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Bone-Deep: How a Novel Took Me All the Way to Aotearoa, New Zealand An Annotated Translation

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Introduction

When I began studying te reo Māori, during my MA in Translation Studies at the Università di Siena in 2012, I was unaware that this decision would profoundly shape my personal and professional life. The linguistic structure and cultural context of te reo Māori offered a unique challenge and insight into Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*, a novel that deeply impacted me and inspired my move to Aotearoa New Zealand. As I reflect on my journey – completing my PhD, enduring personal loss, and raising a family – my dedication to translating this seminal work has become a means of honouring Hulme's legacy and the cultural richness she represents.

My approach to translating *The Bone People* is deeply influenced by postcolonial and feminist translation theories and happens – and it is necessary – within the decolonisation discourse. The need to address power dynamics and cultural hegemony in translation guided me in recognising and preserving the novel's cultural nuances, guaranteeing the representation of the Māori elements in translation, and ensuring that the translated text maintains the same critical stance towards dominant cultural narratives. My ethical positioning as a translation activist, advocating for approaches that emphasise cultural preservation and authenticity, aligns with my personal and professional experiences, which have shaped my understanding of the novel and its cultural significance.

The book

The Bone People is a tale of the tension between two coexisting cultures and the synthetic third space existing between them. This tension, and the balance accompanying it, is embodied in the three main characters: the Māori man (Joe), the deaf Pākehā boy (Simon/Haimona/Clare), and the mixed-heritage woman (Kerewin). The character of Kerewin Holmes performs as Keri Hulme's alter ego, and – through her – Hulme¹ explores biculturalism, transcending the destructive force of a politically imposed construction of the self, and offering the concept of the 'numinous', which transforms the dichotomy 'either/or' into a holistic 'both/and', thus preserving the wholeness of the individual. It is also, therefore, a tale of identity – and the negotiation thereof – in a landscape inhabited by a dominant colonising culture – a hegemonic power – and by a dominated culture (and language) still fighting for its survival exactly 40 years after the novel was first published. However, Hulme writes in the conscious attempt to decolonise Aotearoa New Zealand by fighting *for* something rather than *against* something else. She embraces cultural inclusion as a form of healing, as it is the synthetic third space – the intercultural realm – that holds all the magic, it's the three characters that "[t]ogether, all together, [...] are the instruments of change"². Consequently, the characters' diseases/accidents portrayed in the book are in fact 'cultural' ones that are finally healed when the three become a multicultural family, and they each resolve their own identity in their coexistence with the other two.

¹ Keri Hulme identified closely with the Kai Tahu tribe of the Māori of which she claimed one-eighth ancestry.

² Incipit, *The Bone People*, Keri Hulme, 1984.

The tale came to Hulme in a dream, in short form, which she then decided to expand into a novel, feeling that the characters needed more space to tell their story.³ It took her fourteen years to get *The Bone People* written and published, after quite the publishing rollercoaster. The first publisher rejected it, leading Hulme to rewrite the whole thing with her mother's help. After this massive revision, four more publishers rejected it for various reasons – ranging from a concern over the cultural content of the book (read the Māori elements), the stylistic experimentation of the work, and some of the themes she explored in the narration – and suggested further significant editing and cutting of whole sections. Finally, in February 1984, *The Bone People* came out unaltered, published by Spiral Collective, and all copies from the first and second print run sold out. In that same year it won the Mobil Pegasus Award for Māori Fiction and the New Zealand Book Award for Fiction. In 1985, a new edition was published by Spiral Collective in conjunction with Hodder and Stoughton and went through a number of reprints, while the first American edition was published by Louisiana State University Press. 1985 was the year *The Bone People* was awarded the prestigious Booker Prize, first New Zealand publication to ever receive the accolade and one of only two to this day (the second came 35 years later with *The Luminaries* by Eleanor Catton).

It doesn't surprise that something eliciting such a strong response from the New Zealand publishers of the time would become such a critical success both home and abroad. In Aotearoa New Zealand it's the mid-eighties, the Māori Renaissance is flourishing, decolonisation is slowly happening also by means of Māori literature written in English and language revitalisation and reappropriation. The empire is finally writing back, to say it with Ashcroft et al.⁴ and it is majestic. Aotearoa New Zealand wants to read *itself* and the world wants to read it too. And this discovery of literary identity brings with it the concept of biculturalism (and bilingualism!) as an alternative to government integration policies, very uncomfortably close to colonialist policies of cultural assimilation.

Te reo Māori

It is in this landscape that Hulme's use of te reo Māori happens, as she experiments with its fusion with English (te reo pākehā) trying to craft a new language able to fully express the postcolonial experience and identity of Aotearoa New Zealand. One of the primary challenges in translating *The Bone People* was and is navigating being a translation activist and making decisions between annotation and translation: as a translator committed to an appropriate⁵ foreignizing approach⁶, I had to decide when to preserve Māori terms in their original form and when to provide annotations. This decision was crucial in ensuring that the translation retained the cultural specificity of Hulme's work while remaining accessible to Italian readers.

I was recently talking to Marian Evans – kaitiaki⁷ of Spiral Collective – and we were discussing translation and ethics and how much translators have the duty to represent what is in the source text or, even more so, what the source text *is*. We were reflecting on handling texts that have te reo Māori in them, and how translators of languages other than English have handled them in the far and recent past.⁸ We then started talking about how the writers – well, the texts, if we're being purists, which I tend to be – use te reo Māori (or any minority language

³ Te Kaihau – The Windeater, Keri Hulme, Victoria University Press, 1985.

⁴ *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al, Routledge 1989.

⁵ It is my strong opinion that no theory of translation should be embraced too fiercely, as theory's primary function is that of enabling the translator to localize themselves ethically and inform their practice without defining it. Any theory should be impressing itself on the translator, not the translation.

⁶ To be interpreted along the lines of what was theorised by Lawrence Venuti and in juxtaposition to a not desirable (at least no longer so) domesticating translational stance.

⁷ Guardian (te reo Māori).

⁸ Be it translation, annotation, etc.

for that matter): the use of loan words/sentences/paragraphs can go from the inclusive and didascallic to the exclusive and enraged but, as it were, there are many cases in which the use of te reo Māori in a text has nothing to do with its intended readers! In the book *Imagining Decolonisation*, Jennie Smeaton, very simply, states:

Language is another structural thing that underlies life in this place (Aotearoa NZ, ed.). We use many terms in te reo Māori in this book – Sometimes we will stop to explain these, for those who do not speak te reo, but sometimes we won't. If you don't know the meaning of this kupu, we encourage you to look them up in a Māori dictionary as you go.⁹

Usually, I choose to annotate te reo Māori in only two cases: where the writer provides paratext and where the term in question is understandable/accessible to non-te-reo-Māori speaking readers, meaning a commonly used term that has been borrowed by New Zealand English and is therefore easily accessible to most New Zealand readers. This choice was made to preserve the bilingualism of the literary production of indigenous writers while avoiding excluding Italian readers from understanding those more commonly used terms. This decision, considering the continuum of Māori language knowledge among non-te-reo-Māori-speaking New Zealanders, was made subjectively, based on my experience in Aotearoa/New Zealand and my perception of the average level of te reo knowledge among non-Māori – it is, therefore, forever changing.

English	Italian	Note
“Raupo and ferns”	“Raupo e felci”	I decided not to annotate as “raupo” is not as accessible but also quite clear from context.
“They are ngaio”	“Sono ngaio”	I could have annotated in this case, but it is so clear from context that we are dealing with trees that it seemed rather pleonastic.
“Her chest of pounamu”	“Lo scrigno dei pounamu”	I have annotated in this case, as most New Zealanders know what pounamu are. In this case it is a chest containing all of Kerewin taonga (treasures).

Hulme's voice(s)

The significant translational challenge of te reo Māori use in *The Bone People* is paired with Hulme's use of idiosyncratic and creative vocabulary in English.¹⁰ For example, she tends to merge words that would exist well as hyphenated, in English, and to create humorous or ironic neologisms. These instances need to be handled on a case-by-case basis, but the rule of thumb would be to try the hardest to preserve the neologisms and puns, wherever possible. Thus, words such as careworm, spicejars, slateblue, bartop, saltstained, navyblue, sunfire, bloodyholed, soulwringing, rolledup, sackneck, windwarped, sharpedged, fistplanted,

⁹ Elkington, Bianca et al. *Imagining Decolonisation*, BWB Texts, Bridget Williams Books Ltd, Wellington, New Zealand, 2020. p.18

¹⁰ and other languages featured in her use of loans, including German and Italian.

highbones, hollowcheeked, silverblond, seabluegreen, birdboned in the original text, have been either:

- unpacked into their two-word equivalent and translated “naturally”, as Italian syntax doesn’t allow *noun phrases* nor does it tolerate *adjective + noun* structures too often, without sounding rather stiff and antiquated.
- translated into Italian as:

English	Italian	Note
“the careworm was still there”	“il senso di preoccupazione strisciava ancora” <i>(The sense of worry/dread still slithering)</i>	I attempted to preserve the reference to the “worm” by using the verb “to slither”, in Italian.
“saltstained rim”	“orlo salso”	I used the short adjective “salso” to avoid using complements of specification, thus maintaining the effect of the original. Also, the choice between “salato” and “salso” comes from the former being predominantly used for taste, and the latter evoking “salsedine”, which is the sediment salt leaves behind.
“navyblue”	“blumarino”	I took the liberty of merging the Italian “blumarino” into one word, since in this case it was possible without lexical effort.
“soulwringing night”	“notte contorcianima”	I took the liberty of keeping “contorcianima” as a one-word adjective, rather than translating “notte che contorce l’anima”, especially given its use in direct speech.
“silverblond”	“biondoargentei”	I took the liberty of merging the Italian “Biondo argentei” into one word, since in this case it was possible without lexical effort
“seabluegreen”	“verdeblumarino”	I took the liberty of merging the Italian “verde blu marino” into one word, since in this case it was possible without lexical effort

- or, like the case of “sinshine”, where – once again, given the lexical freedom allowed by direct speech – I decided to recreate the punny neologism as an equivalent, and opted for the single word “malalba” (literally “evil dawn”) to preserve the negative connotation of “sin” with “mal” (“evil”) and the reference to light carried by the root word “sunshine” with “alba” (“dawn”).

Other incredibly compelling “plot points turned linguistic devices” (and vice versa) of the novel are the inclusion of Simon’s sign language and the constant shifting of point of view (POV) of the narration.

Simon’s personally created sign language casts the reader once again in a dance of exclusion and inclusion mediated by language. Similarly to Joe’s use of te reo Māori to (unsuccessfully) exclude Kerewin from the conversation, Simon’s sign language initially includes Joe but excludes Kerewin, who will need time and observation to get into the *flow of things*. From a historical and sociological postcolonial standpoint, it is interesting to see how it is the Māori man and the Pākehā boy who are excluding (or attempting to exclude) mixed heritage Kerewin from the bicultural/bilingual space, and how it takes everyone’s self-awareness, negotiation, and to some extent rebuilding of their own identity to communicate, coexist, and ultimately thrive. I translated all Hulme’s descriptions of Simon’s hand movements and facial expression as precisely as I could in the target text.

As mentioned above, the narration POV shifts continuously throughout the book. Hulme’s skills in this space allow the reader different degrees of insight into the characters and their stories, as exactly as Hulme needs them presented and disclosed.

There are three main positionings of the narrating voice:

1. The narrator is ‘internal’ to the character (we feel their thoughts and perceive the action from their most intimate POV: it is a very effective strategy for Simon’s character, that can thus ‘talk’ to us);
2. The narrator is ‘external’ but adopts the POV of one of the characters to describe a given action, with two potential outcomes:
 - If the character is in a group, we will witness – especially through the description of their external reactions, as we are not in ‘internal’ mode – their perception of the scene taking place;
 - If the character is alone we will witness, without the help of any cognitive filter eliciting our empathy, the barest expression of the character’s self;
3. The narrator is completely external and equidistant, without taking any privileged POV.

This is a powerful device because it allows the readers to empathise with the characters – even when their actions are far from sympathetic – by enabling them to shift between a subjective and an objective view of a given situation. Moreover, when in ‘internal’ mode, the readers have access to some of the characters ‘unspoken’ traumas and motives, their most intimate history and most defining perceived identities. This ability allowed to the readers results in the powerful experience of witnessing positive change while having committed to deeply flawed characters, and makes their renewed self-awareness, rediscovered identity, and ultimately their redemption and joy a cathartic experience.

This style of narration is complex and multifaceted: within each of the above-mentioned point of views there’s space for flashbacks, nightmares, visions, poems, songs, with everything punctuated by a change in register, typographical choices, and so on. I adhere as precisely as possible to these guidelines, as I understand them for what they are and therefore not needing any adjustment on my part. They are the novel’s score, and I am only working on the lyrics.

Conclusions

The action of power does not flow exclusively from top to bottom; it is not always a matter of relentless repression and constraint, but also moves from bottom to top. In the case of Aotearoa

New Zealand and its literature, the translator's aim should be to preserve the balance of the linguistic-cultural continuum already present in the original texts. The choice becomes one of fostering the drive towards decolonisation and the reclamation of identity by the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific. This trend is evident in the intensification of bilingualism, no longer as timid and didactic but proud and authoritative, in contemporary literary texts. The translator can participate in this process of decolonisation by recognising this assertion of identity and reflecting it in their work.

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The bone people

Nelle ossa

Keri Hulme

He walks down the street. The asphalt
reels by him.
It is all silence.
The silence is music.
He is the singer.
The people passing smile and shake
their heads.
He holds a hand out to them.
They open their hands like flowers,
shyly.
He smiles with them.
The light is blinding: he loves the light.
They are the light.
He walks down the street. The asphalt is
hot and soft with sun.
The people passing smile, and call out
greetings.
He smiles and calls back.
His mind is full of change and curve
and hope, and he knows it is being
lightly tapped.
He laughs.
Maybe there is the dance, as she says.
Creation and change, destruction and
change.
New marae from the old marae, a
beginning from the end.
His mind weaves it into a spiral fretted
with stars.
He holds out his hand, and it is gently
taken.

She walks down the street. The asphalt
sinks beneath her muscled feet.
She whistles softly as she walks.
Sometimes she smiles.
The people passing smile too, but duck
their heads in a deferential way as
though her smile is too sharp.
She grins more at their lowered heads.
She can dig out each thought, each
reaction, out from the grey brains, out

Lui cammina per la strada. L'asfalto gli si
srotola accanto.
Tutto è silenzio.
Il silenzio è musica.
Lui è il cantante.
La gente che passa sorride e scuote la
testa.
Lui tende loro la mano.
Aprono le mani come fiori, timidamente.
Lui sorride con loro.
La luce è accecante: lui adora la luce.
Loro sono la luce.

Lui cammina per la strada. L'asfalto è
caldo e soffice di sole.
La gente che passa sorride e lo saluta.
Lui sorride e risponde.
Ha la testa piena di cambiamento e svolta
e speranza, e sa che la stanno consultando
un pochino.

Ride.

Forse c'è la danza, come dice lei.
Creazione e cambiamento, distruzione e
cambiamento.
Un nuovo marae¹¹ dal vecchio marae, un
inizio dalla fine.
La sua mente tesse tutto in una spirale
adorna di stelle.
Tende la mano, che è dolcemente presa.

Lei cammina per la strada. L'asfalto le
affonda sotto i piedi muscolosi.
Fischietta piano mentre cammina. Ogni
tanto sorride.
La gente che passa sorride a sua volta, ma
abbassa la testa con deferenza come se il
sorriso di lei fosse troppo tagliente.
Lei sorride ancora di più alle loro teste
basse. Può estrarre ogni pensiero, ogni
reazione, fuori da quei cervelli grigi, fuori

¹¹ Luogo sacro dove i Māori si riuniscono per le attività religiose e concernenti la comunità: festeggiamenti, matrimoni, funerali, scuola, preghiera.

through the bones. She knows how. She knows a lot.

She is eager to know more.

But for now there is the sun at her back, and home here, and the free wind all round.

And them, shuffling ahead in the strange-paced dance. She quickens her steps until she has reached them.

And she sings as she takes their hands.

They were nothing more than people, by themselves. Even paired, any pairing, they would have been nothing more than people by themselves. But all together, they have become the heart and muscles and mind of something perilous and new, something strange and growing and great.

Together, all together, they are the instruments of change.

In the beginning, it was darkness, and more fear, and a howling wind across the sea.

“Why not leave him?”

They can't whisper any more.

“No guarantee he'll stay on the bottom. Besides, we'll have to come back for the boat.”

The voice. The nightmare voice. The vivid haunting terrible voice, that seemed to murmur endearments all the while the hands skilfully and cruelly hurt him.

“We'll have to move soon.”

It is happening again, and like the time before, there is nothing he can do to stop it. It will take away the new people, it will break him, it will start all over again. He cannot change it. And worst of all, he knows in an inchoate way that the greatest terror is yet to come.

There is a sudden pause in the crashing of the waves, and a drawn prescient hissing.

“Jump now! Take the jacket, I'll swim. I can take care of him. . . .”

Even now, the barb of laughter in his voice.

Take care? Aiie!

In the memory in the black at the back of his eyes, there are words, different words. Help, but not help. Words. There were words.

attraverso le ossa. Sa come fare. Sa un sacco di cose.

È impaziente di sapere di più.

Ma per adesso ha il sole sulla schiena, e una casa, qui, e il vento libero tutto intorno.

E loro, che le trotterellano davanti in quella danza dal ritmo bizzarro. Accelera il passo finché non li ha raggiunti.

E canta quando li prende per mano.

Non erano nient'altro che persone, da soli.

Anche appaiati, qualsiasi paio, non

sarebbero stati altro che persone da sole.

Ma tutti insieme sono diventati il cuore e i muscoli e la testa di qualcosa di periglioso e nuovo, una cosa strana e incalzante e grandiosa.

Insieme, loro insieme, sono gli strumenti del cambiamento.

In principio era l'oscurità, e ancora paura, e un vento ululante che batteva il mare.

“Perché non lo lasciamo?”

Non possono più sussurrare.

“Non c'è garanzia che resti sul fondo. E poi, dobbiamo tornare per la barca.”

La voce. La voce da incubo. La voce vivida terribile persistente, che sembrava sempre mormorare tenerezze mentre le mani lo colpivano con sapienza e crudeltà. “Dobbiamo darci una mossa.”

Sta succedendo di nuovo e, come le altre volte, non c'è niente che lui possa fare per impedirlo. Gli porterà via tutti i nuovi amici, lo devasterà, ricomincerà tutto da capo. Non può farci niente. E la cosa peggiore è che sa, in cuor suo, che il terrore più grande deve ancora venire. C'è un'improvvisa pausa nel frangersi delle onde, e un sincopato sibilo premonitore.

“Salta! Prendi il giubbotto, io nuoto. A lui bado io...”

Perfino adesso, lo scherno del riso nella sua voce.

Badare? Aiie!

Nei ricordi nel nero dietro ai suoi occhi, ci sono parole, parole diverse. Aiuto, ma non aiuto. Parole. C'erano parole.

Ma poi il gemito lancinante e travolgente della barca che si infrange sugli scogli.

But then the overwhelming wrenching groan of the boat as she struck the rocks.

In the beginning, it was a tension, an element of strain that grew and crept like a thin worm through the harmony of their embrace.

“What *is* it you want?”

“Ahh nothing . . . you’re all the man I need.”

Chuckles in the warm dark.

Sitting up then and saying to him urgently:

“You must have a son. You must have people.”

It gnaws at him. She knew, somehow, that she wasn’t going to be the person who gave him a son, who gave him people. And she never told him.

Then, he had only chuckled again and said, “Well, we got him on the way, ne?”

But the undefinable careworm was still there.

After the storm-night, they talked about the tide-washed child.

“I think he likes us,” he had said.

“He needs you . . . look at him hold on though he’s not himself yet.”

“Shall we keep him then?” half-joking.

She had answered “Yes!” without hesitation.

“Before our baby? Before our son?”

“Before them all, man,” and she had turned out of his arms and danced, in lumbering triumphant glee.

Then the worm of care had gone. They were whole and sound together until the night they took her away.

It gnaws at him: the last words she gave him as they wheeled her under the flaring lights. Harsh and whispered, “O Ngakau, mind our child.”

Timote was already dead.

She meant the other one, the one who sat on his lap unmoved it seemed, while he was shaken and robbed of breath by sobbing.

“Hana is dead, dead, dead . . .” the pale child held his hand, and looked into his face with alien sea-coloured eyes, unclouded by tears. Marama said how

In principio era un’attrito, un elemento di tensione crescente che si faceva strada strisciando come un verme sottile nell’armonia del loro abbraccio.

“Che cos’è che vuoi?”

“Ahh niente . . . sei tu tutto quello che voglio.”

Risa sommesse nell’oscurità calda.

Poi si tira su e gli dice insistente:

“*Devi* avere un figlio. *Devi* avere una famiglia.”

Lo consuma. Lei sapeva, chissà come, che non sarebbe stata la persona che gli avrebbe dato un figlio, che gli avrebbe dato una famiglia. E non gliel’aveva mai detto.

Poi, lui aveva ridacchiato di nuovo e le aveva detto, “Beh, tra poco il piccolo arriva, *ne*¹²?”

Ma l’indefinibile senso di preoccupazione strisciava ancora.

Dopo la notte di tempesta, avevano parlato del bambino-della-marea.

“Mim sa che gli piacciamo,” aveva detto lui.

“Ha bisogno di te . . . guardalo, tiene duro anche se non è ancora tornato in sé.”

“Lo teniamo, allora?” un po’ per scherzo.

Lei aveva risposto “Sì!” senza esitazione.

“Prima del nostro bambino? Prima di nostro figlio?”

“Prima di tutti, no?” e si era liberata dal suo abbraccio e aveva ballato, preda di una gioia trionfante e sgraziata.

A quel punto il verme della preoccupazione se n’era andato. Erano stati completi e solidi insieme, fino alla notte in cui se l’erano portata via.

Lo consuma: le ultime parole che gli ha detto mentre la barella sfrecciava sotto le luci brillanti. Dure e sussurrate, “O Ngakau, bada al nostro bambino.”

Timote era già morto.

Intendeva quell’altro, quello che gli sedeva in grembo, all’apparenza indifferente, mentre lui era scosso e senza fiato per i singhiozzi.

“Hana è morta, morta, morta . . .” il bambino pallido gli teneva la mano, e lo

¹² Interiezione in Māori nell’originale.

bitterly, how hysterically upset he had been. But he never showed it to me. It gnaws at him: he has this one thing left of her, this second, hand, barely-touched half-formed relic of her presence.

And he no longer really wants it. And he knows the rock of desolation, and the deep of despair.

She had debated, in the frivolity of the beginning, whether to build a hole or a tower; a hole, because she was fond of hobbits, or a tower – well, a tower for many reasons, but chiefly because she liked spiral stairways.

As time went on, and she thought over the pros and cons of each, the idea of a tower became increasingly exciting; a star-gazing platform on top; a quiet library, book-lined, with a ring of swords on the nether wall; a bedroom, mediaeval style, with massive roofbeams and a plain hewn bed; there'd be a living room with a huge fireplace, and rows of spicejars on one wall, and underneath, on the ground level, an entrance hall hung with tapestries, and the beginnings of the spiral stairway, handrails dolphin-headed, saluting the air.

There'd be a cellar, naturally, well stocked with wines, home-brewed and imported vintage; lined with Chinese ginger jars, and wooden boxes of dates. Barrels round the walls, and shadowed chests in comers.

All through the summer sun she laboured, alone with the paid, bemused, professional help. The dust obscured and flayed, thirst parched, and tempers frayed, but the Tower grew. A concrete skeleton, wooden ribs and girdle, skin of stone, grey and slateblue and heavy honey-coloured. Until late one February it stood, gaunt and strange and embattled, built on an almost island in the shallows of an inlet, tall in Taiaroa. It has the hermitage, her glimmering retreat. No people invited, for what could they know of the secrets that crept and chilled and chuckled in the marrow of her bones? No need of

guardava in faccia con occhi alieni color mare, senza nemmeno una lacrima.

Marama ha detto quanto aspramente, istericamente fosse sconvolto. Ma a me non l'ha fatto vedere.

Lo consuma: gli resta solo questo di lei, questa reliquia di seconda mano, quasi intatta, semi-formata della sua presenza. E lui in fondo non la vuole più.

E conosce lo scoglio del dolore e l'abisso della disperazione.

Era stata indecisa, nella frivolezza del principio, se costruire una tana o una torre; una tana perché le piacevano gli hobbit, o una torre – beh, una torre per tanti motivi, ma soprattutto perché adorava le scale a spirale.

Col passare del tempo, riflettendo sui pro e i contro di ciascuna, l'idea della torre cominciò a farsi sempre più appassionante; una terrazza per guardare le stelle in cima; una biblioteca raccolta, zeppa di libri, con un anello di spade sul muro in fondo; una camera da letto, stile medievale, con travi massicce e un letto semplice e squadrato; ci sarebbe stato un soggiorno con un enorme camino, e file di spezie su una parete e di sotto, al piano terra, un salone d'ingresso tappezzato di arazzi e l'inizio della scala a spirale, il delfino del corrimano culminante in un saluto all'aria.

Ovviamente ci sarebbe stata una cantina, ben fornita di vini, sia fatti in casa che d'importazione; zeppa di barattoli di ginger cinese e scatole di legno piene di datteri. Barili lungo i muri e cassapanche negli angoli bui.

Aveva lavorato tutta l'estate sotto il sole, senza altra compagnia che manovalanza retribuita e sconcertata. La polvere confondeva e scorticava, la sete era insopportabile e l'umore era allo stremo, ma la torre cresceva. Uno scheletro di cemento, costole e busto di legno, pelle di pietra grigia e ardesia e bronzo. Finché, quasi alla fine di un febbraio, si erse spoglia e strana e possente, costruita in una quasi isola nelle secche di una baia, imponente a Taiaroa.

Era l'eremo, il suo ritiro scintillante. Non ci avrebbe invitato nessuno, che ne sapevano dei segreti che strisciavano e raggelavano e ridacchiavano nel midollo

people, because she was self-fulfilling, delighted with the pre-eminence of her art, and the future of her knowing hands.

But the pinnacle became an abyss, and the driving joy ended. At last there was a prison.

I am encompassed by a wall, high and hard and stone, with only my brainy nails to tear it down.

And I cannot do it.

I

Season of the Day Moon

1

Portrait of a Sandal

I

“... Like our bullock, Jack. Bugger’ll be on the old age pension before he’s killed.”

“Yeah, but look who’s laughing meantime?”

There was a rattle of laughter round the bar.

Kerewin, sitting apart, rang a coin on the counter and beckoned the barman.

“Same again?”

“Yes please.”

*This ship that sets its sails
forever
rigid on my coin
is named Endeavour.
She buys a drink to bar the
dreams of the long nights
lying.
The world is never what it
seems and the sun is dying . .*

She shrugs.

Wonder what would happen if I started singing out loud?

The beer moves in a whirlpool to the lip of the glass: the hose withdraws.

delle sue ossa? Non aveva bisogno di nessuno, perché lei era un essere auto-appagante, deliziato dalla pre-eminenza della sua arte e dal futuro delle sue mani sapienti.

Ma il vertice divenne un abisso e la gioia motrice ebbe fine. Da ultimo ci fu una prigionia.

Sono circondata da un muro di pietra, alto e arduo, e ho solo le mie mani sapienti per farlo a pezzi.

E non ce la posso fare.

I

Stagione della luna diurna

1

Ritratto di un sandalo

I

“... Come il nostro torello, Jack. Quel bastardo c’avrà la pensione d’anzianità prima che lo ammazzano.”

“Seh, ma chi è che se la ride intanto?”

Uno scroscio di risa percorse il bar.

Kerewin, seduta in disparte, fece tintinnare una moneta sul bancone e fece cenno al barista.

“Un altro?”

“Sì, grazie.”

*Questa nave che spiega le
vele per sempre
rigide sulla mia moneta
si chiama Endeavour.
Paga un giro per
scacciare i sogni delle
lunghe
notti distese.
Il mondo non è mai ciò
che sembra e il sole
muore...*

Dà un'alzata di spalle.

Chissà che succede se mi metto a cantare a squarciagola?

“Had a nice night?” asks the barman politely.

It’s the first thing anybody has said to her.

“Yeah.”

He hands her back the change.

“Fishing been any good?”

How long did it take to get round town that I had bought a boat?

“O fair enough,” she says, “fair enough.”

“Well, that’s good. . .” he mops the bartop cursorily and drifts away down to the other end of the bar, to the talk and the ever-curious people.

It’s late, Holmes, way after eleven. There’s no point in staying.

There had been no point in coming to the pub either, other than to waste some more time, and drink some more beer.

Guffaws.

Somebody’s in the middle of a rambling drunken anecdote. A Maori, thickset, a working bloke with steel-toed boots, and black hair down to his shoulders. He’s got his fingers stuck in his belt, and the heavy brass buckle of it glints and twinkles as he teeters back and forwards.

“ . . . And then fuckin hell would you believe he takes the candle . . . ”

I’d believe the poor effing fella’s short of words. Or thought. Or maybe just intellectual energy.

The word is used monotonously, a sad counterbalance for every phrase.

“And no good for even fuckin Himi eh? Shit, no use, I said....”

La birra si muove in un vortice fino al bordo del bicchiere: il tubo della spina si ritrae.

“Passato una bella serata?” chiede gentile il barista.

Sono le prime parole che le vengono rivolte.

“Seh.”

Le dà indietro il resto.

“Andata bene la pesca?”

Quanto c’è voluto perché si spargesse la voce che ho comprato una barca?

“O non c’è male,” dice, “non c’è male.”

“Beh, bene dai. . .” passa di sfuggita lo straccio sul bancone e si dirige all’altro capo del bar, verso le chiacchiere e la gente indiscreta.

È tardi Holmes, le undici sono passate da un pezzo. Non ha senso restare.

In effetti non aveva alcun senso nemmeno esserci andata al pub, a parte perdere un altro po’ di tempo e bere un altro po’ di birra.

Risata fragorosa.

Qualcuno è sbronzato, nel pieno di un aneddoto farneticante. Un maori, tarchiato, un operaio con gli scarponi da lavoro e capelli neri fino alle spalle. Ha le dita infilate nella cintura e quando barcolla avanti e indietro la pesante fibbia di metallo luccica e scintilla.

“ . . . E poi cazzo da non crederci prende la candela . . . ”

Si direbbe che quel povero disgraziato del “c” sia a corto di parole. O di pensieri. O forse proprio di energia intellettuale.

L’uso che fa della parola è ripetitivo, una triste compensazione a ogni frase.

Why this speech filled with
bitterness and contempt?
You hate English, man? I
can understand that but
why not do your
conversing in Maori and
spare us this
contamination? No swear
words in that tongue...
there he goes again. Ah
hell the fucking word has
its place, but all the time?
... aue.

Kerewin shakes her head. No use
thinking about it. She drains her glass,
slips off the stool, and heads for the
door.

The group at the end of the bar turns
round to stare. The man stops his yarn
and smiles blurrily at her. She didn't
smile back.

"Goodnight," calls the barman.
"Goodnight."

...

The crayfish moved in silence
through clear azure water. Bright scarlet
armour, waving antennae, red legs
stalking onward. Azure and scarlet.
Beautiful.

It Ias Iout then Ie realised she was
in the middle of a dream, because living
crayfish were purple-maroon and
orange: only when cooked, do they turn
scarlet. A living boiled cray? A
crayfish cooking as it walked calmly
through a hot pool?

She shuddered. The crayfish moved
more quickly through the blue crystal
sea and the fog of dreaming increased....

...

It is still dark but she can't sleep any
more.

She dresses and goes down to the
beach, and sits on the top of a sandhill
until the sky pales.

"E cazzo non è bene neanche per Himi
eh? Porca puttana, è inutile, ho detto. . ."

Come mai queste parole
piene di amarezza e
disprezzo? Odi l'inglese,
ciccio? Posso capire, ma
allora perché non conversi in
maori e ci risparmi questa
contaminazione? Quella
lingua non ne ha di
parolacce... arieccolo. Ah,
fanculo, quella parola del
cazzo ha un suo perché, ma
di continuo? . . . aue¹³.

Kerewin scuote la testa. Pensarci non
serve a niente. Si scola il bicchiere,
scivola giù dallo sgabello e si avvia verso
la porta.

Quelli del gruppo in fondo al bar si
girano a guardarla. L'uomo interrompe la
sua tirata e le sorride sfuocato. Lei non
ricambia il sorriso.

"Buonanotte," dice il barista.
"Buonanotte."

...

Il gambero si mosse silenzioso
nell'acqua azzurra limpida. Armatura
scarlatta, antenne fluttuanti, zampe rosse
in avanzata. Azzurro e scarlatto.
Magnifico.

Fu più o meno allora che si rese conto
che stava sognando, perché i gamberi vivi
sono marrone-violaceo e arancio: solo
quando sono cotti diventano scarlatti. Un
gambero vivo bollito? Un gambero in
cottura mentre cammina tranquillo in una
pozza calda?

Rabbrividi. Il gambero si mosse più
svelto nel mare azzurro cristallino e la
nebbia del sogno si fece più fitta...

...

È ancora buio ma non riesce più a
dormire.

¹³ esclamazione di sgomento o disperazione (te reo Māori).

Another day, herr Gott,
and I am tired, tired.

She stands, and grimaces, and spits.
The spittle lies on the sand a moment, a
part of her a moment ago, and then it
vanishes, sucked in, a part of the beach
now.

Fine way to greet the day,
my soul . . . go down to the
pools, Te Kaihau, and
watch away the last night
sourness.

And here I am, balanced on the
saltstained rim, watching minute
navyblue fringes, gill-fingers of
tubeworms, fan the water . . . put the
shadow of a finger near them, and they
flick outasight. Eyes in your lungs . . .
neat. Thee three-fin blenny swirls by . .
. tena koe, fish. A small bunch of scarlet
and gold anemones furl and unfurl their
arms, graceful petals, slow and lethal . .
. tickle tickle, and they turn into
uninteresting lumps of brownish jelly . .
. haven't made sea-anemone soup for a
while, whaddabout it? Not today,
Josephine . . . at the bottom, in a bank
of brown bulbous weed, a hermit crab is
rustling a shell. Poking at it, sure it's
empty? Ditheringly unsure . . . but now,

nervously hunched over his soft slug of
belly, he extricates himself from his old
hutch and speeds deftly into the new . . .
at least, that's where you thought you
were going, e mate? . . . hoowee, there
really is no place like home, even when
it's grown a couple of sizes too small. . .
.

Si veste e scende alla spiaggia e si
siede in cima a una duna finché il cielo
non comincia a schiarire.

Un altro giorno, herr Gott, e
sono stanca, stanca.

Si alza, fa una smorfia e sputa. La
saliva se ne sta per un istante sulla sabbia,
parte di lei un istante fa, e poi svanisce,
risucchiata, ora parte della spiaggia.

Bel modo di salutare il
giorno, anima mia . . . va' alle
pozze, Te Kaihau¹⁴, e guarda
svanire l'amarezza della
scorsa notte.

Ed eccomi qui, in equilibrio sull'orlo
salso, a guardare minute frange
blumarino, le dita branchiate dei vermi
tubo, che ondeggiano nell'acqua . . .
mettigli vicino l'ombra di un dito e
guizzano al riparo. Occhi nei polmoni . . .
figata. La bavosa mi vortica accanto . . .
tena koe¹⁵, pesce. Un mucchietto di
anemoni rossi e oro che spiegano e
ripiegano le braccia, petali leggiadri, lenti
e letali... ghirighiri e diventano ammassi
inutili di gelatina brunastra . . . è da un po'
che non fai la zuppa di anemoni di mare,
chennedici? Oggi no, Giuseppina¹⁶ . . . sul
fondo, in mezzo a un banco di alghe
bulbose e marroni, un paguro trafuga una
conchiglia. Le dà dei colpetti, sicuro che è
vuota? Titubantemente esitante . . . ma ora,

curvato nervosamente sul suo morbido
corpo di lumaca, si divincola dal suo
vecchio alloggio e con destrezza si affretta
dentro il nuovo . . . almeno, è lì che
pensavi di andare, e¹⁷ amico? . . . aaah, non
c'è nessun posto come *casa*, anche
quando ormai ti va stretta di un paio di
taglie. . . .

¹⁴ lett. mangiatore di vento (te reo Māori: kai=food, to eat; hau=wind, breeze, breath). Può significare sia vagabondo che perdigiorno.

¹⁵ ciao, forma di saluto a una persona (te reo Māori)

¹⁶ "Not tonight Josephine" era un'espressione ironica (o semi-ironica) usata comunemente per declinare l'invito sessuale della partner, attribuita a Napoleone Bonaparte e al suo rifiuto di possedere Giuseppina. Dal 1970 è entrata nell'uso comune dell'inglese australiano e neozelandese ("Not today Josephine") per dire di no.

¹⁷ Interiezione in Māori nell'originale, omografa alla congiunzione copulativa positiva italiana "e", che si è scelto di mantenere usando il corsivo. Corrisponde, più o meno, all'italiano "eh".

There is a great bank of Neptune's necklaces fringing the next pool.

"The sole midlitoral fuccoid," she intones solemnly, and squashes a bead of it under the butt of her stick. "Ahh me father he was orange and me mother she was green," slithers off the rocks, and wanders further away down the beach, humming. Nothing like a tidepool for taking your mind off things, except maybe a quiet spot of killing. . . .

Walking the innocent stick alongside, matching its step to hers, she climbs back up the sandhills. Down the other side in a rush, where it is dark and damp still, crashing through loose clusters of lupins. Dew sits in the centre of each lupin-leaf, hands holding jewels to catch the sunfire until she brushes past and sends the jewels sliding, drop by drop weeping off.

The lupins grow less; the marram grass diminishes into a kind of reedy weed; the sand changes by degrees into mud. It's an estuary, where someone built a jetty, a long long time ago. The planking has rotted, and the uneven teeth of the pilings jut into nowhere now.

It's an odd macabre kind of existence. While the nights away in drinking, and fill the days with petty killing. Occasionally, drink out a day and then go and hunt all night, just for the change.

She shakes her head.

Who cares? That's the way things are now. (I care.)

She climbs a piling, and using the stick as a balancing pole, jumps across the gaps from one pile to the next out to the last. There she sits down, dangling her legs, stick against her shoulder, and

C'è una bella fila di collane di Nettuno che incornicia la pozza seguente.

"L'unica fuccoide del mesolitorale," intona solennemente schiacciandone un grano sotto la punta del bastone. "Ahh il padre avevo arancio e mia mamma era verde,¹⁸ scivola via dagli scogli e si avventura più avanti lungo la spiaggia, canticchiando. Niente ti libera la mente dai pensieri quanto le pozze della bassa marea, eccetto forse un'ammazzatina. . . .

Col bastone innocente al suo fianco, le impronte dell'uno che si appaiano alle sue, ritorna in cima alle dune. Giù di corsa dall'altra parte, dov'è ancora buio e umido, precipitandosi attraverso un rado ammasso di lupini. La rugiada giace al centro di ogni foglia, mani piene di gioielli esposti al fuoco del sole finché lei non gli sfreccia accanto e fa scivolare i gioielli, che goccia a goccia lacrimano via.

I lupini si diradano; l'Ammophila si riduce a una specie di sottile erbaccia; la sabbia piano piano si trasforma in fango. È un estuario, dove tantissimo tempo fa qualcuno ha costruito un pontile. Le assi sono marcite e la dentatura irregolare dei pali ora si affaccia sul niente.

È uno stile di vita strano, macabro. Far passare le serate bevendo e riempire le giornate con uccisioni futili. Ogni tanto, bersi una giornata e poi andare a caccia tutta la notte, tanto per cambiare.

Scuote la testa.

Chissenefrega? Così stanno le cose ora. (A me me ne frega.)

Si arrampica su uno dei pilastri e, usando il bastone per mantenere l'equilibrio, salta gli spazi fra un palo e l'altro fino all'ultimo. Ci si mette a sedere,

¹⁸ Canzone umoristica del canone folk irlandese nota come "The Orange and The Green", ha un chiaro riferimento alla contrapposizione tra protestanti e cattolici.

lights a cigarillo to smoke away more time.

Intermittent wheeping flutes from oystercatchers.

The sound of the sea.

A gull keening.

When the smoke is finished, she unscrews the top of the stick

and draws out seven inches of barbed steel. It fits neatly into slots in the stick top.

“Now, flounders are easy to spear, providing one mind the toes.”

Whose, hers or the fishes’, she has never bothered finding out. She rolls her jeans legs up as far as they’ll go, and slips down into the cold water. She steps ankle deep, then knee deep, and stands, feeling for the moving of the tide. Then slowly, keeping the early morning sun in front of her, she begins to stalk, mind in her hands and eyes looking only for the puff of mud and swift silted skid of a disturbed flounder.

All this attention for
sneaking up on a fish? And
they say we humans are
intelligent? Sheeit . . .

and with a darting levering jab, stabbed, and a flounder flaps bloodyholed at the end of the stick.

Kerewin looks at it with slow smiled satisfaction.

Goodbye soulwringing
night. Good morning
sinshine, and a fat happy
day.

The steeled stick quivers.

She pulls a rolledup sack from her belt and drops the fish, still weakly flopping, in it. She hangs the lot up by sticking her knife through the sackneck into a piling side.

The later round the jetty is at thigh-level when she brings the third fish back, but there has been no hurry. She guts the fish by the rising tide’s edge, and lops off their heads for the mud

con le gambe che dondolano e il bastone contro la spalla, e accende un cigarillo per far passare un altro po’ di tempo.

Il canto intermittente delle beccacce.

Il suono del mare.

Un gabbiano grida.

Finito di fumare svita l’impugnatura del bastone

ed estrae una quindicina di centimetri di acciaio seghettato. Si incastra alla perfezione nei solchi in cima al bastone.

“Ora, i rombi sono facili da infilzare, però si deve stare attenti ai piedi.”

Quali, se suoi o dei pesci, non si è mai preoccupata di scoprirlo. Si arrotola i jeans più in alto che può e scivola nell’acqua fredda. Procedo con l’acqua alle caviglie, poi alle ginocchia e si ferma per sentire il flusso della marea. Poi lentamente, tenendosi il sole del primo mattino di fronte, comincia la caccia, la mente nelle mani e gli occhi attenti solo allo sbuffo di fango e all’improvvisa scia di limo di un rombo infastidito.

Tutta questa concentrazione
per cogliere di sorpresa un
pesce? E poi dicono che noi
umani siamo intelligenti?
Caaazzo ...

e con uno scattante affondo dall’angolazione perfetta, infilza, e un rombo si agita, trafitto, in cima al bastone.

Kerewin lo guarda soddisfatta, sorridendo di gusto.

Addio notte contorcianima.
Buongiorno malalba, e una
bella giornata piena.

Il bastone puntuto freme.

Tira fuori dalla cintura un sacchetto arrotolato e ci butta il pesce, che ancora si agita debolmente. Appende tutto al lato di un pilastro infilzando i manici del sacchetto col coltello.

L’acqua intorno al molo le arriva alla coscia quando riporta il terzo, ma se l’è presa calma. Sventra il pesce al limitare della marea che sale, e mozza le teste per lasciarle ai granchi. Poi si sdraia nel fitto dell’erba e, con un braccio per cuscino e

crabs to pick. Then she lies down in a great thicket of dun grass, and using one arm as a headrest and the other as a sunshade, falls quietly asleep.

It is the cold that wakes her, and clouds passing over the face of the sun. There is an ache in the back of her neck, and her pillowing arm is numb. She stands up stiffly, and stretches: she smells rain coming. A cloud of midge-like flies blunders into her face and hair. On the ground round the sack hovers another swarm, buzzing thinly through what would seem to be for them a fog of fish. The wind is coming from the sea. She picks up the sack, and sets off for home through the bush. Raupo and fern grow into a tangle of gorse: a track appears and leads through the gorse to a stand of windwarped trees. They are ngaio. One tree stands out from its fellows, a giant of the kind, nearly ten yards tall.

Some of its roots are exposed and form a bowl-like seat. Kerewin sits down for a smoke, as she nearly always does when she comes this way, keeping a weather eye open for rain.

In the dust at her feet is a sandal.

For a moment she is perfectly still with the unexpectedness of it.

Then she leans forward and picks it up.

It can't have been here for long because it isn't damp. It's rather smaller than her hand, old and scuffed, with the position of each toe palely upraised in the leather. The stitching of the lower strap was coming undone, and the buckle hung askew.

"Young to be running loose round here."

She frowns. She doesn't like children, doesn't like people, and has discouraged anyone from coming on her land.

"If I get hold of you, you'll regret it, whoever you are. . . ."

She squats down and peers up the track. There are footprints, one set of them. Of a sandalled foot and half an unshod foot.

Limping? Something in its foot so that's why the

uno per parasole, pian piano si addormenta.

È il freddo a svegliarla, e le nuvole che oscurano il sole col loro passaggio. Le fa male il collo e il braccio-cuscino è insensibile. Si alza, rigida, e si stiracchia: sente odore di pioggia in arrivo. Un nugolo di simil-moscerini le vola in faccia e nei capelli. Per terra, intorno al sacchetto, si libra un altro sciame che ronza fievole attraverso quella che potrebbe sembrargli una nebbia di pesce. Il vento arriva dal mare. Prende il sacchetto e si avvia a casa attraverso la macchia. Raupo e felci crescono in un groviglio di vegetazione: appare un sentiero che conduce attraverso le piante fino a un gruppo di alberi incurvati dal vento. Sono ngaio. Un albero si distingue dai suoi compagni, un gigante della specie, alto quasi dieci metri.

Alcune delle radici sono scoperte e formano una seduta a ciotola. Kerewin si siede per farsi una fumata, come fa quasi sempre quando passa di qui, con un occhio meteo all'erta per la pioggia.

Nella polvere ai suoi piedi c'è un sandalo.

Per un attimo resta completamente immobile di fronte alla natura improvvisa della cosa.

Poi si china in avanti e lo raccoglie.

Non può essere stato qui a lungo perché non è umido. È appena più piccolo della sua mano, vecchio e logoro, con la posizione di ogni dito leggermente impressa nella pelle. La cucitura del cinturino in basso aveva quasi ceduto e la fibbia ciondolava di traverso.

"Troppo giovane per gironzolare da solo qui intorno."

Aggrotta le sopracciglia. Non le piacciono i bambini, non le piacciono le persone, e ha dissuaso chiunque dal mettere piede sulla sua terra.

"Se ti becco te ne pentirai, chiunque tu sia . . ."

Si accovaccia e dà un'occhiata al sentiero. Ci sono delle impronte, una serie. Di un piede calzato e di mezzo piede scalzo.

sandal is taken off and left
behind?

She rubs a finger inside the sandal. The inner sole was shiny and polished from long wearing and she could feel the indentation of the foot. Well-worn indeed . . . in the heel though there is a sharp edged protrusion of leather, like a tiny crater rim. She turns it over. There is a corresponding Indriven hole In the rubber.

“So we jumped on something that bit, did we?”

She slings the sandal into the sack of flounders, and marches away belligerently, hoping to confront its owner.

But a short distance before her garden is reached, the one and a half footprints trail off the track, heading towards the beach.

Beaches aren't private, she thinks, and dismisses the intruder from her mind.

The wind is blowing more strongly when she pushes open the heavy door, and the sky is thick with dark cloud.

“Storm's coming,” as she shuts the door, “but I am safe inside. . . .”

The entrance hall, the second level of the six-floored Tower, is low and stark and shadowed. There is a large brass and wood crucifix on the far wall and green seagrass matting over the floor. The

handrail of the spiral staircase ends in the carved curved flukes of a dolphin; otherwise, the room is bare of furniture and ornament. She runs up the stairs, and the sack drips as it swings.

“One two three aleary hello my sweet mere hell these get steeper daily, days of sun and wine and jooyyy,”

the top, and stop, breathless.

“Holmes you are thick and unfit and getting fatter day by day. But what the hell”

She puts the flounders on bent wire hooks and hangs them in the coolsafe. She lights the fire, and stokes up the range, and goes upstairs to the library

Zoppica? Ha qualcosa nel
piede, per questo si è tolto il
sandalo e l'ha lasciato qui?

Passa un dito dentro il sandalo. La suola all'interno è liscia e lucida per l'uso e riesce a sentire i solchi lasciati dal piede. Consumato per bene, insomma . . . nel tallone però c'è una sporgenza di pelle affilata, come il bordo di un piccolo cratere. Lo gira. Nella gomma c'è un buco corrispondente, all'indentro.

“Allora abbiamo messo il piede su qualcosa che buca, eh?”

Butta il sandalo nel sacchetto dei rombi, e avanza belligerante, sperando di affrontarne il proprietario.

Ma pochi metri prima di raggiungere il giardino, l'impronta e mezza si allontana dal sentiero in direzione della spiaggia.

Le spiagge non sono private, pensa, e si toglie l'intruso dalla testa.

Il vento soffia più forte appena apre il pesante portone, e il cielo è fitto di nuvole scure.

“Arriva il temporale,” mentre chiude la porta, “ma dentro sono al sicuro. . . .”

L'ingresso, il secondo dei sei piani della Torre, è basso e spoglio e buio. C'è un crocifisso di legno e ottone sul muro di fronte alla porta e il pavimento è tappezzato di una stuoia verde. Il

Corrimano della scala a spirale finisce nelle pinne intagliate e ricurve di un delfino; per il resto la stanza è spoglia di qualsiasi mobile od ornamento. Si avvia di corsa per le scale e il sacchetto dondola, sgocciolando.

“Un due tre arincoglionita mia cara inferno puro diventano ogni giorno più ripide, giorni di sole e vino e gioooiaaaa,” in cima, si ferma, senza fiato.

“Holmes sei tozza e fuori forma e diventi più grassa ogni giorno che passa. Ma che cavolo. . . .”

Mette i rombi su uncini di fil di ferro e li appende al fresco e al riparo dalle mosche. Accende il fuoco e attizza la brace nella stufa, e va nella biblioteca al

for a book on flatfish cooking. There is just about everything in her library.

A sliver of sudden light as Ie comes from the spiral into the booklined room, and a moment later, the distant roll of thunder.

“Very soon, my beauty, all hell will break loose . . .” and her words hang in the stillness.

She stands over by the window, hands fistplanted on her hips, and watches the gathering boil of the surf below. She has a curious feeling as she stands there, as though something is out of place, a wrongness somewhere, an uneasiness, an overwatching. She stares morosely at her feet (longer second toes still longer, you think they might one day grow less, you bloody werewolf you?) and the joyous relief that the morning’s hunting gave, ebbs away.

“Bleak grey mood to match the bleak grey weather,” and she hunches over to the nearest bookshelf. “Stow the book on cooking fish. Gimme something escapist, Narnia or Gormenghast or Middle Earth, or,”

it isn’t a movement that made her look up.

There is a gap between two tiers of bookshelves. Her chest of pounamu rests in between them, and above it, there is a slit window.

In the window, standing stiff and straight like some weird saint in a stained gold window, is a child. A thin shockheaded person, haloed in hair, shrouded in the dying sunlight.

The eyes are Invisible. It is silent, immobile.

Kerewin stares, shocked and gawping and speechless.

The thunder sounds again, louder, and a cloud covers the last of the sunlight. The room goes very dark. If it moves suddenly, it’s going to go through that glass. Hit rockbottom forty feet below and end up looking like an imploded plum. . . .

piano di sopra a prendere un libro sulla cucina dei pesci piatti. Nella sua biblioteca c’è proprio di tutto.

Quando, dalla spirale, entra nella stanza piena di libri, una scheggia improvvisa di luce argentea e, un attimo dopo, il lontano rombo del tuono.

“Molto presto, bella mia, si scatenerà l’inferno...” e le parole restano sospese nell’immobilità.

Sta lì vicino alla finestra, i pugni chiusi sui fianchi, e guarda il crescente ribollire della spuma sottostante. Ha una strana sensazione mentre se ne sta lì, come se ci fosse qualcosa fuori posto, un’incongruenza da qualche parte, un’oppressione, qualcosa che incombe. Si fissa i piedi, cupa (gli indici più lunghi sono rimasti più lunghi, pensi che un giorno possano accorciarsi, stupida licantropa?) e il gioioso sollievo della mattinata di caccia scivola via.

“Umore grigio e tetro che fa il paio col tempo grigio e tetro,” e si piega verso lo scaffale più vicino. “Mettiamo da parte il libro di cucina sul pesce. Datemi qualcosa per evadere, Narnia o Gormenghast o la Terra di Mezzo, o,”

non è stato un movimento a farla voltare.

C’è uno spazio tra due delle librerie. Lo scrigno dei pounamu¹⁹ sta lì nel mezzo e sopra c’è una feritoia.

Nella finestra, dritto e rigido come uno strano santo in una teca dorata, c’è un bambino. Un esile essere scarmigliato, aureolato di capelli, avvolto nella luce del sole morente.

Gli occhi non si vedono. Sta zitto, immobile.

Kerewin lo fissa, scioccata e imbambolata e senza parole.

Il tuono risuona di nuovo, più forte, e una nuvola nasconde quel che resta della luce. La stanza si fa molto buia.

Se si muove di scatto, finisce che casca di sotto.

Un volo di dieci metri e si schianta come una prugna...

¹⁹ Pounamu è la giada della Nuova Zelanda, anche detta “pietra verde”. Molto spesso usata per fare gioielli, e armi decorative.

She barks,
“Get the bloody hell *down* from
there!”

Her breathing has quickened and her heart thuds as though she were the intruder.

The head shifts. Then the child turns slowly and carefully round in the niche, and wriggles over the side in an awkward progression, feet ankles shins hips, half-skidding half-slithering down to the chest, splayed like a lizard on a wall. It turns round, and gingerly steps onto the floor.

“Explain.”

There isn’t much above a yard of ,it standing there, a foot out of range of her furthest reach. Small and thin, with an extraordinary face, highboned and hollowcheeked, cleft and pointed chin, and a sharp sharp nose. Nothing else is visible under an obscuration of silverblond hair except the mouth, and it’s set in an uncommonly stubborn line.

Nasty. Gnomish, thinks Kerewin. The shock of surprise is going and cold cutting anger comes sweeping in to take its place.

“What are you doing here? Aside from climbing walls?”

There is something distinctly unnatural about it. It stands there unmoving, sullen and silent.

“Well?”

In the ensuing silence, the rain comes rattling against the windows, driving down in a hard steady rhythm.

“We’ll bloody soon find out,” saying it viciously, and reaching for a shoulder.

Shove it downstairs and call authority.

Unexpectedly, a handful of thin fingers reaches for her wrist, arrives and fastens with the wistful strength of the small.

Kerewin looks at the fingers, looks sharply up and meets the child’s eyes for the first time. They are seabluegreen, a startling colour, like opals.

It looks scared and diffident, yet curiously intense.

“Let go my wrist,” but the grip tightens.

Abbaia,
“Scendi immediatamente di lì, porca miseria!”

Ha il respiro affannoso e il cuore che batte così forte che sembra che l’intrusa sia lei.

La testa si volta. Poi il bambino gira lentamente e con cautela su se stesso nella nicchia e si contorce oltre il bordo in una progressione sgraziata, piedi caviglie stinchi fianchi, mezzo-scivolando mezzo-strisciando fino alla cassapanca, appiccicato come una lucertola al muro. Si gira e poggia delicatamente i piedi sul pavimento.

“Spiega.”

Più o meno un metro di lui, lì in piedi, pochi centimetri fuori dalla sua portata massima. Piccolo ed esile, con un volto straordinario, zigomi alti e guance scavate, mento aguzzo con la fossetta e un naso affilato affilato. Non si vede nient’altro sotto l’oscuramento dei capelli biondoargentei eccetto la bocca, fissa in un’inconsueta espressione di caparbieta.

Disgustoso. Gnomesco, pensa Kerewin. Il turbamento della sorpresa sta svanendo e una rabbia fredda e tagliente arriva dirompente a prenderne il posto.

“Che ci fai qui? Arrampicata sui muri a parte?”

C’è qualcosa di palesemente innaturale in lui. Se ne sta lì immobile, imbronciato e silenzioso.

“Allora?”

Nel silenzio che segue, la pioggia fa vibrare i vetri delle finestre, venendo giù a ritmo deciso e regolare.

“Lo scopriremo molto presto,” con tono aggressivo e afferrandolo per una spalla.

Spingilo giù di sotto e chiama la polizia.

All’improvviso, una manciata di dita sottili le afferra il polso e lo stringe con la forza assorta dell’esile.

Kerewin guarda le dita, alza lo sguardo all’improvviso e per la prima volta incontra gli occhi del bambino. Sono verdeblumarino, un colore sorprendente, come gli opali.

Sembra spaventato e diffidente, eppure curiosamente forte.

“Lasciami il polso,” ma la morsa si stringe.

Not restraining violence, pressing meaning.

Even as she thinks that, the child draws a deep breath and lets it out in a strange sound, a groaning sigh. Then the fingers round her waist slide off, sketch urgently in the air, retreat.

Aue. She sits down, back on her heels, way back on her heels. Looking at the brat guardedly; taking out cigarillos and matches; taking a deep breath herself and expelling it in smoke.

The child stays unmoving, hand back behind it; only the odd sea-eyes flicker, from her face to her hands and back round again.

She doesn't like looking at the child. One of the maimed, the contaminating. . . .

She looks at the smoke curling upward in a thin blue stream instead. "Ah, you can't talk, is that it?"

A rustle of movement, a subdued rattle, and there, pitched into the open on the birdboned chest, is a pendant hanging like a label on a chain.

She leans forward and picks it up, taking intense care not to touch the person underneath.

It was a label.

1 PACIFIC STREET

WHANGAROA

PHONE 633Z COLLECT

She turns it over.

SIMON P. GILLAYLEY

CANNOT SPEAK

"Fascinating," drawls Kerewin, and gets to her feet fast, away to the window. Over the sound of the rain, she can hear a fly dying somewhere close, buzzing frenetically. No other noise.

Reluctantly she turns to face the child. "Well, we'll do nothing more. You found your way here, you can find it back." Something came into focus. "O there's a sandal you can collect before you go." The eyes which had followed each of her movements, settling on and judging each one like a fly expecting swatting, drop to stare at his bare foot.

Non anticipa la violenza, imprime il significato.

Proprio mentre pensa questo, il bambino fa un respiro profondo e lascia andare l'aria con un suono strano, tra un sospiro e un gemito. Poi le dita intorno al polso di lei scivolano via, disegnano impazienti nell'aria, si ritraggono.

Aue. Si accovaccia, seduta sui talloni, molto indietro sui talloni. Osserva circospetta il ragazzino; tira fuori cigarilli e fiammiferi; fa anche lei un respiro profondo e lo espelle in fumo.

Il bambino resta immobile, le mani dietro la schiena; solo gli strani occhi di mare le guizzano dal viso alle mani e da capo di nuovo.

Non le piace stare a guardare il bambino. Uno degli storpi, dei contaminati. . . .

Guarda invece il fumo, che si arriccica verso l'alto in un sottile flusso blu.

"Ah, sei muto, quindi?"

Un fruscio di movimento, un clangore smorzato e lì, esposto in bella vista sul petto da uccellino, c'è un ciondolo appeso tipo un'etichetta a una catenella.

Si sporge in avanti e la prende, facendo estrema attenzione a non toccare la persona che c'è sotto.

Era un'etichetta.

1 PACIFIC STREET

WHANGAROA

CHIAMARE 633Z A CARICO

La gira.

SIMON P. GILLAYLEY

MUTO

"Interessante," strascica Kerewin, e si rimette in piedi alla svelta, lontana dalla finestra. Al di sopra del rumore della pioggia, sente una mosca che sta morendo lì vicino e ronza frenetica. Nessun altro suono.

Riluttante si volta verso il bambino. "Beh, facciamo finta di niente. Come hai trovato la strada fin qui, troverai quella per tornare indietro." Le viene in mente una cosa. "Ah c'è un sandalo che puoi riprenderti prima di andare via." Gli occhi, che hanno seguito ogni suo movimento, soffermandosi su ciascuno e giudicandolo come una mosca in attesa del colpo, si abbassano a fissare il piede nudo.

She points to the spiral stairs.
“Out.”

Lei indica la scala a spirale.
“Fuori.”