

**Karin Lessing**

**Also by Karin Lessing:**

The Fountain

The Spaces of Sleep in Midsummer

The Winter Dream Journals

In the Aviary of Voices

**KARIN LESSING**

**Collected Poems**

**Shearsman Books  
Exeter**

Published in the United Kingdom in 2010 by  
Shearsman Books Ltd  
58 Velwell Road  
Exeter  
EX4 4LD

ISBN 978-1-84861-131-3  
First Edition

Copyright © Karin Lessing, 1982, 1991, 2001, 2010.

The right of Karin Lessing to be identified as the author of this work  
has been asserted by her in accordance with the  
Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.  
All rights reserved.

### **Acknowledgements**

The work collected in this volume originally appeared in the following books:

*The Fountain* (New York: Montemora Foundation, 1982),  
*The Spaces of Sleep in Midsummer* (Markesan, WI: Pentagram Press, 1982),  
*The Winter Dream Journals* (Plymouth, Shearsman Books, 1991) and  
*In the Aviary of Voices* (Kentisbeare: Shearsman Books, 2001).

Previously uncollected work in this volume first appeared, or will appear,  
in *Shearsman* and *Volt*.

Cover: details from an untitled drawing (pen and ink on paper) by Louis Merveil.  
Copyright © The Estate of Louis Merveil, 2010.  
The complete drawing appears on page 188.

Cover design: Gilles Fage.  
Author photograph by Nathalie Waag.

## Contents

### The Fountain

I	
Talisman	13
Shadows, firstcomers . . .	14
Les Saintes	15
Moraine	16
Night Song	17
Hollow Wood	18
The Sculptor's Garden	19
Petrous	21
Luberon	22
Miniature	23
Presage	24
Le Beaucet: Shadows	25
Like Gliders	26
Vigil	27
Il Sogno di Constantino	28
Anabatic	29
Wind-Gathered	30
The Barrier	31
II	
Cézanne	35
These	36
Her World	37
From Pliny's Natural History	38
June Poppies	40
Through Glass	41
New Oak	43
On the Way	44
Immortelles	45
Ancestral	47
Dolls' Houses	48
Nazca	49

III	
The Image	55
Mirror	56
Sea-Foam	57
What It Wants	60
Aigues Mortes	61
The Bridge	62
September-Wings	64
Nikaia	66
Fontaine	67
Circe	71
Terracotta Figures, Villa Giulia	73
Primavera	75
The Spaces of Sleep in Midsummer	76

### The Winter Dream Journals

#### *A Winter's Dream Journal*

Twilight World Visions	85
Naming It	86
The Chinese Wall	87
Good Morning	88
Contrary Currents	89
The Kingdom of Heaven is Open	90
A Necessary Burden	91
Roommates	92
The Play	93
The Melancholy Man	94
The Attack	95
St Francis at Dinnertime	96
Infinitely Small	97
A Voice from the Dream of the Dreamer	98
The Departure	99

#### *A Winter's Dream Journal II*

Thirty Poems	101
--------------	-----

#### *The Lifelong Range*

—Suite to A Winter's Dream Journal II	111
---------------------------------------	-----

## In the Aviary of Voices

### *The Night-Ark*

To	125
Fountain	126
The Night-Ark	127
The Native World	128
Coatlicue's Dream Ritual	129
Night and Silence	131
Lilith	133
The Slate Opening	135
Dune Light	143
Under Sirius	148

### *In the Aviary of Voices*

Bee Orchis	153
'A Picture of Perfect Rest'	154
Dancing Down the Lines . . .	160
Li Santo	161
The Butterfly Link	167
Vignette	172
Summer Diptych	173
Clear as the Sky over Egypt	175
In the Aviary of Voices	183

### **Uncollected Poems**

Yunnan Sketches	189
Sonnet Sequence	201





# THE FOUNTAIN

Aquesta biua fuente que desseo  
en este pan de vida yo la ueo  
aunque es de noche  
— *St. John of the Cross*

Se faire tout entier signe, c'est  
peut-être cela.  
— *E. Levinas*



I



## Talisman

At the back of the head  
a giant  
anchors the eyelet sea:

in its jaw, a  
bone  
is singing: good fortune.

## Shadows, firstcomers . . .

Shadows, firstcomers,  
sparked and feathered,  
you fall, you  
dive, driving the spar  
into the lung's nest.

No angel, but a maypole,  
from crown to  
tip toe, swirling  
ablaze. How  
can the rootless ones  
unlock this glow?

Breath, as it winds. I hear  
the coronated  
heart pod snap,  
black, coruscant,  
near.

## Les Saintes

Braced  
the sea wall  
and came, outcasts,  
  
to the nacreous edge.

(How  
each time we repeat  
  
leaving our imprints,  
our  
  
cries:            tellina, tellina).

•

Their salt robes  
folded,  
  
votive, on the  
burning sand, even  
the bottle caps.  
  
The cave, too, burning.  
  
To worship  
upon the shore  
  
Sara's  
heart,  
  
their shadowy pearl.

## Moraine

Through  
thyme

braided  
to thyme

followed  
the scent that

tumbles,  
breast-

high, dream-  
thin.

Un-  
thinking,

saw;  
blinded,

heard  
how they lie

cluster and  
stray,

sometimes  
seem to float.



# A WINTER'S DREAM JOURNAL

*January 1984*



## Twilight World Visions

Reading the twilight world visions.

The rock as a gentle shoulder. They were all saying the same thing while clouds gathered to cirrus. This was older than stone, lighter than grass and yet like grass. I cried out in my sleep.

Raspberries, mirabelles . . . ! Raise water, raise it from the well, Mary of Vladimir, star-coiffed one, with your close-fitting hood of antlers! Sprouting from your cheek, the child of Vladimir, redder and paler than magenta rose . . . When I looked up again, the trestled tables were moving away at full speed. An index pointed to where I could not see.

Then it ceased and I whiled away the long day. Angels can still be seen in the refracted colors of the sun's ray.

## Naming It

For the coming year, they said, but their voices had already been swept away.

Nearly dry, the Dôa still carries on as if it were a river of some consequence. Its former strength can be guessed at. The wide stretch of cerulean sky between the cliffs on either side is that measure. Only the general staff map and the regional map indicate it running west for about three quarters of its course, taking a sharp turn where it encounters a road and then continuing south-west for a remaining six miles.

*D* is for daring, *ô* for delight and *a* cascades as *daktylos*, the little finger of surprise, birth, pursuit.

## The Chinese Wall

I

The visitors came and stayed on.  
I do everything in my power.  
The laws of hospitality go back to Abraham's time.

II

A bird's eye view. Kepler was the first to apply the word 'picture' to the reversed image on the retina. With my granulous wings I can reach the city of Shanhaikwan in no time.

III

Say, I want to thread my way across the mountains;  
say, I want you to thread your way across the mountains  
but: I want me to thread my way across the mountains  
you cannot say.

IV

The landscape is not familiar. It is not. Beyond the green fields and buff filament roads leading to impregnable gates, the bustle of streets, a low house facing a courtyard. Orderly, disorderly. A dog tries to drink from the fountain; beyond the gates, the sea with its fictitious horizon.

**IN THE AVIARY OF VOICES**

*for Louis*



## THE NIGHT-ARK

*Hast auch du einen Gefallen an uns,  
dunkle Nacht ?*

*Novalis, Hymnen an die Nacht*





To

the word-  
less, your things'

shadows  
stacked against mine

a loose structure  
under which we lie

to hold counter-  
point

our stunned  
voices'

rings, the  
prescribed

unquiet  
weights.

## Fountain

Stone lips  
that feed  
on stone

their weather-  
ing  
embrace

final, appeased

for you,  
water-addicted  
one, breath

our breath  
vies  
with, stains

the snow  
purple.

## The Night-Ark

Sea-  
rolled, there  
where  
no blade  
propelled,  
no whirr,  
the sails'—  
none of your gulls

no cry  
hooked  
land, no  
branch, greening,  
stepped forward—

the night-ark  
adrift,  
and water-  
divided, the  
stars.

## The Native World

is  
like a foreign  
country

twitter  
in the drab air

the clouds  
like swathes

the snake asleep  
in its hollow

as the earth  
tilts

and the long nights  
turn  
upon themselves

under  
Orion.