

FROM *Waveforms: Bull Island Haiku*

p.25

The sky and the sea.
And that faint line in between,
drawn as if for me.

Walking the mudflats,
I pass a stranger. We nod.
And leave it at that.

As precise as words on a page,
in the fresh mud –
the language of birds.

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Studying bird song
on my iPhone while songbirds
gamely sing along.

Sudden smell of hops
from a city worlds away –
distances collapse.

James is Cool. Who knew?
James, for one; and, well, his dad –
all you need is two.

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Maps drawn and redrawn,
the tide inching in around
the unmoved heron.

“Glad we had this talk,”
my self whispers to himself.
(Never just a walk.)

A two-person tent
pitched in the dunes. Young lovers?
Kids without the rent

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When I was a boy
we drove out here once, these dunes
like the ruins of Troy.

It was our world then,
us midlander boys and girls –
islanders again.

Dew-damp, the long grass,
balancing small globes of light,
trembles as I pass.

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Picnic on the beach?
A dog with a bag of chips,
two crows with one each.

Polish? Latvian?
Laughter carried on the wind
needs no translation.

Smell that? Camping gas
fulfilling the primal dream:
beer, bunburgers, grass.

p.85 (with photo from p.84)

Darkness drawing near;
slowly – a porch light left on –
the moon re-appears.

It's the moon you've caught
in your bucket, little boy,
budding astronaut.

Where the angler fell
to his death, the sea remains
inconsolable.

From *Our Shared Japan*

A Natural History of Armed Conflict

The wood of the yew
made the bow. And the arrow.
And the grave-side shade.

Way of Peace

i.m. Eamon Keating

In Adidas runners
and white karate suit
with the simple crest—

a dove round a fist,
Wado Ryu,
the way of peace—

down the Downs,
past the gate house gate,
a chubby druid,

a breathing oak,
a shifting mountain,
following patterns

modelled on monkeys,
eagles and cranes,
stray dogs and dragons,

bird man of Portlaoise,
puff-jowled adder,
dancing bear,

a man in his 60s
somehow still
sane enough to play;
and me, 16,
hidden among trees,
glimpsing the way.

From the book *The Unwound Clock* (1990)

When You Are Moving Into a New House

When you are moving into a new house
be slow to write the address in your address books,
because the ghosts who are named there
are constantly seeking new homes,
like fresher students in rain-steamed phone booths.

So by the time you arrive with your books
and frying pan, these ghosts are already
familiar with that easy chair, have found
slow, slow creaks in the floorboard,
are camped on the dream shores of that virgin bed.

From the book *The Shape of Water* (1996)

A Reason for Walking

Words when I think,
thoughts when I word.
Hours with this thought only:
Only words,
not what I feel.
The streets offer
not promise, but escape.
Harmony Row, Misery Hill.
Any named place
better than this.
Back home, the summer sheets
an open book, but blank.
But then the light impression
of our bodies, curled up:
the hieroglyph for love.

From the book *as the hand, the glove* (2001)

FLESH

The spirit, despite bad press,
loves the flesh.

It enjoys nothing more
than body odour,

the warmth of a crotch
or the electric touch

of lips. Those dark religions
that have banned the nether regions

to the netherworld, to hell,
can cast all the spells

they like, can single out for blame
those who refuse to feel shame

about their bodies — children, the old,
the savage inhabitants of the Third World,

but most of all those women of loose morals
whose torture is somehow part of the quarrel

about sanctity and sin
and the vessels the soul is to be found in.

Enough idols and bones!
Enough gleaming chalices and altar stones!

I say it again: the spirit loves
the flesh, as the hand the glove.

And if you doubt me, ask my dying father
which he would rather:

to be done at last with love and pain,
or to leave, but then come back to flesh again.