

*spirits bay*

the joker in the orange vest  
is baiting up an electric kontiki  
his mate is in charge of the line  
has been up here three years or more  
working on the roads Saturday off  
and they want to try this side the kontiki  
is good though sometimes the breakers  
hammer it twenty five minutes  
in the battery enough to get a fair way out  
fish for tea plan A or plan B their mate  
is surfcasting from rocks below the point  
their ute has an orange light on top  
the kontiki a little red flag up on the ridge  
a black horse watches us  
then walks off into the mānuka

she went back to Te Paki turned south  
for the run down the beach a comedy  
with driftwood and tarpaulin under the wheels  
tide coming in and they got the car out  
*marching chocolate and toheroa* leaving behind  
the swish of vague stars above ti-tree  
scratched out lines on Exquisite Bond trying  
to see the flying-off place the pathway  
of spirits a rope and basket affair  
pretty near worn through twenty years  
back trying to see past melancholy  
*love is your overwhelming theme* yes  
but why leave it to the horse and the stars  
or the line of white plumes shaking  
out there where the currents meet

the gateway has been shifted  
the buildings erased only the lighthouse  
remains near the end of the spirit pathway  
where the prophet heard the snuffling peropero  
of the dead as they passed and saw  
a great house above the cliffs crash barriers  
write on the cambered bends  
of the new road sealed now from the top  
working back to the junction and perhaps  
ten kilometres to go the three capes  
wrangle as they have always done  
and down the cliff comes that old kahika  
still holding fast to the rock and refusing  
ever to flower a destiny and a song

*listening*

pīhoihoi the spiralling song a pipit  
and who will give the skylark a name  
to fling against the cliffs I cannot see  
but my ears are open have been opened  
to the song and its destinations  
spiralling backwards into the abyss  
from which we will emerge shining shocking  
ready to start on the long walk south  
alpha and omega I am with you  
but I have changed hands ostriches  
an olive farm big windbreaks small chalets  
unwinding the bird in my throat

in the city of words the wild man  
wakes and knows he must leave  
the warm bed the arms that detain him  
where he has always wanted to be  
this is not romance but death the city of words  
plunged into darkness swans clattering  
into the sky above the lake which gleams  
and turns back to the beloved head  
at rest in the room before dawn the wild man  
ungovernable and meek as milk  
all in the opening of one eye has left  
us now he is near the on ramp and won't stop  
even for the lament his brother makes  
from wood glue a guitar and a kick drum  
even for the voice that has held him  
so long where he wanted to be  
and now reaches into the sky wordless

black wings crying love pain hunger  
I have changed hands alpha and omega  
unwinding the bird in my throat

kōtare out the car window here  
wraith blossom and scrub cattle there  
dustclouds on the way to the fish farm  
gone bust by the shallow harbour  
one kōtare two kōtare three kōtare four  
songlines for idiot ears everywhere  
velocity in the November sun  
dog snuffling its way around a bend  
gamboge yellow not sure how much  
to take literally and what can be left  
for the others orange cones  
fill my eyes on the road south alpha  
and omega changing hands unwinding  
the bird in my throat

*fat buds*

Oihi and the little rose  
that drew us back to the museum  
the historian's papers and Richard Taylor  
boating along to Te Puna the journal  
on its cushion under creamy light the abode  
of civilised man in ruins again already  
strange carvings sunk into lintels  
beside the shingly beach over his shoulder  
the ink drying slowly whales on the sand  
somewhere else and thick description  
of the new everywhere tendrils curving  
across his page all the children but one  
on the ramble to the deserted bay  
Hikutu eyes following another historian  
measuring footsteps over the hills *vanished*  
*to Hokianga* and the little rose hanging on  
at the corner of the house now you see me

but if you don't write it down  
I will disappear and if you squint  
at the inscription without reading glasses  
the wrong word will start down its road  
a gambolling dog making for Great Exhibition Bay  
wrong way wrong word wrong name  
I saw something he said in the land  
waiting to invent its people

the dog led us to Oihi  
and a pair of paradise ducks on guard  
above the valley to the sea there was a rose  
where the rose had been torn out shooting  
green and defiant at the corner of wind  
whacking the hillside absolutely where they were  
said the historian looking at our photos  
and was there one by John King's grave  
tiny pink flowers no scent that I did smell  
pūtangitangi wheeling overhead

fat buds appear on trees  
as the rose dreams itself again  
from cuttings on a windowsill Mangungu  
Ōhaeawai coffee and muttonbirds at Te Corner  
too late for The Trainspotter in Kawakawa  
yes said the old rose grower's daughter  
the council knows it's there they invent  
new reasons for cleaning up the reserve  
and the historians keep bringing out  
their boats and their books they dip  
their pens in black ink and draw parallels  
across the pages and between the lines  
a fig sucker at the pā site an old lemon tree  
in a fertile corner of land by the stream