MY WINDOWS

You have, all of you, brought life to me
through your windows
showing me your landscapes, gifts held up
for me to view
to share: vision from your window,
gardens you have tended
well, your pride; so I might stand looking
out at landscapes
full of your desired colours, family and
ancestry, your
many home towns, your coffee cups,
the fine brown mole
on your left hip, your favourite books.
Even your hand quick
on the gear lever, dab on the brakes:
‘My quick reactions
keep me safe,’ you said. And when
you smiled after tears
I did not want to leave your window,
your fervid landscape
with its green leafiness. Rain smoking
on hot streets, blue haze
from hawkers’ aromatic stands,
the jungle’s oily smells
as we jogged dirt tracks by the reservoir.
Windows that showed me so many
other worlds than mine;
the time we walked beach sands, arm
in arm, and you tried
to peer through a blowing haze
of sand and salt-sea spray
to where the trodden trail of your
next year’s struggle led.
Another time among burnt black boles
of scarp-land scrub
you followed the river’s dwindling pools,
each green window
among darker green reeds and paperbarks.
Or on a mountain drawn
close to me, it seemed, because you knew
it was my birthright landscape.

Meanwhile away among snowy peaks
which framed the rows
of growing vines, patchwork sloping meadows
and hairline of distant
growth of chestnut and fir, I opened October
autumn casements wide
and breathed air which first filled your
lungs a score and twelve
years before. Across an alpine torrent’s
stone-choked bed, we
came to shaded grove on the stream’s bank.
And in the thickest part
while a hunter whistled at his dog in the
distance, and wild berries
stained your outspread skirts, we laboured
well with young love’s will.

You held firm my out-reached hand
as we slipped to sleep,
the night’s journey shadowed with travails
of our separate ways.
Came morning, with its summer fume of bees
over flowered meadows—
marginites and poppies and the cornflower’s
sky-blue blooms—and so
we travelled south again to olives, green beads
on their outstretched
sprigs of peace. It seemed the very place
to make farewells.

Each day you came to me. Work brought you
but the spring’s early
sea-wind through the window shook the soft
down on your resting arm.
Later I took it in mine as we paced lake-side
where black swans grazed
the green lawns, and we gazed out over wind-
ruffled waters to fine
city towers that seemed to aspire to double
their images in blue tints
of the shallow reaches. At last alone at
evening, in lamp’s yellow
with three fingers delicately held in your
waistband, you called me urgently to spirited flesh.

A table strewn with books one summer set beneath a window sill where flimsy curtain flicks in fitful breeze.
As you lean forward reaching for the furthest volume, you mean me, perhaps, to see paleness of perspiring skin after your long walk. Then you turn to me smiling and our chatter goes on, of Paris, your hopes of writing and of study overseas. It seems you seek freedom in measure that kinsfolk would surely warn against. Much later your letters tell of your ruse to cycle in the autumn rains, so that the drenching showers will disguise your sorrows, also streaming from your eyes.

They call lengthwise photos landscapes as opposed to portraits; so when we drive arrow-straight roads into salmon-gum country, eyes bulge like a nervous rabbit who vainly tries to scan for wedgetails.
coming out of the sun behind him as if
fighter-planes dive screaming
from left and right in peripheral vision.
What do we drivers see?
Side windows of our car unwind both pictures
in twin dimensions.
Up close fencelines follow you margined
with two sad strips
of the land’s ancient burning bush. We know
little of each plant’s
survival. (As fabulous voyagers, we can’t see
millennia of secrets still preserved
in these fragile ribbons that persist.)
Further out and wheeling away
across bleached paddocks, are rings of york
or salmon gums that circle
farm dams or mark erratic creeks. And further
again, dark uncleared hills
that also appear to wheel in some greater circle,
measured slow against racing
roadside verges, so they seem even to move
in contra way. You sit
beside me intent, watching nose of the car
crest another climb
and dip down towards salt-wash lowlands, dark
with sedge and samphire.
And you’re waiting to see the vaunted shape
of granite hollowed like an ocean
wave. This stone, more massive than
any sculptor ever chanced
hand to fashion, forces us to face eastward,
to gaze out over
remnant miles of once vast Gondwanaland.
For aeons levelled
by sculpting genius of some half-mile thickness
of a Permian glacier’s
chisel blade. So, as we both stare out,
standing close on
that hewn megalith, I think I feel ghost chill
of an ice-borne wind
they say blew this great stone into a rising wave.

After you had wandered the coalmine town
chatting to phthisic
miners in hotels and local history club
we travelled back the jarrah
way through sombre forest where new sounds
of machines might reveal
scarp scraped for insatiate bauxite mines,
hidden well from casual
tourist eyes. We saw no sign but sped on a long
trail back. Until tired
we pulled in to pause at a roadside pub
in a sleepy hamlet
where only a dozen townsfolk stirred.
Over a drink or two
I chanced to peer out the squared window
to see rakes of ore trucks
shunting down the new line from the hills
to where refinery
smoked its stack over the once clean farmlands.
You broke into my reverie, and I
was happy then that you had the power
to bring me back to talk of another land where Grasmere, Keswick stand.
   So, years later, listening to Mahler’s choral symphony under towering stained glass of Ely I wondered had you some mystery force to draw me through another sort of window back to haunts of certain ancestors amid Norfolk marshlands in shadow of carved sandstone and exalted casements kingdom of gown and book?

You have, all of you, brought me some way, then, toward these window-seats to landscapes where I write letter after letter home.

ANT NESTS

A backyard child I used to see ants bring up to the surface these small fragments of spinifex or grass, little grains of quartz.

They lay warming in our wheatbelt sun most of the day until shadows