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