

The Undermining of Quiet

At the head of a steep-sided estuary creek is a low dam of round-ended stones. The dam holds back a long marsh clogged with tall reeds. The reeds are yellow still in the deepening dusk.

A twelve-year-old boy sits in the crown of a tall willow toppled out into the marsh. His shivering dog lies, jaw on paws, part way along the bark-flattened trunk. The boy is waiting for the barn owl to again come ghosting over the feathery tops of the reeds.

From the dog's narrow muzzle, from the two wet slots of his black nose, comes the first low whine.

Spider Patience

On a narrow beach of flat grey stones a boy stands with his back to the long bend in the river estuary. A black rod and its forked rest, cut from a hazel outgrowth, form a right-angled triangle. The boy is watching a small white and gold spider at work. The spider has anchored its web to the sides of a crack in the low grey cliff.

The cliff rock is dull and pitted, not gleaming like the banks of mud yet to be covered by the incoming tide. Coiling lines of brown scum pattern the filling river's surface, warp what reflections there are of sky, trees and fields. Gulls call upstream. Shelducks patrol the mudbanks on the headland opposite. The spider pauses, and spins; pauses, and spins.

Inside his turned-down rubber boots the boy's feet are cold. Behind and below him the first of the teak-black seaweed is being lifted from its anchor stones. The boy directs his breath away from the web that now funnels back into the crack.

‘At the Twilight of the Gods

the serpent will devour the earth and the wolf the sun.’ Norse cosmology

Roadside cottage
built of stone quarried from
the elm-topped cliff behind
has its front door and lower window
moulded with mud spatter.

Coconut mat
at the deep back door
is green with moss.

In the dusk of indoors
the slow tick
 tick
 tick
 tick
of a seven day clock
on the mantelpiece
is sending small vibrations
across the room
to disturb the dappled ends
of the windowsill’s maidenhair fern.

Not that far away

The large dressed stones of the landing wharf and the curving away ditch of the never completed canal are what remains. Ash saplings grow along the uneven embankment and what might have been intended as a bridge now has a blue tarpaulin draped across.

Darkening trees have grown all around, serpentine roots seeking down the joints between the stone blocks. A van, tyres sunk among old leaves, has its thin bonnet raised and one back door open.

Deep tractor tracks lead away from two oil drums.

Bottom of the tarpaulin is mud-splashed, its folds green with algae. A cock pheasant flaps and croaks not that far away.

path through cherry wood:
chunks of nougat quartz
laid as hardcore

Considerations

A single swallow jinks and jiggers into a wind not felt within the fern-grown walls of this abandoned graveyard. Part-sunk into the uneven ground are tilted headstones, a lopsided table-like sarcophogi and rusted railings. In one corner three straight foxgloves grow at different heights. A thin girl is sitting on the weather-greyed bench, her long-haired dog perched on the slatted seat beside her, her hand on his neck, two fingers under his leather collar. The lower ends of the dog's hair are wet-matted. On the hill crest a single line of pines. Away over the hill the occasional lilt of a curlew. In the eye of the sun a lark singing.

Cold-fingered

An old but still taut fence divides the tangled twiggy mass of an unmaintained birchwood from more of the same. The carcass of a deer, a dusting of frost on its hide, lies just the other side of the gate. The deer's head and skud are missing. One foreleg has also gone, skin gnawed through, the lower end of a few ribs chewed. The stomach's contents, as bright green as freshly chopped parsley, have spilled out.

In winter silence the seldom-used path continues on up between the white birch trunks, marked like bamboo with dark year growths.

winter-parched land:
fields of dead grass, lines of
crow-populated stubble