

Cohabitation 1

Liana Joy Christensen¹

It is easier to escape gravity
than history
try as we might to deny it
or even buy our way back
to a decade that never
really was that way
by trading off several
better futures

So here we all sit
uneasy cohabitants
of the same continent
incontinent in our habits
and deepening our divides

Dispossessed or despoiler
it's easy to be angry
tempting to blame
anyone but ourselves
name the rabbit or the
refugee as the sovereign cause
of all our shame

1 Liana Joy Christensen's poetry and prose has been published in North America, Taiwan and Australia, and in the anthology *Country – Visions of People and Places in Western Australia*. The major passion of her life is writing about human connections with plants, animals and places of Australia and beyond. She was an invited poet at the *International Conference of the Association for Science, Literature and the Arts* in Amsterdam in June of 2006. Her first chapbook *Wild Familiars* was launched at the Spring Poetry Festival in Perth in September 2006. These poems are reprinted with permission from *Wild Familiars*, 2006, Tone River Press, Fremantle, pp 10-15.

But I would like to know
who first learned to leach
the Zamia palm
of bitterness
I'll warrant it was a
woman looking to feed
her children

We could learn from her
how to work with history
humbly

Given sufficient time
our bitterness will be leached
by the impersonal workings
of wind and water
and the land itself
Given sufficient time
we will join all the others
we have hastened to oblivion

Meanwhile
if we can work with
what is at hand
with an eye to tending the future
for the children –
all the children –
we will see immediately
that there is much mending
much weeding
much weaving
to be done
in the timeless task
of tending a habitat
to call home

Cohabitation 2

A sign at the edge
of my local lake
announces
WARNING
Snakes known to
exist in this area

It's an odd choice of words
What, exactly, am I
to make of this?
Is the very existence
of snakes an affront
to suburban citizenry,
who perhaps prefer
the artificial lakes
created at the entrance
to discreetly gated communities
with just a duck or two?

Nothing untidy or unwholesome
like quicksand
or sulphurous, organic smells
or slithery, cold-blooded creatures

I'd rather behead the sign
than the beast
and reading against the grain
secretly feast on my joy

Snakes known to exist in this area

Cohabitation 3

Creatures beyond counting
occupy the universe of your body
Begot and begat and begat
numberless generations
while in your sky the moon wanes
and waxes fat,
just once

Do not be alarmed
Only the smallest fraction
of your tenants will ever
need to be evicted
to multiply in Petri dishes
should you fall sick

As for the rest, most could be
classified as amiable squatters
The precious few pay a generous rent
in services rendered
if you have the wit to know
that being pristine may bring you
too close to God for comfort
or rather too near the
earth you spurned if you
prefer the secular turn of mind

Being a bodily universe
it would not hurt
for you to cast a beneficent eye
on your domains
because while it remains true
that the tribes of your ear canal
know naught of the clans
between your toes
you are the one supposed to
possess the brains to wonder

And no dweller in deep oceanic trenches
is stranger than those who live
in your intestinal tract
And that's a fact