

a water suite

~ Evelyn Araluen and Anahera Gildea

ocean/saltwater/waiti/mulli tahnee

where i'm from the sand is cold at night, the shells empty, grey
cloud scudding like
the irewaru the spirit voices
on the shore

*tender salt, gentle rush of foam
no explorer can hold enough breath for where i'm from
fathoms and fathoms deep*

i have heard. i have danced

narrative after narrative

*have heard it sung
have done the singing
our shadows are nuclear
our gods can swim*

'never turn your back on the ocean.' i hear this
everytime i have saltwater up my nose, down the back of my throat, making me cough;
everytime i have sand in my togs, or socks; everytime
i place the smallest of cateyes in my pocket and whisper a karakia. i hear my mother.

hear fear, not as tremor but as the roar of a wave

*never turn your back to things that swallow
sea, midden, archive, men or the women they hollow*

matariki is an internal time, when
the bounty for the year is told by the brightness and sureness of the sky siblings,
when those who have passed in the year gone are swept up by the great waka,
kua whetūrangitia, made stars.
it is cold, time for gatherings by fires and sharing stories, the time
that the sun shacks up with his winter wife – hinetakurua,
hineraumati is the summer one. this is an arrangement the women had. half a year off is genius
and sustainable

*now is the time for gawura to remind the sea of the song that made it
is time for us to sing shore to shore*

in the summer of my always childhood, the beach is hot sand on fire during the day
we went to collect shellfish with our toes, or check nets
we didn't go to lie down on towels. Nor cover ourselves in coconut.
i sent messages across the ocean stuffed into coke bottles. i wrote
'i'm being held captive in a concrete tower in foxton. send help immediately. aotearoa, 1989.'
because i believed in story, i believed someone might get them

*i did
and i wept for you*

those at tangi speak often of the tides, to the waves that come. when
my son died, we wrote 'go, the evening tide is for you, the morning tide is for me'

- the tūngaengae a precipice

*there's only so much we can carry
only so much before we sink*

*the sea has been taken from us before
and it remembers the pain of spilling across dry earth
the wake of the waters that bleed on the stone
the songs scraping ashen heels across dust and salt
the story it had to carry of our own end
it remembers and will not forget*

two friends tried to die by sea, neither
succeeded one because of the luck of a passerby,
 one because her body refused to stay down no matter the intoxicant

*only so much
and never enough*

when i was alone and contemplating
death, it's expanse a constant
scream, i used to go to the shoreline,
take stance and bait the ocean
come for me, i say. and? and so?

*i heard you
did you hear me sing back?*

this is the sadness our mothers must have felt,
sadness that likes to dress as resentment. grief

- the waters of the earth speaking to us
by the moon

river/freshwater/waitā/wuranggari

*(stars/stars/stars)
balun yuna-bla ggibl-a dugan-dah
the river [milky way] runs
between the mountains
(stars/stars/stars)*

after grief i made art.
the awa I whakapapa to is wide and generous,
her hips slow moving pockets for children

to jump into when they've been told not to/
it is said that water can carry away grief. it can take your story and cleanse

*it is said my river was a secret
a brown coil snaking around the colony
filling the soil with rich minerals to sow the land
it is said my river brimmed and surged at their impudence
swelling the field and crop*

the story of a new zealand river by jane mander in 1929,
a settler, frontier, kind of story. jane had to be offshore like katherine mansfield.
they had to leave the hostile and unkempt lands of their new zealand
send stories back from the various englands of the world,
our native scenery so lush and rapey

*stars and rivers in conversation
a story they were too loud to hear*

but this is designated māori land, you know.
the whānau walk her skirts and pick up litter. the elders
post on the hapū facebook page about who has been abusing our whenua?
who has been disturbing our waterways? what
little shits have been having late night parties down near the swimming hole?
was it you, e kare?
bloody well was and don't you lie to me. tell your koretake mates
dirty someone else's awa. no effing respect

*no respect! they poison and drain
they treat rivers like the family they never honour
like a sickly child to be seen and never heard
no respect! no honour! no justice! no peace!*

the moderators try to tell the kaumātua – this is not a phone, it's forever –
this water is not water,
but they just keep shouting at their moko over the internet.
someone will remove their post within about 30mins,
witnessing time, witnessing generational shift

*they act as if the river is not the most honoured rememberer
as if it has forgotten its own power to drown*

i stood in the flowing water of the awa and said my story to her. she
the cold fresh fun of the cuzzies; downstream she
the place you're allowed to wash your body if you have to, but only there; further she
is food, the cress in her shade,
the tuna burrowed into her sides,
the inanga running and running – though there are less of us now.

i stood with her frozen at my ankles, my story
leaping out of me into her, onto her. we cried together

a single hour, then, i drew a mauri stone
 – the stone she gave me,
 the stone after I gave my story.
 it is shaped like a palm sized weapon

given, not taken
they say no river can be stood in twice
but they don't know how those rivers know us
how they swell cold and frozen round our legs
murmuring their memories of our mothers bathing us at the banks

what ancestors of mine previously gave the awa their story,
 who's echoes are still in this small rock? time is compressed
 we, me, more,
 bent over in the cold shallows to offer the suite of emotions
 we call story

*the eye blinking in the river above
the ancestors stirring in the basins and caverns below
every echo, every warning, every horror we could imagine
but above all the greatest love
to be the vein that feeds us*

the river itself can tell the story, teach us
how to read it how to see the speed of the water at bends
how to watch the direction and thew of the birds, how to call river

how to call star
how to call home

take my story. river take my story. river my story

river my solace
river my sorrow

think of all the rivers that white men have stood in, boot first, and claimed

balun yuna-bla ggibl-a dugan-dah
as it will after they drown

wai hōhonu/deep water/te rire o te moana/[]

when you're in [in. clusion. ex. clusion]

when you're in deep, you are in trouble/
in te au o te moana, the deep soft swell of the ocean
your raft. What happens when you fall/
into somewhere you didn't belong? when gargantuan colonial arms lift you,
congratulate you. they nod and say, yes yes, bring your diverse friends,
their communities. we must have communitites. tautoko.

tautoko. Wonderful wonderful. they clap gargantuan hands. and/

*i don't know when i first learnt the fear
but feel it heavy at the base of my spirit belly
like my shame has decided it would be best i sink
and is filling itself for the fastest descent*

kua mōhiotia. you sink in your stomach
cos you know you are a puppet now. eff it.
you can pretty much see dollar signs in their eyes. and you've signed
a contract. and you're about to become a sellout
though that was never your intention. and/

*and? and so?
they searched the desert for an inland sea
and were an immemorial too late
now we are beached at the shore
gasping heavy through bleeding mouths
our skin drying and cracking as clay*

actually you're not. that's ridiculous. you can fight back
from inside the gargantuan buildings with their gargantuan mouths and/ *and?*

hunger. you can make real change. you can do good. you can
decolonise. you are called to this work. this is the work. this is real.
you push back, hold meetings, do partnership, you know, it's hard,
some days you cry, and/

and most days my body is turning out itself out for the salt

your world can be undone in a second because
how did you become spokesperson for all
māori, random indigenous tauīwi, political agitators,
blah blah blah blah blah, and how do you get out of it, make it stop, step down,
you don't want a platform, you're terrified and/

*and most days i am afraid of drowning
but some i am afraid of rising for air*

gargantuan is an actual measurable size,
all your self-scrutiny, and moralising and policing is like, tiny dots on tiny

*too much is a measurable weight
too much of history to forget, to forgive
too much of lonely to accept the hand
and what if i was not what was wanted?
what if this was never the path?*

but sometimes you hear the echoes of sea creatures in music
youth whales practicing their deep songs in plain sight
swept up in some zeitgeist [moment]

*you taught me not to believe in moments
but believe in work
the muscle memory of getting up and trying again
the refusal to give in to the deep*

that's what it feels like and it's good and righteous

*it feels like breaching
but the dark is still beneath*

when you're in deep, you're all in. Everything at stake

here's where you make decisions. to stop selling
our intellectual property in exchange for that gargantuan applause.
stop it.
if they take our knowledge and try to use it, f them. ignore them. f them

*i've learnt how to make promises in names
in deep breaths at river banks
in cups of tea and the clasp of a hand*

but also, could you please not put it up for sale to the highest
bidder offering cash or pākehā status or both since they're basically synonymous

*we shouldn't linger on what we've lost
but we shouldn't fill those gaps
with the weapon that took it from us*

oh shit, is that insulting? i don't mean it at all. and/
my partner is white so, i'm basically one of you. friends? #tiritipartnershipgoals

*my lover is not from here ancestral
and what i fear is the sea rising
and the land not wanting him to stay*

when you're 'in' is when you've made the above decision

*some kinds of fears are warranted
the water has so much to take*