

Coledale Sonnet Cycle

1.

AT THE BACK of the beach,

We hunt among the painted
Stones for Coledale. With our toes among pools
And losing our feet, we try to divine, as if one could,
A place. Come always into country humbly, knowing it has meant the world—
And means it still—to someone. Across this tessellated shelf
Two continents at least of syllables and time, of bloodshed
And dance steps, have stranded and are
Reassembled daily, by violence and grace,
Into this high estate, this sooty-oyster-captured place, along
This whalebone shore. I know too little
To say too much, so I speak
Only to bribe the kids to open
Their eyes to rarer birds than gulls,

2.

To petition the shallows

To sing. The first time I came
The summer was high; the second, the sky was low—
As if the heavens the holiness came down from
Were keen to take a little of it back. Beginning with the scarp, where
Clouds, those turps-soaked *rags of time*, have reclaimed
Ten millennia and whited out the turpentine and coachwood
Halfway down to Cokeworks Road.
Merrigong crowds the beaches here
All year; its feet are made of shale and coal and potter's clay
And spelling mistakes, and in among the cliffs
Behind the shore, where we fossick
The shelf like shorebirds, my children find
A niche and in that small crypt

3.

The turquoise of a yabby's
Tail, some honeysuckle,
An orange claw. Relics. Spare parts. And our bird
Count is up—swallows tossing out
Rude welcomes on the wing; wagtails, acrobats of the wrackline,
Singing glad farewells among the kelp; bulbuls;
A tern or two; a curlew; and a white-faced heron headed south.
Coledale, where we look for her
In the ebb of afternoon, looks
Like a festival of fallen kites, a tidal tailings dam
The goddess steps over in her Blundstones
At pains to be a coastal
Range again by dusk. The place
We find is a jumble sale

4.

Of mantle-piece gods and random
Aircraft parts and forty-
Seven colourful false-starts, and in the green rockpools
Zebra-striped snails and blue periwinkles
Describe curvilinear songlines—stories whose plots, like ours, are lost
On us; whose lyrics are how these strata learned
To bend. The place that finds our feet
Is a linocut of flyways and tide-
Lines, of starfish and beaches
And breaches and beginnings again. My mother,
It happens, was born in these measures, not far north,
In the settlements they spawned,
The forgetting they begot.
Coal spells many things,

5.

And only some of them well.

Coal parsed this place, which surpassed

Again, in time, the coal they (mis)named it for. A dale, it seems,

Knows much more than its seams. And here, behind

The beach I find a stone, a motherlode, a motherboard, in whose form

And tone the circuitry of this aubergine, this green

And ochre, this stolid and tender, this linear

And round-cornered world

Is spoken—the whole *contracted*

Thus. It's a heavy kite, a skew-weft slate on which

Is spelled out this: A place is a mind

You may come to share;

A heart laid open by birdsong

And tides; a body made supple

By love.