

Marsh Fear / Fen Tiger

SOPHIE LEVY is currently a Ph.D. candidate in English and Women's Studies at the University of Toronto, working towards a dissertation on modernist to postmodern avant-garde feminist writing practises. Her work has appeared in *Long Journey Home* (Women's Press), *Kiss Machine*, *Masthead*, *unHERd*, at the Edinburgh Fringe, on BBC Radio Scotland and on Book Television (Canada). She has published two chapbooks: *You Are Here* (Wingspan, 2000) and *Found Object* (Pan del Muerto, 2002).

LEO MELLOR was born in 1977 and has lived and studied in Cambridge, Mid Wales, Brighton, Sapporo (northern Japan) and Berlin. His poetry has been anthologised in several collections ranging from *Quaypool* to *Hokkaido Aka*. He is currently writing a cultural history of bombsites and a study of George Barker, as well as working as a cook, teacher and journalist.

Marsh Fear / Fen Tiger

SOPHIE LEVY

LEO MELLOR



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

All rights reserved

© Sophie Levy, 2002
© Leo Mellor, 2002

The right of Sophie Levy and Leo Mellor to be identified as the authors of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Salt Publishing.

First published 2002

Printed and bound in the United States of America by Lightning Source

Typeset in Swift 9.5 / 13

This book is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library
ISBN 1 876857 07 2 paperback

SP

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

For Mum:

And though the bitter taste of saw-
dust makes us choke, we'll rinse our smiles brilliant with champagne,
drunk on happiness that is no joke – or perhaps the best we know, and
will not find again.

SOPHIE LEVY

Contents

Sophie Levy

Grace Lake's Kitchen	3
Compass Points	5
Exam Technique	7
Hunting the Winter	9
Danse Macabre	12
taken/out of context	14
Dysphoria	19
p.s. <sappho>	21
'The Journey is the Destination'	22
Letter-Form	23
Epithalamium (or Seven Brides for Seven Builders)	32
A View from a Bridge	34
The Marsh-King's Daughter	37
Open Mouthed	39
Oxyrrhynchus Fragment	41
Rock Music	48
Illumination	55
elege	56
For some girl	57
Stammer	58
"the small biology of kisses"	61
Waterfront	63

Leo Mellor

Blue-black water	69
The Marcher Lords	71
marsh fear / fen tiger	72

blindings	73
The tideway	74
Sunken	79
The last engineer	80
Elegy	81
Coastal	82
A frame for dying	87
Eels	88
On not meeting him	89
The third myth of Johnny Lucifer	90
The seventh myth of Johnny Lucifer	91
Lowenzahn (Dandelion)	92
the hare in the library	93
Volatile Compounds	94
Not that that blocks	95
filmic	97
Notes from Hokkaido	98
Slate	101

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgement is due to the editors of the following publications in which some of these poems previously appeared: *Entropy*; Oxford and Cambridge *May Anthologies* 1998; *Poetryetc.*; *Vines*; *Siren* (Toronto); *Masthead*.

“Grace Lake’s Kitchen” was written at *Performance 2000* at the ADC Theatre Cambridge, and performed with Davina Silver.

“The Journey is the Destination” and “Open Mouthed” were written in a workshop given by Tracy Ryan, 1998–9 Judith E. Wilson Fellow at the University of Cambridge.

“Hunting the Winter” was written during an Arvon Foundation workshop taught by David Morley. Thanks to Andy Brown and the Arvon Foundation for a workshop grant.

Thanks to John Kinsella for inviting us to make this book.

Sophie Levy

Grace Lake's Kitchen

for Davina, February 12th, Performance 2000

Grace Lake has a cobalt kitchen
turquoise counters
sapphire surfaces
Cooking is using blue
 sometimes
we're light enough to make it rise

Grace Lake is glass under water
past imperfect / slub in silk
Nuclear swan
dying kitchen-sink white
 sometimes
we're fine enough to make her fly

Grace Lake is luminous
(as if you didn't know already)
the glowing fish in her water
"you can tell Baudelaire from me —"
Silver fish in black hair
 sometimes
we're bright enough to scar her eyes

Grace Lake has ice in her mouth
Never was a cornflake girl
frosted she sugars
white white or purple (she pants)
 Sometimes
we've lied enough to never try

Grace Lake has a pink background
crimson moon scythe Shadows
thrown on sweets and
such things cut the cutters
sometimes
we like enough to make it right

Grace Lake was her own navy—
sails reefed afore abaft?
Her, really, uniformed as her
until her wings (tragic platinum) Little girl
sometimes
we've fight enough to let it slide

Grace Lake has the poet's kitchen
where words of flour and rat poison are fried
beurre noire noisette bernache mon âme ma femme aux yeux
d'argent de lac de cygnes
Love-lies-bleeding on the windowsill - Cordelia
sometimes
There's time enough I swear there's time

Compass Points

Snow-skinned princess of all points north,
Lava queen with white-cat eyes, you haunt

The elsewheres of my heart. I meet you dressed
In fur like a fairy-tale. It has been impressed

On me you are the stranger, Trouble, dancing
Long-limbed over lives, silver-skated, romancing

Ice with your blades. Cold nights I have seen
You dance, legs that one wants to come between

Like a pricked piece of map beneath steel compass
Points. A metaphysical dream of your thighs. Kiss

And part. Wake with a slow start. Your accent
On the phone, both cute and grave, sent

To charm me from a distance too close. Comfort-
Ing, your subtle, craven touch, your sport,

Long-fingered. I linger in your sight, longing
For this other half you have and are, singing

Sappho's sweet and stinging words. Once bitter, twice
Blinded by your eyes. I have enough sighs

For all thirty-two winds that blow round
The compass. Not Donne's half-split, half-bound

Stalker but the lettered circle of direction showing
Where my magnetic heart will be going.

Pointers swung, true north confounded by your pull,
I stumble in your direction, my hands full

Of all the places you could be. With him, not me,
The useless explorer, hands numb, too icy

To reach out and warm them at your ready fire.
I cannot read the geography of desire,

Unworldly. But I know the difference between the limbs
Of a pair of compasses, united, and the single, whim-

Turned dial of the compass, its face pressed to mine.
It tells me (like Scott) what I will never find,

The jointure of the heart, (con)sensual. I dig my heels
Into the snow and feel what it is to no longer feel.

In you and him you love, a matched pair, encompassed, kiss.
I, alone and stunned, watch the fire-ice borealis.

Exam Technique

There is no art delivered to mankind that hath not the works of Nature for his principle object . . . So doth the astronomer look upon the stars, and, by that he seeth, setteth down what order Nature hath taken therein. So do the geometrician and the arithmetician in their diverse sorts of quantities . . .

Only the poet, disdainful to be tied down to any subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature...not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY, *An Apology for Poetry*

Refract this, language. Distil reality
to some more useful substance. You may not
employ imagination; it interferes
with the transmission of gases.

Figure this numerically, the equation
between sound and sense. Examine 8
for poetry. Can you find some similarity
between the sign and what it represents?

This is astronomy for the star-struck,
for those fucked over by the concept of distance,
a numerical value between zero
and nothing, a matrix with no precedent.

Don't think beyond the limits
of space provided. Make each word
a diagram, each line a graph, all clear
in pencil with labels underlined in red.

Use the left-hand margin as a retort
stand. Don't answer back unless
required to by the question. Write neatly
and do not exceed the time.

Remember: numbers are the music
of the spheres, the perfect harmony Plato's
poets aren't allowed. Figure on signs
and symbols. Don't think too loud.

Show your working. Count on your fingers'
dexterity with a pen. Have all your tools
to hand, wipe your memory.
This test is not an open book

for all to read what they want to hear.
Pay attention: the question
is never wrong, only the answer.
Don't falsify results. Don't change your mind.

Don't find a certain beauty in the logic
of the syntax of your synapses' response.
Don't be alarmed if brilliance goes unrewarded,
just turn your Bunsen burner down a notch.

DO NOT copy from life or nature. You will
be disqualified for cheating. Staring out the
window is not conducive to essay planning.
There's method in the madness of the seating.

God. Define with reference to the following. Discuss
with appropriate statistics. Show his working
through your own. You have until the end of the world.
For the following questions, please tick.

Multiple choice or none at all, free will, solipsism,
or despair. Show the multiplication of care.
Invent a world. Destroy it. The examiner is a poet.
He wants to see the workings of your soul.

Hunting the Winter

HELP written clear as twilight on the outside of a window stained with breath. But I am inside and my leaded fingers write nothing about the famous dead.

This has not been said before. *Seasons of mists*. Well, yes. Inside a cloud as much as out. Stale breath. No *fruitfulness*,

just me, a dead tree stump under yellowing leaves. Here, count my rings: twist them round my bone-idle fingers. There's no trade from head to mouth; some sentimental glottal stop I can't spit out or stick with. Autumn is interfering with my perceptions, blowing gusts of static

across satellite distillations of summer. I pray for digital weather, programmable, summer of discontent made glorious winter by this bastard son of the all-talk/no-information age. Strange, there is a full hunt hounding my head, red coats like horn-blasts, like protests, like right-of-way,

like blood. Running on a slash-and-burn economy, I'm firing off ideas to keep my hands warm, my feet cold as burnt-out neon bulbs full of wasp carcasses and dormancy. Everything is metal. Every breath is full of English shrapnel: grit, manners, bronchitis, leaves, silence, cigarette ash, particles

of rusting summer, centuries of soot. My mind's a clogged brick chimney belching last year's smoke into my hopeless lungs. Breathe. Irradiation catches bronchioles and alveoli in a fractal. Keats reading himself as a Rorschach sees the branches of an apple tree.

Close bosom, my arse. His breath and mine fall down like sycamore
seeds,
twisting the hunt into a kite-tail of brittle bows.
The howls begin. Books fall open. The unspoken in pursuit
of the unspeakable. *Calloo callay hurrah* and *tally-ho*. Nothing really.
The quick fox jumps sentence, Red Riding Hood to Snow White, runs
into

winter. His change will bring us all down, S.A.D. tilting
after invisible blizzards, wind milling thoughts like salt to a fine
snow.

I exhale onto the glass, breath ground from lungs, a rattle
but no hunting horn to purse my lips to
call the dead in from their ice-locked ships. Hard to find real ghosts

this close to Hallowe'en, but all around are vampires—I mean winters
dressed as spring. Not “the torch and drag of autumn” for these old
queens,

but the lightning-blasted oak tree's final showy head of hair
transplant, its last Viagra-growth. Jewelled nightingales. Make-up
for the grave. The dead, the dead are getting published

more than the living, coffins flapping open under autumn mulch
like lap-tops, flip-swift and deadly. I read poems breathed in ether-
net, see plays where the author acts the pixellated ghost in sheets
and sheets and sheets of manuscript. Dead-hand. Lord Bragg
interviews

the recently deceased: *one question—define posthumous fame*.

The dirt that's dug after we are earth. A dearth of *winnowing winds*
this autumn; *thy hook / Spares* what it should sling, a packet of
birthday letters

blown in ash up the chimney long ago, a claim to scandal
not memory, a hardened rut too easy to run down. Any other old
flames?

Keats coughs behind me, his pages rustling like finished fire, like dun

feathers, about to take off, asking me to leave the library's viewless
wing.

I rest my head. I would not exchange my dream of winter for his
Roman spring.

I clear my throat, catch Keats in a cough

sweet wrapper, add him to a pocketful of crumpled poets.

The cold, clear day will come, I think, when they will fall like snow.

Danse Macabre

Let yourself out of this shack of bones,
be the door-closer, become the key-holder.
Embellish the tale with an outside coloured in
verdigris and sunset and slate. Be the single eye
socket-fallen and the tongue gone soft, slack,
unrooted, that see and speak the world without

the skeleton's anguish.

Let yourself leave this
folded parcel wrapped in skin;
be undone from the strings of sinews. Be free
of houses of goods of all but senses
swelling and encumbered
with the world.

Take writing

from the bone-
grasp of your
fleshed
hand

drop
your
voice

from
the string-box,
the wire
cage of your
nervous
throat. Be pure,

untrammelled.