

HAPPY HARADA

*(Happy Harada, most erratic member of the Japanese Olympic team,
had the best and worst scores of the Nagano Games.)*

*And it's Happy Harada on the bench now.
Four years he's been waiting for this jump.
Happy pulls down his giant goggles and grins.
He stands, releasing himself, sinks
into the silver crouch, arms swept back like fins.
The skis scuffle in their grooves like cutlery in a drawer,
the wind presses against him like a wall,
flattening the smile into his face.
He hits the ramp. Yes, it's a big take-off,
he's certainly found a cushion this time,
oh he's flying. The skis in perfect V,
the puffed aerofoils of his sleeves.
Happy passes all the lines of the landing slope.
A hum goes round the crowd.
How's he going to bring this one down?
Telemark won't do it from that height.
But he isn't coming down. Up Happy goes,
high above the crowd, who turn up their faces
like a field of poppies, all the little flags
drooping in awe as Happy Harada soars
right over them, clean out of the arena.
Well, what will the judges make of that?
Just look at Nikkinen the Finn
shaking his head, he can't believe it.
Happy is flying, flying high over Nagano,
past the sushi places, there goes the cement
factory far below, a cloud skits by
just under his skis, he can almost taste it.
A distant ambulance wails among hills.
Happy watches as all the swallows of Nagano
flock up to meet him. They lead him off
over the temples of Mount Hiei
ducking and whistling like dolphins.*