

TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

Two Poems

1. Skywriting

The silver nib of the plane trails off,
leaving *Ma* like a ghost-print
of hand-writing on a sky dark blue
as carbon paper. When it returns,
it lights the stems and barbless hooks

of a pair of *r*'s. It seems the pilot
might be a fan of 100,000 point
Arial or Century Gothic – anything
sans serif, and with enough body
to resist being blown away too quickly.

He's been watching the weather,
waiting for a system of high pressure
under which to work his signatures.
He applies a zen approach to each flight,
loving what he leaves even more

for its impermanence. Next comes the *y* –
a vertical, audible smoking climb
in two parts into what is fast becoming
a clear picture. Then he lifts away
and falls again, four times to make

of his trailing smoke the letter *M*,
followed by a partial loop-the-loop,
leaving *e* to come apart at the edges
in a cross-current of erasing wind.
Those watching are now wondering

who it is that's proposed, and who
has been taken out for lunch and guided
by their eyes into the sky.
The next letter seems the most difficult
of all, requiring a throttle-melting 3/4 roll,

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capped by a horizontal burst of speed
to make a *G*. Another *e*, and names
are being suggested. As if wanting to finish
with the kind of flourish the grounded
will never know, the pilot angles his plane

to catch a flint of sun on the down-
ward wing, then crafts an immaculate *m*
before flying off to better view his work.
It's a statement, a woman says.
She'll never accept. But the plane reappears

with a question mark forming in its wake,
followed by another, minus the dot,
which mirrors it – this forms a dissolving heart.
How could you refuse, someone says.
It's a statement and it gets no word of argument.

2. The Trawler

Like an old shed held together
by wires and panels of light
blue wood, a trawler
is making its way upriver.

A man emerges
to check on what he's found
in the deep sleep
of his long, productive night.

On deck, his fingers
dripping water, he looks out
to where a line of gulls
are trailing like sun-

bleached prayer flags,
feeding on what a lifted net
releases to the tide: prawn
husks and undersize fish

that glitter down to where
nothing is wasted.
Sometimes it seems
he's been at it too long,

yet on mornings like these,
when things come together,
it's not about time or profit,
risk or investment.

Light floods through
the wheel-house window.
The river widens
into a working harbour,

with tugs and tankers,
cranes and lines of men
in hard hats in readiness
for the loading to begin.

At the fisherman's co-op,
on the filleting floor,
an egret steps aside

to let him pass, its neck

like a neon tube on the blink.
Someone is talking about
the new moon's influence
on mulloway. A forklift driver

swears the moon phase
makes no difference,
and is about to climb down
and explain, when a man

wearing a chain-mail glove
throws a mullet into the air.
A white bird swallowing is enough
to silence any conversation.

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