

A Poem in Two Cantos

THE SACRED SKY

MARK TARREN



Canto

1

Here, daughters —
here is our breath,

it is not the wind,
nor the sound of a broken branch,

it is our gift,

the whisper of a falling star
for you to hold.

Here is the white tapa —

we crafted it for you
before the time of tears,

wear it upon your sacred body
as power and strength,

for the heavens fall at your feet now

now —

beside your sleeping breath
and your very last sorrow

we beat the tapa,

with whalebone and wood
we sing your names —

forever moving,
backwards and forwards

binding and weaving,
away and towards

the echo that we cannot hold.

Here is the tiputa —

we crafted it for you
to protect your heart,

for you are our glory.

Here is the red earth —
we have dug it from

The Sacred Sky

it is our gift,

we place it on your womb
and in your hands,

for you are the conscience of the earth.

There are many leaves to mark your body.

Here are twelve leaves
for healing,

twelve stones in the pools of memory.

Here, daughters —

here are our names.

They are our gift,

our breath —

Mauatua

Vahineatua

Tehuteatuaonoa

Teatuahitia

Toofaiti

Tevarua

Teraura

Teio

Opuarai

Mareva

Tinafanea

Fa' ahotu

The sound you hear through the pines.

It is not the wind. It is not the wind.

It is not the wind.



Canto

II

Remember —

scars become our tribal calligraphy
when our faces are stolen from us.

Remember, remember —

Mauatua —

carries your grief
in her power and strength,

from the edge of her hands
falls the soil
beneath your sacred feet.

Her breath is your breath.

It is the seed that grows
in the garden between
knowing and unknowing.

She is The Strong Tree —

whose roots grow deeply

beneath the quiet ache
of your healing.

She collects the salt from
the small shallow pools —

those unfinished stones
of your tears.

She has removed the page
in your communal

Book of Forgetting

for she clothes you
in fine white tapa —

her sacrament of remembrance.

Vahineatua —

who birthed the glory of
your children.

Her womb was pierced in

The Time Before

and from that great wound

escaped three small birds

to fly alongside
the horizon of your life,

beneath all the quiet maps
of the uncharted self.

Tehuteatuaonoa —

has set you free —

along the shores of childhood,
in the caverns of sleep,

she places the tamanu leaf,

which the wind gently lifts
from the water.

Teatuahitia —

her spirit rises
from the weight of your beauty.

She lives and sleeps

in the quiet room
of your body

in the place before —

The Shadows of Innocence

always rising, always rising,

for awake or asleep,

you are the first witness to life.

Toofaiti —

sings the warning song
to protect your children.

The echo of that song

is your heartbeat.

The eternal music of blood and water.

Tevarua —

in her universe of sadness,
she suffered the two great wounds —

those of sky and earth.

Now she sleeps in the bed of
soil and stars,

lives forever in the

Winds of Memory.

Teraura —

in the moonlight dances
the Dance of Life.

She beats the calabashes
and the ihara,

to chase away the darkness —

and the children laugh,

for they do not understand
how much she loves them.

They did not know of

The Great Theft

or of the many acts of thievery to come.

Her bare feet to naked earth,
her tapa cloth —

a ritual of colour for your body.

One eye to view the stars,
that gently retreat from her hand.

Teio —

brings the dawn
in the innocence and shape of
The First Child.

Opuarai —

fell from the heavens with

light and bone,
sand and ash.

She carries the
fragrance of identity

that always travels with you,
nestled safely in the embrace

of your name.

Mareva —

sails between fire and water,
from island to island,

gifts falling like tears
from her canoe.

Tinafanea —

is the movement of the dance
that advances towards you,

circles around you —

she is the hush in the tall grass,
the whisper at the end of
your fingertips,

the mist between you
and this human kiss.

Fa' ahotu —

is your mother.

You are the fruit of her creation,

Her Spoken Word.

In the richness of tongues,
she carries with her your past.

Your one singular world
is her breath.

Do not be afraid.

For when we stepped into the moon

we left you it's light.

When we broke off the branch
of the banyan tree

we left you it's shade.

Do not be afraid.

For when you look into
the still waters,

we will always see your face.

It is the binding of the pages
of our story,

in the collective memory
of our hearts longing —

for each other.



About the Author

Mark Tarren is a poet and writer who lives on remote Norfolk Island in the South Pacific.

A Pushcart nominee, his poems have appeared or are forthcoming in various literary journals including *The New Verse News*, *The Blue Nib*, *Poets Reading The News*, *Street Light Press*, *Spillwords Press*, *Tuck Magazine* and *Impspired Magazine*.

As part of his *commitment to place*, Mark's poetry pays homage to living on Norfolk Island and his connection to its natural wonders, birdlife, bountiful land and sea, turbulent history, resilient people and their living culture.

Copyright © 2020 Mark Tarren

PDF ISBN: 978-0-6450223-1-5

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law.

For permission requests, write to the publisher, Mark Tarren at marktarren@gmail.com