GILLIAN HARDING-RUSSELL

The Resources for Pain
—for Moazzam Begg

Hogtied arms to legs shackled together
he was accused since found in the vicinity
escaped from the scene of action in Afghanistan
on the border of a neighbouring country
(his religion and sympathies marking him
indubitably) he knew not night from day
time passing in slow motion sped up nightmare
as the surreal mind in overdrive contends
with the artful influence of visible
and invisible
pain—kicks and bashes to the head and back
that do not exceed some power of healing
or camouflage before authorities
who look sharply
the other way don't want trouble
when not just the generals (hard enough
to circumnavigate but those higher up
urge the greater good remains
at stake—simple tests
of endurance reach to human limits like go
without food and sleep for five days in a row
Noise and bright lights recorded rant insane about you
with the Interrogator in the white room ready at your elbow
with a prod and a needle filled with some secret serum
orders you to drink 12 glasses of water in five minutes flat
to discover a sea of panic nausea swell up
within you rocking obscenely lurid
on the greenish bile of no man’s land
(You are the guilty one!) And
must agree to everything

and be believed for nothing
short of the worst
repeated in the precise words of the Interrogator
memorized in a sequence as for a strict teacher

imprisoned for three years more
without proven charges you are moved
to a prison of the mind inside a faraway island
where you may hear the splash of waves
as real enough will remember as a very hot place
within your brains’ broiling under

a searing white spot of tropical sun
that wipes out over head thought
under a searing white spot of tropical sun
that wipes out over head thought
about who you are that wipes out
over head thought about what
you might have done that wipes out
over head thought three worlds ago
to arrive on the desolate shores
of this over-exposed shadow
of existence.