

## Rill

Water's fickle. Its uncalled-for free-fall  
over mangroves and patios fills

the monsoon afternoons with grand pianos,  
a flash-flood of fishes, the slapstick

of mudflats: lucky for some. A bucket or well  
will hold a week of sky close as milk

but a sleeve of silk is thirst from shoulder  
to wrist, water runs through its weave

like blood in a vein, its one unbroken thread  
bright as a road, tall and taut as a fell.

Left out in the sun, a land burns to saltpans  
and dustbowls, hands empty of gifts.

Like caliphs we wait for the snowmelt, first  
seep of spring in the ditch, its skeins

of wet felting the stones under mulberry, myrtle,  
till all we hear is this hurtle of newborns,

the clean clear voices of *acequias*, *alcantarillas*,  
the paddling scarlet feet of partridge chicks.

## Dovecot

The word is out.

Arrests are in progress, all the known names  
for whom this can't have come as a surprise,

the knock at first crack of dawn, the long wait  
in the dark, the pails of cold water over the face,

a choke of feathers like white noise in the brain.  
Outside in a field, nightfall lands softly like a crumple

of parachutes emptied of shock-troops,  
rapid-fire shadows of what could be snipers.

Roof-tiles take fright, fly up at the slammed sky  
through the shots, lights. The smell of suspicion

hangs around town like debris or smoke.  
Corpses are found on the outskirts: fox, hawk?

Authorities order more whistles and bells  
to put a stop to the trouble once and for all. Letters

have been intercepted, phone-calls garbled.  
Sources say the device was strapped to the bars

of a birdcage: under the iridescence and squirm  
a plastic contraption coos and whirrs like a toy.

The ridiculous flapdiddle of wings is a give-away:  
hawk, fox. The loft like a cathedral or fortress

is almost in sight. There is usually no warning.  
Meanwhile scraps of paper are sent to forensics,

scores more squabs under surveillance suspected of  
plotting. Squads of messages arrive and settle,

the air of the interior is rank with conspiracies,  
already thickening to dottle and catacombs.

The word is home.

## Grotto

Midsummer is where young men go  
to drown themselves

enclosed in the stone-dark of their bodies  
heading for the impasse

in single file on their knees blindfold  
a corridor of warmth

worming through the small matter of rock  
known for its nonchalance

its bird-bone holeyness and the liking it has  
for slow dissolution

distancing themselves from a world of ferns  
burnet moths girlfriends

too far to go back and farther from home than  
the walked-upon moon

till they arrive at a shoreline and the locked  
gates of a lake

where they must rest face-down in the shallows  
deep under England

like the completion of some unexplained task  
not wholly for love

## Nymph

*'What a delightful entertainment it must be  
to the Fair Sex... to pass their Hours  
in imitating Fruits and Flowers,  
and transplanting all the Beauties  
of Nature into their own Dress...'*  
Mr. Joseph Addison, The Spectator (1714)

Meanwhile, the women. Stitching  
themselves into a time and place  
that was never their own

sketching finicky self-portraits  
of lady's-slipper love-in-a-mist  
in sulks and pastels

pressing the breath out of petals or  
catching likenesses of night-moths  
in a flutter of sob-stuff

then garlanded with praise  
for the exquisite catastrophe  
of their femininity. But

with her hair as the engine a girl  
sits working the soft machinery  
of reverie

excusing herself from dinner  
weaving the ins and outs of  
naked moonlit flits

through tight-lipped buttonholes  
birdcage underskirts, needling  
into the hackled folds

of drapes and cat's-cradles of  
conscience, tracing the bare  
lanes of winter as far

as they'll fray into landscapes of  
April, restless and exorcising,  
mischievous as wheels.

## Prospect

Discontinuous with himself  
    he watches the agoraphobia  
        of parkland glide past its skies,

waving it on as if bringing down  
    a plane in a field, its spent engines  
        ploughing back as hard as they can

to a time when time was suspended  
    between the blue and the gold  
        and everyone sat facing the front

strapped gaily into their destinies  
    while the shires unfurled like scarves.  
        It was an aria sung on one breath,

a portrait of space, a mirror hung  
    where the lake could look at herself.  
        His hands are birds beating the glass.

## The Genius Loci

*'Consult the genius  
of the place in all'*

would carry words like *thicket* and *covert*  
to where a space has been waiting

midway between greensand and limestone  
would stay long enough for moss

would wash the grime of depressions  
in the white noise of ceremonial water

could begin to imagine how sunlight  
in the gold hoop of an eye

would muffle the racket of hooves  
the distant *passagiato* and klaxons

should consider whether wisteria  
or the parasol of plane trees

in a hurricane would arch closer to the heart  
discovering more uses for the dark

would line its absences with tiny drab feathers  
then slow-fill again with emptiness

which would take the shape of gratitude  
cupped like flitted pools of eggshell

in a dell of weathered claggy hands  
whose geography is blue-vein and mottle

## Topiary

*'We see the mark of the scissors  
on every plant and bush',  
Mr. Joseph Addison,  
The Spectator (1712)*

And here

is the statue stony as a Heron	of a tree or Cloud in one-legged prayer
like a small-leaved All standing poses	shadow-puppet of itself. are excellent for flexing

the long bones of the thighs, the roots  
of the feet. A flock of gardeners

settles briefly on a bush, clacking  
a thousand pairs of silvered scissor-hands

in snap decisions through the box:  
a Periwig on its hatstand, an Elephant

squatting on Milady's head, her Beehives  
and Birds' nests powdered with the formalities

of frost. Old age and death  
can be avoided:

pinch out the bud,  
hard-prune

all new extensions,  
adopt the posture

of a Pine, palms raised in  
namasté, blasting

into space.