

THE STORYTELLERS' FOUNTAIN
by
Studio for Propositional Cinema

SCENE DESCRIPTION.

1. **CONTEXT IS CONTENT**

The exhibition inhabits six frescoed rooms on the first floor of the Palazzo Caracciolo d'Avellino, as well as the building's basement. The basement contains ancient Greek ruins which were uncovered, along with the frescos, during a renovation initiated by Fondazione Morra Greco in 2015. The frescos were executed in the early 18th century by Giacomo del Po (1654-1726) and his collaborators by commission of Marino III Caracciolo (1668-1720) & Antonia Spinola (1669-1744).

Palazzo Caracciolo d'Avellino was converted from a Benedictine monastery in 1610 by Marino II Caracciolo (1587-1630) and Francesca d'Avalos d'Aquino d'Aragona (d. 1676). During this period Giambattista Basile (1566-1632) was the court writer of the Prince Caracciolo d'Avellino. In 1619, Basile composed and published an idyll in Prince Marino's honour: the story of Arethusa.

Fondazione Morra Greco has operated an exhibition and residency program in Palazzo Caracciolo d'Avellino since 2006. From April to December, 2019, Studio for Propositional (founded 2013) lived in residence at Fondazione Morra Greco. The exhibition script is loosely based on the Basile's Arethusa.

2. **MYTHS ARE LIVING STRUCTURES**

The Arethusa myth in poetry can be traced through Virgil (40 B.C.), Ovid (8 A.D.), John Milton (1634), John Keats (1818), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1820), and Ezra Pound (1956) among others. It depicts the river nymph Arethusa who, one day after hunting, bathes in a stream that is actually the river god Alpheus, who falls in love with her and pursues her against her will. To evade capture, Arethusa enacts several escape attempts; firstly she flees, but is out-endured by Alpheus; secondly she hides in a cloud that her patron Diana, the goddess of hunting, conjures for her, but as Alpheus grows near, Arethusa perspires and turns into water; finally she finds escape through a hole in the earth and flees her homeland in Greece, emerging, in Sicily, as a fountain. In different tellings she variously escapes Alpheus, or her pursuer also turns back to water and mingles with her waters in violent conclusion.

The endurance of Arethusa's story lies in its thinly veiled allegorisation of gender struggle, sexual freedom, empiricism, colonialism, forced migration, and other never-ending battles between the conflicting desires for freedom and the desires for domination that define the human condition.

Stories are open structures that may be occupied at any time by anyone and be altered to suit their needs. Because their structural integrity is proven, they are convenient and expedient bases from which to act, shortcuts to understanding our present and imagining our futures.

3. STORIES ARE BLUEPRINTS

Narratives sketch out potential realities in manners relatable across cultures, geographies, and generations. It is no coincidence that they have been the building blocks of all religions who have attempted to exert control through the manipulation of desire through the pull of the imaginary. Retaining or reclaiming control of the narratives that structure our lives and desires is the foundation for constructing the shape and content of our futures.

The stories we tell can be used as prototypes for the worlds we want to build. It is our responsibility to construct these stories not just for ourselves but also for unknown futures. As long as they stay alive they can exist as possibilities for a better world, no matter how remote or unlikely.

This is not fantasy, this is realism.

SCENE ONE.

A GUST OF WIND

By now The Night had nearly succeeded
in its long-planned abduction of The Sun;
veiled in blackness the glow depleted,
shadows silhouetted everyone.
Though hidden The Sun was still reflecting
off a distant rock, hoping some would come
with vocabularies for objecting
to the permanent darkness underway
by blackout screens The Night was erecting.
How fragile and tenuous was The Day,
its occlusion was so soft and steady
that by the time it began to decay
the people, squinting, had been, already,
conditioned to mistrust its shining light;
for endless night they'd been made ready.
But well prepared for battle was The Night;
it could anticipate all strategies
that could be used to logically incite
indictment against its laws and decrees,
ready with a convincing argument
to deflect any detractors with ease.
Welcome to the age of malevolent
reality destabilisation:
here truth has been rendered irrelevant,
consensus, sculpted through soft coercion,
has prompted action against self-interest,
leading to elective self-immersion
in a rising tide-pool of nothingness
– not nothing, but rather a deadening,
the power of life reimagined as less.
But behold that comely swamp glistening,
observe its moonlit rippling spasm;
with concentration we can hear it sing.

THE DEVOURING TIDE

I am the all-encompassing chasm
upon which your dreams have been constructed,
in me each fantasy you can fathom
may be fulfilled (though as a corrupted
cipher of itself): I'll give you pleasure
and ensure it's never once disrupted.

Flow into me, mingle in my treasure;
blissfully comfortable eternity,
equilibrium where pain and leisure
are levelled through boredom's fraternity
with uninterrupted entertainment:
to oppose me is pure absurdity.

Credit me with fiction's de-containment
from the prison of your storytelling;
and all I request from you as payment
is participation in the quelling
of any who challenge my position:
life is just more merchandise for selling.

A GUST OF WIND

Its lulling songs had proven efficient
in coaxing bodies to breach its surface,
which reveals, in murky apparition,
fruits of its ever-compounding corpus:
corpses of all who've entered, enchanted,
adopting its will as their own purpose.

In this landscape our story has landed,
on the shore of the cataclysmic stream,
a site where our hopes will soon be planted.

The veil of darkness, as will be seen,
is useful not just for burying facts
(and re-invention of what they can mean)
but also for identifying cracks;
the fall-off of light along the contours
may trace cartographic lines for attacks.

Placed all along these liminal frontiers
– night and day, truth and lie, hope and despair –
are grates that slow the flow to the sewers,
and so, in darkness, we find ourselves there,
the scent of drowned bodies permeating
the crisp breeze wafting the fresh salty air,
where you, my audience, are now waiting
(retaining your customary distance)
to hear (before your patience is waning)
this tale of Artethusian resistance...

SCENE TWO.

A GUST OF WIND

There are those who ask: *at whose insistence
must we accept this gloomy offering
of a glinting meaningless existence*

*that promises this blissful suffering?
Honestly is there no alternative
to this ocean devouring everything?*

And to those few I've an answer to give
which I've shaped into an allegory;
some suggestions for some new ways to live
are planted in the masks of the story.

Here, alongside that putrid ocean's shores,
The Storyteller orated, daily,
for which varied crowds assembled in scores,
stories collected from here and yonder,
with the tale's incapacitating force.

But meanwhile her tales, so stuffed with wonder,
had slowly earned desirous attention
from nebulous forces found asunder.

(Before continuing I should mention
stories are slippery organisms
that readily bend to one's intention
then snap-fly away, creating schisms
between the meaning the orator meant
and their receivers who use them as prisms.

Stories resemble a marionette
whose characteristics are widely known,
so there are certain things one can expect.
But, based on the place in which it is shown
and the intentions of the puppeteers,
malignant desires may become sown.

A Pulcinella may bring one to tears
or laughter or anger with the same script
depending on whose feelings it mirrors.
These scales of meaning are often tipped
by contextual characteristics,
so meaning inscribed in content is stripped.

But still we treat their tellers as mystics
who transform grim reality to gold,
but let's first examine the statistics;
it's the skills by which a tale is told
that can make it more or less enchanting
and so, to dark forces, desirable.

Talented tongues can succeed in planting
evil ideas into innocent
seeming packages, and likewise can bring
skeptical listeners such merriment
mal-intentions will pass undetected
thus making transmission more efficient.)

If our Storyteller had dissected
her usefulness for dastardly measures
she may have much more promptly rejected
the entreaties filled with offered pleasures,
empty promises of agency, and
compliments (those seductive caressers).

For one day, wandering along the sand,
the undertow of the entropic loch
beckoned to her, while extending his hand:

THE DEVOURING TIDE

My love, don't allow my deep voice to shock.
I have pined for you most violently.
Please don't be frightened, allow me to talk.
My shape is too wide for your eyes to see
but my reach extends the planet's vastness.
Though I wield my power quietly
I guarantee I'm by far the fastest
and surest way to disperse your stories
unto the world's deserving masses.
Imagine their joy, think of the glory
they will bestow when they hear what you say.
I beg you, join me, you won't be sorry!

A GUST OF WIND

Initially shocked she fled up the bay,
but those warm salty words held an allure,
a curious drive that caused her to stay
and ask the deep sea if it could assure
that she would retain her own volition.
The voice answered "yes", the rest was a blur,
The Storyteller dunked her toe's tip in...

SCENE THREE.

A GUST OF WIND

As the toe breached there flashed a grand vision,
as the grasping corpses' hands pulled at her.
She glimpsed the outcome of her decision
within that liquid sinewy matter.
The world around her started to quake.

THE STORYTELLER

I watched as my dreams began to shatter.
The Night, which had made the water opaque,
had hidden, behind the moon's reflection,
the contents within that shimmering lake.
The spoils of this pillaged collection
were clarified when my eyes adjusted
to behold that evil resurrection
of an epic barnacle-encrusted
kingdom. (If it weren't with my two eyes
another's account I'd not have trusted.)
For in the depths below our night-tinged skies
lies a dark underwater paradise
in which our worst impulses crystallise.
As if my eyes were spread wide by a vice
I watched and recorded all its horrors,
to return with a most solemn advice
that what waits for us just beyond our shores
are bleak futures sewn into the present
that we're collectively creeping towards.
I'm from the mountains, alpine resident,

the ocean was distant from our plateau.
But year by year the distance was lessened
with an encroachment so deceptively slow
its rise was nearly imperceptible;
a most useful method for it to grow.
And because it was undetectable
it also gained a mythical allure
that made us easily susceptible
to prophets who would readily assure
the fearsome forecasts were all ungrounded
and promised hope in its gleaming azure.

The prophetic promise songs resounded,
with many rushing to join its water.
With each submersion its mass compounded,
each new resident becoming fodder
to speed its rise, increasing its power
to implement its slow-motion slaughter.

Mountainous peaks that erstwhile would tower
over distant shores had since been submerged,
until it reached me, whom it longed to devour.

Despite what the warning voices had urged
like most I denied until it was too late,
by then I'd seen for myself what it purged;
the consequence of its deniers' fate,
the half-life of a futureless world
our hubris caused us to accelerate.

Like a grain of sand that has been pearled
through gentle caress of an oyster's tongue,
below I saw our future unfurled
as the water slithered into my lung.

So I tried to reverse my chosen course
from the bloated kin I was now among.
I rushed to battle the barbarous force
pulling me into its undercurrent,
clamouring breathlessly back to the shores.
My flailing limbs proved no deterrent
to deep-sea's cyclonic gravity,
it's tentacular desires weren't
going to yield to my will readily,
but I blindly grabbed some floating debris
and with my last strength I pulled myself free.
Emerging, gasping, I valiantly
refilled my wet lungs with some musky air
and, panicked, I yelled to the land my plea.

As though brought into a motherly care,
an errant and powerful gust of wind
constructed a wave that thrust me in air.
Like a butterfly whose wings are unpinned
I rose, and by its invisible hand
was delivered, bleeding, broken, and skinned,

SCENE FOUR.

A GUST OF WIND

This outcome was not what the tide had planned.
His lapping waves billowed toward her
to coax her body back in from the strand.
But chance is fate's dependable thwarter;
just before death The Gleaner happened past,
and saving's the nature of the hoarder.
With bravery The Gleaner acted fast
and buoyed her lungs with the force from her own
until her flailing heart re-beat at last.
Then she brought her back to heal in her home.
Her cave was packed with wondrous prizes
saved from the landfills in which they'd been thrown.
Trinkets and tools in all shapes and sizes,
the culture's discarded inventory,
its good and bad in all of its guises;
the contents told this rag-picker's story.

THE GLEANER

You use your world as a refuse-stuffed sponge
filling its holes like a reverse quarry.
So I've made it my duty to expunge
the spoils of this scattered treasure map.
In every burrow and crack I plunge,
returning with every useful scrap,
cleaning and fixing them to be preserved
like pre-historic mosquitoes in sap.
So just imagine how I was unnerved
by what was washed up on the sand today!

A GUST OF WIND

Her sputtering coughs were now being heard
from the makeshift sickbed in which she lay.
The Gleaner rushed to her patient's bedside
where our hero pleaded, with no delay.

THE STORYTELLER

Without your kindness I'd not have survived,
for this my gratefulness is eternal,
but the talons of time aren't on my side.
As we speak there are forces external
looking for me, their escaped prisoner,
to bring back to their liquid inferno.
In my dreams I saw my solicitor
out roving with search parties, far and wide,
to re-arraign me as his Minotaur.

A GUST WIND

Indeed lackeys of The Devouring Tide
were ravaging through the seaside landscape.
The Gleaner said "In my cave you can hide"
But the hero said, "No, I must escape,"

THE STORYTELLER

it's not longer safe here, he won't relent.
I beg you, join me, let's fight against fate.
My sins are clear, there's no time to repent,
for now we must wrest ourselves from the pull
and begin an impossible ascent.

A GUST OF WIND

With a passionate speech her heart was full
and The Gleaner packed a preemptive bag
of tools to make their escape tenable.
With her skills she could turn a simple rag
into sails or parachutes or rope,
and so ropes they used to scale the crag.
As each advancement restored waning hope,
they thought their escape was immanent,
but the rushing waves had crept up the slope.

THE DEVOURING TIDE

My betrothed, I beg for your quick descent,
for from the moment I felt your body
I knew without you I'd not be content.
I crave your touch, I cannot set you free,
with my forgiving arms I must beseech,
return to my clutches, come back to me!

A GUST OF WIND

The spray from his waves had begun to reach
the altitude to which they had risen
and with the suction-power of a leech
began to slide them down to his prison.
Just as the duo had lost their foothold
they were hoisted by an apparition,
stealing them away from the splashing cold
up to a horizontal resting place
where our next chapter will become unrolled.
Safe from their pursuers devious spray
where they'd been caught falling into the air,
they saw their miraculous passageway:
A Band of Rats stole them off to their lair...

SCENE FIVE.

A GUST OF WIND

Once the stunned fugitives became aware
that they were saved from their watery grave,
by an entity who had heard their prayer
and rescued them from the swallowing wave,
they realised that their deliverance
came at the behest of a group who made
them so afraid it seemed their circumstance
had gone from deadly to something still worse,
but the creatures assuaged their ignorance:

A BAND OF RATS

Please don't mistake our presence for a curse.
We are the product of a cruel scheme
that our genetics are bound to rehearse
with our bodies as a stage for a scene
where scientific miscalculation
begat these gene mutations most obscene.

With the alibi of sanitation
a call was commissioned by bureaucrats
to orchestrate the eradication
of all the cockroaches, pigeons, and rats,
to kill them all or halt procreation,
to cull them from all human habitats
within the course of a generation.

Yielding many submitted solutions,
judged by ease of their implementation,
humaneness levels, lack of pollutants,
and, of course, with budget closely in mind,
one firm was hired for the executions.
The best application that they could find
was deemed cruelty-free, it won the prize,
with optimism the contract was signed.

The plan was to slowly accustomise
the vermin to grain that they had dispersed
while blocking off usual food supplies.
The pests were not so easily coerced
but the pains of hunger made them tempt fate
so one of them offered to be the first.

Like kings with their taster they sat in wait
but in time the food showed no ill-effect
so slowly and surely all of them ate.
Of course they realised in retrospect
their fate had not just magically changed
but was puppeteered by an architect,
for once eating habits were rearranged
and initial distrust had been subdued
the ingredients were promptly exchanged.

The city had slowly replaced the food
with grain sprayed to alter their chromosomes
with a cholesterol that, once consumed,
prohibits replication of hormones
required for genetic reproduction.
This they found scattered on the cobblestones.

But time soon showed the steroid obstruction
ushered consequences unintended,
not extinction but a gene corruption.
For with every birth babies ascended
with deformities so vile and grotesque
Hieronymous Bosch would be offended.

The formula they were made to ingest
instead of causing infertility
led to mutations much worse than incest.
Against science's probability
these offspring converged due to suspended
genetic incompatibility.
Lines between bird / mammal / insect ended;

we're their hyper-sirenic descendants.
Although our looks have left you offended
like you we seek our independence.
Our deformities have given us skills
to help our path to mutual vengeance.
We've contact with all the rats in the hills,
can dialogue with the birds in the sky,
we know the tide and the rate that it kills,
and like the cockroach we're built to not die.
We just need a gleaner's utility,
and a storyteller to amplify,
let's unite our strengths and together flee...

SCENE SIX.

A GUST OF WIND

Of course the duo was quick to agree
their complimentary characteristics
could help them evade their shared enemy.
They began to plot the next logistics
as they knew they would not be safe for long.
Escape required strategic ballistics,
the danger was clear, they could not prolong.
While spelunking through a network of caves,
from a cone of light they could hear a song.
Being drawn to the musical lightwaves,
they found a room where the outside was in.

THE LENS-GRINDER

Look at the light, how the image engraves
itself on the wall like fluttering skin.
The camera obscura projection
illuminating this cavern most dim.
Does anyone here have a recollection
of such life-echoing apparitions
suspended in time for resurrection?
While my memory has raised suspicions,
I recall such static fragments of light
and stories about the sad conditions
where technologies to capture sight
were deleted from our understanding
and erased from our world overnight.
At the time their use was fast expanding,
their production and dissemination
accelerated, as a demanding
public caused a decentralisation
of the means by which history is told,
an image-based democratisation
that threatened what governments long controlled
– the shapes of societal narratives –
so plans were made to renew the stronghold.
The presence of synthetic irises
made to record the world around us

was viewed as an outbreak of viruses.
So advances were made, stoking distrust
they showed the world accurately,
then suggesting they were superfluous.
These images once were made chemically,
their recipes readily shared with all.
But before long the image-alchemy
transferred to the realm of the digital
which, due to its convenience and speed,
caused the relation of the camera
to the material world to recede,
making the knowledge proprietary
so legal conditions could supersede
the camera users' ability
to control the types of images made,
ensuring a corporate monopoly
over how they were produced and displayed.
Initially they would only disable
recording of content deemed renegade.
Each image, algorithmically labelled,
was subjectable to analysis.
You can predict the fate of this fable,
our stories are all quite analogous:
the image function was soon deleted,
causing an image paralysis.
After a while the protests receded
and, as technical knowledge had been lost,
communication, ever depleted,
had reached the point where a line had been crossed,
where images ceased to offer bridges
with discursive potential as the cost.
Since then I've lived in these mountains' ridges
playing with chemicals and carving glass
to reinvent the fixing of images,
and with these tools I saw the sea harass.
I can magnify the far and the near
and record these events as they pass.
As this may prove useful I volunteer
to lend my skills on your arduous walk,
as you try to escape this drowning sphere.
We must take flight now, we're against the clock...

SCENE SEVEN.

A GUST OF WIND

So leave they did, clamouring up the rock,
And, to make the bleak landscape more floral,
The Storyteller told this to the flock.

THE STORYTELLER

There was once a kingdom steeped in sorrow,
for a beast, who moved to a nearby cave,
declared to them *your end is tomorrow*

*each one of you will be sent to your grave
unless each morning you quell my fury
with a child under sixteen years of age.
As long as they're sent you needn't worry,
but feel my wrath if the debt is not paid.*

They had to choose a child in a hurry,
so every morning a lottery was made.
Children, sentenced to death without trial,
were sent out daily to meet the beast's blade.

Though The King's cruelty grew more vile
since his son died at war, one could not find
a Princess more loved. But fate didn't smile
on the basket of names picked by the blind.
Chance is a game that's never defeated;
at sixteen less a day it was her time.

The King, though he begged, reasoned, and pleaded,
couldn't ignite the kingdom's compassion.
This time the rules could not be cheated.

He offered a trade, in his brutal fashion:
another child for the hand of his daughter.
The Princess refused the trade with passion
and, filled with skills her lost brother taught her,
said *I'll find the dragon with my sword and shield
and mark my words: I'll slay that marauder.*

Then she rode to the cave thorough the field.
Despite her fears she felt valiant and brave.
To this dragon's teeth she refused to yield.
Climbing the slope she passed into the cave,
her echoed call to the beast billowed out:
Surrender now and your life I will save!

The responding voice was soft and devout.
He said, from the shadow of stalagmites,
*I'm not going to harm you, throw your sword out.
I've waited for you for countless long nights,
as you and your kingdom suffered that king,
but now you are here, come, follow my lights.
Please don't be scared, I'll no harm to you bring.*

She followed the torch-light in his hand.
As they drew deeper he started to sing,
*Princess, I come from a treacherous land,
there isn't a child who's safe in that place,
so for this world I could no longer stand.
One day I vanished and left not a trace,
I paid soldiers to report me as dead,
and vowed to return my doomed home to grace.
I didn't abandon it, but instead
returned, concocting a devious plan:
I sent them a ransom letter that said
that I would destroy each woman and man
unless they sent me a grave sacrifice.
Since then they've placed their children in my hands.*

And when she looked down, to her great surprise,
below veils of mist there lay a valley
filled with the children they'd sent there to die.
But instead of bones below a galley
all the children were playing together.

Fighting tears the beast staged his finale:
Look at my mouth. No fire, not an ember.
He left the shadow that had hid his face,
she ran to him and said *I remember!*
Oh brother, I've missed you! As they embraced
all the children encircled the siblings
and welcomed their princess into the place.
Free from the land that burned them like kindling,
each day they welcomed a new arrival.
Their city grew as the old was dwindling.
That's how the beast who had seemed like a rival
saved a dark city from murderous greed,
building anew, as a means of survival:
if we are wise we will follow their lead.

SCENE EIGHT.

A GUST OF WIND

The group walked 'til their feet began to bleed.
Lacking nutrients, their bodies were frail.
They couldn't continue at such a speed.
The Devouring Tide was fast on their tail,
but help came when an eavesdropping stranger
who'd been listening to the dragon-tale
delivered them from immanent danger
to a hiding place carved into a dam.

THE TRANSLATOR

It's in The Storyteller's nature
to transform life into a diagram,
simplifying muddy reality
so receivers can better understand
culture's underlying mentality.
Stories' elements are adaptable,
so with prodigious practicality
the teller turns into an oracle,
re-organising given components
while discarding parts they don't find useful.
Time has shown us that even opponents
will borrow stories and make them their own;
in your mouth a dragon became a prince,
the citizens villains made to atone,
and we all saw it as a metaphor
for how to escape an oppressive throne.
But we also find in the story's core
survival tactics that, while misguided,
cannot be so easily judged before
seeing every story is two-sided;
like The Tide whose love was his only crime,
a feeling you may well have requited.
If you'll allow me to further opine,
I believe that we could reach agreements
if you'll allow my neutral light to shine

as interlocutor of your grievance.
Let's end this endless destructive chase,
foregoing the need for future violence.
As a translator I create a space
to find mutual commonalities
so disparate parties can interface
and, despite opposing mentalities,
can understand another's position,
illuminating shared realities.
With experience and intuition
I propose to act as mediator
to end this cycle of demolition.

A GUST OF WIND

This self-elected negotiator
made arguments that the group debated,
but, battle-worn, they asked The Translator
to approach The Tide whom they so hated
and attempt to negotiate a truce
with the force who'd left them mutilated.
The sky, glowing with weapons of Zeus,
backlit The Translator as he approached.

THE TRANSLATOR

Hey Tide! the one you've aimed to seduce
feels that her sovereignty has been encroached
and requests you give her a safe passageway
back to her homeland from which she was poached.

THE DEVOURING TIDE

Imagine a meal where the finest entrée
was melting blissfully upon your tongue,
and at that moment, to your great dismay,
the host reached their hand in your mouth and flung
this perfect morsel on a filthy floor,
and you might see how much this betrayal stung.
I was left with nothing while promised more,
and now these criminals she's recruited
can expect to die with her in this war.

A GUST OF WIND

Disheartened to see all reason precluded,
and hoping not to leave empty-handed,
contingency plans were executed.

THE TRANSLATOR

Though it's clear to us what you've demanded,
The Storyteller proposes a game.
If you win your desires will be granted,
she will willingly submit to your claim,
but if you lose they must all be set free,
you'll return to the depths from which you came:
a game with the stakes of fatality...

SCENE NINE.

THE DEVOURING TIDE

With laughter I hear this insanity!
What game could she possibly hope to win?
She must have a death wish to challenge me!
I know the whole world and the secrets within,
at her peril my strength she belittles:
I accept this contest for her precious skin.

THE TRANSLATOR

Fate will play out on the Devil's fiddles;
the terms to which you've readily agreed
are rested on a trio of riddles.
If guessed correctly to you she'll concede,
but guess one wrong you're banished forever.
These are the rules that the game has decreed.

A GUST OF WIND

The Tide, feeling no one was more clever,
salivated in anticipation.
Feeling for weakness, The Storyteller,
aiming for miraculous salvation,
felt his biggest vulnerability
was found in his unwavering belief
in his omnipotent virility,
as well as his underestimation
of her cunningness and ability.
The waves smashed, ready. She hid fear and grief.
Above them a crowd of the living few.
The pilfered many watching from beneath.
The Storyteller started: "I ask you"

THE STORYTELLER

to listen to this and say who am I?
Only one answer can be judged as true.

*I can make you happy or make you cry.
Cast out from one hole I then dwell in two.
Repeated, I live. Forgotten, I die.
Once you have met me my fate lies with you.*

THE DEVOURING TIDE

Manipulator of feelings and fears...
by recruiting others you live anew...
You're born in the mouth and raised in the ears...
I know your name well for you are A Song.

A GUST OF WIND

A Band of Rats exploded into tears
for they knew that this answer was not wrong.
With all the strength that she could wrangle
The Storyteller moved the game along.

THE STORYTELLER

*Triangle through circle to rectangle.
I once was present but now I'm in the past.
For time is the rope with which I strangle.
History's bones are encased in my cast.*

A GUST OF WIND

A long silence fell on that fateful night,
but after a long while he spoke at last.

THE DEVOURING TIDE

I know you, you come from the land of light.
Born in the world as a travelling cone,
imperceptible aspect of sight,
a lens selected you and you alone,
imprisoning you, before you could flee,
on the surface on which you had shone,
as evidence of what you made it see.
As time passed it became an epitaph
of a past life that could only recede;
The answer's so clear that now I must laugh.
This surface that kills and commemorates
knows no other name than A Photograph.

A GUST OF WIND

The tension that desperation creates
leads to a climate that mitigates hope.
The Storyteller knew all of their fates
lay at the mercy of her fraying rope.
With a heart filled with fear she told to the sea
a riddle she thought was outside his scope.

THE STORYTELLER

*Received and given, but no one owns me.
I increase in size the more I'm consumed.
I travel the world, no border knows me.
An ancient friend, without me you're doomed.*

A GUST OF WIND

Like a bullet mid-air in a duel
the knowledge of someone's certain death loomed.

THE DEVOURING TIDE

You rely on others for renewal...
travelling opportunistically...
The content of others is your tool
so you steal everything you hear and see
and try to ingest it for your own gain
so you can increase your fame and glory.
Respect for nations you do not maintain...
Forgive my glee but the future's gory,
for now you have bound yourself to my chain.
I know your name, for you are A Story!

SCENE TEN.

A GUST OF WIND

The underworld exploded in glory,
basking in the light of their victory.
But before conceding territory
The Storyteller stated, wistfully,

THE STORYTELLER

The answer you've given is incorrect,
you have misunderstood its mystery.
You see I've discovered your worst defect,
for I spoke of something that you've never known.
Fear is the tactic you use to collect;
you don't believe there's something you can't own.
My first two riddles just led you along,
but I won by the heartlessness you've shown.
While I'm like a story, there you're not wrong,
stories know borders well, though those they breach
(networks of traffickers move them along).
The story functions like a tender leech,
embracing hosts and extracting them of
resources needed to exceed their reach.
I'm more like the breath-giving air above,
with each lung I enter the larger I grow.
You will never know me. My name is Love.

A GUST OF WIND

Speaking these words she struck the final blow,
the hillside erupted in joyous dance.
Even the sun was increasing its glow.

THE DEVOURING TIDE

Though sad and mortified I had my chance,
the rules were clear, I know I'm defeated.
From this day on I will cease my advance.

A GUST OF WIND

And with those words the ocean conceded,
beginning a slow descending draining,
scattering boneyards as it depleted.
Our heroes watched as the tide was waning,
planning the rebuilding upon their return.
Perhaps a lifetime of doubt-ingraining
had coloured the future with some concern,
for it felt quite uncharacteristic
that events should take such an easy turn
with a villain who was so sadistic.
So A Band of Rats had offered to scout
before their mood turned too optimistic.
In valleys some weeds had begun to sprout,
which the Band, descending, used as cover
to research if the truth could be smoked out.
The Rats could dig, the Pigeons could hover,
the Cockroaches hid deftly in shadows,

and with this network they could discover
why the game's ruling had gone unopposed.

THE DEVOURING TIDE

The Storyteller's famous for her tricks,
dressing her lies up in dazzling clothes.
She thought this was a game that she could fix,
but she played as if I accepted the rules.
So I spun some straw from her house of bricks.
Here I await the return of those fools,
and once they're lulled into thinking they're free,
I'll devour them in my whirlpools.

A GUST OF WIND

Hearing these words the Band began to flee,
but their hasty flight had made too much noise,
and their espionage was made clear to see.
The sea followed after as the Band bound
back up the hill where their friends lay in wait.
With an old telescope The Gleaner had found
The Lens-grinder could see this turn of fate
and quickly the crew picked up and took flight
as The Tide continued to decimate
any and all that came into his sight.
Soon almost everything had been submerged.
The earth's highest peak was their last respite.
They bristled as the waved below them surged.
With no more tricks to evade the danger,
hope seemed gone, they were fully discouraged,
when they met the last surviving stranger,
calmly perched on the summit's highest peak,
observing the sky, wistful and demure.
As the circumstances couldn't get more bleak,
riddled with pain, exhaustion, and hunger,
the embattled group heard this figure speak
the wisened musings of The Cloud-monger...

SCENE ELEVEN.

THE CLOUD-MONGER

When I came here the world was much younger,
its possible futures seemed infinite
and were imagined with endless wonder.
Always crueler than we like to admit,
with humans and nature in constant war,
we forged an evolutionary split
with the order seeded in nature's core,
shifting so human will superseded
the predatory beasts that ruled before.
Now free to accrue more than we needed,
we developed a taste for conquering,
conjuring rivals to be defeated.
Across the globe we began wandering,

pillaging others we found on the way.
In an attempt to avoid squandering
we found places where we wanted to stay,
accumulating wealth by sending out
surrogate armies to go forth and slay
any opponents they found on their route,
returning with any stolen riches.
Opposition was quelled by spreading doubt
and blacklisting, as traitors and witches,
any who questioned their authority,
sending for torture, throwing in ditches.
Each developed an origin story,
its narratives controlled by an elite,
a chosen literate minority
who assuaged, by threat of eternal heat,
potential dissenters to their orders.
Any who persisted they would delete.
Equally powered neighbours drew borders
and, through temporary alliances,
compounded, so to export their horrors,
exchanging divine right for false sciences
to justify their murderous attacks
by constructing and stoking biases.
This trajectory seemed to find climax
when murder became industrialised
and the world could see the fate of these acts.
This sobering moment left most surprised,
with many proclaiming we must change course,
but in time we became desensitised
and returned to the hate that lay at the source
of archaic tribal preservation,
which we let right in like a Trojan Horse.
Darkness, after time for acclimation,
seeped out clear like oxygen from its frame,
an atmosphere for self-ruination.
Our bellies breathing its explosive aim,
with leaking gas occluding vision,
it was easy to introduce the flame
igniting underlying division,
to conclude civilisation's project
as a collective suicide mission.
Undermining and starving intellect
allowed the last pillage to go unchecked,
until there was nothing left to protect.
Now, just before the last ship's shipwrecked,
there are just a few possibilities
of what, on this ground, we want to erect.
Our individual abilities
could facilitate construction of signs
to leave for potential futurities.
As likelihood of survival declines
we can accept and fade out with the fate
that ruin was in our species' designs,
or optimistically anticipate
a possible future in the distance
and leave, to be found in this far off date,

some traces of a last resistance;
our warnings as well as some evidence
of the beauty found in our existence.
So the moment before our severance
I propose as a final testament
a message to future intelligence
in an ancient knowledge survival kit...

SCENE TWELVE.

A GUST OF WIND

The first act of building the monument
was to define the theoretical
perimeters for drawing the blueprint
for structures that hypothetical
beings, emerging at future dates,
could encounter as decipherable
objects with messages to contemplate.

Three categories were identified
as elements that they must integrate
for their message to be solidified
in forms that could potentially transcend
long periods where life is nullified.

THE STORYTELLERS' CHORUS

First. Legibility: to comprehend,
texts must first be identifiable
as sign systems organised to transcend
decoration through classifiable
reference points that are reorganised
and interlinked within reliable
internal structures that, if analysed,
allow their embedded information
and meaning to be recognised,
facilitating the transformation
of a hermetic communication
system to be unlocked through translation.

At the very point of their formation
languages may be intentionally
designed for such decodification
so the hypothetical addressee,
of unknown time, body, and intellect,
should be offered a multiplicity
of expressive forms that can intersect
in order to be compared and transposed,
increasing the chance that they'll connect.

A new language should also be composed
to reintroduce opticality
to semiotic systems which disposed
of them, as, since they functioned sonically,
their signs didn't really have to depict
the concrete world pictorially.

But to speak to futures one can't predict
it's not possible to link sign to sound,
so relation to sight must be more strict
for potential connections to be found,
so the goal is to reverse-engineer
decryptification into its ground.

Of course the expressive system most near
to the nature of our sensorial
aptitude and intelligence is clear:
the condition of the pictorial.

The innate humanness of depicting
visible fragments of corporeal
reality, often not restricting
itself to informational relay,
is a phenomenon quite conflicting
with our survival needs, which is to say
with them we transcend our existential
condition to imagine, through our play,
situations within our potential.

So pictures must be incorporated;
because their natures are so essential
to how humans have situated
themselves on earth, this sensitivity
to images makes them pre-translated.

Second. Material Stability:
While all matter is doomed to be devoured
by the empty chasm of history,
materials aren't evenly powered
to withstand effects of time's entropy,
and so, if a future earth is scoured
structures that are more materially
permanent may have survived conditions
inhospitable to humanity.

Therefore all material decisions
must address structural integrity
in relation to innate conditions
of the Third. Distributability:

SCENE THIRTEEN.

THE STORYTELLERS' CHORUS

As trans-temporal legibility,
to be enacted with hope for success,
must multiply its visibility,
the structural plans must also address
the necessity of wide dispersal,
distributing messages to excess.

A GUST OF WIND

No time remaining for fate's reversal,
the structure's construction had to commence
without a prototype or rehearsal.
Building necessitated the presence

of all the characters that we have met.
The Cloud-monger made the atmosphere dense
(a lifetime of observation had meant
attunement to the nature of the clouds,
and so, to aid in their concealment,
he surrounded them in a misty shroud).
The Gleaner has unloaded her archive
of objects and facts, narrating aloud
stories of cultures who'd once been alive,
while The Storyteller narrativised
them in stories told to the other five
which the group then, together, synthesised;
The Translator into written languages
(including the one they hypothesised,
because, at its core, they knew language is
a modular system whose only goal
is to splice signs to meaning like stitches.)
The Lens-grinder enacted his role,
conjuring images from what was told,
to make scenes identifiable
to new languages not borne from the old.
A Band of Rats, with their collective skill,
gathered the materials to unfold
their massive structure with which to fulfil
their aim of sounding the earth's last retort
from a lightless lighthouse up on the hill.
As the structure got taller, time grew short.
The Devouring Tide had nearly arrived
at the building site on the final port.
In humid conditions his power thrived;
he saw his target through foggy cover
and sucked in the moisture until it dried,
pulling the cloud in time to discover
their flagpole planted atop the mountain,
built with the spite of his would-be lover:
an enormous story-spewing fountain
adorned with warnings and manifestos
against the pulling death that lived in him.
His waves pummelled it with their deathly blows,
as the fountain spurting into the sky,
and before the last moments came to close
The Fountain let out its ultimate cry,
pulverising itself into a mist
that I, A Gust of Wind, propelled most high.
I then pushed, with my hurricanal fist,
the fragments of the narrative's column,
with traces of worlds that used to exist,
dispersing, as my ultimate solemn
duty to the dry world I blew along.
And now the blue watery sphere is calm.
With nowhere to nest the birds are gone.
Marine life perished in the toxic waves.
The wails of my winds are the only songs.

Lately I've noticed the veils of The Night
that block The Sun are becoming threadbare.
Holes let through minuscule arrows of light,
releasing moisture into the air,
exacerbating the veil's decay.
With every subsequent rip and tear
the water levels lessen day by day.
Cast out in search of impossible shores,
messages, buoying on the gentle wave,
describe forgotten pasts that once occurred.
Sun illuminates, through broken sutures,
these fragments waiting to be discovered,
projecting hope into ancient futures...