

The Imageless World

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PUBLISHED BY SALT PUBLISHING
PO Box 937, Great Wilbraham, Cambridge PDO CB1 5JX United Kingdom
PO Box 202, Applecross, Western Australia 6153

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First published 2003

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Lightning Source

Typeset in Swift 9,5 / 13

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ISBN 1 84471 005 x paperback

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1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

To Nick O'Malley

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Acknowledgments

Thanks to the editors of the following: *Antipodes*, *Arena Magazine*, *Ariel View*, *Cordite*, *Heat*, *Hermes*, *Island Magazine*, *Jacket* (online), *The Literature Review*, *Meanjin*, *notes & furphies*, *Salt*, *Siglo*, *Slope* (online), *Southerly*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Plastic*, *poetryetc* (online), *Prague Revue*, *Prism International*, *Ulitarra*, *Verse*.

Locuting Love originally appeared as a collaborative text with colour images by Kay Orchison, and was awarded the 1999 Siglo Collaborations Prize. I am grateful to the Literature Board of the Australia Council for the Arts and the Queen's Trust for Young Australians for the generous support without which this book would not have been written.

Heartfelt thanks to J. S. Harry, Kevin Hart, Dorothy Porter, Chris Edwards, John Kinsella, Chris Emery, Martin Harrison and Elizabeth Webby. Dedications: *Letters home* sequence for Noel Rowe; *Afterthoughts* for Sarah Tran; *Excavation Series* for Kay Orchison.

The Imageless World

You would like to live somewhere
but this is not permitted
You may not even think of it
lest the thinking appear as words
and the words as things
arriving in competing waves
from the ruins of that place

MICHAEL PALMER

Letter home

“Ah, good. I was not very sure, finally, of having initiated the conversation myself.”—“But could I have come otherwise?”—“Friendship would have sent you.” He reflects again: “I wrote to you didn’t I?”

MAURICE BLANCHOT

These are strange lands I barely understand.
We are walking in a park of manicured lawns.

The sky is a mosaic of syllables
Parts of a puzzle.

The people here douse themselves in petrol
As though poetry mattered.

Some of the pieces are missing
And the old man tells me we have to make new some new ones.

He looks through me. It matters little if I am here.
In a corner of the park monks are burying elephants.

I found a word under my tongue
but swallowed it whole.

The lawn is a lesson in geometry, it imitates
The cast of the concrete walls,

I don’t know if the grass is grey or the concrete grass.
None of it looks like the sky, least of all the sky.

Fashioned out of water, paths no one walks on
Lead into proximity.

The old man spits out tones that sit in pools on the water,
Half-oil, half-mercury, he tests them with one foot.

In the distance someone or something catches fire.
Perhaps it is the elephants coming into bloom.

Letter home

On a street in Tenerife she finds a photo
A pigtailed girl she places on her index finger's

Soft pad and balances there each day of her life.
At night she listens to jazz in Stockwell

Where she gets in for free
While outside estate kids hustle for crack

Or she dreams carefully of lavas turned to basalt,
And a boy half-covered by dune sands,

As some morning she could discover certainty
Between the sketches of her notebook:

The woman with the oversized eye, the thin bodies
And small breasts hidden between phone numbers.

She doesn't walk the quickest way home
After the jazz, through the unkempt cemetery,

Where male lovers meet at night to touch
That place between desire and fear, where

She's seen a fig's roots melt over a grave
And clutch a headstone in its liquid grip,

1856 in one hand, today in the other.
She doesn't know the girl with the pigtails

Is already nineteen and works as a temp in the City,
How she laughs with friends and falls in love easily.

Postcard

The old man fumbles with his keys,
The waiter appears embarrassed.

'I don't want to talk about love any more,
But sing it on the pebble of your tongue.'

She listens, counts petals of a sunflower
on the table between them, and listens.

'I want to sing so the stone rests, knows
Nothing of the world but that love creates us

From a moment, that the world only exists
The fraction before it sings.'

She listens and counts petals just so many
grains of sunlight trapped.

Ellipses

Stained glass on a winter's day. I read your
diary backwards.



Tea hot in the cup, the sugarbowl empty
and, yes, rain beginning to fall outside.



Green eyes turning hazel in the sunlight.
Laughter on the skin of a peach.



Tell her this morning nothing is as sweet
as the kiss on her lips, as though nothing
might be more.

Five hundred roofs and five hundred
nights in this town.



Wherever you are now it was a day in the
future, a foreign country where we didn't
know the language or the customs, one
foot in front of the other, a day yet to
arrive, yet to depart the lines on the hand.



But what of love? A city not yet mapped?
Will we wake there tomorrow or the day
after? At the end of the block, will every-
thing become suddenly and strangely
familiar?



I'll see her in a week when the months
reverse, drawing us together, binding
there.