

ODE TO NORMALITY

The testimony of a Manic Depressive
now off the bottle for nearly 30 years:

Talking of mood swings, the one I was in
just then seemed fairly remarkable.

Under the giant chestnuts and sycamores
where old men like Auguste play petanque,

where sixteen year-old schoolgirls congregate
and you hear the shrill laughter of tourists

I had a flash of something resembling satori.
The deep inner peace which stole upon me

with a feeling of unusual light and lightness
had me thinking I might be undergoing

normality, for a change. It seemed as if
I had acquired the birthright of happiness

others had experienced for most of their lives
and were in the process of enjoying here

on this Saturday afternoon in summer.
This newfound 'human' identity was strange

and I vaguely wondered if it would last
until I got home. Would Maria detect

a personality change? Would cooking go well
between us, I mean, would we play our parts?

Totally relaxed and at peace with myself
I wander round the house, look out the window

at the green leaves fluttering in the wind,
searching in my mind for some explanation.

I had prostrated early with complete abandon
asking, as usual, for guidance and strength.

I had written a humorous love poem to Maria
at the library, and a piece of doggerel for Zina.

I had lunched alone in the veranda and put Lieve
in capitals in my agenda. I wanted to see her.

I wrote *A Thought* on a bench on the way there,
I knew I had all the time in the world and more.

We hugged. She came to my table. We talked,
and went on talking with nobody in the shop,

deeply, intently, honestly and sincerely,
seeing eye to eye as we always somehow do.

She proudly showed me a book she had started
to read, called *Writing*, in Dutch, a key to the art.

Right then I decided I would become a writer
myself, and write myself full time into my grave.

Late sunlight is glinting onto my glasses.
I'm developing cramp in my hand. I'll stop.

As Dan says in an illuminating e-mail,
it's better than drinking alone in a cellar.

Saturday 9 June 12, 17.00.