

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Alison Croggon**

**- 47 poems -**

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## **Alison Croggon (1962 -)**

Alison Croggon (born 1962) is a contemporary Australian poet, playwright, fantasy novelist, and librettist.

### Life

Born in the Transvaal, South Africa, Alison Croggon's family moved to England before settling in Australia, first in Ballarat then Melbourne. She has worked as a journalist for the Sydney Morning Herald. Her first volume of poetry, *This is the Stone*, won the Anne Elder Award and the Mary Gilmore Prize. Her novella *Navigatio* was recommended in the 1995 The Australian/Vogel Literary Award and all four novels of the fantasy genre series *Pellinor* have been published. She also edits the online writing magazine *Masthead* and writes theatre criticism.

Croggon has also written libretti for Michael Smetanin's operas *Gauguin* and *The Burrow* which premiered respectively at the 2000 Melbourne Festival and Perth Festival, produced by ChamberMade. Other poems by her have been set to music by Smetanin, Christine McCombe, Margaret Legge-Wilkinson and Andrée Greenwell. Her plays have been produced by the Melbourne Festival, The Red Shed Company (Adelaide) and ABC Radio.

### Career

Her poetry has been published widely in anthologies and magazines in Australia and overseas. Her most recent poetry publication is *Theatre* (Salt Publishing 2008). Other titles include *Ash* (Cusp Books, Los Angeles 2007); *November Burning* (Vagabond Press Rare Objects Series, Sydney, 2004); *Mnemosyne*, (Wild Honey Press, Ireland, 2001); *The Common Flesh* (New and Selected Poems) (Arc Publications, UK, 2003) and *Attempts at Being*, (Salt Publishing, UK, 2002).

Her first book of poems, *This is the Stone*, won the 1991 Anne Elder and Dame Mary Gilmore Prizes. Her novel *Navigatio*, published by Black Pepper Press, was highly commended in the 1995 Australian/Vogel literary awards and is being translated for publication in France. Her second book of poems, *The Blue Gate*, was released in 1997 and was shortlisted for the Victorian Premier's Poetry Prize. *Attempts at Being* was shortlisted for the Kenneth Slessor Poetry Prize in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards and also was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in the US.

She has toured frequently in the UK and the US, among other things reading at the Poetry International Festival at Royal Festival Hall in London, the Soundeye International Poetry Festival in Cork, and the New Writing

symposium at the University of East Anglia. In 2000 she was the Australia Council Writer in Residence at Pembroke College, University of Cambridge (UK).

Alison Croggon is also the author of the acclaimed young adult fantasy quartet, *The Books of Pellinor*. The first volume was nominated in two categories in the Aurealis Awards for Excellence in Australian Speculative Fiction in December 2002 and named one of the Notable Books of 2003 by the Children's Book Council of Australia. The series has since been released to critical and popular acclaim in the US the UK, Germany, Spain, Portugal and Poland. The audio edition is in preparation for the US and Australia/New Zealand.

Alison has to date written and had performed nine works for theatre. Her theatre work includes the operas *Gauguin* (Melbourne Festival 2000) and *The Burrow* (Perth Festival, Sydney, Melbourne 1994-95 and broadcast by ABC Radio), both with Michael Smetanin. Her performed plays include *Lenz* (Melbourne Festival 1996), *Samarkand* and *The Famine* (Rules of Thumb season, Red Shed Company, Adelaide 1997 and ABC Radio 1998), *Blue* (CIA, La Mama, Melbourne and the Street Theatre, Canberra, 2001). ABC Radio commissions include *Monologues for an Apocalypse* (2001) and *Specula* (2006). She also wrote lyrics for *Confidentially Yours* (Playbox Theatre 1998, Hong Kong Festival 1999).

Many of her poems have been set to music by various composers, including Smetanin (*Skinless Kiss of Angels*, Elision New Music Ensemble), Christine McCombe and Margaret Legge-Wilkinson (Canberra New Music Ensemble) and most recently Andréé Greenwell.

She was a member of of the 2005 and 2006 Artistic Counsels for the Malthouse Theatre in Melbourne, and in 2009 was one of the members of the Arts Stream for the Australia 2020 Summit. She was poetry editor for *Overland Extra* (1992), *Modern Writing* (1992-1994) and *Voices* (1996) and is founding editor of the literary arts journal *Masthead*.

She currently lives in Melbourne, Australia with her husband and three children.

#### Works:

##### Poetry

*This is the Stone*. Penguin Books Australia. 1991.  
*The Blue Gate*. Black Pepper Press. 1997  
*Mnemosyne*. Wild Honey Press. 2001  
*Attempts at Being*. Salt Publishing. 2002  
*The Common Flesh: Poems 1980-2002*. Arc. 2003  
*November Burning*. Vagabond. 2004.

##### Novella

*Navigatio*. Black Pepper. 1996

##### Fantasy

*The Gift*. Penguin. 2003 (Published in the US as *The Naming* (Candlewick Press))  
*The Riddle*. Penguin. 2004  
*The Crow*. Penguin. 2006  
*The Singing*. Penguin. 2008

##### Libretti

(1995) *The Burrow*  
(2000) *Gauguin* (a synthetic life)

**(untitled 2)**

Whatever drags downward, the heart hampers:  
hands softer than dough  
may leaven massy weights, o delicate  
knucklings of love,

those confusing perfumes, wafers taken  
out of the flesh-hot ovens  
to be laid on muteness, on whatever starves  
in crowds of noise

or between walls neither silent nor friendly  
where restless shadows  
take refuge from themselves, wherever  
no rains fall,

there may the tongue flood and flower:  
harsh the stone that cracks  
the seed, harsh the fire, harsher still the heart's  
voiceless need.

Alison Croggon

**(untitled)**

i

there bees were perpetual as meadows asleep in a brooding sun  
or a curlew recalled as a mirror of all sadness

no one could tell if it was day or night  
they always slept on the silk of their delusions  
wherever they fell  
in the dust of libraries or among the soft  
vegetations of sensual musings

no one was certain either of borders  
and therefore the citizens were courteous to strangers  
continually puzzled by familiarities  
as if they were siblings raised in the same hayfield  
or perhaps cousins suckled on the same wolf  
as if the face before them chimed  
like bells on an alien planet

they were too shy to compare fingerprints  
it could have been that each whorl matched exactly  
and so their harmonic voices  
drifted through the grasses like a cloud of questions  
waking lizards and beetles from innocence  
and flowers hastening after rain

but every now and then a citizen would wake  
with a phrase in her head that she couldn't explain  
and found the libraries were silent

then she would walk through the humming streets  
past refineries and docklands beyond the knowledge of cities  
until she found a rock inhabited by no voice  
perched on a mountain with no history  
and there she would breathe an air without language  
pure and violent as a galaxy

and only then would the veins in her feet  
tell how cold the ground was and how bloodless

how unlike death  
which laboured hotly in those other cities  
she saw teeming beneath the torn sky  
so far from the home she could never return to  
now that it never existed

Alison Croggon

## **A digression**

Being proved non-existent, I rejoiced in the delicious air. Alas, an angel grabbed me by the heel and started whispering flatteries. I floated to the ground in order to hear him more clearly.

As the dust cleared, I saw the usual disasters were taking place on a huge screen in the city square. A hundred children vanished in a puff of smoke. A magician pushed his goggles onto his forehead and scratched his nose. A woman sang the same words over and over again.

Then I noticed how many people were shopping. They walked indifferently past a man who was weeping on a unicycle. Everything they bought turned to rubbish in their hands.

I realised I must be at a fairy ball and that all those masks were futile defences against enchantment. Only the clown bought nothing. He ground a pomegranate into pulp with his oversize heels but not one coin clattered into his hat.

I thought he must be very joyful, to be weeping so copiously. But as I approached to ask his secret, he turned and vanished into a department store. A beggar started foaming at the mouth and ran down three fat children with a knife and fork. A mangy dog with worms drilling its back was fossicking in a bin.

What is this? I asked the angel. And who dictates these horrors? But the angel was trying on a new tuxedo.

From this level I could see how each smile dissipated into the dust of reflections. Again I demanded, What is this? An answer came back to me like confetti on a cold wind. It is called the Real World, the angel said.

It doesn't look real to me, I answered, but he had already gone.

Alison Croggon

## A History of Rain

1.

I marvelled at the squid's mantel,  
The sloth's curled hook,  
The magenta lips of orchids.

Behind me barbed feathers  
Tore air to turbulence  
And then were still.

The soluble sky thickened  
As grief heats an eye  
To astonished blindness.

2.

You who love me best,  
Have you traced my pulse  
Through city walls?

I was lost already, I retched  
As oil plumed through my blood.

The clouds are still falling  
Huge and angry wounds.

Your heart is an executive  
Who remembers nothing.

My face is the face of a man  
Who looks down amazed  
At the murdered thing  
His stained hands  
Open like hunger.

3.

It will not lack colour –  
consider the intricate brachiation of silica,  
pale spicules green with cyanide algae –  
conifer needles in snow, their colours  
unaccountably reversed –  
or the butterfly lustre of sulphur lakes.

Will your eyes blur at this beauty  
so unlike you? No, you have long dissolved,  
you, your reflections, your aqueous desires,  
into the flame-coloured sky.  
Posted

Alison Croggon

## A Requiem

Introit

Cassandra: Useless; there is no god of healing in this story.  
Agamemnon, Aeschylus

that crowd of ears  
scurrying past the screams and brutal metal

through shivering walls the street talk burns us  
none pity not one

plates rattle on walls the dust the stink  
day after day after day

I who policed my murder  
and now I write my shame

but my wife went to the trains  
but my daughter dies in my dreams again and again

how meekly I bargained with death  
who will live to spit on my ashes?

through the wire her face emptied  
my wife said nothing

\*

o littlecunt your brows so even  
slagged by war you stare a thousand fathoms

a word  
a shard of song  
a leaf  
the linking odour  
missing

her white throat sliced open  
her black panic smoking on the stone  
dragging you here

silenced nevertheless  
or nevertheless unheard  
or nevertheless muttered at knee height  
to erupt through the bronze talk of weapons

you step  
towards the fatal palace  
and steadily you know

longing for the gilled sleep

before the appalled womb spat you  
into this shattered hall of mirrors

this the gate of love  
and this of hatred

this the mouth of offense  
and this of healing

this the portal of dream  
and this of disenchantment

this the long farewell  
and this the endless greeting

Dies Irae

so light is the urging, so ordered the dark petals of iron  
we who have passed over Lethe.  
Ezra Pound, Canto LXXIV

I stand in the door of my house  
I walk through its sleeping rooms  
I number the beats of its breath

my hands brush  
the shaft of a knife  
the edge of a bowl of fruit  
my daughter's tangled hair  
the hair of my husband

animals that each night  
embrace me with their scent  
hands that clasp my neck  
mouths that devour me

o livid planet pocked  
by the veneration of wars  
you are not innocent

---

The child lay in his bed buttoned up for sleep  
his hands folded under his head like a little boat  
and I lay next to him on the raft of his breathing

All I could feel was the cold ocean under me  
so deep that at the bottom no currents moved  
the light bones that lay there

A steady vapour of fear drawing me closer  
to the green water's unreflecting surface

---

We toy with silence, that seductive bell – pouring its molten alloy into the pit of  
ourselves, holding our breath for the unflawed pitch – but the world is loquacious. How  
many voices are we?

How impossible to be rid of desire for a pure rebellion! What to do with that angel who  
boots me towards the absolute?

Yet cunning cloaks us with reason. We press the button out of spite.

---

This is utopia dreamt by the burnt visionaries

These are their hells where the pale rider pauses at his calculations one third and one  
third  
and one third and one third the infinite divisions

This is the pit of human skulls and these are the trinkets of ears and teeth and here are  
screams in amber the prettiest of all

This is the hydra hand that breaks into millions and this is the one voice pricing the  
fruit of  
equations this is the mouth that gobbles the sweat of slaves this is the suit and the  
restaurant

This is the blinding cloud of ash the revolting unstoppable flower

This is the one just man who died on the final day of a war that never finished

---

the cloth is rent and the table is split and the appletrees are blackened and broken  
and the cradle is tipped and broken in the roofless bedroom

the sniper flicks a last cigarette into his stinking burrow  
daughters and sons return to cities that no longer see them

the chapel is stained with foreheads pressed into their own blood  
bindweed creeps on the empty roads like a child afraid of the light

and daffodils sneer in meadows that behave as if nothing has happened  
bursting from sleep to bless the mildest of skies

though bootless feet stopped at their rims to flower  
in greens and blues and purples that signalled the end of exile

the earth is indifferent as usual  
dissolving coffinless children far from their cities

---

what moves through light and water?  
o laughter and night  
and what comes after

what a violin's lone voice  
might illuminate  
with its pitiless

liberties, a wood's lost forest  
axed into the flight  
and warp of sorrows

a burned and chiselled violence  
to amplify the bright  
desolate silence

#### Offertory

Praised be your name, no one.  
For your sake  
we shall flower.  
Towards  
you.

Psalm, Paul Celan

the dreaming boy hears in his pillow  
mad echoes of hoofbeats

the heart of Varus is eaten raw  
his head grins from a stump

the trees blanch like a scream  
untimely ended

---

the citadel is not taken  
the citadel was never there

the beautiful Europeans  
scribbled the earth with churches

they believed the text was immortal  
and God heard their singing

who is to say they were wrong?  
in the middle of nowhere

blue irises bulb  
from the eyes of the dead

---

one candle bleeds enough warmth  
to keep a body breathing

in the coldest  
emergency

although the mind may be damaged  
by the constant repetition

of lighting one candle  
again and again

---

a man is weeping in an alley of stone  
the alien ground thickens with his noise

to his fathers it was a desert  
and his mother is buried far away

and he doesn't know what angers him  
or why his tears seem a refusal of blessing

except that at last something is clear  
that he should have known before he left

when the household gods flew out  
and the door swung shut behind him

---

who is asking questions?  
throw them out

where is the ancient song?  
forget it

what violets slumber still?  
possess them

lock up safe  
swallow the key

---

the night's small teeth  
ate my hands and my hair

I was a pebble of faith  
the moon's little sister

storm blew open the door  
but no one could find me

---

the hand that touched you through the words  
that wrote the words that vanished in their saying

the mind that stroked the hands that moved  
the lyre that sang the words into silence

the night that opened in the heart that sang  
that opens in the night that is endless

---

yellow star the trench is deep  
that crows your shyness

birches whiten as the spade  
unveils your hair

yellow star your clean brow  
leans over a black well

your eye opened and closed  
the day stalks in

a blaze of witnesses  
to consecrate your absence

Communion

I show you a new world, risen,  
Stubborn with beauty, out of the heart's need.  
Taliesen 1952, RS Thomas

The oranges are pale moons. The wind  
sings them into eclipse and calls them  
back from the black leaves.  
I envy their voicelessness, the sweet  
fertility that falls  
mindlessly to the grass.

I am not gentle tonight.  
Tonight my calling is useless,  
foreknown and foresuffered. If my face  
chills in its blood, if my eyes startle open,  
it is because all this sobbing will fall  
to inhuman water.

They will say they are redeemed.  
They will crown my absence with their suffering.  
But I remember a crowded table  
and a plate heaped with oranges  
and how generous hands reached out and tore  
open the common flesh.

Alison Croggon

## Child's play

What grieves terminally in that warm  
angle of sun fat with voices  
vapourised from play? You  
know the calculation of angles, the nice  
cut to the cushion: arcs of panicky  
alternatives, weighted at the edge  
of what is possible. The play  
beggars choice: a willed act  
cleaves trajectories where  
eyes turn, and the hand  
opens thus and the mouth speaks  
doubtlessly. Luminous,  
like a memory of god,  
you can believe in it, knowing  
it is everything there is.  
Making the true, even  
if it's pointless. But no gripe this, just  
the courage it gives you. Hold that feather  
close: it's all you've got. Days  
might dribble through your hands, leaving  
their tried sediment, each morning  
might seem heavier, but it's how  
images flicker past you faster and faster  
without touching, that drills you  
coreless, insubstantial. You have to reach  
further inside, through deeper skins:  
the animal curls up, refuses  
your call: and then nothing.  
But still you hear its breath, a bristle  
of shock, walking unwarily  
on a lightless road or perhaps in the sudden  
gesture of a leaf. Only that eyes  
flower all over you, and forget your name,  
and you hollow and replete.  
How damaged, that this is so little,  
this lightness, that we must inhabit names.  
What matters most is least, and that  
refuses us shelter. How slight we are,  
wrens running on a skin of rubbish  
over a dark river: but still distinct, like actors  
costumed as kings. A kiss will do  
in lieu of meaning, its violent  
unselving which tumbles us out, unlovely,  
rotting, the blind dream  
forging itself, intricate dumb chemicals,  
and we their flickering screen. If  
language infects us, our unease, it's one of our  
few beauties. No solace there:  
what hones us makes us war.  
So the Word  
muscles in to save us, warping to false order  
the desperate ignorance on which we stand

our vanities, only to crumble  
on the cusp of speech.  
Music might be us, deeply,  
but we can't bear it: our instruments  
are too crude. We have  
our hands, our lips, our eyes. Nothing.  
Each other? Only what is released  
briefly into lit arms. If we could hold  
the dream of play and vanish  
in the shimmer of that  
blinding stream.

Alison Croggon

## Divinations 1

1

A dog ran from the whistle a child tugged his mother's skirt  
the dog skittered through leaves of rain a bird covered the child chased the bird  
the dog circled the twilight deepened the child hit his mother  
the bird hid the moon was gibbous the jasmine swarmed through the deepening air

a nub burgeoned with lips and fingers sucking life through its eyes of water  
voiceless fearless sunless wingless branching into my blood  
the sky tripled its risk folding the clouds in joyous omens  
o black foot o little finger of fear  
innocent like a lash of hair pricking the hidden eye

who was the wolf who paced the bedroom scarlet tongued and ruffed with hunger?  
who was the child which fell into the riddling cabbages?  
who was the mouth which steamed a duff of lies in the fuzzy nights?  
who was the word which stamped and stamped until all thoughts were its footprints?  
who was the eye which broke and bled as it fell on the polished floorboards?  
who was the finger wriggling in and plucking out god like a tooth?  
who was the thunder cracking the roof until all houses were shadows?  
who was the witch who marched up and down with her lonely hammer?  
what was the body which knew no names a bloom of nerves a barb of questions?

2

I listened for you in the throat of summer, in the fanfare  
of trees I lingered and spelt their shadows

you rose out of my darkest soundings, inaudible fish  
eyelessly twirling in warm currents

autumn cauled your arrival, tracking my veins with weariness  
and floated you out on sad leaves of blood

down to the icy waters where gentle fingers  
will never prise into bloom your promise

and my kisses will never spark your hair  
into electric beauty

nor will the eager petals of your skin  
char to brutal seed

3

Bidden from silence  
where all things wait for lips  
to blow their hungers  
into the burning air  
you touched me and your resonance  
still moves my mourning body

nor can I remonstrate  
your refusal  
although your death is written  
in my blood

4

We wake up from what is endured  
patiently, without hope, and find  
that old hunger waiting with its pinched face  
and radiant eyes – nothing will drive it away,  
it will simply transform  
and implore us again. What can be done?  
It cannot be fed and yet it begs us  
and hurts us, like an angry child,  
and there is nothing to eat.

Poor fruit, these windfalls  
rotting in the garden of love.  
They swamp the mouth with death.  
Remember, once there were apples  
confusing the sky with pure savour.  
Remember, the thighs of saplings  
interrupted the air's foolings.

The ghost of a child  
lingers and its wan voice  
has no language.  
It nags us like an old grief  
which will not lessen and no tears  
will silence its complaint  
chiming out of the shadows  
in this torn place:  
which never shall be  
and never was.

5

Even the sun  
may not return  
to eyes risen  
for its blessing

and this vine  
winding our bones  
rustles ceaselessly  
in absent winds

yet this leaf  
is damp still  
from the torrent  
of its becoming

Alison Croggon

### Divinations 3

1

This hand was the flower on your mother's breast  
rooted in the dark river  
and it was the crucible  
in which the sunlight hardened to a crystal

you have placed this hand with involuntary pity  
along the cheeks of those you love  
and felt the language break  
like flocks of birds spelling out the winter:  
a cold sky, a breast of twigs

an eye stricken by sight

2

(for Rilke)

You spoke out of that deep cleft,  
sexed and unsexed, where carnivorous petals  
caress the strangeness of dream –  
but what nocturnal meetings  
deliver you here, emptied so finally of yourself,  
poet whose gaze was self

o cruel love, coldly tended in solitude,  
forcing out of the chilled root  
its delicate bloody garland:  
and night moves through you, inhuman, voiceless,  
bleakest of gods, deaf  
to the continuously dying self delivering  
its first and only cry

and the gladness in your being  
grows tired and folds itself away  
and all the names you mine out of silence  
retreat into the sounds of themselves  
the earth raises its horizons  
so close to your mouth you cannot speak  
and the roses shut before your fingers  
alien, innocent, illegible

and you fall towards the dark  
unwinding genitals and tongue and eyes  
to feed the faceless wind that scours you:  
for who can say what ripens  
tenderly in stone, or what flames  
sleep beneath black water, or what mouth opens  
its articulate springs after the last  
songless winter

3

You open the blue gate  
in the wall of stone  
and pass through the dense  
birdhaunted forest

the rhododendron drops  
its scarlet tongues  
through the green heavy perfume  
of rotting earth

and the branch which snapped  
under your swinging thigh  
is falling again  
into the distant summer

4

The swallows too are bending the light  
calling the blossom out of the frost  
with their precise magnetic eyes  
and wings of articulate hunger

out of the panic and twittering  
emerges the sun and the splitting cell  
shapes an eye for its mirror

and children with voices of water  
carelessly inhabit the light  
time for them is a bird  
piping its promise on the edges of sleep

where soon the bitter ghosts will stand  
like bodies of rain in the falling light

Alison Croggon

## Divinations 4

1

You always spoke for me  
so how could I name  
what happened later

the earth was generous:  
her rising hips  
burned with flowers

and clouds darkened on her skin  
summoning the springs  
of an intolerable compassion

2

Returning, it seemed  
that eyes bruised  
against the dark of flesh:  
that hands flaked to ash  
in unsensed fires:  
that now we stood  
helplessly as strangers  
locked in a season of frost:  
a beat, a gesture, an eyelash  
and the sky empties:  
the word flies out  
and is extinguished

3

What is this empty face?  
this dry inscription?

these cold echoes splashing  
on the floors of dream?

is there no kindness here?  
no delivering hand?

this eye rots in sleep  
this mouth opens

this heart walks unshriven  
through its own winter

Alison Croggon

## Extracts from ANTIGONE

1.

CHORUS There is nothing stranger than man.

As if he were a storm  
he strides through the waves  
of the winter seas  
and year after year  
he wears down the oldest god,  
earth herself, with his ploughshare.

In his clever nets  
he captures whole nations  
of feather-headed birds  
and the ocean's salty brood.  
He masters the beasts  
that wander the open hills  
and yokes with his cunning  
the long-maned horse  
and the muscled mountain bull.

He taught himself speech  
and the flight of thought  
and imagined the laws of the city.  
He shelters himself  
from the hostile weather.  
He never meets the future  
without something in his hand.  
He has found a cure  
for every illness.  
Death alone baffles him.

Skilful beyond imagining,  
subtle beyond hope,  
he can turn in his wilfulness  
to good or to evil.  
When he honours the laws  
of the city and the gods  
his standing is noble.  
But the man who betrays  
the laws of the city  
deserves no home.  
May one such as this  
never sit at my table.  
May a man like this  
never share my thoughts.

2.

CREON Hard wills are first to break.  
The smallest bridle  
tames the wildest horse.

Those whose pride is bitter  
are more shamed as slaves.  
This girl laughed in her insolence  
when she broke my law.  
Am I the King of Thebes  
or is she?  
She is my sister's child  
but even if she were my daughter  
I'd take her life for this.  
I'll trample all her pride  
under my law,  
she and her sister.  
Summon her:  
I saw her just now in the house,  
out of her wits with madness.

Often the mind convicts itself  
when plotting darkness.  
But I hate more those who do evil  
and make a virtue of it.

ANTIGONE Do you desire anything more than my death?

CREON No more than that.  
Your death is everything.

ANTIGONE Then what are you waiting for?  
You have nothing to say  
that can please me  
and I can say nothing  
that will charm your ear.  
What greater glory could I seek  
than to honour my brother?  
All men would say so  
if fear did not silence them.  
But you are a king  
and can do what you like.

CREON You are alone among Thebans  
in thinking this.

ANTIGONE They know it too  
but keep their mouths shut  
for fear of you.

CREON Are you not ashamed  
for thinking differently?

ANTIGONE I see no shame  
in loving my brother.

CREON And wasn't it a brother

who died opposing him?

ANTIGONE Yes, a full brother,  
born of the same parents.

CREON Then is not your loyalty  
disloyal to that brother's memory?

ANTIGONE My brother would not say so.

CREON He would if he were given  
the same honours as a traitor.

ANTIGONE He was not a slave who died.  
He was our brother.

CREON A brother who laid waste the land  
the other died defending.

ANTIGONE In death all are equal.

CREON There's no equality  
between this good man  
and that impious corpse.

ANTIGONE Who knows what laws  
rule the land of the dead?

CREON Even in death  
an enemy is an enemy.

ANTIGONE My nature turns to those I love,  
not to my enemies.

CREON Then love the dead  
when you walk with them  
in the world below.  
While I am king  
no woman shall rule in Thebes.

Alison Croggon

## From Beowulf

XI

Cursed by God,  
Grendel walked out of the moors,  
over the mist-slopes. He planned to snatch  
a man from the mead-hall. Onwards he slunk  
until he saw the high gold glimmering  
under the clouds. It wasn't the first time  
he'd sought Hrothgar's home, but never  
in all his days before or after  
did he find harder luck or hall-thanes.  
Alone and joyless, he came to the hall,  
ripping open its fire-forged bars  
with a touch of his hands. Plotting murder,  
he trod the tiled floor. His eyes gleamed  
with unlovely light, a flame of malice,  
as he saw the sleepers gathered,  
a host of men. He laughed in his heart:  
before dawn came, he'd kill each one  
and fill his belly. But fate forbade him  
any such meals after that night.

Hygelac's mighty kinsman watched him,  
wanting to see how this cruel killer  
made his attack. The monster was quick:  
he grabbed the nearest sleeping man  
and tore him to pieces, ripping his sinews  
with savage teeth, drinking the blood  
straight from his veins, gobbling down  
each sinful morsel. Soon the dead man  
was all devoured, even his hands and feet.  
Grendel stepped forward and reached out  
with open hands for another sleeper,  
but this one quickly saw his intention  
and took his arm in an iron grasp.  
And Grendel, master of murder, felt then  
a harder grip than he'd ever encountered  
in all the world's wideness. Flooded with terror,  
he longed to flee into darkness, to join there  
the throng of devils. In all the days of his life  
he'd never been more afraid of death.

Beowulf then remembered his boast.  
He stood up and tightened his grip,  
his fingers breaking: the monster fought for the door  
and the man stepped forward to keep him.  
The troll strove against him, wanting to run  
to his lair in the fens, but his fingers weakened  
in his enemy's hands. That was a bitter journey  
to Heorot for the harm-wielder.

The hall shook with the noise of battle

and as they listened the Danes tasted  
a bitter ale, while the two rivals  
fought in their fury. It was a wonder  
the wine-hall stayed standing: but it was braced  
inside and out, with well-wrought iron.  
I heard that when those enemies struggled,  
gilded benches were wrenched off the floor,  
although wise counsellors said that no man  
living could break that splendid hall,  
unless it was swallowed by greedy fire.  
The clamour rose, and the Danes stood in horror,  
hearing sobbing and grisly screams,  
as God's enemy wailed his downfall,  
pinioned there, hell's captive, held  
by the strongest man in the world.

## XII

By no means would the earl's protector  
release his vicious guest alive; he counted him  
worthless to anyone. Beowulf's thanes  
brandished weapons, iron heirlooms,  
defending their leader, for they didn't know,  
in seeking to hack out Grendel's soul,  
that no weapon on earth could harm  
that giant enemy. The greatest war sword  
lost its edge on him, robbed of its power  
by enchantment. His death that day  
would be more wretched, his outcast soul  
would journey in anguish to the realm of fiends.  
He who inflicted untold miseries  
on mankind, who fought with God,  
found his body would not obey him  
now that the bold kinsman of Hygelac  
held him fast. While they lived,  
each loathed the other. Then the monster  
felt the fire of terrible pain:  
a great wound gaped in his shoulder,  
sinews snapped, muscles burst open  
and Beowulf was handed the war-glory  
as Grendel fled, broken and dying,  
to his unhappy home in the dark fens.  
He knew now his days were ended.

After that murderous storm, the will  
of the Danes was done. Heorot was cleansed,  
rescued from ruin by the shrewd man  
who came from afar, proud in his strength.  
Beowulf rejoiced in his night's work.  
He'd kept his oath to the East-Dane people  
and remedied grief and evil suffering

long endured. The sign was clear  
when the hero hung above the door  
Grendel's hand, his arm and shoulder,  
the whole of his grasp.

Translated by Alison Croggon

Alison Croggon

## **Good Friday**

it was the sound of a bird  
startled from sleep its wings hurting the air

it was a sound like shame  
since then I have not slept

my ears multiplied I heard the hammers  
ringing down the cries of men and women

the wing of sorrow  
beating louder and louder

words betray the delicacies  
which hide in each freckle of each face

each gesture each strand of hair each voice  
calling its own call like no other

it is the shadow of love  
kicked bleeding from the garden

whose hands burn  
through barricades of flame

Alison Croggon

## **Goodnight, sweet prince...**

Such possessions as gore me pontificate from corners.  
I am no longer solid but a speech of butterflies.  
How it spills, when all is said and done:  
It is hard to see virtue in the cold matter  
Staining the floor - frills, cups, leaves, arquebuses,  
Bile - the gross litters of meaning - the new king  
Knitting up this mess in his brainless sinews,  
Mere presence the answer to everything, the golden  
Halo of a new dawn impressing all the peasants.

Alison Croggon

## Great Aunts

great aunts are very swallowing and dangerous  
they exist all their lives in broughams and monocles  
sometimes they recite poetry to frighten you  
I have spent whole months trembling for their assignations  
I have heard them hooting in supermarkets at the full moon  
when they rattle their clavicles entire cities come to a stop  
even those constructed entirely of masonite and six inch nails  
eventually I suppose they must die like everything else  
but the spoons of imagination will not let me believe it

Alison Croggon

## Here

So where do you end up when your eyes are finally working  
so well you can hardly see in front of you instead you look  
inside out you feel the acid in your brain  
working through to the page as pitiless as economists  
adding up zeros you live in this world it opens its arms  
exactly what you feared it is worse than your dreams  
shutting your eyes to find the tortured boy printed  
on your retina the hole in his cheek the slashed  
arms bloodless now the cigarette burns how did they  
and the big stupid money fracking the laws of mercy  
all the connections obvious and obscene and still you dream  
of linoleum in kitchens that years have demolished  
into hygienic visions mothers in aprons squawking for decades  
of migraines and butter or bending over shining ovens  
in their Good Housekeeping skirts their hair in scarves  
their perfectly polished children executive husbands televisions  
you murdered them all you stood in high heels and vomited blood  
better than madness your sister's eyes turned in to policemen coming  
to slash her to ribbons her visions of Lear her naked pain  
poetry you never saved me but there was the rail  
of words that promised a fake redemption you knew  
it was fake but out of the dream stepped those ample summers  
as real as the camellias opening outside your window  
red as your fingers red as your newborn babies beautiful vaginas  
speaking the possible here in this same world  
where chemical nightmares scour the skin from children  
o poetry who stepped down and clapped her manacles  
speaking her legislations knowing the sentence is life  
its fluid chains its solitary rooms its knives of ice and blood  
opening inside you like forgiveness you think  
of your mother's will where she ministers justice your sisters  
and you laid out in columns neat and shy and obedient  
scrub the skirtings weed the roses death will visit at last  
and run his finger along the shelves and find us wanting  
but he can go to hell him and his little brothers  
all those feminine lessons I flung on the fire of my ego  
refusing death although I invited him in with every word  
every cigarette every failure poetry you never lied to me

Alison Croggon





## **I will stop writing**

I will stop writing and walk out, and in the clamour of commerce I will consider the value of truth.

When I return, the evening light will be yellow and the bird that whistled all day will have fallen silent.

Once again I will discover that I have nothing to say. Perhaps a bright instrument may flash then, in my empty hands.

Alison Croggon

## **In the hour of dogs**

in the hour of dogs  
every human voice  
is hushed

night is our scavenge  
us and the watchboots  
no stranger dares

we prowl as kings  
we are the claws and noses  
we are the grip

that stalks on stiff legs  
rotting ribs and vertebrae  
and hostile ankles

the steam of our piss  
rises past the towers  
and dims stars

Alison Croggon

## Iseult

I am a queen at a high window  
a black sail stands  
at exactly the same distance  
as always  
which means the opposite  
of whatever I take it to mean  
I can't speak  
no matter how many words  
clot on the cold floor  
some nursery rhymes are deadly  
all of them are cruel  
here the weather is harsh  
and full of dust  
words cut me as usual  
or the usual words cut me  
or was it someone else  
I can't stitch a meaning  
it unpicks itself  
night after night  
so many impediments  
swell my tongue  
you are the bitterest  
heavier than rings or water  
colder than a flock of birds  
dispersed by storm  
there is no true north  
the stars oscillate  
in unfamiliar orbits  
the earth is strange  
and marvellous  
as winter is  
and now is further away  
than ever

Alison Croggon

## **It is easy to forget me**

it is easy to forget me  
I am a cloud in the corner of your eye  
that vanishes in your direct gaze  
when the rain comes

I would like to be  
the whole of your sky  
when the night falls over you  
and hunger begins

I will never be the whole of anything  
I am the air's inconsolable heaviness  
and the stars glowing  
in a dark well

I will never be whole  
bits of me have fallen everywhere  
my hands vanish in my dreams  
like the smoke of a flower

I am here like summer  
in the voices of crickets  
that fall silent at the sound  
of your footstep

Alison Croggon

## Lamps

I might have lifted out of the day  
small tremulous lamps to guard the night.  
But day's centre is dark.

Nevertheless the lamps are there,  
flaring discontentedly like my daughter's  
marine sleep.

She is as silent as hands.  
Her breath peoples the sea  
with fins of rose and lavender.

The lamps go out  
and reveal a horrible beauty.  
The sea curls back.

I push my tongue into silence.

Alison Croggon

## **Love: after The Triumph of Death**

Love may not exist, it may be  
only a word, it may do nothing  
useful. To erase love  
is easy, it forgets itself, its weapons  
are bread and wine, it sings,  
its hands are empty -  
Still - it persists, like poetry,  
idling on a tiny green lawn  
as death marches its vast armies  
through the deserts behind it.

Alison Croggon

## Medea

Forgetting what is mine  
as rain sheds its petals  
I will show you everything  
falling away like water

As rain sheds its petals  
in this endless night  
falling away like water  
from my callused hands

In this endless night  
I think of knives blooming  
from my callused hands  
and a vast exile

I think of knives blooming  
treacherous as lips  
and a vast exile  
numbing every prayer

Treacherous as lips  
curling inside the body's love  
numbing every prayer  
in blood's filthy clamour

Curling inside the body's love  
forgetting what is mine  
in blood's filthy clamour  
I will show you everything

Alison Croggon

## Nocturne

gently we are saved:  
your body formed  
from bodies so long grieved  
by mine is warmed

the moment that you sleep  
my mind awakes  
I have nothing to keep  
for our sakes

nothing to break or hold  
nothing to lose  
the generous powers fold  
to emptiness

the nothing that we are  
is all:  
vulgar and opaque and rare  
and mortal

Alison Croggon

## November burning

yesterday the world came to visit  
it was easter and the sky split in two  
with the grief of an old crime

tomorrow will be christmas and the same birth  
opening again with the same desolation

what is it that I cannot remember  
if I was old if I was wise I am neither  
my hands close on nothing my womb is tired  
my fingers are scarred with old scrubblings  
I have tried staring out of the window  
all I can see are old griefs

the old gods walking in the garden  
and the child holding a flower  
in the painting on the wall of a chapel  
where the afternoon sun is a memory already  
ancient confusions  
the blood that refuses the hunger that will not listen  
I would like to know some answers  
but can barely shape the questions out of fear  
there are no new questions  
only questions that have always gone unanswered  
must I ask them  
every night and every morning of my life  
must I ask them although there are no answers  
every night and every morning

in the difficult night of prayer  
when the gods do not attend  
in the washings away of afternoons  
in each crumb of solitude given and wasted  
in the tough bitter bread of love  
that grazes your mouth and leaves you gasping  
in the halfheard voices  
and the cheek offered and withdrawn  
the city's voluble inattention  
the penances of ignorance and sobriety  
perhaps the humble one ignites his presence  
a balm of water on a fevered forehead  
that evaporates before it is sensed  
no withdrawal  
but further and harder and without colour  
holding all colour within it

or perhaps the pure white that one dreams  
past exhaustion in a crumpled bed  
after all the interactions  
that demanded one be other than you are  
merely an erasure of pain

o you who were fragrant as Lebanon  
the groves of your undoing  
now pumped up irrevocable chimneys  
the sky a burning glass  
and the lands wasted

the child with a flower in the chapel  
who was once a child bribed with sweetmeats  
scratching lice  
and the flower long dust  
and the promises made and unmade and forgotten  
living in the glance  
how easy to lament  
to stare with grief across the dying garden  
it was always dying

never for my children or my children's children  
will Adrasteia, Amalthea, Ida and Cynosura  
bend white studious brows in the college of the bee  
the deep caves of water are poisoned  
never will the spring

.....

did it travel the oceans from Olympus  
heeled with the spite of the dead  
is it socketed by ranks of heavy skulls  
icythosaurus diplodocus tyrannosaurus rex  
a schoolyard chant of bones mounting up  
to the delicate mammalian intelligence  
is it daubed with hair and ochre on the rock  
near the rainy season water  
and carved in relief in the tombs of kings  
to gaze forever over a dry sea  
remembering the stare of a jewelled woman  
and the light windowed on her globed eye  
measured by a bored painter  
each shut of the lid and each dust mote  
moist with millenia of blinkings  
how far is a glance  
as it flickers and rests and moves on

what is it that I cannot remember  
if I was young if I was ignorant  
the door suddenly still in its movement  
and afterwards crystalline with light  
that never shone there  
as if a god had stepped in that common place  
shared by mites and cockroaches and ants  
and a mouse running its stink over the floor  
as if a child long mute spoke a word

and its echo budded into flame  
in the minds of those who heard suddenly humbled  
by an unexpected

or weight of the lamb  
on a burnt tongue  
or the twisted tap  
in a smoking garden  
a single wing flapping  
a lone dog howling  
a bent nail

in the bleak Novembers  
when the first winds roar from the northern deserts  
bringing flame to tinder forests  
and ash falls in the suburbs like soft black stars  
where frail old women read their fortunes

ravens tilt outside shuttered houses  
summoning a red moon  
through the blasted twilight

humble wooden houses  
up like a match  
ash black and grey ash  
in the black garden

and the door swinging on its hinges  
in a late damp breeze  
from an ocean far away  
in the cold south

who died? who died?  
and next door untouched  
the wind seasonally capricious  
and the stars unfavourable  
Venus low and urgent in the west  
yet fifty metres south  
honeysuckle dips a curling tongue  
into cool air

in such a November  
I come to the same questions  
in another place  
formed by irreversible losses  
a landscape of bloated corpses  
walls crumbled to ruin  
and no sign of rain

she who touches the forehead of the virgin  
child sleeping with her hands  
closed beneath her cheek as if in prayer

to brush back a lock that has fallen  
and moves on a slow breath

she may not perfectly  
step between the chasms of illchoice  
she may have betrayed herself  
again and again  
she may be foolish  
and no longer hope for redemption

she may shiver with an awe  
in a stained church where no one is waiting

she may know a wren is moulting  
into the blue of his wedding  
on the wasteland past the powerstation  
where melancholy scrub bends down  
before a salted wind that whips  
the endless complaining of seagulls  
into a troubled sky

she may know nothing  
she is bitten with anger at the old curse  
thickening about her throat  
she has been silenced too often  
her voice rang clear across the silent fields  
and then her lids shot open to the choking  
stain  
on the sky  
the choked  
sky

she has spoken excellently modest and low  
she has been gentle in the ungentle nights  
she has bled on the sheets giving birth

she is forced to blame herself  
there is no one else to blame

she should never have been silenced

o you  
applefoot  
eyewing  
starfreckle  
when did you vanish

o moth sprayed to its final agony  
crumbling its wings  
on a table

you were always

a mute star lost in  
brash sodium

useless

the wires spat you out  
the smart dollars laughed  
in the bars

forget nothing

remember how you lifted the child  
running for a train  
strong as a god  
in the sweet rain

Alison Croggon

## Ode

We were woken too early, before the moths had died in the streets,  
when buds had barely hardened in the frost, when stars are hurtful  
and famished. They took us through gardens and past the halls  
where once we had lingered, past the houses and doused markets.  
Our footsteps echoed back like iron. Of course we were frightened,  
that was a given, of course we remembered photographs we had studied  
that then had nothing to do with us. The empty light of morning  
made anything seem possible, even freedom, even God. We stumbled  
on familiar roads, and everything turned away from us,  
lamp-posts, windows, signs. They weren't ours any longer. Even the air  
greeted us differently, pinching our skin to wake us from its dreams.

•

Words of course were beyond us. They were what killed us  
to begin with. They were taken away from the mouths that loved them  
and given to men who worked their sorceries in distant cities,  
who said that difficult things were simple now and that simple things  
no longer existed. It was hard to find our way, we understood  
the tender magic of hands, we knew the magic of things not spoken,  
but this was a trick we couldn't grasp. It lifted the world in a clump of glass  
and when everything came back down the streets had vanished.  
In their places were shoes and clotting puddles and sparking wires  
and holes and bricks and other things that words have no words for  
and that silence swelling the noise until you can't hear anything at all.

•

It's said that the dead don't dream, but I dream of flowers.  
I could dream so many flowers — lilies like golden snow on water,  
hyacinths the colours of summer evenings or those amaranths they call  
love-lies-bleeding. I dream of none of those. I dream instead  
of wind-blown roses that grew in our shabby yard, of daisies  
glimpsed through the kitchen window, of marigolds that glowed  
through nets of weed. But most of all, I dream of red anemones  
that never grew in my garden. They rise on slender stalks,  
their seven-petalled heads bobbing and weaving in the wind.  
Wind-flowers, Pliny called them, because they open only in the wind,  
and the wind scatters their petals over every waste in the world.

Alison Croggon

## **On the Death of God**

In the age of barbed wire, they announced the death of God. Great men traced the flyspots on ancient walls and studied the mutations of stars. Never before was so much knowledge gathered together.

They forgot to examine the dirt at their feet which was, as it always has been, full of God. A vast emptiness winced at the core of things. They thought that if they stepped on the moon, the cancer would retreat. They thought that if they invented washing machines, the asylums would empty. They thought that if they grafted wings to books, the poor would levitate. Nothing worked.

They became more and more afraid, and ordered inventories of their armouries.

They wooed the drug barons of Burma and Mexico, the bankers of China, the executives of Somalia and the Balkans, the despots of Indonesia and Chile and Uzbekistan, the monarchs of America and the Middle East. Many were photogenic and drew huge ratings, and white opium clouds soothed the people. But still they had forgotten God.

In the East, where God had been banished forever, the Pope rose out of the stills of the dispossessed and boxed the ears of the Kremlin. He raised his hands and God stepped forward to the podium. As they watched, a giant crow landed on the steps of Congress and plucked out the eyes of onlookers. A dark cloud hovered over Persia.

They understood then that God had never gone away. His transactions passed all understanding. Not a sparrow fell, but He sold it. He suffered the little children to come to His wars, and His dogma belched from all the world's leaders. His factories and powerstations obliterated borders and His mansions towered over the hovels of the unenlightened. The electronic nerves of every economy led to the bottomless abyss of His intelligence. They bowed and ate the dirt.

Alison Croggon

## Owl Song

I

she was made of flowers : named and shaped and punished  
taken from her stemmed sleep : and slapped to eye  
petal breasted whore : buddable and silk : soft orifice  
his to hold and husband : nectar swelled and stank : she split to claws  
or so the story said  
a long time ago  
in another place

\*

what skin is. organ of music  
edging self, places of rawness,  
worldvoice shaking you to its distances,  
running you through invisibly

\*

the broken can't be mended:  
not sky smeared and stripped, not looted forest, not the algal river,  
not cancered earth, erupted gene, memory extinguished,  
nor starved shot scurvy fur and feather, nor the flamed  
and thug-smashed home, nor shard shocked child-damage:

the faith in seed:  
that green will burst the grey  
carapace of ash  
cover the bone-site over

\*

ash rose and rose of stone,  
lymph and haemad martyred from the wood  
undoing bone as paradise pricks sight -  
the lovely cheek, the leaf, the tear, unfleshed  
past wail or weal, flashed to shadow:  
rose whose secret petals close the harm  
blent for public pap into the fearsong:  
calculations of empire: tithes of blood.

\*

the loosed weed lives:  
under her leaves  
rot ancient languages

dragged into touch  
she cannot but scorch  
the sweetest seasons

alien honey  
driving the shy bee  
into extinction

\*

she the impediment  
of mind a stutter  
masked with feathers

she gulps your useless history  
and spits it out in pellets

spelled  
by a speech with no words  
for the perfumes congealing  
on her mute lips

how harmless she looked!  
but her tongue watered already  
for what was missing

\*

probing the iris, a laser  
cuts all the way in  
to the truth: a dead thing  
leaking on the slab

II

What becomes conscience, shame mating with love

in the eye of a child driven to hurt.  
It isn't your fault you were born.

So much missed, the womb's slow thud, the gentle light,  
muffled mother music imagined as heaven -

but save the blame. No god will coddle you  
back to that dimness. The light grows brighter and harder,  
breaking your sight, breaking it into pieces.

\*

Symptom is all:  
the king of wrong erases with a doctrine  
evidence of death.

Love broods in the womb  
flexing its fingers for the world's warm breast,  
its cry of nails hammering the harm.

\*

matter moves as light  
a Rabbi wrote in Prague

marking the golem  
zapped by godword  
slavish man-mock  
tricked from mud

how we bettered that!  
petty gods, intellect's brazen angels  
twisting strings of light

how beautiful the equation  
that blasts the feeling flesh

a single hand  
gestures and is ash:  
o smile, o kiss, o love,  
pain would not be but this,  
given and revoked, alas,  
revoked and given.

\*

there is nothing to understand

the flower dissolves into its secret  
the holding eye revolts

war is a mask he can gobble everything

the earth panting beneath his feet  
where he always wanted her

\*

the book the smirk and the hot rack  
the bridle of spikes the bent foot  
the stone the wheel the bar the law

beat them into a tongue  
with both your hands

pretend the tongue is a flame  
tend it gently

\*

wretched exile wrenching the wordhoard

\*

rails vanishing into cold  
she played with starlessness

Yes said the face in the window  
I can hear you even behind the frost

\*

eye, touchlight, bag of water, pinhole letting the world in  
look, mind not the how: be

wavelets shunting cell to cell  
softly flaring mind  
the kiss of wind, branch  
morphed to arm, gods whispering

eye blooded shut  
now open  
yes?

and whose the broken speaking  
yours? mine?  
soultrust violate  
fingertouch  
a questioning of all edges  
heart numb  
wingsofblood

me? you? me?

### III

relearning how to be still, that is the difficulty.  
blinder and more coldly clouds race  
far above the pious stone, which has nothing to do with you.  
spring is more than a melting place in the mind  
or new kinds of blossom reckoning futures  
past your dissolving hands:  
perhaps you can forgive the longings for solace  
which damage you, the brilliant promise of water,  
enough to endure a gentleness that wakes  
the million eyelids sleeping in your skin

\*

Here in riverless Williamstown  
cannons pout in the parks. Black swans  
pick through mud, scooping crusts  
from bags snagged on the rubble. Fish nuzzle  
at the outlet from the power station  
where water's warm as blood.  
Blue jellyfish inflate behind barbed wire.

Once we walked the breakwater,  
black basalt laid with ankle bruising stones  
broken by convicts. You fell and cried.  
I lifted you and carried you, my shoes flayed on the shards,  
the hard way back from what you had  
imagined - a silver beach  
luminous with toyshops, or a ship-shaped cloud:  
not, at least, this backwash lapping,  
this edgeless sky.

\*

I see frost as if for the first time  
when a single frozen dewdropp was enough to entrance me  
these days of course I am no longer a child  
my skin would run like tears but how to be discrete  
if love is the self's apocalypse  
questioning too deeply as if I had no right to be present there  
beneath the dress the feathers beneath the claws a mirror beneath the glass a sex of  
radiant music  
beneath the music infinitesimal galaxies  
who doesn't want to vanish perhaps it is time to be literal  
that infinite trust I used to call a body evaporating in the vivid air  
as if the words fall burning down as if the sky shakes free its glorious petals  
for that while between whiles  
here in the light

Alison Croggon

## Possible Elegies

1.

There's never been an excuse, you always knew  
it was easier to ignore, to drown this hollowing voice  
in cascades of inertia. Their fluid columns  
fall with a certain beauty after all, and smash  
stunningly into your stillness, as if there really were  
something happening, as if those tossed reflections  
were faces that belonged to you. And what of the recessed  
demons who grin and turn away, the flames  
are flickering darkly against the roof of your mouth.  
It takes so long to be obvious. If you knew who to call  
your throat would be full of god, but the code slips past you,  
and you just wait on the train between stations,  
watching the sky break open and float away.  
Behind the afternoon are stars that only the darkness can beckon,  
behind those faces a flame is waiting for nightfall,  
impossible bridges arc over the horizons  
in inexplicable colours, as if a dream came real  
and stepped outside you, and all this beauty were yours.

You watch your hand on the cliff face, it seems astounding  
such power could curl inside it, to lift a bottle of lye  
or drive a knife through skin or sign the ultimatum,  
one small act and everything is different. What world is this  
that has such choices in it? Yet when the ads peel back  
their dazzling skins, who cares? That late-night horror  
plays again and again, the blood-mouthed woman  
stretches out on the shiny car, the planet goes on dying  
under the welts of a billion poverties, and all the little flies  
curl up and buzz inside a billion webs. Their prised wings  
are clogged with dust, and at this distance panic  
dulls to a drowsy hum. Who were you waiting for? Angels?  
Or have they abandoned the earth, being abandoned?

As if the tight white ball of a bud on an orange tree  
could save you, as if the rose-coloured light  
that alters a street of naked trees were a blessing,  
you wait, trusting the warped seasons. You hear  
that the art of hope is obsolete, and wipe your benchtops  
clean with poison, turn on the silent clocks, measure  
your life with whitegoods. And who now stalks these cavities,  
monstrous with belief? Was it a god, were those plutonium wings  
once made of feathers? It's not as if you can see  
the path of its voice, the dread scorching beneath your skin.  
It's not as if you know why your hair stiffens  
with awe. And is there anything bigger than you, that galaxy  
afloat in your skull? Where to begin?

2.

I understand the desolation of flowers.  
My companion, your hands are cruel lilies  
grasping for life, whispering of ash and bones –  
my companion, even you cannot touch my isolation.  
Smoke darkens the sky, a planet of fires  
where each of us warms our bodies, the sky is a crematorium  
that we cannot see with our eyes, although we feel it in every cell  
where the bitter salt is rising.

Even in this quiet hour, I can remember the tumult.  
It was the colour of lips, it was the shape of sunset.  
When birds flew out of the earth, I caught them in my hungry skin,  
their shrill cries were my challenge and my desire.  
How many wounds have mounted to this sorrow?

And when you wake, the winds are too high, we are too good at breaking.  
How will you count the leaves that no longer exist?  
What will you say when the possible languages fail?  
How carelessly we move through catastrophe,  
our eyes fixed on a horizon that will never behold us.  
Creatures fade because they cannot live with so many walls,  
already my childhood shines with the remoteness of myth  
and I believe those voices who shill for my penitence  
no more than the men who live in canyons of glass  
making bombs with the names of women and flowers.  
O the deadly lie of salvation. Beyond their grasp  
are the strict parabolas of joy, a faith that leaps  
from finger to finger, as real as the hand that holds this pen,  
that pulses in sunlight and shadow, a warmth on the darkening earth,  
that one day will be gone, memory, smoke, not even that.  
Who will you touch, my hand, when you are nothing?

3.

Sometimes the light is too big for you, it floods your retina  
with unbearable radiance, and you push shut your eyelids  
as if you were afraid, your sight scorched  
by the edges of things, the stylus cut  
between one word and another, marking a line  
where this is no longer that, where chairs  
stand clean in the evening light, and on the table  
the knife, the salt, the bottle lie in their terrible separateness,  
undissolved by flux, unmoving. How generous is the air  
that connects these things, edge to edge, invisible flood  
warmed in the lamp of my chest? I breathe  
and everything shifts, I breathe and all this sharpness blurs  
so nothing is as it was or will be, I breathe and fear transforms  
into the feathered present, one of countless things  
gifted as texture – the harmonica my son is blowing

in the next room, the heaviness in my shoulders, the dog's grunting  
search for fleas, the mortal sunlight glancing through leaves –  
Somewhere else a bomb is killing a child. Somewhere else  
grief congeals the sky like a plume of smoke  
mounting out of a smashed building. Somewhere else  
edges are shifted to stranger borders, the moment between  
one heartbeat and the splinter that stills it. Even this  
is merely a demonstration, price no object, of how a line  
must be drawn and drawn again, lest the breath  
that warms an orange, say, or the skin of a child  
might mist the borders, warming eyes with recognition,  
might sing across a wall or through a window  
to an uncertain ear, might make the letters of law  
shimmer from stone and dance. Who would believe then  
those syllables of righteousness, falling from the lips of liars?  
Who would want to kill, when orange is so sweet on the tongue,  
when the day is to and fro, like the smell of laundry in springtime  
giddy nonsense with the wind, and desire rises  
softly from the pit of the belly, tender and inconsequential,  
fluid as the touch of laughter? The curves of women  
must always be despised, the mouth that whispers  
hope must welter in blood, the rubble collapse  
across a field sown with teeth, nourishing dragons that rise  
real and absolute, blasting love to cinders, so its complex pollen  
will never drift again in those blistered orchards.  
The phosphorous light boils dry the aqueous glow of eyes,  
the light strips the possible skin, the light erases everything  
but the line between one thing and another. That line is built of words  
tangled with barbed wire, bristling with sentries.  
No one must get in. No one must get out. The righteous  
draw their lines, deep in their bunkers, where the infinite shapes of pollen  
are filtered out of the dry air, and there are no shadows.

4.

And where are you now, my soul? Didn't I glimpse you  
in some fluorescent corridor, a ghost in the glass  
hurrying through a dim afternoon, your face  
composed like a mask? It seemed you were thinking  
of something beyond the brief you held to your breast, but knew  
that words must be dealt with, before you turned  
to the pain that quivers inside you, the quick light  
rising like salt, seductive and toxic, that at last you know  
is the price of all your days. I wanted to tell you to stay, I wanted  
to take your hand and feel its hot grief blazing up  
my vanishing arm, until my vision dazzled  
like rain in winter sunlight. But perhaps it wasn't you.

Alison Croggon

## Silence

Silence broke my mouth:  
the crumbs flew out the window  
like paper butterflies or those magnolias  
nonchalantly shattered on the grass.  
These mirrors are confusing,  
so cold and expensive, they ripple out  
noiselessly like the sweet curve  
of water from a cliff  
where I am looking down, seeing further out  
that blue point beyond  
any voice.

Alison Croggon

## **Sonnet: Thoreau in Chernobyl**

The woods were beautiful as always, but dry.  
It seemed a subtle poison at the roots  
drained them imperceptibly of life.  
A want, or heightened colour, in each leaf  
hinted profound disease, as if the rites  
of generation faltered and withdrew  
beyond emergencies of flood and fire  
to deserts that no green could penetrate.  
I shaped my stanzas, but the form seemed trite:  
all metre euphemised a deepening flaw.  
I heard no frog calls, and the birds were fewer  
in species and in number. I trod  
ungodly glows, a covenant betrayed,  
a humus rotting slowly into fear.

Alison Croggon

## The Branch

Branch I pick up from the edge of the woods  
Only to abandon you at the world's end,  
Hidden among stones, in the shelter  
Where the other path invisibly begins

(For each earthly instant is a crossroads  
Where, as summer dies, our shadow  
Runs to its other land in the same trees,  
And only rarely in another year  
Do you pick up that branch with which, distractedly,  
You bent the summer grasses),

Branch, I think of you now that it is snowing.  
I see you tightening above inscrutable  
Knots of wood, there where the bark is peeling,  
With the swell of your dark forces.

And I return, a shadow on the white ground,  
To your sleep that haunts my memory,  
I pluck you from your dream, which scatters,  
Being only water filled with light.  
I take you where the earth  
Falls suddenly away among the trees  
And I hurl you with all my power,  
I listen as you bound from stone to stone.

(No, I want you  
For one moment more. I go on, I take  
The third path that I saw  
Vanishing in the grasses, without knowing  
Why I did not enter those dark thickets  
Where no birds sing.  
I go on, soon I am in a house  
Where once I lived, but whose way  
Was lost: as in our lives, sometimes  
Words are said, without our noticing,  
Into the eternal for the last time.  
A fire burns still in a deserted room,  
I listen as it searches in the mirror  
Of embers for the bough of light,  
Like the god who believes he will create  
A life, a spirit, in the night whose knots  
Are serried, infinite, labyrinthine.

Then I place you gently on a bed of flames,  
I watch you flare up in your sleep,  
I bend over you, long afterwards I still hold  
Your hand, which is childhood, dying.)

Alison Croggon

## **The Branch (translation)**

Branch I pick up from the edge of the woods  
Only to abandon you at the world's end,  
Hidden among stones, in the shelter  
Where the other path invisibly begins

(For each earthly instant is a crossroads  
Where, as summer dies, our shadow  
Runs to its other land in the same trees,  
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Knots of wood, there where the bark is peeling,  
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To your sleep that haunts my memory,  
I pluck you from your dream, which scatters,  
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A life, a spirit, in the night, whose knots  
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Then I place you gently on a bed of flames,  
I watch you flare up in your sleep.  
I bend over you, long afterwards I still hold  
Your hand. It is childhood, dying.)

Yves Bonnefoy, trans. Alison Croggon

Alison Croggon

## The Duino Elegies: The Eighth Elegy

With all its eyes the creaturely sees  
the open. But our eyes are  
as if reversed and placed all round it  
like snares ringing its free departure.  
What is outside, we know from the beast's  
face only: for we turn around  
the early child and force it to see formation  
backwards, not the open, which is so deep  
in beastsight. Free from death.  
Only we see death; the free beast  
has its going down behind it  
and before it god, and when it goes, goes  
into eternity, like a running spring.  
We have never, not for a single day,  
the pure space before us, in which flowers  
unendingly burst open. It is always world  
and never nowhere without no:  
that pureness, that unwatched, which one breathes and  
endlessly knows and never wants. But a child  
might lose himself inside the quiet and become  
shaken. Or someone dies and is.  
For near to death one sees that death no more  
and stares ahead, perhaps with a beast's huge glance.  
Lovers, were not the other barring  
sight, are nearby, astounded . . .  
As if in error one is lifted  
behind the other. But beyond him  
nothing emerges, and world returns.  
The universe is always empathetic, we see  
there only reflections of freedom  
darkened by us. Or an animal's  
dumb glance, silent through and through.  
These rule destiny: to be opposite  
and nothing else and always opposite.

Were the awareness of our species in the  
sure beast, which pulls towards us  
from another direction - , it would drag us  
into its mutability. But for the beast its being is  
unending, unprepared, and without insight  
of its belonging, pure, like its outward glance.  
And where we see future, there it sees all  
and itself in all and healed for always.

And yet in the wakeful warm animal  
is the weight and sorrow of a huge dejection.  
For it also clings to what often  
overwhelms us, - a memory,  
that what we thrust after, was formerly  
nearer, truer and its connection  
endlessly tender. Here all is distance,  
and there was breath. After the first home

the second is ambiguous and windy.  
O bliss of tiny creatures  
which remain always in the womb which carries them;  
o happiness of the gnat, which still hops within,  
even on its wedding: for womb is all.  
And see the half assurance of a bird,  
which almost knows both through its origin,  
as if it were one of those Etruscan souls  
received by space out of a corpse  
whose silent figure is its lid.  
And how dismayed is one which must fly  
out of its native womb. As if it is  
afraid of itself, it zigzags through the air, like a crack  
running through a cup. So the track  
of a bat rends through the porcelain evening.

And we: onlookers, always, over all,  
interested in everything, and never looking out!  
Overfills us. We order. It decays.  
We order again and ourselves decay.

Who turned us thus around, so we,  
no matter what, have the pose  
of one who is departing? As he who on  
the last hill which still shows  
his whole valley, will turn, halt, pause -,  
so we live, forever taking leave.

Alison Croggon

## The Duino Elegies: The Fifth Elegy

For Frau Hertha Koenig

But who are they, tell me, these vagrants, a little  
more fugitive even than us, in their springtime  
so urgently wrung by one who - who pleases  
a never contented will? So it wrings them,  
bends them, twists them, swings them,  
flings them and catches them behind: out of the oil-smooth  
air they come down  
onto the flimsy carpet worn  
by their eternal leaping, this forlorn  
carpet lost in the universe.  
Stuck on like a plaster, as if there the suburban  
sky had wounded the earth.

And scarcely there,  
upright, there and shown: the vast  
initial letter of Being ..., so the strongest  
men roll again to the joke, that ever  
approaching grip, like a tin plate rolled by August the Strong  
along a table.

Ah and around this  
centre, the rose of looking:  
blooms and defoliates. Around this  
pestle, the pistil, stricken  
by its own blooming pollen again  
conceiving illusory fruits of disgust, never  
aware of it, - bright with flimsy  
surfaces the frail smile-sheen of disgust.

There, the flabby, wrinkled strongman,  
old and now only drumming,  
decayed in his mighty skin, as if once  
two men lived there and one  
lay now in the graveyard, and the other outlived him,  
deaf and sometimes a little  
bewildered in his widowed skin.

But the young man like the son of a thug  
and a nun: he's strong and stuffed full  
of muscles and simpleness.

Oh you,  
who once were given a pain, that was still  
small, like a toy, in one of your  
slow convalescences....

You, who fall with the shock  
only fruits know, upripely  
a hundred times daily out of the commonly built  
tree of motion (that, quicker than water, in a short  
minute bears spring, summer and autumn) -

fall and crash to the grave:  
sometimes, in half a pause, a loving face wants  
to grow beyond you towards your seldomly  
tender mother; but it loses itself in your body  
which smoothly consumes it, that shy,  
scarcely attempted expression ... And again  
the man claps his hand to begin the leap and before  
an ache forms distinctly near your perpetually  
jogging heart, the brands of footsoles  
arrive, its origin, driving before them with pain  
the quick and carnal tears into your eyes.  
And yet, blindly,  
the smile .....

Angel! o take, pluck, the small-flowered leaves of healing.  
Make a vase to preserve them! Place among them our yet  
unopening gladness; inscribe the lovely urn  
with flowering, soaring praise:  
Subrisio Saltat.

You then, darling,  
you, mutely leapt over  
by the most bewitching of joys. Perhaps  
your frills are happy for you - ,  
or over your young  
taut breasts the green metallic silk  
feels itself endlessly pampered and wanting nothing.  
You  
constantly place on all the swaying scales of equilibrium  
under your public shoulders  
a marketfruit of equanimity.

Where, o where is the place, - I carry it in my heart - ,  
where still they can do nothing, still fall away  
from each other, like mounting animals  
wrongly coupled; -  
where the weights are still heavy,  
where from their vainly  
whirling sticks the plates  
stagger and fall .....

And suddenly in this laborious nowhere, suddenly  
the unsayable place, where the pure too-little  
inexplicably changes - , leaps  
into that empty too-much.  
Where the many-numbered calculation  
numberlessly resolves.

Plaza o plaza in Paris, infinite theatre,  
where the modiste, Madame Lamort,  
knots and winds those endless ribbons,  
the restless ways of the earth, inventing new

nooses, ruffles, flowers, cockades, artificial fruits - all  
falsely coloured - for the cheap  
winterhats of destiny.

.....

Angel: there's a place that we don't know, and there  
on some unsayable carpet, lovers display what now  
they can never bring up to knowing - their bold  
high figures of heartplay,  
their towers of pleasure, their  
long-since groundless ladders, leaning  
on only each other, tremulously, - and understand  
before the surrounding onlookers, the innumerable soundless dead:  
Wouldn't the dead then throw their last, ever-hoarded,  
ever-concealed, unknown, eternally  
valid coins of luck before the finally  
truly-smiling pair on the stilled  
carpet?

Alison Croggon

## The Duino Elegies: The First Elegy

Who, if I cry, hears me among the angelic orders? and even supposing one of them seized me suddenly to his heart: I'd vanish in his violent presence. For beauty is nothing but this terrifying beginning, which astonishingly we endure, and we admire it so because it calmly disdains to destroy us. Each single angel is terrible. And so I restrain myself and choke this call in darkening sobs. Ah, who then is able to our need? Not angels, not men, and the clever animals understand well that we are not trustingly at home in our imagined world. There remains for us perhaps some tree on a slope that from day to day we re-encounter; there remain yesterday's streets and that distorted fidelity of a habit which kissed us with pleasure, and so remained. O and the night, the night, when the wind full of worldspace consumes our faces - where does she not remain, this longing, soft disillusioner, whom solitary hearts laboriously approach? Is she lighter for lovers? Ah, with each other they only conceal their lot. Don't you know yet? Fling the void from your arms towards this freedom, where we breathe: perhaps as birds sense the expanding air with more ardent flight.

Yes, the spring needed you. It petitioned many a star to you, so you might trace it. It lifted itself as a wave out of the past, or maybe there as you passed an opened window a violin gave itself. That was all a duty. But were you overpowered? Were you not always distracted by expectation, as if it all announced a nearby lover? (How could you hold her, when the vast strange thoughts within you wink in and out and often stay all night.) Yet it desires you; so sing the lovers: their renowned feelings are far from immortal enough. Those abandoned, you envied them almost, whom you found so much more loving than the requited: perpetually begin their unattainable praise. Think: the hero survives, his foundering self is but a pretext for being, his ultimate birth. But lovers are grasped by exhausted nature back to herself, as if such strength could not flare twice. Have you said enough of Gaspara Stampa, that any woman whose lover escaped her would feel this love for her stronger example: if I could be like her? Shouldn't at last these oldest sufferings bear more fruit? Isn't it time that in loving we freed ourselves from the lover and tremulously endured:

as the arrow endures the string, gathering in the leaping off  
to a being more than self? For remaining is nowhere.

Voices, voices. Hear, my heart, how otherwise only  
the holy hear: so when the immense cry  
lifted them up from the ground, they kept kneeling,  
impossibly, more deeply attentive:  
such was their listening. Not that you could endure  
the voice of God, even remotely. But hear the waves,  
the ceaseless communication shaped out of silence.  
It rushes now from those young dead towards you.  
Whenever you entered a church in Rome and Naples,  
didn't their destiny silently press upon you?  
Or it sublimely bore you an inscription  
as recently the plaque in Santa Maria Formosa.  
What does it want of me? Gently I must remove  
this false appearance, which sometimes slightly  
impedes the pure motion of its spirits.

Certainly, it's strange to inhabit the earth no longer,  
discarding scarcely learnt customs, no longer using  
roses and other expressly promised things  
to give the future a human meaning,  
to be no more whatever one was  
in endlessly anxious hands, and even to leave one's name  
behind like a shattered toy.  
Strange, the wish to wish no longer. Strange  
to see all those relations fluttering  
so loosely in space. And this being dead is painful  
and full of retrieving, as one gradually sees  
a little eternity. - But the living are all mistaken,  
marking divisions so certainly.  
Angels (they say) often don't know if they pass  
over or under the living or the dead. The endless torrent  
tears all ages through both spheres  
always and in both sounds over them.

Finally they need us no longer, the early departed,  
they wean themselves gently from earth, as one outgrows  
the mild breasts of a mother. But we, who so desire  
vast mysteries, whose grief so often  
springs in blissful progress: can we exist without them?  
Is the myth pointless, how once, in the mourning for Linos,  
music's first wager broke the nerveless drought,  
and how the terrified space, which an almost godlike boy  
suddenly left forever, first struck in the void  
that other vibration, which now overwhelms us,  
and comforts, and helps.

Alison Croggon

## The Duino Elegies: The Fourth Elegy

O trees of life, where's winter?  
We are not one. Are not intelligent  
as flocking birds. Outstripped and late,  
we hurl ourselves into sudden winds  
and fall down into apathetic pools.  
Bloom and wither meet in us.  
And somewhere still roam lions who understand  
in their majesty, nothing of impotence.

But for us, when we assert one thing wholly,  
it's at the other's palpable expense. Enmity  
is what follows. Don't lovers tread  
always on edges, one into the other,  
which promise them width, pursuit and home?  
There for the blink of an eye becoming a sketch,  
a ground of contrast arduously prepared,  
to aid perception; only then can we  
distinguish it. We don't know the contours  
of feeling, only what forms it from outside.  
Who hasn't sat timidly before his own heart's curtain?  
It flings itself up: the scenery is parting.  
Easy to understand. The familiar garden,  
slightly swaying: then first of all the dancer.  
Not him. Enough. And if he acts too lightly  
he's just disguised, he turns into a bourgeois  
going home through the kitchen.  
I'll not have these half-filled masks,  
rather the puppet. That's full. I'll endure  
the skin and the wire and its sight  
that's all outlooking. Here. I'm waiting.  
Even if the footlights go out, even if they  
say to me: Nothing more - , even if the stage  
breathes out grey draughts of void,  
even if none of my silent forebears  
will sit with me, no woman, not even  
the boy with the brown-eyed squint.  
I'll stay anyway. It's always a spectacle.

Am I not right? You, to whom life with me  
tasted so bitter, sipping mine, father,  
that first thickened infusion of my force,  
always bigger sips as I grew,  
and busy with its aftertaste of such strange  
future, tested my covert gaze, -  
You, father, often since your death  
my inmost hope is your fear for me,  
giving up death's equanimity, empires  
of equanimity, for my bitten destiny,  
am I not right? And you, am I not right,  
that you loved me for that little beginning  
love for you, which I always drove away,  
because the space in your countenance overflowed,

there as I loved you, to worldspace,  
and you were no longer there. When it moves me  
to wait in front of the puppet stage, no,  
gazing so intensely that as my gaze  
at last swings up, an angel is forced down  
as an actor, shredding the skins.  
Angel and puppet: that's finally drama.  
Then what we're always dividing while we're here  
comes together. Then emerges  
the circle of all mutability out of our  
first seasons. Then the angel plays  
over and under us. Look, don't the dying  
imagine the whole pretext of everything  
is what we achieve here? Everything  
is not itself. O hours of childhood,  
behind those figures was more than just  
a past, and before us was not the future.  
We grew of course, and sometimes we pushed  
ourselves to grow up quickly, half to please  
those others who had no more than their bigness.  
And yet in our solitude we were  
amused with duration, and stood there  
in the interstices between world and toy,  
on a place which from the earliest beginning  
was founded for a pure process.

Who shows a child what he is? Who places  
him in his constellations and puts in his hand  
the measure of distance? Who makes the childish death  
out of grey bread grown hard, or leaves  
it in his round mouth, like the core  
of a beautiful apple? . . . Murderers  
are easy to understand. But this: death,  
the whole of death, even before life so  
soft to hold and so unmalignant,  
is indescribable.

Alison Croggon

## The Duino Elegies: The Ninth Elegy

Why, when it approaches, the interval of life  
surges forward, as laurel, a little darker than all  
other green, with tiny waves on every  
leaf edge (like a smiling wind) -: why then  
must we be human - and, shunning destiny,  
long for destiny ...

Oh, not because there is happiness,  
that hurried gain so close to loss.  
Not out of curiosity, nor for the heart's use  
which was also in the laurel .....

But because being here is so much and all that is here  
seems to desire us, these vanishings, that so strangely  
approach us. Us, the most vanishing. Each thing once,  
only once. Once and no more. And we also  
once. Never again. But this  
once was real, even if only once:  
earthly and real, shining beyond revocation.

And so we compel ourselves and will to achieve it,  
will to hold in our simple hands,  
in the generous glance and in speechless hearts.  
Will to become it. To give to whom? We'd love  
to keep it forever. Ah, to that other dimension,  
woe, what can be taken there? Not that intuitive sight, learnt here  
so slowly, and nothing that happened here. Nothing.  
Thus the sorrows. Thus, most of all, the weight of being,  
thus love's slow unfolding - thus  
the purely unsayable. But later,  
under the stars, what then: they are better unsaid.  
Yet the wanderer brings from the mountain edge  
not a handful of speechless earth, but a word  
hard-won, absolute, the yellow and blue  
gentian. Perhaps we are here to say: house,  
bridge, spring, gate, jug, fruit-tree, window -  
at most: column, tower ... But to say, you understand,  
oh to say in such a way that these things never  
meant so intensely to be. Isn't the secret cunning  
of this reticent earth, when she urges lovers,  
simply that each and each rejoice in their feeling?  
Threshold: what is it for two  
lovers, that they should slightly wear down  
the older threshold of that door, they too, after so many before them  
and in the future ....., lightly.

Here is the sayable time, here its home.  
Speak and confess. More than ever  
things fall away, our experiences, as  
they are driven out and replaced by an imageless act.  
Act under crusts that will split whenever  
the business inside outgrows them and finds other outlines.  
Between the hammer endures  
the heart, as the tongue

between the teeth, that yet  
nevertheless still praises.

Praise the world to the angel, not the unsayable, to him  
you can't brag of magnificent beatitude: in the world  
where he so feelingly feels, you are a novice. So show  
him the simple, formed from generation to generation,  
which lives as a part of ourselves near the hand and in looking.  
Tell him the Things. He will stand astonished, as you stood  
beside the roper in Rome or by the Egyptian potter.  
Show him how happy a thing can be, how innocent and ours,  
how even complaining grief purely decides on a form,  
serves as a thing, or dies into a thing, - and beyond  
approaches the bliss of a violin. And these things, which live  
by departure, understand that you celebrate them; transitory,  
surely they rescue us, the most transient.  
They want us to change them wholly in our invisible hearts  
into - o endlessly - into ourselves! which finally also we are.

Earth, isn't this what you want: invisibly  
rising within us? Isn't your dream  
just once to be invisible? Earth! Invisible!  
What, if not transformation, is your urgent order?  
Earth, my love, I will. Oh faith, my yielding to you needs  
no more of your springs, one,  
ah, only one is already too much for my blood.  
I've been namelessly yours from the very beginning.  
You were always right, and your holiest insight  
is this intimate death.  
See, I live. On what? Neither childhood nor the future  
dwindles ..... Supernumerous being  
springs in my heart.

Alison Croggon

## The Duino Elegies: The Second Elegy

Every angel is terrible. And yet, alas,  
when I hear of you, deadly birds of the soul,  
I desire you. How long since the days of Tobias,  
when one of the radiant would stand at the plain front door,  
slightly disguised for the journey, no longer alarming  
(a young man to the young man looking curiously out).  
If the archangel, perilous behind the stars, trod now  
only one step down here: our own hearts  
beating so high would kill us. Who are you?

Early blessings, you coddle creation's  
mountain ranges, the red dawning edges  
of all making. - Pollen of blossoming godliness,  
hinges of light, corridors, stairs, thrones,  
expanses of being, shields of rapture, tumults  
of stormily joyous feelings and suddenly, singly,  
mirrors: which draw up again their own flowing beauty  
into their own faces.

For we, when we feel, evaporate; ah, we  
breathe ourselves out and away; from ember to ember  
giving a fainter smell. Here perhaps someone might say  
yes, you enter my blood, this room, the spring  
feels itself with you ... it's no use, he can't hold us,  
we dwindle in and around him. And those who are beautiful,  
o who holds them back? Appearance continuously  
enters and leaves their gaze. As dew on the early grass  
what is ours rises from us, as the heat of a  
steaming dish. O smile, where do you go? O upturned glance:  
new, warm, vanishing wave of hearts -;  
alas, that's what we are. Does the universe  
in which we dissolve, taste of us? Do angels capture  
only their realness, streaming towards them,  
or sometimes, in error, a little  
of our being? Are we only diffused  
in their features, like a vagueness in the gaze  
of pregnant women? Unremarked in the vortex  
of their recoil to themselves. (How should they remark it.)

Lovers might, if they understood, speak  
amazedly in the night air. For it seems that everything  
hides us. See, the trees are; the houses  
we inhabit still persist. Only we  
pass everything by like an exchange of air.  
And everything unites to conceal us, half in  
shame perhaps and half in unsayable hope.

Lovers, you, who fulfil yourselves in each other,  
I ask about us. You seize yourselves. Have you proofs?  
See, what happens to me is that my hands  
move within one another, or my used  
expression considers itself in them. That gives me a little

sensation. Yet who would gamble existence on that?  
But you, who swell each other in rapture, until overcome you  
implore: no more - ; you who under each other's hands  
grow ample as vintage grapes;  
vanishing sometimes, only because the other  
wholly seizes the upper hand: I ask you about us. I know  
you touch so blessedly because the caress persists,  
because the place doesn't fade, that you, fondlings,  
conceal; because beneath it you feel  
pure duration. So your embrace almost  
promises eternity. And yet, when you endure  
the first frightened glance, the yearning at the window,  
and the first walk together, once through the garden:  
lovers, do you yet exist? When you join your mouths  
one to the other -: drink on drink:  
o how oddly the drinkers elude their action.

Weren't you amazed by the prudence of human gesture  
on attic steles? weren't love and departure placed  
so lightly on shoulders, that they seemed to be made  
from stuff other than us? Think of the hands,  
how they rest without weight, despite the strength of the torso.  
Those masters knew this: we are so big  
we encompass this, and may touch it so; the gods lean  
hard against us. But this is the business of gods.  
Could we but find our own strip of orchard,  
contained, pure, narrow, human,  
between river and rock. Then would our heart overstep us  
even as theirs. And we can no longer  
gaze after it into those soothing figures, nor in  
those godly bodies, where it more modestly expands.

Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by Alison Croggon

Alison Croggon

## The Duino Elegies: The Seventh Elegy

Woo no more, no wooing, outgrowing voice,  
be your natural cry; your cry pure as the bird  
when the heightening seasons lift him up, almost forgetting  
that he is a pitiable animal and not just a single heart  
they fling into brightness, into the ardent sky. You plead  
as wholly as he does, no less - for the yet invisible  
friend to arrive within you, in whose silence an answer  
slowly awakes and warms itself over listening, -  
your venturing touch which kindles feeling.

O and spring comprehends - , there is no place  
which doesn't carry the note of prophecy. First each little  
inquiring sound, which with the gathering stillness  
expansively hushes a purely assenting day.  
Then the steps upward, the call-steps up to the dreamt  
temple of futurity - ; then to the trill, the fountain  
whose urgent jet already grasps its collapse  
in a play of promise ... And before this, the summer.  
Not only all of the summer mornings - not only  
how they change themselves into day and shine of beginning.  
Not only the days, so soft around flowers, and above  
so strong and forceful about the forming trees.  
Not only the prayer of these unfolding powers,  
not only the paths, not only the fields of evening,  
not only, after late storm, the breathing clarities,  
not only approaching sleep, and a prescience, evening ...  
but the nights! But the high  
summer nights, but the stars, the stars of the earth.  
O once to be dead and endlessly know them,  
all the stars: for how, how, how to forget them!

See, there I called for the lover. But not only  
she came ... Out of their fragile graves  
girls came and stood ... How then could I confine,  
how, this continually calling call? The sunken still  
constantly want the earth. - You children, here it means as much  
to wholly feel one thing, as a thousand.  
Don't think that fate is more than the gift of childhood;  
how often you overtake the beloved, panting,  
panting, after the blissful flow, to nothing, to free air.  
Being here is magnificent. You knew it, girls, you also,  
sunk in your seeming lack - in evil  
city alleys suppurating with open rubbish.  
For each there was an hour, maybe not  
even an hour, one measure of time barely  
measurable between two whiles: there she had  
being. All. The vein-full being.  
But we forget so easily what the laughing neighbour  
neither confirms nor envies. We want to possess  
the visible, although the most visible joy  
first gave itself to perception when we transformed it within.

Beloved, world can be nowhere but within. Our lives,  
changing, arrive there. And always the outward  
meanly contracts. Where once was a durable house,  
an abstract structure, wholly imagined,  
stamps itself in the brain.

The zeitgeist forges huge silos of power, extracted  
out of everything, formless as the excited throng.  
It knows the temple no more. Of all the heart's extravagance  
secretly we spare this one. Yes, where only one endures,  
one once petitioned thing, once served, once knelt before -  
holding itself, just as it is, already there in invisibility ...  
Many see it no more, missing their chance  
of building it now within, with pillars and statues, greater!

Each dulled return of the world has such disinherited,  
neither the dawns nor the nights belong to them.  
For nearness is also far from mankind. This must not  
confuse us; the proof within us is strong  
of this yet perceptible form. It once stood beneath us,  
in the midst of destiny, in annihilation, it stood  
in not-knowing-where, as it was, and bent  
stars to itself out of the steady sky. Angel,  
I'll show you, there! In your aspect  
it stands, rescued at last, now finally upright.  
Columns, pylons, the Sphinx, the shoring buttresses  
of domes, grey in the strange, vanishing city.  
Wasn't it miraculous? O Angel, be amazed, because we are,  
o great one, tell how we desired so much, my breath  
cannot encompass such praise. So after all we haven't  
neglected the spaces, these vouchsafed, these,  
our spaces. (How terrifyingly vast they must be  
if they're not swamped by millennia of feelings).  
But a tower was great, surely? O Angel, it was, -  
great, even next to you? Chartres was great - and music  
reached still further and overstepped us. But even only  
a lover, o alone at the nightly window ....  
didn't she reach to your knee - ?

Don't believe that I beg.

Angel, I even beseech you! You don't come. For my call  
is always full of away; against so strong  
a current you cannot advance. Like an outstretched  
arm is my call. And its hand opening  
to the grasp above remains against you  
open, as defence and warning,  
Ungraspable, further on.

Alison Croggon

## The Duino Elegies: The Tenth Elegy

Sometime, leaving this violent vision,  
I'll sing up joy and glory to assenting angels.  
Let none of the clearstruck hammers of my heart  
fail against softening, uncertain or  
rent strings. Let my streaming face  
shine forth; let the plain weeping  
flower. O grieving night, then you become to me  
what love is. Why didn't I kneel before you, inconsolable sisters,  
why not accept you, give my loosening  
within your loosened hair. We, spendthrifts of sorrows.  
How we look away to the sad duration beyond them  
to see if they end. Truly they are but  
our enduring winter leaf, our dark evergreen,  
one of the seasons of the secret year - , not only  
seasons, - are place, settlement, storehouse, ground, home.

How strange, alas, are the streets of the city of pain,  
where in the falsity, uproar becomes a powerful  
silence, and out of the mould of the void outpours,  
bragging its gilded noise, this bursting monument.  
O, how an angel would trample their market of solace,  
and the fenced church, bought ready-made:  
clean and shut and disillusioned as the post on Sunday.  
But outside swirl the edges of carnival.  
Swings of freedom! Divers and jugglers of passion!  
And the embracing happiness of shooting galleries,  
where the trick shot hits the target, fidgeting off  
its tinplate. From applause to chance  
he staggers on; for booths enlist his every curiosity,  
drumming and yelling. Especially  
for adults: money's anatomical reproduction!  
more than just amusement: the genitals of money -  
everything, the whole process - , worth seeing for instruction  
and fertility...

Oh but just outside, over there,  
behind the final hoarding plastered with ads for "Deathless",  
that bitter beer which seems so sweet to drinkers  
who always imbibe it with fresh dissipations,  
just at the back of the hoarding, just behind, it's real.  
Children play and lovers hold one another, - aside,  
earnestly, in the shabby grass, dogs follow nature.  
It draws the youth further; perhaps he loves  
a young Lament. He comes up behind her in the meadows. She says:  
Far away. We live out there...

Where? And the young man  
follows. Her posture moves him. The shoulder, the throat - , perhaps  
her origins are noble. But he leaves her,  
turns away, waves. What's the use? She's just a Lament.

Only the young dead, in that first condition  
of timeless equanimity, that of weaning,  
follow her lovingly. Girls

she awaits and befriends. Gently she shows them what she has on. Pearls of pain and the fine veils of endurance. - She goes with the young men silently.

But where they live, in the valley, one of the older Laments grabs the youth when he questions her: - We were, she says, once a great family, we Lamentations. Our fathers worked the mines there in that huge range; among men sometimes you find a polished fragment of original pain or slaggy petrified rage from an old volcano. Yes, that came from here. Once we were rich. -

And lightly she leads him through the wide landscape of Lament, shows him the temple columns or the ruins of towers, from where the Lament Lords wisely ruled the land. Shows him the high tear trees and fields of blossoming sadness, (the living know them only as gentle foliage): shows him the pastured beasts of mourning, - and sometimes a startled bird, flying straight through their upglance, writes the distant image of its solitary cry. - At evening she leads him on to the graves of the oldest Lamentations, the sibyls and omen masters. But night presses, so they walk more gently, and soon the moon lifts up the sepulchre that watches over everything. Twin to the one of the Nile, the lofty Sphinx - : the secret chambered countenance. And they are awed by the regal head, that forever silently places human vision on the scales of stars.

His sight can't take it, dizzied by early death. But her glance from behind the pschent frightens an owl. And its slow downstroke brushes along the cheek, the one with the ripest roundness, sketches softly in the new death-given hearing, over a doubly upflapped page, the indescribable outline.

And higher, the stars. New. The stars of the Painlands. Slowly the Lamentation names them: "Here, see: the Rider, the Staff, and that fuller constellation they call Fruitwreath. Then, further, towards the Pole, Cradle, Way, The Burning Book, Doll, Window. But in the southern sky, pure as the interior of a blessed hand, the clear radiant M that signifies mothers..."

But the dead must go on, and silently the older Lament

brings him as far as the gorge,  
where the source of joy  
shimmers in moonlight. She names it  
with reverence, saying: "Among men  
it's a sustaining stream."

They stand at the foot of the range.  
And there she embraces him, weeping.

Alone then he climbs the mountains of primal pain.  
And his step never once rings on his soundless destiny.

But if they awakened a likeness within us, the endlessly dead,  
they'd show us perhaps the catkins hanging  
from empty hazels, or  
would mean rain falling on dark earth in the early year. -

And we, who think of happiness  
climbing, would feel the compassion  
which almost confounds us,  
when happiness falls.

Alison Croggon

## The Duino Elegies: The Third Elegy

One thing to sing the beloved. Another, alas,  
that hidden guilty rivergod of blood.  
Her distantly known boy, her lover, what does he know  
of the lords of lust, who often, out of his loneliness,  
before the girl soothes him, often as if she doesn't exist,  
overflow, ah, from what unrecognisable, heaving the godhead  
up, rousing the night to unending uproar.  
O the blood's Neptune, his awesome trident!  
O the dark blast of his breast from the winding shell!  
Hear how the night hollows itself. You stars,  
doesn't the lover's delight in the face of his loved one  
stem from you? Doesn't his ardent insight  
into her pure sight come from the purest star?

Not for you, alas, nor for his mother  
is the taut bow of his expectation.  
Not for you, girl who feels him, not for you  
does his lip bend to fertile expression.  
Did you really think that your lighter appearance  
would shake him, you, who step like an early wind?  
Of course you terrified his heart; but older terrors  
hurled into him at the shock of touch.  
Call him - you can't call him back from those dark companions.  
Of course, he wants to, he springs; lightened he settles  
himself in your homely heart and grasps and begins himself.  
But did he ever begin himself?  
Mother, you made him small, it was you who began him;  
to you he was new, you bent over those new  
eyes the friendly world and averted the strange.  
Where, ah where are the years when just for him  
with your slender form you trod back the boiling chaos?  
You hid so much from him; that nightly suspected room  
you made harmless: out of your heart's full refuge  
you mixed human space into his night-space.  
Not within darkness, no, in your nearer being  
you set the nightlight, and it shone as if out of friendship.  
Nowhere a creak your smile didn't explain,  
as if you'd long known when the plank would behave so.  
And he heard you and relaxed. You managed so much  
tenderly standing there; his tall mantled destiny stepped  
behind the cupboard, and in the folds of the curtain  
lay neatly what so easily slips, his unruly future.

And he himself, as he lay, relieved, under  
sleepy lids your lightening form  
loosening sweetly into the foretaste of sleep - :  
seeming protection. But inside: what checked,  
what hindered inside him the floods of origin?  
Ah, there was no caution in that sleeper; sleeping,  
but dreaming, but in fever: he sank himself.  
He, new, fearful, how he was tangled  
in the long vines of inner event

winding already to intricate patterns, to strangling growths, to bestial predatory forms. How he gave himself up - . Loved. Loved his innerness, his interior wilderness, these ur-forests within him, on whose mute collapse stood his greenlit heart. Loved. Left it, and went down to his roots and out to immense beginning where his small birth was already outlived. Lovingly lifted down into older blood, the ravines where horror lay, gorged with his fathers. And every terror knew him, winking, was so understanding. Yes, atrocity smiled. . . Seldom have you smiled so tenderly, mother. How could he not love what smiled at him. He loved it before you, for even as you bore him it loosened inside the waters that lighten the seed.

See, we don't love like flowers, for one single year; we raise, when we love, immemorial sap in our arms. O girl, this: that we love inside us, not one, a possible, but numberless brewings; not a single child, but the fathers who root as ruinous mountains in the ground of us; but the parched riverbeds of earlier mothers - ; but the entire noiseless landscape under its clouded or clear destiny: these, girl, forestalled you.

And you yourself, what do you know - , you coax deep pasts up in your lover. What feelings swelled out of mutable substance? What women hated you there? What sinister men did you rouse in the veins of boys? Dead children reached towards you. . . O softly, softly, make love for him, a solid day's work, - lead him close to the garden, give him the night's excess. . . . .  
Restrain him. . . . .

Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by Alison Croggon

Alison Croggon

## **The Visitor**

On whom should we meditate as the visitor? Which of the many is she? Is she that by which we smite, retain, caress, hoodwink, abide, separate the blind mole from the horse piss?

Or is she that other, living in the mind or the intellect as deformation, harmony, diligence, modesty, mischief, mortification, delight, vigilance, flattery, amazement, barnacles, villainy, traffic, innocence, metal, corn, wine or oil: all names for those many intelligences?

First she becomes the brine of the astrologer, which is light gathered from all the limbs of the ocean. She nourishes herself within herself as brine. When she injects that brine into a man, she herself is born. That is her first pearl.

The brine merges in the man's body. Because it becomes his body it does not harm him. He nourishes the eye of the woman within himself. Repulse him, for he is crediting the eye.

Before and after the drowning of the eye, she blesses the music, blesses herself. She lives in her music: that is her second pearl.

The visitor being the fool over again, carries the canker of the family, and the fool having completed her mischance, charms and and is cloven again. That is her third pearl.

The Sage said, when lying in the pool: I understood how the knaves twangled. They put me in that hundred-branched hundred-blossomed isle, but I flounced merrily, I flounced like a sparrow!

The Sage flew to the sea-marge, loved all that she troubled, attained the plot of peacocks, became a wager: yes, became a wager.

(Thanks to The Tempest and the Upanishads)

Alison Croggon

## **What I am saying**

what I am saying is  
assuming nothing  
locate the parameters  
sight hearing touch  
what am I saying  
cliché as violation  
fear as unbeing  
the voyeur flays  
to aphasic wreckage  
seduction is always  
dishonest / therefore  
liminal gestures  
dissolve in cities  
of representation  
the joke of culture  
an abstract capital  
a smile perhaps  
cheating the stockmarket  
despite all that  
a hesitant outline  
drawn and withdrawn  
something specific  
in the peripheries  
orchids budding  
their luminous rhythms  
what am I saying  
what am I not saying

Alison Croggon

## Working Note – On lyric

Must I not begin to trust somewhere?  
Wittgenstein, 'On Certainty'

In the end, only love matters.  
Picasso

[...]  
3

a poem is not a mirror but a breath in the world the world is inhaled translated and exhaled

a poem is not a representation but a mimicry of relationships in the world  
it is in motion as a gesture is

lyric is not a category but a dimension of a poem

lyric might be thought of as the field of force of a poem

the conditions of its occurrence are potentially infinite

the freedom of the present of a poem is inverse to the extent to which the lyric dimension

is eschewed [...]

5

touch is the seed of feeling

the sense of touch is the root sense by which we know ourselves in the world

the light which touches our retina invokes sight the soundwaves moving through air

touch the instruments of our ears the molecules of matter touch us into taste and smell

touch is the first thing we know and the last thing we know

it is the beginning and end of aesthetic and the beginning and end of our humanity

the poet is blind not in order to see but to feel

lyric is the poetry of touch

the vibrations of sound on the organs of the ear translate the imagined distance of worded

image into the intimacy of touch

we respond to those vibrations even in the imaginary silence of reading

when we are touched by lyric we wake to the intolerable beauty of our world

6

lyric is a metaphor for feeling

the truth of lyric is particular to each poem and resides in the accuracy of its relationship

to feeling

this truth may only be evaluated in the present in which lyric is encountered

it is impossible to predict or control

feeling is our vibrational responses to our relatednesses to our world

it is as incorrigible as pain and encompasses the totality of our responses moment to moment

it is the consequence of the corporeality of each of us and as complex and mortal as

our  
corporeality  
a poem seeks to inhabit our corporeality but knows it cannot express it

7

lyric is indefensible  
it neither seeks nor answers an argument but exists in the vibratory exchange of feeling  
the incorrigibility of feeling within lyric breathes unease into all totalities  
even if all a person's thoughts were legible to another that other would still not understand the felt world of that person  
the felt world of that person is secret  
lyric does not disclose its secret its secret is enclosed and retreats as lyric is interrogated  
it exists as a resonance which may resonate in the present in which it is read or heard  
a poem may not be paraphrased or explained it may only be read again  
it is the dimension of lyric which cannot be paraphrased  
its meanings reside acutely in the relationships of the parts of lyric each to each other  
lyric is the same question as "I am"  
lyric is neither rational nor irrational as the rational has no ability to explain the incorrigibility  
of feeling  
feeling is not irrational although its consequences are sometimes expressed in irrationalities  
it has this in common with reason: that reason is forever without ground

8

the I of a lyric is neither a self nor a not-self  
the I is lyric's protection against totalities for the I is aware of its incompleteness  
the illusion of the totality of the self was always a misunderstanding  
it is the mistake of those made uneasy by the lyric's assertion of feeling  
the I is what a person makes when translated into feeling which is released from the constraints of exterior gaze  
lyric is made when that feeling is translated into language  
the relationship of words within lyric are the means by which it mimics the reality of feeling,  
which is how we know our relatedness to the world  
the translations of lyric are always made in the humility of approximation  
the metaphor is the most precise means of approximation  
to unite two different things in one metaphor is to make a third thing which is at once neither and both of those things  
a metaphor can resonate across probabilities in a directed way which mitigates the self's control in either the writer or the reader  
each lyric has negations which are particular to itself  
a lyric's negation is simultaneously an assertion  
the existence of what is negated is felt in the present of the one whom lyric's presence inhabits  
the gaps or the silences in the lyric are as important as the words  
they notate the relationships between the words and indicate the lyric's relationship to reality

reality is what always lies beyond the lyric  
it is the corporeality of the people who encounter the poem and the details of their relationships to their worlds  
reality is what the lyric encounters when it enters the present of another person in another time or when it emerges in the present of the poet  
the reality of a particular poem is always changing  
lyric is not reality  
it is real

9

lyric  
is the eroticism of language  
the consciousness of lyric is the consciousness of love  
in lyric the subject and object relate equally  
the subject is a consequence of the object and the object is a consequence of the subject  
as the distinction between subject and object is dissolved in the embrace of lovers whose discrete selves dissolve on a tide of sensation  
in love the self embraces the otherness of the other but the other remains unknown  
in lyric the poem embraces the feelingness of feeling but the feeling remains unknown  
the feeling is the secret of the poem just as the otherness of the other is the other's secret  
feeling may only exist in its other presents when it resonates within the present of the person who reads the poem  
this resonance occurs independently of the conscious desire of the reader or the writer of  
the poem  
a relationship of power is negated in the lyric  
being negated it is simultaneously asserted  
the assertion of power in a lyric is the assertion of the power of feeling  
it is a tautology, just as the statement 'I love you' is a tautology  
lyric is radically redundant

10

lyric  
is berated for its lack of reality  
although it is precisely its artifice which permits it to be real and precisely its lack of reality which permits it to be courteous towards reality  
it is blamed for its aestheticism  
as if the conditions of feeling were understood enough to bypass their denials  
it is condemned for its exclusions  
despite its invitation to the present to open up to the world  
it is dismissed for its beauty  
as if beauty were a dimension which did not belong to everything  
it is considered irrelevant  
as love is considered a cliché  
it is attacked for its glorification of the self  
although lyric doesn't have a self  
it cannot be a commodity  
as one cannot consume a condition of feeling

lyric can redeem and explain nothing  
it is no consolation  
it is useless

11

Nevertheless

Alison Croggon

## Working Note – On lyric

Must I not begin to trust somewhere?  
Wittgenstein, 'On Certainty'

In the end, only love matters.  
Picasso

[...]  
3

a poem is not a mirror but a breath in the world the world is inhaled translated and exhaled

a poem is not a representation but a mimicry of relationships in the world  
it is in motion as a gesture is

lyric is not a category but a dimension of a poem

lyric might be thought of as the field of force of a poem

the conditions of its occurrence are potentially infinite

the freedom of the present of a poem is inverse to the extent to which the lyric dimension

is eschewed [...]

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touch is the seed of feeling

the sense of touch is the root sense by which we know ourselves in the world

the light which touches our retina invokes sight the soundwaves moving through air  
touch the instruments of our ears the molecules of matter touch us into taste and smell

touch is the first thing we know and the last thing we know

it is the beginning and end of aesthetic and the beginning and end of our humanity

the poet is blind not in order to see but to feel

lyric is the poetry of touch

the vibrations of sound on the organs of the ear translate the imagined distance of worded

image into the intimacy of touch

we respond to those vibrations even in the imaginary silence of reading

when we are touched by lyric we wake to the intolerable beauty of our world

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lyric is a metaphor for feeling

the truth of lyric is particular to each poem and resides in the accuracy of its relationship

to feeling

this truth may only be evaluated in the present in which lyric is encountered

it is impossible to predict or control

feeling is our vibrational responses to our relatednesses to our world

it is as incorrigible as pain and encompasses the totality of our responses moment to moment

it is the consequence of the corporeality of each of us and as complex and mortal as

our  
corporeality  
a poem seeks to inhabit our corporeality but knows it cannot express it

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lyric is indefensible  
it neither seeks nor answers an argument but exists in the vibratory exchange of feeling  
the incorrigibility of feeling within lyric breathes unease into all totalities  
even if all a person's thoughts were legible to another that other would still not understand the felt world of that person  
the felt world of that person is secret  
lyric does not disclose its secret its secret is enclosed and retreats as lyric is interrogated  
it exists as a resonance which may resonate in the present in which it is read or heard  
a poem may not be paraphrased or explained it may only be read again  
it is the dimension of lyric which cannot be paraphrased  
its meanings reside acutely in the relationships of the parts of lyric each to each other  
lyric is the same question as "I am"  
lyric is neither rational nor irrational as the rational has no ability to explain the incorrigibility  
of feeling  
feeling is not irrational although its consequences are sometimes expressed in irrationalities  
it has this in common with reason: that reason is forever without ground

8

the I of a lyric is neither a self nor a not-self  
the I is lyric's protection against totalities for the I is aware of its incompleteness  
the illusion of the totality of the self was always a misunderstanding  
it is the mistake of those made uneasy by the lyric's assertion of feeling  
the I is what a person makes when translated into feeling which is released from the constraints of exterior gaze  
lyric is made when that feeling is translated into language  
the relationship of words within lyric are the means by which it mimics the reality of feeling,  
which is how we know our relatedness to the world  
the translations of lyric are always made in the humility of approximation  
the metaphor is the most precise means of approximation  
to unite two different things in one metaphor is to make a third thing which is at once neither and both of those things  
a metaphor can resonate across probabilities in a directed way which mitigates the self's control in either the writer or the reader  
each lyric has negations which are particular to itself  
a lyric's negation is simultaneously an assertion  
the existence of what is negated is felt in the present of the one whom lyric's presence inhabits  
the gaps or the silences in the lyric are as important as the words  
they notate the relationships between the words and indicate the lyric's relationship to reality

reality is what always lies beyond the lyric  
it is the corporeality of the people who encounter the poem and the details of their relationships to their worlds  
reality is what the lyric encounters when it enters the present of another person in another time or when it emerges in the present of the poet  
the reality of a particular poem is always changing  
lyric is not reality  
it is real

9

lyric  
is the eroticism of language  
the consciousness of lyric is the consciousness of love  
in lyric the subject and object relate equally  
the subject is a consequence of the object and the object is a consequence of the subject  
as the distinction between subject and object is dissolved in the embrace of lovers whose discrete selves dissolve on a tide of sensation  
in love the self embraces the otherness of the other but the other remains unknown  
in lyric the poem embraces the feelingness of feeling but the feeling remains unknown  
the feeling is the secret of the poem just as the otherness of the other is the other's secret  
feeling may only exist in its other presents when it resonates within the present of the person who reads the poem  
this resonance occurs independently of the conscious desire of the reader or the writer of  
the poem  
a relationship of power is negated in the lyric  
being negated it is simultaneously asserted  
the assertion of power in a lyric is the assertion of the power of feeling  
it is a tautology, just as the statement 'I love you' is a tautology  
lyric is radically redundant

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lyric  
is berated for its lack of reality  
although it is precisely its artifice which permits it to be real and precisely its lack of reality which permits it to be courteous towards reality  
it is blamed for its aestheticism  
as if the conditions of feeling were understood enough to bypass their denials  
it is condemned for its exclusions  
despite its invitation to the present to open up to the world  
it is dismissed for its beauty  
as if beauty were a dimension which did not belong to everything  
it is considered irrelevant  
as love is considered a cliché  
it is attacked for its glorification of the self  
although lyric doesn't have a self  
it cannot be a commodity  
as one cannot consume a condition of feeling

lyric can redeem and explain nothing  
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