

## *The Impossibility of Flight*

Unplumbed ocean,  
and this is the problem list.

### *Fireworks:*

A posy of damp squibs, a bucket brimful  
of tubers mouldering, as we look skyward,  
with spiderlings catching in our hair; rockets  
by the quiverload, but our touchpaper drips  
with condensation, our saltpetre dissolves  
in spraydrift, and we wish for tarpaulins,  
a momentary break in cloudcover, another  
day when we can ignite Bengal Flame, burn  
Roman Candles, and pink chrysanthemums  
bloom all the way from where we lie to Mars.

### *Operatic aria:*

Soprano, carrot cake. Tenor, Irish Moss,  
or a descending cadence, slipshod, Ionian,  
Aeolian, lost for words, as we await the coda.  
Should we join in? Should we sing along?  
With knife in hand, rasp in throat, where  
is the appeal of a midnight assignation,  
when hail thrums hard on naked tympani,  
when sounds of violin and contrabassoon  
recapitulate the plot we missed, assert  
the fate that beckons our hungry return?

### *Satellite radar:*

Has anyone seen the latest surface chart?  
Calculated mean wave height? Maximum  
integrated pulsatile power? Immersed in  
stasis, all we can say is that the Doldrums  
must be upon us again. Over the horizon,  
if only the fog would lift, we might detect  
filigreed minarets with the promise of gold  
and incense and allspice, if only the current  
drawing us inward would pause a little, if  
it might reverse its quickening vortex grip.

- Belladonna:* No Morning Glory, Everlasting Daisy, no thorny espaliered Briar Rose, not unless your night-vision, coal black, dark-adapted, peers through the guylines and puppeteers' strings that tangle, disentangle, our sense of Magnetic North, the inertia, the inability, to move beyond illusion and crystalline hallucination, to prevent spin and whirl, unrelenting vertigo, until you count to ten, breathe in, hold, hold, nowhere near home.
- Amelia:* Heart of Earth, misplaced, restored to earth, or, depending on location, your deep sea bed, there to sleep anew, to toss and turn, jostled, pushed by phantom arms, restless impressions of legs with minds of their own, that desert the body, stroll, saunter apart, leaving you, (dear sweet brave you) emulating a mermaid in a storm, sinking into abyss, hopelessly far from tribute or admiration, finding yourself in the surprisingly good company of worms.
- Final options:* (Invertebrates) Portuguese Man O' War, Box Jelly, Marbled Cone; (Elasmobranchs) Mako, Spurdog, Tiger, Leopard, Grey Nurse, Bronze Whaler, White Pointer; (Teleosts) Giant Grouper, Barracouta, Moray, Conger; (Mammalia) Orca; (Miscellany) hydrostatic pressure, the height of the jetstream; the tendency for hurricanes to form, hidden costs of progress, the thermal energy of helium, fluid dynamics, an equation, the distance between your turbulence and mine.
- Unplumbed ocean,  
and this, then, is the impossibility of flight.

### *Glossary*

*Belladonna:* a plant extract once used by Italian women to dilate their pupils, enhancing their dark-eyed beauty; its active ingredient, atropine, is a sea-sickness remedy.

*Amelia:* as a girl's name, means "industrious" or "fertile", but in embryology, a fetus born without limbs. Amelia Earhart was a famous American aviatrix who disappeared over the Pacific Ocean in 1937.

*Elasmobranchs:* sharks.

*Teleosts:* bony fish.

Ian Gibbins. Two poems: 'The Impossibility of Flight' and '100 Words'.

*Transnational Literature* Vol. 4 no. 2, May 2012.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

### *100 Words*

Randomly tuning in somewhere outside  
Adelaide's Southern Suburbs, *en route*  
for beaches, more or less  
pristine, wind-hilled, sand-banked, stalked by  
black-shouldered kites ashore, white pointer  
sharks at sea, Radio National  
crackles, shifting static, momentarily right-channelled,  
strands today's interviewee, port-side, deconstructing  
bloody lineages, water-borne refugee tales,  
unapologetic on the contradictory problems  
of translation, suggesting, as he  
remembers once having been told,  
that non-native speakers (aren't we  
all?) should learn one hundred  
new words each day, practise,  
internalise, syntactically interweave, conjure up  
Daliesque associations invoking imaginary journeys  
like future-tense dreams, and I,  
tongue-tied, considering my alphanumeric options,  
decide to begin again, tomorrow.

*Ian Gibbins*