The Lower Reaches
ALSO BY MARTIN ANDERSON FROM SHEARSMAN BOOKS

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The
Lower
Reaches

Martin Anderson

Shearsman Books
“This is England, and I’m in a nice, clean English room with all the dirt swept under the bed”.
—Jean Rhys
After the high pitched whine of bellicosity: “We’ll bomb you back to the stone age” the remote is pressed. Crackle of distressed air. Warm, incendiary smell. All colour implodes to a white mote. Silence. The crevasse opens.
Boiling white spume. Caught on steps of the public baths before noon, the shadow of a vapour. Ash, in the dissolved hand. Shard, or ember. All melted into air. In the stone, heart’s cold memento.
What keel breaks this ice? What *dignitas* is affirmed in these particulars of a profound winter? Our Lady of the Salterns bless this rotting wharf, this ramshackle back-end deserted by the tides. It is snowing over all the reed clogged wet-lands of the earth.
“Perched on the rotten shell of a crumbling empire.” He writhed. Listening to its long, inhaled sighs. A continent in trouble, economies adrift. Bemused at its beleaguered identity. Its ‘cradle’ mocked by its own hand. Not a ‘Hellenic Occident’ (extending east of the Dardanelles) no. No, surely. But an acropolis purged of the stain of all jewelled, scented potentates. Austere. White: its demokratia, its logos. Derided now and held up as dishonest, its people indolent. And, held up instead as its antithesis, those hardworking lands which provided souls for the Middle Passage and whose people previously they’d characterised as “lazy beasts [who] must be compelled to work—with a stick” … and “whether they should be reckoned as beings of the same species.” Perched on that rotten shell he “received such a salutation in [his] nostrils as [he] had never experienced in [his] life.”