

Dyoondalup

Nandi Chinna

In the blinding absence of light
the guttural booming
of a pair of boobook owls
echoes across the dark slash of the river.

Standing on Dyoondalup,
with the moon breathing coppery waves
along its path of reflection,
I scrape a handful of sand
and toss it into the galaxy of the estuary
where clusters of stars shine
through infinite generations
on Noongar Boodja.

In the morning scribbles of light
snake across the coruscating surface.
A flock of cormorants,
like black arrows slicing east,
follow schools of fish
through time and chronicle,
through whitecaps worrying at the beach,
a gnawing skirr of seasons repeating.

Two black swans,
heads under-wing,

float like burned-out pyres,
islands of fire drifting through millennia
on Derbarl Yerrigan swelling with sea wind.

Walter's Café, aromas of bacon and eggs
float out through open windows,
champagne for breakfast while the slatey river
continues its work of moving tides,
churning sand, birthing gastropods,
slooshing and slapping against shorelines,
renovating its trajectory slowly
every thousand years a little less a little more,
sluicing out to its grandmother beyond Wadjemup,
unfathomable depths
where luminous creatures
glow in bosky darkness.

On Jenalup
smoke haze fugs the opposite bank,
rocks polished slick by hands and feet,
find the sweet spot, grip and hurl
into the gaps between mortality.

Where the drone of boats' engines
judder into your body,
and into the body of the pelican
fishing at the base of the cliffs,
throb into limestone tunnels

carved under the land by centuries of tides
before the river's mouth
was exploded open.

And now wind gusting from the west
rocks the yellow buoys,
goosebumps the river's skin
clang jangling masts.

A dolphin shadows me in my kayak,
it's mate and young one
stroke the red hull of my boat,
an instagram moment but I don't,
I drift with the current and watch

a darter plunge into the middle of the scrum.
Like a circus performer it tosses
a fish into the air and lets it tumble
headfirst into its beak.

Jenalup, pillars stand like sentinels,
globular, gritty, crumbling away,
tender memorials
to the crustaceans they are made of,
the roots of many generations of us
clinging in crevices,
until we stop asking
about the meaning of the river

and instead think of ourselves
as those who are being questioned.

In response, an osprey
pierces the lens of the sky
from her tuart perch on the edge
of all form and its lingering memory.

I turn to the hill, a secret woodland,
stepping in through the back-end,
djiti djiti sings into the wake
of my human rambling.

Old Bibbulman trees still generous,
shed seed, exhale oxygen
a memoir of birth and death,
eggs and feathers riffling above
the footsteps of Noongar, Yok, Kulunga.

Clatter brattle my footsteps
under Marri trees
sliding on honky nuts
snicking over tuart cupolas,
piles of mulch carry their ghosts
of cambium and sap, phloem and xylem,
cast phantom shadows over the golf course.

As the day begins to warm

a slow unfolding of picnic blankets,
the darmoorluk rings out above ferries, planes.

In the distance the river glowers
towards the apparition of a city
that may or may not exist.

Rhythms of luminance blow across Doontanboro - Melville Water,
red-necked stints, the size of a matchbox
have flown all the way from Siberia just to be here
flickering along the intertidal zone.

If we listen,
we can hear the sheoak
reciting the lives of the curlew sandpiper,
osprey, and great egret,
herring and cobbler,
Bibbulman and newcomers,
whispering, a soft place to lay down in.

And now as the sun goes down again,
the river beach is crowded with devotees,
letting their intimate secrets go,
leaving the complex detritus
of their lives discarded on the beach
where a benevolent tide will wash
away joys and triumphs,
sorrows and laments.

We leap into the aquamarine water
coldly fizzing, breathless,
we are here, we are here
giddy with the life of the estuary.

In the deep horizon of these words,
I dive into the mouth of a shark,
it's razor teeth scrawl marks
on the house of my chest
which the river deities have broken open.

Using my body as a marker
I sink into Derbarl Yerrigan,
limbs like weed, blood full of sediment
inscribing myself into the offshore drift
I wonder how words
can be the world?

A lineage of survival
etched with the tooth of a shark,
the tail fin of a black bream
or the slow progression of a mollusc
across a rock where a pelican
has nested and smeared its own
scumbling poetry.

Attempt to crush the world into a word,
and it escapes the page,

blows away in a gale,
laughs from the mouth of a magpie
who croons the particular theme song
of its own small clan.

World dives from Jenalup,
vanishing under the swaying,
susurrating river
to emerge metres away,
smudging inscriptions of salt and tears
on the face of the word.

To comprehend that the river
can never be claimed by words,
we can celebrate the never captured
in the salty breath that quivers in our bodies
when we stand in this place
at the edge of words.