



Native Origins

from the scraped-up residue of what's left – what's gone – what's printed – she's finally grown into the bookshop i've become – i stand between a town's passion for altering skins the shapes of bodies & the dripping of colours – i've shifted from these native origins these houses these cracked windows – i stand on safe ground & the sun knocks the sun leans against my door – in a room – old books change hands quickly – daylight plunders canopies of trees – it shakes the bougainvillea the blueberry the frangipani – the girl flicks her hair at the sun's face – she picks overdosed flowers from her garden from a sodden waterlogged Spring – she is the solitary participant of an ancient game – scraping up blue infinities – ululating loudly capturing the shudder of an embalmed echo – she pinches my lifeline to see if we're back on the road & driving past farmers' houses – paddocks humped with unpicked potatoes – we've lost touch with the South Pole the bright cold stars we've lost touch with local words cluttering up our veins – roads rattle the frost-bitten grass – insects swarm – lampposts bend their ears to our windows to listen for people sleeping – for ghosts huddling amongst trees – it's natural then for us to fraternize with the icemen of Maungatapu who climb mountains who follow their paw-prints through valleys of snow

she's finally grown into the book i want to write – the hallway reverberates with music her kind of music the music that sucks harmonies out of the air – birds dissipate unable to compete with her singing – the world tilts from this morning's departure it spins on flashes of deflected sunlight the girl traverses desolate playgrounds where the land is burnt red where rainbows swirl odourless in clouds & an army band marches & small battle-sized boys – tackle each other – for the hell of it – they jump over stinging nettle – blackberry – clumps of gorse – they reek of war paint – angels conceal their footprints amongst the gunned-down flowers – & after an interval – the fighting fizzles out – a bell rings – & each boy goes home & slides into his shrine built for nights of sleeping in soft seclusion

every day i've grown into the book shop she returns to – for some reason i think of orange vests i think of who i am of who we are – literary workers spiking up street-side pages of one story rolling into another – we identify with who we are – i realize there's this possibility of she & i veering off to explore life's abstractions – the bronze skeletons of Borneo the mango gardens of Polynesia – we work in seasonal shifts we follow ancient star charts for displaced boat people – going north – going south to the plank-built communities of islands freckling the Pacific – whatever she thinks we still pick up survivors – like ourselves who continue to cross borders – pull down fences – swim rivers cross oceans – i make time to unclog the voices of families working the fields – relics of ourselves dug up & dried off – we make time for mythological lovers – like us – we make time to ask – questions – for us to rehabilitate to move on & we do – we do – move on

not often do we dream of – or brush off the interference of light pinging off windows off a fallen ancestor – at night i show something of my father’s perversity & run amok amongst goblins frolicking in the tall undergrowth – i’m tired of worship & glamour of mantra slogans – the world of affectation & false glitter – but nothing much changes – my father goes on – the boy goes on & we buckle like metaphors – the sun pulling on its ropes – not usually dreamt of – but a full-blown fantasy can drop suddenly – like hot rain – i reset my clock & every night a different butterfly instantly disappears – its life cycle drowned in nectar

in the middle of our house carved figures grow vertically from large pictorial books – every night they emerge – their skins of sunshine melt into sap – close to the silica edges of our founding–fathers’ memorials – i contemplate the theory of assimilation of all things pulsing – all things waking & sleeping – of high–blue domes of deep–green troughs i feel for the weathered faces of trees the adzed facades of houses of women who open the eyes of huntsmen herdsman – the girl is a hands-on exponent of washing her body – she sits in the heat – she sits – often squatting on fathers – grandfathers – the girl whose thighs imprison her twins – identical mythmakers waiting for the bone hook to set them free – the hook which pulled the earth out of its green volcanic sludge – families huddle around the warmth of swapping stories – i pull her towards me towards my nose my brow my years of stillness – she presses into me a familiarity of worship – we walk through tessellating dimensions of colour – she presses me into the soft cloisters of her body uncertain of this coming-of-age of changing forests of changing families – climbing over families – i live this revelation – this transitioning into guardians with fire in their eyes – what’s real is the remoteness – the end of a summer squall – a sundial burning my hands – & i stroke it – i stroke the sundial’s path – stroke the slide of heated rain – what’s real are the traffic lights – the Shell signs flashing – the smell of McDonalds of Kentucky Fried Chicken – but nothing seems to happen – no horns sound – no trucks rumble through – cars are historical – the Newman’s bus stops – no one gets off – gets on – the truth is the carved figures leap up like burnt artefacts as if pulled from the sun

a blind old bugger feels his way into the book shop (or perhaps he wants out) pedestrians squeeze onto paths – some perform diminishing acts – & i hear the soft peristaltic swallowing of an afternoon – feral cats paddle ditches – island birds squabble for landing rights – the girl phones me from a book shelf behind Humanities i hold her voice in my hand – she’s been talking to Sartre – from the messed up residue of what’s left – what’s past – she & i find a talismanic pendulum ticking ticking & a blue rose– springs up in the room – grows like a creeper – flakes its petals she touches my arm – speaks of doping herself up by inserting her eggs into my skin my role – to collect wings abdomens cocoons maggots moths famous for their spirals their twists & turns & sudden dead–ends – her role to gulp at headlines good & ugly or far–fetched – a rare procedural darkness reveals her war paint – of setting suns glossing her face – what’s rightly hers – the scorched–earth philosophy of an obscure journey – she’s been talking to Sartre again

she stares – the eyes of huntsmen herdsman are hers – she stares at us – it’s true the loneliness of the Te Atatu street dancer goes on & on – the girl dances – no restrictions to alternative limits – whoever slashed & flattened this track to the sea for her – has left me no choice – i gather high balls of cloud – i squeeze at their internal organs & experience the feverish dancing of her skipping lightly over water – a

cascade of music breaks the softness of her movements the sea interferes – is intrusive
the sea is in my face too much – sand shifts the tide – a jazz band plays *Dave Brubeck*
& the girl sways her hips – clicks fingers & somehow i float into her breath – the sea
wants in – wants to play its part – the beach tumbles & rips into a newspaper’s
masthead of one more passerby – sinking or swimming – call it survival – then
chasing after a picture’s glowing self – the morning tosses up a snapshot – of mouths
sounding off – faces sweating – a reminder of a clump of trees & daylight whispering down
my neck – i hear her jeans rubbing against mine – a feminine shift – a feminine
background brightening suddenly into mangroves & cliffs & clinging homes – the sky
camouflages itself amongst thin blue clouds – the sky follows – she’s visible for such
a short time – i feel the lushness of shrubs flowering – of traffic lighting up thin yellow
lines – sometimes i traverse the city – drained from an ancient swamp – devoid of
samples of recognised fingerprints – fingerprints gathering dust from places where
she’s been – of people who she’s touched – & if i sit for too long under the
tumorous snout of this tree – she’ll eventually go by – maybe stop maybe not – maybe
somebody will – but that’s all right – that’s all right – being who i think i want to be –
i know sooner or later – i’ll brush myself down – the girl dances & the Te Atatu
locals ogle at her slick body jerks – the girl entertains – she’s thinks of Jean–Paul –
she dances her interpretation of how to be existential – she’s jealous of anyone
who tries to fuck with his cross–eyed brain his diminutive philosophical body – if
asked about credentials between streets – i pick up the stares of strangers – the faces
at windows watching laughing – the dress-up artificiality of decorating emotions –
i battle through rough membranes of devotion through thinning fog – the squelched
fields of mud – if asked about credentials i have my mirrors – my lenses – i follow up
on hunches of who went out my door first – who went second – who stole my phone?
who wants a tattooed face? – she wants a tattooed face – wants time to compare tidal
moons – she has her twins to live for – to keep her warm – i close the bookshop
leave it to itself to find a sentence complicated enough for us to crawl into – for her &
i to retreat to

where my father digs for potatoes

my mother – slows down the sun

Iain Britton is an Aotearoa New Zealand poet and author of several poetry collections. His work has been nominated for a Forward Prize for Best Single Poem and Best First Collection. Poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Harvard Review*, *Poetry*, *The New York Times*, *Poet Lore*, *Wild Court*, *Blackbox Manifold*, *Molly Bloom*, *New Humanist*, *The Scores Journal*, *Stand*, *Agenda*, *New Statesman*, *Prototype*, *Poetry Birmingham* and *Poetry Wales*. *THE INTAGLIO POEMS* was published by Hesterglock Press (UK) 2017.

Copyright © 2022 by Iain Britton, all rights reserved. This text may be used and shared in accordance with the fair-use provisions of Copyright law. Archiving, redistribution, or republication of this text on other terms, in any medium, requires the notification of the journal and consent of the author.