

## Appellations

A semi-acoustic ballad  
merged with an instrumental of breaking waves  
as I entered the Black Bay Revivalist church

drawn by a mural of sailfish on the wall  
and the words *Be Thou My Vision*  
in a clouting scrawl above a lit-up sail

and as my eyes adjusted to the light  
I fisted the loose change I'd spared  
from a night out with my spirit of choice

my late brother, his collection of cowboy songs  
throwing up a chanter of dust  
over where I'd been

uppermost and uppercase  
in the pastoral care of the here and there-  
after, his features coming apart

whenever I spoke of a road  
black with ice under his cruiser, where he was  
a tight corner away from dying

and having said his name, I stood  
as a flurry of hands made shadow puppetry  
from belief, and even

while being embraced by strangers  
I could feel my burden, a weight  
distributed unevenly and almost entirely

composed of emotion, shift around  
and settle in the windy stairwell  
of my throat, and I found myself

trying too hard to find and feel The Name  
as the band kicked in  
with a sanitised version of *Lust For Life*

and soon it was over  
the believers became leavers  
and at the door I was met by the pastor

minister or elder, who welcomed me  
as I said goodbye, then extended  
an invitation to return, and when I did

not respond, he quoted a prophet or disciple  
his voice on the awkward side  
of being theatrical

and on the street I flipped  
through the selection of 45's I'd filed  
away in the sound archives of my head

choosing songs that matched my mood:  
Melanie's version of *Ruby Tuesday*  
Graham Nash falling apart with grace on *Simple Man*

Billie Holiday's *Strange Fruit*  
and when the songs had been sleeved and shelved  
I questioned the cost

of a loving name and nature  
my brother saying faith, yes, but in the end  
I needed speed, then he faded

a slow dissolve from scene to scene  
and walking to the wharf  
I followed patches of dried blood

like an archipelago, saying God  
the hard syllable dying out like pain  
in a facial nerve

and on the ferry  
I heard the thump and surge of a troubled heart  
in the engine, which continued

even on the beach below the zoo  
where a man was using  
an old-style wooden spindle

as though it had been lifted  
from the hand-gathered pages of his life  
as behind him, from terraced enclosures

the lo-fi, wistful broadcasts of animals  
came and went on the wind  
and I asked him how it felt

to be as one with the elements and himself  
but before he could answer  
a wave left condoms and a clot of red hair

on the sand at our feet  
as the day shut down like a faulty alarm  
and my brother waved

from the fire a panel of sunlight had made  
inside a cave at Curlew Camp  
and I knew that to abandon

not suspend disbelief, I could remain  
in contact with someone  
ten years dead, and I could see

in Autumn's lease of colour  
in the fire-water that died out  
as I waded to wherever I was going

to spend the night  
that we are, for all our need to take control  
most likely not the ones in charge.