



The Canonical Horizon

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Preface

This is an anthology of ‘travel writings’: that is, poetry that I’ve written while away from my main place of residence, containing influences from my temporary surroundings as well as reflections that they’ve given rise to pertaining to where I came from.

The first work chronologically here is *A quiet name*, which I wrote while on a train from Edinburgh to London when visiting the UK for the first time since emigrating to America. It was lost in Kyoto before being returned to me a few weeks later!

The other works from 2016 were composed while I was a visiting scholar at Nagoya University in the summer. I loved living in Japan and plunging into Japanese culture – the cover art for this collection is by the Japanese artist Kumagai Morikazu – and I suspect that one can detect some Japanese connection within these poems.

~2016~

Estuary

I push past the banks of trees, the
Spindly trunks whose upward cargo
Barely seems worthy fruition
For what's beneath, as topsoil
Makes way for sand pressed closer
To learn lessons from the water.

The sight is amplified to
A solitary scope: the
Far shore becomes the horizon,
The fleeting movement beneath
The surface the denizens
Of this kingdom of perception.

I'm reminded to heed the
Canonical horizon,

Acknowledge the screen of trees

As the interval curtain,

And with unprepared eyes see

It's only an estuary.

A quiet name

The clouds mass in indecision, their grey
Partly silhouettes the features of the land
Offset by the half-dry, half-wet haziness
Found there. Every so often there's
A jet of blue, lounging lighthouse-like
In the space its travels have earned.

The crops identify the soil, ascribe a
Quiet name that must be sought to
Be heard, and hence nudge the
Listener towards remembrance.

Other spaces are tilled by footfall
And have waived their right to an
Unobstructed view of the sky.

~Us with~

I-III

Us without

There's no better time than
When you're awake to rest
And permit expectations
Of tomorrow to slide,
Watch-hammer like, across
The land until it catches
On the horizon line.
A division lasts longer
Every day as the earth
Conquers more but inherits
Less; rockpools fill with dust
As pillars return to sand
From contexts that pinned them
Skyward. To walk through it
Is a peaceful havoc,
A resurgence of green

In which footpaths occupy
The role of lean highways
Rendered trustworthy by
The shallowness of their
Camber; they're now regarded
In the right light, or just
Through the wrong sight before.

Us withheld

These questions inhabit
The air cloistered over
Paths intended for feet
But tread by them instead,
A gallery of earth conjoined to
A mausoleum for gratitude,
Spoken sotto voce
And blending into the
Clay haze of the foreground.
The moorland is quilted
By bridges suspended
Because of rivets replaced
By rivulets; useless
Opinions wandering
Overused land cross them
Like so many shadows

Straining the girders in

The shade, still forms astride

Still water, but red fruit

Bobbing components of

A green canal lying

Above the riverbank.

Us withdrawn

There are steps the river
Flows down that, despite its
Many cycles, remain
Unanticipated,
Unclued within the path's
Prequel, but a fixture
Of its rotation in
Any case.

Either the
Steps or the river leads
Down towards settlement,
Are persuaded into
Dividing their forces
To skirt streets and dabble
In a more radical
Interface.

Time proves that
By night it's a different
Empire: low-lying clouds,
That suppress the light by
Day, colonise the night
With an urban orange,
Convert constellations
Into suburbs laced with
Halogen; ungated
But framed as if a memory
Favoured by the earth.

It shares no nostalgia
For the dust, nor sunny
Rocks widely bearing
Attributes intrinsic
To their position and

Yet matching the posture

Of the soil.

One is led

To mistake walkways

For solitude by the

Soliloquy of each

Wayward adjective that

Passes, though their epitaphs

Evoke a nativity

Of expression

That begins: us withdrawn,

You and I to live.

Sonder

A spry smile fleeting across a face
Well-known to time, summoning to mind
A past that set that face ablaze
And others beside, perhaps that
Of his companion, perhaps the
Memory only awakes for him.

A quiet word from she
Breaks his reverie
And draws him back towards
Some muted present thoughts
Leaving me, maybe as I should,
To see the varnish, not the wood.