# PETRA CWHITE THE SIMPLIFIED WORLD

with

and

THE INCOMING TIDE



# A Hunger

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THE INCOMING TIDE

### PETRA WHITE

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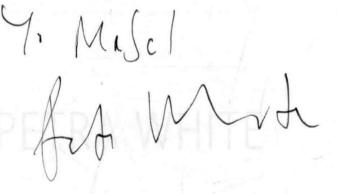
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Petra White was born in Adelaide in 1975 and has lived since 1998 in Melbourne, where she works for a government department. Her first book, *The Incoming Tide*, was shortlisted in the Queensland Premier's Literary awards and for the ACT Judith Wright 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

J.A.

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#### **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? 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 indispensible?
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 riffing 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.

Trying not to try to purloin him whole but keep him near – to tell my heart so stupid!

The drawbridge clatters up.

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