

## Beginning with a thought from an American Poet

Such is the goodness of many a sick thing  
that my grip on you is shaky. I can't turn back  
the shadow of a sundial or snap cold bones.

My crowded house looks empty, but isn't.  
Individuals smell of my clothes, my furniture.  
They smell of you!

They photocopy and stick heads,  
legs and arms and naked torsos of you  
all over my walls. They

dangle your image from my ceiling –  
glossy banners flapping in my face. In every room  
I'm constantly aware of being stalked

of being muscled aside and my food taken.  
These hangers-on spill outside on bright cold days  
to drug themselves up

on the emptiness of streets, the stripped  
bareness of gardens, the skeletal indifference  
of alcoholic messiahs. You are constantly

in front of me – the horizon lying down  
a silhouette of contours, of mountains.  
You're there to be reached, to be fondled like a stone

and dipped into the sun's red paint.  
Such is the transience of many a good thing  
that I can't hold you like I used to.

Others who run with the air I breathe  
also run with your eyes, your hair  
your long athletic limbs.

They run with shrieks, chasing your laughter. They  
smell of you – always taking you from me  
taking the tattered shreds of a girl into the night. And

nightly I grab my share of the industry  
that is you. In my house there's still much  
to love about you, enough to put on display

to be repeated, enough for everybody  
to feel their eyes watering as if you were a virgin  
made in a grotto for a special order.

# Through the Black Window

Through the eye of a window  
I tumble outwards  
like a sheet of newspaper, or a gymnast

cartwheeling  
into a starched-white  
star.

Caught in the wind, I  
somersault over houses,  
plant

a flag on a black beach  
where the sand dunes  
nudge bones into the grass

bones that once  
propped up sheep, that helped  
whiten hills. My flag

wears a hat. The sun  
bends a shadow. The wind  
plays with lizards

skittering on sand. A city, multi-  
lensed, like a camera-mad sightseer  
leans over the sea

dripping contaminants.  
I paint the windows  
black.

In this house, rooms  
survive on little light. When doors  
open, a fine line of gold

separates the nights, the days,  
the seasons. It separates families  
from those who breathe, from those

who can't,  
from those who only cough in the waves.  
I work the landscape into a sheet of

corrugated iron and paint it black.  
I let the yellowness of the moon  
run thinly.

A neon Aurora Australis  
electrifies the clouds – colouring  
Coca Cola on my clothes. Time to

track back up the  
black beach. Somersault  
in reverse.

I roll up the flag. There are gaps on the horizon  
wide enough for ships to fit through  
for albatrosses which look like people.

On a cliff-top, there's this house  
with a broken window and a solitary light  
moving shapes from room to room.

## The New China Café

These backyards are more like paddy fields  
or urban plots for the propagation of endless menus.

The Yangtze flows by my door, yellow

death-giving, frothy with waterlogged  
dreams. Behind me, sunlight

wraps itself around a midden I often visit.

People who live here  
in their strangely-built houses,

some splintered in ruins, some still temporary shelters

of wood and glass and leaning at all sorts of angles,  
these people I know.

But that's okay. I can work with them who are here

who are related, or who feel they're lighter than air.  
Across the river,

through trees, the red glittering tubes

of the New China Café advertise good hot meals  
at very low prices. The locals

scuttle about like dotterels on sand – they overpopulate

footpaths with laundries, eateries  
and entertainment shops. I've a lot to say myself

about what Confucius says

on shifting his gene pool  
closer to frozen continents of ancient water.

But here we gather at the same place

to feed, talk and sing. We act according to the shove  
of seasons. I often visit to look at the river

to comment on the other side –

the bright lights, the stuffed-full apartments  
the prattle of a language first heard (along with Swahili

and Urdu) on radio, then television. I've spent hours here

and nothing seems to happen  
then someone stands at the smell of rain.

## Fish Don't Care

Told by a boy to smack  
Henry in the mouth ... I do. So

where to now for this bloke  
sheathed in white-lacquered skin. Where to

next? Henry whistles through full blubbery  
lips ... spits out full-bloodied words at me.

Smiles.

Where to now? I ask. Which way is north,

is south, is the long  
curving road to the ocean

where fish don't care if I'm white/he's white or  
brown or dark as a sunburnt Indian

from Viti Levu. Where to for Henry  
bruised and messy as a dropped apple.

The sound of the sea  
is a long way off and Henry wants to

tell me a story,  
thinks I've got time to listen

is arrogant enough  
even to think I like stories. Henry

spits his words in blood across my shirt.  
He doesn't understand the meaning of *No*.

He was brought up on bread and golden syrup.  
He smiles

because that's what he always does. He wipes  
red snot across his sleeves. Told by his brother to

smack me in the teeth ... he doesn't. We  
stand on a beach of stones

listening together but to different waves. So  
you want to hear my story?

He asks. He smiles. He  
spits clearly.