

From a collection of hand and typewritten pages of verse
by Elizabeth Durack – loosely assembled into five parts
by padc July 2010.

III Questions and Answers ...

- 1 Black cockatoos (1957)
- 2 Someone came (1956)
- 3 **Anniversary (1958)**
- 4 To ——— (1955)
- 5 Anniversary (1957)
- 6 Dirge (c. 1955)
- 7 A kiss (c. 1954)
- 8 'The building of the Great Wall of China ...' (1951)
- 9 On not taking up an extended hand (mid 1950s)
- 10 **Gist for the psychologist (c.late 1950s)**
- 11 Return (1976)
- 12 Anniversary (1955)
- 13 Anniversary (1956)
- 14 Anniversary ('56)
- 15 **I shall weave no more spells at midnight (1955)**
- 16 To a suicide (1990)
- 17 In memoria in aeterna (1990)
- 18 Death – questions and answers (c. 1948)

3 Anniversary 1958

Oh I am less sad now
for sorrow
of all of yesterday
then the unburied power
in you
over tomorrow –
This unremitting barrenness
of your persistence
to pursue.
Had you but lived
you could have died
for me
as better men than you
and some more true
that I have buried
of my own accord –

I could have seen
you wed
to some coarse wench
some nag or bore
and patched
a wounded pride with:
"Well matched!"
Or as the years passed
and a string of
nondescript offspring
swung into existence
I could have faced you then
with cool indifference –
or on a chance meeting
(in a pub; on the tarmac;
buying a lettuce;)
seen the hand of time
had thickened your face
thinned your mind
and smiling then

consoled myself,
the way we do, with:
"Lucky escape ...!"

There are a thousand
ways
you could have died
more utterly

(as better men than you
and some more true)
than as you did –
but with your death
(sudden, preposterous
22 years ago)
in one swift stroke
of cunning
you contrived
in me
your immortality –
and I am shocked
from sadness
into anger
at the long
remorseless
continuity
of your living –
better men than you
(and some more true)
I've buried in the sands
with these two hands –

Oh I am less sad now
for sorrow
than for this power
you hold
upon tomorrow —

#

21.11.1958

10 Gist for the Psychologist

Last night I dreamt of everything
And surely every one
(Almost) that I've ever known
Since my life begun.

I dreamt of stories in old books
I read when just a kid
I dreamt of an old chocolate box
With roses on the lid.

I dreamt of chairs that furnished once
A convent long ago
I dreamt of an old stair-case
And a fig tree branching low.

I even dreamt of noises
I didn't know I heard
I dreamt of an old dress I had
With the waist-band round it shirred.

I dreamt of getting sunburnt
And looking at a shell
I dreamt of ships that sail away
And falling down a well.

I dreamt of packing in a rush
And then to make it worse
The suitcase wasn't big enough
And I couldn't find my purse.

I dreamt about a woman
In a hat with cornflowers on it
I dreamt about a Persian cat
In a white crocheted bonnet.

I dreamt about the children
And of my oldest brother
I dreamt about the magazine with the
Frenchman on the cover.

I dreamt of walking down the street
This afternoon with Kim
I dreamt about a glass of beer
It had a broken rim.

Oh such a mad procession
Filled all the night hours through
And yet (it's rather curious)
I never dreamt of you.

#

undated – late 1950s?

15 I shall weave no more spells at midnight

I shall weave
 no more spells
 at mid-night,
 nor sit, witch-wise,
 with my lamp
 to light
 the wanderer
 through that no-man's land
 between two souls.

Bleak and uninhabitable
 let it lie
 in limbo-gloom,
 for, far too often,
 have I made of it
 a play-ground –
 safe and bright
 and lit
 with swaying lights –
 a place for gay trespassing
 where, laughing,
 my mirrored face
 reflects the image
 of your own.

I shall weave
 no more spells
 at mid-night,
 nor, with a light
 sprinkling of my hand,
 transform that bitter land
 into a common –
 pluck out the nettled weed
 nor grow
 for deadly night-shade –
 daisies –
 form comradeship
 of lying treachery
 nor turn the bats
 swallows;
 neither shall I carpet
 the sharp-edged rock
 with moss
 nor render
 black quick-sand
 into foot-firm earth.

Let it lie
forever
cordoned off,
for I, no less than you,
am safe from
the dark deceit
of my own spell-bind.

So –
Let the wild
guardian birds
(flapping their moulting
wings)
screech
and let the
sign-post
(tattered with salt winds)
read:
'KEEP OUT'

August 1955

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