

Currimundi Beach — Eulogy

Back

from the zigzagging edge of the ocean

stands a red gum, alone, like a young flame.
there had been others ...

now the dunes are full of young girls' bones
and they are trying to stop them blowing away;

the sea is no longer found in the sound
of rustling trees, the bush all cleared

fifteen years ago.
the gullies are hot

and full of brick veneer; young men in yards
beat tied dogs and fix cars —

the place is eighty per cent fences and the rest
kerbs: "nothin' to think about"

except chance and ignorance and social security
I'm back from the city

once every three years or so
out of compulsion, necessity, Christmas?

and head straight to the beach.
we were the first people to move here;

put our house on a truck
and took it out of town.

set it down at the end of a sandy road
and walked the dog along the water:

too dangerous to swim, rips pulling
our suspicions the length of the beach

and back
it really was beautiful ...

I grew up here
and I wasn't raped

(though as my sister says, "we may
as well have been ...

all those bastards") and it doesn't seem
fun when I remember back

just frenzied and lazy and sad
drinking on the night strand;

boys' gritty fingers
and on the television's paranoid screen

a man dangling a noose from a car window
as his daughter rots in the sand

every day he returns there, grief stranded
and his tears are mythic

beached shellfish squeezing out salt water
every few years I return here, my father

picks me up at the airport
but there are no more shells on the sand.

He asks if I'll move back
and I say, I'm here for four days

MTC Cronin
1995

Beach

*white air breathed on word
wind skin of the throat*

*stripped by a universe
slip grains of sand*

*what can you tell me about the waves?
human's crying.*

*evolved through the tunnel of an ear
winding like a sea-shell*

*in convolutions brittle
surrounding the soft body of fear.*

*when we lived apart
we had somewhere to go*

*never leaving
the beach in my memory*

MTC Cronin
1995

Surrealism & Damages (or "Did I Come?")

Counsel: How was the injury caused?

Witness: Well ...
I fell off a passionfruit vine
out of the sky
onto a green-ants' nest
beside a grape-vine
in the backyard
of my best-friend's house
when I was fifteen
and in the arms of a randy boy
who had his hand
down my pants
with the ants
which bit me
and they hurt
and I sustained
these injuries
which are of a serious nature
of a human nature
(the judge is thinking:
of her putative nature)
that is ongoing
the longer I live
and I can no longer
bear the sight
of passionfruits

or grapes
or randy boys
and have taken
to squashing ants
wherever I may
find them
The damage is really
unquantifiable
and does it really
matter

that in speech
women use numerical specificity
less often whereas
men use it more
but with less accuracy?

The boy didn't have
his finger in the right place
and since then I don't know
how many men have
asked me
how many times
did I come ...

MTC Cronin
1995

Their Backs Turned

Across the yard
is a woman's face at the window
The line between her eyes
lies like the ladder
resting against the garden's wall
She's climbing the walls —
as twitchy as a cat
on bending ice
She has the face of a cut,
a seed within a hard shell
It projects from her body
and rests on an adjoining idea
— that of beauty —
the important part of anything
Her face is out-of-doors,
playing truant,
disguised by the skin of a
young animal
Her skin holds the water of
the lake
and the light which the day
has become too old to carry
Her outer gown of destiny
is as bitter and native
as the wild cherry

Across the yard
a war-spirit watches her
from the lake
with the impatience of a crop
grown before the monsoon
And then suddenly
it moves as if kicked,
as one who murders readily,
irresistibly,
as if the next of kin

Across the yard
her hands in the sink
go as still as butterflies
mimicking dead leaves
She had once flown kites
of rumour and suggestion
to see how the wind would blow
But now she is a sculpture
in which air currents play
an essential part —
as the wind whips she changes
by virtue of its motion

Across the yard
 her eyes blow
 blue with the day
 of hours
 With the lift
 of her pelvic bones
 into fear

Across the yard
 she is bearing a God
 Playing a game
 in which a hand is exposed
 and I, the duenna,
 only the imaginary player
 of such a game
 Her hand at the window
 holds a dagger
 with a wavy blade
 — as precious as an extra bone —
 it is an instrument for recording
 distant thunderstorms,
 for loosening hearts
 The spirit is acting
 like a person who is mad — like air
 leaping upward to the music —
 as behind me I hear
 a black voiceless step ... and

across the yard,
 my face at the window
 I speak to her
 in kindred languages

“One common scenario for wives was to affect a busy manner at the kitchen sink, peeling potatoes, believing that this could in no way invoke a violent reaction from their husbands on their return to the home. Almost all the victims reported that this had been futile; they had been attacked from behind innumerable times and now experience ongoing anxiety when at the sink with *their backs turned*.”

(*Summary of Background Research for the Development of a Campaign Against Domestic Violence*, August 1988, Elliott & Shanahan Research, Communication and Research Psychologists, at 11, original emphasis removed, emphasis added.)

