

Greg Tome

To origins and back

I drive north

to where my brothers' bones
my parents' bones
enrich the earth that blankets them

I drive past hefty hills

wrestling with their individual shapes
past clusters of trees competing
to claim the sky

I emerge from sloping eastern lushness

to a bleached flatness that insists
on shrivelled trees

scattered across grandmotherly paddocks

Empty-eyed cattle gather forlornly

where food will arrive eventually

Further on

different paddocks

different contents

huge granite boulders

lie where they were spewed up

by a volcano

eons ago

Then the town
 where so much of it began
 so much has ended
Weighed down by its Scottish title
 it attaches itself to the lining
 of a languid river's valley

Now a centre
 whose unrelentingly regular matrix
 absorbs from far afield
 an influx of pilgrims
 linked by kinship

Names
 greetings
 embraces
 laughter
 warm confused energy

I begin to drown
 in this familial panorama
Flashing before my eyes
 faces with various degrees of recognition
Similarly with sounds
 voices registering an array of different memories
A swirl of empathy
 or is it love
 lifts me off my feet and I float
 to wherever it takes me

I drive south
 away from the bones of my brothers
 from the bones of parents
I have done this often
 but this time feels different

The road
 the scenery
 a blank
Glazed eyes search the way ahead
A tactless wind buffets the car
 blows family ghosts into my head

South

I drive
 south

Strange fruit: different types, different places

Long before Billie Holiday angel-voiced the spectacle
of trees bounding southern USA
while bearing strange black fruit
with twisted mouths
and bulging eyes –

Long before in that same country
an aberration trumpeted its way into power
personified by faux hair arrangement
wimpy hand gestures
grating words floating on a grating voice
and a definite disdain for strange fruit kin-

Long before all that
we had smeared unspeakable shame
across our vast landscape
not fruit
but also black
more vegetable
introduced to the soil
by whiplash of rifle shot
Too many to be buried by their own kind
composted by time
by nature
and conveniently faulty memory

Periodic exposures of such barbarism
peeled back as from an onion
left too long in the ground
and guilt passed around like a disowned smelly parcel

Indigenous memory persists their story
honours it with dance
with written words
with Gurrumul
with Archie Roach leading a people
in soul-searing song that crosses an ocean
to clutch at Billie's hand

Paradise shrinking

cinema
main street coffee shop
sun deck
playhouse
son's beach house
library
concert hall
nearby park

all these
 have gathered up their skirts
crowded into this small room
cheerless room
where he is fed
showered
visited
Which he seldom leaves
When he leaves
where he craves to return to
Where he sleeps
 dreams
wakes
 and wonders
Where he sleeps
 dreams
wakes
 and waits