

TWO POEMS BY JAN ZWICKY

High Summer

High summer, roads home dusty
as the untouched shelf of childhood.
Fields, heat-shimmered, turn to seas.
Dry by the river, too, banks undercut
by floods as past as they were violent.
The only water we can bring is salt

and useless. Names of hay
have been forgotten. Brome-grass? Timothy?
Those tall dry stalks were never
so remote. Wild rhubarb at the pig-barn
offers nothing, monstrous leaves
flat, poisonous. Unreadable.

Cows raise white heads,
their thoughts mysterious as moons.
Like tides they drift through pastures
heedless of the dark far line of hills:
drowned continents, immutable
as bedrock is, dissoluble as stone.

March Nineteenth

Then near sunset, suddenly
the sky clears off. Surprising
our surprise at the inevitable
after weeks of cloud, this fragile window
opening and opening
on small unsteady stars.

The longer it takes us to get dressed,
the more likely we will notice what's been living
in the backs of drawers: those oddly-coloured scarves,
creased snapshots and cancelled envelopes
with stamps of hopelessly inadequate denomination;
an outmoded bit of jewellery. Ancient ticket stubs.

In age, the hardest thing
is to accept the fact of birth.
Reality is loss, and solitude,
slow gathering of simplicities
like old wood coming white
beneath one's hands, at last.