

This is the story of a baby coming into the world, and of her first year in that world altered beyond recognition by a virus born into our lives at nearly the same time. It is a song of breath, and of light. It is a collection of love poems, and a cry flung into the universe echoing the cry of all babies, a cry of loss and of nearly unbearable love. It is a book not just for pregnant women, or new mums and dads, but for all people who have entered through that small crack into the light of this life, and for all who have parents and have grappled with the joys and challenges of those most intimate of relationships. It is a song of light, and of breath. It is a story of where we come from.

“This collection not only exalts, is frightened for, and treasures new motherhood, but allows for its complexities and the terrible potential for loss, and especially I like how it doesn’t amputate mother-love from just the way we love as humans, sensuously and sometimes messily. It never slips into ‘saintly mother’ territory – it seems to recognise the burden that particular role has placed on women – for those who chose to have kids and those who didn’t.”

—Lynn Davidson

PRAISE FOR *AFTER ECONOMY*:

“The fifty-six poems of *After Economy* balance on a wavering tightrope between oblivion, void and humanity. An intriguing unpredictability fills Williams’ poems, as they unfold into sensitive, beautiful musings: ‘this poem may die some evening in garden by the sea’. A hallucinatory-feel transcends the confines of familiarity as ‘I was close enough / to hear colour, to see sound’. Enigmatic and thought-provoking poems.”

—*Poetry Book Society Bulletin*

Books by JL Williams include *Condition of Fire* (Shearsman, 2011), *Locust and Marlin* (Shearsman, 2014), *House of the Tragic Poet* (If A Leaf Falls Press, 2016) and *After Economy* (Shearsman Books, 2017). Published widely in journals, her poetry has been translated into numerous languages. She has read at international literature festivals and venues in the UK, Sweden, Germany, Denmark, Turkey, Cyprus, Canada, Hungary, Romania, Montenegro and the US. She wrote the libretto for the opera *Snow* which debuted in London in 2017, was awarded a bursary to develop a new opera with composer Samantha Fernando at the Royal Opera House and was a librettist for the award-winning 2020 Covid-response *Episodes* project by The Opera Story. Williams curates writing events and creates workshops and professional development activities for poets. She is hopeful about the simple and mysterious power of poetry that allows us to know ourselves, each other and the world more deeply. www.jlwilliams-poetry.co.uk

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ALSO BY J.L. WILLIAMS

Condition of Fire
Locust and Marlin
House of the Tragic Poet
After Economy

SAMPLER

JL Williams

SAMPLER *Origin*

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Because of this, originality consists in returning to the origin.

Antoni Gaudí

We dream; we don't remember.

Louise Glück

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for Imogen and her Daddy

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Origin

out of chaos a voice
greeted you tender in the womb
as a mother does loving
already your ability to smile

the silver exchanged
is rain, vernix, coin, a quiver in time
for your unexpected arrival

before language and after language
there is light
in between there is this offering
of life

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GLIMPSE

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19 April 2019, Edinburgh

It is a miracle, I can accept that. Whatever that means.
That you weren't here and now you are, and that
on the day by the station when the sun was shining though it was still cold
I looked up and saw / felt an invisible winged presence coming
while thinking, 'open, open, open' ... well now I know that was you.

And suddenly where there weren't any before there are bright new leaves
on the trees like lights turned on, and coffee tastes like poison,
and I'm tired most of the time and distracted as if my mind is elsewhere,
my mind is with you, my mind is building a spinal cord.

I'm never alone. The sounds I hear seem more particular,
the world around me is speaking not to me but through me,
to you. The food I eat is for you. I'm hungry.
I'm still keeping you secret. I'm pissing all the time.
I'm holding my breasts when I walk downstairs.
I'm curling over myself, cradling this mystery.

They came to tell me your name. I'm keeping it secret.

Ciao, mi chiamo...

inside the secret heart of the crane
is its secret name
what I mean is Rome's secret name
(only a few initiates...)
what I mean is my daughter's secret name
though I will not

all these unfinished sentences mean
what I mean is
to not have children does not mean
one gets written out of history
though my queer friend said
that's where the story (the family tree
branch breaks off if you don't...)

I'm trying to finish a sentence
but my daughter who may be born, says
in the future we don't have periods anymore
and we have learned how to read the Babylonian map of the universe
in which the inner circle contains the known world
and the world outside the circle contains
all time and space delineated
by the triangular folds of our dreaming

the small sign in the glass cube said
the clay tablet was 3,000 years old
but I recognised it, I'm certain
I carved those words

12 June 2019, Paxos

It was not long ago before we saw you for the first time...
aquatic dancer, translucent skin and ribs and skull revealing
brain and kidney, miniature beating heart,

turning, stretching, waving, rolling – we never expected this
movement, your aliveness, your alien motion

still not in me as feeling though in me

here now swimming in paradisiacal wombs of salty turquoise
I think of you swimming twice, within me and within the water,
taking your first sips and swallows

as I hold my breath, and dive.

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Shoshana

from the oak tree
certain leaves are removed

which lets the rain / light in

a building 6,000 years ago
could call it a building
washed every winter
in oil blood gold

which lets the light in

bent four fingers back
count them
five six seven eight
thousand years

which let the rain / light in

taking out the mastic
makes a dense perfume (cedar-like tears)
crushed clove (aka cleave)
certain letters are removed

which let the rain / light in

below the water
new skin

iridescent as fish skin
seen through a glass vase's
pupil-like curve

hewn he saw

no thing

fishes' curved eye
sawn saw no thing

o thing
o crystal thing

give me back
my years

tho now I have
what lets the light in

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When on waking

everything is dream talk

—Theresa Muñoz

inside the dream she said she was here to use this machine and this machine
this frightened me and I left the dream and also did not write down
the words she had spoken or the image of the machines

while he said he was travelling in America seducing rockstars
but that was a dream of his it was not true just because it happened
in my dream but it might have been true regardless

she said to me I must dream what I most desire and the truth
will be born of the dream so isolating these items I fall asleep repeating
I am a dragon and thanks to my fire and my gold

everything I dream will come true said the dreamer
and when I woke I realised the dreamer had my voice but also the voice
of a swimmer submerged in ice water a tightrope walker balancing
between two swaying skyscrapers

and rising from a well with no echo my own voice whispers wake
please wake up

1 July 2019, Edinburgh

easily as passing through walls

aleph

after that sour taste as if eating one last cherry
it was not sweet and in the mouth
what lingered was the is the
realisation that less could have been more

which really is the power of the imagination

now I do my best to be a blade of grass
and within me grows the sweetest new shoot

imaginable

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