

Books by JL Williams include *Condition of Fire* (Shearsman, 2011), *Locust and Marlin* (Shearsman, 2014), *Our Real Red Selves* (Vagabond Poets, 2015) and *House of the Tragic Poet* (If A Leaf Falls Press, 2016). She is interested in expanding dialogues through poetry across languages, perspectives and cultures and in cross-form work, visual art, dance, opera and theatre.

She has been published widely in journals, her poetry has been translated into Dutch, Spanish, Turkish, Polish, German, French and Greek and she has read at poetry festivals in Scotland, Turkey, Cyprus and Canada. Williams wrote the libretto for the opera *Snow*, which premiered in London in 2017, was Writer-in-Residence for the British Art Show 8 in Edinburgh with the artist Catherine Street and plays in the poetry and music band Opul.

[www.jllwilliamspetry.co.uk](http://www.jllwilliamspetry.co.uk)

SAMPLER

Also by JL Williams

*Condition of Fire*  
*Locust and Marlin*

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JL Williams

*After  
Economy*

SAMPLE

Shearsman Books

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for RJ Iremonger

*you on the horizon*

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## After Economy

First they choose the forest with the most trees,  
then they bind each tree in strings of brights.  
Then they bring electricity to the roots,  
covering the plugs so as not make fires.

Then they drive the firetrucks up,  
it is winter, you remember—each red truck shiny as a new toy.  
Then they unwind the hoses, embrace the soft tubes  
and three people at each wheel begin to turn.

The first rinse takes some time, a glassy sheathing,  
the second ices each branch quick and soon  
the entire frozen forest glitters and shimmers  
from within—each bulb encased in ice

a mouth through which the final word  
of the world is shining out; *light light*

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## Antelope

In our hollow horns, music.  
Beyond the long slope of stone,  
shallow where myriad anemone bloom,  
eels were raised for Antioch Caesar's blessing.  
Bounce now, 'blouson of white like mist' he said,  
where under water is blue and bellow below,  
her hair a gold bubble shaft, his  
white hands, beneath the water, like ivory  
and art and I am. Bold, blow, he says  
I am a boundary, and boundless.

Then when the great plains were covered  
in snow as white as ivory,  
we watched the last antelope,  
like a dream of what man had been, bounding the drifts  
and where his airy horns had broken off, music blew out  
as if from French horns, women's mouths,  
the caves we enter into.

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# Opacus

The wing of the plane  
slicing through heavy mist.

Time slows down, or you become  
part of geological time.

Somewhere rock  
is turning into diamond.

Somewhere glass  
of a very old greenhouse  
is shattering.

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## Iskele Super Tamam

Some room three hundred years of light in it  
No furniture a branch with six flames of magnolia  
The body on the floor is half in darkness half in light  
The skin of the body is half dark half light  
The tongue of the body is speaking in all tongues  
The walls are so white I polish them and polish  
What floods my mind is a thousand years  
Of river pushed to the tops of trees  
And stones rubbing stones as stones rub skin  
Into the shapes of this body this very body

&

He says in Arabic  
he sings he sings he sings  
He says in Arabic  
in words of bird script  
in words of sky script  
these words are written by birds on the sky  
He says in Arabic  
it is the dark burning  
The words I remember  
are from another poem from another sky  
where it is darkness  
has power to heal  
I realise also  
that what he says  
is also what I overheard some time  
in some place it was some question  
asked to the sky by birds  
No one here is really from here  
except for the trees  
In Arabic the words  
are weightless in Hungarian  
the words are heavy jewels

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&

There is sea there is land

There are vast tracts of undeveloped land running from hand-shaped mountains to the sea

There are houses half-finished, human-sized dollhouses, living rooms and bedrooms filled with air

The air smells of salt and soil and green leaves

Sometimes mimosa sometimes lemon flower sometimes bougainvillea

There are birds calling morning prayer and skinny cats and pregnant cats and out of the dryer fluffy cats and a tiny wild dog barking a wolf

How do we love everyone how do we fight how do we fight complacency  
how do we wake how do we wake up how do we play how do we play  
fight how do we win how do we win kindness how do we play

we go to Othello's castle we go to the Venetian palace we go to the poet's  
prison overlooking the garden once this mosque was a cathedral the tree  
outside was born in 1299 it doesn't practise religion

I am not from my home or from my new home completely. In this third  
culture I have no flag, I speak no language but my own. There are many  
third cultures and in each our homes are our tents and our passports are  
our tongues. I am not a colonist I am a traveller

&

You say to go away but I will not go away.

You ask me to be quiet and for an eternity

I am quiet. But as you say this poem

is a poem we are all writing, I recognise

your words in my poem my words in your poem,

his words in her chest her words in his sails

their words in their hearts those very old words

in this newborn poem, my love there is no sadness

breathing could not forgive my love without breath

I can't even stop loving you my love

this poem may die some evening

in a garden by the sea when dusk is blushing

up from the earth her eye of moon her hair of bats  
but we won't be there  
to witness the light stop shining

&

don't be afraid  
just cuz  
you can't stop love

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## New Aesthetic

the whale carcass on the beach with nearly all the flesh washed away  
the taste of those salty bones defamiliarising words

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## Asterism

You cough out a mouthful of glitter and I see stars.

Did you forget your dream again? In the long pool, bodies and stars.

There is a threat coming from other people, but really it is because  
there is a star inside you sucking everything toward it.

On your forehead, a star, here, and a star, here.

Vastness is not darkness, it is the light within the star.

The light hits you and I see a tattoo with stars.

In all the broken places, constellations.

Once there was a universe with no people in it, just stars.

Disgusted with yourself, you close your eyes and implode.

Forgotten cellar in Egypt in which there is a 6,000-year-old map  
of distant stars.

Stone whose constellations shift in time with stars.

# History, like the Rhine

As we said, history, like the Rhine, passes through a castellated region, and like that of the river, this stratum begins and ends suddenly.

Samuel Lucas, *Secularia; or, Surveys on the Mainstream of History*, 1862

()

The way you licked my leg  
was how a man would lick.

I bought you. Thus I had every right  
to free you.

My hand is broken because I built  
every castle history lapped,  
that damn river  
whose silver veins  
seam the skin of the world.

Between the turrets  
I carefully cut  
as a child with an automatic saw,  
was the space in which  
my whole life would take place.

It's not about dreams.  
It's about the way I lick.

Baby you forget  
this jazz quartet  
doesn't know  
how to end the song.

()

Ezra walked from castle to castle  
in the footsteps of the ancient bards.

Later in the birdcage  
in a Pisan piazza he cried  
*the words, the birds.*

There is a poem translated from the Scottish  
to Italian in which the bird species changed.

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()

From the hoof of the fountain unicorn  
in the courtyard of the palace in Linlithgow

I stare at the wall  
as if my eyes  
are butterflies  
pinned to green baize.

JAMES ALIEURS (Ever in Bondage)  
BELLE A VOUS SEULE (Beautiful to You Alone)

That's what  
the bosses say,  
says the sign.

My hand a piece of silk  
in the burn, your tongue  
sliding up the inside of my leg, the fire  
raging in a hearth big enough to cradle  
twenty able-bodied men.

Between my thighs  
that unspeakable crystal  
you dreamed  
in this life or the next.

The time of castles  
was also my time  
but this time  
is also my time.

*James Alieurs*  
*Belle A Vous Seule*  
The words  
flow over  
ma langue.