



CHANTAL'S BOOK







Chantal's Book

by
Jack Ross

It was customary for a young City gentleman to woo his intended by presenting her with a hand-written anthology of improving texts and stories to demonstrate the principles he would bring to their union.

*– Richard West, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Daniel Defoe* (1998)*

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Contents

I

Bronze	10
Melting the Ice-Block	11
E-Mailing Venus	12
A Woman Named Intrepid	14
There's Something about Chantal ...	16
Situations i: Albany	18
<i>Edge City</i>	
<i>Between OR and Main Campus</i>	
Situations ii: CBD	20
<i>Auckland nach dem Regen</i>	
<i>Between "The Newton Boys" and "The Big Hit"</i>	
Situations iii: Tauranga	22
<i>Poetry Festival</i>	
<i>Girls on Film</i>	
Situations iv: Coromandel	24
Chantal at an Opening	26
Chantal's Housewarming	28
Christmas Cards - Tension Headache - The Madwoman in the Bus - Her Plastic Shopping Bags - Thoughts of Marianne	30
Lock, Stock, and ...	32
All at Sea	33
Proverbial Philosophy	34
Not the Director's Cut	35
Body Fictions	36
Valentine's Day '99	37
The Consolations of Chantal	38
1 - Mute	
2 - Walk Back	
3 - The Mask of Zorro	
4 - Bound	
5 - Aztec	

Freeman's Bay	48
Sound Culture	49
The Reason Why	50
Idyll	51
Phoenix (<i>after Giordano Bruno</i>)	52
1 - <i>Tell Briar I got a hammer</i>	
2 - <i>... life is not in our hands ...</i>	
3 - <i>les sages et beaux paysages ...</i>	
Dream-Chantal	58
Life-Mask	60
Chantal: A Creed	61
Beloved	62

II

Lessons of the <i>Genji</i> : Around the South Island at New Year	65
Gathering I: Motueka Midday	
Gathering II: Canaan Downs	
Gathering III: Zone Five	
Shades of Meaning at Cape Foulwind	
Time and Space on the Okari River	
Perseverence Rd	
Gematria on the Great Divide	
ART	
Death and the Maiden	
Approaches to Aoraki	
Tautuku Bush Walk	
Waituna Gorge	
In the Footsteps of Ice Giants	
Extreme Green	
Der Berggeist	
Now Entering Parnassus	
Christchurch from the Air	
Chaos AD	
What You Read in My Diary	
The Bachelors of the Quintessence	

Acknowledgements	109
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for S-









I







Bronze

Is Chantal bronze?
That makes me – what?
Lost wax?

Bodies are clay,
albeit they've
been washed,
and glazed, and fired.

Is love smoke?
That makes me fire. If water,
land. If sea,
I am the sky.



Melting the Ice-Block

You know my favourite saying by now:

“Nature abhors a vacuum.”

I don't know, though, if you understand
how momentous these emotions are for me –
how intense, *unheimlich*. I think about
you every day, see you round every street corner.

I'm set up, in short, for a fall.

But also for the unimaginable joy of success,
reciprocation: provoking feeling for myself in another
– *such* another – human being.



E-Mailing Venus

A tidal slick of water
over the grass
beside the Northcote
exit

TIME TO STRENGTHEN
above three hatchet chins
in the newspaper
ahead

*Were you testing me?
Your e-mail came out
as indecipherable
symbols*

I suppose I was

During his 1682 courtship, Daniel Defoe relied, we're told, on stories from the Roman classics. Do I know any? I *do* know a story about Basho, the great Japanese haiku poet. I even wrote a clumsy poem about it when I was – what? Sixteen?

*Bashō throughout the fastness of a day
Took horse with five companions up the track.
The mountains plunged in shadow to a gorge,
The poet's mind was moved to stop and pray.*

*The altitude, the river and the day
Combined to cranial music in a forge.
The advent of an abbot clad in sack
In conversation drowned what he would say.*

It's not quite the same as the story of Coleridge and the person from Porlock – there the interruption was business [“Porlock Vice Squad, Coleridge – You're busted,” as a *Punch* cartoon I saw once had it]; here it was politeness: mere aimless garrulousness.

A Woman Named Intrepid

Questing – like a gun-dog –
for a route around
Pohutukawa branches
at Okura

Busting through supplejack
– *Sportsgirl* –
above the Piha
dams

“I can’t climb that” – climbing
sheer reservoir walls,
you dangle back
to lend a hand

“It’s cold; you’re used to it”
in the clay pool

Ngongotaha – can you say that name? Ngo-ngo-tà-ha ... like the “ng” in “singing”. *I can’t.*

I’ve just spent three days there, coughing and spluttering with hayfever, and performing a strange set of controlled, riskless “death-defying stunts” – the flying fox, the luge, paragliding. Last time it was the rocket bungy, the rope swings at Lake Taupo; the time before, the bungy-jump itself.

It’s my extreme fearfulness about these things that commends them to me. The pleasure comes when they’re over. It is, I suppose, a slightly more drastic equivalent to pinching yourself to make sure you’re awake. This dream is so detailed, so comprehensive, so horrible (at least at times – like the one I had last night, where I was forbidden to read my essay out loud to the English class, though I’d been waiting patiently for hours) that you need to convince yourself it’s real.

There's Something about Chantal ...

Tartar brows
hide secrets (*Bernice
Bobs Her Hair*);

thin waist, slim hips ...
That's not a cop-out,
is it?

Eyes, though!
Akhenaten
optics;

Laugh! Throaty,
hoarse, insane:
the *Magna Mater*

loose in a storm-drain.
Jags of spleen:
"You're *wrong!*"

What is it, then?
She's kind
to people:

speaks to gallery
guards,
shop-keepers,

has a ... a
loving heart
(can I say that?)

I like her upper lip.

Situations i: Albany

Edge City

*No this-ness
in planned landscapes; my effects
depend on being smelt – felt – heard.
“Don’t pull that city face.” So
Julia, six months ago:
no flame-trees in my garden,
rosebud gone: “dark fields
of the republic.” Is it time
to shoulder wood, blue sky?*

*Albany signs –
a long jog to the light.*

Between OR and Main Campus

But *I* walk faster
asphalt oyster-
catcher tracks turned cracks
forbid
enamelled synaesthesia
of landscape after
rain shoulder-slung
jacket
outdistance me
the sun goes out
grey storm-front coming yes
outdistance me

Situations ii: CBD

Auckland nach dem Regen

NO VACANCIES

at the "City of Sails" motel.

*It's hard to convey how strange that is:
dark, skid-marked streets; day after day
of grey ...*

Who the fuck's there?

Two loonies

standing by the road

(blue parka, beige kagoul)

not waiting for anything

– just waiting.

By a roundabout.

It's ten at night.

Rain-slick streets are cool.

Between "The Newton Boys" and "The Big Hit"

Ground Zero: *The line between
man and machine
should never be erased ...*

Look at your faces, children of
the glass arcade – leaf-brittle.

Chantal's eyes look past
me, pupils to one side.

Two friends stride by,
waving, laughing; I've never seen them
look so happy.

We trade more remarks:
life – jobs – art.

Her skin is chapped
in patches, underneath pale eyes.
I want to kiss them.

We talk for an hour.

Situations iii: Tauranga

Poetry Festival

*Futility is a kind of dislocation
too, whatever Bill
may say – cover yourself
with ordure, vomit in
the gutter, fail to
come on time.*

*That last time,
sweating, I scarcely
saw in a hollow-cheek'd child
– Sleepyhead mattress torque –
myself, self-satisfied with
Speights.*

*Look forward to
a morning of revelations:
lightning blasting buzzards from the sky.*

Girls on Film

Stress Relax
like the JANSPORT blue backpack
strapped over your shoulders
your black *pull*
grey trousers
ponytail

Don't frown
Sun's out, tickets
in hand. We talked till four
the other night -
voyeur:

You carry
a green fabric dinosaur

Situations iv: Coromandel

Who cares what happens when they're dead?

It's bad enough now.

Or good. Who knows?

Swimming at Opito,

arguing

Emmanuelle Béart

with an old friend:

La Belle Noiseuse ...

Refusing to hear

the story of the ghost

again

at the Brian Boru in Thames -

the carriage trade

a monstrous cat.

The title *Situations* is cribbed from Jean-Paul Sartre. I was trying to apply the idea of getting a *fix* on a particular time or place by putting different (contradictory?) impressions in italic and roman script, roughly corresponding with negatives and positives.

The other settings are Albany University, The Tauranga Poetry Festival, and the Auckland CBD. The allusions in the last are to Max Ernst's *Europa nach dem Regen* [Europe After the Rains], that strange, melting, apocalyptic landscape from the mid-forties; as well (of course) as our first meeting in that Lorne Street café, Alba.

The Coromandel poem is here mainly because of its reference to *La Belle Noiseuse*, a four-hour film starring Emmanuelle Béart, which I didn't then realise was based on Balzac's *Chef-d'Oeuvre Inconnu*, so minutely – somewhat inconclusively? – analysed in that Christmas present you gave me, Dore Ashton's *Fable of Modern Art ...*

Chantal at an Opening

I imagined him (Chantal's friend)
politely asking:
"What do you write about?"

Chantal.
Of course.
But I can't can't can't can't can't can't ...

"No wonder you can't write women,"
Annora says:
reified – deified ... beatified?

No wonder I can't describe you.
You were kind
to me today. Not *very* kind. Just nice.

Do I embarrass you?
This yule be cool.
"I want this year to end."

“It’s not the despair that gets me, Sharon, it’s the hope,” gasps John Cleese, as he staggers along a wooded country lane in a monk’s robe, halfway through the movie *Clockwise*.

I realise that what lends this compilation its fatal lack of a consistent *tone* is, similarly, hope – the fact that I can’t despair of finally showing it to you some day.

And, on that day, what would I like it to say, to be? Caring, passionate, well-informed ... the list of clichés rolls on, each suggesting a dark alternative: rabid, obsessive, cluttered, gloomy

I want it to say your name.



Chantal's Housewarming

Expect nothing
and you won't be
disappointed

Nothing changes
in sidereal time
except the concrete

grows
Exploding into
theatres

why can't it not
be Saturday?
No lonely like tonight

No lonely like tonight

David Howard tells me that what I've been doing in pursuing this relationship is trying to make love (in the old sense, you understand) to myself – devising a romantic image in order to fall in love with it ... Perhaps even simply in order to write about it.

Certainly, leafing through these poems, I wonder if he's right. They're all about me – my feelings, hopes, despairs – not in the least about you.

It's not that you're entirely absent – just that you're not really allowed to speak, express a concrete point of view.



Did I start pursuing you because I knew it was safe? Because you constituted no threat to my way of life? It must have been clear to me from the beginning (the way these things always *are* clear) that you would never feel about me the way I felt I felt about you.

**Christmas Cards - Tension Headache - The
Madwoman in the Bus - Her Plastic Shopping Bags -
Thoughts of Marianne**

We haven't said a word
the other heard,
except for silence.

Sitting with Chantal in her underwear
should choke despair
until that dialogue

begins.
Perhaps this afternoon,
tomorrow - sometime soon.



If, like me, you have that puritanical sense that pleasures have to be bought and paid for, you find yourself doing disagreeable things in order somehow to *tip the balance* onto your side of the scales:

I have a terror of needles and hate the sight of blood, so go regularly to the donation centre ...

I like company – I live alone.

I like sex – I sleep alone.

I like going out – I'm staying in.

I'm lazy – I work too hard.

I loved my wife – she's a stranger now.

Is that enough? – I'm not in the mood.



Lock, Stock, and ...

The more we talk,
the less
it happened

places, people,
kisses
You're leaving

Thursday
Wanganui,
Melbourne, Kawhia

I'm staying here

All at Sea

Did I say
I loved you?
No – that I was

in love with you
(subtle distinction)
But, you tell me

we should just be friends
Is “keen on you”
more apposite, then

(denoting non-reciprocation)?
Obsessional? *Psycho*
about you?

Fantatising
madly ... slave
to your least whim

Proverbial Philosophy

Treat every day
as if it were
your last

Spent loafing, cursing,
 darting bare-
foot from

patch to patch
 of shade
on Woodend beach;

writing this drivel,
 making notes
for more on

But what does *that*
 mean?

Rumours

and yourself?

The same old
clack? Shut up!

Ships on fire

*off the shoulder of
Orion?*

cocktail napkins;
taking a bloody big gulp
of wine

smack on the cheek

Not the Director's Cut

As if one were on the verge
of something extra-
ordinary – blue

highlights? Not precisely;
more a sense
of always inhabiting

night. Not a panther, nor a faun
*(The wanton Troopers riding by
Have shot my Faun and it will*

dye) exactly, either:
the perfect punk?
Still, unquestionably, one-

self. But that's the attraction
(allegedly), despite all
obstacles: sandbags,

duff magicians?
Thank you, Tasha,
anyway.

Body Fictions

i

Water-marbling
... *glassie, cool, translucent*
wave ... amber
sealed around
a sound

ii

Insight in
a booklined room
talk on the phone
back to the street
the light reveals you

iii

The music of the rain
from underneath the duvet

"Why can't she put
her feet over her head?"

says

Heather

Valentine's Day '99

I'm only human
out of longing
for you

What would I be
if you loved me?
god ... or pig?

Long longing
leaning forward
at Shinchoku

- *tender treats* -
to give me a chaste hug
and one last kiss



The Consolations of Chantal

1 – Mute

Hunc enim vitae immobilis praesentarium statum
infinitus ille temporalium rerum motus imitatur

The doors are open
 but the lights are off
Chantal hasn't arrived
 Street-corner man
Hombre de la esquina rosada
 prop up that wall
in your well-worn jacket
 unanomalous



For the perpetual motion of time

imitates

the infinite state of eternal life

- Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (c.480-524)





2 - Walk Back

cumque eum effingere atque aequare non possit, ex
immobilitate deficit in motum, ex simplicitate
praesentiae decrescit in infinitam futuri ac praeteriti
quantitatem

Walk back to seven years ago
the patter of the rain
dissolves in puddles
no more truth tonight

A liner on the thrust of the horizon
I was thin, I think
the streetlights hummed in tune
the streetlights hum

Talk quietly to me
how could I know you then?
don't turn the computer
off

*since, however, it cannot feign
or equal it,
it declines from immobility into motion,
from the simplicity of presentness
into an infinite quantity
of future and past*

3 – The Mask of Zorro

et, cum totam pariter vitae suae plenitudinem
nequeat possidere, hoc ipso, quod aliquo modo
numquam esse desinit, illud, quod implere atque
exprimere non potest

As you watch the dust clear,
Antonio Banderas and Catherine Zeta-Jones
come striding from it
con el pueblo [with the people]
los de abajo [from the world below]
and you think, “She looks like Chantal”
narrow, almond eyes, enamelled
cheekbones:
eucatastrophe

and
– because it cannot possess at once
the whole round of its life –
by never ceasing to exist in some manner,
that which it cannot fulfil
or express,
it seems to imitate to an extent

4 - Bounds

aliquatenus videtur aemulari alligans se ad
qualemcumque praesentiam huius exigui
voluscrisque momenti

That tale you told
of marking the bounds
up north
a feral child

Then, caged in Auckland,
waiting till night
to roam
through darkest Newton

Marianne, too,
in the *Forêt des Soignes*
no thought of distance
then



binding itself to the experience
(such as it is)
of this tenuous
and fleeting moment



5 - Aztec

quae, quoniam manentis illius praesentiae quandam
gestat imaginem, quibuscumque contigerit, id
praestat, ut esse videantur

Aztec princess

svelte, dark

bright under white

Popocatépetl

Chimborazo

Aconagua

I want to sketch you

Am I so self-centred?

You reached over once

to kiss me

it burned all the way home

*which, since it carries an image of that abiding presence,
gives this benefit to everyone who possesses it,
that they seem
to exist*

De Consolatione Philosophiae 5, Prose 6

feign
equal
fulfil
express
tenuous
fleeting

Freeman's Bay

He loves her most
when she's
most there

pressed up
against him
under gossamer

tipped in
from a
medieval window



He loves her most
when she's
not there

He loves her most
when she's
not there

late night
alone
lights of the city

or breath
upon
his arm

He loves her most
when she's
most there



Sound Culture

Your face splits off
the grain

The spire of St John's
Ponsonby

Here in the windy uplands
Western Park

Someone's idling
their car

Chantal's sleeping
in the etching

The Reason Why

what the suicides abandon the living hug
- Herman Melville

MARVEL	Is that the secret of the universe?	
	accomplish every task	NOT
THAT	without thinking about	
	what follows?	HE
SHOULD		
	Chantal rises, rifles through her	WITH
AVIDITY	drawers - from Rajasthan -	
	takes out her white dress,	SEIZE
THESE	irons it,	
		RAGS
WHAT	turns on Morning Report,	
	showers, cooks us breakfast,	THE
SUICIDES	drives Ed to the airport	
	(kissing Jack goodbye:	ABANDON
THE		
	until tonight?)	LIVING
HUG		

Idyll

Portage, mate

- beach conversation (28/3/99)

Starlight asked Non- Entity	Communicate this moment: <i>When Clouds Collide!</i> blue steps a mask for space, the seagull swoops.
“Master, do you exist?”	Chantal’s reading Ursula Le Guin: “what will the mind do, each morning, waking?”
He received no answer	Adam and Eve in Mahurangi. “It’s only up to here” – sardonic man beside the submerged road.
to his question, however.	Communicate this moment: hair filled with sand / pohutukawa tangle / boat coming round the bend / munching a golden delicious /
- <i>Chuang-Tzu</i>	naked in the surf.

Phoenix

after Giordano Bruno,
De gli eroici furori (1585)

I

*Chi femmi ad altro amor la mente desta,
Chi femmi ogn'altra diva e vile e vana,
In cui beltade e la bontà sovrana
Unicamente più si manifesta;*

*Quell'è ch'io viddi uscir de la foresta,
Cacciatrice di me, la mia Diana,
Tra belle ninfe su l'aura Campana,
Per cui dissi ad Amor: – Mi rendo a questa. –*

*Ed egli a me: – O fortunato amante!
O dal tuo fato gradito consorte!
Chè colei sola, che, fra tante e tante,*

*Quai ha nel grembo la vita e la morte,
Più adorna il mondo con le grazie sante,
Ottenesti per studio e per sorte;*

*Ne l'amorosa corte
Sì altamente felice cattivo,
Che non invidii a sciolto altr'uomo, o divo.*

Tell Briar I got a hammer
- Small boy at Murrays Bay (28/9/98)

Chi femmi ad altro amor la mente desta

Key femme It's true the mind closes

ad altro amor la mente desta

adulterer other beauties half-baked somehow

amor la mente desta

hammer in a sea-bound bach at Easter

la mente desta

lamented crossing the dunes with a shovel

She whom I saw trip down the stairs
of the Gallery, dark-skirted Chantal:
"I know I don't look old enough
to have a grown-up daughter."

(But it wasn't for ages yet,
and I don't talk to myself
... or not all *that* much - or that often),

yet Love undoubtedly
would have replied:
"life and death lie in that lap."

In a third-floor flat
captive, watching her sleep
envying neither god nor man.

II

*Unico augel del sol, vaga Fenice,
Ch'appareggi col mondo gli anni tui,
Quai colmi ne l'Arabia felice,
Tu sei chi fuste, io son quel che non fui.*

*Io per caldo d'amor muoio infelice;
Ma te raddiva il sol co' raggi sui.
Tu bruggi 'n un, ed io in ogni loco;
Io da Cupido, hai tu da Febo il foco.*

*Hai termini prefissi
Di lunga vita, e io ho breve fine,
Che pronto s'offre per mille ruine;*

*Nè so quei che vivrò, nè quel che vissi:
Me cieco fato adduce,
Tu certo torni a riveder tua luce.*

... *life is not in our hands. You are lived / by*
- Kendrick Smithyman, "Idyll" (17/5/71)

Unico augel del sol, vaga Fenice,
Unique, O angel soul, sole, solar phoenix,
Ch'appareggi col mondo gli anni tui,
who've paired your years to this ellipsing disc
Quai colmi ne l'Arabia felice,
- burn, are reborn to burn again in Felix
Arabia.
Tu sei chi fuste, io son quel che non fui.
You orbit; I'm eclipsed.

You are what you were, I am ...
nothing that I was
what I never was

love's heat drives me, dries me - I die, unhappy
the sun revives you with his healing rays
you burn in one, I in every place
Phoebus fires you, as Cupid's fires scorch me

In railway terminals
I track stiff fines
to pimp for me through miles of ruins

I can't see what I'll see;
Blind fate blinds me.
You. You're guided back by your own light.

III

*Questa fenice, ch'al bel sol s'accende,
E a dramma a dramma consumando vassi,
Mentre, di splendor cinta, ardendo stassi,
Contrario fio al suo pianeta rende;*

*Perchè quel che da lei al ciel ascende,
Tepido fumo ed atra nebbia fassi,
Onde i raggi a' nostri occhi occolti lassi
E quello avvele, per cui arde e splende.*

*Tal il mio spirto (ch'il divin splendore
Accende e illustra), mentre va spiegando
Quel che tanto riluce nel pensiero,*

*Manda da l'alto suo concetto fore
Rima, ch'il vago sol vad'oscurando,
Mentre mi struggo e liquefaccio intiero.*

*Oimè! questo atro e nero
Nuvol di foco infosca col suo stile
Quel ch'aggrandir vorrebbe, e'l rende umile.*

les sages et beaux paysages
font les ombres sages aussi
– Jean-Jacques Goldman (85-86)

Questa fenice, ch'al bel sol s'accende,
Questing phoenix, who brave solar ascent
E a dramma a dramma consumando vassi,
from drama to drama consuming vastly
Mentre, di splendor cinta, ardendo stassi,
Men trade your splendour for ardent ecstasy
Contrario fio al suo pianeta rende;
Contrary flesh back to your planet send

“Perky” – *perky nana*. D’you remember
that vile expression
from a TV ad? (*Nana’s French*
for “chick”). We’ve made ourselves

A kind of gutless language,
dirtying everything
it touches: *Perky tits, arse, tush ...*

How can I say
what you mean to me
– Rima, spirit of the forest?

Your soul evades those nets,
black, crusted fogs.
You go out singing in the pouring rain.

Dream-Chantal

*The forward youth that would appear
Must now forsake his Muses dear*
- Andrew Marvell

I

ACTS
on an
articulated
truck
steel snarl

I wrote Chantal
I love you
but do I?
Alexander fights Persians
in the sky



II

Whatever you do
still sounds like you

Ship catalogues, excluded
middles, triple

columns – baked sun on
white buildings

Jie-Young and J. J. Lee,
Gab-Soon, Eun-Sook,

Ichiro, Faisal, me ...

Life-Mask

Feeding the mutant within
– Fridge magnet

Time out and no
mistake


There's many ways to watch a wo-
man sleep – demented
and forgiving

Singing
three notes at once (yo-
delling, really) while you
breathe it in: the music

Can't be bad for
some

I thought I'd had it
but there's more to take
just no more ways to take
it: iron pills, ant-
oxidants

the fact of want-
ing it's a smile



Chantal: A Creed

- She could almost get away
with a black beret
- She's coming to a cinema
near you
- where she'll drink merlot
- One hand toys with the fur
behind the car-seat
- The other inches up
your sober leg
- MAINZEAL would welcome her
for sale or lease
- PROJEX would hire her out
- Her destination's somewhere
south of Rio
- She spells suspense, romance, & ...
cranberries



Beloved

after Paul Éluard

She *is* on top of my eyelids
her hair is tangled in mine
the same shape as my hands
the same colour as my eyes
she's swallowed by my shadow
like a stone against the sky

Her eyes are always open
there's no way I can sleep
Her technicolor dreams
make the sun dry up
make me laugh, laugh and cry,
talk with nothing to say



II





Lessons of the *Genji*

Around the South Island
at New Year

Vuelvo al Sur
como se vuelve siempre al amor
Vuelvo a vos
con mi deseo con mi temor
...
Te quiero, Sur

- Astor Piazzolla

We are still talking in generalities when suddenly he is off, murmuring something about there being 'too many maiden-flowers in the field.' I remember thinking how like the hero of a romance he seemed.
- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Wednesday, 29th December - 4 p.m.]

Stilwell Bay

blue sky, shading from chalky to cerulean

banks of cumulus

far-off, the Marlborough ranges

gradations of green
& blue

grained golden
silica sand

Much thinking as we walked along the Abel Tasman track – mostly about poetry (a girl stoops to stroke her boyfriend's hair, green-blue shorts moulding to her youthful finish – he, a burly, oafish character follows her blonde perfection up the beach).

Gathering I

Motueka Middy

Vertige des pays chauds

- France Gall

A matter of the heart
between two brothers

drive through thistledown
in C's Toyota sudden
Sensurround

St Thomas **FOOD** A sausage
sizzle draws the tribes
the Gathering the
Gathering

A simulacrum here
of inner weather talk
last night

from two am
This morning back to tension
Sit on a split-bark bench
in the hot sun

It was a relief that no-one could actually recall how anyone else had looked on that occasion.

- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Thursday, 30th December - 3.15 p.m.]

... A helicopter soars effortlessly by (a snake of metal from his vantage-point). "Another 5 k up to the turn," said the man with orange shades behind us. Someone blows iridescent bubbles up ahead.

"They're clambering down the bank for *their* piss," says Chantal. "I was going to go down there, but now everyone's been there I think I won't..." Birds sing on, unperturbed. Cyclists barely pause.

A taxi-van trundles past. "A bus went over the bank, & the crane had to pull it out, but it's done now, so you should be moving soon." At least this long wait's in the shade.

Girl ahead, in shades, grey trousers, red top, cowboy hat, dips & blows her bubbles. "I'm going to need a new me, for the new millennium," she confides, flipping through a magazine.

"If I was a true radical, a bolshie, I'd hoist up my skirts & do it here."

"They're expecting heavy rain," says one more passer-by.

From here, it looks like a little parable of the 20th century - a long line of dusty cars going God knows where as dark begins to fall.

Gathering II

Canaan Downs

*I can see Richard Killeen walking through here
with a bemused look on his face*

- Chantal

In the rain everyone is equal
mustard-soaked hot dogs
in a sodden tent

*It doesn't take that much
to make a legend*

three plums make up
a piece of fruit

*I just saw a one-legged man
go by on crutches*

Chew in your green-blue hood
young lady chew

bite spit swallow bite spit swallow spew

On the last night of the year the ceremony of casting out devils was over very early; I was resting in my room, blackening my teeth and putting on a light powder, when Ben no Naishi came in ...

- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Friday, 31st December - 4 p.m. to Midnight]

Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. IV, chap. XL: "... the enthusiast who entered the dome of St. Sophia might be tempted to suppose that it was the residence, or even the workmanship of the Deity. Yet how dull is the artifice, how insignificant is the labour, if it be compared with the formation of the vilest insect that crawls upon the surface of the temple." [writing interrupted by the returning rain]

Tomorrow? / Just be free / Ecstasy

at the mud-soaked tribal dance area.

The countdown came a few minutes too late, by my reckoning. There was also a Maori chant and some singing, though somewhat half-hearted. They were still going at it when we turned & groped our way back to bed (the car radio had told us that Christchurch, too, was grey that night ... ditto Auckland, which was charting the life of Christ in song).

Gathering III

Zone Five

The second-coolest place to be at New Year's

- Oprah Winfrey

Should we be like trees?

A goblin

prompts the question slowing down

the dance to trance

Yellow red and blue on bracken

thunder in the sky

Choose I'd like to tell you

that it's easy

as the bells are struck

You *know* it's hard

to tune in when

the answers

to the questions

are absurd

How is it that a little incident like this suddenly comes back to one, whereas something that moved one deeply is forgotten with the passage of the years?

- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Wednesday, 5th January - 1.40 p.m.]

... Staring down at the lazy-looking kekeno fur seals stumbling over the rocks near Wall Island. Time to confess my terrible crime. It took a wee while to back out from the café parking area (with Chantal booming "plenty of room"). Mr Suave-o with the designer wife & nuclear kids was close behind me in a grey four-wheel drive, so I was anxious to escape. As I drove up to the narrow gap between the banks, *another* four-wheel drive came in sight. I stopped & tried to nose in out of the way, but there wasn't much margin. He went past & I went on, but caught a glimpse of him in my rear-view mirror yawning over into the ditch.

I panicked & drove on, hoping to get away before having to:

1. help them out;
2. endure their recriminations;
3. exchange addresses etc. for damages.

Was it my fault? Perhaps - but not very culpably. I am bad, though, for running away. Maybe they took our licence number & will hunt us down ...

Now sitting on a hill overlooking the sea & rocks, whinging of birds below us.

Shades of Meaning at Cape Foulwind

*How soon the silver fades in the dust! How soon the black figure slips
from the wrinkled sheet! How softly the sheet falls to the ground!*

- Wallace Stevens

Lying with hat on head
tipped over staring up
through the brim at red
more prepositions
yellow inside red inside green-grey reach out
from sweating Panama to touch
her shoulder Chantal
hot in this new sun
supine not stable seals cry down below
Lying *present participle* Seize
the moment
Why? Is it momentous?
no or glad? sweet? somewhat yes
side-swiped a car three miles back
my fault or his
one slip or less
entanglement with business Tartarus of day
An aphid passes
greetings green
comrade



Time and Space on the Okari River

It's bigger on the inside than the outside

- Doctor Who

Time for the crabs to come out

And scuttle back and forth

Relative to the singing wires

Dimensions foreshore sedge & tussock

In a gnarled white tree-trunk

Space to share

in shallow waters



I was about to send the fan back with the poem:

Chrysanthemum dew

I brush my sleeve just once

restoring the thousand years to you

But then they told me that Her Excellency had already returned to her apartments. There was no point, I told myself, so let the matter drop.

- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Friday, 7th January - 12.40 p.m.]

PERSEVERENCE RD - outside Reefton. A message to me in that?

BRAZILS RD No Exit.

CHATTERTON RD No Exit - near Hanmer Springs.

So familiar, all this.

Sandwiches at the Jay Walk café:

BLT Bacon, Lettuce & Tomato

BETR Bacon, Egg & Tomato Relish

BLAT Bacon, Lettuce, Avocado & Tomato

BLGT Bacon, Lettuce, Gruyere & Tomato

SCBLT Smoked Chicken, Bacon, Lettuce & Tomato.

Perseverance Rd

My darling, my beauty, I am not your aunt, but your willing slave!

– Anton Chekhov

*I'm very keen on nectarines
at the moment
they taste of Summer*

Dragonflies obey
their nature
bowing to the stream

I munch an apple
going round and round
the edges

scoring down
the core
to pips

The road-signs seem to
speak to me
flashing me messages

↗ 45 go

CHATTERTON – No Exit
Perseverance Rd

... but I fear if I single out everything for comment, I will never finish.
- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Saturday, 1st January - 5.50 p.m.]

Vignette: Whirling cage, seen from afar in the half-light as we entered the Gathering past that strange ghost army the first night. It cost me ten dollars to go on it at about quarter past eleven on New Year's Eve. It was an exquisitely unpleasant experience - being bashed against the cage, with minimal padding. It left me dazed & dizzy afterwards.

Vignette: Two girls sitting in a white car, crying their eyes out, expressions of total hopelessness, as we drove past them on our way out of Canaan Downs. Had they broken down? For the first time I felt really worried, not just tense & anxious (the security people seemed nice but overstretched - the nightmarish quagmire caused by 8,000 cars heading over the same piece of grass hadn't yet got home to them).

Gematria on the Great Divide

comme un pharaon en amnésie

- Jean-Jacques Goldman

day more some day
 there'll be
no more no some
blue speck goings
creek the creek all
artist over
former over
ly known nothing
as rest at all
stops on car strewn
the Lew with leaves
is pass so long
some more no more
 there'll be
some day no day

*The nobles had been amusing themselves painting small white pagodas
on as many petals as they could ...*

- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Tuesday, 18th January - 11.15 a.m.]

In the Otago Museum. Rather a fine one, actually - excellent, if creepy, collection of Melanesian artefacts downstairs, along with Maori canoes, meres, etc. Upstairs now. Chantal goes slowly through the Egyptian stuff while I sit in a hall of amulets and clothes, having my hair packaged for remote posterity.

Very much liked a painting by Monet in the Art Gallery called "la Débâcle" (1880). A marshy winter landscape with red, cloudy sky (towards evening?)

a calm	usual
peaceful	insanely
coldness.	heavy
absolutely	&
dead	ornate
still	frame

ART

*Can all men, together, avenge
One of the leaves that have fallen in autumn?
But the wise man avenges by building his city in snow*
- Wallace Stevens

on a camper-van

headlights on

Midday

*no more than two or three
intelligible stanzas*

ex-partner's friend's sister
works at Pegasus Bay

Is that truck overtaking?

cabbage moths

beside the road

squaring the circle

Novalis said

thunderheads mass
across the plain

Welcome to Amberley

Take your time

I pulled back the sleeve that covered her face.

'You remind me of a fairy-tale princess!' I said.

She looked up with a start.



'You are dreadful!' she said, propping herself up. 'Waking people up like that so thoughtlessly!'

I remember being struck by the attractive way her face suddenly flushed. Someone very beautiful can look even more beautiful on occasion.

- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Tuesday, 11th January - 3.05 p.m.]

Went for a swim in the icy cold waters of Okains Bay to cool down a bit after playing with C's pussy through her bikini panties. Water straight from Antarctica, through the empty leagues of the South Pacific. Water turquoise-blue against the tawny lion-sand colour of the hills. I was very cold when I returned & Chantal proceeded to warm me up by playing with my cock with her hand while I pulled down my shirt to hide this activity from prying eyes. Luckily, the beach is vast & the cars and people were some distance off. I fingered her till she came, but was left tumescent when a red car pulled up in front of us. A boy got out and started dancing around in the sand with admirable unselfconsciousness.



Heat-shimmer now between us and the hills. One would scarcely imagine the scene had ever been different: single sail, three lines or blocks or areas of green-blue sea, brown, turquoise, ultramarine, one fat man paddling, another sitting in white towelling hat to read, three gazing out to sea – Chantal’s head on my knees as she reads *The Alexandria Quartet*: “Alexandria, the capital of memory.”



Death and The Maiden

Brief life is here our portion
Brief sorrow, short-lived care
The life that knows no parting
The endless life is there
- Lyttelton cemetery

Fire-dancing on a hillside
tangled in the strings
the laser strikes you

Fog and rain surround you

Each one of us is quite different. Some are confident, open and forthcoming. Others are born pessimists, amused by nothing, the kind who search through old letters, carry out penances, intone sutras without end, and clack their beads.

- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Sunday, 16th January - 8.40 p.m.]

Signs on the road to Mt. Cook:

MT	JACK	DEADHORSE
COCK	STREAM	STREAM

Drawn in the moving car:

Great rock bluffs	a series of foreheads of massy rock
mist bank	rocky tussock landscape
elephant feet in the hills	

So much sketching - so little writing: the science of the *vignette*.
No thinking, that's for sure.

Approaches to Aoraki

Mt. Cook

- turnoff sign

no thinking here

too cold

warm in the car though

Pukaki turquoise

Arabia Petraea red

only the penitent man

shall pass

A face

grows from the ground

black truck-treads score

blank tar

A Christmas tree is left outside to spoil

His Excellency happened to see that Her Majesty had the Tale of Genji with her. Out came the usual comments ...

- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Monday, 8th March, 1999 - 23:20:57 -0500]

Jack,

I've seen your letter about *Genji* both at the Amazon and Suite101 sites. I've begun developing a documentary about the book and its influence. If you have any additional references or ideas about the book you'd like to send along, I'd like to hear them.

Thanks, Elliot Berlin

The first moment of jarring strangeness in Lady Murasaki's great novel comes when her hero, the shining Genji, settles for the embraces of a young boy go-between, rather than his reluctant sister. From there, the novel goes on to explore ever more complex psychological dimensions of incest, the Don Juan complex, and married love. Each chapter is composed with the care and precision of a poem, and the author's elusive/allusive prose conceals the Jane Austen-like precision with which she charts her two heroes' foibles and self-delusions. Somewhere in between Seidensticker's robust and spare translation and Arthur Waley's Proustian expansion it may, perhaps, be possible for the English reader to grasp the lineaments of the original work. The greatest novel ever written? The first psychological novel in any language? The first anti-hero (Kaoru, Genji's nephew) in world literature? Each of these statements could be defended, but perhaps it would be more to the point to say that the Genji should be as essential to the truly educated reader as Homer or Tolstoy ...

[12th July, 1997]

Tautuku Bush Walk

*There were many more bones on Cormorant Island,
but they were all fishbones*

- Arthur Ransome

Generally very cryptic
and active by night

VPL
visible planty line

Please keep to boardwalks
fragile area

Upside down world
UƆɹɹɹ ɹɹɹɹɹ ɹɹɹɹɹ

Lancewood?
just a branch

You don't see a lot of
epiphytes here

Or maybe you do

That was the night Lady Koma had her embarrassing experience.
- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Monday, 17th January - 1.50 p.m.]

Am I censoring myself? I get the impression this diary is a hostage to fortune. The official version, then:

Sitting in a sylvan glade on the Lindis pass, where we've been for a swim in an icy-cold swimming hole, complete with fast-flowing waterslide. Both feeling very Homeric: Chantal at doing her washing like Nausicäa, me at bestriding the stream like the resourceful Odysseus (now up to tape 4 of the Penguin Classics *Odyssey*).

Driving down lake Dunstan, between Cromwell & Clyde, saw an immense construction on the hillside: monumental, Egyptian,

long terrace
pipes
massive frieze for run-off
with (half-effaced?) graffiti

which I presume must be the Goldfields Memorial.

Waituna Gorge

what on earth is the good of a lighted window?

– T. E. Lawrence

The heavy skies of Southland

Waimakaha

Odysseus

at whose expense you're living

whose wife you're courting

whose son you are plotting to kill

Last night the moon's corona

circled stars

as fog crept up the stream

the chance of returning home

has gone forever

A number of the preachers caused amusement because they kept on interrupting each other and getting tongue-tied.

- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Monday, 24th January - 8.20 a.m.]

Had a strange dream last night. I got back to Auckland to find the whole of Mairangi Bay in ruins - part of a redevelopment scheme. P. was in charge at the Uni, & laying down the law most tediously about an essay he'd written in England, republished here anonymously. The computers wouldn't work because my brother had stuffed them up. Marianne was also in the dream somehow. She said she couldn't stand me hanging out with U so much.

This is not a guide book. Rather it is a journey I want to share with you. I invite you to see the Catlins through my eyes, but it might also happen that your own spark of creativity will kindle when you hear the ocean in counterpoint to the birds of shore and bush ...

- Lynley Millar, *The Catlins Collection: Verse & Vistas - A Personal Journey* (Invercargill: Morepork Press, 1998) 2.

In the Footsteps of Ice Giants

*Young ones everywhere
holding hands to show they care
- Princesse Stéphanie*

don't want to make up images
combine expected words
Vuelvo al Sur
back to the south
Astor Piazzolla sings
at Latitude 45°

**FLATMATES LIVES BARED
TO THE WORLD**

beside an ironing board
that beech tree took
600 years to grow
the rock riddle is slow

The Minister of the Right, Akimitsu, became somewhat over-enthusiastic about the koto playing and started to play pranks which ended up with his making a dreadful fool of himself. We all shuddered to watch.

– Diary of Lady Murasaki

Calypso

*Il me disait y'a qu'le look qui compte
Et moi bien sûr j'me suis pas rendue compte
Qu'il regardait par dessus mon épaule
Cette fille lui a fait le coup du sang chaud
Et moi j'avais pas la couleur de peau*

*Pour le Calypso
besame mucho
Vertige des pays chauds
Il disait let's go
J'ai besoin d'autre chose
Calypso
Il rêvait tout haut
Danser là-bas bientôt
Le Calypso, tico tico tico Calypso*

*A chacun ses héros
Lui Dario Moreno
Moi Police ou Toto
Moi Elton ou Bowie
Et lui Luis Mariano ...*

He told me, all that counts is the look. Of course, I didn't know at the time that he was looking over my shoulder; eyeing that other girl – the one who made him hot. Me, I didn't have the right skin colour ...

For Calypso ... kiss me madly, hot country vertigo. He said, "let's go," I need a change right now. Calypso. His dreams were bold: dancing there, soon: the Calypso ...

We all have our heroes: him Dario Moreno, me Police or Toto; me Elton or Bowie, him Luis Mariano.

– Michel Berger / France Gall

Extreme Green

I feel that now ... my love for her is purer and loftier than it was in the past; and that is why I want to go up to her, to stamp hard on her toe with my heel, to hurt her and smile as I do it

– Anton Chekhov

That branch that caught my arm
like a hand
above Lake Wakatipu
did that mean
Track washed out
ahead Turn back unfinished
business Drop-off zone
above the Kawarau?

*It's not as high
as I thought it'd be*

A moment's pause
then over backwards
down the precipice

*I'll let you go
off the side of the cliff*
Mother to Child

'If there were no small pines in the fields,' he murmured to himself. Such a fitting reference, I felt; far better than any new poem of mine could have been. I was most impressed.

- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Monday, 3rd January - 10.55 a.m.]

Leicester has found a strange orchid, which he wishes to collect.
Time for an orange-break.

Sunlight gleams

the leafy spot
we passed on the track

foaming, tannin-brown stream

miraculously green rock

"The weather's not doing what it should be - I don't have it properly trained" - Leicester Kyle in the Fisherman's Rest, Granity.

Der Berggeist

Tom's words laid bare the hearts of trees

– J. R. R. Tolkien

Bush-lawyer glow-worms
in the garden butcher's
shop ground to stone
slabs *Dracophyllum*
Mountain Neinei Dr
Seuss Trees the yellow
orchid *like*
Aladdin's cave *a pothole*
in the moors *with water*
flowing by the Christmas
bush *so long*
as no-one mentions
anything to do
with Christmas
green *like that stone*
you picked up last
time from the Gentle
Annie

Poems were composed and we all prepared ourselves, reciting one just in case the cup should come round to the women ... but in the end, perhaps because they were so busy and it was getting late, they retired before picking out any of us.

- Diary of Lady Murasaki

The Fishing Frenzy

[Sunday, 23rd January - 3.15 p.m.]

It begins with one dark-haired boy with a new fishing-rod, his older sister, and their father. The hook drops, & the fish gather.

"Are there any big fish there?" asks a little red-headed boy with a grating voice. "There's a big salmon," replies the father.

"I've never seen a salmon - do you have a spare hook?" asks the boy again. Silence. Much dropping in of bait, fish, scraps. Red-headed boy: "Where'd you get those mussels?" Father: "Ulva Island."

"Sam, have you got a line?" the r-h boy asks of an older brother. No answer. Soon after he reappears with a line, but still no hook. By now, older, more capable-looking boys are gathering, with lines on wooden reels. The r-h boy now begins vainly requesting bait and hooks of a certain James, who remains discreetly invisible.

“Look over here!” cries a boy further up the wharf. “Don’t push me back, Sam,” whines the r-h boy at Sam. ‘This is *my* fishing spot,” ripostes the latter. One or two tiny spotties are caught, but the whole scene dissolves when the Foveaux Express’s engines startup. The r-h boy is last heard making vain enquiries of his green-clad, canvas-belted father. ‘What was it, Dad?’ his hands spread wide apart in mute enquiry.

“Die,” says Sam.



Now Entering Parnassus

*... all the lousy little poets
coming around
trying to sound like Charlie Manson*
- Leonard Cohen

Hills flat as our photograph

Skies green as noon

Are ambulances needed?

- Hanmer Springs -

Police patrol their detour
with a smile

She is a fruit that no one has yet tasted –
Who then can smack his lips and talk of tartness?
'I am shocked,' I replied.
– Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Sunday, 30th January – 12.15 p.m.]

Garrulous girl at the table opposite in the Coffee House: “Guys are cruel to ugly girls ... You know how girls tend to do better than guys, generally.” Is she a doctor? Some of her conversation implies as much.

“I want to go home – I don’t have a home,” sounds from the kitchen.

AUDI

VIDE

TACE

Inscription on the Freemasons’ Hall in Lyttelton

HEAR

SEE

SHH!



Christchurch from the Air

*The lady Celalta had whispered a thought
to her lover ~~and master~~ ... "To the stars?"*

- Cordwainer Smith

More trees than buildings

more buildings than cars

oases of activity

Sign o' the Bellbird

in the Port Hills

three weeks ago

the fog gave me a warning

Ⓜ man with red stop sign

on the wing



... hanging curtains were all that separated us. His Excellency was amused.

'What happens when you entertain someone the other one does not know?' he said. A tasteless remark. In any case, we are both very close to each other, so there would be no problem.

- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Thursday, 30th December - 12.35 p.m.]



"Watching the people ... you mean, being a voyeur?" (Chantal)

[Wednesday, 26th January - 3.35 p.m.]

I know
on a telegraph pole
in Westland

[Thursday, 27th January - 9.10 p.m.]

At Punakaiki. "A threshy sea," says Chantal. Indeed. Orange light through the clouds. Mist steams off the road after rain.



Chaos AD

*While living
be a dead man*
- Bunan

Stonehenge on
Barrington

Coronation Street

WELCOME HOME
BLAIR
in red on green

... people who have become so precious that they go out of their way to try and be sensitive in the most unpromising situations, trying to capture every moment of interest, however slight, are bound to look ridiculous and superficial.

- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Tuesday, 25th January - 9.40 p.m.]

In the Glendhu Camp Toilets:

Sam Harpur	For sex	[area code a
4	PH: 03 217 8445	nice touch]
Pumpin' Pubes	ask for	
	Stoody	

Richard 2000	
For sex	DC - 2000

2000	some people come
Drunk	

JACK? 20'

~~BRAD~~

JANES<

sux!!!

It's beautiful here. The hills were like velvet last night, as C remarked - egg tempera, by Grahame Sydney. Today, animal pelt with muscles.

What You Read in My Diary

*There is no serenity so fair as that which is just established in a
tearful eye*

- Henry Thoreau

Start naked while all of the others
 are down on the dirt floor
but no-one gets too far
that way

Look up at heaven blue blue *ciel*
 the ceiling take another
breath

 I used to know a
woman once

& cry not for yourself nor
 destiny nor any two-bit
word but those you've hurt
however many times

*Why should I hesitate to say what I want to? Whatever others might say,
I intend to immerse myself in reading sutras for Amida Buddha.*
- Diary of Lady Murasaki

[Monday, 27th December - 10.45 a.m.]

In Ohakune. Woke up this morning & looked at Chantal (wrapped in her sleeping-bag - too sulky last night to speak to me) & realised that I didn't care. It is, to all intents & purposes, over. I know I've written - & said - that before, but I really wonder if there's any going back. I also wonder if she feels the same thing. Certainly it's a useful discovery for the beginning of a stressful five-week Odyssey around the South Island.

"I wrote Chantal / I love you / but do I? / Alexander fights Persians / in the sky." When she asks me, it is (or seems to be) so. Are these doubts real, or chimerical? I need to be cleansed - away from tension-knots in the stomach, fear of loss, of damage - fear of the other.

The Bachelors of the Quintessence

He was between stories, and he felt despicable

- Raymond Carver

Russell Crowe the man of heart
in *Mystery Alaska*

Ali off

a lumpish boy is sitting on a car
inside the parking lot as
raindrops cycle
in the lake

Poetic crossing out
the words *stamina*
baby son not all
the ones that
count

Scrape off
the graveyard
snow turn in your
night-stick *dick*
above duty
guard
the magic puck



Acknowledgements

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- “The Consolations of Chantal” first appeared in the limited edition pamphlet *The Consolations of Chantal / Torch Songs* (Auckland: Perdrix Press, 1998).
- “The Reason Why” and “Idyll,” in *JAAM* 13 (2000): 95-96.
- “Bronze,” “A Woman Named Intrepid,” “Chantal’s Housewarming” and “Christmas Cards – Tension Headache – The Madwoman in the Bus – Her Plastic Shopping Bags – Thoughts of Marianne,” in *JAAM* 14 (2000): 48-52.
- “Situations i-iv,” in *The Journal of Australian-Canadian Studies* 18 (2001): 189-94.
- “Phoenix” (in slightly different form) in my novel *Nights with Giordano Bruno* (Wellington: Bumper Books, 2000).
- Eight of the twenty sections of “Lessons of the *Genji*” were featured in *Poetry NZ* 22 (2001): 11-26.
- “Body Fictions” and “Approaches to Aoraki” appeared, respectively, in *Spin* 34 (1999): 51 and *Spin* 37 (2000): 51.
- “Freeman’s Bay,” in *When the Sea Goes Mad at Night*, ed. T. L. Marshall (Auckland: Christian Gray New Zealand, 1999/2000).





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The Perfect Storm (Auckland: Perdrix Press, 2000)

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(co-editor) *Pander* 3-9 (1998-1999)

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Spin 42 (March, 2002)

brief 24 (July, 2002)

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