

The Fancier

for my grandfather, died 1993

I knew then that they would speak of you—
Of your returning to the things you understood
As though they were all still in place.
That garden shed, for example, with its dark squares
To be measured in years of shadow,
And the cobwebs like a broken eye-glass.

And so it was that in amongst the carefully tended roses
You made a second life from the portions of defeat,
Lifting the transparent earth in your hands,
Like a globe of rain, you stared and stared,
Wondering how the prophecy would appear.
But that was it—one day explodes up before you
From the cold fire of the last.
There is nothing more to it. The future is dismantled
And spread around you in a hundred secret signs—
The little things of the day,
With its alien plants and strange dusks,
Its chalk hills in the telescope of dreams
And the slow drip of stars from the wooden night

I see you sitting in your garden, a red-spot briar
Clenched in your teeth like an horizon,
Writing the long poem of your exile
In an ever-lengthening silence.
As a child, it was a discomfort I could not understand,
Nor how that other life could have swallowed you
So completely. Now I understand more
That there are those for whom language is an alien planet,
That they will always prefer a world of things,
Since things always rhyme with one another
And with ourselves.
That garden has grown quite dark and late
But still I see you are there on your bench seat
Rattling a tin of seed, expecting something

To come home from the dimming sky.
Yet not this day, I think. This day it will not return.

It has gone entirely the wrong way.
It is miles into darkness by now.

Adrian Heathcote