

DAVID HOWARD

Memory is viral

1

The heartbeat of my father's step
on the stairs. He worked with maple
tabletops thick as a hand-span

and the bevelled edges of the world before
I was born. Now the stairs work him
too hard, his labour is breathing.

2

A caretaker with strong wrists, my father
wiped the dance floor then
wrung out the piss-mop of *Who's Who*.

Obscenity? Forty years on
the mailbox he erected
accepts his death certificate.

3

The distance between looking and seeing – call it
my blue heaven. 'Come quickly, the sun is on television!
It won't grow old, not so you can see...'

Whereas we retire to the acetylene interiors of sheds
near Glover's Geraldine, Curnow's Karekare...
There are whites on the washing line, windless

proofs of wear in this best possible world.

4

Because it accepts everything
black is angelic. 'You get big
shadows from signs' (Gorky).

Memory is depression,
the wear of heels on Timberseal.
The sun kneels to plead its case as we count

the reasons, undress one another
carefully so as to bypass
the heart.

Father, I sleep with my mouth
open so secrets
slip onto the pillow, where

my lover holds them
against me. You are
the figure on the stairs, perpetually.

5

Minor yet widespread
like the skeletons of sea urchins:
the facts, hard

to comprehend. Detail is what
the skipping stone
misses,

the throwing arm recalls.
Father! The ripple of
plesiosaur.