

Between the forest and the sea

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'Poetry,' said Simon Critchley (2005: 12), 'describes life as it is, but in all the intricate evasions of as'. The world that separates us 'is a world both seen and unseen until seen with the poet's eye.' The world that separates us is ten thousand miles long, yet we cross waves and continents, hemispheres, south to north, north to south daily, to converse like neighbours over the garden fence. Swapping words and poems, borrowing lines and phrases, sleight-of-hand light-as-air-asides, lost lines, found lines; traces of thoughts and inter-reliance come together in an eco-poetry exercise that blurs the lines between borders, gender, race and sexuality; our days and nights never meet and yet our words collide. His are hers, hers are his, which become ours as words from two old, northern and southern hemisphere worlds, collide.

These poems are an eco-collaboration between two writers who live in separate time zones, hemispheres and continents where, to quote Charles Taylor in 'Overcoming Epistemology',

What you get underlying our representations of the world – the kind of thing we formulate, for instance, in declarative sentences – is not further representations but rather a certain grasp of the world we have as agents in it. (Taylor 1995: 12)

As members of a prose poetry collective, who trade ideas, bounce off each other's poems and ideas and allow their writing to collide and collapse into poems whose origins have become so blurred they unsuppose a source and momentarily focus on the world in bewilderment. Here is a sample of what lies between the forest and the sea.

A path between primordial trees, a guide who is teaching us to name the trees and their tenants: kahikatea, he says, pointing; totara. Between the giant rimu and the harakeke we stopped to watch a kererū bathe and then he was gone, and you with him. The forest breathed green and slow, fantails whistled, I sat back against a tree and watched bracken trace my arms, fingertip mushrooms bloom bright across my belly. By night you had found me, among the quiet trees, less than memory, more than a sigh.

The stories they tell of fish all shining with life whose lives they took, gasping on a grassy hill. The fish whose bodies they ate, white flesh searing silver in a pan. The stories we tell of tales that burrow up from the earth, push through soil, up the trunks of trees, along the branches, then cling to leaves as they drop with the dew, or piggybacking seed pods they slide off the edge of the cliff, a clutch of broken vowels, and birds swoop to catch them in mid-flight, press them into the rock face where they build small nests in patterns like the pattern you traced in sand, a love poem, like the pattern we saw years later scratched into a Berlin wall. *You anchor me, it read, your light-as-air asides dispel the despair of a world.*

There are no anchors. Only light. In early morning we stretched out on the beach, making sand angels, while below the tide line every tenth wave raked the sand, swirled the empty shells. Later we fell asleep, bundled together, the sea black under a half moon, and when we woke flowers had woven around us, their roots tracing the blurred outline of our angels. Time to leave, before the wind and waves took us, and we ran ahead of a dreich cold laced with damp

till we were back among the trees, their leaves falling russet across windfall. Keep up, you said, but then lost me in the haar as it rolled off the North Sea and across the coast.

Dawn arrives early, a cacophony of seagulls, the cat crying at the door. Bees drone, pipes drone, and a drone whirrs overhead, calling out to a bank of screens it cannot see. For you I left the house, braved the morning and the sea, the breaking waves and the tempest that threatened to sink me. Anchor me in your harbour, let me feel the steady land under my feet and my life in your hand.

Now it's birds in the litter tray, fires at the front door, the racket of walls and cliffs and trees falling, and afterward just the sound of breathing in an empty room. This is not the end. Despite the lights out, gardens burned, boltholes closed. Promise me it's not the end.

Works cited

Critchley, Simon 2005 *Things Merely Are: Philosophy in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens*, London: Routledge

Taylor, Charles 1995 *Overcoming Epistemology*, in *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press