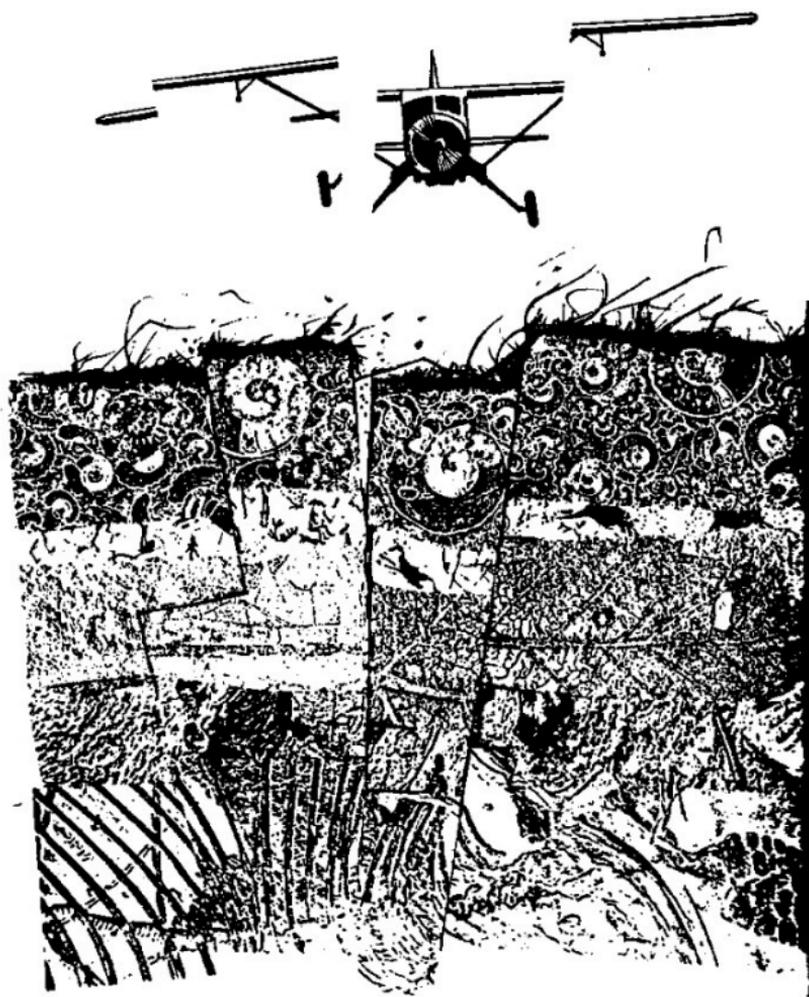


## Flying to Iceland



# Alasdair Paterson

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## Flying to Iceland

## **Frontispiece by Ann Paterson**

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*'I find no peace, and all my war is done.  
I fear, and hope, I burn and freeze like ice.  
I fly the wind, yet can I not arise. '*

*(Sir Thomas Wyatt: Sonnets)*

*'But since we cannot afford under any circumstances  
to let a holocaust occur, we are forced in this one  
case to become the historians of the future ... "*

*(Jonathan Schell: The fate of the earth)*

## FLYING TO ICELAND

The suitcases would say  
palm trees or snow - remember?  
The climate of the rich was quite extreme.

And their journeys went far  
back, to humble origins -  
the slow climb from sea to beach  
and up, an ice age of oysters  
under the palm fronds ..

Times changed: meaning,  
ruin of the holiday snaps;  
meaning, an ultimate photography  
fused shadows to the tarmac.  
These days, my way lies to the north  
and fire and ice at once;  
journey's end a conceit  
from a sugared sonnet.

Even so, even now  
I hardly believe in the controls.

And only today, I think, broke  
that dim light at low tide.  
lichen blistered the rocks.

I took a handful of sand  
and faced the mainland  
but the radio was silent.

I leant my head against  
the cold skin fuselage  
but a breeze was getting up.

Time to go.  
No-one waving.  
I hardly believed in the plane.

The plane dips now  
over the old ship-burials -  
flames and flesh, fragments  
of alliteration, a sunken language;  
gun turrets cooling in the ooze.

For the sea took them down  
year in, year out  
as mirrors swallow dreams  
and further from its surface  
than planes soar.

Their new element. Define.  
The vertigo of fishermen  
as the nets plummet.  
A submarine's dive beyond satellites  
down where rock begins  
to carry fire to the maps.

Island. Iceland. Poppies  
red, yellow, sheen of silk;  
petals slipping down, slipping  
down beyond the drenched window  
where you would rise, smiling.  
What happened to you?

All the time, it seems,  
we were in the dark.  
All flowers were there for pity  
and remembrance.

This is the coastline region  
haunted by phantom announcements,  
fanfares of static;  
and passengers, poor ghosts,  
oppressed in their microclimate  
by the day's headlines  
and implausibility of seat belts.

Down there  
between the whale fjord  
and the volcano, between the glacier  
and the black sand,  
the eternal stone  
and the birch oases,  
the gods long ago  
worked out their notice.

A better adaptation survived them.

Or rather,  
we were always  
getting there in our own time.

Soon enough come  
views of a deserted interior -  
jealousies weathered to roofless stone,  
stories scoured smooth.

Now wild flowers in the turf  
have taken up the saga.  
Tongue coral.  
Honey musk.  
Blood stigma.

And the craters by the moonlight.  
Since astronauts rehearsed here  
every year has been  
a small step for mankind.  
The more we could manage  
the more we watched the clock;  
and every year flocks of birds  
came to perturb the radar screens.

On the scheduled approach  
the flesh was sad, remember? - and  
you'd read all the defence correspondents.  
Your hands smudged with their newsprint,  
you saw the world through  
their tinted glass, coming down -  
what future you rehearsed.

I'm flying through it,  
into it, freezing now  
and burning. the times  
no-one will get used to;  
leaving our past,  
leaving it still the only address.

To you, wherever.  
From: where the flight ends..

Circling over firestorms  
to come down  
into the onset of a long winter.



## MERSEYSIDE POETRY MINIBOOKS SERIES

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**ALASDAIR PATERSON** was born in Edinburgh, but has lived on Merseyside since 1972. His most recent collections are *Topiary* and *The Floating World*, both from Pig Press.

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