

Graeme Miles  
Infernal  
Topographies

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For Ali, Angus and Freya

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## I was the last one left

after the great extinction. The others  
hung around as ghosts. Some  
inexplicable necessity compelled me  
to mark the exams of the deceased.  
I graded my brother-in-law's Russian paper, knowing  
neither he nor I knew Russian.  
I wanted to write  
something about all this,  
a solipsist novella.  
It seemed worthwhile,  
the act of working,  
writing something about a turn back  
to the brief blank between thoughts  
like turning a cheek toward the space just emptied.

# Living on the Banshee

Ah those days when we lived  
on our own zeppelin. It was quiet  
when it moved and silent  
floating at anchor.  
We had percentile dice  
and a detailed chart  
to determine our moods.  
We called it the Banshee  
in an ironic moment  
but when it burned into almost nothingness  
it sounded just like they said:  
thousands of stones,  
acres of greenhouses.

# Infernal Topographies

For a while I joined the club for people  
who like to be close to great white sharks  
but they'd get on your nerves with their ecstasies,  
their mock-humble willingness to be devoured.  
I moved to an island called Earthly Paradise  
by estate agents, as cover for a name  
famous for brutality. When it got busier  
bookshops came where you could buy poems  
and a newspaper called Conquest Times.  
I wondered whether it could really be called that  
but thought I might be living a memory  
from some period of unselfconscious empire.  
Was about to buy some living poets  
until someone pointed to a new Berryman,  
big and crisp and blue, since if  
there's one thing certain from infernal topographies  
it's the neighborly feelings between deaths and dreams.



# Domestic Fauna

## 1: Wryneck

*Name:* Wryneck.

*Description:* The head is small but with a long beak, somewhere between an ibis and a toucan. The body is a coiled spring, feet long and avian.

*Movement:* A jaunty, fairground rhythm with a little hop like someone preparing an awkward kick.

*Diet/favourite offerings:* Smooth twigs twisted slightly at one end. Marriages, especially first ones. Childhoods, especially first ones. *Sounds/cries:*

Difficult to describe but suggestive of the word 'disconsolate.'



### *3: Visits from extinct animals*

And once a thylacine came. Something wolfish  
in its long head, its fur thick  
and rough. Something hyena-like  
in its knowing eyes. It knew  
it was extinct because of us  
(one pale human looking  
much like another) so we worried  
when the kids wanted to stroke  
its long jaw, mimic its drunken  
walk. It was like meeting someone  
whose suffering you'd heard about,  
someone excluded come out  
of the past. It could almost have been  
a person disguised or a sleazy god  
in an old myth, hidden in a skin.  
It had the look of someone condemned  
who knows he's innocent and has something on you.

#### *4: Sphere*

Another household creature, quieter  
being, the sphere, whose movement  
is a circumambient flowing,  
who seems to feed on nothing, or quietly  
on itself, diminishing imperceptibly.  
Its mostly hollow centre,  
an emptiness to revolve around.  
It is something before gender, that will outlive  
all animals, everything weak enough  
to need to move. It is prior  
and patient, runs kaleidoscopic  
shapes across its skin. It's  
billions of years before the wryneck.