



Two prose poems

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PUBLICATION DATE

01-05-2011

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Atherton, Cassandra 2011, Two prose poems, *Otoliths: a magazine of many e-things*, no. 21, southern autumn, pp. 1-1.

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OTOLITHS

A MAGAZINE OF MANY E-THINGS

ISSN 1833-623X

20110417

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PAN

Most people don't know that Hermes Pan choreographed all of Fred Astaire's routines. Fred gets credit for the lot. Every pick-up. Every wing. Every turn. Dancing on the walls and the ceilings – Pan. Waltzing with a coat stand – Pan. Tapping with a drum kit – Pan. Pan is a great name for a choreographer. Especially someone who choreographs tap. It reminds me of Sunday afternoons when I search for my poacher in the cupboard. My saucepans and pots clink together. Stylish syncopation. I choreograph musicals that start with a 'C'. I choreograph in my kitchen at midnight. I get credit. Somewhere at the back of the programme. Page seven. Or eight. But my name is not Pan or Astaire. I thought of changing my name to something with "ova" on the end. Like Natalia Makarova. But it still reminds me of my poacher and I need more inspiration than a dirty pan with holes. Steam. Steam Heat. A member of the cast once told me that *Pyjama Game* was an entertaining musical but the "Come on Union, Get HOT!" number had to go. It's the best number in the production. Bowler hats and girls in men's evening jackets with fishnets. I can't choreograph it though. It doesn't start with a 'C'. Hermes Pan would have loved it. It has sections of tap and jazz. He could really have done something with it. Though I must say I love Bob Fosse's work. He was in *Kiss Me Kate*. I can't do that either. Pity I can't choreograph phonetically. I freelance choreograph productions of *Chicago*, *Copacabana*, *Carousel*, *Calamity Jane*, and *Can-Can*. I also do *A Chorus Line*, but I call it *Chorus Line* without the 'A'. Superstition. Naturally my favourite song to choreograph is "Cell Block Tango". The six merry murderesses are great. I like the one who says she didn't kill her husband, he just "ran into my knife. He ran into my knife ten times!" Kander and Ebb are great. Librettists are great. Gwen Harwood wrote the libretto for "The Fall of the House of Usher". I'd like to be a 'dutiful librettist' some day. I would definitely write my memoirs. I'd call it "Cadence" It's a great word (Two Cs in it). It doesn't remind me of my poacher. Hermes Pan also reminds me of Peter Pan. Of Robin Hood outfits in Lincoln green (not British racing green which is supposed to be bad luck). And of Pandora's Box. I always wanted to be Wendy when I was in pantomimes. But I was never blonde. And I looked sallow in blue. I wonder if Hermes Pan had a Peter Pan syndrome. I wonder if choreographers who don't get credit for their work have the Hermes Pan Complex. I used to wonder why theatre people said "Chookas" before a show. It reminds me of my poacher.

RAPUNZEL

I called you Rapunzel because you stole my hair. Stole it from under my sleeping head. Or from the bathroom floor after I was sick for you. I could've danced in red shoes with a plait striking the curve of my back. If it weren't for you. I could've drunk champagne and written letters to my lovers. Poison pen. Poisson distribution. I could've been the nurse-child grown up. I could've been Katherine de Merteuil. If it weren't for you. Your father left us when you guessed his name. Guessed it just to spite me. Sprite. And now there is only us. Bound for an eternity like Chinese feet. I could've danced en pointe if it weren't for you clinging to my knees. Needy. Needling me. I could've danced the Tarantella if you had let me out of the doll's house to breathe. But your greedy lips took what Lady Macbeth despised. Lactose intolerant. My body rejected you two months too early and I watched you die. In my head. Over and over. In the first eight weeks I flushed you down the S-bend but you clawed your way up and out of the bowl. My own foetal attraction. So now, what do you want from me? What more can you take from me? The colour from my cheeks on rainy days? The storm in my grandmother's teacup? Tell me. What more can you steal from me while I sleep?

Cassandra Atherton is a Lecturer in Literary Studies and Creative Writing at Deakin University. She has published a book of literary criticism, *Flashing Eyes and Floating Hair: A Study of Gwen Harwood's Pseudonymous Poetry* (Australian Scholarly Press, 2007), a book of poetry, *After Lolita* (Ahadada Press, 2010), and a novel, *The Man Jar* (Printed Matter Press, 2010). She is currently working on a book, *Wise Guys*, about American public intellectuals, based on her interviews with Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, Harold Bloom, Camille Paglia, Stephen Greenblatt and many more.

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