

Speak to Me

- For Cristina, Athens, 31st December, 2006

Little voice, speak – but not here, where crosses aren't for suicides –
sharply speak, as you did that last time when you said you were done with him.
Woman much missed, leap out of the bath before slitting your wrists –
death was a tear in a cloud – its entrails wreaths and chrysanthemums.

Rise like the mist beyond caves Palaeolithic, slashing white stone,
claiming the air. Now shake away fears like raindrops and *call to me*,
call to me, goddess in flight, your season of madness gone –

No longer dying but coming – on campus, in public latrines,
his lust your command – “Pórni!”, he called you, “Harlot! Poutàna!”
This is the heart he took, the tongue as far as the larynx.
Later, he ditched you. Sex as ash, but who could have warned you –

No longer coming, but dying. You were brief as a dragonfly – here's ocean,
the copper silicate of life as you craved it, sweet rot of your hair –
body still grazed like the stones that skimmed it – Say “Luck ran out –”

Have you not seen in the faltering light some sign of mystery,
rapture, delight? – this verse, your bold reach, the spiked line of your heart –
Sing then, little voice, sing! Come back as stone crop, snapdragon –
dog-headed and fierce – or acanthus, bear's breeches – hooded and wild –

body awakened to change – each bract, a scatter of sun –

(i)

heart

brief

ly

seen

– hooded

sun

(ii)

Speak

This

line

as

body awake

(iii)

Rise

Poutàna!

com

brief dragonfly –

(iv)

Woman

goddess

Harlot!

Sing

sing!

(v)

entrails

slit

slash

public

tongue

(vi)

ditch

Sex

dragon

and

bear

(vii)

mad

coming

lust

verse

Come back as

—

Bush Diary

Cathedral Canyon, Wollemi National Park

i

You've nothing left
but your body, the bush,
the sandstone –

*nothing could exceed in dreariness
the appearance of the tracks through
which we journeyed –¹*

Nothing's left of love
or deceit – you're not
unhinged by mothering,
by disease –

Far from the campsite where families
play ball, their white caravans
curbing the wild –

*our advance and our retreat
were alike cut off –*

ii

Scratch your arms against
the swords of grass trees,
white-tipped warriors
lancing the air,
coral ferns splitting
unexpectedly,
bullet ants like questions
asked of the body –

air heavy, sky dull

flies exceedingly troublesome

*How could an European
expect to find food?*

*trees stunted,
unfit for building*

Branches raise themselves
from inclined trees,
the alchemy of sunlight
and dying moth –
all species arrayed,
disarrayed.

*The aspect of the country beneath them
much disappointed the travellers.*

iii

Those first Europeans searching
for versions of home
suffered this ghost-grey tinge
that mutes the landscape –

the most brilliant silvery lustre

everything singular, unknown.

At dusk, life would lapse into

¹ All marginal quotes are taken from 19th century *Journals of Inland Exploration* that may be found at The University of Sydney's library database.

another form, gum trees
silvering the last light, a vision
so unlike anything they'd seen,

the country, exceedingly broken and confused

they were lost, disarrayed –

iv

Slip on gum leaf and moss
aiming for the promised caves, the story

*we passed hollow
after hollow*

no view of distant objects

beyond the story – questions
you never know the answer to –

the spirit, detached from the body,
becomes shape and form,

like these secret openings in the rock,
millennia of crumbling, finest sands

*no smoke to betray
a water hole*

in cream and gold, each ledge
melting into another.

v

*however unfit for civilized man
it seemed a most desirable one
for the savage*

Caves whose hues
break into waves, rusts,
terracottas, grooves
oranging into belief –
bright ambers, pale pinks,
the reds of lichens
dotting the rock-face,
ironstone staining
your hand –

vi

You're still here, there,
adjusting lens, tripod,

failing to frame the whole,
until tired, disarrayed,

the horizon unbroken

*no glittering light
among the trees*

you put everything away,
walk towards the interior –

down below, three angophoras
ringed in light, a eucalypt
flowering out of season –

baffled in every instance

my b o d y is a room with shadows
dan gismi kamra dellijiet

(i) *hand* –

Speak sorrow in your mother tongue –

let the sixth vowel

my clavicle

your heart/hurt trochaic with lust/love

the long-lying 'ie' cleat you to

do not leave before you've entered/plundered

in openness I let you

go /

(please come back)

this is you climbing out of the light

(nightjar: too used to darkness)

both of us exiting

(are we hieroglyphs then?)

kienu mietu

extinction from 'extinguere'

they died – exiting –

razed flesh – this is erasure

(there is no mustard tree here)
(the pines have withdrawn)

I must pine like the maiden
whose hand became a taper
for light to shine through

wake to sorrow

(say grief's a ballad)

was it fire wiped out the mustard seed
or were we agents too

caricatures in a flaming landscape –

my mouth ghosting your voice

the shadows –

your b o d y – silting / citing

(ii) *navel* –

don't tell me when you peeled off the skin
was the meat of us

all you found

hunger came to you first

before I made you

you were the ripped mouth of a cypress cone

you came because I called you

of a viral landscape

alone in the fluorescent blue

the mycelial edge of dawn I conjured your contours

stretching my anemomal pulp to meet you

nuzzling the scalding tip of your snow

you came after closure
with promise

the year's end pluming
/ but weren't you already here?

I knew you by the numb scent of asphodel

language

yes you taught me sex through

gorging on dopamine

serotonin

toxic / in-toxi-cate-ing

Was it you that I loved or what I made of you?

don't tell me it's the same