A FAMILY TRADITION

My father worked West Lyell
all weathers, his father in the Blow,
coming up with Great Grandpa
from Teepookana and Strahan
to the hole in the earth
and the dawn start with billy and crib;
boots hitting the step together
and a collar of cold air on the back of the neck
and the echo of shiacking up to the mine
and the laughter and crying
from the huts and the houses

all weathers; it goes without saying,
outside the door, dragging your hat down
along the ridge-back gravels
on the climb from Gormie
with your cousins and brothers,
young sons nippering
and daughters at home
with their sisters and mums
in the Gormanston basin
watching their men trek the slope

backs to the white Frenchman,
past the old workings and the Iron Blow
and the waste tailings rusting
in the copper water to Linda,
coming over the brow into the truth
of a long horizon and the cold earth
dragging up the worst and the best
but drizzle, sleet, snow, nevertheless
peeling back the whistle from brave lips
like steel bars around the open cut,
denying the urge to keep on walking
down the other side and take the Abt to the coast,
Bruce Roberts, "A Family Tradition".

a steamship through Hells Gates
into the white clouds of promise;
but for the arse in your trousers and home
with your mates coming down the mountain
to a game of forties, a log fire and hot rum
held prisoner by a family tradition.