

The Century

Also by Tony Beyer

Jesus Hobo
The Meat
Dancing Bear
Brute Music
The Singing Ground
The Male Voice

The Century

Tony Beyer

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wellington

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Source

the gate latch
kisses apart
at my touch
and the garden
flows towards me

so many
human hours
devoted
to the ground
as work and art

an arrangement
for the still voice
saying over
what belongs
because it is here

and barely
visible in the
stirred silence
of the porch shadow
the hands

that gathered this
rest in each
other's warmth
waiting to
open to greet me

Place

in this dream
I am at huia rd
where I haven't lived
for fifteen years
and the wistaria threaded fence
I lean on
has long been pulled down

gone too
are the faces of those
I expect to converse with here
some to other towns
or parts of town
and some into the free fall
of identities
accessible only in dreams

seeming to drift
outside my body
I look
at the pencilled height marks
left by its growth
on the stud
of the fibrolite garage

to move
is also to move away
from the absences of others
and bring their occasions
on waking
to different fierce light

Pacificity

jerseys with girls' hairs trapped in the sleeves
blunt artillery of thunder among the hills
fine high bright cloud lit ginger at the edges
amazing ginger lioness eyes

shivery moon on or under the water
black kiss of meaning where the face meets the sheet
monstrous cruise liner eructations
spuds in dusty half sacks under the stairs

warm smoke rain over the grandstand
pallor of revellers in pub coloured photographs
special milk light of the upper harbour
hawk suburbs in the unmade hills

a cloud hung sideways between glass buildings
light ribs of wind ruffle on sudden puddles
the edward hopper school of restaurant decor
extended family *kilikiti* in the domain

dancing garments on the dry line
supper after the parodic wedding
heart to hearts in the pushphone mouthpiece
map of the former borough exaggerated

asleep in the silent ear of the forest
waiting for the balls of the mad juggler to drop
love that has softened revolver bullets to paste
foreplay of tides against my porous heart

Stone Threads

1 *Family Name*

first the unsatisfactory site
north of the tributary
on tutere te aho's land

then half a century
of *benign influence*
on the river plain

and the usual floods
and fires
and early or untimely deaths

fraternal names in the cemetery
fenced off by denomination

five sons with sons can't
hold as one
what one man held

the immigrants
the indigenes
delete one
exhibit strange customs
concerning land tenure

taupiri

wife of pirongia

closely clinging loved one

2 *Matukutururu*

mclaughlin's gashed hill
tiered into a ziggurat
by quarryings

the homestead removed
and its foundations
a place of weeds

dust hangs
over the turning
in the road

carved shallow
on a weathered block
a head facing four directions

four mouths eight eyes
four warning tongues

ceremonies
to appease mataaho
have disappeared from the region

in flight
the sunk vertebrae
of drystone partitions

between archaic gardens
where the landscape
recedes into its name

McLaughlin's

empty for a summer
the house was augmented by a swallow's nest
built above one corner of the front door
with attendant spatterings on the porch

in memory the bee wall
was the south side of the nursery
packed with honey like a lion skin
that sort of quality of legend

what happens in dreams
is that you wake to an artificial dawn
and the familiar landscape removed
from the frames of the windows

rolled up and replaced by sky
or inauthentic trees and hills
out of reach of yolky magnolia pollen
and the quarry siren

or a room from each
of the houses where you have lived
is joined with the others in a confusion
negotiable only by you and only asleep

*irresistible sense
at the reunion
not of recalling the past
but of imagining this future from that past*

forbidden the stairs by restorers' ropes and signs
hours of youth pass unhindered
through the still procession of atoms
in a house made fit for the dead to live in always

Settlement

horses of my grandfather's day
had manners
that would have prevented them
stepping in their iron shoes into the house

at dusk across the dusty yard
those long solemn countenances
rested over fence rails
or patiently lipped water

reassuring in their ancientness
some of the smells gone
out of the usual world since then
remain local and perturbingly alive

to crouch under the broad girth
in a storm
or to be carried home sleeping
was to gain wisdom at a measured pace

Window

now it is
morning in the lonely cinema
where the dust of the spittle of lovers
mingles with sallow light

men loading the truck of fictions
pause to be given their wages
by the manageress
in her green dressing gown

all night upstairs
that younger self my father
has lain awake with his hands
behind his head and ankles crossed

oxford bags under the mattress
to preserve their creases
widow's peak pointing out
the still visibly throbbing stars

The Works

my father's office was a shed built into the side of a railway tunnel at *the works*

he sat in there in his white overalls that signified foreman and with a butcher's knife honed thin as a bootlace carved linoleum stencils for the heads of tallow barrels

hard thick tea was served milkless in seven ounce pub beer glasses with sugar for weaklings

a maori man named billy did the tea and did square hand-clipper haircuts including what was left of my father's

the department my father supervised stank of candles bone-dust and blood in huge white painted brick rooms full of mysterious pipes taps valves and vents of steam

on saturdays the save-all he took us along to inspect was a deep cess heaving with liquid *mullock*

favouring his *crook leg* on the ladder he sometimes clambered down with a steam hose to perform inexplicable offices

Picture Theatre

hot nights with the fire doors
of the next door picture theatre open
he could watch at an angle
through the window of his room
the huge grey slow moving faces
and kisses of the era
or the frame shaking percussions
of hoofbeats and six-shooters

like the ushers and the ice-cream boy
and the sleepy projectionist
entranced by the smoke drifting beam
he saw parts of the same feature many times
assembling in no secure order
from these fragments
exemplars of conduct and its deserts
that would last through his life

meanwhile the world turned to war
and back again
and the pictures to colour
among other complexities
as his character thickened in shape
then diffused through his offspring
starters for afternoon sessions to a lad
whose education estranged him

denying himself sober focus
he saw the remainder occurring or not
after the final shoot-out and embrace
and the sunset end credits
with the hero home on the fenced farm
having his wound sewn
and the faithful horse rewarded
in the dim gold welcome of the stable

in his last room cast in an armchair
in front of the television's
louche tunes and self-interrupting glare
that alternated or commingled
with the difficult scripts of dreams
he surfaced for visitors
telling parts of the same story over
hoping it would end differently each time

Exploded View

winter saturday nights of 1956
I was allowed
if I went with my brothers
to walk to the great south road dairy
for the *8 o'clock*

we looked at the front page
football cartoon
under street lights on the way home
good news from hamilton
bad news for the maoris

this was before the handy store
in our own road
sold everything from eel spears to emetics
but had to draw a blind
over some items on sundays

the year of suez
and dad saying his old unit
put ashore at ismailia
would sort the wogs out in no time
eden or no eden

also my first cigarette
reprise of which I postponed
for three years until I was eleven
with my confusion
between hungary and hungry

what happened always
of course happens no longer
the house and our parents are gone
and though still geographically near
we have scattered in our ways

travelling outwards
we travel in closer detail
slow then fast again then slow
the zapruder film
or the challenger launch

those randomly numbered
switchboard plugs
of events that confine an actual lifetime
enhanced as much by soap opera
as by technology

history is what grown ups talk about
and what dates them
the perishable past as imperishable subject
just as I am silently proud
of having grown into mine

the president waving from the motorcade
a painfully photogenic icon
like the clowns
beaten by the police in my city
on the last day of the springbok tour in 1981

Two Stills

1 *Still*

for ground bait at night
my german great grandfather
spat bits of chewed up cigar
on the surface of the water
and promised the sinking aroma
would bring fish near the boat

this is all my father remembered
to tell me about him
a kind of sporting monochrome
of someone from the time
of lamps and horse transport
preserved into this century and gone

2 *Solstice*

my daughter brings me
the flawless pane of ice
a centimetre thick
from the rain cache
in the bottom of the tyre swing
hung on our apple tree

we look through it
at each other and the cat
and the dense mauve sky
until it becomes too
slithery thin in the winter sun
and falls and shatters on the path

Papatoetoe Poems

1 *Early Days*

the billy that rang empty
on its hook against the gate post
last thing at night
was full of the colour of starlight at dawn

2 *Originals*

them kumaras is really gallopin now
mr kilgour in braces and hobnail boots
he'd stamp and click on the path
like a horse modestly skittish in its stall

when he came over to use our phone
party line 796D
he shouted as if he believed
a hollow and not altogether reliable tube
connected him with his son in henderson

there was also the backward boy opposite
whose face became more anxious
left behind in the childhood we all shared

and errol you could never get a straight answer from
a wigwam for a goose's bridle he'd say
or we had one but the wheels fell off

3 *Archipelago*

in the sunday school tableau of iniquity
someone has eaten too many honey and banana sandwiches
and someone is copying someone else's homework

the angel of the lord
disappointed by the accommodation industry in gomorrah
smirks to one side in a bedsheet

4 *Task*

the lawn
divided in three
for each to mow his share

smallest in front
but awkward
round the shrubs

the middle clear
except for the clothesline
which paspalum fringed

the rest secluded
leading to recklessness
among fruit trees

parts of the world
that if I don't remember
won't have been

5 *Neighbourhood*

not that I want the bottlebrush shrubs
the since defunct council planted on our verges
not to have grown

nor that the houses whose owners' names
I knew by heart a generation ago
need to be renamed

but that someone should notice
like me in passing

6 *The Headstones*

calm pasture for cattle
and the constantly unfolding
episode of the motorway

this detached green fingertip
of the absorbed borough
presses into estuarine mud

lettered in dry uprights
everyone's best attempt
at what can't be said too often

every love second love word love is love

7 *The Rec*

a line of poplars
thrashing as the wind comes on
individual gestures within
an encompassing choreography

boys walk to the crease
in their first creams
in their padded gloves so much better
than the rubber-spiked ones we wore

I nearly lost teeth here
over the other side by the school
misreading a rising ball
from my brother when he was fast

8 *Address*

loose metal at the roadside
signed by footprints and hooves
and the turning curves
of audibly sprung cars

thick flap of the upright
white wooden letter box
through which I still receive
indecipherable mail in dreams

Touch Wood

1

this desk I write at
came from the surgery
my father in law
kept for twenty seven years
at hunter's corner

it has heard
of many sorrows
and some joys

he liked to work
mainly
with women
who were becoming mothers
and had the occasional
serious pleasure
in that time
of delivering
children of those
he had assisted
in their turn to arrive

2

certain trees
I have always lived near
especially in memory
whose placement on the ground
in relation to one another
and to the boundaries
and the conformation
and sizes of whose
trunks and branches
never change

and are a kind of ritual to observe
especially in memory

the plums
yellow and red fleshed
sweet christmas and tough
dusky damson
in the back right hand corner
next to the quince
and the shed
repainted or not
removed or not
then the nectarine on the left
the central old man peach
and other peaches
the fig the mandarin and apples
advancing to
lemon and grapefruit
attempted apricot
all climbed at one age or another
except the spiny citrus
and all on that part
of our quarter acre
called without hubris
the orchard
enlarged by the size I was then

3

reading these lines
why think of the reserve
at the elbow of winter rd
where it turns past the right of way
to what used to be wagners'

each year the huge
local guy fawkes bonfire
nearly got out of hand
and louts were blamed whose names
might as well have been ours

or that once
on the front steps
mum soaked it in warm water
then squeezed the boil
where a round scar still marks
the back of my hand
and the rotten matter flooding out
made me feel faint
and then sick so I missed
the whole cold sunny day of school

4

tile roofs the rain moulds
and the sun crusts with colour
you forget how much
light there is up under
how much compacted heat

beams that as night comes on
and nearly all night
remember the forest
imprinting
the sense of canopy
arms of the house and its shaken master
aching over us

man war and woman war
man and woman war
one night she went out and sat alone
in the fork of the nectarine tree
one night he wanted to punch
a neat hole
with his fist in the wall-board

ghosts
of my oldest loves
in a street photographer's proof
from the fifties

he distinguished by his hatlessness
she by her beauty
passing that of other women

5

not just blank landscape
front fences and front lawns
with street names
and some tree names
in the other language

some of the trees had stood
breathing at night on fricker's farm
and knew something
and on our road boundary
remnants of the hawthorn windbreak
had to come down

the homestead
shed prospect and aspect
as housing encroached
though the old lady lived to warn me
with impartial solicitude
against eating watermelon seeds
and once

 only once
in the grass of the empty section
that became logans'
I uncovered the blotched cream trove
of a quail's nest
and told no one

Erin Street

when instead
of the quotidian mugs
she sets out

thin rose-patterned
china cups
and a saucer each

with a flatter
wider plate for
under the saucer

though there are
no longer
enough of these

to complete a set
and some incongruous
substitutions take place

I know the visit
is serious and formal
and that something

fully rehearsed
in advance
is to be discussed

and it doesn't
matter how often
we have covered

the same subject
even repeating
some of the same words

it's too important
to be hurried or
impatient about

or ever
however many times
completely forgotten

Alice K

blind now
and numb in the
hands and feet

in anticipation
of the time that is
coming to her soon

she uses these
last hours
and days to review

the lives from birth
or first meeting
to death or

final moving apart
of everyone she has
known well enough

in youth or age
to remember
in this way

and it is neither
regret nor
sere acknowledgement

that her active
life has passed
compels her

but rather
for themselves the
silent narratives

intense and
comprehensive in their
affection

the purpose
her long years
have guided her towards

Sang aus dem Exil

i

sleeping through daytime rain
and the dreams it summons
is one of the great earthen passages

sound temperature and light
infinitesimally modulated
in the palm of one huge hand

then pierced by bird song
relaying some distant intelligence
into distance out of hearing

ii

I need not wander further
than the street address of my birth
to be challenged as a stranger

one season only in this city
one flavour of rain
the locals praise immoderately

I'm going to give you my images
flat sleep without dreams
with an egg-blue tablet

iii

tell me the light still moves
finger by finger breadth
over the salt whitened table

cane creak of conservatory chairs
gone in one breath of fire
indestructible in memory

ripe smoke calligraphy
so many thoughts like words
yet to enter language

iv

I hang my shorts on a chair
for the night like a boy
and lie outside the covers

sometimes the stars
in their eternal formations
watch me watching them

on the edge of sleep
who can be sure
of the intentions of moonlight

v

setting of the plum tree
green roofed shed
and brick paved ant tenement

a young man in a T shirt
leans forward pursing his lips
to drink from the hose

persistent discourse
with those for one
or another reason absent

vi

what is the message
each bird cry calls to the next
without understanding

prayer rhythms
of the tails of summer cattle
swinging at flies

master I am waiting
the mad man in his cage eating flies
as the world awaits its prince

The Century

on a rain lit afternoon in epsom
as the century closes
my aunt is talking about the house
she stayed in with her grandmother
for a time during the great war

she can still describe the layout of the rooms
and who slept in which
and the gilt-spined ramparts of the passageway
where an uncle's books were shelved
who was studious and polite and died young

the yard through the scullery door
has become for her
a permanent blue cube of daylight
edged by sweet-pea trellises
and the idle interrogatives of hens

it is one of the pleasures of the aged
to disregard exactitude
or to answer only the unasked questions
but she is lucid and particular in detail
keeping faith with her task as remaining witness

she was sent to be looked after there
during the difficult aftermath
of the birth of my mother
her sister who has subsequently died
like all the other characters in this story

except one whose memory is its vessel
and insists that a child's sense
of intimacy and familial order
has significance beside the breaking of nations
and will not for now be lost

A January Café

summer with proust
and white
fragrant breakfast rolls

the lower floors
of the albert park oaks
fully curtained and hued

only the man with the chin
has not moved
closer to the windows

and the bicycle woman's dog
grins in
through the street door

chopped fetta and olives
an oregano rain
the waxed points

of the cook's moustache
parrying humid air
my ballpoint

lazily impulsive
over the furry page
of a 50c memo pad

blaze of ordinary living
and its quaint
epiphanies

also to be saying
you again
after months of consecutive I

you moving through
the room in clothes
that redistribute the light

you playful
as a cat stalking
in the thicket of the light

Pride of the South

1966

someone I helped
push start his car

shouted *bloody student*
at my borrowed scarf

as he banged off up
stuart street

leaving me to walk
to brief steep digs

acquired by word of mouth
and my promise of restraint

with the vegetarian
hard line of the house

lentils and spiced
rice escaped

for nights with new friends
in the after hours town

doorbell signals
and blatant taxis

I was 17 but big
and though no one asked

said I wanted to be
a poet when I grew up

1973

change of poisons
speights to sharp grass

pills and blood rock
thumping through the walls

as well as the
purposeful discord

I've since become
accomplished at myself

but left to myself
all one morning

I read in the
university library

kawabata's *izu dancer*
no one had anywhere else

magic sentences
treading each step

of the mountain path
breath by breath

with the travellers
like the clear

suspension of gravity
on a wood block print

Poems in Takutai Street

two summers ago
the headlong rain

evelyn waugh trousers

resurrected umbrellas

sustained indoor visiting
*

stations
on my brothers' journeys
numbers 29 and 30
a twenties bungalow
round shouldered bauhaus brick
and the bottom flat
among tropic garden bush
*

surprising morning bulldozer tracks
on the shining mud at low tide
*

up over the hill
for sunday breakfast
massive iced buns
from the gladstone rd dairy
old stoney ginger beer
and coffee
and a different paper each
which we then swap

we could already have

become old men
together like this
*

the rainsquall a tongue
idly probing the cavities
of bloodworth park
and whakatakataka bay
*

one nephew
remembers trying to return
his new brother
to where he came from
by spading the pram full of sand
*

brushing cats
and their residual hairs
and flea eggs off the table
before the caffeine rite

self exiled house-sitter
you were reading
american civil war history
to my voltaire
in the house of a man
in his eightieth year
who as a child
had seen thomas hardy
and whose room of books
was testimony
of love as long as life

cat eggs you said
*

short sighted and
absent minded
I shave carelessly
leaving stubble patches on myself
and the man in the mirror
*

life itself
such a
temporary alliance

Back

wind sown swallows
write cursive welcomes
on the sky
above the kumara pits

the shapes of hills
and islands
from this vantage
out into invisibility
are familiar
even without a map
or names

but I know the names
and on the green cone terraces
fondled by shadow
my earliest world
cloud and wind bare

*pain across my chest as my photograph
is torn in half in another city*

a woman
lifts an infant
past her bare breasts
on the sand
and the clear part of the sea
hesitates

sheen past beginning of noon light
beginning ardour

The Reclamation

1

boys shoot at rabbits
or on bad days
each other

2

below the level of imperturbable
green flannels on the ngaio
below fennel shocks
launched out of drought clay
to neck and breath height

through the culvert
that directs the creek's last gasp
under the road and the railway line

dumped concrete bridge sections
orange bionics of reinforcing
flaking the border of substantiality and air

heaped grit

erosion tailings

space tamed for sunbathers

3

the boys
walk in pairs and threes
hearts thumping
at the division of the chest into breasts

Testimony

the bridge in
bridge road
took us across
a dry loop
of the river
to farm sheds
idle in tall grass
and milking pails
the rain first filled
then evaporated from
all summer
leaving a rich
living sludge
or too far gone
a crust
of tessellated crackles

there were also
horseshoe prints
baked in the
roadside mud
like the spoor
of dinosaurs
or signs of repeated
three-astride journeys
to and from
the charred
rectangle of a school
somewhere behind us
where the town's
exhaust and
barbecue smoke
made the hills shiver

to have the taste
of that past
in our mouths
we rested
and spread food
on the beams
of a lapsed gate
that stained our
knuckles lichen orange
when we tore bread
and having eaten
drowsed
on the feral scent
of noon heat rising
off sweet alyssum
daisy and buttercup

thus it was
possible to watch
through some
dim inward lens
those paddocks
or their mirror
shorn of overgrowth
and a man who
walked exhausted
bowed in
green moonlight
holding his hands
away from his sides
so the slippery
dark liquid on them
wouldn't mark his clothes

a history
the full sun
cancelled
teasing deeper
shadows from
the structures
abandoned years ago
or yesterday
already silvered
with old wounds
that had all of forever
to change or
be more the same
or muster weightless
peopled by
their own still ghosts

like anywhere
it was a place to
imagine growing in
and spending
the long blank dusks
of february
biting your thumb
over compositions
in ink on
stiff lined sheets
about the visit
of the queen
you never saw
or days peace came
like nothing really new
to this eventlessness

The Signs

1

in willis street
any sweatshirt
\$9.95

in the boundary hills
where the last
fluent speakers
of the lyric tongue
might be found
a human ribbon
singing peace songs
among the grass

2

election day
partisan colours whip
from car aerials
under a
campaign sky
handing the mother
by her pouched elbow
up the steps
to the monument
where her tears
blur carved names
into faces
younger than ours

3

the land
has had taken from it
several kinds
of small bird
and some large ones
and the chill
inaudible quiver
of the forest's distress
shed like leaves

4

it rains and
the californian quail
scuttle in alarm
up and down the low branches
of a macrocarpa
beside the lawn

the house is renewed
by this wet membrane

but someone
caught on foot in the
immigrant fields
shirt transparent
angry at the sky
follows the shadow ridges
of spiked fur
on the dogs' backs
and their odour
past thistles
and drystone gaps
and the ocean breath of the windbreak

5

I want you to
have some memories
lying under
the scorched car
watching the dust
suck the colour
out of everything
and a man or
mirage
dust coloured
get up and speak

Rudiments

1

I am aware
that the northernmost tip
of this country
is a place where
the spirits of the dead step off
into their meetings
with the bruised paunches of clouds
and that not enough
of the people
expect this will happen to them

I am also aware
that the passages
of many of those who do believe
conclude frustrate lives
in the place of their ancestors

2

native but not autochthonous
I am walking the beaches
I am uttering long sighs

ensnared by the wan drowned sailor bleat
of the sonar buoy
marking the channel reef

and the seaweed's
revolting repertoire
of turd and gut impressions

my body is taken apart
by an immense shudder

my fingers twitch off
to populate the inland waters
and my wrists and arms
to hunt in the open sea

my blood leaps to stain
the heart wood of tall trees

my wounds are crusted
at the edges
with the stiff pus of lava
and vegetation in tatters

I am not the land
I am what has died
in the land to make it live

listen to the gurgle and belch
of my round belly
its punctures and slits
issue foul gouts of steam

with my stone teeth
broken now
I have eaten my enemies
I have said the names of those I love

I am not the land
confined
within the single circle
of the bone hard bone dumb human skull

The Gulf

1

I have always
only
wanted to be in that house
above that bay
looking out
at the unfinished headland
the sky and tides and people
that come and go
and the stencilled wall
of the concrete block changing shed
where it says
NOCAMPING
NOFIRES
NODOGS
NOHORSES
to which someone has added in dayglo
NOHAVINGFUN

as far as possible
also
from likelihood of employment
at any of my trades
where sun rain and wind are the gardeners
the people kill none or their own
and what I have to teach
is better learnt from the sea

2

denuded of spars
the islands on their own voyages
crewed by loners

*

the beached afflicted
of the great families of the town
their handsome dynastic faces
their genial drool

*

fakir

I control my breathing
and the wild speed of my heart
by listening to coves
on an island where
the waves abrade the sand
like the edge
of a silver coloured coin
stamped with the monarch's
fretful effigy

my arm is wrapped
and the cold
mouth of the stethoscope
touches my skin
and there are gull cries
rage of bitter water
and under the still hale timbers
of my ribs
wine and salt music
for all the poems in the dictionary

Kororareka Notebook

lustral effect
of arriving by water

*

off my own ground
the pleasure of knowing no more
than everyone knows
and in essence less

I can read the free pamphlet
I can ask at the store
I can be any dozy harry
in a hat and backpack

*

someone who knows
someone I know
in the reconstructed pompallier

the new zealand story
in a short
comparison of connections

young people
used to telling each other
their similar stories

which I contact
at a generation's remove
talking about my children

or these already nostalgic
children's parents
I have at times unknowingly known

*

outline of the waka
a quick pencil stroke
in the bay
*

bottomed with a permanent
ballast of stones
the manganese ore barge
beached at uruiti

sprouts rusty orange
polygon headed nails
where its deck used to be
and a bow wave of mangroves

not in the least arthurian
a place to sit eating lunch
and read of course in thumbed penguin
the african queen
*

technologies which require
intensive supplies
of paper and lead

the discharge of muskets
and the spreading
of the word of god
*

et in arcadia ego

a bed
with a box beside it
to put stuff on

a lamp
to read and cast
shadows by

a door
on the back of which
to hang pack and pants

a window
to hang a star
or two in
*

at the wharf
guys with beards
want to tell everyone
how the world should be run
*

kingfisher

pied shag

black oystercatchers

tui in voice and abundance

fantails

swallows

morepork night shift

pheasant

warbler

parakeets

terns

kereru

hawk overhead

pukeko on the way home
*

russell boat club
matauwahi bay

the afternoon of two
drowned boys' funerals

ensigns at half mast
lanyards tinging aluminium

in the shore wind
abide with me

17-20/9/96

River Wedding

1

elsewhere the river
carries used souls away
in the form of ashes and milk

garlands and bread knots accompany them
and paper prayers

2

here water
is the symbol of union
and arrival
imperious and tea coloured
bitter to sight
but cool and sweet tasting

here cloths
shivered with threads of light
are laid on the banks
and music is sounded

3

a chorus and a procession
in honour of the unseen sea
immense and turbulent
issue of rivers
and the rivers' future

whose ancestors
numberless over time
are measured in their own time

4

creases in the palms of the hands
and dull blue veins
on the inner sides of the arms

one pass of the hand
makes all the waters wine

5

the bedspread
perfumed with subtle oils
is figured with a map
of tributaries and confluences

sometimes molecules of drought
are roused by its movement

but lovers are mountainous
turning on each other
stiff shoulders of umbrage
or melting together as fidgety hillocks
and peaks invisible to thought

which will she be
there behind her veil
at first glance more like an artefact
than the tall girl
whose nipples twist into points of ice
at the sound of ankle bells

Deep Houses

1

branches of the indoor forest
moved by moonlight

over the walls
this thin intrusive blue

that leaches through the dormer
lightening bed head stair head empty page

something the soul's colour
bodily red would erase

2

recovered in memory
or dream
a vision of your own conception

rooms guarded by the shadows
of their half-closed doors
the hard curved shin of the dressing table

your conscious self hovers and darts
in a corner of the ceiling
like light reflected off a wristwatch face

scent of face powder
ironed handkerchiefs dotted with cologne
and other still unnameable smells

whisperings movements
of loved ones now estranged from you
by all this distance all this life

a point of entrance and exit
that exists
neither in time nor in place

3

just shut your eyes

the black slot of a seagull's shadow
hungers along the ground
keening for tribute to drop into it

one black triangular flaw
in the rug pattern
to allow god not to be mocked

one drop of black
stirred into white paint
to give it brightness

one black lock cut
from your head and sent underground
where you will follow

The First House

1

shell paths
 blue under the moon
in the sheer night breath of jasmine

the strongest anxieties were those
that reflected starlight
off parts of the new plastic roof spouting

what could be so luminous up there
so intense
in banking and releasing the force of other systems
and then without my glasses
fade into moon smears
brittle rubble of light

close to my face your face
obscured by detail

close to my mouth your mouth
improbably flavoured

2

last night I was sure I could hear the sea
brought home by my ears' habituation to it
lapsing lapsing
against the soft tissue of sleep

this house floats rigidly
above the precarious fire crust
older than the half built shells
in the prospering cold war suburbs of my childhood
framed up but unclad
for stars and wind to live in a while longer

*I'm older than most of the houses in this country
and most of its forests
which are taller than I am*

writes yehuda amichai

not
with a bit of modification
untrue
of citizens of other wary and unwelcome settlements

3

sometimes the wind grips the roof's topknot
and twists
and crackles every knuckle in the place

sometimes after it rains
the locks of the doors loosen
and windows that were warped by the heat
swing to with ease
and there's this close intelligent murmur
all over the ground outside
where single drops tap the hedge leaves
in a sequence unlike human music

renovations and maintenance and money

the water blaster man
is coming to see to the lichen