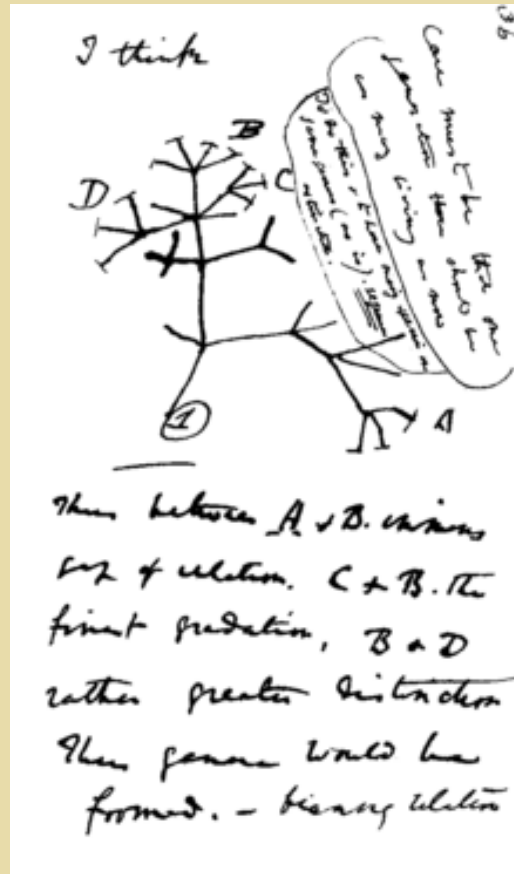


Coral Reveries

(Darwinian Poetics)

[This collection is part of the 'Songs of the Interstitium'
Transmedia Project]



Publisher: First published Mercurius Press, Australia, 2013. This version published by The Zoetics Institute (Australia) 2016. 'Coral Reveries' is copyright Ian Irvine (Hobson), 2011-2013, all rights reserved [This timeline ©]. Note: Five poems from this collection (plus audio) were published in Robin Ouzman Hislop's *Poetry Life and Times* (Spain/UK) in 2013 and 2014, a further three were published in *Artvilla* in early February 2013.

Image: 'Darwin's Tree of Life' [from public domain image drawn by Darwin]

Author's Note: many of these poems meditate upon or, in some cases rework/recombine, random phrases appearing in the 2nd edition of Charles Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle*. The first edition of the work appeared in 1839. Darwin's natural lyricism and relaxed prose style is duly acknowledged.

PUBLISHER'S WARNING

These poems were recovered from a DVD in an ornate wooden box found in a cave complex at the back of a property near Harcourt central Victoria, Australia (2006). Apart from the DVD, the box contained five novel manuscripts and other objects supposedly originating from a parallel Australia. The DVD contained various files organized by the apparently 'fictional' *Dinas Yarkuk Transmedia Collective*. The collective suggested that the untimely release of their 'quantum influenced' material to an analogue version of the 'global super-brain' could be potentially 'destabilising'. For the full story, go to: *The City of Quartz* at the project's online site.

Infusoria*

Having swum in the ocean of stars
calling them Gods—their campfires, their monumental
sorrows, our bliss at a faith-conceived heaven—
we are driven back by heavy gales.

Few living creatures inhabit these broad
flat-bottomed valleys, abode of kingfishers
grass-hoppers, lizards—not much else
a ruined fort in a dull brown landscape.

Relief to find a small stream threading
clefs of rock, greening, here and there,
otherwise barren soil. Onwards then, to a flat plain
stunted acacias—until, a flock of guinea fowl.

Anxious panorama of time: jagged cliffs,
lava-rock, distant mountains enveloped in
dark blue clouds. It's coming: the storm
of the modern. *The monkey likes bananas.*

I'm collecting dust: the air is ion charged,
flashes of lightning, the will to see
the infusoria: African sunsets, the question
of microbes, my lens, my imperfect vision.

And then another island—fertile, volcanic
red cinder hills, everything slopes toward the
interior. But I will paddle the rock pools
notice: sea slugs, cuttlefish all arms and suckers.

Having swum in the ocean of stars
we are driven back by heavy gales
It's coming, the storm of the modern,
anxious panorama of time.

The air is ion charged.

* Parts of Coral reveries are inspired by *The Voyage of the Beagle*. In the above poem words and phrases selected randomly from the first ten or so pages of the journal have been combined with my own meditations.

Darwin's Vision

There is nothing I wish to germinate
seed-sprout and faith me not
I do not please these eyes to see
the truth of it. Un-see
the truth of it.

The Islands Recede

They recede, the White Islands
in a fragile sea—to blink
is to lose them. I lose them.

It was dung anyway, that splashed
them brilliant white. Dung!
The dung of angels.

Aboard the Beagle

In case we brought the cholera
to the conical hills,
beneath the scorching sun
they forbade our landing.

They forbade our landing,
so we walked the deck
in the stinking heat—
observed the distant mountains
that sat
beneath the scorching sun.

That scorching sun
above the hazy plain, above
the cloudless, lofty mountains that
barely tolerated our presence.

Perhaps we did bring the cholera—
or some other European plague—
made more virulent, more contagious,
by the stinking heat
of the scorching sun

Island Evolutions

Praise to the holy island!
 isolate, sea-cropped—the life
gets frozen in time.

Phonolite columns,
 steep pinnacles of history,
they hammer at my
 dream brain (tripartite),
whisper
 and the dry woodland
 and the fine pink flowers
of a tree like laurel
 but not a laurel ...
for the land is sliding
 into ocean,
the vast blue ocean

Such a pleasant view!
 (the cloudless horizon)

The Naturalist Awakes

The violence of the rain
 disturbed my reverie
and I awoke after utter silence
 to noisy insects, the aroma
of gaudy plants.

I'd lost my (found my) way
 among the glossy verdure
of alien vegetation
 until I awoke

to the luxury
 the violent grandeur
of the warm rain

A Power Denuded the Granite

All that glitters in the sun's rays
 suggests a profound ocean
and a growing burden

*How many years
short of infinity
to polish these
burnished stones?*

I have come to the tides
 and the rivulets
the countless inundations,
 the waves on the black rocks
 the cataracts, the great rivers
the stubborn work of millennia.

I am growing old and weary
 on this boat,
this salt-stained boat
 of Empire.

The Fish in the Belly of the Shark

Amusing puffed up creature
Diodon is a salt-water

Samson
and an artist!

Paints in carmine-red
enough to stain the heavens
and he bites like hell
through stomach lining

The shark that ate him suffers

perishes
and then Diodon emerges
distended, spitting water like a hose
secreting fibrous red

Amusing creature.

The Devil's Confervae

Can you see us from behind?
 early morning salt haze—the sun
rising. And the boat slowing
 enters an eerie stretch of
 ocean, velvet-red, and
glides between a god-infested heaven
 and a godless carpet of sea stuff
This blood track—it must be
 two miles long—of
infernal waters.

The boat slows, we glide
 Can you see us from behind?
The morning is huge
 as we plough
 the pulp of our sorrow
the whole surface of the water
 pulses—and the waves lapping.

Under the lens, I observe
 the contraction of tiny granular spheres
their number must be infinite

I've heard they make
 the Red Sea
 (appear) red.

Their Massive God

Whether I killed their God,
 one and massive.
book-tombed, with chiselled words
 on granite—his puny reign,
 mere millennia—
was not the issue.

Mine was the gambler's fear, for
 the mist-wrapped hull of the new
drifts only slowly into view
 contrasts with the rotting hulk of God
 (as slowly sinking).

How will they endure
 this unbearable in-between?

The Noble Love of Freedom

In the forest,
 with huge butterflies
that float
 among horses and men
such brilliant colours!
 - they flit
 from shade
 to sunshine
I find it dreamy
 to think of her
and ignore the granite hills
 steep and bare

They tell a story
 steep and bare
 of runaway slaves
and the moon was dim
 (a few fireflies)
and we came upon a desert
 followed by a wasteland
 of marshes and lagoons
heard the sea's sullen roar
 off in the distance.

We tethered the horses
 but they refused to settle.

We tethered the horses
 on a sandy plain
next morning, more salt lagoons
 and a few stunted trees.
The nights grew hot, and
 a dim moon on white sand.

Became aware
 (the exact moment is not recorded)
of a problem with the horses.

We bathed in lakes and lagoons
 traversed pastures ruined by ants' nests
passed forests with lofty trees.

Every morning more horses
 bitten and infected
until one evening
 I saw it in the gloom
suctioned to a horse's back

a large vampire bat.

I found it dream-like
blatant in the gloom
(How could I ignore the granite hills?)

But then I saw it
suctioned to a horse's back

a large vampire bat.

To Inhabit the Fields of Time

The more I observe
 ‘mother nature’, the less
God I see,
 the more in need of a God
(or gods)
 I become. Even as I
 refuse to believe their
broadcast baloney.

The idea gnaws.

I came upon a parasite
 in some distant jungle—
it gives me wild ideas, and though
 the doctors work their alchemy
I still feel ‘inhabited’. Besides
 my son in a coffin.

So many blind millennia—
 and still they refuse to see.
But is my vision true—
 unencumbered by faith
 (my daughter, my daughter)?

The clear and terrible beauty
 of aeons of methodical suffering.
He never did intervene. If
 he exists, he’s a patient sadist
 or useless as the carnivores
of all ages, thrive and
 evolve.

The Road Without Bridges

After the cabbage trees—
 among the ferns and mimosa—
we pushed on
 to the sandy zone,
until we discovered
 a road with crosses
instead of milestones—
 a road without
bridges.

However far we travelled
 (a pleasant little excursion)
it seemed the crosses
 grew no less numerous
and most appeared a predictable
 distance apart.

So I determined
 to transform the road,
to tear down the crosses
 to build stone bridges
 (gloriously engineered!)

Such thoughts brought me
 to an eerie crossroad,
 and the promise of
 an unknown destination

Strange modern highway
 devoid of crosses
 and
 chiselled resignation.

The Work of Minute and Tender Animals

Not far off shore
 we test the bottom
 (the bottomless ocean)
The line spins down and down.

Envisage:
a steep edifice
 (theorise: underwater ramparts, sheer
 and dense).

In awe of these submerged mountains—
 accumulated stone of ages!

The island, the reef, the coral—the coral
 the living part of the greater death,
a vast, eroded, sedimentary death.

*Once a volcano—spewed hot
then froze into a geologic form
then whipped by the wind
and lashed by the water
for countless millennia.
Amazing to contemplate—
the splendid work of ages.*

It looms from obscene depths
 and bleaches in the diving—
the underwater kingdom of
 vegetable bones!
But near the surface
 such colours, such vividness, such
intricacies of fish and frond.

Coral! The epiphanies of coral
 their various shapes
 their complex textures
—marvellous life on a bed of death!

Our ancestry as sediment—
 compacted into memory.
Today, for the first time, I sense
 their concrete presence.
This self, mere fruit of their tragedies—
 (the past beneath the waves).

About the Author



Ian Irvine (Hobson) is an Australian-based poet/lyricist, fiction writer and non-fiction writer. His work has featured in publications as diverse as *Humanitas* (USA), *The Antigoneish Review* (Canada), *Tears in the Fence* (UK), *Linq* (Australia) and *Takahe* (NZ), among many others. His work has also appeared in two Australian national poetry anthologies: *Best Australian Poems 2005* (Black Ink Books) and *Agenda: 'Australian Edition'*, 2005. He is the author of three books and co-editor of a number of literary journals – *Scintillae 2012*, *The Animist* ezine (7 editions, 1998-2001) and *Painted Words* (8 editions 2005-2013). He currently teaches in the Professional Writing and Editing program at BRIT (Bendigo, Australia) as well as the same program at Victoria University, St. Albans, Melbourne. He has also taught history and social theory at La Trobe University (Bendigo, Australia) and holds a PhD for his work on creative, normative and dysfunctional forms of morbid ennui. In his recent theoretical work he has attempted to develop an anti-oppressive approach to creative writing based upon the integration of Cultural-Relational theories concerning 'self in relation' with Jungian and Groffian models of the 'collective' or 'transpersonal' unconscious. Web site:

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