

**Anna Kerdijk Nicholson**

## STARS, UNBROKEN CODE

On the porch there's an uncluttered view  
of the infinite — and a map, except it's hard  
to work out, from the rail, which way is up  
because you're supposed to be in a deckchair  
holding it above your head and because it's  
a celestial map, up is the flat black, fat black  
glittering, not the stuff for feet and dirt.

But that will have to be another night, when I have  
the red cellophaned torch required to disinhibit  
my night eyes so I can read the map, find the M5  
of the heavens, seek out the recently-near Mars,  
locate Venus. How in hell long would it take  
to navigate by the stars? They're on the move,  
as I attest, between one long reading of the Best  
American Poetry 2001 and my next endeavour —  
to get the dog to pee before we go to sleep —  
the whole formation's rotated round, but like a ship's  
compass or one of those snow-storm domes,  
it seems to operate on gyroscopic principles, three-  
or-more dimensional, not left to right, or front to back;  
then there's trees and cloud and neighbours' lights:  
I'm not getting it at all, I'd lose myself if I had to navigate  
back to the front door. Would I keep my eyes on  
one constellation or its feature, follow it for all  
I'm worth — but what about its pace, if I'm a liner or a dhow,  
does it make a difference how I keep a grip on the pin pricks?  
I start to muse on the same old stuff — we're made from  
the dust of stars, every bit of me's recycled, I'm drinking  
water which has passed through other beings many  
times before. What profound need or compulsion  
would get me out there spotting Magellanic clouds?

My toes crack in the leaf litter and sticks as I  
hand underwear and shirts in the hot violent air. It's been

trying to push the house down. Occasionally, a branch whacks the tank and it resounds like a drum and I imagine the wind has lines like an aerodynamic prototype knotting in the cabin's stumps, so the place gets hitched and humped. It's far too hot to even contemplate a short walk with the dog, who's bored beyond compare. At the river it's like a hairdryer down between the cliffs, we're dry in seconds, hair raised in outlandish quiffs, scaly skin, and I think of how Dylan Thomas took lovers, though *madly in love with Caitlin*, ripped in two, having affairs then hooked and hauled back home.

What then is truth? I do a survey: the skin of the black snake which the dog recoils from thinking it's the snake; blood, or the marks it leaves behind; subjectivity, objectivity, what you're willing to negotiate and by definition, what you're willing to disown, or surrender, or let go. But oh god, how sweet it must be to satisfy desire, to have the object, to own the right to love it, be fulfilled, for even a short time, and forget the promises and reasons, the pact you made and which you haven't changed and you could, if you wished, renegotiate, but can't or haven't bothered.

So what do you say to your wife on Friday night after the affair's over? Do you describe the way the pen just fell down the outline of your lover's back, how food was redundant, how the node at the back of her knees became your Magen David, that the sweetness of her sweat is all forgotten now and would you like a cup of tea? And what it's like lifting the sheets you so well remember and watch your legs lift in and under near the nightdress you'd wanted to forget, the face cream, the lustlessness of the bedside lamp, maybe the angle of the clock as it looks on down over the four pillows and you feel the need, again, to pee so you can be in the quiet of the room at the back alone, thinking about all the confusion you're making and whether you can go it alone.

The wind forbids as much as rain, unlike words it does not discriminate; whatever the syntax or the architecture, it wants it down. In this bright spring blue, wattle-lashing sky, its hot violent air rotates on the ecliptic, part of some zodiac unable to be named and I have a cartographic urge to transect the celestial equator, to contradict the wind.

Sitting still here in my Ptolemaic universe writing text on text, wondering if writing cross-hatched across the page, as they did in old letters, will help meaning to be read between the lines, erasing text with text, a palimpsest of reading and believing and, given that they say nothing is fixed not even the sphere of stars, how many theories can be reconstituted, having been pounded to dust?

Everywhere the signs "1080 Fox Poison Baits Laid on This Property." I see him, Renard, down by a brook, he's mid-stream, smaller than my dog but much the same kind of colour; he sees me; I see him, his peaked face, nose; turns tail on the stepping stones, and that beautiful brush that balancing tail slips away up the bank. I stand, amazed. He didn't look deserving of epithets like *deceitful* or *feral pest*.

The wind's grabbing the shirts by the armpits, the grey and white ones on the line, swinging them around. I walk to and fro to the gas stove, brew coffee, read more and the dust is lifted up and off, to the place erosion goes.

