

THE CATTLE DROVERS

That we are men, we hunger for the bottle all a-shake
to brand our throats and strike us dumb
to enjoy the heady silence
and understand what it means,
not known by him who spoils his life
with clocks, the squawking wife
and all the woman's irksome quibble
concerning mashed potatoes and baked beans.
That we are men, we have no troubles
at five in the afternoon.

That we are men, there can be no dispute.
Our hollow faces basted by the years
and leathered by the winds,
spidered and scalded by the black rums and cordial,
coarsened by the scrap of black beard
and the grey razed stubble.
Our moistened purple lips
cling to remnants of cigarettes
shrivelled worthless butts
in which no spark will ever glow again.
That we are men, we totter like tangled puppets
and baffle shopkeepers with a wheezy snigger
at five in the afternoon.

That we are men, we make great celebration
following the cramming of puzzled sheep into trailers,
the slaughter of pigs and occasions for dress
scrubbed and solemn to witness the hand of marriage
or in reverence of death
to stand dumb awhile in the holy silence
and understand what it means,
to be free from the life of
contesting a woman's quibble
or the batting of shuttlecocks in badminton shorts.
That we are men, we take only hands of poker
at five in the afternoon.