

# 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



she contemplates again the imperfection  
in the glass  
that bubble  
where clouds wiggle

should he select  
a door  
or wait for one  
to swing  
open in his direction?

seen from the bed, the window  
is the scene of all life  
all activity  
of birds and neighbours  
tradesfolk and the curious unknown

the strangest door  
is the one  
that closes silently behind him  
leaving him  
surprised  
to find that all seems still  
the same about him

the same

and not the same

## 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.