

## Speak to Me

- For Cristina, Athens, 31<sup>st</sup> 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 –<sup>1</sup>*

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

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<sup>1</sup> All marginal quotes are taken from 19<sup>th</sup> 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

the long-lying 'ie' cleat you to

my clavicle

your heart/hurt trochaic with lust/love

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)

wake to sorrow

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

(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 anemonal 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