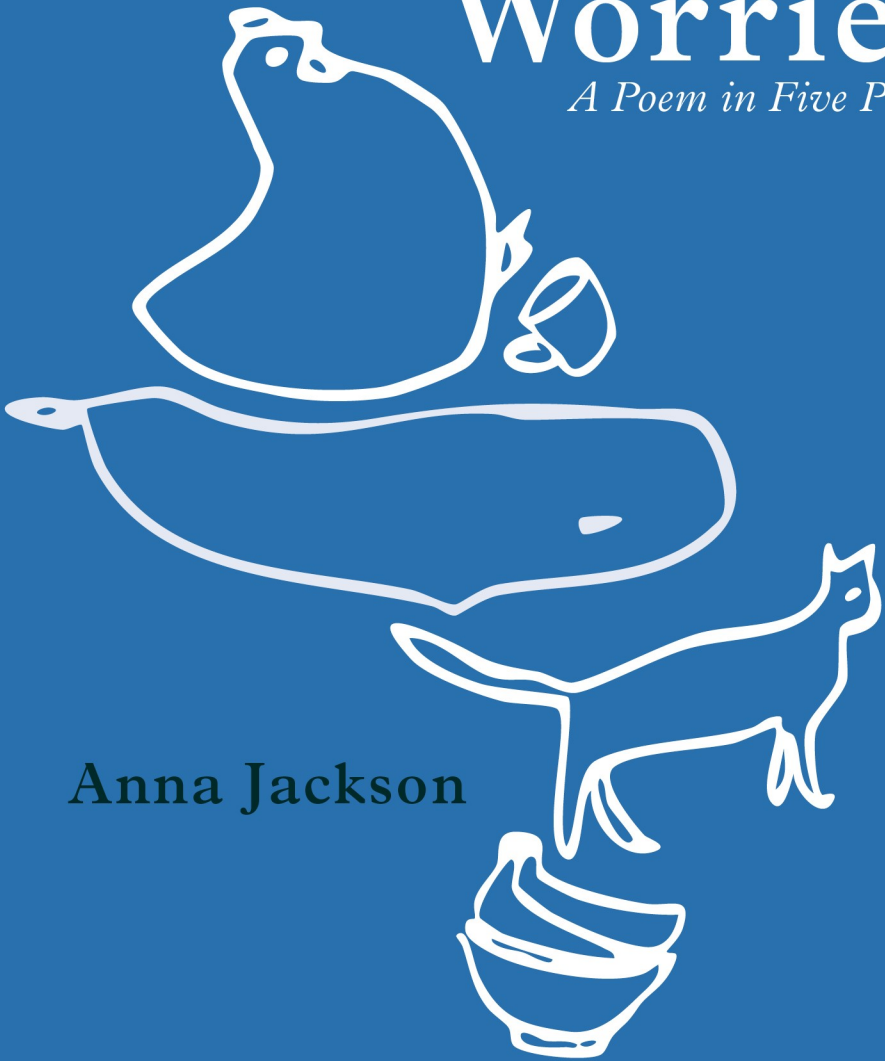


Terrier, Worrier

A Poem in Five Parts



Anna Jackson

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AUCKLAND
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Summer

Terrier, worrier



I thought about the dreams I had dreamed in the night, and how I was already forgetting them but could still remember the kindness in them, and whether the kindness of the friends in the dream was really about the warmth of Simon's legs against mine.

I thought, I could get up and have breakfast. I heard the cat and I thought, hearing the cat is not a thought, it is just something I am hearing. Then I wondered whether thinking that hearing the cat wasn't a thought was itself a thought, but because I wouldn't have thought that thought if I weren't thinking about thoughts I decided it didn't count.

I had been reading *In My Mind's Eye*, Jan Morris's thought diary, in which she recorded a thought a day. When she reached 188 thoughts her thought diary ended. On day 87 she recorded that she didn't seem to have had a thought.

I heard birds and thought that although I am only hearing them, and I am not having a thought, it still feels like a thought, almost like a thought of my own, or a conversation I am having, or perhaps it is more like reading a poem, where the words, or the movement of the thought, the song of the thought, is given to you rather than coming from you, but still moves through you.

Wilma the hen was making a pet of a blackbird. She was the only hen left of our flock and I thought, I need to get more hens.

Several of Jan Morris's thought diary entries are about her Norwegian cat, Ibsen, now deceased but often remembered. 'All other cats may be just cats, but my cat Ibsen was a friend and a colleague. My cat Ibsen was different.' I thought about the strange manner in which other people's cats are just cats, and I thought, that must be what it is like for our cat Momo, who likes us but is afraid of other people, probably because other people aren't persons at all to her, but human beings, just as other cats aren't persons to me but cats.

I thought about the distinction we make between nature and culture, as if only humans have culture, but what about how differently animals learn to live when they live with people? The pet hen I had as a child joined the flock of people and cats she found in our household, working out a hybrid culture that could make sense of quite different instincts and behaviours. She maintained a place at the top of the pecking order, shooing the cats off all the beds in the morning before laying an egg in one of the warm hollows where a cat had been. The cats weren't cats to her but people, or flock members.