

## *Three Rivers*

*for Louisa*

ISIS

When you were born, the night sky broke to let fall  
its rainwater for hours, and then for days,  
then for a week at last, a week of rain,  
so that I drove you home over a causeway  
with fields submerged on either side of us  
where the river spilled across and kept spilling,  
the same river that twenty years before  
I walked beside on a late October morning,  
homesick, crash-landed, watching the slick water  
and hearing over and over the words, *How like,*  
*How like, How like an angel came I down,*  
as I strained my eyes in case they broke with tears;  
the river that seemed once to swell in sunlight  
when it ran like an illuminated margin  
beside me later, and the step-by-step  
inevitable love, which started here  
and brought us here, held safe and moving fast  
on a road over acres of floodwater,  
sending us home through rain and daylight fall.

LAGAN

Down, step by step, and along the bumpy path  
he used to follow here, day in, day out,  
I took by the arm at last, slow and unsteady  
in the blank sunlight of the seventieth spring  
since he had lived here in a river cottage  
now gone for ever, like that spring itself,  
your grandfather, who leaned on me, and looked  
through me towards the place at another time—  
his run and walk and run all the way to town  
along the river, or the soldiers training

across that field, who had to run until  
 their feet bled; or some other time entirely,  
 when it is you who take me by the arm  
 to bring me slowly past Shaw's Bridge, and past  
 Minnowburn, to the spot where the cottage was,  
 an old man who moves gently and with pain  
 talking to you in silences and sounds:  
 as afternoon lets in the sound of the river,  
 you help him down the worn and bumpy towpath.

#### JORDAN

We saw the big grey fish deep in the river  
 as shadows and reflections from above  
 where we sat on the bankside steps at last,  
 letting the water slip into our hands  
 and watching colours come to near the surface  
 of creatures so small they were hardly fish  
 but green and gold half-lights, dissolved there  
 glittering at angles in the straight-down sun  
 —*How bright, How bright*—that searched the shallow bed  
 until the sky was shining underneath us;  
 the quickened surface and deep calm below  
 were imaged in each other, we in them,  
 two bodies made of frail and heavy earth,  
 one bending up to scoop the busy water  
 into a bottle held firm in the light—  
 your mother, who moves with you, step by step,  
 across the sky from one bank to the other  
 on a well-worn, inevitable path  
 that goes waist-high and waist-deep in the river.