

Account of Events at Boulder Bay, Otago Peninsula

In the bathroom steam I perform a naked plié
and watch my penis hanging like a plumbline down to earth.
It has the same mute shape, the same I-saw-it-moving-maybe-it's-
just-my-eyes
sense of life and death about it that I saw in the greyblue-fat
and muscle-smooth
flesh bulk of the yellow-crested penguin dead on Boulder Bay
this afternoon.

There in the sand it had trailed the map of its death,
its frantic wings had etched ripples, the whole curve
of its forward struggle to leave the sea and reach the safety
of the flax scrub
was spelt out in a gentle 'S' that came to rest at the foot of a
small sand cliff
where the kids jumped off and watched the penguin from the
corners of their eyes.

Why it was dead there, stitched to the earth with all the force of
its gravity,
one sandy lid open to the sky, none of us, three adults, three
children,
could explain. There was no sign of what had done what to it.
We left it there feeling that was what one did with death, and
walking back
I tucked my hands inside my pockets cradling the warmth of my
genitals.

The wind whipped at our throats. And yes, my penis
and the penguin were then seen to be (that is, seen by me)
each like the other, the one the map of, the other the map of,
but neither could I make out as the ding an sich, the thing itself.
There is a detail I am slow to mention :
as we left the beach,
two people, male, female, young, strong, running,
that sort of pair of lovers who look like
brother and sister, or that sort of brother and sister
who look like a pair of lovers —
the two of them, in bush shirts, jerseys,
jeans, barefeet, came down across the beach
and found the bird there dead; and the boy
took off his jersey and he wrapped the penguin's body in it
and picked it up and carried it away
and together they climbed out of the bay
up the cliffs of flax scrub,
right through the penguin's nesting place and refuge,
they climbed up out of the scrub and
over the crests of several hills
until we lost sight of them
and we did not see them
again as we went home.

I mention them because the record would not be straight
without them.

MURRAY EDMOND