HOMAGE TO OPHELIA

When you sang a sad song, humming:
‘Down-a-down, an you call him a –down-a’,
you thought of when you were a child
and how you looked on the wide world
in the grey half-tones, but with outlines clear.

Strange how sharp these images—
you even stopped your murmuring song,
‘Down-a-down, an you call him a-down-a’,
did grief touch those dry grass strands
with flame of images in your hands?

By barren hills an old home waits:
verandah floors of fluted boards, that lead
to brown Victorian doors.
In parlour there you now will find
the shadow woman half-reclined.

That perfumed couch she splays upon
is carried off on a muddied stream,
a bunch of wildflowers in her arms.
So then you sing the sad song humming:
‘Down-a-down, an you call him a-down-a’. 1975