

Source to sea

for Rebekah and Mark

What is this turning mystery,
this juncture, this opening in the land?
Love traces the river from source to sea,
the distance covered in the joining of your hands.

This juncture, this opening in the land
a train draws itself through, inexorably,
the distance covered. In the joining of your hands
the track leaps ahead to fresh inland seas—

a train draws itself through. Inexorably,
the walled city reveals its gardens; now found,
the track leaps ahead to fresh inland seas,
lanes where coupling bicycles unwind.

The walled city reveals its gardens now. Found
wandering together, visiting love's untidy
lanes where coupling bicycles unwind,
you will camp in each other's mercy.

Wandering together, visiting love's untidy
red telephone boxes, you understand
you will camp in each other's mercy.
All this movement: lips meet; you find

red telephone boxes; you understand
love traces the river. From source to sea,
all this—movement—lips meet—you find
what is this turning mystery.

Letter to Sam Hunt

Amen a real satisfaction this
opening in the day learning to tell the lie

of this land—the contours of your
cadence still rolling in my head—witness

the restless entrenchment against gentle
slopes the frantic reclamation of land

channeling of spent estuaries hollow spires
of brick—engines chugging motionless—

the industries and outlets of Portsmouth Drive that
consume consummate this in-filling piles

driven up the harbour to deny
movement the generosity of water.

From this rigorous blockwork—mausoleum
to the threadbare pioneers who endured the strange

light were creative in their blind aggressions
in the angle of the ploughshare—from here a strict trinity

of streets—London Cargill and York—point
beyond to Saddle Hill always pregnant always

showing the bay where Baxter slipped and fell
just visible the breakers breaking still

away at Kaka Point Tuwhare
clings stubbornly to his rock.

Works Infrastructure park up behind me trucks
and bodies fumbling for the smoko

before they go back to filling and sealing—
dental technicians of the road and easy

with it—such bare metal reminds me of
you Sam great gap of a man

jeans tighter than a fish's arsehole hair
like high country tussock pontificating

[Holy...] in the Cathedral throwing
the hotel towel around like you could finish up

at any moment now me hunched
above the pioneers and crushed

between my legs is a can of double brown—distinctive
malty character—not mine but I like to keep things

tidy in bins ordered like a jaw that keeps
clenching down a door swinging shut.

From Milton under Starlight

In the way I stall
under the oncoming headlight
of each ancient train,

this acupuncture of light,
the weightless years that advance,
recede, the dot-to-dot surveillance

of our listless twitching, driving.
Off the surface of Waihola
they cover us.

There is relief only in waiting
for the rind to roll under us,
a brief valve in our atmospheres.

Who moves? Do we rear earthily
into the black Taieri hills, or does Orion,
his blue diamonds worn long over cool indigo,

slip into the wings?

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Previously a resident of Dunedin, John Dennison lives with his wife and children in St Andrews, Scotland, where he is currently writing a PhD on the poetics of Seamus Heaney. His poetry has been published in *Takahe*, *The Otago Daily Times*, the *OUSA Literary Review*, *Critic*, *Chrysalis Seed News*, *Stimulus* and *Canvas*.