

Thus

The park lawn lifts
at a sudden command
its beach of blue-grey cobbles
high above the trees

A dog runs forward barking
through the cold conjubilant air and birds
of a springlike winter morning

The Country Bus

Every morning, on board the country bus,
I imagine our forebears deforesting the clay,
amazed how erotic such former wetlands can be.

I've come to divide my time on the journey
between archaeological thoughts about drainage
and idle rehearsals of my sexual history.

At the edge of town there's a girl gets on
who looks as if her people might have graced
this landscape for a couple of thousand years,

where silken channels run between the fields
and upstairs travellers lower their eyes to gaze
through glass and leaflight, at its gently waving cresses.

Solarised

At last I get to walk
below the high cliffs,
along the black sand.
And let me tell you something.
It is not as we expected.
My feet print white,
and every step I take
adds itself to a distance which stretches
before me, instead of behind,
taking me back to places
I have never been
but can never quite forget.
Where I find myself now,
it is a west-facing bay
where sanderlings run on the shore,
and the fractured dazzle of sea and sky
is a myriad tiny flint crescents,
conchoidal débitage
from some ongoing work of the Sun.
Are you with me thus far? No matter.
You will be soon, and in the meantime
all you may do is attend.
The rocks are still warm.
The path we never took that day
still stretches round the headland.
In a little while, there will step from the waves
entirely appropriate forms, darkly illumined,
bearing that of which I cannot yet speak,
but names perhaps, and artefacts, and graces.

The Village, or, Festive Schadenfreude

for Debbie Joy

Saint Stephen's Day at dusk.
Ropes of light around the village pond.
A muddy island trampled by heavy birds.
A patch of scrub and a sign enjoining
a Merry Christmas, done in coloured bulbs.

It could be worse.
At least there is something to read.

While wife and child and friend
walk slowly to the other end of the water,
he lags behind to peer at a board,
with glossy graphics and "Heritage" in its title.
A map shows where all the parish chalk pits were,
which are now such a thorn in the County Council's side,
and where, he supposes,
careless townies may still get done to death
by the old Brer Rabbit method, watched by a sepia gaggle
of former village residents. For look,
here in ancient darkening sunlight
stands Disraeli Gardham, attending a horse's head;
and Waxy Oliver, holding court outside a pub,
one of the three still boasted by the village,
its former custom not yet back from the Somme.

The women and child now stop to wait for him
on the bridge along the road, and as he comes up
he can see the severed scarlet head of a goose
bobbing at the margin by their feet.
They haven't noticed, and he's looking forward
to pointing it out to them,
but all it turns out to have been when he gets there
is a crumpled drinks can, seen from an odd angle,

in the half light, from a distance,
through a dead man's eyes, by a fool.

Strangely, though,
there does actually float there, next to the can,
a headless goose torso, which he *badn't* seen.
It's upside down, and looks about the size
of the one they've been eating for the last couple of days,
which would make it roughly eleven pounds in weight.

There isn't much worth relating after this.
They take a well-kept uphill path,
traverse a field with a fence which they treat
as being electric until they discover
that it's wired with coloured string,
then wander around the village until it gets dark.
Much of interest, certainly,
but their main enjoyment consists in designing
impoverished lives for the modern inhabitants,
while looking in at their windows,
and spinning dark tales about foxes and water birds.