

Canto Transitional 1 (Gluttonous to Lustful)

Lifting the valley tableau, a mirror
eyeing the swift shade's crossing,
drag of body: hunger, longing,

sight worn past sockets,
a favored object worn away
and flesh wearing away

with it; and so to crossing up,
as red as spectrum will allow,
collective memory recognize:

that sun at our shoulder,
scorpions burrowing under lichen-
encrusted granite, rose quartz chunks;

beetles' carapaces hang on a thread,
and a cushion of green emulsifies stubble
sharp enough to puncture rubber soles.

How quickly you move across the reliquary
of invertebrates, a solitary pink and grey
pecking at seed swept onto firebreak:

its curl of beak gurgling with the piston
nub of its tongue, husks falling
into shade that won't leave it alone,

won't take notice of its irritable twitch
of head or wing, scratching to tear
into light. It's whispered that across the road

they invite friends to watch dogs copulating,
getting stuck into it. Between here and there
the remnant York gums, shells of exfoliated

granite bearings, cyclone wire twisted,
claws inwards, about the base of older
specimens: uncut grass in there, cauterized

wire where the nylon of the whipper snipper
has lashed, broken off, fallen like catechesis
uttered out of habit—you recognize strike,

tussle, and after the snapping, higher
revs of the device's motor; fruit on the house trees
has set and fallen—a season away from harvest.

To barrier the outside, to clarify inside property
boundaries where loyalty is familiar, custodial,
tree lucerne—Tagasaste—planted, walling

in quickly...an earlier resistance brought down
by a flock of rescue sheep, their blackness
culling from a herd of whiteness...

ring-barking tree lucerne to a deciduousness
of shade, unmoved by a strong sea-breeze
cutting up over scarp from concave waters,

driving against fire, heat of an emptied inland.
So, walking hard again, and thinking out loud,
our three-year-old marvels at movement

of shade: so slow beneath jam trees
when he's standing beneath or beside foliage,
yet vastly different walking in morning,

at midday, or evening...; in walking,
a wariness pervades—dugites, gwarders,
red-back tripwires coming down

from veranda eaves, from old power pole
fence-posts, scorpions under rocks inviting to sit on,
turn over idly—a destructive curiosity,

habitats bashed, adapted—scats
of silent animals, fullness of darkness
that makes visible a density in loss: fox,

rabbit, cat, field mice, hopping mice,
even rare marsupials struggling among
York gums, up high; owl pellets.

The child walks free of gluttony and lust,
but spray-drift of mosquito poison,
coating storm-fluids, conditions him

for a life of negotiations, tolerance, loss.
The joy of the walk is lost, but we still smile,
and amuse him, and share as many names

as we can. Again: “It’s so beautiful,” he says.
A trio of ring-necked parrots darts
up onto the limb of the dead tree semi-arched

towards the driveway: they call with an energy
to match his enthusiasm. They depart suddenly:
alarmed, joyful, possessed, enraptured?