



Heather McPherson

edited & introduced by

Emer Lyons

*i
do
not
cede*

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ISBN: 978-0-473-59884-6

Produced and published by a Spiral collective: Biz Hayman, Emer Lyons, Marian Evans. With warm thanks to Jane Zusters for the images of Heather and to Rick McPherson and Mokopōpaki for their ongoing support. Special thanks to Adrienne Martyn for offering her technical expertise exactly when we needed it.

Introduction

Definition of cede

verb

give up (power or territory)

i do not cede is an ekphrastic collection of poems, odes to local and international writers, artists, and lovers. This chapbook is a taster, a lead up to **Dirty Laundry: New and Selected Poems** by Heather McPherson, publication forthcoming. McPherson titled the collection herself, leaving a lineage, an embodied manifesto of rebellion, as she writes in the dedication,

& all (us)*Others

& all our lovers

while

“your body will haunt mine”

*(Adrienne Rich, **Twenty-One Love Poems**,
1976).*

Heather McPherson worked always in the genre of community (us). This chapbook is a haunting, the poems alive in their will to survive. The experience of lesbianism is privileged, beginning with the speaker ‘playing / vulva music’, gasping for breath from inside language, the O a (w)hole, ‘whose cOde’. She uses Adrienne Rich’s phrase ‘a rose-wet cave’ in an act of literary taxidermy to continue the search for a common language, an erotic language, ‘inside burst urgencies of kiss’. McPherson repeats the personal, centralises the all-seeing lyric I, ‘of which I in the I in the eye’. The speaker

becomes a monster, questions herself, ‘& a voice howls / what / if the monster is me / the monster is me,’ and troubles the invisibility possible in a woman’s life, ‘and nobody sees you again’. The concerns are contemporary, ‘stroking lately’, the poems show how sexism and homophobia are not ‘healed griefs’. Still, McPherson’s poems are joyful, singing with her characteristic playful language,

and stars kept trying to pin back night’s
 dimensions and we to pull out the pins
 and let expansions fly [...]

This chapbook ends with *sister, when you pick*, with the speaker asking, clearly, vulnerably,

will you
 dOcument
 (me).

Four years ago, I started documenting Heather McPherson. A poem she typed on her typewriter sits framed in my office thanks to the ineffable Bridie Lonie. The handwriting on the poem belongs to Marian Evans without whom I would not have access to these poems or the beautiful entanglement of *Spiral*. I listen to a recording of Heather reading one of her poems when I feel my resistance failing. I too ***do not cede***. I am lucky to have survival built into my DNA through the work and lives of lesbians and feminists before and around me.

– Emer Lyons

thanks to Fran & Miriam & all the women artists

who
make us
images
in
strokes & signs
& two-way eyes so
we face our
coloured nakedness
O painted woman come to life –
as we our bodies will explore
so our story we possess
& Mirror Woman
tell our texts:
How we tore off the purple
cloak of queens & bared the cross-stitch scarlet L
& threw off the serving maid's disguise & put our broomsticks by –
& out of the old fantasies we wove the white robes
with the blue – green – persimmon – aubergine – &
stripped our blacks off for a cape – red white black & the
rainbow stripes that twirling spin the world alight – come
you and you – in drag with tats – in flaming
androgynous butch-femme spats – in
waistcoat overalls grins gowns hats –
from easels presses drawing pads
in pairs threes singularities
out of our wrong-fit too-small roles
we gallop our wild Night Mare
bones and rouse & ride
our vision home & cry
O love I am full
of you I will
never be full
enough

written among images by:

Fran Marno
Miriam Saphira
Lisa Gannison
Allie Eagle
Tee Corinne
Judy Chicago
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Sharon Alston
Jane Zusters
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Carolee Schneemann
Lynda Benglis
Barbara Hammer
Hannah Wilke
Jean Laming
Merret Oppenheim
Pulse
& all (us)
Others

& all our lovers
while

"your body will haunt mine"

Adrienne Rich, from *The Floating Poem, Unnumbered*

who is this

for Miriam Cahn

painter
you have made
her face
her face
her
long-face
sweet-face body
she
makes two-faced
making it face
back
naked
her
blind
nipple & nipple
eyes
and
schnuffling

bellybutton
nose
& vulvic grin
shiiiiiiiiiiifting
off
outline and who
might
a woman in a woman's
hands
be
a refugee
goddess
sexily
light-fingered
watching
her body
OO
facing
each other
how much
are
we
you
are you us

and sometimes in my single bed

I love the surge
volcanic urge
my fingers

playing
vulva music
deranging

a ghostly yoni-verse
in pink folds

I warm my earth-strings
in the cliff
the secret cleft

my lover
left

whose hell-gate

yonen

does a wOund
prOduce

whose cOde

of course, she says, the vagina might be also

a rose-wet cave between warm thighs
the lotus in the lilypond a sun's egg
throb inside cupped hands -

a writhing nest inside whose rim
the welcome swallow swoops and flies,
fork-tailed, trailing delicate blue

membranes of infinity - while echoes
shake cathedral domes & rib-cage
caverns hum - & soprano arias

swoop from a tiger-lily throat
and crimson peony tongues lick
the shining fiddle-hair ferns

inside their loom of rippling skin
hungry fish-mouths nibble in
and over swelling lungs

sizzling tides unleash novitiates
singing bells and tight-stringed spasms
inside burst urgencies of kiss

and eely shapes uncoil and shift
and below each surface glitter
dance the stars of afterlives...

crossings in the southern hemisphere

When Bubo flipped her skirts up
heaven fell about laughing

and when Hine-tītama smiled
red hibiscus tongues slipped off their velvet
slippers and sashayed off to otherworlds

and stars kept trying to pin back night's
dimensions and we to pull out the pins
and let expansions fly

must turn the stars from exploded
blows into little people trying
to patch up holey sheets

pussy got your tongue

haven't you got a tongue
in your head

O yes O yes
a tongue in my head

who is it tolling the tongue
in your head
the host of tongues
the toast of tongues

the tongue of the mother
who wants you rich
the tongue of the grandma
who wants you a witch
the tongue of the grandad
who wants you well-read
the tongue of the auntie
who wants you well-bred
the tongue of the sister

who hears what you said
the tongue of the father
who wants you dead

the tongue of the uncle
who wants you sweet
the tongue of the brother
who wants you meek
the tongue of the teacher
who wants you well-spoken
the tongue of the sergeant
who wants you broken
the tongue of the cleric
who wants you tame
the tongue of the judge
who knows you're to blame

the tongue of the friend
who wants you whole
the lover who wants you
body and soul

which tongue
are you thinking of
Puss in the head

which tongue
of which I in the I in the eye
which tongue will incite
your delight or dread

monster

(i)

he loiters under the trees
half-bent & shadowy
looking & waiting for me

& I have been waiting for him
looking & looking away
wanting not wanting the day

as he smiles his secret ooze
into my eyes
till I am mesmerised

like my naked red-lipped doll baby's
open and shut blue eyes

the splayed manikin in the plughole
the lightning-struck god in the head
till I sicken till in dread

I told I told
& the monster shrank
a limping hulk

between the living & undead
& I grew I grew
I grew old

behind my mirror wrinkled skin
the face of my skull-bound twin
stares stonily two-faced back

in front of blackened eyeholes
a child blurts her deed
& my hair stands up

& a voice howls
what
if the monster is me

the monster is me

(ii)

You emanate your agenda
without words
or even movement

here I am
inscribes itself across door & ceiling
roof & sky

everything goes quiet

or if it was quiet already
suddenly full throttle along the faultline
everything starts shaking & crying

furniture topples & fridge vomiting
& edges bashing heads together
& fists in your face

how Huka Falls might feel
to somebody in a hīnaki
gone over the top

how you never have to
announce yourself
it's the others

hunching and ducking do that

how you have nothing to say
as they pull the membrane
of the waterfall over their eyes

and nobody sees you again

out of your costume

out of your game

remembering early

the heady years
Beltane Samhain
Lammas

we sprinkled a salt
circle in the sand
and ranged

for driftwood & lit
the bonfire & hummed
& crooned & screeched
& chanted

many a wild wicca tune
& prayed & split a red-cheeked
apple to break old spells
& make new toasts

& hold hands praising
dry & bloody bodies

& stroking lately
healed griefs

in new-found
goddess spirit
relief

sister, when you pick

sapphic
fragments
out of my body
from under
your words

& my
words from
under your
body

& after
you shake out
Other assumptions
of sites & times

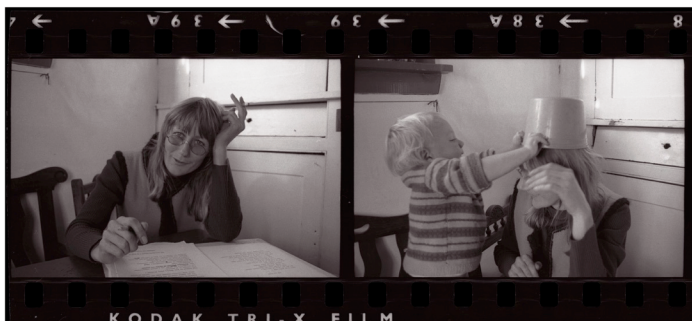
& ignorances
will you
recOollect
(me)

will you
dOcument
(me)

in y/Our

blOOming
Olivia
tree

heather mcpherson



Jane Zusters, *Heather McPherson and her son Carrick, Christchurch* (1975). Giclée print. Edition of five, 31 x 50.5cm. Courtesy of the artist and Mokopōpaki, Auckland.

HEATHER MCPHERSON (1942-2017), poet, publisher and editor, played a key role in supporting women artists and writers in New Zealand. In 1976 she started the Spiral Collective and its literary magazine and she was also a founder of Wellington's Women's Gallery (1980-84).

Heather's *A Figurehead: A Face* (1982) was the first collection of poetry published in New Zealand by an open

lesbian, followed by three more collections. Spiral published a posthumous fourth collection in 2018, as part of **This Joyous, Chaotic Place: He Waiata-Tangi-Ā-Tahu**, a CNZ-funded multi-media exhibition about Heather and her peers, at Mokopōpaki, Auckland. Heather has been widely anthologised, most recently in **Out Here: An anthology of Takatāpui and LGBTQIA+ writers from Aotearoa** (AUP 2021). The Spiral Collectives website documents her life and work.

emer lyons



EMER LYONS, who is preparing a major collection of Heather's poems, **Dirty Laundry**, is a lesbian writer from West Cork. The recipient of the inaugural University of Otago City of Literature PhD scholarship, she now holds a creative/critical PhD in lesbian poetry and the manifestations of shame and is the Irish Studies Postdoctoral Fellow at Otago's Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies. Emer has been shortlisted for the Fish and Bridport poetry prizes. Her play **The Green** was nominated for Best Narrative in the 2018 Dunedin Theatre Awards, in 2019 she was the Otago Regional Slam Poetry Champion and in 2020 she was nominated for a Pushcart Prize for fiction.

biz hayman



BIZ HAYMAN is an artist and design historian based in Aotearoa New Zealand. She has taught and researched art and design at six art schools and universities in three countries.

The cover for this chapbook combines several concepts pertinent to the project: a rendering of

Heather's own handwriting to announce her work (with thanks to Marian Evans and the staff at the Alexander Turnbull Library); the clarity and strength of the 'Geneva' typeface, designed by Susan Kare in 1983 when professional font design was largely a male preserve; plus, the wonderful 1975 photographic series by Jane Zusters, capturing Heather herself working at her kitchen table.