**The Night of My Conception**

It was during Beatlemania, my parents

already old

pre rock n roll, pre sex

caught

in the leg snare of a long finished war

in the eye line, of the teen Canadian pilots

that they had watched as children

folding their Spitfires into nothingness.

My parents love was giggling and darkness

a slipping from Brylcreem, silk and tweed

bomb shelter, love shelter

to birth me underground

the earth shaking over me

dust sprinkling down as I come complete.

In snickering and blushes I appeared

found another half

held on for dear life, for a life

apologetic in my being

always surprised by my mother’s love.

**Fireproof**

We would set the flame

from the caved in face of the soiled matchbox

held captive too long in the pockets of small boys.

We set alight the long grass by the side of the golf course

or the wheat field behind my parents’ house,

turn our backs to see

which one of the two of us

would lose their courage first

would have to turn, in an inferno

of shouts and laughter

to put it out

before the adults came running

in dumb delivery across the fields

bringing us their world.

Later, we left our homes, our families, our country.

Became estranged, then unknown to each other.

Eventually even his face

started to change shape, melt.

It was years later still

I heard on the radio

of a fire in that city I’ve never been to

where I knew nobody

that burnt though a school, a nightclub, factories

kept going

in an unstoppable, untamed energy

that for a moment bought him back, flameproof

immaculate.

**The End of The West**

Living alone with others

has been my way.

Out in the early morning, hung over

5am.

A silence, flattened by train

a heavy freight

pointed down into the brain

of the States.

The first commuters

negotiate the last drunks.

A semi-trailer exposes its teeth

crunched in slow retreat

up Front Street.

Wrung-out lovers head home

mumble, fumble obscenities

negotiate into each other’s bones.

Two refugees of love

dance before

a shuttered wedding shop

loose their bodies in a Jell-O tango

along Columbia.

A loosening buckle of moonlight

balances on the tongue of

a swelling horizon

flames the inflated grids of

colonial streets

that whittle down to knife point

at the river edge

At the dockside, a tug creases into

mid channel

white horses

hooves banded in gold

trot out towards the pacific.

**Amelia Hill**

The dead get more demanding as I age.  
Yes, the living are tricky, the dead however  
downright devious.  
  
It’s just that they need us more than we need them.  
  
Last Sunday morning  
I found my grandmother, who died in 1980  
behind the cherry tree at the end of the driveway.  
  
Still in the full blossom of her dementia.  
Still with her polished mahogany breath  
the regimental cutlery of her being  
presented formally against the bare sheeting  
of her Edwardian black  
  
She surprised me by the recycling bin  
buried my head into her Hell dried hair.  
She wanted me to smell her, nothing else.  
To know a little more of maps, blueprints  
of the genetic ropes and ladders  
the pulsing bloody empires  
that bind my daughter’s scent to hers.  
  
Later, I escorted her back to the demolished hospital.  
I needed those long gone nurses to know  
that it was I that bought her home.

**The Great Leap Sideways**

In this town, it started with ruin

the timber alchemized to air

across the hillsides

history, available, whored before us

in the red lipstick cauterize of tree stumps

drawn and quartered first growth

the rationalization of wilderness

through the slobbered mouths

of the obese bodied mills

bloodied swollen

ruptured

against the slack imperial jaws of

winter sky.

We were birthed

in foundries and the forges

the new born factories

that made things, people soon realized

they needed, actually wanted

engines, tractors, agricultural machines,

clothing, medicines

that if you squinted, held your breath

you could convince yourself

held human worth

would bring prosperity, progress

something for all.

In time, these things did mean something,

at least to us, in our town

to people of our tribe

our aspiring, blue collar class

in that moment after World War Two

between the Beatles, the end of Vietnam

with work for all that did or did not want it

the factories their own cities

with their own suburbs, downtown,

districts, social clubs

theatres, marching bands.

When the hooters went

the old Fords and Vauxhalls

pumped themselves with a purpose

up the stiff veins of gridded streets

back to the detached

the snail shell curves, the chicane straights

of the pristine crescents and avenues

with their neat hedges,

purposeful garden ornaments

where everyone

was richer than their dad has been

knew their kids would be richer still

with money to spend

in the new supermarkets,

on those weekend shopping trips

to stores

that once were foreign countries,

now available

open, in an insistent hit parade of new colors

freshly hatched sounds,

different cuts of denim

lengthening hair, beard experiments.

Just for that short time it was worth it all

you could not conceive

there was anything but forward.

**Canadiana**

***for Bojana***

Knowhere is home, the children next door

not yours

the church locked, bark of fox, the midnight DNA

the open book of iron, wood, not you

Serbo-Croat, Croato-Serb the Siamese twins

that hacked themselves apart, to be free

to leave you homeless, Canadian, yourself.

Somewhere, in another place, not here

drunken uncles roll over yesterdays floorboards

sing farm songs, the bastard offspring of hymns

wail the death cry of the two headed eagle

to reel you back, apple, pear, plumb

for you kind one

the geese to be fed, cow to be milked

the half real home, painted against mountains

night frost, colossal moon, distilled with blood

bowel, brain and guts in the air

held in your hands

offered to the sky, to a little girl waiting to leave.

**Sandringham Avenue**

*New Westminster, 1911*

Here there is an avenue with no trees.

These homes are for the poorer ones

scuttled at the bottom of the

long slide from Queens Park.

No royalty here, a blue collar safari

wobbly eyed chicken, loose furred rabbit

chiselled hemorrhoids of Edwardian woodwork

untreated empire, tuberculosis for the flag

the oil stained thumb of membership.

A map of varicose veins

that has arrived in steerage

un-cushioned boards for eyes

chalkboard intestines

school caned tramlines, beaten through forest

back of the hands raised into the red welt of

Canada.

A wind chapped sunrise.

Loose tobacco

smeared across the sky at sunset.

An unmoored Spring evening

clutched and rattled.

Christ sized nails crucify a Blue Jay Sky.

Bleached canvas shucked among tree stumps.

Small children armed with sticks

mark out road grids in dirt

City plans for a place that doesn’t yet exist.

A girl on the back of a rickets wheeled waggon

mauls an out of tune piano into giving forth Chopin

notes bounce of splintered stream heads

invade, swarm a melody of alien species.

The stubs of one-way tickets

are checked by a beaten breeze

thrown like confetti at a shotgun wedding.

**Iron Work**

At the beginning, my father was banished

lived with a village blacksmith.

At night he stalked the edge

of the railway line

spied on the iron flow of bombers

their black skins linked in a lean string

of death

cupped in the distance over the open wound

of London

the outage of his parent’s home.

Most evenings he was in the forge

to watch the shoeing

the docile horses, muscled and dulled

from local farms

that felt nothing

from the metelwork, melted

through their hooves.

In that place, heat became object, flame

became object, wheel rim, scythe:

In the darkest hour there was light.

**Vacation**

After thirteen years, we don't have it

the animal shift between bodies

minds

tide divined, atom frigged copulations

the tawdry pose, empty squeak

of ready flesh

happy shopper, money back guarantee

Cosmo love-

 '250 ways to have better orgasms'

'how to perfect anal at dinner parties'

'liposuction and the a grade oral'.

What we have is stretch marks

maps and runes

scars and ruts we have become

the cracked elastic of your kiss

an accumulation of tiny stones of kindness

that have become a cairn

a wall against a hernia of unsaid words

then the knowing, planned surrenders

treaties we have made against oblivion.

Temporary but enough

proof we are no longer tourists

that this is where we live.

**Mapping The Dominion**

3am, unseen rivers, in the leaky skiff of me

under elephantine, imperial skin, a layer cake of brick.

The negotiation of words

over the underworld of lightless waters

the darkened being of fish, sightlessness.

CAT Scan history, every

bone in our bodies revealed to the past.

Knife cuts on a shirtless back

runes on tattooed arms, the City singing itself whole

in dementia recollection.

Believe this flesh.

It is the last known map of how it is.

Cosmopolitans in fear for their lives, I-Phones

cowered under cut loose coordinates

the monster headed fragments of empire

surrendered to multicultural, its kill of infection

the cross cultural wheel ruts

to be followed towards fire and food

the liberation of the manoeuvering of tongues.

**The Fly Past**

I marched my children out onto the steps.

I expected Spitfires

not the stubby, beer bottle training planes

bee bodied bullets

Thalidomide winged

implausibly capitulated by smooth skinned teens

over the acne tinted rooftops.

Than another distant drone.

I expected Lancaster’s, Flying Fortresses

perhaps a B52.

It was the neighbour mowing his lawn

one last time before winter

hunched beneath his Rugby player shoulders

rolling his cannonball head over the morning.

Then silence, empty sky

a truce of a November blue after a millennium of

rain.

By the window

a photo of my Grandfather

standing with his dad and brothers , South Wales

1914.

How still they are. They hold their fingers

to their lips

urge my compliance

that it must not be me to give them away

that I must turn their picture to the wall

in the hope that history will fly past

miss them.

**Swimming the Fraser**

There was industry here once

the Empire grind of logging, milling, shipping.

Whey faced children

freshly sieved from “the old country”

pressed their faces

to the heavy frame of titanic wooden windows

waited for overall suited fathers

to deliver their wrought bodies home

the mailman to skim in letters from aunts

uncles that were never seen again.

Then history went backwards

nature unnaturally returned.

A municipal placed Eden, settled compactly

into a smooth administrative whisper

among the trees

the many headed highways, pythons of modernity

slumbered across the city’s neck.

Here now, the remained white poor

yoke a scattering of dodge caravans into circles

new immigrants shelter under ethnicity

around an overloaded summer.

I reached out to the sturgeon grey tide

let my feet, crab themselves across

a wide eyed rosary of beach stones

braille themselves between

the obligatory massing of Canada geese

the alter high minefields

of sharp stones and shit

littered between my nakedness , the water.

My oil slicked skin sparked in algae

boomed into the undrinkable flow

wished me in over my neck

beyond the flush of chemical toilets

the urban enema of tourist launches

into the deeper sea.

The yacht sail mountain tops floated over

the forest ambulanced down

to offer up branches, the touch of rescue

the sun to punch it fingers

into the river’s spine.

On the jetty, a murder of clumping teens

congregated around skimpy swimwear.

A gaggle of tween bodied wanabees

nested themselves under the warrior eyes

of tattooed older brothers-

boys and girls circled themselves

around government issue picnic tables

found shelter under a tepee of BC bud

that cuffed me to an odor, brought back

other summers, other voices

what I felt then, now know

the light, the moments of heat on the flesh

sometimes you

the shade at the edge of the forest

sometimes me.

I didn’t swim much-

just enough to thread my body

along the borders

of the pockets of warm and cold water

find the grey between

where there is space for faith.

**Play Cars**

I am my son, in his moves, thoughts

that move within me

that are me, but not me

mine, yet which I have no patent on.

“Play cars, play cars” he calls

…and I do.

Vehicles, looped through improbable loops

bent in the invention of new speeds.

Police trucks, race cars, suburban station waggons

bad guys, good guy’s

blood free crashes, again and again

glass that doesn’t smash, metal that does not break.

A generation back, on the beach with dad

I buried my toy Ford

to let a future people dig it up, discover me

in the still turning wheels, the pocket grab dynamics

the immaculate interior.

Tonight I open the windows on our game

in the distance, I hear the ocean.

**War Babies**

A birthday arrival, in brown paper

string.

A book of war, to Morse out violence

along the skinny trenches

of a spring afternoon.

To present the clean lines of the just killed

the shined shoes of the just hung

the bleached mush

still partly recognisable as human

pressed into extinction by

the tracks of a tank.

I peeled away like a diving Spitfire

to be alone

leave my friends to party in my name

so I could be with my pictures, read the neat

old world inscription

*“Happy Birthday*

*love mum and dad, April 28th 1974”.*

I knew then

that they had gifted me their history

passed themselves in burst of photograph

in a rupture of light

that led to this, my crowning

no higher accolade, monument

to what they once had known

than to be captured, dead, in black and white.

**A History of New Westminster**

At first I spied it from the air

Coast Salish Canoes

the hive of muddy tracks through cleared bush

anonymous cabins in the blinding yellow of their new cut flesh

the imperial outriders, backwoodsmen, stubble pocked soldiers

the steamboats, the creep of white mans logic at the river’s edge

the crinoline sail tips of bride ships

the grab and barter of newly arrived flesh

in the passing from hand to hand

of the unwanted woman of old Europe.

A small Chinatown, there then gone, the geometry of trade

odour of gold, SOS vapour trails of small pox

the triplicate paperwork

immaculate copperplate of an invading race

I got nearer

spied the first cars, May Day Parades

the mathematic conjuring of parks

municipal buildings, schools and public halls.

I gagged on the smoke from an incinerated Front Street

held my Union Jack over my maple red eyes.

When it cleared there were soldiers heading off to war

then heading off to war again

foundries and markets, the unemployed finally slotted into work

muscle cars and trucks, shoppers

in from the valley farms to bathe beneath the city lights

farm boys running their fingers

down the paintwork of the modern world.

Then closer in again I hit the street-

beyond the wedding shops, random drug dealer

it is all brick and well washed glass.

On the hill, the multiplying grids

of family houses with their bleached smart yards

a boy and girl standing by a gate

waiting for something they think I can bring them.

There is nothing universal in my hands

just this particular love, that will have to do.

**Nature**

It was a Saturday, the baker

with his Elvis sideburns

offered his wicker basket

at the door

its creaking and slipping

like the Mayflower at anchor.

My sister and I

boxed each other for doughnuts

to vacuum our fingers

over the sugar shot paper bags

to be the first to bite down

into the softness and certainty.

I was the one to run my teeth

against its back

feel the squirm and curve

of Wasp upon my tongue

its wiggle away from me

back into the absorbent tunnels

of the fresh dough

into its un-chartable way of being

the hard halls

of a pleasure all its own.

**The Industrial Revolution**

There were forests here once

the deep pocket of a valley gloved with grass

cupped the spanned limbs of a vicious stream.

A tableau crowned with grazing cows.

The knife blade fish glinted in sunlight.

We were gold paneers, woodsmen

peasants of a disinterested empire

then later, labourers in foundries and mills

slipped into condom tight brick.

A little later on again, shoppers, occasionally

someone’s soldiers

finally voters, citizens.

Then it was gone, as if it had never been.

To leave us our shiny homes

the same as our neighbors

and their neighbors

and all those others whom we do not know.

**Family Values**

Family ,blood, bone, wiping shit

what we were given, allocated by

accident

two arms, two legs, house, car

where the seeds of our elephantine

self-regard are sown

incubator, of the patriarchal, free market

smart arse I

defender of tribe, class, nation, the

indefensible

where the crack was snapped, into

the solid bell of who we are

where we learnt to toll out of tune

too distant, discordant for most to hear

where, in the breaks, fissures

we mapped the value of love

learnt it to sing it aloud

on our stumble into

the bottomless cleavage of its being

where we ran our fingers on the blade of

its oiled breath, odor of guilt

pressed open skin on the manacle of

mother to son, father to daughter

gleaned its orchard

where there was laughter, light

a thigh wide meadow

nurtured at the unremitting nipple

of a crooked stream.

where there was always fruit

dropped ripe, peppered out in patterns

that hinted at being understood.

When there is no family left

only the imagination will remain

the beast of the field, brother, sister

gone:

extinction, its clean plate, shining cutlery

laid before us

in front of which we will hunger, start

again.

**The Canadian Flag**

The white, the ice reactor, the meltdown north

Lord Franklin loitering in the home goal

Henderson scores, communism collapses.

Germ free, clear, whitewashed

white people

an open book, a vacuum.

Then the red, where the real action is

perpetual hemorrhage

Passchendaele, Ortona, Afghanistan

the Algonquin tincture of

Montcalm’s nighty Merlot

Wolfe’s strategically maneuvered bleed

his aristocratic totter on the vertigo heights

the arterial drops of hunted Metis

woven into Saskatchewan snow

of battles hung and dried like pelts.

This flag that brands us as ourselves

not gun hording Americans.

not British, hanging like hungry puppies

to the cold tit of an indifferent queen.

This flag that spreads it flesh in hope

that there may still be more to us

than to be the world’s

most luxuriant dormitory

a cosy clutter of

cultural competing and ignoring

all good while the money lasts.

Then the maple leaf

the birthmark, smallpox burn

bullet hole in the head.

The mark of

otherness, of forest, lake and rail

of the vast interior space,

where most will never go:

small towns, where only the aged live

the lucky places where we were made

no longer us.

**Heading Inland**

I pitied him then, on those

teeth snapped winter drives to the office, marooned

in the spacious cocoon of his old truck, the heater

cranked to maximum, loose denture windows, rattling.

Every day, the repeated story.

The loveless, sexless wife.

The waiting for children to be grown

so that he could continue.

It seemed so inappropriate for him to tell it all.

We were strangers then, strangers now.

Later I came to know this story for myself.

One day, while I was at work

love broke in, upturned furniture, scattered underwear

held orgies in my head to which I wasn’t invited.

It had been weeks earlier, on that December morning.

He had stopped us on the indeterminate verge

of the toe to tail highway -

to spy on the Coyote-

its filthy coat scribbled in connection

to the sub-zero whiteness

its insistent retreat, away from ocean, toward mountains.

**Cascadian**

My cousin Wolf at the end of the bed. When I wake it is always there.

Scrawny, hungry, worse for wear, still dangerous.

The fur squalled 49th pressed to my mattress end with its napalm saliva

Sniffed in the scent of the slippery negotiation between new measurements

kilometres to miles, City to village, an end to a beginning, Province to State.

When it let it, give myself to its teeth

it takes me into its jaws towards cabins, bungalows, the

collapsed barns of the Purple Heart Highway, a country started

from another finished

overweight strip malls and casinos, the super sized flag

shows me old cultures, the survival of genocide through the worst of the new

drags me into farmland for the wounded, the clawed imprint of invisible forest

offers the worn medals , cold bones, of someone somewhere who escaped

tracks me through yesterdays fields and mills, peddled backwards into scrub

under the naked belly of the shark fin mountains, the crushed tonnage of winter:

across the glittered bodies of all terrain Starbucks, yesterdays rusted trucks

the buckled asphalt of the end of Empire, freedom in swampland, green land

animal heat

the pursuit of happiness, the bloody hunt for it.

**I Swallowed Los Angeles**

I was trampled

by the manacled stare of a confederate general

leering over battle plans in the next booth.

I removed my glasses to

blind myself to the possibility of violence

focussed myself on our talkative waiter

from the hills above Shanghai

sweet and sour conversation

white people friend rice, linguistic chow-main

flabbed myself into upholstery

the colour of tainted promises

muscle car roomy

struggled to explain my order

as I shouted from half way back

across a continent

stranded in mountains, boots full of ice

ready to eat my fellow pioneers, rub on soy sauce

for the greater good.

In the distance

a waggon train of assorted condiments

had pulled sharply into a circle on

a Formica table top

beyond that a

Schwarzenegger sized TV

the blurred outlines of a high speed  chase on

Channel 9, the static of impending endings

a helicopter gripped on, the

vice of its inverted moon

spotlighted a conga line of cops

that had massaged shotguns to shoulders

spooned themselves

into the beach babe curves of car doors

the hard pump of insistent lights.

A juvenile black woman

made last call, mouthed goodbyes

stepped into space to present her face

to the concrete

to slip herself into criminal skin

the cold metal cuffs of the American Dream.       

**Empire Blues**

See it there, with   
my wife's grandfather, James Graham, arriving by train, Canadian Pacific, 1923.

A Glaswegian, city boy, knowing nothing and nobody.

See that he is seated in his allotted place, in third class.

Notice that he holds the roller-coasted grade, pockets the penny hard words

-power, elevation, sun, sky-

feels the worth of this new country.

He already knows its being in the bone  of steel  and wood,

in the stanzas of vertical scree balanced over eye sized lakes

the permanence of smoke, fire hardened trestles,

burnt across a century, never out.

He is poor man with a hand full of syllables ,a future

packed in his cardboard suitcase of half understood verbs, in his

pocket change coordinates , a purse of unwritten letters.

Observe it- his one palm pressed on a hernia of half digested history.

See his other on a blank catalogue, not colour yet, still black and white- full of

what has not happened, places that do not exist.

**To My Children**

I was half eaten when you met me.

What I was-

if you really want to know-

you will have to piece together

play detective to find

look under carpets, in old boxes

sift through newspapers and mold

forgotten pots at the back of fridges

to pinch at my frozen fingers

squeeze them back to life.

It is easier for me.

I see myself as I was, in your quickness

body tone

the tuning fork hum of being young.

To you I will always be old

somewhat unknowable

suspiciously historic

like the Titanic or Betamax

something odorous

that you must move away from

to become your own scent, yourselves.

I am that old house

that is passed everyday

that once demolished, nobody

will remember.

That is just ok, the way it must be.

Have your time, make room, leave

only crumbs.

**The Pacific Gateway**

Twelve hours

to lend his body to the western night

live for the womb less contractions of the machine

hide his mind

clock-less, sunless, speechless.

Anonymous money barn, anywhere North America.

London, Tokyo, Beijing, low rent, on the edge

on in-between land-whored earth

where people do not live.

He should have kissed his parents, hugged his sister

when he still had the chance.

This is work. A solidarity in loneliness.

A country discovered

in the unpacking and stacking of fresh plastic-

scented in its bright white body heat

of industrial past midnight- in window frames

that will never decompose, promise a view

for eternity.

**White Dress on Fire**

Our marriage night, over too fast.

The rise, swell of white light

machine gun pop,pull of buttons

the sound of a gold cufflink in a

rough touchdown on pine floorboards

the low moan of a battleship turned turtle

a speared Hippo, feet up, holding up the moon.

Below us in the bar, my friends, drunk

distracted the servers

liberated booze, bloated themselves skywards

against high windows, Victorian plasterwork

threw open French windows onto

grassy midnight

onto

the pump and pulse of red dotted phone masts

aircraft warning lights

pinned against the blackened mountain tops

into

the flood of cold air in lungs

a tip into a laughing tide.

When we awoke, the party was over.

Its wreckage on the ocean floor,

too deep to reach, marked as war graves

monument

as mythic and unknowable as Atlantis

**The Royal Visit**

-New Westminster, 1939

On Columbia Street, the medals hard as gallstones.

King George, Queen Mary, open topped, hatless

heated on a griddle of unquestioned worship.

The rolls of reused bunting, stretched one more time

from Queensborough to Queensland, Sapperton to Singapore.

They wave on automatic, to yet another crowd

to justify it all, all they have.

“One day it will have to stop”, George says. “It is so tiring-

all this waving to yourself”

He is being sandwiched

between the thick buttery smiles of motorcycle cops

first growth gas tanks, Churchill wide tyres-

the jangled trinkets of yesterday, the municipal red brick of tomorrow.

Above the crowds he sees a river, an old man fishing in a string vest

who glows in the sticky resin, the thick cake of the wasp yellow sun

a row of railway ties that twitch across this country, like

old spinsters trying to nap.

He thinks about his, long dead, great grandmother

snoozing on a Balmoral Sunday

the rattling crystal crowned by her snoring

sees the heavy husband of a locomotive, that waits for him

buckles it gut, stretches its tired limbs at the platform edge.

**M&M’s**

Made for war, to not melt under fire

to keep your fingers clean in battle

Forrest Mars SNR

saw something like them in Spain

in civil war, when the bullets ran out

candy thrown at Franco’s tanks.

in 1941

American GI’s pressganged them

to fight the Japanese.

Officially now M&M’s, branded

conscripted, pure red white and blue.

On the Beach at Iwo Jima, Okinawa

cool doses of desire

when the food had gone, bottles run dry

to be consumed by the handful

at the fixing of bayonets.

A little later

the Enola Gay, coasted over Hiroshima.

Pilot Paul Tibbets Junior

eviscerated a packet with his teeth

with his pinkie

maneuvered the sugar pellets, into

his left palm.

When he had finished eating, he

pulled the bomb release

noticed his hands

admired how spotless they were.

**Hand To Hand**

I was born in centuries

a dead younger brother stood inside me

I was born out of place, in exile, asylum

the umbilical cordite of war hung its shawl

over the valley end.

I was born anointed in blood and coal dust

wrapped in lamb skin

held as a member of clubs

cricket, band, trade union, family.

From my beginning

I knew how to stand in a crowd, my bearing

position, already pegged out

to walk past the workhouse

with both pity and fear

as an inheritor of an anger, that

I rubbed like a Rosary.

I was born, tubed, wired for dissolution

to hand on the dark baton of disease

to be scrubbed with carbolic

mined with pickaxe and candle

at the midnight  seem of

Winston Churchill’s strike breaking army

the Glamorgan Police

I was born to create, myself, my people

beyond the snap of snare on leg

the enclosure of minds

away from the frivolous, unwanted rich

as foreign to me as Pigmies or Martians

I was born in my own school

cast iron around my heart

at railheads and foundries

to busy myself for ever

in the swap of uniform and song, negotiation

of nation and tribe

to carry a banner of diffident speech, the

shadow of black lung, black mountain.

**The Franklin Expedition**

In February, the albumen clear head of Lord Franklin

un-drowned itself under my rosebush

farmed out the mud from its eyebrows

with the skeletal stump of its one free hand

throned his remains on his mummified testicles

that been had pinned on as medals by Queen Victoria

ejected from the North on an ectoplasm scree

of Timbits, loyalist tundra, broken spirited hockey sticks

his teeth sled flat

by a 170 years of chattered out S.O.S.

It was not too long

before he divined my ship boy credentials

sniffed out

my in-built ability to swab decks, monkey in rigging

fold myself into the skin of the village idiot

disintegrate into resentment, envy

fall onto the perpetually raised horns of the upper classes.

I quickly reburied him.

Sometimes, at 2 or 3pm

I can hear him shouting from underground

as he seeks new channels, map’s unknown coordinates

orders the disobedient earth to set him free

**Karl Marx In Starbucks**

**-Front Street , New Westminster**

When he was in the queue

being jostled by bored office drones

the gentry held the land

still terrorized with their priests and lackeys.

By the time he had ordered his

triple macadamia pumpkin whip

capital had come

high finance, commerce, the shuffle of

well oiled lawyers

fact secreting professors

the form , the superstructure of it all

that he caught a flash of in the washroom mirrors

in the old memories, personal enmities

uniquely shaped sensations

syntheses and antithesis

within the barricade storming, sugar rush illusions

in new modes of thought

the shaping of his class in relation to others

the forming of his hand around the paper cup

in his thought that he himself

was the actual motive

starting point of his own actions.

**The Buddha of New Westminster**

A Cobra of wood smoke

curls itself around the spine of falling snow

that has come all day,

in this early Spring, out of season

to bring its quietness

its hushed monks, canticles of light.

My daughter catches flakes

upon her tongue

her hands supplicated to the whiteness

her purple jacket

explodes itself against an early dusk.

I shovel snow

out of the driveways mouth

for the first time I know

I am alone- sold to the highest Buddha.

Nobody can help me.

not that I require help.

This is a release

this becoming of freedom

in the emptiness of existence

at the very core of it, where

there is nothing but my phasic shovel

to exhume the sidewalk

to free it of all falsity

bare the bones of what it is

bring me its hermitage,

the contemplation of concrete by ice

**Earth Hour**

The planet rations me a little of its darkness.

Just sixty minutes with the blinds open on a workday evening

watching the neighbour opposite his house a Dresden of bright light

a knit of takeout pizza that he is unpicking from the fabric

of his freshly pressed sportswear

as he rocks the pale blue crib of his fat baby girl

who is in training exercising her legs on thin air

moving herself to the beat of Hockey Night in Canada

to the TV that is throwing out its sticks of light

in aggressively angled tackles

on to the exquisitely tinted wall space to spear her father

a suburban Saint Sebastian framed in the silence

between their house and mine

haloed in his private heat in a tableaux of tenderness risen.

impure broken immaculate.

**Drinking for Canada**

Alcohol has always been me

the warrior

at the evenings end, the nurse of ended expectations

the conjurer of silence,  of a oneness in numbness

a pure forgetfulness

to dismantle me

in the completeness of vomit and sleep.

When it is time to depart

there is the sift through the  broken arms of bar glow

the yellow swing of half-light midnight

the limber beneath the bent elbow of

shattered illumination

the float of my bloated self

expanding itself, being raised into the air

cut loose

into a swim of deep , a

mouthful of blue beneath tables

the totem lines of cigarette butts

a flood of party plans

the grubby fingered hive of throbbing phones

runes of black shoe marks on hardwood floors

communication of dot dash into deeper down

into the sunk among ocean and garbage.

Outside the empty meadows, mountains wait,

the track ways curve away into interior, wilderness

where I will hide under pine, curl myself tight

to be Eve’s apple, to be offered as sustenance

to nobody

away from the cleave of never touching teeth

to lie under hedgerows, to be held

in the fist of innocence, in summer lust

for nothing

and everything, in all life and death at once

in the press of my solitary flesh, to

the blunt edges of the night.

**Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band**

The Beatles**-** Parlophone- 1967

The summer of love

was never bothered enough to stop in our town.

By the early seventies

some men, tired of waiting, sprouted sideburns

or grew hair over the ears.

When they got drunk they punched people

with a little more tenderness.

My hip young art teacher in his corduroy jacket

was caught reading porn on the bus

a gaggle of teens got t shirts

of bands they had never seen

concerts they had never been to.

I suppose someone would have

blown their minds out in a car

if they could have found anyone who

owned one that actually started

or would move fast enough for long enough.

A friend of my older brother’s took acid and

leapt off the fire hall

his underpants pulled over his jeans

superman.

Then there were rumors of all that casual sex

that could to be found on the other side

of high windows

that remained unclean, unreachable

in their Victorian hardwood frames

as around us the older boys insisted

everything had became permitted

now was possible.

That by the year 2000 no woman under forty

would bother with underwear.

And yet the days went on

as they always had-

as nothing happened, not just once

but many times.

**Swimming to America**

The night after the divorce

he discovered a bluff at the far end of the park

launched himself in.

The river took him, negotiated his angles

accommodated his weight.

A crescent of current accredited his being

accepted him into the flow.

The tide took him out, shuttled him

back to shore.

He did not swim, attempt to stay afloat.

Five, six times he tried, netted himself

in the circular breath of water and land.

Eventually he slipped back up the bank

his naked body, become

harnessed by the metal of the moon.

**Lightning Lake**

I soiled the perfect geometry of summer.

Unbalanced the season’s weights and counter weights.

I liquefied a mountain with a swish of hands.

Dived down along inverted trunks of pine

to place my face against the solid centre of the river.

I became stripped of all heat

forced my alien body to negotiate

when I knew it had so little it could give.

Twisted my limbs beyond the first three feet

allowed for sunlight, into

the contacting iris of a sharply focussing darkness.

I gave in open armed weightless sightless.

I held back a bullet hard inch of breath.

That was all I had

all that was wanted all that was not mine to give.

**The Punishment of Remembrance**

In the big field in winter

it was sugar beets to be stumbled over

thrown like grenades.

The two of us ran headlong

into a wires of an eye neutering fog

towards the invisible eclectic fence, the pulsed pain of it

propelled by our doubt destroying laughter

the need to be the last to stop, be stopped.

In summer it was hide and seek in the corn.

An open season to damage crops, to bed down in hollows

with the rats and rabbits

to tunnel ourselves

through the dark caves

discovered below the tight fists of wheat

skin welting, magnificent

that were to live no longer than the season.

After harvest time, the farmer burnt the stubble

the granite clouds of smoke

dammed shut the only road out of the village

reached up to circle and squeese out the sun.

**The Three Ships**

That still-dark Christmas morning  
mum and I caught in the slack tide

of decades, sometime between Woodstock

and Watergate—she still young,

we still a family with a brother  
whom I knew, who knew me.

My mother’s smile a swing-bridge  
to an island city, her voice a parachute

that possessed everything it is possible to know.

She sang to me, *I see three ships come sailing in,  
come sailing in, come sailing in*, a song from before

the written word, a brother of *Greensleeves*,

as we sat with linked arms beneath the tree

that cast its armada of white light  
into the dark Atlantic of the lounge

—and the ships came in, small, medieval,  
large single sails back from new worlds  
or unknown frontiers bringing something,

not Jesus and Mary or Nixon and Kissinger,

not the plague or the oil crisis, but a box  
marked *Madness: Do Not Open*.

Knowing we would disobey it, the box  
wound past the docks, cut through

the razored frost of our front yard

and settled into the house.

**The Woodlands Ski Team**

The solidity of sound

the open jaws of the air take me in their teeth

swallow stars of ice.

A silence

folded suburbia back into its own pocket

pressed it into the open palm of a whiteness

into a swirl of prefabricated space

double doors

held itself

to the iron, imperial, heartbeat of starched linin.

At a window, a young woman of 18 or 19

emotionally arthritic

Bipolar, crabbed into a child’s plastic chair.

She is to wait for ECT.

Pinched between her fingers is a coffee

gone cold:

in her eyes four seasons

being restrained beneath an avalanche.

**Snow Fences**

Moving upwards onto Mount Seymour

alone and on foot

in defiance of the drift

into the bone biting banks of snow,

the breath taking fences

of a darkness, the levelling zero

of cloud

the rubbed hands of settlement

under ice

the eyes of the city

in a valley yellowed out of stone,

leeched through wood

where the stores are still open

buses slip themselves across junctions

stick in the throat of storm

where people rush with packages

overflowed grocery bags, cars dislocate

across empty street.

Watched from the drift

inside the force of wind

all paths down are blocked.

I climb into the whiteout

the bitter tendons, the waste season

single minded, un-distracted.

**The Commonwealth Blues**

Abandoned landfill.

Wasteland – at the City’s edge

slithered between the mountains and the Pacific.

The City’s open mouth- punched flat

under the weight of the boundary-less North.

Beneath the iceberg shift of a whole continent

spilling blood and breaking teeth

aiming itself down from the Arctic.

Freighting down a thousand languages

cultures, histories

that I had have access to, no measure or control

people that have no need for me, that

will not be made to speak.

**The Throne Room**

In psychiatry, there is that place  
with corridors as sure as Camelot

veining grails trailing towards  
Victorian wards, bulging corsets  
of iron bars and fist-tight brick.

There is a lake of milky tea

a raised arm with a loaded  
syringe, a moat of   
sausage and baked beans,

the battle smack of knife on fork.

There is a teenage girl in her high-back  
chair who is stiller than it is possible  
to be. She hides beneath a frozen  
waterfall of witchy hair that drapes  
her body’s winter-twig bones.

There are skinny young men  
who move too fast, their sleeves  
pulled over scars and needle marks,  
their heads steaming with the low fires  
of a feudal disappointment.

There is enough nylon curtaining—  
bunched in prayer around beds  
and high bared windows—  
to stretch from Vancouver to Halifax  
and to surround the empty moments  
that stack up like dominoes.

**In This Illness Of The Mind**

I’ve been farming in my thrift store rainwear  
on the outer acreages of loss.

I have held that flick book of a lifetime laxative  
of pretty faces that have shot through me and gone.

Trapped myself, within the freak show carnival  
of continuous fresh starts,

Dedicated to the baby-gating  
of every thought, the tupperwaring of all beauty.

I have been sped away in one too many taxicabs  
on one-way rides to the darkened edges

of unfamiliar towns.

Been the good Victorian in pith helmet and shorts  
crabbing my burnt fingers in the inner Congo of my mind.

All this effort just to plan

the perfect rebirth that will not come.

All that wasted time in doctors’ consultation rooms

that are studded with Buddha’s.

Writing out cheques  
swiping my credit card at the altar of self-acceptance

**Small Town Travel Plans**

It was from the cell of my tiny back bedroom

that the darkness unpacked itself

smoothed itself out flat, dipped itself down

into the valley

draped the caesarean of

road, river, rail

stitched into the land between mountains,

wheat fields.

it was the freight trains that held me

pressed open the throat of night , shook

the land by the shoulders

insistent, unstoppable; waggoned new wombs

in the offer of a door to jump through,

a tarpaulin to crawl under

in the promise of being taken somewhere,

anywhere

where there was no need to arrive.

**The Old Country**

The village doctor expelled me

crushed me under the Dunkirk brilliance of his exploding face

in the finality of the swagger stick swipes, his unchallengeable decrees.

The local drunk admonishing the local druggy.

I drove back up the hill

the thin lane narrowed to needle point in late summer son

the over processed farmland flopping itself down between anemic trees.

At my parents’ house I had knives, an axe.

I used them to chop my father’s head, to cut into my belly, or my arms

as I lay myself in the boiling being of a bath, into its water drinking down my blood.

I worshiped at the shrine of the utopian machete swipe.

I would think it not to be it- control it in the guts and garbage

in the slitting of throats, hatred and defeat, victory belonging to me…

as all the time the TV on- cold milky tea- handcuffed pleasantries

a half mast flag interminably flapping.

**Possibility**

The party, overrun by bigger boys.

A full bearded seventeen year old

emasculated the store room door with

with my fathers rusted axe-

became Viking, rolled out a fat bodied barrel of

sight denying cider onto the lawn.

With the second swipe

orphaned a statue of a bathing nymph from its own legs.

A virus of rapidly synergising violence broke out in the vegetable patch

fists flew

The sky sowed itself with freshly scalped herbs,

missile sized carrots

windows broke, the moon vomited.

I slipped into interminable kissing with

the person next to me.

Not knowing our options, we were soon naked;

staring in terror and amazement at our newly minted genitalia

the alarming possibility of pleasure.

**Poverty**   
   
New Years Eve in the already dark I walked through forest to town.  
  
My feet and fingers stretching in slow negotiation   
of wire and wood   
in sonar settlement of tight muscled movement   
between small pastures mean stone walls.   
   
Just turned twenty dressed in other peoples cast offs   
a Cohen blue raincoat not famous not fashionable    
parading myself to the scent of fox   
the sound of an owl emptying its war cry over silence.   
   
Three miles later I made it to the road   
hitchhiked picked up by a drunk   
doing penance for his year of bar fights  stub fingered drug deals    
who left me at the start of houses   
under brick buildings tinted in deoxygenated red   
the lazy eyes of incendiary skinned street lights.    
   
I got to the party late.  
   
The ten room boarding house already inflating itself on weed.  
   
Later I gratefully fumbled   
with the body of a willing stranger whose name I will never remember   
   
the sharp dash of my come   
tattooing a tired white bed sheet punctuating midnight.

**The Lockheed Starfighters**

We stiffed out our nine to five

at the American airbase.

Clocking on and off under the hairy imperial noses

of the resented new master race

who fashioned our country into an aircraft carrier,

swiped our empire.

Yet we- sort of- liked them

relieved they had taken it, squirreled away

all that guilt, greed and genocide

were quite prepared to nurse us

on muscle car weed, smuggled in body bags

grant us the pleasure of their magazines

spilling with the hard porn of cars and motorbikes

the greased gears of Californian sunshine,

New York knowingness,

the mysterious Louisiana swamp of the always erect flag.

I acquired a wagon train of new friends

pilots who’d flown in Vietnam,

to bomb the country of my future wife.

This was fifteen years before met her

when I couldn’t imagine

anything beyond our small town.

Two aircrew lodged with a friend’s mother

two skeletal guys

with the skinny hands of pianists or stranglers

perpetually emaciated frames, dark globes for eyes

from all that government issued speed

ladled out

to keep them killing over Hanoi.

One of them slipped to me a knife thin photo

of his flight school graduation class

now, mostly dead , mostly killed in accidents

from planes

exploding red white and blue in mid air

over the villages that never got a clear scent

of the people killing them

never got an honest shot:

so busy

were my new friends with their own destruction.

**The First Saturday Night**   
   
Awake at the fat feet of the first hours of a sleepover

we slipped out

fanned

from the back door  
under a thick butter of stars   
a full moon muscling itself over cedar tops

shimmying us over the back fences

of suburban gardens   
around the slow eyed

backyard pools   
sitting themselves

tight in the skin of yesterdays heat  
  
to the disco at the tennis club   
its space ship of light  
levitating in blackness at meadows end   
  
in whose aura we hid behind beer crates   
the pressurized A- Bombs of metal booze barrels

on the edge of the one-world

of adulthood, the secret club that stretched

from London to Tokyo

where everyone knew everyone else    
that held us at bay   
with a force field of Bonny M, Donna Summer

by the Globe itself

its silver ball   
mirroring all knowledge

of money, sex

the promise of all beauty, tumbling out at 2am.

**In the Apple Tree**

At eighteen I smacked into the apple tree.

It had appeared overnight

at the bottom of my parents garden.

Already fully grown, regimentally breasted with

a labia red universe of fruit

just out of reach

each apple labelled with a future

academic, lover, lawyer, strangler

poet.

Every time I climbed to pick one

the lower braches snapped

the non grip coating someone had had painted on

would make me slip, tear my skin

rip my nails.

In the winter

when the tree was bare

the lungs of summer out of breath,

I could see the solid body of its wholeness.

I pressed my hands against the trunk

felt the company of the persistent pulse.

**Push Me Pull Me**

The carnival at the edge of town.

Every year in the fall, the slow soup of lights

the revolving acreage of rides.

A small field- we thought

it bigger than it was-

surgically removed of cow shit

the last gleanings of summer wheat

suddenly held in the aggressive tutelage

of a skinny regiment of ratchet jointed carnies.

Then our favorite ride: the Austin Mini

sawn in half

put back together -with two heads and

no discernable butt

a Frankenstein car

joined with a third-world scar

of raised up weld.

A friend and I, seated back to back

both accelerating, both steering

ploughing circles with no crops to spread,

nothing to be achieved

but this higher life of

the racing of each other

towards a cliff of stalled engines,

the annual never quite remembered

or expected disappointment.

**The Interior**

In the town marching band

my father grappling with the heart of a drum.

A melodic suicide vest

a city sized trampoline of near accurate notes

strapped to his chest.

The middle aged breathing deeply

into Tubas , French Horns

flooding themselves through suburban streets

in a glittering gush of hair cream

a tsunami of sock suspenders and string vests .

Men who had only ever left the farms and factories

for war

to be the foot soldiers of other peoples empires.

A musical militia, a thrift store regiment.

Older men, farmers, mechanics, ex-soldiers

hearing aids clipped on like medals.

**Manpower**   
   
I was a client of a make work scheme

for the unemployable

swimming myself though the thin blood

of an Indian summer

by renovating graveyards.

Coercing tombstones into orderly lines

crazy paving church patios

for nonexistent congregations, their   
never happening barbeques.

Sloppily, I painted church halls

hibernated myself  in the belly

of a white work van

under the faintest Braille of rain

blistered my tongue     with gibberish

 knotting it      on the rocks

of lazy conversation

huddled under tabloids

immersed myself in their papery grave

of tits and certainty

the Forman freshly pressed from prison

the driver, alive in his one cylinder fantasies.

By August we applied our ineptitude

to small Victorian chapels 

built for communities that had passed away

to other jobs in other towns

in whose bone yards

we made our own small settlements, spent

stoned afternoons

half alive       in high grass   
  
lying      between the dead

watching ourselves up into the empty skies.

**Leaving Home**

I took the short cut out of town

slipping myself up through the woods

the stiff lip of the hill.

Pushed myself into the tough muscles

of snow.

Ran into the reptile black

of a December evening.

I measuring myself into the drift

worked my feet to keep the slush

from tipping into my plastic boots.

Behind me, in the valley of my birth

the yellow rip of a line of street lights

the open hand of an un-curtained window

with its

sugar rich flickering of television

all evidence of a nesting humanity

thrown into the unbothered face

of mid- winter

against the only sounds:

the struggle of my first breathes

sawing themselves sharp

on the brick of the air.

**Leaving Heathrow**

At first I only saw detail

too many ways for the poet to frame

recalibrate, lie.

A traffic system designed by

Hieronymus Bosch.

A raft of finger print sized meadows

bricking the city from the ocean.

The bored doodle of suburban streets.

Then further up, before the clouds

the highways

gave their bodies back to grass.

There was no longer any traffic.

Commuters had left their cars

to amble through the sunlight forests

of new beginnings:

there were no endings

time no longer played it straight.

**The Grand Canyon**

When my auntie forgot she had dementia

she could no longer remember the Grand Canyon

where, in 1975, she

turned the waggons of her honeymoon in to a circle

settled.

There is that photo of her at the Mohave Lookout

with her, then new, husband , a

chubby Austrian doctor in oversized brown sunglasses

drip dry, baby shit yellow, summer shirt

standing by her side with a house brick sized camera.

Behind them, a vast sliced open body of rock

the scalpel of the Colorado river glinting its baby spine

in the open guts of the sunken cheeked gorge.

In those days it was less safe, fewer railings

less strident warnings:

Even today, when I speak to my aunt

walk around her without adequate protection

there is a chance I could tumble in to her

drop six thousand feet into oblivion.

**In The Afterlife**

After the funeral, I drove. By 3am the car was gasless, extinct

leaving me inarticulate, beneath the cooling flesh of open country.

My fingers fumbled in the dark womb of the glove compartment

caressed the thin skin of my aunt’s love letters.

I carried them with me over the rusting fence into the fields of wheat

the nipple hard grains wrapping their rosary around me

flailing me deeper into the morning’s lean brittleness

In my hand the written evidence, the words

coming up punching themselves into focus in the first rays

of sunrise:

The page on the elderly mother that would not let them be.

The pages of bland confession , the anatomy of petty quarrels

of these two doctors sharing notes gossiping about genital warts, celebrities

with hypochondria

in-growing toenails, haemorrhoids of the mind.

Then the tenderness, intimacy, not meant for me to see

Small parcels of kindness laid as land mines in the overbearing undergrowth

of the ordinary

confidential, not mine as I tore and left a trail

each page a year, each line a decade people and places become confetti-

who were never meant to meet and not like this, so far from home.

**Grief**

After her death

my children baked cookies

in an apocalypse of colliding ingredients.

Not aware

of the empty space at table

where she should have been

yet now was not.

Not comprehending the forever loss

they had just inherited

that someday they would have to pay back

If only cent by cent

.

.

**First Day in June**   
Sunroofs prized open spilling out

the architecture   
of yesterday

from battered radios where all days are at once        
none ever are.      
Where hours are held in my glances   
at the strawberry bodied

young mothers in the park

in my humble lust that has dropped   
the dud bomb of itself   
amongst the gridded Brasilia

of shiny children's play equipment   
amongst the moats

of silver chimneys venting methane   
from a former landfill

buried under the phrenology   
of the over green grass, held beneath

the all defeating zip line   
my daughter loves   
that I must push her on fifty times:    
   
bowing myself to the atom-spitting power   
of her nonstop laughter changeling being.    
   
later we are out

near the heated flash of the train tracks

where my children   
like to stand

and wave at sleek figured carriages   
the tinted glass   
   
call hellos to passengers   
they cannot see   
that probably haven't seen them   
that need not exist to be befriended.

**The Voyage of the Beagle**

We walked to the supermarket

mother and father

son and daughter

dipping under the weak knees

of a May sun, the unfolding clatter of rush hour

bedding itself down beyond suburbia.

My small children holding hands

locked in the tightly significant noting

of their bodies.

That were once our bodies

others before that

then going back beyond

from two legs to four, to fins and gills

all that we were and are

all of it leading to this

a small boy sitting in a shopping cart,

a girl barely big enough to push

my wife and I

buying what we don't really need

adding to our air miles Matterhorn

as evolution doesn't have us flying yet

we are not yet monkeys with wings.

We are breathing in

following a blueprint we can’t read

have never seen

wearing springtime as a wound.

.

**Immortal Son**

Up from the water’s edge and back again

I watch you, now aged two,

spilling the elephantine curves of an August light.

You hold a trickle of reluctant Pacific

in a green bucket with a broken handle.

Whole in your miniscule mini man shorts

with fake pockets for a fake cell phone, nonexistent

baby sized wallet.

You take up water. Courier it

to the top of the concrete steam bank

then deliver back.

Not once or fifty times but for the whole afternoon,

tilting without question at transparent windmills.

 I watch , take a stick

write your name into the back of the sun.

**Where Your From**

In the photograph that has been lost

I am about your age- about three or four

in a sunrise red jacket, holding

a small white soccer ball

that I am holding tightly to my chest,

whose memory Braille

of touch and texture I still hold.

If this picture could appear for you

you would see that we’re alike;

the skull curves under a kingdom of curls

the coordinates of nose and mouth.

You would see me

pinned against the thick and rusting metal

of the garbage cans.

Homemade rabbit hutches

The zoo of mismatched bricks

split haired timbers

from your

Grandfathers half abandoned house repairs

see that I am stand ready to swim,

dive headfirst into the tightening skin

of who you will be.

**To Be Childlike**

I praise my son’s greed

that he will bite

through his own fingernail

to slay fresh popcorn

his aspiring vanity

the way he accelerates away from me

becomes a greased pig

when I endeavour to kiss him

in front of his regiment

of racoon brained friends

his reluctance

to wear the parrot engraved shirt

that for my own devilish amusement

I like to parade him in-

that makes him ridiculous

a midget Hawaiian.

I enjoy the way his beach ball head

becomes a weapon

the goat like butting

he delivers to his sister-

only occasionally interrupted

by my foul mouthed admonishment

when he nukes me in the balls-

his pretence he cannot dress himself

cannot identify

his left or right

how to maneuver his underwear

into the correct coordinates

all those skills that will miraculously

return to him

at the promise of ice-cream, the

rattle of dollar store trinkets.

There are so many faults for me to love

that sometimes, just sometimes,

I feel am his equal.

**A Great and Glorious Rage**

Little son, you won’t remember it:

your two hours of committed tears, how you

on your mother’s birthday

stomped on the geriatric wooden floorboards

in our child trashed house

imparting the importance of birth control

to the couple renting downstairs.

Or that same evening

how you fired yourself alive

in apoplectic rage, window shaking shouting

by the door of an Indian restaurant

while the rest of us shocked survivors,

shovelled back curry

with the speed of starving untouchables,

paid an over generous tip

Of course you were learning to cut deals

with disappointment.

Had just discovered it exists

how much of it there is.

Learning

that after all that anger has its say

it’s easy to forget, become yourself again .

Not learning.

And I not yet telling you,

that sometimes you cannot.

**Thomas and the Coyote**

My son rides his new, bruise colored, bike

in a Mandela of silver and purple

circles himself  around the outer thigh

of the tough muscle of  sculptured park

waggons his young wheels

over sensible grassware

its municipally chartered Eden

He is a full throttle child, cranking himself up

becoming unstoppable

delivering us to laughter

in his unboxable exuberance

in his brilliant octagonal sharpness

in his life

streaming itself

through the ineffectual bars of evening light.

Later, over pure virgin tears

he tells us of the Coyote

how it nipped at his wheels

marinated his shins with its volcanic breath

whipped his legs

with the hungry hot slobber

of its summer tongue.

**To Be Childlike**

I praise my son’s greed

that he will bite

through his own fingernail

to slay fresh popcorn

his aspiring vanity

the way he accelerates away from me

becomes a greased pig

when I endeavour to kiss him

in front of his regiment

of racoon brained friends

his reluctance

to wear the parrot engraved shirt

that for my own devilish amusement

I like to parade him in-

that makes him ridiculous

a midget Hawaiian.

I enjoy the way his beach ball head

becomes a weapon

the goat like butting

he delivers to his sister-

only occasionally interrupted

by my foul mouthed admonishment

when he nukes me in the balls-

his pretence he cannot dress himself

cannot identify

his left or right

how to maneuver his underwear

into the correct coordinates

all those skills that will miraculously

return to him

at the promise of ice-cream, the

rattle of dollar store trinkets.

There are so many faults for me to love

that sometimes, just sometimes

I feel I am his equal.

**Cascadian Footwear**

Two young dear

press themselves against the forest’s outer flesh

push into the greener grass, beyond

the sharpened wire

slip their bindle bodies

under the rug of late august sun.

An angry heat crunches its knuckles

over the tree tops

a branch snaps

a solitary dog bark

trots itself up a spine of wood smoke

car noise from a six lane highway

massages itself

up and down the hot beach of the afternoon

the summer paces itself along the tree line

like a junkie in dead man’s Nikes.

**Bite Marks**

I have a family- brother, sister, mum and dad

that love me.

It took this long to know it.

I tripped over it as I ambled in the fat paddock,

of middle age.

The sharp edges, razor nailed resentments

now shrunk and smoothed.

The bug eyed demons, lords of dysfunction, got

so bored at not being dealt with that they packed and left.

I have fathered a son and daughter to replace me.

I have a wife that is too good for me-

who, most fortunately, has not yet noticed .

I have a father with dementia

who can’t remember what he had for breakfast

whose claws have been clipped

teeth neutered, tamed behind glass

basking themselves, fat and still in salt water

unreachable on an impressively high shelf.

**The Family Pet**

Just once I saw him cry

that August

when the cat got crushed

by a truck.

He could not loose a tear

for the years

of frittering and dissolution,

served up sloppily by his sons

their pantomime lives.

He had grown as hard

as the drought bleached fields

that lined the roads by our home

as brittle as the bones

of the family pet

that could not bend, only

fracture.

**Learning to Eat**

My father grew strawberries

hungrily angling his fingers into their misty intestines

curving his harvesting knuckles over the milk eyed planets

uncharted Martian moons

Amazonian boned globes of river and red.

My young hands would shuck between leaves

disentangling the ripened berries

birthing them into air, new gravities

stacking them high in rocket skin colanders.

Later I would wash and dress the bodies of new picked fruit

prepare them

for the dissolving into sugar

for the navigation into pies and crumbles

the becoming changeling in the oven’s heat.

**A Triptych in Concrete**

**Concrete 1**

He was concrete, resurrected

forked and shoveled into

a perfect consistency of muscle and bone

Flabby gutted cement bags hiked

across his binding back.

All winter the bare teeth of the garden tools

sounded themselves out

against the cold skin of the wheelbarrow

He worked himself alive

under a biblical plague of particles

as paper tore and powder spilled

dust married dust, became whole.

**Concrete 2**

Unknown to him

the neighbours christened him

the concrete man

all winter he lived in the back yard

building pathways, walls

the base for a greenhouse

then later, after the spring thaw

he started on a porch

his hands mummified in dust

fingernails cracked

body

becoming the heart of the machine

as he covered all greenery in flatness

logic, the angles

of the geometric dreaming

of his unmixed being

**Concrete 3**

What I learnt then, I still use.

I will always know the perfect mix

powder, water, sand to pad

strengthen

I will always see

the greenhouse base

in which his fat industrial fingers

carved his name

“M.J.Hill 1974”

The glow of his tiny lamps

in the darkened garden

on those December evenings

that allowed him to work into the night

merge with it

while his wife

my brothers and sister and I

watched him from the Kitchen window

wishing him to finish, come back to us

from wherever that it was

that he has been.

**The Class War**

On my final family holiday.

A Scotsman , with beach ball head, a perm to scrub pans with

who in road rage, crumpeled my father’s half inflated legs

bruised his pimply English arse , red white and blue.

Later, an off duty soldier

and a car radio-

his muscled refusal to leash his attack dog Rod Stewart.

He had my father muzzuled.

At home my father had suburbia as hard as granades

investments as sharp as razor blades

an afternoon of Sunday bridge as pummeling as a baseball bat

a regiment of Beethovans loading heavy concertos on the lawn.

I knew it then , could have told those macho fools

that shot stoned or stabbed, victory was his.

**The Great Indoors**

In his old age,

my father had to wrestle with my occasional visits.

My elbowing myself in

over an impotent Atlantic.

Bringing my raccoon brained children

that spread themselves  as a rash

across his Sudoku lined old world hutch.

Last Fall I helped him in the garden

half-heartedly attempted to compensate

for all those years as hindrance, as expense, as worry.

Busied myself, pretended I knew

how to chop wood

cut grass, dig up the older trees

helped him bring up cavities of earth

un-bury roots, free them in death

in the touch of never dreamt of air.

We never have talked much-

still do not

In our aftermath of work

the small limbs of the cherry tree

were desecrated out across the lawn

disappeared

as the evening light peddled itself backwards,

branches became obstacles

barriers blocking us from the house.

They shielded us from the

yellow weld of the kitchen window,

from the blunt blade of that inside world.

**The Knowledge**

For the last time that year

I wrestled with the reluctant mower

over an indifferent lawn

forcing it under the summer’s thin shawl

as it came loose

from the bare shoulders of September.

There were spiders in roughly sheared light

hallowing me under the magnolia tree

my three year old son watching me

as I once watched,

to learn the lessons of suburbia.

I never did tell my dad I loved him

I never needed to:

It was enough for him to know,

that one day I would trim hedges,

straighten flower beds, cut grass.

**Father Death**

My Father and I

we don’t show hurt.

We cry for strangers, sick pets

not ourselves.

There was winter sunlight

that inflated him against an open window

found him pressing a brick thick telephone

to his impassive face

absconding with the pellet hard words

of an unknown nurse

informing him of his mother’s death.

When he dies

he won’t expect fine words

flowers, self-pity or inflated sentiment.

He and I have something more

something unspoken that just is.

that, some have told me , is called love.

**Father’s Day**

That first time he blacked out

he cracked his skull on the bathtub.

Robbed of all blood pressure

his brain snapped open

flooded itself

across marrow white floor tiles

in a wave of half digested thoughts.

After a night of bottomless waiting

in the emergency ward

eavesdropping on the discomfort of others,

he got bored

got sick of waiting for young people

in white coats

to tell him they knew nothing

walked out at 4am

swaddled in the cotton concrete

of his hospital pajamas

took a taxi home.

The second time he blacked out

he didn’t trouble doctors.

He lived inside the headache

got on with his usual job

of sending me

those tsunami sized emails

about people I had never met

places I had never been to

details of chess games and bridge club

a few jokes about dying-

what he was going to do

when it was over.

**Father – Son**

This is nothing new. I have been here before.

As you have.

Tell me something original that is true.

Show me that you are blindly reaching

for where the wheel meets the water

that you are ready for the undeniable current, unreadable flow.

There are no guarantees.

If you are allowed to live

you may see the arthritic magnolia on the river bank

the abandoned picnic table streaked with the remains of summer

a small bridge over an unforgiving current

taking you into a silence

that must be walked towards slipped into as skin.

**When God Wasn’t Looking**

The minister- in his desperation to vacate- banished all light

forget, my father and I were at the organ, packing up.

He expelled us through darkness

in the violent withdrawing of illumination

out into the graveyard, where we  lived in exile between stones

hiked ourselves forward on handholds of holy air

twisted ourselves  into the porous hymnal of the knotted ground

to become  broken bone , blood  to lay out our eyes

into the wet grass, empty our bellies into the  runnels of rabbit and rat

tangle our bodies into the thickening beard of midnight.

We survived on honey and locusts, party bags of Cheetos, on

starlight alchemised to bitter wine

on the occasional sighting of a scimitar of distant camels

twisting itself between winking villages

by roasting lizards on tiny fires build on crypt tops

in preparing our union with night

thinking though thought of fox , wing beat of moth

in living on our hands and knees, grubbing for bugs

shifting our shapes

over the glittering Sabbath of an excommunicated silence.

**Fixing Things**   
He could fix anything, eventually.   
His workroom

a broken country of dismantled TVs   
a regiment of soft skulled valves

boxes of tooth hard switches.

slit eyed fuses with their glassy corneas

lined up like a firing squad.

the hard mouths of old radios

the scattered shell casing

of broken Bakelite.   
   
Crouching under the tattooed arms

of a tough winter, he built a greenhouse

mixed a fist

of hardening concrete into garden paths.

Massaged life back into the heart

of my older brother’s car,

crafted a storage shed for my toys and bike.

Later, in retirement

he made himself violins, then a cello.

That was his life.

Persuading things

that they could not exist

unless it was he

who had made them.

**In Mother Time**

I liked butter, she could tell.

Announced it

in the offering of a buttercup to my chin

its miniature sun printing its plate

of uneven circle into my flesh.

Lighting the way for us

back from the napkin sized park

along

the arched knife back

of ungraded alleyway.

On to

the smoothed out serving

of blacktopped highway, the

splayed out veins of arching elms

that swam us out

into the open fields where we lived.

All that way home I had her to myself

in the nest of eye sized yellow flowers

held in a basket between us.

Her free hand reaching towards me

spreading her fingers into mine.

**The Cosmos**

It was with someone else’s mother I found trust.

Who walked me home under the cold veins of November

the voluptuous nothingness of leafless oaks.

Waddled me in a procession of beacon blue bobble hat

sheltered me under the broad fortress

of her husband’s greatcoat,

pressed me into the delta of her varicose being

into un- streetlight  right of way, the highway’s edge

the Zeppelin ray maze of oncoming trucks

the glass eye of midnight, teeth of fox-

into hoar frost jacking itself up from empty fields

ironing skin

writing its winter thinness on to my flesh , its

starved paragraphs of darkness

strapping  me to the stars

pressing me, cloudless, into a strangers grip.

**Someone Else**

It was the letters and the cards that came

flushing the years in, years out again.

 Always in the third person:

“mum’s having a lovely time”

“mum’s sending socks and vests for the kids”

“mum’s got a cold”.

Then more recently the emails-

no clues left anymore

by the race-track curves, sharp chicanes

of her fountain pen.

Who was this “mum”?

A friend of hers, an old acquaintance,

work colleague?

There was always all that one- way conversation

about people I had never met

s stranger’s divorce, their friend in the bridge club

bickering at table,

the in-depth run down of pub menus

followed by the sign off : “love to all” .

All who exactly?

A slogan or a jingle,

rather than an intention, statement of feeling.

She understood love – knew she had to keep it herself.

**Blackberries**

When Seamus Heaney died

I went to search for blackberries.

Walked a thin deep track up to the end of summer

where most of the berries had already gone

the determined with their sticks

having beaten the bushes flat

taken almost everything.

So I went out further where people didn't want to go.

Beyond the twisted shins of the disused rail lines

out of site of condominiums , away

from the cozy, coffee sipping

the mutually assured policing  of ordinariness.

Beyond the homeless people’s  seasonal campsite

the unpicked bulges of their possessions

hanging overripe in white plastic bags from thin limb trees.

To where the fruit still lived.

The rat grey fungus banished.

The thick rosary of berry flesh unbroken

solid blood uncut , untroubled,

Stigmata of juice pressing through my hands.

**It’s All Relative**

In this place I am always six

curled into the gleaming barrack room

of my grandfather’s tobacco smell

the retired cop

cuffed in his certainties.

We are on a hillside watching rabbits

above a valley with a rickets bent river,

that stitches an untidy land

of loosened meadows

back into itself

presses a baton of tidal water

to the ankle of a sunken-cheeked mountain

against the neck

of the fire-skinned jetties

of rising air.

Red spirals of a sunset

detach themselves

up,  restrain the horizon.

The sky whirls in our heads,

his fingers close on mine

fold me in, form me complete.

**Leaving the Land - London 1940**

The arm from a water logged corpse-

the wet bread of it coming away.

The firestorm, snaps its fingers in his head-

a city boils its breath into the river.

The Thames suffocates in arterial blood,

oil skinned

the bayonet hard steel of an empire of shipping

slips under, snaps the estuary neck

broken bowels of sugar, rum and pineapple

become eviscerated

in the perpetual, bomb delivered daylight.

He a farm boy become cop

A fist full of reasons to leave the fields.

The drudgery,

the empty wallet of a winter morning

or being beaten to pinsize

under the ikon of his loving father.

Then the pull, of gambling on dogs-

the dumb, unpredictable beasts

of the Wimbledon and Catford tracks

where he first unpacked that pleasure

of actually having influence,

just for once, over something.

Then all those doors that opened

when he became

his tight blue uniform

the elastic bound fist of his sergeants pay

though all he really had, that was his

was his boy man body

silhouetting itself

under red brick certainty of falling stone, under

history collapsing itself

the illustrated firewalls, the twisted runes of heat.

**Cold War**

Any time I could I played

D Day, Al-Alaemein, Dunkirk.

Flew spitfires with cardboard wings

churned out Lego soldiers

rifles from femur thick sticks.

Walking back from school

I would spy the farm.

My eyes follow the riders

on their the atomic-bodied horses

running from themselves

across the open fields.

Advancing themselves forward

into the bursting stomach

of the evening sun

the burning towns

that only I could see.

the people in them martyred,

churned into the comfort

of one dead body, one stopped heart.

**An Introduction to Physics**

*1972*

Inside, the power plant Christmas party

the young blue collar guys

truck drivers, mechanics, warehouse staff

clear the dance floor by just being.

Icons of pure blue denim

certain in black studded boots

in their synchronised, formation, rock n roll

thumbs fused in their pockets.

They skitter their bodies forward, then back

into stars, squares, new connections

beginnings.

Outside, the reactor’s fat stump

the bleached skull of itself, scientific bringer

of division

a bloodless growth on the winter riverbank

the moan of water

being pushed through the heart.

**Veterans Affairs**

Our cheerful neighbor who had been ‘in tanks’

scuttled after Rommel, assisted in the shovelling

of his Aryan head full of desert -

who spent the post war years

to become the creator of his own inconsequence

to neuter and frame all that death

in wire and wood, the close pinched corners

of tedious anecdotes

lobbed like dud grenades over the my parents garden fence:

How he fried an egg on his gun turret

in the body mangling heat.

How he had drunk milky tea on the top of a pyramid,

got bitten on the butt by a camel.

Often I would hear him in his yard

shooting an air rifle at the garden birds,

I would listen to the dull thud of lives cut short,

the arriving ambulance of silence .

**An Enemy Of The King**

***For Frederick John Hill , 1892- 1967***

In 1919, demobbed from the army of occupation on the Rhine

my grandfather stitched his own wounds

buried himself alive in the male bodied flesh of the Trade Union.

My family got new organs, new guts, new alliances

a new ease to squeeze between the exclusions of class and income.

He trained himself in leadership for a world that has yet to exist

had surgically extracted a little of his greed.

He was coached in going undercover, becoming anonymous,

became shell-shocked out of the illusions of empire-

reborn

to be perpetually in waiting for a utopia of Brylcreem and Woodbines.

Eventually, he felt broken bones bending back to shape

his body knitting itself whole

over the empty centre, the flat caps and used suits of a hollow century.

**Being Love Sick**

Eventually after many months of schoolyard glancing

I wrote a note.

Too dumb and young to know they almost never work,

usually get sent, when it is all too late.

She arrived, as suggested, to me at the bus shelter,

bringing us our blood, swelling it through her face and into me

to let it take me by the throat, make me speechless

clasp us tight into the mutual impotence of our virginity.

We bent down under the ripe head of forest

voyeuristically leering itself over us in our small town valley end

where no buses would come, not just once but every day

the only sound under the stiff sash of summer light

made by my fists

caressing themselves to death against concrete.

**Reincarnation**

My wife of ten years, the Saigon girl

knows innately the ingredients

of a good fish sauce .

Knows its Braille of fish and salt

that has been permitted to ferment-

usually for a year to eighteen months -

in the tightening fist of a wooden barrel

Knows that, I the white guy, loves it.

She tells me that in a former life

I was Vietnamese.

Anchovies are typically used

although the occasional white devil

drops his guidebook and accidently

tumbles in.

Some fish sauces are also made

from other types of fish or squid.

She innately knows the ingredients

of a good fish sauce -fish, water, and salt.

For seasoning, sugar or love struck husband

may also be added- but isn't necessary.

**A Love Story**   
   
They slip down easy

are taken in  
the old and young alike

succumb to my wolf being  
   
kicking against ribs   
become for me

in the flick of shoulders entering my chest

in the final struggle of dissolving   
in the cities of circumventing veins.    
   
These days

I only take the willing

no need   
for all those yesterdays

of blood and ripping flesh   
the way of how it used to be   
in all that hamming it up

under a full moon

those cardboard battlements.   

Only once was there a *no*  
   
the woman

who undressed for me  
took my sobbing head in to her hands  
picked out the nits  
brushed my matted pelt held me

in firelight   
to the persistent pulse of falling snow   
   
listened with me to my lonely brothers   
howling in serenade

from somewhere unseen.

**The First Kiss**

The last ferry

crabbed itself toward the mainland

cracked open

the start of an August night.

A squat boat, fossilised into bone

Swan necked steel

the head a closed café

outside observation deck.

Two lovers

on a mean beak of white bench

folded themselves

into an origami of togetherness

cupped in the half scrambled clothing

of recently scuttled wedding guests.

Their love did not see it

oblivious

to the darkened skin of late evening

that pressed its body on the Pacific

the fattened blood cells of ocean

the puckered lips

of tide perfected circles

the tightened grip

of other currents

muscled up against

the dot and dash yellow of city lights

forming in a softening caress

against the horizon.

**The First Known Fire**

There is a spark     that can’t be killed

however hard it is stamped on

It has no interest in reason     burns holes

into the darkened drapes between us eats itself

into the ear of an otherness

that cannot will not  be explained.

It feeds us      with its un-measurable body

in the cut of shadows       the sprinted pinnacles

of light, warped labyrinth of caves and tunnels

at the nearest tip of the all we know of it

in the slightest caress      of its whale sized being

against the  press of flesh         on the leaky ship  of us.

Sometimes the spark will hurt

leave me gasping for air      opening windows

forcing doors

to release the bodily heat  of unmet need

take the  sharpened nails of frustration

vacation them  against the skin

cart my heavy luggage of blood and bone

press shut my fists on unchecked tickets

mop the cooling brows

of the weeping infants

of an unobtainable consummation.

**Undone**

At one time we still touched

expressed our love through contact, in

the offering of our un-bothered bodies

through

the effortlessness of being young

before  children, mortgages,  the

slackening of flesh

left me to distrust what the mirror

had to give to me

left me to want cover, darkness.

There had been Hanoi,

the city of your mother’s enemies

when I woke you on new years eve

to, naked, watch fireworks on the roof.

The city with its shadow gone

unfolded in its silken fabric of light

however briefly

breathed in the brilliance of a moment

**Question Time**

It was marriage guidance who issued us the question sheet.

It lay itself out naked in its starched and doubt free black and white

with the factuality of a gonorrhea diagnoses’, or

a declaration of martial law.

Conversation cues to substitute

for the usual vomitorium of televisual indulgence

marathon length phone stroking.

We started with the obvious ones:

What five things do you like about your mother, I mine?

What do you value most in a partner?

What have been your five top happiest experiences?

Then, as the embarrassment set itself over us

there were the questions we added for ourselves:

What would you choose to have - a robotic arm or a robotic leg?

Who are your top five favorite African dictators?

What top six celebrity chefs would you want to want to French kiss?

How far would we get if we tried to hop up Mount Everest?

Then the questions I wanted to ask, but could not:

What top five ways will it hurt me to know you no longer love me?

In how many places will I break

when the avalanche of your disappearance rolls over me?

**Heat Wave**

Every Window forced open

a tired breeze stretchered in

on the back of a July night.

How long it had been since rain.

The garden, stained by drought

lay quiet.

My wife and I

ferried bath water out to the flowers

baptised the Hydrangeas in our soap

dirt.

It is all we could offer them

there was nothing else.

Life needed us

had included us in its own reflection.

That night we made love

the first time for months.

**The Value of Life**   
   
Every day I start my work by climbing stairs  
twist my body up the bird boned glass

Of City Hall.   
   
On the first floor I am only slightly above ground

if I jumped now life would be cushion me

bosom me in grass

pat me gently across the shoulders   
as would an old friend  at a wedding feast.  
   
By the third floor   
I would need a parachute role to avoid snapping   
an arm or ankle  

the earth would send me a warning   
but, probably, allow me to walk away as a first offender.   
   
By the forth or fifth

bones would break-organs disconnect.   
   
Any higher   
then life would no longer be my friend    
   
It would show its naked self

allowing me a view

of a scattering of billowy maps rising in cloud    
snow sharpened mountains   
highways limbering out towards distant bridges   
   
on some mornings the heavy flesh

of a flowering sunrise. 

**Christ in the Wilderness**

I cut my own Christmas tree became masticated

by a Passchendaele grade field.

An injured pine      shared its pain against my neck.

I had touched upon a bleeding seem of Jesus

a raising vein of holiness

welted in his schlepp

in his cross shaped embarrassment

his uncertainty of mission

in the know it was easier to accept it

than let those people down that had come to own his love.

I suspect he knew, it was not worth a mention

that he would much rather be somewhere different

colder  with his sandals up.

Yet, which Jesus would I be-

the one of undiluted love, the wave

of it travelled backwards through bone

planet sizing the heart...

                         or that other guy, Old Testament

a nuclear winter of howled judgment, dripped wounds

scowled damnation.

Whichever one I would be a man like him

who held no way to disobey

who would insist on his own Crucifixion

on being nailed by the words of an inscrutable father

to follow

of the star of his own small certainty

across farmland, towards the wrong car-park.

**Failure**   
   
It is with cars I have failed most consistently.

I have spent a life time in broken ones

kneeling before the alter of exploding radiators   
talking myself into the acceptance   
of mysterious overheating    
   
the broken throat of a dying ignition.   
   
Of all that passive waiting for assistance

on hard shoulders of unloved highways  
   
of the carting of empty gas cans

across wheat fields at midnight  
   
the anxious swivelling of car keys   
as pistols on my seizing fingers.   
   
The fumbling in underworld 2am laneways   
changing flat tires under a cocoon of city centre lights   
   
under the always present possibility violence.   
   
I have grown hardened to the pity of strangers   
   
well meant, but inadequate offers of assistance.   
   
Grown to pace myself  
to the slow clicks of my blood bright warning lights   
growing fainter as I walk away

head out, beyond failure into edge lands

into the all promising sunrise of a perfect invisibility .

**After the Bee Box**

***for Sylvia***

These bees they live on

after the master has long gone.

They have come to clot on my Laburnum

in mid May

that is weighted down with its head full of Plath.

These insects immune to the tree’s poison

its reputation as  killer

their bee box long broken life unleashed

shake branches to orgasm under their weight.

I hide under skirts of foliage

sniff underwear of undergrowth

a voyeur to this bringing of being.

I am a stowaway,

beneath the tooth saw arpeggio of wings

their bruised beating on the golden chains of leaf

the powdered messages of love

that pollinate telepathy in the ticking of blood

the eye opening sting  that leads to all flesh

the single furrow of the plough

in the push and grunt of birth

in an ovary of shade

in a garden's bloody corner

where I am circled invisible surrendered

hold up my stranglers hands in offering

to a tomorrow where I may be set free

from this life that is only temporary

from this existence

with it bookends of boredom and fear

nothing of which matters

in this sunlight gush into lungs

in the footprints that separate life and death

that I tracked here along the winter’s edge.

**A Peoples History of Gardening**

First I weed, then hoe

guillotine the scruffy and the dead off at the neck

then manufacture and repack

mix earth with fresh sprouted sunlight

take

the hard grit of seed to rub between finger and thumb

press

the soil into my flesh , let it fingerprint me

rub up my DNA , made me real.

I lay out the stiff limbs of garden implements

the shovels and rakes,

dragged from the entrails of the broken bodied shed.

Then I cut grass, the first time this year.

Untangle the mower from storage

from the ruptured bowel of broken Christmas lights

the un-decorations , un used bicycles and ski shoes

to take down the lawn to its virginal length

to short back and slap

to bring it back

after the slow hippie slip of winter

to prepare it for barbeques

the envious glances of strangers

children’s birthday parties

the shitting of passing dogs.

At the evening’s end – the pressure wash

a declaration of war

on a whole generation of fungi

that are unwilling to give themselves up,

that thought I and they were friends

that peel themselves away in stripes

expose their inner tigers in shadow and light

become mammal, primordial

to move themselves beneath the water’s punch

in the

spit back spray

aquiline hammers

thrown against the neighbors windows

in the oceanic vomit, the liquid

pursuit of fleeing children:

although, it is there, undeniable

beneath the watered concrete there is beach.

**With William Blake**

I planted the apple tree

sliced

a fleshy slab of lawn

exposed

the many headed being of the soil

in the slip of shovel

between water mains, electric cables,

that I prayed were not there

into unseeded earth

rotten roots, matted into fists

printed

into the ground before suburbia

into the continents of bacteria

undercover lungs

in the citadels of worms

the heavenly kingdom of the lowly

that I inched up to on my knees

bent into

asked for a forgiveness

that was not to be given.

**Grass Cutting**

For a moment there is a scent, of

something offered up

a doorway opened, then shut.

A measure of old summers

the geometry of comfort

the angles and elongations of

other seasons

a move into the embrace

of other layers, other voices

untimed moments.

A returning, an anchorage

The writing of a history of

a greener grass

cleaner air, a movement of

shape shifting certainty

a vine of water over rocks

the circling away of light, that

is not quite catchable, cannot

be defined

passionless, without need,

all being

achingly familiar, unknown

that is here

in the going elsewhere of

all pain.

**Summer Watering**

In the August heat wave, I watered.

freed the in-between of air and solid.

Let lose a naked element, that

offered it fluid geometry, it’s pure form

that curved from the hose

in a scimitar of gravity.

This shadow essence, translucent key

that is most of what I am

that, unaided, could not enter the solid earth

so tight had its armor hardened

in the open mouth of the sun.

I am the dust , a spy in the water

that had sharpened into pools around my boots

coagulated slowly, down and inwards

retreated in to itself

raised its back in hardening escape

deflated itself,  becoming traceless

solid again.

In the swelled bodies of the bushes.

In the thickened, labia red berries.

That have loosened to my touch,

softened to my tongue, become liquid.

**The King of Glenbrook North**

First my parent’s garden

its Eden of children’s parties

filthy knees

perpetual summer ecosystem,

of sugared up boys

microclimate of budded hormones

punctured soccer balls.

Then the garden I tended as a student.

Industrial grade carrots,

cannonball sized cabbages

between which my fiancé Michelle

posed

in her wedding dress, netted herself

in front of the unsteady flesh

of the neighbours fence-

her peasant’s hands, bony and white

from the lack of a ring

that even then, I knew, I

was to never acquire for her.

Then this garden I have now- small

secret, suburban

each corner

a continent overcrowded with trees

Laburnum Pine Magnolia

pockets of Spring light

that only I have seen-

uncharted silences in the raspberry canes:

bordered by a pelt of rough cut lawn

shimmying itself shyly

towards the back of the house

squared up

to the edge of the known world.