

Prologue

Probably
I'll go that way
by sea
in a ship that sails in the night
and drops life-boats
like lifts down lift-shafts
onto storm seas below.

*

The sea will be glass
with ice breakers for flags.
If you look starboard
you'll see ink-rays, sparks.
My travel will be fast.
I will be lightning.

Travelling to My Mother Last Century

I step in a taxi, again. It takes me there fast
cutting the white dotted lines of highway
into miles of silence. Back to my mother
in the ship or the plane
reversing my steps, to see her curve
herself into her pillows, her red walls
her eyes not seeing me but a blur.
My mother calls to me from her place far away
in deep mind, where she has built a tower of knowing.
From her far tower, she can see the white gardens –
her Vita Sackville-West, the lighthouse, waves
still far away enough for her to remain in greenness
to inhabit, to dwell in the green light of Pre-Raphaelites.
She can read the mind of clouds.

kunanyi / Mt Wellington

After the storms

birdwing
glimpsed in a watercolour sky
– white
turning into winter mist

soft rain
on the mountainside
slides
in a lessening of less

bare stalks of trees near the summit
lean at an angle in a gale.
Time's a soft-tissue injury
a rift

threads broken
in the blanket-weave of leaves.
A vague purple shade of green
seeps into the dark.

There is no sound here.

I cannot speak rainforest or cloud.

Language

slips from me.

On Hearing the Bells of St John's, New Town

The rolling bells five minutes out of town
all out of sync with Greenwich
are still. No midnight toll of twelve
that in my sleep's thirteen
rings across the streets.

No hollow gong at dawn
no pealing sound in storms
no intervals to count the hours.

Who reads a book of hours
or marks this place in time?
Something soft that sang to silence
in a lordly way allowed
is gone, clear as birdsong
gone.

The brickworks have closed down,
their white noise has lifted from the hill
and I can breathe again with ease.

An angelus of sorts
has called us into silence.

A space inside me opens up
like the moon at half past day.

T is for Transference

Where once we looked through air
now glass stands between us like a wall.
This side, sand – that side, splinters.
The wall conducts the silences between us –
we wave bravely to each other
this side, that. Out in a field
there's a blue canvas room
for screaming. A balloon of a place.
The image moves aside
for its object, breaking
the tether. The balloon
floats, off-balance. Day
has no image of itself
just sky repeating into a mirror.

As You Left Home One Winter's Night

It's dawn but it's dark.

Winter. Your *Winterreise*

begins. But you don't want to wake.

I tried to wake you but you wouldn't, then you would.

If I knew then what I know now.

But there was the ticket, the passport.

Your father's ready. Names, numbers, labelled luggage.

The car is idling outside.

It's dawn but dark.

It's winter here but summer where you're going.

I've bought you coats and bags and clothes and phones

and all the usual clutter's jammed and folded.

You turn back to sleep. No no, wake up, I urge you

and you do.

Reluctantly you dress, foot-heavy. Swallow today's pills.

What if I never see you again.

The thought occurs, but does not stay.

What if I were travelling too. I could but don't.

I'm your taxi. Fate's unwitting Charon
your ferry, cross the Derwent
to deeper waters than you've ever known.

And then you're gone. Your plane's
a red dot slowly blinking in the sky.
Your brother and I drive home as blank as owls.

Your silence is everywhere around us.
Nothing's left behind, except a woollen jumper.
I'll post it to you. For Switzerland.

And so I buy a card – *LIFE!* is all it says.
But I lose it with my wallet.
When they're found, I wrap *LIFE!* in the jumper.

– *LIFE!* could reach you in a week,
before you get to Europe. But it will be summer there.
And still I do not post it.

At a point of no return
small as an exclamation mark's full stop
in Zurich's Needle Park – cleaned up

almost, but not quite –
you punctuate your life.
And you don't want to wake.

Red Angel

She's from the country of angels, I could tell,
her shadow behind her like a dark door.
Her hands were cupped as if waiting
to receive a globe, as if she were about to be Atlas
and carry my pain. Hesitant,
but finding me, or at least my shadow, waiting,
she touched my forehead with blessing.
It was some kind of comfort, in an empty church
on a weekday afternoon. No priest she was
and I, no Catholic, had come to light candles.
I'm just on an errand, she said, to buy a red bowl.
I hold, and she empties, my red story of loss
witnessed by birds in the rafters.
Outside as she leaves, her footfall is soundless.