephalic, duck-billed, your skull  
a helpless baby too heavy for itself.  
If you want to better love the world,

ask counsel of those who never come inside;  
her order, *perissodactyla*  
(large mammals with odd numbered toes)

have largely failed. Taxonomy  
progresses, dividing its names. Sometimes a life,  
pressing on, proves its point

but Life does not. Let her advance –  
she is herself, through flowering heads; eyes careful,  
thinking nothing of advancement,

above lips tough enough to strip  
the exquisite thistle-crown from its armoured stem.  
How excellent is her tail! She draws all grass

through the bone-set strata of her teeth,  
grazing 12 hours in her open-lidded present –  
deep time made one dimension

by limited depth perception, wide world  
made pasture and shelter. Let her head's long neck  
lift to her clear-edged ear

whose hearing threads in darkness the Earth  
to its sky. Let her steady herbivorous day  
blink open and consume and close it all.

## LONGITUDE

The horse and I  
move on different axes – I the vertical increase, she  
the horizontal: measure of length and speed, her spine

long into landscape like a ridgeline:  
forwards like time. She orbits me on the long rein:  
my best thing. Still at the centre

of her circle, my love charts its latitude: her body  
my glowing focus, world blurred except where her feet,  
inoposible, make landscape land.

Where does a child learn to die for love?  
For the right gown to descend the right marble stair  
to glittering fortune – a being

we would step into like the body of a horse?  
Puritan, raging for fundament, waking each  
day with a start of hot despair –

still girl-human! We lay untransformed  
in bodies both too heavy and too light.  
Learning, each step on a horse

was a flag on a map: the bridegroom's heart,  
the Future. I bought her at first glance,  
her bright coat and its husbandry, her listening

that snaps from my voice to vigilance – her bounds  
further out than mine – then softens back  
to the giant calm that walks her, ageing, into lengthening

darkness of the paddock as she homes away  
from the empty halter, my broad loss  
in the lap of the familiar – twelve years of one template

horse that cannot requite me  
except in body's memory, trained both to the other's  
balance: an intimacy that bullies you

then freaks when you walk out of sight. She circles  
and I turn on my spot. My sun-dial shadow  
lays me standing in gentle grass, light as a choice,

tethered at the feet. She powers on, imprints  
rhythmic over my ghosted head, hands filled with rope,  
my voice that lifts to slow her: over

my tilted spine, turned falling from her years ago.  
We will never be one person.

*Good mare good horse good girl.*

## RECURRING

*for Petra White*

i

The best way to stop a loose horse –  
careening at you or off, rope hanging broken  
from her head like an arm  
divets hurling up like bones unsocketing

while you block the exit to the road, stranded  
in your spine like a mast  
becalmed, thinking *a fast car*  
*will explain me to her* – a gate left open or sometimes

terrorists and then a bunch of cops  
wrestling her to the ground under suspicion, guns  
to her terrified snaking head while you *don't*  
*hurt her!* sleep silently –

*if she only*

but she never turns back

– is to throw your arms wide,  
open your fingers like the unsheathed claws of a lion  
as if you would enfold her in the embrace of a bear.  
She'll always shy off – mutual convenience –

she doesn't need that love  
and you couldn't take her weight, waking you



## ILLUMINATIONS

Someone in a blue cloak belts someone else on the head  
with a shovel in the frame ruled  
for the sin of Rage. A French lady  
adjusts the robes of a unicorn held  
by a monkey whose rich commissioner kneels  
before his saviour on the first page. A dog  
contorts to lick his testes with a lizard's tongue.  
Below, a bird-footed dragon bites the head  
of a fourlegged man in an indigo tube  
while a snake with a corkscrew neck eats his toes.  
Pink turrets cower under currant-like projectiles  
from a giant mangonel: Jerusalem!  
Heretics swing jaunty from a mini gallow, weightless  
necks cocked like holiday hats round the pole: May  
in the Hours. In the initial the author  
sits under arch penhanded, familiar at feet  
like the pictured saint and lion or the open loggia  
of annunciation in some floppy headgear, a babewyn beneath  
aping his posture. Another monkey with a giant fork  
feeds turds to a nun from a shit-pyramid.  
The lion and his ministers rejoice and celebrate, eat and drink.  
I promise you: an astronomer  
in a red robe googles through an astrolabe.  
Rabbits conduct a funeral.



*from* LETTERS TO THE TREMULOUS HAND

iv *address to the hand as fellow scholar*

Are you a ghost? Luckily, yes –  
that's why I can see you

alone at your desk, eyes turned  
to your own ghosts. You mourn well –

put on the past like a perfume:  
walk in a cloud of it. Carry your head with you

seeking revenge on those who did you doom.  
One life is not enough

to copy and translate a lifetime's grief.  
Every sorrow

gets a new body, inherits distant letters:  
a past that never happened

or not in that way, to you  
and yet is no one else's – foundling

on your step, the mother fled or never born –  
no one to name it but you.

Do you tremble? Good. Better  
to write by: the hand moving without end, griefwheel

milling the past. Glossing  
*heolstor* hiding-place, your mark the ghost

of living thought, Time thought's winding-sheet.  
No-one at court loves our language.

Schools sold, teachers punished, scholars shamed:  
I am all your subject: you are mine –

life and works and time – each the others'  
elegy and grave and afterlife.

Dearest love,  
Neutral as love itself,  
Forged either in love or in hate  
For good or bad

Here are the instruments  
Of my hand: pencil, paper, wood, light  
Mine are the greatest news  
The worst tidings

Here are the instruments of  
My eye: light, handwriting, rowed spines, window  
Look how the night goes down  
Without our help

Instruments of my heart:  
window, wood, hand, eye  
Forged for good or bad  
Nothing is new, my page is sore

Here the instruments of your death:  
Hand, pencil, eye, spine, heart  
Neutral as love itself  
Nothing is new except my love



