

1ST JUNE

At this height above sea-level, may blossom arrives late—and then only below the wind line on squat trees in tight cloughs.

The rain was stotting but I wanted to take pictures of the hawthorn in bloom and to inhale the scent, so I drove down into the South Tyne Valley to a tree that I had grown to know.

*there is a hawthorn on a hill
there is a hawthorn growing
it set its roots against the wind
the worrying wind that's blowing
its berries are red its blossom so white
I thought that it was snowing . . .*

Three hares scattered as I approached the lightning-divided trunk, like a couple in a lethally ecstatic dance.

MIDSUMMER

a blood-coloured star above
the swell of a reclining woman
backlit by sun sunk
behind skunk hills at midnight

16TH AUGUST

When I woke this morning I was groggy after working for eight hours in the café's take-away hatch selling drinks, sandwiches, burgers, bacon buns and a range of cakes to a continuous queue of hungry and thirsty bikers, cyclists and cars full of families. The hatch is barely more than a cupboard—a small cramped place in an annexe off the kitchen and facing the entrance. Vending from there, meeting demand en route, slightly eases the pressure on the women working inside the café.

And work is fast in the kitchen. Cauldrons of hot soup, large pans of steaming water, a vat of bubbling chip fat, one oven baking bread and cakes and another roasting meat. A whirl of pan stirring, dealing out portions, filling orders, peeling, chopping vegetables and fruit, dish washing, ploughing dough, slapping pastry, whisking, whipping eggs, cutting and slicing—all sidestepped by waitresses bringing and collecting orders. Generations work in the café, grannies, mothers, daughters—some from the Alston Moor side of the escarpment and others from villages below tucked in amongst the East Fells and directly in the path of the Helm Wind. These are its children and they can be as fast and

furious. Jackie, who is responsible for keeping my hatch display supplied, shouts above the busy kitchen: ‘Tom, do you need more muffin?’

‘Only as much as I can get.’

When it closed I washed dishes and cleaned up, then ate dinner in the empty café at a table next to the French windows. During my meal a thunderstorm travelled over and on to the hills of Dumfries. Now the sky is clear and the air crisp, the sun is low over the Solway Firth, some fifty miles away—and I’m drunk with it.

READING CREELEY'S
'HISTOIRE DE FLORIDA'

Sightseers in a lay-by seek discernible facts
from a dissembling landscape,

like midday sun on the fleece of sheep
that lie and watch them drink
from polystyrene cups
filled from flasks, and photograph.

Banks of cloud stack up and pass.
A low owl blows in, easy as a breath of thistle.

The moon struck
a set of headlights over the hill and in my face.

The dead don't remember us.