Eventually it seemed possible that you could all attend the same school, after all. The boys could grow into husbands, the girls into wives. For a while you more or less got along like this. In the matter of making babies, however, and then with the question of who exactly was minding the store, disagreements began to occur. Separations. Fights. Now, within only a single lifetime, why did you boys, snarling, all go back down to the basement, and become armed and dangerous? Why did you girls, upstairs in your labcoats, nonetheless continue the research programme, insistently smashing through walls and ceilings?
Lethe

The only time
I discovered my dad
Wrestling my mam to the floor
She was back up in a trice
Strong as an eel
Her wild eyes
Free of constraints

Fleeing out of the front door
Onto the street, round the corner
Out of sight
Gone

As if she was never coming back

Without even her coat and hat or gloves
Just her pinafore

I stood in my muddy football strip
(With her having lost its whereabouts)
All the men in the corners of rooms
Chastened
The streetlights coming on
In desperation, my dad driving away, to search

Haunting the porch
In my dressing gown
The door still wide
As those other women
(I didn’t know who)
Came quickly, louder, one by one
Out of the shadows
Past the hedges
Their faces glancing at me briefly
Quick-stepping
To a future tune
(I didn’t know what)

Until the street was hushed by the moon

I was asleep
When she emerged again
Shivering
From the waters of Lethe
Her fingers
Without a latch-key
Tapping on the shut door
Light as a forgotten bird
In a single lifetime, what began as scarcity must have metastasised into surplus. What was mostly broken could never be fixed, only replaced by a shining new model. For everything. What use do you have any longer for a needle and thread, wire and string, hammer and nail? Even if you have a house to live in, its garage is filled to the brim, the driveway stacked to the edges, the entire catchment violated by the oppressive materiality of nightmares. In this great city, what else could advertisements be for? Business has so little use for bedrooms. For the pillow, the blanket, the single framed pictures of the past. For sleep, even.
Bed

The only time
I built a
Bed
(With my own hands)
Was when the Americans
Were landing on the moon
I carried long planks home
On my shoulder
That was in Manchester
With a view across 24
Football pitches
I followed a plan
In the Reader’s Digest Complete Do-It-
Yourself Manual Book 2
Sheet 27
I sawed & I drilled & I screwed & I varnished &

Next
The Bed was in a room
In a cottage in Cumbria
Built in 1611
Which had a waterfall
In the room below
Next
The Bed lived in a room in Bristol
Above which hot-air balloons flew
(Behind the curtains)
While I was in bed with
Different women
The wood had dried out
And I could put my finger
Through a knot-hole
Next
The Bed was in a back room
The castors kept falling off
Next
It went into a container ship
To the other side of the world
All that ocean
Was when Challenger exploded

One (dazzling) morning
I photographed my new daughter Leda
And her mother Angie
On the Bed
The house was wooden
And creaked and shuddered
In the Wellington winds
Next
It became Leda’s Bed
In another house
In Palmerston North
While she grew up
With a new mattress
She hated banging her legs and feet
On the sticking-out bits
The headboard had disappeared
When she was 14
I painted a picture of her
Holding a black swan
(Symbolic)
About to fall from the Childhood Bed
Into the Adult Garden
Next
When I was very very sick
Pancreatitis
I slept on this Bed
For 16 hours a day
On a day a machine landed
On a comet
I photographed what was left of the
Bed
Now
I wonder what will become of this
Bed?
The Strange Order of Things
Life, Feeling, and the Making of Cultures

ANTONIO DAMASIO

"Damasio undertakes nothing less than a reconstruction of the natural history of the universe... [A] brave and honest book."
—The New York Times Book Review
homeostasis

"A moment-to-moment report on the state of life in the interior of the organism"
"the enchainment of precedences"

"the non-conscious neural signaling of an individual organism begets the protoself, which permits core self and core consciousness, which allow for an autobiographical self, which permits extended consciousness...which arrives at some stage at conscience.


'The brain's body-furnished, body-minded mind, is a servant of the whole body"

- *Descartes' Error* 1994
Once endlessly bound to the turning earth, ancestors could only convey the impression that your labour must give back to others, over centuries, what had already been so effortfully and resentfully given. Digging into the dirt, that was the single, relentless task, in exchange for a short, suffering life. Until, that is, work was timed by the clock, waged by the ledger, with everyone coming to expect such better medicines. But why did that only encourage your resentment even more? Within a single lifetime, could there still be no better mantra on offer than ‘a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work’? Was it true, already, that your machines really would be doing all your living for you, wherever it was we came from?
The only time
I had a brother
My mother was kind enough
First, to ask me

So that his appearance could be properly arranged
A small white bundle, held up high
By the nurse on the distant balcony
For me to wave at

And use the same arm
To wrap him safe
As we sat together
In Mr Foreman’s photographic studio

And for years
In the shared bed
In the back room
With the rattling chimney grate

Until he was big enough
On his own two legs
To run the length of a football pitch
Stride into his Geography classroom
Hike across all manner of maps
And mountain ridges
High tops
Without ever removing
Those selfsame boots
From the wet, heavy, Northumbrian soil
Out of which grew
Broad beans, potatoes, cabbages, couch-grass

Unlike me
Who had flitted for good
To a separate side of the world
Flying my freedom kite
A whole hemisphere apart

Helpless to catch him
As he tumbled, without a sign
Headlong down the fissures
Acute ischemic cerebrovascular syndrome
His vanishing
"Sociality enters the human cultural mind by the hand of affect."

"It is reasonable to say that we live part of our lives in the anticipated future, rather than the present."
The only time
He himself put in an appearance
It was almost over
Before it started

Waiting
On a plinth, front-lit
For a role
In which, relatively
Time would take care of itself

He has meanwhile swallowed
81,000 meals
Inhabited
38 different addresses
Calling them home
At the wheel, he has completed
More than 50 circumnavigations
Of the Earth

This adorable child
Has already left
His infant footprint!

Already taken those incremental steps
Everywhichway
Between his wilful chemistry
And the kindness of strangers

Already spoken those clumsy sentences
More suited to dreams
In a voice
Attempting to be sceptical, egalitarian, funny
As helplessly awkward as an alien
With news of another planet

Already kitted out in character-clothes
Especially supplied for the interim
His innocence-soaked face
Already smiling
Topped by curls as vigorous as forests
Hiding a skull as cratered
As the moon

Look how he himself continues to beam back at you
Bright-eyed
In his little dungarees

Anticipating what it is that best
Might still be made to happen
The truth is, once and once only, within a single lifetime, a thousand knives and snares have failed to cut and catch up with you. Within a single lifetime, you have woken up yet again, come back to yourself, and more or less completed the task. Within a single lifetime, you can’t have been expected to escape the bad habits of your tribe, nor better inhabit a generous and liberal conscience. Done your best, after all; remaining unremarkably remarkable. And with this reasonable hope of surviving, to the end of another week. Another year. Another century! You, consumer, criminal, citizen, confederate, co-conspirator, can that still be your future lurking there, unable to give itself any other kind of name?
THE ONLY TIME
An autobiography in twelve pictures

JOHN DOWNIE