

PETRA
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with
THE SIMPLIFIED WORLD
and
THE INCOMING TIDE

A Hunger

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THE SIMPLIFIED WORLD

and

THE INCOMING TIDE

PETRA WHITE



JOHN LEONARD PRESS

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G. Masel

Petra White

Petra White was born in Adelaide in 1975 and has lived since 1998 in Melbourne, where she works for a government department. Her first book, *The Incoming Tide*, was shortlisted in the Queensland Premier's Literary awards and for the ACT Judith Wright award. Her second, *The Simplified World*, was shortlisted in the Adelaide Festival awards, and the ACT Judith Wright award, and shared the 2010 Grace Leven prize. She holds a Master's degree in Public Policy and Management.

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A Hunger

for
A stylized musical notation logo featuring a treble clef, a sharp sign, and a large, ornate letter 'R'.

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(New poems 2014)

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I

Thirteen Love Poems

About Desire

Some smouldering secret, that scarcely
holds its place in our two lives.

Nothing of the ease
of established lovers
dreamt to memory.

My body still fresh with him, not yet
longing all over again.

No promises, but already
something to forfeit.

What is he that has me,
making me think he owes me his self,
the whole heat of his presence,
taking my appetite and
stripping me thin,
eating my thoughts.

For Love of Petrarch

So turtles also love and love is common, but
this is mine and no-one's ever known
it or its like – unique and coddled as
a real child whose charm no others see –

and my sudden secret smiles all day are truest
shafts of noble sunlight breaking
on the world and each poor creature
who shrivels outside all this.

And comfortable love, trying to creep
in and spread itself out and smooth off
this unbearable newness that yet
I'll bear: how hard to grip

the future tilted, *will I see you, not see you,*
*will you be where I am?*² One crate of doubt,
and behind around before
is terrible otherness of the world that goes on,
those giant people who survive
without the whim of his attention.

Pilbara

In a dream there is a veil of water between us,
your face green with algae:
my mirror image, separate, waterlogged
in a world you trail within you.

The Aztec water goddess is you, who grew
the hearts that were thrown to her
into a prickly pear tree, each fruit
unpickable, embroiled with the spines of love.

How we climb
halfway out of ourselves to be together,
having only each other to throw to each other.
There is only the world to crack
the shell of self, the shell of us tight
and alive.

In the Pilbara,
humpy spinifex stiffens in silver light,
a silence carries us as we walk,
balanced on the thread of what binds us,
you stopping to photograph every wildflower,
your sharp crouching focus
joining up the landscape like the echo
of changed and absent spirits we can barely sense, something
charging the earth that bows up to the sky.
Of this place we know little, it holds us
as you hold me in the night, distinctly as the red kangaroo
that uninjured touched our speeding van,
the smudge of its fur on the white paint.

Ode on Love

What he has taken of me
I don't even want back,
I don't want to want back.
This new happiness holds up
a novel mischief that waits in the near.
Why so indispensable?
Before I knew him I did not need him:
if he goes I must replace him,
as if I could. And that circling body-mashing doubt.
How he throws me
into dark and retrieves me!
And with gazes like little rifting flames inhabits me.

What does the bottom-most soul know of this –
that basin of us
concerned only with survival,
collecting residual passion
and washing clean,
shining up that bit of us
that cares nothing?

That idea that every lover is the same,
that there's a template, a type,
that what I orbit
is an all-man man
likely to be just like my father,
many desires folded into one bright
bouquet of obsession that springs from the heart like Spring.

He is coasting along his own midnight.
The trapping of his breath, the only outward sign,
I devour it like meat,
as if it were him,
tenderly and watchfully in all love's creepiness.

Love is a thing, the self's
undoing that it begs for.
He twitches out hot shivers of love he shifts away from,
exalts and voids me
with the economy of a waiter emptying a whole table with one hand.

Power to love draws the long breath from me.
Petrarch made this a joy, an Other queening distance,
love never shaken by reality, never
whittled by exchange.
I fear whatever we have will puff like a thistle.
And if not?
Mutuality, mutability, love nuanced and grappled, hard.
This seam of encounters can't peg itself down,
it is or isn't, it is high or low, a scythe swinging in, or out.

The self tries to locate him, and itself
in all the moving signifiers of love,
lover and love, meaning and feeling,
thing that says, love this one, not another.
I lie in bed scratching at the night.
Absent, his beauty
evaporates. He flickers before me,
knowable-unknowable, central lover, man-figure
skating so sweetly at the edge of a beauty.
How I hope against. How I want to know if he.
And love dares the self.
To risk what there is in hope of havocking more to risk.

What a world of trouble and pain!

Trying not to try to purloin him whole
but keep him near – to tell my heart so stupid!
The drawbridge clatters up.

How long will it take to get to the top of the mountain?

I have seen the mountain from the top of the mountain
and I have seen the mountain from the bottom of the mountain
and I have seen the mountain from the side of the mountain

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