

## *History as Fen*

When you walk a field you walk two fields,  
thinking of the mole-catcher's saying

and his moleskin vest. Vermuyden drained  
the fen: its level Dutch Republican extent

as fertile as it's improbable—  
keeping a head just above sea-level,

below clouds that are dragonish. Eel-traps  
and beam-engines; a raw red brick estate;

Cromwell's cannon on the cathedral green.  
The confected Romanesque towers

of the drifting becalmed "ship of the fens".  
Your neighbour digs his allotment

in all weathers, brews beer, swears  
that he hasn't left his village in fifty years:

not since leaving the ghost of himself  
a prisoner of the Japanese.

But with the unseasonable rain,  
like the wooden figure house in the Swiss

chalet-shaped barometer, your man  
retires inside with intent to return.

In a Pontine marsh outside Rome,  
on a lake made by Il Duce,

an Italian Olympic "eight" trains.

from *A Case of Eyes*

CALIFORNIA

As the US has its Athens, Norfolk  
has its California. Lettered rock;  
an inflatable ("Free Willy") killer whale  
hanging outside a shack-like store  
with an inflatable Smurf and crab nets.

Each shoebox chalet shivers in the wind.  
The all-day breakfast we sit down to  
is a dog's dinner. Someone  
has written "Dream On", backwards,  
on the steamed up café window.

BECKETT COUNTRY

Giant Ur-preachers once strode the hills  
lit with inner light and tongues.  
Tramp in the skull or an upturned coracle.  
A hurt Proustian kinned with Bunyan.  
A scalpel ambling down a road.  
Despising *a literature of notations*.

# *Footfall*

*after Salvatore Quasimodo*

And here is the sea and the flowering agave,  
and the bright river parallel to ancient tombs  
fitted into the wall like cells in a hive;  
within mirrors, still smiling,  
girls with their jet hair down.  
One was at your side on an Ionian shore  
(a bee shining sleeked with honey in her eye)  
leaving barely a trace of her name,  
in the shadow of the olive trees.  
No one to your rescue,  
you know that a day like any other  
plays across your face: a quick play of light  
around the circle that encloses us—  
on the other side of the moon  
your soundless footfall,  
crossing the threshold of Hades.

*(Translated from the Italian by Simon Carnell and Erica Segre)*