2007

Womb Tongues : A Collection of Poetry

Kim Coull

Edith Cowan University

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is posted at Research Online.
https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/1192
You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement.
- A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.
Womb Tongues
A Collection of Poetry

Kim Coull

Bachelor of Arts (Writing) Honours

Faculty of Education and the Arts
School of International, Cultural and Community Studies
Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia

Date of Submission: May 31\textsuperscript{st}, 2007
USE OF THESIS

This copy is the property of Edith Cowan University. However, the literary rights of the author must also be respected. If any passage from this thesis is quoted or closely paraphrased in a paper or written work prepared by the user, the source of the passage must be acknowledged in the work. If the user desires to publish a paper or written work containing passages copied or closely paraphrased from this thesis, which passages would in total constitute an infringing copy for the purpose of the Copyright Act, he or she must first obtain written permission of the author to do so.
This collection of poetry seeks to explore the experience of relinquishment (in this case, primarily, being given up or abandoned at birth by the mother) from the baby’s perspective. It endeavours to evoke the baby’s ‘voice’ and experience (the ‘primal wound’, trauma, self-loss, and ensuing silence) as an adult trying to find language for something that occurred in the pre-language state. Kristeva’s theories of the semiotic and symbolic are referenced to highlight how, without the ‘mother’ as a translating bridge from the state of ‘non-being’ (the semiotic chora) to the signed world of language and ‘being’ (the symbolic), there is a crippling inability to express, define, and conjure a ‘self’. This loss of ‘mother’ not only creates a loss of the ‘I’ as a ‘self’ but, also, a loss of the ‘I’ as writer and raises the question of how one creates a ‘self’ when that ‘self’ is ‘lost’ before language. In giving voice to what lies within the inexpressible, incoherent totality of the wordless experience within the mother’s body (the ‘chora’), the characteristics of ‘choric language’ – fragmentation, cryptic allusion, repetition, rhythm, and doubt (incompleteness) – are employed to ‘give birth’ to (or enrich and nourish) the symbolic (language).

The collection is divided into a preface and three parts. The preface provides an example of the ‘glossolalia’ (the ‘womb tongues’) and various cryptic translations. This is meant to direct the reader through the rest of the work – to the difficulty of ‘translating’ the lost ‘self’ into a recognisable form (read, language). Part one, ‘water’, references the in utero experience, the birth, and the abandonment that follows. Part two, ‘gap sickness’, explores the psychological breakdown as a child and adult (with the emphasis on self-negation and non-human ideation), the loss of a recognisable ‘I’, and the attempt to find a ‘mother’ through supplication to ‘deities’. Part three, ‘land’, seeks to represent the dissemination of the experience from a more mature perspective, not only the realisation of what is lost and the grieving that ensues, but also the inability of language to conjure the ‘mother’.

The accompanying essay, ‘Womb Tongues: The Language of Relinquishment’ endeavours to explain how Kristeva’s dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic underpins and supports the poetry’s attempts to express the loss and subsequent longing of the baby (frozen within the adult) for the lost mother and ‘self’. 
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a
degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

(ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person
except where due reference is made in the text;

(iii) contain any defamatory material.

I also grant permission for the Library at Edith Cowan University to make duplicate
copies of my thesis as required.

Signature:

Date: 31/5/2007.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to very much thank Marcella Polain for all her help, belief, encouragement, and direction in the preparation of this thesis.

Deepest thanks also to Paul for being the ‘translator’ (a ‘cryptic allusion’ that plumbs a deep well).

Most of all, I would like to thank my husband, Alan, for his inestimable – and here the language certainly ‘fails’ – love and support, and also his ongoing commitment to the ‘project’ (not to mention the proof reading!).
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

USE OF THESIS ........................................................................................................ ii
DECLARATION ........................................................................................................ iii
ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................ iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ......................................................................................... v
TABLE OF CONTENTS ....................................................................................... vi
Womb Tongues: A Collection of Poetry .................................................................. 1
Preface: foetal glossolalia .................................................................................... 3
Endnote ................................................................................................................ 4
part one: water ................................................................................................. 5
   a small act of leave ......................................................................................... 6
   inside blind walls ........................................................................................ 7
   The Book of Germination ............................................................................ 8
   birth .............................................................................................................. 9
   Perinatal Points ........................................................................................... 10
   this is no Earth .......................................................................................... 12
   Debris ......................................................................................................... 13
   What To Think While The Papers Are Being Signed ................................ 14
   Lyrebird ........................................................................................................ 15
   Creation Myths ........................................................................................... 16
   small bones ............................................................................................... 18
   Belladonna Baby ......................................................................................... 19
   knowing things after you died ................................................................... 21
part two: gap sickness ...................................................................................... 22
   Slap ............................................................................................................. 23
   Nine Months in a Psychiatrist's Womb ....................................................... 24
   100 Symptoms ............................................................................................ 27
   The Breastless Jesus ................................................................................... 29
   insanely good .............................................................................................. 31
   snow reader ............................................................................................... 32
   Jesus People or How To Be Saved ............................................................ 33
   the little Alien (something about survival) .............................................. 35
   carnival ...................................................................................................... 38
   The Little Alien is Hungry ......................................................................... 39
   A secret message (ARE YOU LISTENING!) .......................................... 40
   Lost in space .............................................................................................. 41
womb tongues

a collection of poetry
'If I met you outside I would kiss you'

Song of Solomon 8:1
Preface

For the glossolalia...
Endnote

(phonetic translation of foetal glossolalia)¹

bull ya bull ya des ka na deska la sha na esk ka la sha na mon ne se sha la ka daan mali guul na dal eel un da seca na faal el sha lelka dhun na sasshey la busssh ka cunna fah malaka la sa busssh na guuska la abusshta la na sha la na shahla fah kaas kala shah bulla ka deska shulamah kuuta eskala busshka bullia kada bulluya dama shala kada bahileel daakuh shal leel kada na gaashka skana una shala cuuna del an a ka desk ka a la mani shala cunna shukana seli air fukadah moozhalaka fedisah laalakadasay bullikudasar manyasah lalaka shudakala unoo pala cuatamasa gulla gulla gulla na shelia mana deskala deskala gulla gulla manasay deskala deskala manussah deskala manussah

bull ya bull ya des ka na deska la sha na esk ka la sha na mon ne se sha la ka daan mali guul na dal eel un da seca na faal el sha lelka dhun na sasshey la busssh ka cunna fah malaka la sa busssh na guuska la abusshta la na sha la na shahla fah kaas kala shah bulla ka deska shulamah kuuta eskala busshka bullia kada bulluya dama shala kada bahileel daakuh shal leel kada na gaashka skana una shala cuuna del an a ka desk ka a la mani shala cuuna shukana seli air fukadah moozhalaka fedisah laalakadasay bullikudasar manyasah lalaka shudakala unoo pala cuatamasa gulla gulla gulla na shelia mana deskala deskala gulla gulla manasay deskala deskala manussah deskala manussah

bull ya bull ya des ka na deska la sha na esk ka la sha na mon ne se sha la ka daan mali guul na dal eel un da seca na faal el sha lelka dhun na sasshey la busssh ka cunna fah malaka la sa busssh na guuska la abusshta la na sha la na shahla fah kaas kala shah bulla ka deska shulamah kuuta eskala busshka bullia kada bulluya dama shala kada bahileel daakuh shal leel kada na gaashka skana una shala cuuna del an a ka desk ka a la mani shala cunna shukana seli air fukadah moozhalaka fedisah laalakadasay bullikudasar manyasah lalaka shudakala unoo pala cuatamasa gulla gulla gulla na shelia mana deskala deskala gulla gulla manasay deskala deskala manussah deskala manussah

translation (in repetition) – ‘i love You God, so much so much so much’

penicillus erigo stigma
the style raises the stigma
there are various

¹below
part one

water
a small act of leave

the evocation of dissonance
is such a small act of leave
the rigour of forgetfulness
is what passes for content
the text has no apparent corrections
inside blind walls

for a long time i couldn’t open your mouth
there was no pulse
for a long time i couldn’t crown you

a long time

while you were opening
i expelled what i could
i practised
a movement or two for you

it was an artful abuse

you were lancing me
i hung like a monkey with a thumb
inside blind walls

while i was waiting

& for a long time

i pursed
& plumped
i fruited past my season
i ate whatever fell
inhaled your invisible drugs
i saw visions
i took the veil to heart

but You know what happened, You know

unannointed
a stranger entered
right through the chasm
insane
unsound
white throated
sorely tongued
unslit
knife poised
devoted
The Book of Germination
(with annotations)

1 A soft violence in the breach. A seamless evocation mutes into a fugal flowering. The pulpy germinating seed bursts with urgent swell, with rabid shoot and soft tongue maiming, with warm and manic tendril teeming. Out sourcing for the complication, it buds inwards to its consecration and speaks before the mouth is formed.

2 And in that vertex, slow ploughed and soft with intersection, a feral delta digs and fans into the wall, grasps and bleeds into the well. God makes suckle rain and rabid disconnections. God stalks, molests, and sprouts the grove. God frets the germ into a close knit crave and ache and adoration.

3 Then there comes the shadow. A stinger hovers in the dream. It settles nectar fresh within the honeyed grail. Its wings are thin and veiny papered and with a sting and prickly patience – little rubs & nettled dreams, little sips & machinations – it sucks that mother up to fat.

4 Turned aside and sleeping, God's face is hardly seen while undulations ripen in the harbour as the stranger in the grove grows blind, mews silent. The pantheon multiplies with serried maturities.

5 Deep in the lathe a record has begun of mute weather. The stem and style becomes so hot it bathes the seed entire. The husk is parted from reason just as there grows a whisper of profanity in the uneven hem.

6 In aching eruption, a spectrum revels from the garment’s shade. The wet swells into the nub and bramble. There is a siege against the wall. In the throb and thirst, the stranger drinks inside the claret season, between the maiden hair and thigh.

7 Then upon the waters there is forced an opening. The Moon’s carpel uncurls up into the darkness through the luscious soil of makings. Capillaries shoot a breath. There is a whimper of light and the lip of day parts.
birth

my dead hand bent and sore profanes hurts your head falling to crash it through the dogs
bark like fractured sea glass edging to a cataract’s mouth oozing rheumy water
the mangroves bake in the furnace fish swim up their skirts

and bite

and hang

until morning

someone is swallowing the shore collapsing the elating crib a girth of empty and sucking

in

they always hang until morning in the hot bone house
my dead hand membrane tepid tight

in the unsectioned sea

the mothers are congregating an evacuation just off Morocco’s mouth the unassailable shore
beneath the mangle my fractious foreign delta (you know, that country I have always
wanted to visit) all their reckless fish have walked onto land by sharp implementation
there is a listless flourish

seeping from their sides the constant leak

of oil

and ink

and smear

my dead hand floats eye up to clot and crepe
some don’t make it no your head falling to crash your rogue & foreign mouth

the dark dogs are smelling it

even from

here

Black Water
Perinatal Points

Culture

Humans do not eat their young. Sometimes they leave them out on hillsides or even in a field, within a copse of trees, in a forest somewhere. They may be draped like offerings. Or naked. I think it differs from region to region. But they do not eat them.

Gravidus

Having the body distended with ripe eggs about to give birth, the flesh concertinas out flat folding into parturient down. In infinite section a salt water aquarium (with 4.8 billion careful owners) bulges the pip.

Fish

Fish are an ancestral bubble in the mind, a transhumanist regression. Because of their slippery pathology they do not bite the land. At certain depths they become invisible, bud in uncomplicated ways, suck microscopic creatures, make their own light, escape atmosphere, risk wet, slide, sleek, turn, dart, swarm, mass, gurgle, & eat near shores at night.

do not resuscitate

Confessions

I am not born. I am a fighting fish. Siamese.

I am still not born.

Gap Sickness*

I am sticking my head through a vent licking something. It shines like mucus. I am reversing. I am staring at the mirror maze mother God Jesus Buddha hallowed be thy name slough. I am mucking this up toward heaven. This is a vertical limit.

Where to hide a baby

Under white sheets
Near flammable terylene curtains
Inside a magic wardrobe
In bull rushes
In your left ventricle
In a secret
Underneath mountainous layers of fat

* A term used by Stephen R. Donaldson in "The Gap Cycle".
In your head
At sacred sites
Inside a dog
In an army barracks
In Africa
Up your skirt
In the wolf’s belly
In a musical instrument
In cognitive behavioural therapy
In a suburb
In a small white package
Inside a woman
In a bassinette
Under a wig
In a marriage
In the beard of a guru
In your mouth
Under water
At a new age goal setting conference

Advice

Stay calm during the choke

Genetic material

You may be able to sing like your mother or even speak like her but only if you hear the sound of her voice at least once.

Genetic deviations

Evolutionary deviation can occur at any moment given a need. Becoming a fish is acceptable if the water temperature turns cold or if you are hooked by a tourist passing by. Mouthing constantly, then, will not be considered unusual. Fin care is important. Fronds are useful for camouflage and repairs. Swim quickly.

Hints

Stay soft and silent. Avoid the white by closing your eyes.
Remain folded. Loose the musk.
Smile at any approach.
Keep breathing like you are under water (just in case).
Do not cry (or you may not hear your mother leaving).
this is no Earth

i am resting against this wall

i am waiting

rock hard seeping with dreams hard pressed into the cavity constant sunset warmth of a dying star the red and long forget and die from this infectious parturition push will come grieve and gamut down in holey eye to circle heaven round

i do not want this

universe

to end

fat and formed god’s sweet harbour fused i am to bone and now my arteries are my own knitted in her furious appeal for clemency and cleave away she asks this sad deep sin waiting with its head against the wall so resting eyes that will not close fists that will not open incubus collapse and shove the red world leaving fear is in the pump and blood and quiet waiting there is no earth in here

i fear contraction

i fear the gate

muck and fat suck and wean detach and leave go and float away reverse to space displace

there is no disclose since her collapse since her collapse there is nothing to refer

but red and round and inside deep, blooded silent shroud wolf’s belly stone the red girl little red bad and stained digestive juices crown is that my name? can animals penetrate this far? what tongue will lick me clean?

there is no geography in space
debris

at the base of the brain
the deepest part of the sea
heart neurones multiply
your deep sea fish is forming
mouthing to breathe
valves

open
close
spasmodic rhythms
liquer the sheer
deformities
press by fear
into secret alliances
uranic rebellions
connections
fractious aspirations
rise from the teem
swarming
to a coastline
wreckage

there are no witnesses

your mouth is full of brine
you strain from the hot trigger
pull red
like blood
like
sinking
to vent and vital
flowing
swimming small
you suckle disconnections
the brain stem
wet
with infirm
rapture
edging
toward the debris ➔

← ripening
on the shore
What to Think While The Papers Are Being Signed (the foetal translations)

In the worship hole, the red room gut, I am wet with in-formation. I have a secret nerve condition because I believe there is a terrible gore beyond the wall.

Under a gauze of light there are multiple mutations at every turn day and night. These constant exhausting adaptations, ornate and rich, I know to be a delicate bloody chamber ache.

In the gaming grotto there is a blood gush hum, an arterial, almost mathematical sequence saved by its theory of chaos and intertwining strings. I inherit, windowless, its meticulous confusions.

The red velvet pouch grows secret skeins around the pump suck bud. In vein waste water I realise the sea slug dark mutation.

Serpent in the hole. Gurgie fish and swimmer. Sea-fruit urchin. All of these are fractions of the deep. Drinking shadows into deviation, I understand the tail and wing thrash of a buried Delphic creature.

Gracing sideways in the blood rain trickle, russet crimson plumes create a séance suck against the wall. In oscillating rumours behind the curtain rub, I fathom the floating no fetch vagi-nation.

The minute acre ruptures into swell and cavil. In the sump and muster of uncounted eyeless mores I conceive a paranormal thumb suck grief.

Unwanted ripenings lush and pique to prescient tremor. These vibrations orchestrate a nerve mass fugue pulsating to an overwhelming sublimation. In bone flesh speak and drown I bloom to evanesce within the deep fold fester never leave forget.
Lyrebird

'There is no need to tell her'

i am wetting myself in all this open mouthing leaking blood rush venting i am wet and covered in fern the lyrebird is speaking to me he is feathered like an argument display and gesture near the mouth of everything i copy him the eyeing beak of everything he is singing in falsetto i am copying him i am singing well he is teaching me i am singing wet into the silence behind the fern and gully to the mouth where everything is falling i am copying while i find my boning like a dog to a hole i am singing his song my mouth is copying springing falling streaming from the rock mouth leaking in the strange of lyrebird singing where lucid rents her moon mind frown

Liar and loud

my head is engaged at the mouth i am wetting myself incontinent babbling brook wild and grown to dark with fern and brackish water breaking over stepping lightly rock face silent mouthings my head is engaged stuck like a dog with a giant bone in a hole the lyrebird is barking in falsetto stuck in here i am midway eaten sung and veiny aired i am boning this mouth with my wild-headed beasts my wild headed boning disengaging down and sour

Liar and loud

stone in belly to drowning flowing downward eons forward and fish come girding all this downward flowing their mouths opening eating flotsam gel and small ripe pieces sucked from stone to crescent moon bath leaving coming sucking mouthing eating gurgling downing finned and eyeing all the stones that lie in pieces far away this ground beneath the drowning outward downing wet and boning out my head to pieces somewhere mouthing mouths are mouthing ever still to make the flightless falling sing and crown

The wolf and her belly stoned to quiet
The bird in his gully liar and loud
Creation Myths

_In the first creation Gods and Devils became artists in the sodden groves._

_Feather and quill to pulp and nib._

_They wrote the revelations._

Blister

A blister is also amniotic.

It comes from a fractious rubbing where two parts cannot handle their intimacies, back and forth, back and forth, until there is a lake at the centre of the world they (unknown)

rub each other until an ocean is formed a swell, a wet. The rubbing makes the soak, the fret, the scrape and a moist gauze forms above the universe.

A blister will burst at some point and whatever was fractious will flood.

The year of the falling clouds (_the creation of Emphasis_)

In the year of the falling clouds the sky _pricked_ the earth.

It was _no_ _fondle_ caress arousal we learnt how to sew the hide

and _flay_ the skin and paint with white ochre on tannin rich carcass. Fields were laid as open books and women lay _flay_ the skin and paint with white ochre on tannin rich carcass. Fields were laid as open books and women lay low to the ground working memories and _madness_ to seed. Sad shapes were flagged. Many faces were _lost_. We drank off the _brackish_ back of God. We lifted our skirts high and stepped across. Small animals _forgot_ how to _breathe_. Councils were found in open _crevasses_. There was a fine-grained _coagulation_ and we wore the _dead_ adorned – sewn against the weather – in the year of _falling_ clouds.

A Short History of the Universe (_Fish Theory_)

Strange and augmented.

_The mouth was open Rib finned, angled out._ The waters moved between the circumference, arc to shore. _Tropical. Hot._ All the windows stained with meaning. _Purple fuchsia_ sprouted wildly against the order. _Cuckolded._

_Long throated in octaves unheard a voice pierced this veil._

_Ragged edges wafted in the now hazy lit expanses. There was a keen eye down to water. Movement there. Acute and flighty._ Anemones began to wave boldly crested. _Eons passed. Fish dreamt._ There was a great silence. Up above, where careless, fields and oceans welcomed the wild, canoes shaped themselves into a float. Masts formed, then rudders. There was an eerie light from strange tongues white faces.

_Bull whips cracked across the winds. Passing ships were buoyed and rose through the membrane to bake in the sun’s eye, to reek, and spill, and wander, while beauty, a pump and suck away, congealed, and autumn reaped what we almost were to brown. The swill ran down the mountainsides, multifarious like a raven feather, dark like sorrow in a ditch. The birds spoke wretchedly, the deaf fish were thankful for their mute-tations, while the land arched up to greet the host in longing for the cherry._

_She takes me in her body colonizes my tongue I moan in the shaft_
What the Sea Worm Dreamt

Wormholes pock the universe

The Sea Worm dreamt of the tropic of the mouth, the hot and florid journey, of velvet tongues and soft protrusions, anchors in the night, small acts of leaving, the rigour of forgetfulness that passes for content. It dreamt an entire population naked. It drank up from the spasms of the deep, from the liquor sea, the narcotic of constant return. It calculated the expense of ache, the pressure against the teat. The lack of suck should it drown. The time it takes to undulate to land. How imminent a red tide might be. The Sea Worm dreamt that God lived at the end of a collapsible tunnel. Much is still in the tube.

The Lake at the Centre of the World

In the beginning, the universe was loaded.

It shot and swelled into a flood. Much receded into a single noted swallow. The swallow continued until a lake formed at the centre of the world. An eye opened. There were extensions. The dark packed into a form.

Brain coral. Tear drop litigations. Wild poisons.

To stop the nausea God made a potion

became full to aching cursed the waters. A serpent arose from the deep and bent itself into a girdle of prayer. It drank God into intoxication. It drank into a feral drowning. It grew and fatted on the flood. Then God became full to aching, angry with a belly full of bile. God arched and burned and blistered. God became a dog snarling at the moon. There was a pincer movement to land. The earth opened up and ate the wet. There were tremors and terrible faces at the door. God expelled the serpent and all his little alms. God opened his hand in the light. There was a slap. The slap lasted forever.
small bones

last night i floated to the surface

marinated sweated out

what i remember was enclosure

& an Eden enforcing its lush against a hunger

(my terminal fantasy)

i walked with little steps, on little feet, hoping to slip into Your crevice without falling

but the moon loves soundless movements in the dark

small increments dumb beasts

(You were fond of your foundling until i crippled your hosanna)

~

i mewed with my mouth open

into which the moon hung its face

ghosted from a milk nipped night

the cry of its pearl

beyond translation i covered my ears

to hear my dumb beast moan

i wanted to suckle tongue lolling

up against

Your milk white & berry berry

blue

~

later

when i awoke there was an excavation just outside Your walls

of a night creature mouth open

were found & cradled in gauze
Belladonna Baby

This is perennial
Non-volitional

~

The Devil has exclusive right
Have you seen him lately?
His vagina is overgrown - almost a forest
He exposes himself on a half cube
He taught me a song

Bad baby
Stupid baby
Sad baby
Fat
Blue baby
Dead baby
Mistake baby
Rat

I rose from a winter root
It coiled around my neck
Bit me like a strangle snake
I started dreaming like a worm

They conjured me up
into a porcelain dish
Salt encrusted
Pink stained
Bile yellow
I developed a rash
My throat made adjustments
The bells were ringing like a dosage

I tried to put the little berries in my mouth (her wee wee berries)
Bad baby
Bad baby
Bad baby
bad

(and you know what the Devil does with those who steal his fruit)
Mother sent me away to school
(I was scared of the Devil’s vagina)
Mother kept her berries to herself
(the Devil has his own)
And sent a special message to me
(I was her ever-dilating pupil)
‘fly, fly...take flight’
(so I stood on the edge of a precipice)
I never stop dreaming her call

The Devil has exclusive right
Have you seen him lately?
His vagina is overgrown - almost a forest
He exposes himself on a half cube
He taught me a song
Bad baby
Stupid baby
Sad baby
Fat
Blue baby
Dead baby
Mistake baby
Rat

An after-word: (there is something else I didn’t tell you)

Sometimes at night mother ties her ribbons around me
She lowers me into the ground
She weeps

Sometimes at night I float
and hallucinate the rescue

Sometimes at night (and even in broad daylight)
my rapid pulse turns feeble
and mother dreams she is a beautiful lady
with a bright hat and a ring

Sometimes at night the Devil
moans like a cow

Sometimes mother wanders
without her breasts

Sometimes I swim for miles
and never find her body

This is perennial
Non-volitional

You may leave now
knowing things after you died

there is a great silence now because God has stopped talking
the only sound you can hear is the scraping of hooves by the tomb

the wind fretting the blue
insects burrowing
antennae twitching
wings folding to rest
the lapping of thirsty tongues
the opening of beaks
the closure of secondary eyes

& the memory of the sea in winter

the unfolding of your letter
the turning of your tarnished handle
the creak of your opening door

how i imagined i fell at your feet
& tried to guess your disguise
how i dreamt i kissed your cheek
& told you i was alive
how i told you i loved you
how much i loved you
how your heart froze in a petrified suckle
just as they were shearing your hair

the lolling of legs wide open
the stretch of a strap
the tear of a lip
the seep of an ocean
the slit of a knife
the pool of our blood
the folding of linen

the humming of lacewings outside your window?
(who can say it may not have been so?)

the rush of your eyes closing
head turning
heart heaving
your breath veering
down
the wrapping of tight
dry
white
protection

god empty
part two  

*gap sickness*
Slap

How heavy is a cow’s heart?

Mary Poppins
tight arsed bitch

Dame Slap* is slapping
slap
slap
slap

* After ‘Dame Slap’ in Enid Blyton’s, *The Folk of the Faraway Tree* (1949).
Nine Months in a Psychiatrist’s Womb

First Month

I am invisible  
He is empty  
There is a fertilisation in a remote corner of the office.

Second Month

He is thinking he is hungry. One hour till he is out.  
Insanely hungry  
Insane with it.  
He looks out the window.  
Gormless  
There is a fester, a tropic inside him  
An incubation  
It has been nine years since he gave up smoking.  
He has an engorged appointment book.  
I am an indelible entry  
No mouth  
Blind  
Deaf  
Budded incidentally in unrecognisable places

Third Month

There is a phantom in the room.  
There is a heartbeat  
He dreams he needs a blood transfusion.  
That he suffers from anaemia and parasites.  
That he has inclement breasts  
And a bucket full of unspent blood  
He sighs when he wakes  
and I tumble silently within him sucking up the soak  
well  
silent  
bug-eyed  
I am his alarming alien

Fourth Month

I am beginning to encroach.  
He has been alerted.  
There has been an ultrasound  
A revelation  
He is staring at me.  
A ghosting on the screen denotes something organic  
Forming  
Sucking  
A heart is beating  
It is complete this fist-sized intrusion  
He is staring at me  
I am not learning words yet.

Fifth Month

I am growing within him.  
It is too late for abortion.
Sixth Month

He is sitting lower in the chair
There is absent-minded stroking of his belly
The window lets in too much light
He closes the blinds
keeps me in the dark
makes gurgling noises
dreams of adaptations
I am learning from him what it means to have arterial connection
To be a cellular incursion

Seventh Month

He feels full
I have learnt how to kick him
a projection behind his skin
He is thinking about me now
I might be real
He is wondering at my silence
At my unblinking eyes
He dreams of deep space
When he wakes he is alert and ruddy
He comments to himself on his fullness
consults books
meditates
I look at him from within
We meet somewhere
Co-joined
I am staring
kicking
He has also moved in

An ocean has formed
He is learning to swim
I am his fish
His little endangered whale
There may be research involved

Eighth Month

He dreams about a bloodied harpoon
About not breathing any more
Of interminable imprisonment
Of unfathomable Gordian knots undone and seeping
Of black holes
Of formless intelligence

He is grossly overweight
There is liquid retention
He continues to read to me from his primer
I am learning how to make sounds when he is quiet
‘Forbear’ is his favourite word
He thinks he is becoming enlightened
Ninth Month
I am late
There may be a medical intervention
Something to do with knives
Or drugs
He wants to do it naturally though
In the office somewhere
Quietly
Lights dimmed
He has bought a boat in case of still birth

When I come out we are both bleeding,
It is the only way
I am staring at him for life
100 Symptoms

Fear of Cuisenaire
Fear of day care centres
Inability to climb monkey bars, tumble, run, speak, pummel horse or skip
Irritated friends, teachers, parents, various divinities, and brown owls
Wishing God had fur
Having Veronica constantly say your name backwards
Speaking fish to a room full of pre-pubescent girls
Thinking you are a fish
Fear of water
Not washing your face for three months
Hairy legs and generally unshaved anatomy
Consuming copious amounts of vitamins
Wearing a blonde wig
Eating secretly
Fear of mummification, brain tumours, and blindness
Orange tapestry wallpaper
Talking to Jesus for an hour every day
Praying for results
Fear of kayaks
Fear of humans
Getting over the death of your dog
Wearing a visibly dirty bra underneath your cheesecloth communion dress
Understanding Jesus like he’s in your mouth
Going to San Remo when you are 14 with a 21 year old boyfriend who’s been in jail
Being frightened of holly
Being frightened of blow holes
Fear of children
Fear of schools
Fear of government funding
Fear of red bricks
Not becoming
Singing for Jesus in front of homeless people
Telling a woman who killed her baby that Jesus loves her
Having criminals pretending to commit suicide while wanting to sleep with you
Being a virgin till you’re 22
Pretending to be a nun
Asking God all the time to be better
Being told by an allergy doctor you are not allergic to anything
Writing confessional poetry about love in free verse to your psychiatrist
Falling in love with your psychiatrist
Paying him 50,000 dollars

Congenital laryngitis
Clinging to driftwood in the backyard pool
Fear of swimming
Pretending to be a secretary with breasts
Wanting to be from India, Mozambique or Morocco
Having a child who looks foreign
Being so frightened your children need therapy
Saying sorry to lamp posts
Craving a man with one leg
Marrying a man with one eye and a heart problem
Living with a Chihuahua, Doberman, German Shepherd, Pitt Bull cross
Fear of dogs
Fear of walking without a baby
Fear of losing a baby
Losing a baby
Not being able to find a baby
A baby
Bad use of knives
Bad use of finger nails
Bad use of God
Bad use of good
Inventive, imaginative, pathological, obsessive, psychologically obscene use of bad
Paranormal scar tissue
Fear of hurt, mess, dirt, ragged edges, wounds
Being falsely identified as a person, alien, adult, child, savant, idiot, guru, lover, loser
Having a passport with a picture of someone who went with you that day
Not being wanted by the police or any other kind of authority
Being inclement
Wandering lonely as a cummulo nimbus
Hating the sun, heat, rashes, burning, light, glare, the bush, and endless blue skies
Hating bush poetry, poetry about the bush, men in the bush, bush hats and the bush
Hating country music, singing breasts, awards for country music and breasts
Being given herpes by a man with a very large moustache
Eating a pregnant suicidal fish
Learning to drive in a Volkswagen
Running out of petrol because you have faith in God
Breastfeeding for five years
Having six names simultaneously not true
Asking advice from non-humans
Having your husband morph into a swede
Taking God as a lover and explaining this to your psychiatrist
Deciding to become a Buddhist nun
Fear of baldness
Fear of being alone
Fear of saffron, chakras, meditation, reiki, haikus, and exposed midriffs
Petrifying a monk by crying in front of him
Running away
Fear of contraception
Fear of abortion
Never taking any drugs whatsoever
Fear of marijuana
Fret, worry, anxiety, lesions, perpetual fear
Learning you might be Swedish, German or something European
Fear of mothers
Fear of not-mothers
Fear
Having your father come with a letter confessing everything
The Breastless Jesus

i love you like Jesus
like Jesus
like Jesus

Jesus wears a mayhem blanket
like a sticky sweet rumple
like a seahorse
swims
& sways
like a trumpet nosed
perambulator
like a sacerdotal womb
a sea spurt sculpted satchel
packed loose on reckless moorings

on bare-arsed undulations
on Jesus & his gorged ripe bolt hole wet

he sits like Buddha
in a godless dream
coiffured
like Mozart at recital
& floats incandescent
a swarm and swim

when the moon is full

& the dogs are barking on the shore

his egg sac spills
like sago pudding from a bowl
& trickles down
vermilion

he drowns thirsty
while his throat is bursting
his brackish basin torn
a saturated sea brine spill

a belly split

a swell

my no breast Jesus
my arabesque wet horse & mage

he makes me sticky
beneath the mayhem mantle
beneath his lurky coat
& stain

He is leaking me away

like the boatman seeder
like the upright cleft man seepy bleed

i am his uterine floater
i love you like Jesus
like a seahorse swims
i love you like Jesus
like a seahorse sways
like a breastless seahorse Jesus
hairless and very

my no nipple suck
insanely good

i am being insanely good again
you know
the kind of insane
that no one can pick
i am filling in forms
& smiling on cue
& doing all my work with excellence
i am thinking of everyone’s feelings
& silencing myself when i am cross
i am not even suiciding
at all
i am burying all my anger in a big black hole
somewhere in the backyard
it’s full of holes now
(nearly all the way to somewhere else)
& things are growing from it
snaking their way to the house
but I have a plan
& it has to do with knifes & cutting implements
(you know, things like that)
to stop it all

i am being insanely good again
& greeting all
with due deference and love
magnanimous to the very last
my vigilance is legendary
against the unforeseen
though i am frightened
that
at my funeral
they will say
i was just insane
& forget the good
or
they will forget the insane
& just remember the good
which one is worse i wonder?

they will fill up all my holes tut-tuting
all those big black holes
& say
how messy i really was
& that no one knew
& how surprising life is
(& that someone could have hurt themselves you know)
they will fill up those holes not knowing at all
they don’t keep all those weeds enclosed
& that it won’t stop them — no.

in a gardening magazine they said
my garden was a perfect example of how to be a good
gardener
but i know all those dark & luscious vines & leafy
growths
from all those holes
are something very angry
& something very bad
not insane
at all
i remember stooping low to touch it stooping low in snow some parcel dropped i wasn’t scared until you cried then I couldn’t leave you alone it was folded small almost Japanese like a distant thing fine crafted on a thin shore dropped by a passer by amongst the snow like a Haiku left aside to dry silent folded into paper origami dropping to the floor and never picked up inside its folds outside there is a large forest but inside it is like a fine stroke against paper folded against its ink crest wave water kissing God sky blue sea-spray i stopped to see it very low i couldn’t see it for a long time and then i did brilliant and white to its edges like a snow thing it was folded very close it was so very large inside its little name it had a mouth it was bleeding on the snow like a little wound that wouldn’t heal i saw it up close and it said my name that little thing because it had a mouth or did it see me or you as nameless and just cried out in case? i saw it up close with its eye-lashed pointers and finger nail atoms meshing fine and brief bleeding quietly but all the same saying a name always briefly like a wing just about to the snow was very white around it i saw it up close (as you know) stooping i wasn’t scared until you cried and then i thought i knew its name i watched atoms shift to make a name it was a mouth that was bleeding in winter it was a door and i was stooping low against it in case it opens me to itself

it was very small like an origami thing papered and inked like a haiku sonnet language verse across the tiny tiny little page reading it within its folds it read long and wide and deeper than the ocean that washed up on the little shore that made it there are long thin shores everywhere to make it but only this was made so tiny this tiny little thing like an origami thing that could be burnt but was dropped upon the snow with a mouth that kept on opening the mouth was bleeding as it always does all those words and ink stains bleeding like a haiku that is crying into the ocean deep that it is and wet the snow is freezing it tiny tiny little folds just like a mouth crests and folds a fish like thing a fish all those flowing things such a soft palate paper thin not foreign i have greeted it continually like a snow reader stooping very low always so very low i am wet and cold to watch its mouth dreaming like a fish i am almost small now right to the bottom of it stooping low against it just in case it opens me to itself
Jesus People or How To Be Saved

Jesus People in God's House

Un-rooted city dwellers visit Jesus’ shop front right next to the Laundromat. They are street witnesses. Wanderers come in half empty wanting to be heard and everyone sings like they are drowning. In the Jesus room people are vague about the flood. Next door, the dryers spin, the washing machines tumble clean. People wait reading old magazines. Someone is eating an apple.

Jesus People at the Green Leprechaun

At the Green Leprechaun people are huddled into small wooden booths eating toasted sandwiches and listening to folk singers. Some are folding their lives down into a teacup and smoke. One clear voiced puss is late. Another dark haired mouse prince is halfway up the tower. The streetlights are mugged by smog and the passing cars are thin and fast. It is late. After midnight. People who claim to be lovers are pairing off to watch the moon slip fat and yellow from sight. Trees drip with winter and the bitumen is wet, shining, reflective, aquatic. No-one knows how to swim in the city fringes. Night bites to the core and is full. Jesus is a homeless person under the street light.

Jesus People at a Baptism

At the beach she walks into the water. Submerge for Jesus. She hasn’t shaved her legs. People are trying to pray to Jesus but most can’t believe how hairy her legs are (and that she didn’t shave them). Some feel sick while she is saving her soul. Some look away while she plunges into the Jesus sea. She is on the edge unshaved and water logged near the beach. The people on the beach will never love her because she is too hairy. The hair curls in circles around the back of her thighs. She doesn’t know. She walks into the water unshaved for Jesus. And everyone who loves Jesus has questions they do not ask. Like what happens to the babies who die before they can be made completely wet and almost drowned? Is it their fault they don’t know how to love Jesus and be submerged?

Jesus People at a Funeral

At a funeral the singer forgets the words of a song she has sung every day for two years. The coffin is closed like a grave. She forgets the words and everyone knows. She forgets on the most important day of this man’s life. She wonders if he knows she let him down and made his trip to Jesus less. She can’t remember the words she forgot. Everyone knows she did. The young man in the coffin doesn’t move. He had polio and walked carefully. He was in a car when he died. The song did not want to sing itself the same. And so she forgot. Jesus was watching. Everyone who loved Jesus knew.

Jesus People at a Christian Youth Camp

At the Christian beach camp in a tent there are a group of teenage girls listening to a young adult reading from the bible and explaining things. They are glad to be away from home and to have activities. They want to kayak and swim. The group leader reading from the bible, has a fear of water and a giant ringworm on her arm. She has come to the country for Jesus. She has broken out in boils. It is ugly. The words from the bible do not heal it. She is too frightened to kayak. The camp organisers chide her for her fear. She has been infested in her sleeping bag. There are muffled silences when she walks through the forest. Constipation ruins her chances at overcoming and in the dinghy she becomes eternally sea sick.
Jesus People in a Volkswagen

On the way to Sale in her Volkswagen a young woman hits a kangaroo. It makes a large dent on her bonnet. When the others come over, she is in shock. She is calling out to Jesus to save her. They recoil. They get back in their car. They are not Jesus people. They drive off. Later at the camp, these others huddle and talk in muffled whispers and laugh at her Jesus shock. In her sleeping bag she thinks of Judith who died for Jesus in Russia and how pretty she was on the cover of the book. She was beaten to death in a barn by a group of men who didn’t like Jesus and who thought Judith was probably too beautiful. She earnestly thanks God (so the others cannot hear) for being ugly.

Jesus People in Lygon Street

On Friday nights they sing for Jesus in the rain. Michael has no job and when he was a boy his father beat him and his mother’s friend fucked him. He never remembers the words. But he walks around just in case.

The people who sing for Jesus are either very beautiful (and know they should) or very ugly (and know they must). The people in between get married and have children.

Always keep your guitar in a case when it rains.
Never wear jewellery.
A cross is ok.
The little alien is petulant because I will not attend to her.  
She jangles me retrograde.  
She has brought space into my throat.  

She is an intercepting drown.  
A black hole reach.  
She is wide.  
Stares like a universe.  

She is a persistent  
She is a holograph projection of the eternal float.  
Time folds there, over and over. (It is how they travel)  
I have folded her over and over and over again thinking she will worm down, travel away.  
But she is origami.  
She tries to become.  
She is huddled into a virtual.  
She ghosts thin.  
She is static.  
Megalomaniac is hard to say.  

There is a corner. There is a huddle. There is a continent. It is the shape of Africa. She is glowing. She is explosive. She never sleeps. She is vigilant. She is full of my vagina. She is full of my babies. My nightmare clouds. My inside cavernous mouth. She is full of whatever I am and am not. She is waiting to be got. She is waiting.  

She is hissing at me not to write this.  
But I know she wants me to.  
But get it right, she says, get it right before I devour you.  
It is a threat.  

Sometimes she gives up.  
I am too slow.  
I am a host apparently.  
I must work hard to support her tapering tentacles.  

That little alien.  
(She looks innocent but she has suckers)  

Her heart beats backwards, misses, the left ventricle makes funny noises.  
A man with a stethoscope nearly found her once.  
Aliens can hide from their host but now  
I know she is in there.  
Huddled.  
Head down.  
When she is quiet I am sick.  
When she is quiet I am scared.  

She is most often sucking.  

She watches.  
She conducts.  
Scours.  
There is an orchestra of possibility mad with constant music irreversible and frantic, louder, deeper, darker. Every time they play, the orchestra never diminishes. It is crescendo heavy and soaking the inside. She is playing all the concertos backwards to conjure the devil. She is slumped. Sometimes she gives up. The music never stops. She is slumped.
No-one has tried to detect her.
(The man with the stethoscope was looking for other things).

She is invisible
subterranean
secret.
Remember the Midwich cuckoos
Perhaps they are thinking of me
like she does.
Will they make me?

She emanates a virtual bacterium
Clustering.
She plots to make me feel it.
She wants me to know
all huddled up inside her invalid skin
transparent
unbudded
encased against the elements
very very small.
She has the durability of lunatics.
She is a nervosa experiment
trembling like the butterfly wing that changes everything.

She is shaking now.
I am too slow.
She is yelling at me.
She is dispatching me.
I am her translation.
I am her foreign face at the boarding gate.

She is clever
watchful.
Her transmissions are constant.
They do not check me out completely.
She enters.

This little alien detects fine movement.
She investigates metabolisms
tides
washes
little currents
fevers
wasted moments
pulse
how one’s hand reaches to imbibe distraction.
She is varicose to my skin.

She learns everything
remembers everything
will not allow anything.
The orchestra keeps playing
bass note cacophonous.
When humans wander
forget
look away
yawn
eat
sleep
vacancy is her little hell.  
She can detect vacancy like spider central.
Lone.  
Trailing something sticky to her caul.

She is not filled with acid.  
She pumps her heart in complication.  
She is a humidified mass  
a vague pounding 
a pre-menstrual ache 
an after birth  
an umbilical  
the weatherings of existence 
a high fluted wail  
a mad, loud, incessant, frequenced, orchestral movement in repeat.  
There is no pause button.  
She is a virtual.

She is going to give birth.  
Otherwise (and anyway) she will devour me.  
I am half way down her throat.  
She keeps me like a morsel stunned  
until she can 
spawn in safety.  
I am her mosh pit crazy.

I keep telling her that it can never be safe.  
Never.  
Aliens are the ultimate minority.  
She feels it and is insistent she can wait forever.  
But I know she doesn’t want me to die.  
Something about survival.
carnival

My mouth is wired
    like a carnival tent
I swallow everything
& chew the bright lights
Until I am a round beach of glass

I used to sing on street corners
With razor blades in my pockets
Ten dollars
For a plate of coleslaw

I was slapping myself then

I knew only 5 songs
    (just like a human being)
My face opened
A stave
Of interminable notes

I was piping myself to sleep
Back then
Wide awake and dreaming
Until the piano wires
Disconnected

A cacophonous mess
    (I took a ratchet to that)

Andy Warhol came to me and said
There are only 15 seasons
Between what changes

I thought I’d better hurry up

But for a long time
My head housed all this weather like
It was an infectious unleavened boarder
You know
Leaf falls and ice floes
& marigold gardens
Until all the helium
Pressing up against my
Painted, gymkhana, bum slapping face
Of sky
Floated from me

I let go
    (I think they escaped)

They nancied up
Those weather balloons
Past the hot albino canvases of summer

My mouth is a mess of wires now
    in the collapse
The Little Alien is Hungry

She stares blankly at the screen.

Ellipses. Blips.

Silence.

A morning. An afternoon.

There is a juggernaut. A capsule. Cocoon. Debris. (yes, it could be a weather station). There is a secret bunker under the sand and a desert around this city striking out the concept of distance. I am folding. On the radio there is a montage of 21st century pre-occupations – the beauty of wooden spoons, how to maintain health, Ibises in Africa, advertisements for underground bands, mufflers, the history of whale blubber, what a priest in Milwaukee said about Stone Henge, how some fish have lungs, the price of apples in Tasmania, gun control. I nearly went and lay down.

Silence.

(I’ve had a communication. I sucked on it until my teat was sore). Ellipse. Blip.

A man with a Polish (a mad poet) name says we mustn’t be too precious and that men who live alone should be pitied. I think he is right. (Another communication. My lips are blistered). He is deep inside me talking to my little alien. She isn’t put off when he talks about shit. They are having a wonderful conversation. He was scarred (she is drawn to the pock marks on the Moon).

A flare.

(Ok, now resume) The sun hates it where you are. Now I am not alone because I mention you (I am waiting for communications – it’s hot in the control room – my tongue is double its size, parched, out of control). The sun hates everything to brown. Why do I always write about dogs? Is it because I want one? I have paddocks and acres and asphalt playgrounds, and blue, blue, blue, blue, bloody blue skies that separate me from you. If you were here I would be happy. You – like God, like Jesus, like Buddha, like that man who ran the cult I nearly joined (you know the one, who said my name was really Emma), like my first husband, second, third, like my Guru man, child, my other child, like my father, my other father, like my mother, my other mother, and the blonde and brunette mothers, yes, you, you, you, you, like that. You (This is a long silence)

How many miles is it to where you are? (I’m glad you’re not my blood relative)

I am waiting for my dog to come and bark angry and justified. Wild eyed. On all fours I might bite you they say. We will bite the sad from you. Chemicals? Imbalance? No. The Bearded Mage says it is the imbalance of experience. Not the chemicals. (Sigh. I am not even allowed a pill). But who knows what my metabolism does when I am sleeping? I am the night waiting for a dog to come and bark at my Moon. A lunatic (the mad poet with the Polish name is laughing and not answering the door. He is chasing a butterfly up the chimney). I never had a dog or perhaps I had too many. All that howling. How many miles is it to where you are? (I’m glad you’re not my blood relative)

Blip. Ellipse. A fluorescent flare...

(all my eyelids are blinking in slow motion...this is another long silence and I am not going to tell you when I resume)


She stares, she stares. She has no underpants on. The little alien is hungry.
A secret message (ARE YOU LISTENING!) Jesus, sorry...

Hi

Just out for a stroll
Inside this dead wood barricade
Just strolling
As you do
I am binning a lot as I go
So don't worry about that okay
Anyway
As I said
Just out
Walking
Just strolling
Said to my therapist the other day
'Haven't been out for a while you know'
So
Here I am
Out and about
Walking strolling
A while ago I
Came across
a secret message
on the hanging tree
underneath it said
ARE YOU LISTENING!
(I instantly said sorry)
I was stoned dead by that
I wanted Jesus to come and raise me up
(but my therapist had said to me a while ago that Jesus was, you know, well – a surrogate or something, you know – a kind of walking stick that stopped me from balancing right – or something, and now my therapist is like Jesus but not as cross not as cross, and he never walks, never...)
so Jesus was out of the question
and it was a question
and it deserved an answer
but my mouth wouldn’t close after the sorry
(you know it was a-gaping or something)
and a wasp went in and stung me
and I blew up like a balloon
and ended up in hospital
just like that
sigh
so anyway
I haven’t done much walking since then
So I thought I would
Stroll
Just a bit
And say

Hi
Lost in space

After being cryogenically frozen your parents proceed to take you into deep space. However, there is a sabotage at take-off and you quickly learn that space debris can kill you. Your balance is disturbed and you constantly fall and hurt yourself due to damage in the navigational equipment. You then find the spaceship, now disabled and off course, crash lands on a barren, unknown, hostile, and (from Earth) invisible planet. You are nearly drowned, burnt to death, and frozen because the planet has an elliptical orbit. Somehow this becomes manageable. You set up camp. You encounter Mr. Nobody and nobody believes you. You are constantly abducted, brainwashed, or harassed by aliens. Your best friend is made of metal and is wired to like you. You constantly hear voices telling you of imminent danger. You wear a restrictive and unattractive uniform. There is always someone ready to betray, doubt, criticise, and negate you. You learn never to leave adults in charge of anything. You enter time travel machines with great hope and innocence, press buttons and wait. Sometimes sad music plays while you contemplate the probable death of loved ones. You learn that jokes help alleviate space sickness. You befriend swamp animals, criminals; and highly intelligent (but deformed) creatures. Earth becomes a past life regression. While living your life vicariously, you grow older but remain the same age. After some attempts at escape you realise there is no return. After a certain number of episodes the Creator calls your life into question. At some point you learn that Gods can become lost, bored, invisible, childlike, pompous, petulant, sacrificial, and sad; that they speak a language of untranslatable and incomprehensible trajectories; that love has no body; and your connection to family is a microcosm of Everything.

Finally, dark, formless, and voiding areas of non-being become a disturbing fetish and whatever was lost only remains available in re-runs.

*After the 1960’s television series
part three

land
Portents

Before the storm came, five thousand birds died. This was a conservative estimate. They fell from trees and landed like stones from heaven, initially hot, but upon impact, unmoving. Then just warm. Then cold. They dropped, some hurtled, others let out a cry before the fall. One lady said she found 500 birds in her garden, heaped in places – minors, wattlebirds and crows. The feathers still looked alive long after the eyes had vacated.

The locusts had been through in the late spring.

A lot of people thought of Egypt.
What to Think
While Having Your Tea Leaves
Read

Tea leaves
fall
clumped in the air
with wet.
The crucifix never
moves.
The pattern left is
dark soil carbuncular
a hot wet
caffeinated
fresco
conceal.
Someone is remembering
Budapest. Microfibrous
elongated snake pictures and congealing clouds.
Rain is forecast three Sundays from now. The
draught horses are dead and the milk has gone sour.
I am that old. A moth is fragile, one wing-rip
away from a crash landing. There are mirrors on her
dress that blind the blind. I am coughing up
phlegm. The Italian tenor has a perfect
voice. I cannot think of Africa. I am clumping on
bone china. There are forty two stations of the
moon. Dorothy’s red shoes have no legs that
can be accounted for. Accusatory paraphernalia
corrode and cut a swathe red an apple
to its core.
Dispensations
aqueous
filigree
dog-eared
down.

Blow.

The pot is
empty and the
avoid and mad of
flapping is silent
in the
stain.
parchments

I'm so tired today
wind blowing from the east
my head persuaded to the left side

from gustings equivalent to damage

thoroughly twisted
like an art
my bones crushed against the sheer
leaving only
tongue lock
tongue sick
throat urge

while a thousand miles away
ghoulish ecstasies groove the saffron
my sanyasin has the cat-o'-nine-tails
thinks of Goa & the sweet hibiscus thrills
as sin
today
I'm far from home
high in occult peaks
my throat so dry
& numb
& hollow
plumbing these caves at the edge of chronicle
where upon an altar
open books &
fine wrought tassels
worm to dust
these yellowed pages
weak to air & light
prescribe a touchstone
fragmentation
we long to know the forms of disappearance
the endless ways of mild encroach
something ancient for the lonely
holy for the plain
precious for our restitution

while a thousand miles away
my sanyasin wanders vacant
loose upon the land
he has a new name
that sounds as if he might be saved
beads & absolutions
his ochre purse is full
of sand
& blood trails in the footsteps of a saint

yet today
I must resist his humming
his quoting of the name
his urging in the silence for dead sea consolation
I must not fall asleep in here
& mummify to bleach
faint to aching
thin as paper
dry as ink
fade to memory's cool safe institution
in cuneiform belief

my sanyasin says
  as he thinks of two-faced deities.
  & holy sanitations
  as he fucks to hell the blind and sick
  I am faking this in my mouth

but I am thinking
as wind and sand erode our ancient tombs
we write to fill these deep arched caverns with our wreaths
& throat the wild hibiscuses of God
to make the stillborn breathe
Father, I presume?


Preface: Dear Ancients, departed and entombed please reveal the sarcophagul phalus. As I float to the font and aperture, receive my sodden, papyrus heart. Unfold the archaic litany and the re-occurrence of HIS story. I give thanks to mumification and the separation of internal organs.

Introduction: There are at least two beginnings in the dendritic wet of a complicated veiny source fingering the valleys between the mountains. Two. And the DNA of numerous descents.

You can see the Nile from deep space.

Expedition reconnaissance: A map is unfolded on the edge of an obscure deity. The eagles are circling the caravan. Walking is a slow affair. The river is an occult religion. It has a many pointed tail.

Found: Field notes partially obscured by time

March 3: I am in undergrowth... dark wood... ferment... at the mouth of a river. High... vent... and fly... wing and... eye... drop... descent now... trickle down.

My father is a mystery beyond the flood plains. Where the Gods live the priests can only dream. I am an outcome.

March 29: Dark underwood... tangle... twig... knot... moist decay... in leaf... river-bank collapse.

My father stands on the edge, white shirt, thinking of his foreign country, his hair crinkled. I am my father's forget and burial, his shirt is a shroud, I will be entombed in his chest, lowered. It will be immense that hole where he stands. He guards himself like a blind sentinel.

April 16: Dark underwood... at the source of the river.

My father is boating across the current. I am under his hull. I am swimming finned and angled out. But he is no fisherman and I am not that kind of fish. He will not catch me. He is not trying. I am red. I am invisible. I am toothed, tailed, and lunged. Breasted. I am his myth. I am his secret barnacle. I am his under, his blunt mouth memory, his unseen.

May 23: Darkwood undergrowth at the maidenhead... tangle... death... jungle-mass... knife work

My father is no explorer in this humid bath. Languid trough, equatorial descent. He pokes and pros with a cigarette hanging on his lips. Now he is a fish swimming to the ocean from his narrowing estuary. There was an explosion, a storm, a briny release in the mountains of Ethiopia where the blue Nile vents to just a trickle. It was something foreign like that. Something, so very mystic and unavailable beyond the falls. Water comes unexpected and the ocean swells to flood. We pray to Gods who look away obscured by opulent gold-encrusted drapery. Build effigies that look like fathers, with feathers, and fins and foreskins hanging. They stand dark in temples, tall and straight, with their faces turned away, one eyed, and incarcerated. He is a tomb. I am his dung beetle. I am laying all my eggs in his rot. There is waste. There is smell. There are worlds formed. There will be an outcoming.
July 12: Darkwood...catfish...eyeing...trough of summer...parch...must walk quickly to the mouth. Hot...touch...drought...robid...the measuring stones are...naked. There is a line of...cloud 1,000 miles away. There is no promise...recognition...end...

My father has fair skin, frizzed and waving red-gold hair. He looks away as he leans on the balcony. He is draped in blind. He is thin, wiry. He is small. He wears a two-tone shirt from the 1950’s. A cigarette hangs from his lips. A dark-haired woman waits the garden. There has been a fertilisation high up in the gaudy mountains. Winter is over a landmass at the peak. There are clouds too far away to ever know. The priests are guessing. She has a fish tail and mistakes him. He is in a foreign country smoking cigarettes. He runs away after the rainy season. Across borders.

The Nile is the very longest river in the world.

Epilogue: The black, shiny feathered bird God and the dung beetle continue. The catfish walks. This is not a sightseeing tour. I have scraped my knees and parched my mouth. I have blighted my rations to seed. I have thrashed on dry land. I have sourced him. He is not here.

But I am his obvious possession just like I am Livingston.
49

**Various Degrees of Disappearance** (after The Sabian Symbols)*

Crouching against the eastern gate, delicately measured narcotics trace down a woman’s chin and neck. Her knees lock.

In summer, a child in a neighbour’s garden kills cicadas by drowning them with the garden hose.

Nil Desperandum.

A sinful girl (with no feet) dances uncontrollably while god strokes himself.

Wild pigs sleep in the sun.

An artesian basin forms beneath the breeding house. Tunnels are dug. Fossils are found.

White throated lilies expose themselves beneath a vaporous pall of cloud. A storm of leaves is blown from the witness tree. Small animals are hung out to dry.

In a theatre, a man exposes himself just before the end. A woman leaves without noticing.

A woman with horns seeks treatment for petrification. A doctor prescribes her.

A man with a booming voice leans too far out a window and blames physics for the fall.

A little girl stares at a fish tank for hours. Sand forms between her toes and water gushes from her mouth. They resuscitate her just in time.

A woman digs a grave in her backyard and laments the earth’s empty eye. There is a many­roomed house behind her.

Spiders pack the groove.

Creeping softly across warm patches, a woman hears the earth whispering her name. She reaches a moist cave to hear the orchestra.

While crawling through the undergrowth, an old woman knits a tapestry. Coming home, her womb aspires.

A girl, dressed in red, dreams all her mothers are flying out softly packed windows. The curtains are terylene and easily torched.

Wild pigs awaken.

At the mouth of a cave, birds swarm into formation upon entry. A woman, in a forbidden rainforest, counts them.

A man arrives at work through wrought iron gates with his lunch wrapped lovingly by his wife. He knots his rope with care into a noose.

Crossing a busy street, a blind woman drops her parcels. A parade engulfs her.

In an after-school day-care centre an older boy hangs a young girl from a doorknob. Someone enters.

A clairvoyant woman, who can hear galaxies collapse (and is sure angels have hands), cuts into a principal vein. She hits the mother lode.

* The Sabian Symbols are word images corresponding to the 360 degrees of the Zodiac. They were divined by clairvoyant Elsie Wheeler in 1925.
music from the abyss

1.
black dogs can hear it
when they are sleeping
awake
they are deaf & relentless
noise makers
they pad unheard of
i am singing, singing to them
to make them sleep
i dropped an octave & it floated for a long time
a downward spiral
(i had no idea i could sing like that)
even dogs know in their dreams
how silently the slough can fall
relentless

2.
i left my flute on a high rock
& the wind played it
leaves breathed over it & it sighed
i fingered it
as i remembered you
so far beneath
the dogs were barking
black & unsleeping
how many heads can a dog have?
i keep fluting just in case

3.
i hear them padding
i am singing all the songs i know
to make them tired, tired
& poor
as they pass
in Beethoven's house
the dogs sleep
to hear him
there is a quartet playing on the edge of
something
orchestral
relentless
4.

my voice nearly broke
at the thought of those hairy beasts
herding me into song
i am singing, singing
all the way down
there is someone maintaining in the grasses above
my flute plays by itself without audience
there are mysterious bodiless hands
it is a grave accompaniment
my head is bearing it all

5.

the dogs are sleeping now
they are dreaming of me & the one pure note I know makes them holy like gods

6.

there are no footprints on the abyssal plain
my throat is not required
bloom blood

the hibiscus flowers to its furthest point
blush tongues
papering the scent
careering varicose
liquor thin
creasing from the germ stem sac
delta fine
minute
unwrapping
mapping
pooling

bloom blood
dries on moonless days
shrivels
to a slattern smudge & stain
hot house florid
seed burst full
across the curve
the splitting hour
hung with flowers
& red wet seeping
we are lush
& moulding
feral
ripe
like veiny leaves
short lived from seed
to claret season
i am speaking to my mother
along the thinnest tracks
in efflorescent prayer
to make my fat
hot bruise of tongue

bloom blood
portrait of the artist as a survivor
(for Robert Dessaix)

his wings quiver
against the light
against the light
a marginal insect
uncommon soul gauze across the wound
gossamer that breathes with a
resting mouth
paper thin shafting
at an angle too
obtuse
for the butterfly catcher
he has goddess eyes painted on sheer
his mother's membrane still a caul
stretches fine across his face &
hands and skin
wings beat
against distance
light against his lace
he is between intransigence &
manifest
somewhere
more delicate than perception
flying across the
dreaming acres
a shaft of chancing light has stretched to moist appreciation
he is a lover on the white but wounded gauze
the rip between worlds
foretells the breadth and weight of wingspan
the trajectory of flight
toward the edges of the soul
he understands:
in summer
lacewings
gather over water
eating small morsels for
restitution
portrait of the old woman as an artist
after the film 'Modigliani' (2004)

last night the violins were playing
mad with terror
& the sky beaded into droplets
(Pissaro's points)
my mouth was open when i left you
full of blue
(the Prussian kind)

my red shawl trailed on the snow
my hat i gave to Picasso

he painted me over and over
'til i was not a thing

i mixed up the name of your book
& the years
yes, the years

i let go of something from my hand
before it was born
its mouth opened when it left me
the indigo peninsula

i traced myself back
into my grey
on bridges i gathered
walking
dead men passed
floating
like liquid signage

i am finishing
finishing

quite underneath
everything

& my velvet dresses hang
empty
blue
dead eyes till souls

i have spun out words
from your little books
that you spent a life time writing
so easy
i paddled them on this river
i wet them for you
linseed & hog
to stay alive
like a woman frightened of her own contractions
whose only possession would be
a name

but not my name
a man's name
that vicarious possession

i offered you everything
spilt my palette
mad with it

till

i am on this little verge
this tiny little verge

without you
congenital

I wore black today.

An engulf, protect & neuter. I wore black with spikes of green like regrowth after burning. I left the red sucked into the smoke of daylight, turning harm to fret. It was a black outcoming, somber, full of onslaught redirection fee-paying subjugation. In this shadowed fugue state I saw a wild iris (small but accurate) just before the sunset outside my daughter's garrison door. In the shading tunnel of dusk it sought the light, bent and up-faced. Its wet hem above the root ball webbing, perfected its crown. A nemesis (ancient wounds grope their way blind in such an perfect world). Yes. A flowering uttered at a safe congenital distance. On its anther a bee had settled. An occult sting pursed, just in case. I wore black today. I think it was a protection – protection against the unlived perfection of

the stillborn child.
she keeps her hands still

lapping them

in quiet

unsure

doctor ward

too loud

in silence

she flaps

breaks upon the window

dashes

to the sever

she wants it gone

flies heavy

hungry

she eats into her

self

an un-sweet imagined bleeding

her habit

dogged

by hair so

full

hardly

breathing

underneath

the crush

something reddens

plump &

fat

(some juiced unholy unction)

but she

cannot touch a thing so ripe she

wonders

what her mother said

behind the door

right at the moment of

annunciation

before her hands

were

stilled
Mummy

He had an unpronounceable name.
His eyes were quiet fish.
His skin was a map of soul stress.

His hands were giant beetle claws.
His hair was tundra.
His mouth reminded me of my mother.

They wrapped him in white muslin & laid him down wide
& low
dark & horizontal
It was a morning of ochre dust
& dead saffron fish
Did I say fish?
shimmering in the dry
piqued to stone

Until the sand fell away from the sky downwards
like the ferry of night
into earth’s open mouth swallow
while the wild women on the shore piped a low & foreign song
just beyond a third

Heaven pursed its mouth just like my mother’s
& I wondered where all the water went
even though he sailed away on an Egyptian barge
like he was about to become a constellation
like I was a conservator
who walked one-eyed
in a thousand tiered Sarcophagus

I am a star-gazer
&
I am petrified by his mummification
Cinders
(for Dorothy)

my mother was a seamstress
voluminous as she floated down to table
lighter than the sky
sewing down the edges
pinning up the seams
toe to wheel
& racing through
her chiffon veils
racing through

she danced and sang in choruses
on a Friday night
a plump & ready fairy

her fiance was a stockman
struck by lightning dead
racing through

she became a cinder
hot
she smoked in country pubs
suit-cased salesmen
sold her
all the tools and carnage
of desire

for months and months she danced and sang in choruses
on a Friday night
a plump & ready fairy
racing through

she made a dress to birth in
wider than the sea
she hated water
all that gushing
all those creatures
crawling through her legs
little evolutions
creased
unholy creations
it seemed
she seamed
it up so tight
upon the table

she worked 9 to 5
but afterwards
& this is where she found her skill
she let them pick her careful seaming open

hands on her nape
with needle thread
a mother's weft and woof
undid the bloodied knot
the bloodied eyeing knot
the serpent snaking to a saccharine song
as she wafted down to table

lightning remembers
little congregations
in deserted places
& those
who
take candy from strangers
in copses and cars
on hot December days
lightening knows
the soft spots in the ethers
& where to marry heaven and earth
unholy

lightning knows and always strikes the same
right down the seam
straight right down
the seam

that little cinder
wafting aft
she floated down
her thin curtain
in a gust
caught fire

racing through

with smoke
& beer
laughing
like a fell way
home
toe to wheel
& racing through
her chiffon veils
her tray
full of ash
& cinders
hearing

some can hear so vague and fine
leaves growing
&
the acrid smoke turning northward
a pencil moving on paper in New York
& ash falling like snow
a world away from that
a prevention of touch
a flicker at night
that eye beneath the covers
that small caress of air
in confined spaces

i can hear my mother breathing (yes, still)
& the collapse of a crepe balloon
or tomb
i can hear her lighting a cigarette
& laughing on a couple of beers with the short German man from Stuttgart
i can hear her vacating the premises
the door shutting
the silver key pursed
the footsteps to the wire gate and the dog in the car barking
its mange away

i can hear the pumping & trickle
& infinite marblings of incubation
my reckless ears
my reckless ears

statue quiet now
statue quiet
Rebirthing

i am heavy in my bed

    a child is slipping though me
    (the water is sharp)

flower lip

    & velvet tongue

    as you bleed into the basin

    (your first breath when it came was beautifully insane   blossom torn from branches)

aureole        purple         bruised

    red in places (a deep vein)

you fold me back

    into the clairvoyant sea

you slip and fight against a small thin crust of ancient ruin

    you pass from the realm of the living and the dead into

    the occult velocities of dream

then    they gave me the empty food of arrival (a hot breakfast for sinners)

    now

I am prone to wild experiments with Gods
The Hospital for Lovers

There is a hospital for lovers invisible to the sick. There are wounded lining the roads to wellness blind. The beds are full. There is no room at the inn. Best find a wise woman who is up early and has milked the beasts in the barn. Best drink of her potions in the winter to the marrow. The moon's milk is bitter like medicine. You must leave the sweet palate of childhood behind. You must feel the bite of the snake within her apple (let it slither down your throat and unsound your belly). She will give you a wicker broom to sweep the dung. You must do this until the sun rises above the mountains. At first light she will curse you from her yard and kiss your brow before you leave. In her satchel she has spied you. She will show her empty purse and laugh. Once a woman has forsaken you, you are whole. Once a woman has let you go, you are free. After the bitter milk, a change of season. Your palate rounds upward to fullness. You may walk then into company without your dress. You will find that apples wither to raisin sweetness in your palm. You will be breasted and give birth. You will walk across the mountains, your satchel ripe. Only then will you find the hospital for lovers.
mother

i can memorise the flocking of the white cockatoos
rounding the peninsula
& the crying of gulls against the seaside
& i know that
what ever place i came from
it does not exist

once a word has been uttered it can never cease to be

i have no sound of you
no word
not even a sigh i can remember
no whisper in my ear
no exultant cry
the gulls are only echoes

a sound never ends (and silence too)
they say
but what do you say?
when a sound is never born?
yet i can memorise the flocking of white cockatoos that day
& the gulls crying against all your windows
& i cannot go to the seaside
without wanting to nest again
inside you

but the pulse of vein is all i know of you
the muffled marbled suck and push within my red room longing
the rhythm that might be
god
sleeping
the rhythm that might be
you
(it might be)
in silence speaking
*Modigliani* [Motion Picture]. New York: Lucky 7 Productions LLC.
‘Womb Tongues’: The Language of Relinquishment

(ESSAY)
‘Womb Tongues’: The Language of Relinquishment

This collection of poetry seeks to explore the experience of relinquishment. I am defining relinquishment, in this case, as a child who has been given up by the mother (and father) at birth (although relinquishment takes many forms¹). Nevertheless, the poetry examines relinquishment from the baby’s perspective, evoking the baby’s ‘voice’ and experience through the child as an adult² trying to find language for something that occurred in the pre-language state. Kristeva’s theories of the semiotic and symbolic processes – set out in Revolution in Poetic Language (1974/1983) and Desire in Language (1975/1983) – are referenced to highlight the dialectic between ‘non-being’ and ‘being’ in understanding the trauma of removal from the very space that nourishes a ‘self’ into existence. The loss of the mother means the loss of the ‘I’ as a ‘self’ and also indicates the loss of an ‘I’ in the writing experience. This loss of an ‘I’ goes beyond a theoretical inquiry into the absence of the author in a text and cuts to the deeper dilemma of how to create a ‘self’ through language when that ‘self’ is already lost. Blanchot (1986, p. 60) describes fragmentation as the ‘pulling to pieces of that which never has pre-existed’. These poems seek to conjure the psychological ‘fragmentation’ of a nameless ‘self’, that by virtue of relinquishment, continues to exist, unformed, in the untranslatable ‘belly’ of another universe. By using the techniques of fragmentation, cryptic allusion, repetition, rhythm, and doubt (incompleteness) – all characteristics of Kristeva’s ‘choric language’ – it is hoped to evoke the moment of schism itself, its aftermath, and the ensuing silence and imprisonment it brings in a world without the translating bridge that the birth-mother provides.

Psychologist Nancy Verrier (1993, p. 6), in her groundbreaking book The Primal Wound, points out that being born, for the relinquished child, is like a death. Disconnection from the mother automatically means disconnection from the self. The baby learns to have a stable and anchored ‘I’ because it learns to be ‘I’ through its symbiosis with the mother. As Axelrod (1990, p. 86) says, ‘we are dependent on our mother’s ability to reflect back our own existence’. If the mother is taken away, then

¹ Relinquishment can occur at any time in a child’s life and also be read on other levels, as all of us know intrinsically – in just being human – the experience of separation and abandonment in one form or another. However, the bonding that takes place at birth is crucial (and also irreplaceable) to the psychological development of the child into adulthood.

² Lifton (1975, p. 1) points out that inside every adult who was adopted is an ‘adopted child’ because no-one ever speaks about an ‘adopted adult’. So the adult must negotiate the relinquishment through the child, as a logical path back to the trauma, but also as a response to society’s idea that adoption only affects children.
the baby struggles to have a centre, or to feel human at all. As Verrier (1994) points out, when the child is born, it is not an entity in itself. A mother and baby are one—‘an eternal double’ (Axelrod, 1990, p. 84). If part of the entity is taken away, then the baby cannot know the self as a ‘whole’ and it is left with an incurable3 ‘primal wound’. This ‘primal wound’ often manifests, psychologically—and sometimes physically (Verrier, 1993, pp. 42, 43)—as a chronic and palpable pain, in the space where the mother once was and the child should have been. As Verrier (1993) says:

For the child relinquished at the primal phase of development when the mother not only plays the role of the child’s Self but actually is that Self, we may well be dealing with not only the loss of the ‘primary love object’ but with the loss of part of the Self. (p. 38)

Without this psychological nurture and attachment the baby is never truly born. In this pre-language state (before the actual birth), bonding occurs as a cellular experience and the subsequent post-natal separation leaves an ineradicable wound that is marked by silence (Verrier, 1993, p. 39). This type of experience has no currency in the world (one has only to refer to the difficulties of innumerable minorities in the past and present who have been, and are, afforded no voice) because it is invisible and cuts to the core of human existence. It is a disturbing, secret, and invisible legacy for many relinquished children.

Most often relinquishment is seen from the viewpoint of the mother who is giving their baby up for adoption, and there has been, until recently, little attention given, even by clinicians, to the experience of the baby (Verrier, 1993, pp. 39, 49, 51). It has been assumed that ‘any mother will do’ and that the child should feel special because they have been ‘chosen’. However, what is often overlooked is the fact that to be ‘chosen’ is a postscript to the relinquishment that has already has taken place (Verrier, 1993, p. 10). So, for the baby, the experience of trauma and loss that sets the trajectory for their life, is one shrouded in silence and invisibility. Indeed, trauma that is not only repressed, but also, by the nature of its origin, inexpressible, continually and painfully reasserts its hold in unconscious ways, sabotaging the development of a recognisable and stable ‘self’ (Caruth, 1996, pp. 2, 3).

If language forms and marks the personal and social context of ‘self’, then, what happens if we lose ourselves before language (or consciousness)? How do we find words for the experience when that experience lies outside the form that may express

---

3 It is incurable because nothing can replace the symbiotic bond between a baby and mother. Once it has been broken it cannot be replaced by anyone or anything given the uniqueness and depth of physiological and psychological connection of gestation within one’s ‘creator’.
it? The theories of Kristeva may be helpful in understanding what happens to a relinquished child as they enter the symbolic world of language, having been (ostensibly) discarded by the very space that precedes language. Kristeva (1974/1983, p. 24) theorises that language is formed by two symbiotic processes: the semiotic chora and the symbolic. The semiotic chora describes the space where we are merged into the body of the mother and into the ‘wholeness’ of ‘being’. This semiotic chora is formless and unidentifiable, inexpressible, multivariant, and a continuous process rather than a figuration. It is essential to the enrichment of the symbolic (read patriarchal, linear, univocal, and authoritarian language) and manifests in language (especially evident in feminist writing) as indeterminancy, uncertainty, doubt, absence, and semantic and grammatical rupture – indeed, the ‘poetic’.

As Kristeva (1974/1983, p. 40) posits, the symbolic represents language (the agreed signage) and the psychological and social selves that are constructed through it. Around the age of two we separate psychologically from the mother and develop a sense of ‘self’ that is different (Kristeva, 1974/1983, p. 41). It is the womb and the mother who mediate the baby’s sense of existence and pre-empts the formation of this ‘self’. While one has the ‘body of the mother’ (a Zen-like space of totality), one can negotiate the world, emerge, be visible, feel real, and total (to the extent that we may function, at least, without pathology). From this safety, then, the child at the mirror stage develops a sense of self, (we ‘see’ ourselves ‘outside’ the ‘body of the mother’). This is a symbolic self (or Lacan’s split self) – a self that uses (and listens to) language to construct a psychological and social being. The mother provides the bridge (inside and outside the womb) for the child to grow and cope with the ‘appearance of truth’ manifested in the symbolic world of language. The child has to be gestated within the ‘mother body’ (read the semiotic chora) and nourished by that ‘nameless’ universe, until a self appears in the ‘mirror’ who can ‘speak’ (read the symbolic).

---

4 One must note that the baby does not ‘know’ what reasons the mother may have for the relinquishment. One has to appreciate that from the baby’s point of view there can be no adequate explanation and the trauma stands as an unmitigated experience.

5 Indeed, this might reference the theories of Lacan (1966/2005, pp. 442, 443). He suggests that through language and association with the world, the ‘I’ can only be symbolised and cannot truly be real. As a split-subject, we are caught between the ‘I’ that is symbolised, that we see outside of ourselves in ‘other’, and the ‘I’ that resides in the void of ‘non-meaning’, the place of jouissance, the ‘Real’, the place of ‘not-me that lies beyond language. To write, then, is to move away from the Real into the world that only resembles the Real. The Real may be equated, in some ways, with Kristeva’s semiotic chora, that inexpressible and unknowable place from which we translate our indefinable selves, and through which we risk the loss of jouissance (or the chora).
Kristeva’s (1996, p. 221) description of that choric space as an unnamed, inexpressible, fecund void may be useful in evoking the experience of the baby, given that it describes the last known space before abandonment. Indeed, the baby is psychologically ‘frozen’ by the relinquishment at a time when there are no words to describe who they are and what their world is like. The world before schism and loss is one of ‘habitation’, pure experience, sensation, and totally filled with the presence of the mother, who is a deity and a universe that defines who the baby ‘is’. Indeed, the poem ‘foetal glosasolalia’ attempts, in a word-picture (using the symbols of language in an unfamiliar configuration), to capture the essence of the baby’s overwhelming focus, its pure experience, and feelings. Here, the representation of glosasolalia (language used to express ‘religious’ states of being):

| bull ya bull ya des ka na deska la sha na esk ka la sha na |
| mon ne sé sha la ka daan mali guul na dal eel un da seca |
| na faal el sha letka dhun na lashey la busssh ka cunna fah |
| malaka la sa busssh na guuska la abussshka la na sha la na |
| shahla fah kaas kala shah (p. 4) |

sets out these ‘feeling sounds’ or states of being, so the ‘language’ intentionally fails, directing us beyond the ‘symbolic’ to what might lie beyond or beneath it (the choric void and the psychological dislocation of the baby/adult). This phonetic transcription of the choric ‘womb tongues’, overlaid in different fonts and sizes, seeks, not only to relate the difficulty of ‘speaking the unspeakable’, but to symbolise the inexpressible, formless, and unidentifiable character of the chora. The indefinable nature of these words (in their placement within the word picture and also their repetitive translation in ‘Endnote’), suggests that to lose the mother before language can ‘name’ either the ‘self’, or the mother, is to be rendered eternally mute and unidentifiable (immersed in the choric void) and that any ‘self’ constructed through language is one not quite ‘Real’. In the poem ‘parchments’ these lines suggest this dilemma:

I am faking this in my mouth
but I am thinking
as wind and sand erode our ancient tombs
we write to fill these deep arched caverns with our wreaths
& throat the wild hibiscuses of God
to make the stillborn breathe (p. 46)

It seems relevant, and necessary then, that in giving ‘voice’ to the inexpressible – to the lost ‘self’ – the characteristics of the semiotic chora (perhaps the ‘wild hibiscuses’) will help illuminate the nature of the pre-language experience (‘make the stillborn breathe’), as it is translated into language.
Indeed, as Walker (2004, p. 82) suggests, regarding Barthes’ (1968) ideas on the death of the author, we do not originate in this symbolic world but we are, instead, translated. Yet, where are we translated from? I would suggest it is our mother’s ‘body’, or, as Kristeva posits, the choric space that gives ‘birth’ to the symbolic. The mother plays the role of translator, stabilising the child in the choric pre-language world and, from this security of being, allows the child to recognise the separate self that emerges at the mirror stage. Without that ongoing, genetic crucible as mediator, the baby may be lost (and thus the adult, too). Without this ‘body’ the translation becomes difficult – if not impossible (as in ‘foetal glossolalia’). Kristeva’s own words in *Stabat Mater* (1977/1985) offer an insight into the relationship between the body of the mother and language:

> inordinately swollen atoms of a bond, a vision, a shiver, a yet formless, unnameable embryo... Let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with meaning under a veil of words. WORD FLESH. (p. 176)

This ‘WORDFLESH’, as Kristeva (1974/1983, p. 22) suggests here, points to the ‘body of the mother’ and its crucial role in ‘giving birth’ to ‘meaning’ (in the case of the relinquished, also read ‘self’), even if that meaning can only be expressed through the covering ‘veil’ of the symbolic. Feminist writing insists that utterance be given to the ‘otherness’ that lies hidden and unarticulated within society and language and that the ulterior ‘self’ be afforded a ‘voice’. Miller (1986, pp. 102-120) points out that for women, the death of the author does not necessarily apply, as they are not defined by ego identity – in fact, rather, they search for one. This is true, too, of the relinquished child. The loss is not only the loss of a self intrapsychically and socially, but also the loss of the choric space, the very space that ‘nourishes’ us into language. The question of whether there is a true self becomes an agonisingly real dilemma, not just a theoretical one, or, rather, a difficulty that the relinquished child cannot even enter into, not having a self to undo or question. HD (1972, p. 7) said, ‘Write or die’; Foucault said (1984, pp.102, 103), ‘Write and then die’; but the relinquished might say, ‘Write or never be born’. So, conjuring the self with words may be a way to become ostensibly ‘real’ whether that be by translating the unidentifiable ‘foetal glossolalia’ into the simplistic language childlike language of ‘i love You God/so much, so much, so much’ or into the cryptic language of the phrase ‘the style raises the stigma’ (the elitist reference to Latin ‘penicullus erigo stigma’ indicates capitulation to the patriarchal nature of the symbolic). Somewhere between these two

---

6 For example, in ‘Lyrebird’, there is a play in the word lyre (a musical instrument) and liar (the fact the lyrebird can mimic any sound). Relinquishment sets up a lie (and this is increased manifold if the child is not told) and forces the baby to ‘become’ someone ‘else’ (whether consciously or unconsciously), silencing the real self.
extremes ‘womb tongues’ uses the ‘poetic’ to translate what is unutterable into meaning. In doing so the ‘body of the mother’ (the chora) is summoned to give birth to (and enrich) a ‘self’ into the ‘symbolic’ (the agreed ‘reality’).

Conjuring that ‘self’, however, is a dangerous business because it invites an experience to consciousness that has the capacity to annihilate. In ‘bloom blood’ the poem ends, ‘I am speaking to my mother/along the thinnest tracks/...to make my fat/hot bruise of tongue/bloom blood’ and in ‘The Book of Germination’, ‘be a little one for killing’ suggesting that to ‘speak’ may cause more harm, even death. Indeed, Caruth (1996, p. 3) points out that traumatic experiences often cannot be re-visited without fear of psychological death (as in the line from ‘portrait of the old woman as an artist’ – ‘last night the violins were playing/mad with terror’ and from ‘100 Symptoms’, ‘Fear of mother/Fear of not-mothers/Fear’) and that it is this ‘fear’ that keeps the experience locked away and invisible (for example, ‘inside blind walls’). This dilemma may also reference the dialectic between the semiotic and symbolic processes. The semiotic needs the symbolic to be visible and the symbolic needs the semiotic to release it from its stasis. The line, ‘the style raises the stigma’ from ‘Endnote’ suggests this relationship. Indeed, we can read this phrase as the ‘style’ (the symbolic) illuminates the ‘stigma’ (the ‘wound’, or chora). Yet, the symbolic can annihilate the possibility of meaning as the ‘veil’ of language, in its very attempts to elucidate, falls and obscures the experience being expressed. For example, in ‘What To Think While The Papers Are Being Signed’ (‘Papers’), the language, in its formal sentence structure, is almost sterile, or at least, creates a ‘safe’ and ‘acceptable’ emotional distance from the trauma. Nevertheless, these sentences are filled with ‘choric’ images, such as, ‘floating no fetch vagi-nation’ and ‘the deep fold fester never leave forget’. The verb ‘forget’ is used as a noun and a new ‘word’ is formed by using ‘vagina’ as part of a ‘nation’. These devices summon the ‘inexpressible’ from the chora, in their disregard for grammar and the use of unusual word juxtapositions, challenging the ‘symbolic’ to allow the semiotic expression.

As Stein (1935/1967, p. 142) argues, once you name something it becomes meaningless. Indeed, the poem ‘snow reader’ references this in having a ‘dislocated someone’ searching a metaphysical ‘parcel’ for ‘its little name’ (indeed, ‘someone’s’

---

7 The repressed trauma manifests for many relinquished in life-long sadness and depression and the fear of repeat losses (for the baby, loss means annihilation) can cause constant and debilitating anxiety (Verrier, 1993, p. 47). As Caruth (1996, pp. 2, 3) suggests, often the trauma, in the attempt by the unconscious to bring it to consciousness, is liable to manifest also in unforeseen and self-sabotaging repetitions.
If the semiotic chora is equated with a totality beyond language that is inexpressible, then to write is always a loss—a relinquishment into the world of the symbolic (indeed, 'a mouth that is bleeding'). Given the slippery nature of the textual self (and of meaning itself), Wallace-Crabbe's (1990, p. 126) suggestion that writing is like dancing 'on the thin roof of Death's house' is, perhaps, especially relevant in the case of the relinquished, because to create meaning, in even just Kristeavan terms, invites continual 'abandonment' and 'loss' as suggested in the lines 'I let go of something before it was born' from 'portrait of the artist as an old woman' and 'sometimes I swim for miles/and never find her body' from 'Belladonna Baby'. To find the mother's body (the chora) is to find the 'self' because through the 'mother' we can be 'born' and achieve a translation (into the symbolic) that reflects (in some part) the 'Real' or the totality of experience beneath language (the semiotic).

The poems in this collection, then, are an attempt to voice the 'womb tongues'—the loss and longing of, and for, the chora (mother), the self, and an adequate means of expression (indeed, to find the 'language of relinquishment'). The collection itself is divided into a preface and three parts. The former attempts to orientate the reader to what follows. It contains a word picture, 'foetal glossolalia' and the accompanying 'translations' and cryptic pointers in the following 'Endnote'. Again, in the line 'the style' raises the stigma', that 'style' is introduced as repetition, fragmentation, and cryptic allusion. It also introduces mother as 'God' and the longing of the baby for 'salvation' and acceptance. Part one, 'water', examines the experience in utero, the impending loss and subsequent 'absence' (of mother and self) left by the schism of relinquishment. Part two, 'gap sickness', seeks to present the loss of the definable self, and the ensuing God fixation, non-human ideation, and psychological breakdown. Part three, 'land', with a more mature voice, maps the aftermath of relinquishment with its dislocation, grief, attempted dissemination, and acceptance.

This collection of poetry endeavours to articulate the 'primal wound' through the discontinuities, textual rupture, silence, fragmentation, and repetition that characterise the configuration into language of what lies within Kristeva's semiotic. Indeed, many of the poems are formed by fragments with each thought being a highly cryptic form of psychological and physical loss. In 'Various Degrees of Disappearance' the line

---

8 This 'someone' never quite seems to find 'its' name and is always just on the edge of 'finding out' as if to find that 'name' will obliterate the very 'self' (or 'someone') being sought.

9 The 'style' in Latin is 'penicillus' meaning 'paintbrush', hence the inclusion on this particular page of the painting of the 'womb tongues'.

‘Nil Desperandum’ suggests the baby’s obsessive and desperate belief that ‘mother’ can be found and in ‘wild pigs awaken’, the idea that what lies repressed (‘wild pigs sleep in the sun’) will eventually, either consciously or not, be expressed. In ‘The Book of Germination’ the lines ‘maim the pup’ and ‘inhale her fume’ point, firstly, to the psychologically damaging nature of relinquishment, and, secondly, to the inescapable presence of the mother – with the word ‘fume’ suggesting asphyxiation.

In ‘Father I presume’, the writing is fragmented into excerpts from ‘field notes’, a commentary on the ‘Father’ with an intentionally ‘hieroglyphic’ introduction as way of entering the poem. The text is broken up in order to mirror the difficulty of finding who ‘father’ might be, to recreate the tiny snippets of information apparently available, and the way these might be constructed to form some kind of picture (although a fractious one). The piece is deliberately cryptic to evoke the difficulty of accessing or knowing ‘father’ but also, on another level, the difficulty of the ‘symbolic’ (father) to express the ‘wound’. The poems ‘birth’, ‘she keeps her hands still’, and ‘debris’ are also fragmented in the way the words and phrases are separated by gaps and spaces. This, as well as the lack of punctuation, indicate psychological dislocation (indeed, in ‘she keeps her hands still’, we are told her hands have been stilled but the positioning of the words on the page reflect an almost nauseous and compulsive movement). These poems (and others, such as, ‘mother’ and ‘hearing, for example) are also placed to the side or in a corner of the page to indicate the ‘void’ from which the words have been conjured. Some poems also create doubt and uncertainty by cutting the sentence off early, as in the line, ‘But he walks around just in case’ (from in ‘Jesus People or How to Be Saved’), ‘like a wing just about to’ (from ‘snow reader’) or ‘she is a persistent’ (from ‘the little Alien’). We are not told in these examples what the phrases may be describing. This type of discontinuity allows for various possibilities in the mind of the reader (and/or unsettling and echoing doubt), opening, in Kristevan terms, the symbolic to be nourished by the semiotic.

Kevin Brophy (2005, p. 16) suggests, ‘poetry is a way of moving through a particular landscape’ and in this collection the landscape, overwhelmingly, is one of water – that of the uterus, the amniotic fluid, and to the baby, the known universe. Ostriker (1986, p. 109) points out, in literature, water has represented danger, death, and psychological dissolution and in ‘Creation Myths’ water is depicted, not only as an

---

10 The fact that the ‘pigs’ are ‘wild’ suggests they have no owner and will ‘rampage’ through the psyche causing havoc, and in doing so, bring themselves (the repressed material) to conscious attention.

11 The ‘mother’ (by virtue of the relinquishment) becomes the perpetrator of a psychological ‘death’ (asphyxiation) and, yet, she is obsessively longed for.
ocean, a lake, and falling clouds, but also, as a ‘blister’ that will ‘flood’, full of ‘wild poisons’. In ‘bloom blood’, the lines ‘bloom blood/dries on moonless days/shrivels/to a slattern smudge & stain’ indicate that this landscape, represented as ‘vital fluid’, is one that is receding and deathly. Grof (1988, p. 12) suggests that, in remembering difficult pregnancies and re-living them through a form of therapeutic rebirthing, individuals often experience the amniotic fluid as toxic waste, polluted, and life threatening. Sometimes the water disappears and the landscape becomes a desert devoid of moisture. This is alluded to in the lines, ‘how many grains of yellow sand and white salt, dead gum trees’ and ‘the sun hates everything to red and ochre like we are a hateful species’ from ‘The Little Alien is Hungry’. Either way, the baby fears annihilation from ‘landscapes’ that are uninhabitable.

The landscapes in the poems are also those of mangroves (from ‘birth’) – suggesting the baking hot and moist crucible (psychologically) of the uterus – and ‘space’ (as in ‘Lost in Space’ and also from ‘this is no Earth’, ‘there is no geography in space’), indicating, again, psychological dislocation and the baby’s feeling that it can never be a part of the ‘world’ because it has not been ‘delivered’, ‘nourished’, and ‘translated’ by the ‘mother’. The baby finds itself at the ‘base of the brain’, in ‘debris’, suggesting that the effects of relinquishment are buried deep and ‘primal’. The references to Egypt (an ancient civilisation) suggest that relinquishment, no matter how long ago it occurred, harbours ‘ancient texts’ (as in ‘parchments’) that must be read and ‘tombs’ that must be opened. Indeed, Egypt has flowing through it ‘the very longest river in the world’, indicating, as ‘Father, I presume’ implies, that ‘beginnings’ orchestrate the ‘flow’ of the baby’s life to adulthood (the ‘mouth of the river’) and, as such, have a long reach. These poems also seek to map a landscape filled with caves – ‘plumbing these caves at the edge of chronicle’, ‘our deep arched caverns’; abysses – ‘there are no foot prints on the abyssal plain’ and ‘councils were found in open crevasses’; doors – ‘an older boy hangs a young girl on a door knob. Someone enters’; and holes – ‘the worship hole’, ‘the chasm’, ‘God’s hollow’, and ‘the emptied grave’. These ‘places’ not only recreate the womb (as the phrases ‘the minute acre’, ‘the red room gut’, gaming grotto’ in ‘Papers’ suggest), but also the spaces of non-being, loss of self, dislocation, and silence (as in ‘statue quiet now/statue quiet’ from ‘Hearing’).

---

12 This could also refer, in Kristevan terms, the tendency of the ‘symbolic’ to ‘dry out’ or ‘parch’ the ‘semiotic’.
13 Again, Grof (1988, p. 12) suggests that the archetypal themes of ‘space’ are common to those who have been subject to traumatic intrauterine experiences.
The baby also sees itself as non-human, and especially with reference to the 
landscape of water, as some kind of aquatic creature. Fish, for example, figure as a 
symbol of the baby's last memories before physical and emotional expulsion. 
Numerous references throughout the collection (such as, 'I turn blue when spawned' 
and 'your deep sea fish is forming') are made to the baby being born as a fish, 
endlessly seeking nutrients and breath through the body of the mother, because the 
mother did not (could not) mediate (psychologically) the journey into human 
breathing form at the appropriate time. A part of the adult will never be beyond this 
non-human stage (especially, again, if there is no possibility of the child or adult 
being able to speak of it). Therefore, the memory of mother as nurturer, as holder, as 
the giver of life is one of 'ocean' where the fish swims incessantly, as in, 'the mouth 
was open, rib finned and angled out' in search of what it knew before dry 'land'. In 
this watery landscape the 'baby' also sees itself as a 'sea worm', 'a sea slug 
mutation', and a 'grossly tentacled leviathan'. These are negative images designed to 
express the baby's feeling that there is something essentially wrong with it. There are 
non-human entities such as dogs, monkeys, and devils, all suggesting the mauling at 
birth, the sense of being 'devoured' by the dark mother and the dark patriarchal 
'father' (the seahorse in the 'The Breastless Jesus') who can afford no protection to 
the formless. These 'creatures' suggest the unsuccessful translation of the child 
from the womb into the outside world and the 'danger' of emergence onto 'land'. 
With no mother to translate the 'self' into the 'symbolic', the child grows up feeling 
not quite human. In this way, the text is conjuring an 'I' but it may not be 
recognisably human (as in 'the little Alien'), and if it is, there is a sense of damage in 
the voice (for example, in the poems, 'A secret message', 'Belladonna Baby', and 
'snow reader').

Indeed, the child-like, repetitious, and disconnected voice in some poems (such as, 
'The Breastless Jesus' and 'Belladonna Baby') also suggests the 'dislocation' of the 
'self'. There is a certain disingenuous tone that masks a painful 'knowingness' 
beneath the innocence. There are also, in other poems, hints of echolalia (an infant's 
repetition of sounds) and glossolalia in their rhythms, intonations, and pulsing (as in 
'snow reader' and the initial primary 'translation' of 'foetal glossolalia' in

---

14 Given that we must not confuse any particular woman with the archetypal 'mother' because, it is always the 
archetype we seek in the mother we are born from, and how little or how much we gain from our physical mother 
determines how we approach the whole issue of 'mother' and 'mothering' within ourselves.

15 Language can give a 'self' to the child but it cannot express adequately, without help from the chora, what 
happened before language (if the 'chora', or 'mother body' is lost, then this can lead to silence and an ongoing 
psychological 'death'). If a child is not told they are adopted, then, even in the most basic terms, language cannot 
protect them from the trauma. It settles within the dark recesses of the psyche and breeds discontent and 
disfunctionality. Silence forms a prison that even the pulsing from the chora cannot break through.
‘Endnote’). These qualities represent, as Kristeva (1975/1983, p. 101) suggests, the pre-language state and the ‘unfettered’ and ‘irreducible’ substrata of the choric void. For example in the poem ‘snow reader’ (and also ‘Lyrebird’) the sentences run into each other and are repetitious, there is little punctuation, and the tense changes. However, the words are kept in a rigid configuration, justified to the margins, to indicate the narrowing and tightly packed nature (as in a box or ‘prison’) of the obsession:

i remember stooping low to touch it stooping low in snow some parcel dropped ...i saw it up close with its eye-lashed pointers and finger nail atoms meshing fine and brief bleeding quietly but all the same saying a name always briefly like a wing just about to...it was a door and i was stooping low against it in case it opens me to itself it was very small like an origami thing papered and inked like a haiku sonnet language verse across the tiny tiny little page, reading it within its folds it read long and wide and deeper than the ocean that washed up on the little shore that made it... stooping very low always so very low i am wet and cold to watch its mouth dreaming like a fish i am almost small now right to the bottom of it stooping low against it just in case it opens me to itself (p. 32)

The voice here is also childlike, as if the mind has been broken, forced into the simple and safe space of innocent, mythic, and cryptic (but almost incomprehensible) understandings.

The poems are also filled with references to mouths, eating, sucking, all the signs of compulsive choric orality (Moi, 1986, p.12), and as Axelrod (1990, p. 5) points out, the signs of premature dislocation from the mother, as this passage from ‘Lyrebird’ conveys:

stone in belly to drowning flowing downward eons forward and fish come girding all this downward flowing their mouths opening eating flotsam gel and small ripe pieces sucked from stone to crescent moon bath leaving coming sucking mouthing eating gurgling downward, finned and eyeing all the stones that lie in pieces far away this ground beneath the drowning outward downing wet and boning out my head to pieces somewhere mouthing mouths are mouthing ever still to make the flightless falling sing and crown (p. 15)

The words here are pressed together without punctuation and full of images of ‘mouths’, ‘eating’, ‘gurgling’, and ‘drowning’. The poem ‘inside blind walls’ has the baby hanging ‘like a monkey with a thumb’, and in ‘small bones’, the ‘baby’ says ‘I wanted to suckle tongue lolling/up against /Your milk white, berry berry/blue’. Referencing these ‘blue’ berries, in ‘Belladonna Baby’, the line, ‘I tried to put the little berries in my mouth (her wee wee berries)’, suggests that the baby desired to
suckle but felt there was something ‘wrong’ with this impulse because mother left. In
general, the poems also purposefully confuse the mouth with the vagina, referencing
the idea that to speak one must travel through the birth canal and be expelled through
the mother’s vagina (the semiotic gives birth to the symbolic), perhaps most
obviously in ‘Belladonna Baby’, where ‘His’ vagina is overgrown – almost a forest’. This forest is dangerous, a place that one can never emerge from, a place that
harbours evil. However, despite the danger, in ‘The Book of Germination’ the lines ‘I
opened my mouth/my tongue came forth/I wet the bud into an infinite familiar’
indicate that the translating bridge the ‘mother’ (chora) provides is cellular, insistent,
and necessary, both in terms of the formation of a ‘self’, and in the formation of
language.

In ‘testing relations between utterance and matter, between utterance and silence’
(Axelrod, 1990, p. 22), the ‘mother’ is evoked as the world itself (as referenced in
‘Creation Myths’). She is accessed through taste (the ‘bitter milk’), soundings (‘a
nerve mass fugue’, ‘crescendo heavy’), a landmass (‘a fractious foreign delta’,
‘mangroves’, ‘hazy lit expanses’, ‘occult peaks’), and flora (‘purple fuchsia’, ‘flower
lip/and velvet tongue’, ‘hibiscuses’). The mother becomes the weather (the ‘snow’
from ‘snow reader’, ‘falling clouds’, ‘inclement breasts’), tides (as evoked in the
poem ‘debris’), a smell (‘I smell secret ecstasies/hysterical perfumes’ and ‘the dark
dogs are smelling It’), the cry of birds, (‘the crying of gulls’ in ‘mother’), and ocean
(the ‘harbour’, the ‘lake at the centre of the world’, ‘the clairvoyant sea’, ‘the liquor
sea’). She is a wetness, a bleeding, a fear, and a longing that never leaves. Grahn
(1989, p. 254) suggests feminist writing (the writing of ‘otherness’) is characterised
by vibrational essence. For the relinquished, the mother is not only the very tongue
that articulates a sound, but also the sound itself (as in the poem ‘music from the
abyss’). When the mother is emotionally dead (by virtue of the relinquishment),
everything takes her place to try and fill the void, to evoke her vibration, and, in
doing so, to somehow conjure the essence of the lost ‘self’. When the mother is dead
a stream will be her artery of connection to the baby (as with the descriptions of
‘flowing’ in ‘Lyrebird’); leaves in the wind the sound of her voice (as in ‘all the
leaves were blown from the witness tree’ from ‘Various Degrees of Disappearance’);

16 The word ‘His’ denotes the ‘Devil’ of the poem and, perhaps, the ‘baby’s’ inability to identify (because of the
trauma of relinquishment) with the ‘mother’ (and in this poem there are connotations to the adoptive mother also in
the ‘exclusive right’). It also references the psychological ‘shadow’ as well as the fact that all that is left is the
patriarchal (masculine) domination, in terms of the relinquishment (society’s morals and laws) and in terms of the
‘symbolic’ and its dominance over the ‘semiotic’.

17 Grahn says there are certain essential rhythms and vibrations that underpin all we do and are. Indeed, the birth
mother’s vibration reverberates and echoes through the relinquished child and adult. Yet, those are sad echoes, given
the loss, and their vibrational make-up is difficult to translate into a firm ‘score’ that can be played and understood by
the self and others.
rain and water as her milk (for example, ‘blood rain trickle’ from ‘Papers’), seeds germinating and erupting as the signs of birth (from the ‘The Book of Germination’); and ‘disasters’ (in ‘Creation Myth’s’ ‘The Lake at the Centre of the World’) as the experience of ‘first breath’.

The poems also reference deities—Mother as ‘God’ and the ‘Symbolic’ as the repressive, muting ‘God’ of the signed world. The structure of the poem ‘The Book of Germination’ mirrors the way that the text is laid out in the Bible, especially with regard to some versions that include annotations down the centre of the page. These annotations, in their cryptic and fragmented form, provide ‘choric’ breaks in the text so that the reader is forced away from the traditional text (the ‘symbolic’) to assimilate the ‘semiotic’ and allow it to enrich the meaning. Yet, other references are made throughout the work to Gods, for example, Jesus, Buddha, and Egyptian and Indian deities, linking the act of being born to universal creation and salvation myths. Indeed, in the poem, ‘Creation Myths’ the universe is ‘loaded’, full of ‘tear drop litigations’, and ‘wild poisons’. ‘God’ here is angry and expels the ‘serpent’ who has ‘bent itself into a girdle of prayer’, into a ‘feral drowning’ (the ‘girdle’ around the mother). Expulsion is the ‘slap’ of birth (this ‘slap’ also references the tendency for the relinquished to ‘self-harm’—psychologically and physically—to see themselves as ‘bad’ and deserving of punishment). Kristeva, likens the semiotic chora to a formless, vast, seething, and indefinable complexity that nourishes form and meaning through its dialectic with the symbolic (the agreed signage and meaning of language). In this case the ‘indefinable complexity’ is malevolent. Yet, the baby sees the mother as an imperative and necessary ‘God’ (it is unnegotiable). The baby pursues this ‘deity’ with an obsessive longing (as in the repeated lines ‘I love you like Jesus’, from ‘The Breastless Jesus’ and, from ‘Endnote’, ‘i love You God/so much, so much, so much’). The last line/word, ‘devoted’, from ‘inside blind walls’ also sums up this need as does the deep seated longing and grief of the last poem ‘mother’ and in ‘knowing things after you died’ with its realisation that the baby is, at the very end, (and will always be, in terms of the relinquishment) ‘God empty’.

Creation myths most often contain images of a great flood and are usually (no matter what culture one references) about God punishing the people for bad behaviour. However, a baby cannot blame God (its mother)—it can only blame itself. ‘God’ cannot be wrong (as the lines ‘Bad baby/Stupid baby’ suggest from ‘Belladonna Baby’). Often the ‘womb tongues’ will be self-negating in this way, full of shame.

---

18 For example, the Revised Standard Version of The Bible (1952).
and desire for 'goodness' and self-perfection (as in 'insanely good'). These last two qualities are sought after to 'lure' the mother back to a 'baby' who is no longer 'bad' and somehow redeemed through atonement\(^{19}\) – but with psychologically damaging consequences (as seen in the poem 'Jesus People or How to be Saved'). The poems are also filled with descriptions of Judeo-Christian symbols and beliefs, evoking the 'God of approval' (especially all the references to Jesus). These poems suggest the fruitless search for a 'replacement mother' ('deity') and also evoke the oppression (through the idea of sin) of our humanity in the quest for transcendence (read 'mother'). In the case of the 'Breastless Jesus' the 'replacement mother' is now a 'male' (symbolic) who is the only one who can give birth within the choric 'ocean'. However, instead, what one achieves is a submission to the patriarchal negation of everything that might describe and conjure the self that was lost ('my no nipple suck').

The 'primal wound' creates a longing that can never be sated. Loss generates demand (the womb generates desire for life and breath – the semiotic chora generates desire for sign and signification). The 'womb tongues' seek to uncover that longing and give it voice, to make visible what has been made invisible and inarticulate through the schism created by relinquishment. 'Mother' becomes a memory of self as a 'whole' experience, as a unity, as a nameless all-encompassing multiplicity, as a vibration attuned to some kind of essence of being (the semiotic chora). These poems seek to voice what is left when one is emotionally and psychologically expelled from this safe place, when the 'universe' disappears, and not only that, actively participates (seemingly) in one's removal. In these poems I seek to evoke the taste, sound and vibration, absence, and the rupturing of the 'mother body' (which is also the body of the relinquished) through textual elision and fragmentation. Through references to the natural world, by referencing 'non-human experience'; by drowning, falling, swimming, bleeding, sucking, eating and 'boning one's head' out into the air, a voice is sought for the inarticulate. In recreating the in utero experience, the aftermath as a baby, and the adult's search through the child to find the 'womb-tongues', I am attempting to transport the reader back to the place of rupture and journey down into the void. These 'tongues', by virtue of subject matter alone, are entirely characteristic of feminist writing – of what Kristeva calls the semiotic chora (indeed, in using the

---

19 In terms of writing, that 'at-one-ment' is found by seeking the acceptance from the Symbolic (capital 'S' for patriarchal authority) and by using the agreed signs of language to form a self. One may seek this for many reasons, but for the relinquished especially, the 'mother' certainly is not 'available' and has already proven unacceptable of the child. Hence, in trying to allow the chora to speak, there is set up an almost impossible paradox between writing that conforms and writing that ruptures the very conformity one is trying to achieve (read the 'self' that conforms and is identifiable and the self that remains formless).
poetic voice, the ‘mother’ as the choric void is being summoned, to not only assist in
the procuring of language, but also to ‘procreate’ a ‘self’ that can ‘speak’). These
‘tongues’, then, engage in semantic disruption and incompleteness, repetitions and
rhythm, cryptic references and doubt, (indeed, Kristeva’s description of ‘poetic
language’), and also present a childlike (and psychologically damaged) perspective,
leaving room, in the spaces, for whatever the ‘voice’ is, whatever the ‘womb tongues’
are, for whatever was left after the leaving – after the ‘expulsion from Eden’.
References


