

A Brief History of Jesus: A Mother's Perspective

My grandfather's name was Herod, King of Judaea.
My mother's name was Salome.
I was raped by a Roman soldier.
Soon the servant told me I was pregnant.

In my country there are laws. As a teenager,
I'm a shame to my family, to my community.
An old man named Joseph agreed to marry me.
He was sixty years.

We were very poor, when we travelled to Bethlehem.
Stars all over the sky, I gave birth to a son,
Born in a stable, in the wee hours,
Out of the freezing desert night.

My son is first in line to Herod's throne,
If only he were conceived legally.
And through his father, Joseph, he is
From King David and Solomon.

Herod knows I have a son. He is a jealous man,
Wants to keep his throne forever.
Herod killed 200 babies.
He wants to kill my child.

We travelled to Egypt in secret, with my son twice a king,
And what little we could carry.
With my husband I had three more children...
.....

Returning to Judaea, I took my four children
To live at Khirbet Kumran.

By the Essenes they were taught language and history,
Scripture and healing art.

Jesus was like his father. He wanted to be a carpenter.
But he became a spirit healer and teacher.

He understood that his birthright, as king of two royal lines,
Had been stolen.

Herod's old cronies disliked him. He knew
They wanted to kill him, his whole life.

For a long time he lived a quiet life in secret, but then he was angry, defiant.
He held a political opinion.

When he was healing, as was his calling,
People started to talk.

The soldiers began to stalk him. My son, my gentle, educated son,
They tried him as a criminal, and they crucified him.

It broke my heart to see how fickle are men's hearts.
I was afraid for many years.

I live in a stone house, dirt floor. I live alone.
I am proud to bear witness.

Wherever I go I walk, I carry water,
In a clay pot on my head.

My name is Miriam, it means bitter.
My skin is brown, my eyes are dark, but all my hair is white now.

Beautiful beauty is counted

for Cassie, who has beautiful beauty in spades

you drag all your well-cultured arses in (the middle class is in)
to resplendent, ideal, right wholly and full
alive in good wonder and green

you are educated yo you are exquisite pleasing and who
you're aesthetically rich you bring all to befall
your erudite self is an elf
and you crawl
right into the scene

of a beautiful beauty and fine
that is shapely enticing one of mine
that means you are here where you matter

but time only will tell if this finds
if your sparkling clarity your thirty-five lines
will morph to a brutiful oh you are beautiful
thing near divine
that is lyric or sadder

you've a beckoning pleasing a much longer-versed
same story of glory gag gets too magnets
you are similar beau you are morphing

my sweetheart my peach you are true statuesque
you're a pearler are smashing allure with the best
it's a verb you're authentic in reach of inventic

and withall budapest
those foxy endorphins

your glamorous soul
is on-mounted
because beautiful beauty
is counted

for Eve Langley – *nerves exhausted and husband unhappy*¹

because *immortal is that moment and rebellious against all partings is ours, against the high yellow cliff, and crying and waving and shaking a leg on the bridge, home I come ...*

what it was like for Eve Langley, in Aotearoa, all the world with *a voice that comes through the throats of cicadas, in the lovely singing island air of the Saturday,* her desire was my own: *to desert myself by way of flight and leaf.*

and how she fell,
on a *glorious night of moon and dark leaf,* for the impetuous, tempestuous musical artist, European, accomplished, soon married him, and followed *among the bamboos and Queensland passionfruits, with the sun-sifting pine trees down the steep hill,*

the wrong
man of course, as she knew well enough in her intellectual mind – *but this is the elf in life* – excusing it to wiser friends, choosing not to return to Australia, or to her adored sister, her *black-and-white spotted silk scarf tied over her head ... outlined against the silver-grey pohutukawa dark at night, as she eyes the city with its blaze of light and long lines of cars,*

embroiled instead in
the intricacies of his unpredictability, within the yellow-walled rooms of his studio.

and watched him *sitting unforgettably on the hillside in the night, swearing because he couldn't sell his great paintings anywhere at all in the world.*

what she felt then *lost ... flung into the limbo of motherhood forever more* when he drank, *lying freckled and weak* when he angered at her starving and helpless in the face of poverty and cold,

his accusations of *neglecting everything, lying around like a tramp,* and of being *a nothing! ... an Australian swagman!*

his a mask
of false calm and leaving her for months, years eventually, *living on native weeds and potatoes ... drinking many cups of cheap loose cocoa a day ... to keep up ... [sufficient] strength to suckle the baby.*

so, when he wished, at first covertly, to go to war, she was irritated and pled, pleading for home and *anything save that dumb idiotic rushing into the field to keep imperialism rampant.*

then Eve, when he did at last go,
the military a safer escape than her inadequacies, and never to return, unfolded as irrevocably to herself as that *old sound of scrim rising in the wind,*

squatting

¹ Words in this poem in italic font are from works by Australian novelist Eve Langley.

on summer evenings slowly at the chill edge of the bay,
or the lake
as cold as *ice-cold stone-grey trout from the pens*, and also went, finally,

insane:

recalling how *the nights ... wildly and savagely ... opened without change,*
the flying cry of the owl as it came up the gully, out of the gullies of manuka ... and

me, like her,

in my bed, my lonely bed, with my head to the windy fireplace... when that cry
sounded, floating across the wildness, I would say 'Night has begun again'.

... so

strongly for Eve a felt death now, sobbing, then,

when only her *dry bones are writing*,

were writing;

the children she'd tried so hard to love:

a girl, a black patch over one eye,
which gave her a piratical look, and a boy, only a little child, his very shoulders seeming
small and bony,

were taken from her, and never to return ...

To write a song

to write a song
has been my constant dream

to hear some shining dripping
notes of steel that shine
like nought
'cept ease of tongue
or silver green of twinkling
fish's scale

and slippery wet black eyes
that flow inside my mind
like electricity

get this: a holograph
of creation –
the beginning and the end
and middle
will be there

so flippantly my voice
would render word and note
like laughter, sudden,
and with fluent ease

and so let joy to sleep
on moments of forgotten time
where waterfalls of meaning
trickle deep through avenues
of rhyme

How romantic is the dream²

To celebrate the hundredth year anniversary
of Europe's Armistice,
the grind
to end of WW1, we find *two* hundred *anni* also passed
since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.
It's then,
when a mighty head and torso – wild!
– of Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses
was taken,
liberated from its home
and sent to a museum, tamed,
its nemesis.

And how romantic is a dream of liberty,
espoused by all who've heard of PB Shelley,
in a *pleasure of believing what we see*
Is boundless,
as we wish our souls to be,
and if we'd know that *half the sky was roof'd*
with clouds of rich emblazonry,
dark purple at the zenith,
in the beauty
of this biosphere,
we'd be free.

He admits (as Julian) he loved *all waste*,
the open lands,
much as
a purported love of 'love' itself,
with gentleness,
and with friend Byron has
no doubt plucked a few stems of those
amphibious leaves,
salt *weeds*
that grew on Italy's *uninhabited -side*,
sucked them while astride
two saddled steeds.

² Quoted text (not including titles of works and non-English words) that appears in italic font in this poem is from P.B. Shelley's poetic work, *Julian and Maddalo*.

Now abandoning all Shell-eyèd dreams
of liberty,
and rides along long sands,
we go home,
to ourselves and kith,
and that *island*
where the madhouse stands,
and seek,
for *strong and black relief*,
a mug of coffee;
it's – for living – sweet,
and we too *mar*
The force of his expressions:
Madman,
in your dying was defeat.