

5 Poems



Aidan Semmens

A Strange Geometry

after all these forty summers her face
now powder white
interrupts his nights

her cold white face
bandied
everywhere before him
as he roams his little world
swinging
between crutches

some storeys up, she descends into hell
– or is it escape? –
via the beckoning frame of a window

here then is the story
every story there is

the door hinged
to open either way

she is no ghost
for time is not present
or past
but is

yes, a window, geometric aperture
through which a woman – anyone –
may make an exit

restlessly
he moves
among the arcane structures
the complexity
set out by men

but was it the window
he saw her face
reflected in
or staring blankly through?

the windows polished and shone
the windows broken
shattered in the streets
leaving mannequins and their owners
exposed, still, barefaced, blank

the trap does not spring shut
but closes slowly
irrevocably
impermeable

where one's head is arranged
at another's foot
he, wandering, must
seem a malignant growth

yet

Dancers and Architects

on warm windless nights
the old termite mounds sparkle
with eerie green light
flashed by click-beetle larvae
living in the outer layers

you may be struck by the contrast
between the leaf's cool blue
and the light of the fire
seeping through the wound

shifting winds make flames of the dancing sand
lightning lacerates the sky, lava lighting
the swelling smoke
a breeze pushes the animals along
like tiny boats

elegant swimmers, they will glide
right into you, gently nudging
you out of their way, she says

waterlilies stretch up to the light
through a thick green layer of mist
in a once sacred sinkhole

low cloud covers the meadow
and apollo's shelter among the grasses

the male pauses
in his pre-dawn display
tail and wings fanned and fluffed
against the backdrop of the forest

then turns his back on her
brushes her face with his wire plumes

the massive gorgonian coral shelters
by day a shoal of tiny cardinalfish

a geological event, extreme heat deep
within the continental crust
gave rise to the crystal formation

an almond tree where fireflies gather
patterns of light moving constantly
on the surface of a forest pool

planktonic animals nightdiving in deep water
contrasts in movement and texture
patterned fish sheltering among swaying tentacles

tangled silvery threads, the rivers
and deltas change from day to day
a firework display in slow motion
a giant puffball frantic with activity

tendrils coiled like clefs
on a musical stave

Goodbye Don't Mean I'm Gone

nothing that happens in the roadside cabin
is his doing or his choice

outside among the waiting men
the air is grey with condensed breath
and cheap smoke, fumes
from heavy engines slowly turning over
to retain a little warmth
and the illusion of readiness

few words are passed among them,
for some perhaps it matters
where the dead are buried,
on what patch of earth
the border line is drawn

Light Falls

not yet halfway to the summit
we pause to take in the view –
on a stretch of road near the power plant
abandoned vehicles swallowed
by trees and grass, a chained-up motorbike
absorbed into the land

above perhaps raptors or ravens
and a stray gleam
of something you can't make out
or tiny icicles of breath
caught in the shining air

dust of the country, dust of the town
weave together on the wind

where a traveller might stumble
on an ancient site
old men sit under arches, tombs
robbed of artefact and bone

places have voices not their own
yet I am snatched back
to a land of lawns, sunset malls
coldest recorded winters
the room dark and a man
writing, moving his hands

the lost game of self
and making it all up

we watched the news
with the sound turned down
on secular transcendence

of falling towers, tear-streaked
infants in bombed-out plazas
migrants at the gates
of a gated hell
crusts in their multilingual hands
at the alarm-wired portal
the revelations of February
triumphs of industry and agriculture
a glimpse behind the scenes at the congress
splendid acts of desecration

you say nothing we remember today
may be of significance tomorrow
to see is not to understand
things photographed or passed over
old texts that speak of mysteries
the sick asleep in temple sanctuaries
for fear of the image
reification of the word

a pale sky scratched by contrails
erasures in the view
misleading shadows
uninterpretable space
impressions of movement and gradations
of light travelling obliquely
casting reflections glistening
on sea or city streets

and how we learn what happened here
in passing fragments, not quite believing
or not wanting to believe

Thirty-four Statements Amounting to a Definition

Unseen dangers lurk beneath the grassblades of your lawn.

A mountain cannot be trusted to remain where it is mapped.

The blackbird does not know how closely its song resembles Mozart's 40th symphony.

At one moment the number of mobile phones equalled the number of living alligators.

The patterns of motorway traffic may be described as a form of Brownian motion.

The motion of bees may be discerned in shopping malls.

A man has reached adulthood without ever having a name.

There is a woman who has never been seen.

The piano was invented in Bolivia in the year 1216.

There are several species of worm that breed only in the catacombs of Paris.

This former jihadi and publican is now an itinerant bookseller.

This cola contains several unknown substances.

Some rainbows contain more colours than others.

A mistranslated copy of the Book of Genesis has been found in a cache of dinosaur bones.

Spinoza and Pocahontas became secret lovers in Brussels.

A mile below the Antarctic ice is a stone in the shape of St Basil's cathedral.

This ancient petroglyph may be decoded as a periodic table of elements.

From a certain angle, all inhabitable planets form a perfect image of the Mona Lisa.

For certain species all perceptible existence lies within the wavelengths we see as green.

In the basement of my house is an incalculable number of unexplored corridors.

The warm night conceals artworks and aardvaarks.

The bear you see in this picture is a 23-storey building.

These shoes were once worn by a Californian war-lord.

Most of the Earth's surface has been seen only by fish.

Communication has been achieved between Bratislava and Bangkok using an old nail file and a television set.

Pitldown Man was fluent in several Polynesian languages.

In certain Sumerian dialects the number three is unpronounceable.

The most intelligent person in the world is the fifth daughter of a subsistence farmer.

The colour vermilion is unknown in Letchworth Garden City.

Deep in the Mariana Trench lies a phonographic cylinder of Enrico Caruso singing Dixie.

St Anthony of Padua passed messages to the KGB hidden chemically in a phial of urine.

The relative acidity of Beethoven's concertos has never been accurately measured.

Plato and Aristotle scratched their names on the Berlin Wall.

It is impossible to prove whether the Mona Lisa winks when unobserved.

In some worlds this poem includes a thirty-fifth proposition.