

I am young when I see, in a child's encyclopedia, pictures of diving birds – their throats cinched with metal rings – that are forced to spit their catch into the market baskets of fishermen. *Who thinks up something like that?* I wonder. But the lesson is learned: it is our human genius to make nature work against itself. Water is power, it is discovered. Someone hypothesises that a ring of mountains could be made into a bowl for holding it, if only a way could be found to plug the occasional ravine that allows a wild river to run away to the sea. That way is found. Catchments, they call them, as if map-lines could net water itself. Into the heart of the island come

**IN OUR DREAMS**

steel and concrete and dozers that push through the raw gravel roads that are needed for conveyance, and soon the rivers are stoppered and the mountain-bowl fills

**WE GO ONCE AGAIN TO THIS PLACE WHERE THE SKY GETS ALL**

like a bathtub so that hilltops become islands and stands of trees appear as solid mirages on the surface of the floodwaters. Years pass. Waves lap on mountainsides,

**SHELTERING AND THE UNDERFOOT EARTH IS THE SOFTEST PELT AND**

washing away peat soil, and now we know that if the rivers were loosed, the ranges would be marked for centuries with a dirty-white Plimsoll line to remind us. For

**THE MOUNTAINS LEAN CLOSER AND TIME S L O W S TO THE GRIND OF A**

now, though, the rivers remain plugged, and when I go to this place, I wonder, *would you know?* I mean that if you didn't know, would you be able to tell? Would you

**GLACIER LEAVING A BASIN OF LIGHT THAT BATHES THE EYES AND**

see the wrongness of the ratio of water to mountain? The way the edges of hilltop islands fall into the water without shelving? Would you know, if you didn't *know*,

**WHEN WE BREATHE IT IS TO THE RHYTHM OF WAVES THAT**

about the other lake, the true lake, the lake that lies beneath?

**HERRINGBONE THE SHALLOWS WITH THEIR COME AND GO AND WE**

On the edge of the impoundment is a lodge where travelers can stay in white-bedded rooms and order salt-and-pepper squid over the counter at the restaurant-bar.

**ARE NOT NOW OR THEN OR HERE TO CONQUER OR PRAY BUT ONLY**

In the car park, a Colourbond roof has been built over a Huon pine log, several metres in girth. Screwed into the age-rings of the cross-sectioned face are labels like 'the

**TO LISTEN TO THE RIGHTNESS OF AN ANCIENT HUMAN CODE**

birth of Jesus' and 'the signing of the Magna Carta'. In the foyer are billboards with photographs of temporary villages scratched into the stony-white soil, Hydro

**READY-TWISTED INTO OUR HUMAN HEARTS, WHISPERING**

children in billycarts, the heroic arch of the Gordon Dam under construction. The walls behind the reception desk are hung with moody images of impoundment's

**THIS IS HOME THIS IS HOME THIS IS HOME**

waters and pictures of fishermen dangling gleaming trout from their fingers. But the drowned lake is nowhere to be seen. Here, it exists only as a mid-blue smudge on

a scale model – under Perspex – that makes Lilliputian crinkles of the Franklands and the Coronets. The true lake is still there, divers tell us. They've seen the pink

crystals of its beach lying in wait beneath a fine layer of silt. Discernable even now, the divers say, are tyre-tracks from the light aircraft that landed in their droves on

the wide swathe of sand that last summer. When I dream of the lake, it is sealed, somehow. As if water tension alone could make a thin, rainbowed film to separate the

true lake from the floodwaters that weigh upon it. And I do dream of it. Waiting down there. For its chance to **undisappear**.