

## Rupert in Japan

Prince Shotoku, who dedicated the temple at Horyuji,  
the moment he was born leapt up to pray  
fourteen centuries ago and quite unlike our Rupert  
who was six weeks till his first smile.

We stare at the deer. Now in Nara Prefecture  
eight months older, in temples of shopping  
and mountain air, his gestures much closer to thought.  
Existing in a state no one's ever known.

My book's page. Its black ink.  
And it's not quite prayer.  
More like paper's feel  
of the words.  
And a bell resounds.

## Song

Certainly winter. The house has twenty-six  
walls, I've done my tour of them all, yet  
I'll struggle to keep more than sixteen inhabited.  
It's like the war's going  
elsewhere and I'm abandoned.  
Only my little boy tugs at me as if  
I'm a balloon in the breeze that's letting go.

A day till they leave, Roberta and I  
outdo each other in kindness and care, like kissing  
on New Year's Day over No Man's Land.  
Perhaps this truce could last. Only  
tomorrow they'll both drift out the door.  
A trench is no place to be letting go.

## Lions in the Beach

Rupert punches policemen in dreams, then blinks  
at the beach,  
out of sleep leaping and spinning  
around in his underpants,

I punch the waves, he says  
and he then says Daddy it's scary on the telly  
when it roars. Little fella,  
lions are like that. You just change channels  
by speaking to them calmly.

So he roars  
goes back, to catching  
cops in  
waves, cartoons, he's asleep.

## Painting's Flatness

You're just a life  
to the thought that writes and would happily kill you.  
Certainty has its roots in Rage,  
art's perfection too. There's no other Holy Name.

But why?  
Why painting's flatness is so confronting?  
Because it is how we see.  
We are made to do nothing, sitting within.

If only surfaces were possible  
here in the imagination  
just to walk and to touch sincerely  
the ground.

## A Gift

Germanton, in Nineteen Fourteen  
needing a name change  
now has a submarine  
ninety metres long  
emerging from the main-street view;  
and is Holbrook  
Country New South Wales.

It's painted the pitch of night  
at a hundred metres underwater.  
Holbrook's sub hit ground  
in the Dardanelles, the sky  
a rain of missiles above  
and the air running out in fear.  
Submerged in a dusty park

on a street wide enough for drays,  
dwindling locals –  
at a hundred metres above sea level  
one hundred kilometres  
inland, his craft floats  
through this tiny, passing town forever saying  
we'll probably die here.

## Elegy

Round about this time of the year my father comes back to life.  
There are seasons of things and he is one of them.  
It's hard to know quite how to talk to him then.  
But he was so easy in his nature. I could mention his death  
or pretend, it wouldn't matter.

We make coffee in his ritual way, pouring the tiny cups  
just so. It's true we don't drink it anymore.  
It's obvious he wants to know of my child. When they're  
older they'll chat, and I'll leave the floor to them.  
That's how it would always have been. It was

one of our childhood mysteries, that ease.  
He asks about my travels – the last time we spoke  
was on a phone line from Tierra del Fuego.  
I can't remember a word we said.  
What do you do with their quiet?

## Red Square

After twenty-two years we catch up and the sense so desperately sad  
I can't name it till later how absent for ever the past  
that will unite us again one day here or there but never back then.  
My friend you've arrived  
for little, for nothing but this moment. Our friendship,  
our broached loss.

And the façade could not feel more desperately thin  
of inhabitation,  
now the past is beating all my skin like a drum.  
In Red Square, the distantly approaching,  
her face severely  
then a smile that melts.

# Stone Postcard

I

Here's your fucking rock, my actions said  
to the psychotherapist who had requested  
from my six months' travel in Tierra del Fuego  
I bring him back one. I plucked that eyeball,  
cancelling all future sessions, put it  
gingerly in his hand.

One time I usurped his chair  
which was the same shape and make as mine.  
He'd left the room for a minute  
and I swivelled in it.  
The closest I came to psychotherapy.

Actually I was crying a mouth full of grief  
an earshot of anger  
saying people in glass houses  
are obliged to throw stones

2 *from years earlier*

It's when you all speak in a circle of chairs  
though there are two wearing lab coats  
you feel close to equal, and each like a performing dog.

That's the stage: in the theatre  
of a glass-walled tram, and impressing at work,  
at conversation –

and shining at the family session,  
working off their responses, saying whatever you feel  
so as to star in the mirror chill

of the silver stethoscopes hanging off two motionless  
psychiatrists' necks.

It's convincing God that you're fine,  
in fact up there with the skies  
above this mess below.

In a circle. Her and us. Sat.  
The family, each clean white tooth of self:  
she only is insane.

Do stethoscopes speak of love? Who knows? –  
but not this day. The walls do it in their stead,  
their mirrors shining bright with smile,

a yacht race of white coats behind.  
Others speak you as you yourself don't.

It was during a break in the performance of the family smile that I walked up to one of the mirror-walls to stand at no distance and stare through. Drown in four millimetres of glass. Stand into the mirror up close the way you do when you want to disappear. Look into the black of eyes closed. The medical students, observing, behind our reflections, appeared. I hadn't known about this extra audience staring right through us. Our role was to be a family with two doctors as sort of drop-in guests and the psych ward was pretend home. I was trying to drown. But only in psychosis do the mirrors look at you really, and God doesn't know.

Something softens the blow of that stone postcard  
when it's called love, religion or pleasure.

Why would psychiatrists wear stethoscopes?  
Heart-beats have been known to deliver.

Or a wind flute,  
dear reader.

Like Orpheus I'd lead her (them) back from your dead  
where nothing is more out of control.

## Payable Thinking

Once in his lifetime, Ludwig Wittgenstein  
published a book, nothing else,  
and would now be unemployed,  
for failing to pay the tenure with enough philosophy.  
The writers of journal articles were ‘journalists’.

The last word from the Deans is ‘Don’t write books’  
– it is placarded on a huge pretence.  
Question: who’s pretending? Not us,  
our main job is to break the crust of what’s fake.  
Our dear old fakery, it’s from the Eighties, is satisfied  
with two articles annually as the target input.  
Burrowing and mining for a thought-through book?  
The wild target could be seven years, which is no.

This would be a pampered little gripe,  
but universities are a common house for a while  
to four in ten of our children.  
Actually, research has changed, from an activity  
that’s ongoing to a rash of little submissions,  
because these add up in units  
regardless of ‘that deforms my thought’ thoughts.  
The students get the ethos.

What is an MBA  
but a language of quantities that ignores local conditions  
to speak to them commandingly?

There is a language of goods held in common,  
public reasoning and parks among them  
in an older economics.

In the new, Government heaps up students,  
with a mutual hope, 'investment'. Common goods  
have rolled into 'the economy'.

Bought in bricks from academics  
busily manufacturing.

Andrew Wiles writes nothing for seven years  
in Princeton  
then in Nineteen Ninety-Four solves Fermat's Last Theorem.

## Data Collection

‘Um, I don’t know how to begin. I married wrong. My wife was a junkie. She abused our kids and then abducted them one day. I remarried. They grew up there in Glasgow. Their step-father drank the maintenance. He abused them too, but that’s only the background . . . her next guy wants to kill me.’ And at that she left us alone to get more paper. The police, collectors of stories.

(There’s only two mm’s in remember.)

‘Remember Community’, the typed sign reminds us.

‘I’m a bit anal, you see,’ that same man in the queue at the police station pointing it out (V-neck, tie, shirt, and ironed slacks),  
‘I notice mistakes  
I’m a software analyst.’

‘Oh I notice them too, I’m a teacher’ – looking up from my incident (the heavily drawn impact diagram beneath my pencil) report of a stranger reversing hard into my illegally parked car who saw no one there, and scrambled.

She came back.

‘You see, I’m dying’, his mouth typed out of her fingers: ‘Cancer,

my daughter's in Australia for a semester, was abused,  
she smokes, has premarital sex, steals my alcohol,  
last time she'll see me. Now the school counsellor  
won't let her out of the country. My ex-wife's  
boyfriend is coming out from Scotland to kill me  
I know he hasn't committed a crime  
yet so there's no way you can stop him but I guess  
I'm telling you so at least you'll know why, when  
I'm dead.' He was almost laughing now, absurdly  
fated to this, one who always notices mistakes.

I concluded my pointless report just then,  
no licence plate number, and the  
question echoed off his

why am I telling the police  
station this?

. . . ployment, Inemployment, Unemployment

I *Concerning the original ground of the world as  
the sum total of all objects of experience*

Tattooed from skull to shin, but blank-faced  
a man walks, love-hate knuckles tightening  
to the retreating sea of secretarial staff  
behind the counter where they try smiling.

He will probably not quite add up at *Employment Plus*  
the Salvation Army's drop in / be dropped out of  
a country where employment is voluntary,  
nor I, three Degrees tucked into me, ideas all over my face

not that easy to excise.  
Noses can be altered, not personality.  
And I surmise from Liz's 'workshop' that  
*observant* is the wrong one. She is teaching us

networking, and how employers value honesty  
over skills. She's already cut the benefits off  
two students for speaking  
out of their minds.

But not Tattoo-head! 'I'm not very honest', the words roll  
out of his mouth.

Liz goes blank, he looks scary,  
her skill the only skill  
is to cover-up, quite honestly.

2 *Ploy*

Four people now produce  
the food that in the nineteen thirties ate up the labours of  
seventy-eight  
and those four are still paid the same way:  
by the day.

Freud never wrote about ‘the ego’  
(someone else’s translation), it doesn’t fit his concept at all.  
The ego in German is das Ich.  
That is simply the I. I’m going to the shop now  
is not my ego is . . .  
It’s the way I mark myself  
grammatically  
and when we brush past:  
*The I is first and foremost a bodily I.*

Your sense of your own body –  
you can get it shopping  
which includes buying money with your labour.  
We pay them, we are paid, wages  
regardless of the desirability of the production.  
It can only get worse.

## Smudged Newspaper Photo

Among the names unlikely to appear in newspaper headlines  
is Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

Man's way of saying his daily prayers, he said,  
is now reading news stories. Yesterday in Iraq  
a policeman embraced a man blowing himself and him up.

And now with colour for blood. This distant news,  
aviaries of elsewhere in paragraphs of print.  
Down the road in the wind.  
But when that black ink comes pecking in your face,  
do you not know, the sky might ask, how to read?

It's simple, actually.  
Instantly knowing  
the stranger who opened his coat at the Baghdad market  
an Iraqi policeman ran up to embrace him  
and the burning in the breast  
of his murderer. Hundreds are saved from him.  
I don't know how to read. The pages  
are singing for us, though inaccurately, off-key.  
One by one, just turn the pages  
and receive their kiss.

## Planet, House

So many things are bigger than they seem.  
Cities rarely fit within their population.  
That keyhole has shelves,  
books, a bed, TV sets and a sink.  
Books are clearly more than they say;  
keys, inseparable from a wider machine  
of laws, are a perpetual hope of containing.  
And so is honesty, which at times  
hangs onto lies, along with virtue,  
violence and grace, an element of  
masturbation or at least nakedness.

## Coney Island

Coney Island dilapidates and is closed  
but there are forty thousand strong chanting  
Joey, Joey, USA,  
one of the men they're cheering a marine  
another in wrestler's mask, a third  
with a hockey stick as the pole to his flag  
BOO!  
and there's zok at stake  
in Nathan's famous Fourth of July Hot Dog Eating  
Competition. The record is broken by one  
but not without a fight from Matt Stonie  
only twenty-two, forty-eight dogs in  
ten minutes, has long hair and is small.  
No one's really fat, except Bad-Arse  
who puffed up the rostrum and no one  
pukes, though the judges squat in the 'splatter zone',  
and Rick Shea, compere in bowler hat  
says By the grace of God, I'll be buried six feet deep  
beneath the in'ersession of Stillwell and Surf.  
This is life and death.  
Brooklyn is the greatest city on the planet, USA, and it is  
as if every dubious patriotism  
ever on TV  
is by Rick surmounted  
with a widely-spread, delicious irony  
that doubles up language and shows us all  
to be more than we say.  
Or that we're nothing but it  
once dead. And art only works  
by a cunning, you might say hilarious simulation  
of more than it says. So Joey 'Jaws' Chestnut

up to his sixty-ninth dog and won,  
by eating two at a time then the rolls,  
a science. Now at the top of the world  
and exhausted, he can't see nor speak  
the mysticism of his labours, for he's a larder  
just fed an army  
a whole mess hall inside, in greater pain  
than the hot water bottle the strong man blew up till it burst.

## After Ginsberg, Almost

Princeton train station grey concrete.  
Car park white stripe.  
Drive from station through New Jersey green,  
new, yellow ears of corn.  
Pulling up to folks' house, tricolor of flag,  
white stars white stars white stars.  
The black of the black gloss transcribing device.  
White of cigarette, and grey gauze smoke.  
Conversation as it turns to Trakl  
greens and reds suffused.  
Dinner downstairs beige cloth on lap  
unfurled from white napkin ring.  
For dessert blueberries fresher than any  
in a painting, so fresh you blink.

## Observatory

Wind sounds like water  
birds talk in whistle tongue  
and this huge boulder I'm on cracks, over time  
without a noise that I can hear, none of it is human.

The ex-observatory, doors and windows  
bricked in to keep out vandals, stands deaf-mute.  
Its plaque, a metal tongue,

*From 1974 to 1998 mirrors placed by Apollo crews beamed  
their data to here.*

Nature has no doors, no windows.  
The kangaroos observe, also monumentalised.  
It's in the world of their surface.

## To Music

Guilty at not returning those CDs  
which I listened to strangely  
in the life that followed,  
one year on I decided to  
return them to a public library,  
the shelf of souls in circulation  
dead books and arias of divas  
unrevived until they're played.  
I couldn't say why they felt so guilty being Murray's,  
who was dead anyway.  
I placed them in the chute.  
I'd borrowed them from him a week before he  
– not died but suicided. The two things just  
don't gel. And now this morning  
a voice has loaned me its death, Montserrat Caballé,  
her darkest heights from Handel through  
Verdi, those never returning notes:  
it had never occurred to me they were his gift.