

1.3 The White Swan (1982)

You come to a place
unexpectedly,
hidden brightly in a seam
of the river's garment.
Jewelled shoals of light
shifting, glittering
against the supple dank water
defeat the unaccustomed eye.

And all at once
you are aware of
the urgent and peculiar
voice of the place: stirred
by wind, as breath, derived
from stance of willow, caught
between the island's shadow,
echo of the sun,
trembling of its limbs,
shimmering of the trackless leaves
upon the water-face:
in all, an overwhelming agitation -
as of a girl too long ignored, -
demanding our attention
to some extraordinary event
we see, but fail to comprehend.

We have heard the sigh of willow
in another place at night
and caught the voice of
other trees before, but here
there's something deeply unresolved –
the White Swan still awaits
her longed-for suitor.

Twickenham – 1982.