

Mal de la mer, or I walked the island searching for you

*The more we know the further we are away from them*  
--- John Berger

1.

À l'île, where sealers, marauders, naturalists came, the amphibology  
of strangers-not-estranged.

Trying to eulogise, outlining from ornithology to anthology,  
almost preservation.

My first words are *amatory, armoury, (à)mourir* to have and to hoard

a damaged bone, the tarsometarsus, a prized feather

(... don't think it hasn't hurt me).

2.

Driving to the lighthouse, where your bones lie buried under grass,  
all the grave sites dug up, developed by a Vietnamese investor

below the golf course, code en-ligne, a photograph credit reads: [juvenile and adult femurs,  
above, of dwarf emu. Supplied, Natural Museum of History].

Or the rank kelp at Surprise Bay, knuckled, wind-wracked, its volley  
gunshots the sand-logged ship's compass, and snuff box.

Recycled parts of you: plume, fable, subject, object *third specimen hitherto*

*unaccounted*

*for.*

Steam rising from the road, driving past a recent portfolio

[Lawsons-blood Angus cows, plus progeny & bulls],

Listening to Amy Shark's 'Adore'

Sarah hosting Triple J's *Live at the Wireless*

polished grass, the sun fretting.

Guinea fowl scamper off the tarmac

a smashed head near Egg Colony, her twisted neck

feathers waxing the road ...

who is not yours to recollect?

White rivulets

yet threading,

and threading

through storm clouds

you, and your

radio silence.

There's death everywhere

out on the scarp at Quarantine Bay, masquerading

a dead *wallabi (sic)*

beaded with flies, the cable of her tail,

translucent periosteum,

garnet tibia

hauled off the road, (possible?) half-buried, dun-colored as these dunes

that have risen from a screaming sea,

where relics of animals, boatmen, steerage, ship's captain and first-class passengers have lain,

namesakes unmarked.

Stubborn optimists, how we hope

for the dryness of death.

All I see is glistening, clouds pregnant with rain

their shadows drifting, insubordinate skies

sleet hissing,

spare white

stones that are become, becoming ...

The Lighthouse graveled, sentinel roos, dying out there in the cold,

in squalls,

racing me along the road

our delirious crossings

subtle dislocations

working through

grasses whipped into metronomes

violent composites.

3.

A hen runs ahead in the swamp hollows, flightless.

*Le plumage sujet à la mue.*

Wind ploughing the Latinate silences ...

*Note: There has been nomenclatural sleight-of-hand over the [emus]  
and their technical names have been changed  
for reasons that may not be entirely proper*

*Two lesser, extinct, casoario nero, ater, D[romaius] minor*

*Two live birds were taken aboard Nicholas Baudin's ship*

*Height: Four and a half feet, Weight 50 or 60 pounds*

Having opened the didactic collection

I say: *It is a violent end*

*[snakes, tiger cats, quolls]*

You say: *You are tired, this has probably tired you.*

Our dream of death never stagnates:

it can be dried, salted or smoked,

*but '[T]he best way of preparing the flesh' is roasting*

*'I have already caught or killed more than 300 myself, said the same  
inhabitant of whom I was speaking.'*

[Unkissed] before-and-after, we dine in the bayside bistro

BYO food

knowing hunger, knowing how the wind minces names, makes us visceral

*In cold weather, this fat melted and left to set can be eaten on bread; he said that it's very good like this*

You and I, [fidgeting fingers] mauled adrift, this stormy, bickering, wind-swept, sub-Antarctic,

*île de la famine*

to Joséphine's menagerie, mounted in glass cabinets

to Eden's swamp lagoons, Le Jardin des Plantes, Tuscany, Giglioli's notes  
on 'working out the cassowaries'

*'I was pondering over the matter ... and contemplating the specimen when I noticed for the first time  
something written on one of the leg bones.'*

4.

From the cliff, the island's grid of road posts, powerlines, fencing, mesh are divisions,  
the marks of men, artefacts, Lesueur's disproportionate fantasies,  
partisan spills in parliament, dead knobs, rumps  
the road's signature.

Seals hemorrhaging, shedding tears, wind the colour of grief, made of the earth,  
mouthful by mouthful.

Wings that cannot lift,  
black, glistening feathers on our faces, the nail tearing our lips, the feet  
scratching us, knocked free of each other by a beak  
torn apart from the broken springs of knowledge.

Our eyes open, glassy, what we swallowed vanishing ...

Too dead for the public gaze,

the smell of pesticides, formaldehyde  
fossa, foramen, organ a grammar  
blended with  
*the pleasant smell of food in their bellies*  
full of gravel  
berries  
seaweed.

## Note

Archival voices were sourced from the French naturalist, Francois Péron's interview with a King Island sealer, Daniel Cooper, transcribed by Alphonse Milne-Edwards and Emile Oustalet which appeared in *Bulletin de Museum d'Histoire Naturelle* 5, 1899. This was translated into English by Gillian von Bertouch, Hobart 2008. The interview appears in Stephanie Pfennigwerth's superb *New Creatures Made Known (Re)Discovering the Extinct King Island Emu* submitted for her Master of Arts thesis at the University of Tasmania, 2010. Her thesis as well as media reportage about the discovery of bones at Surprise Bay and Cape Wickham informed other voices.