

## The Skunk

Up, black, striped and damasked like the chausable  
At a funeral Mass, the skunk's tail  
Paraded the skunk. Night after night  
I expected her like a visitor.

The refrigerator whinnied into silence.  
My desk light softened beyond the verandah.  
Small oranges loomed in the orange tree.  
I began to be tense as a voyeur.

After eleven years I was composing  
Love-letters again, broaching the word 'wife'  
Like a stored cask, as if its slender vowel  
Had mutated into the night earth and air

Of California. The beautiful, useless  
Tang of eucalyptus spelt your absence.  
The aftermath of a mouthful of wine  
Was like inhaling you off a cold pillow.

And there she was, the intent and glamorous,  
Ordinary, mysterious skunk,  
Mythologized, demythologized,  
Snuffing the boards five feet beyond me.

It all came back to me last night, stirred  
By the sootfall of your things at bedtime,  
Your head-down, tail-up hunt in a bottom drawer  
For the black plunge-line nightdress.

