

*Flight*

Effortless and uninscribed, the sky  
has earthed everything outside  
of where even bleached flight-lines

are ground as small as the pellucid breastbone  
of a golden oriole or wren  
between the thumb and palm of my right hand

to a powder that settles on this:  
the point at which two rumours coalesce,  
one to do with vision, one with voice.

One minute, it's ruse and colour,  
the next, it is wingspan and whirr.  
And who's to say just what occurs

when something loses the run  
of itself, and slips airborne  
and downwind into the auburn

undertone of flight. And so, away  
from the calligraphy of swallows  
on a page of cloud; tern prints on snow

that almost lead somewhere  
but then break off and stutter  
underground, or into breathless air.

Closer to hand, there is the slight  
precision of the black and white  
and its close score and countercut

that becomes what happens here,  
between these squat characters  
and a thinning fiction keen to aspire

to a sequence of hard words laid  
 one on the other and back again  
 like a schoolgirl's braid,

chaotic and restrained: that cannot  
 be taken in hand; that's here now, but  
 working up to clearing itself out;

soon to be thin air: nothing to write  
 home about; an advancing quiet  
 that throws this into shadow underneath

where, by way of leave-taking this time,  
 death, like a moth in a paper lantern,  
 is rattling in even these lines.

## *Whitethorn, and Then*

Plucked like a leaf from a whitethorn hedge  
 and put down almost at once before the flowers tarnish  
 or the promise of worse luck can come my way.  
 Of which the house and its bright door are innocent  
 as Sunday evenings or a whitethorn hedge  
 with all the light flocked into it. Any hour of late.  
 A kitchen table with plain flour sieved unfairly  
 so the table's even gleam is done away, and nothing  
 to show for it but my hands and their business  
 to do with the white-handed home and the waiting on  
 for the first slice to be dressed with cream  
 that will gather itself against the heat, and turn  
 like small white buds to a square of warmth  
 that comes lately when there's nowhere else to go.  
 I make a well and count the seconds until  
 the water fills and the crumbs begin to topple  
 in the small deep like flecks of whitethorn  
 strewn on a whitethorn hedge when there is little  
 else to see from inside and anyway, the heat has  
 blanched the view into something so seemingly  
 close. Like the twin lambs who will probably buck  
 my broken playpen in the back of the garage  
 for what is left of light over Auburn hill.