

# KEENING LUNA

## (A TIDAL THRENODY)

A performance in two parts by Douglas Morland

As a child, at night, I often wondered what would happen if the moon were to simply just *disappear*. Hours spent in insomniac cosmic speculation yielded no clear picture of what a post-lunar existence might hold for us here on Earth, were that silver disc just to drift off into the dark unknown, never to return, like the slow fade of a retinal after-image. One thing I did know, at least, was that it would affect the tides in some way or other. I imagined a world without tides – eerily placid, seas and oceans like glass, a dark veil descending at night. All would be still.

Recently, I discovered just how wildly off-the-mark my hypothetical *après la lune* imaginings had been. According to scientists' projections, the effects of the moon's disappearance would be truly catastrophic for life on Earth as the incredibly sensitive set of celestial checks and balances that hold the planet's rhythms and ecosystems in complex synchronicity would be thrown into complete chaos. The length of a day would be drastically altered due to the drag that the moon exerts on the Earth's orbit. Seasons would conflate. The lack of tidal regularity would cause incredible changes to land masses. Extreme weather conditions would ensue - floods, droughts, ice caps melting, seas freezing over - entire species would be wiped out. Eventually we would all die.

It's worth noting that our moon is the only moon we know of that is quite as close, in terms of size and composition, to the planet it orbits (and they are the only tidally-locked pair we know of too). Perhaps then it's no coincidence that it's also the only moon we know of that circles an intelligent civilisation. Could it be that our large satellite not only benefits life on our planet but is an utterly essential requirement for it ever to have existed at all?



"Of the various works of art on which the primeval inhabitants exercised their ingenuity, probably none are more interesting than their *boats*. In these we see the first rude efforts of savage man to adventure on the deep, and to float himself on his native waters. Our noble Clyde appears to have been, from immemorial time, a favourite locality for the construction of vessels; and the deep alluvial strata, skirting the river of Glasgow, has at various periods yielded up the wrecks of canoes which these unknown savages had launched. No less than *seventeen* have been discovered within the last eighty years, at various places, on the plain of Glasgow; some under the very streets of the city."

David Robertson *Glasgow Past and Present* (1884)

I was born in Yorkhill, overlooking the Clyde. My father grew up in Whiteinch to the clank and clangour, klaxon bursts and shrill whistles of heavy industry before he sailed off down the same river to explore the world as a young merchant seaman. This was just as the future of Clydeside shipbuilding was starting to look bleak and the resultant impact upon the culture, economy, topography and human story of Glasgow was about to be felt in all-too-real terms. River industry as relic: that's what you glean from a walk along the refurbished river front – old iron protrusions, cobbled sections of path containing rusting rail tracks and black flagstones beat an intermittent tattoo on the long stretch from Partick to Glasgow Green amidst the clean lines and smooth surfaces of the modern gloss.

During its major period of dredging, narrowing and deepening in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Clyde yielded well over a dozen relics from a far earlier period. These prehistoric canoes were buried well inland at points that would have marked the tidal reach *thousands* of years ago, when these vessels were sailed. Opening a space in the imagination of the Victorian Glaswegian river-user, he too dependent on its ebb and flow, a sense of continuity may have been perceived. A ghost may have been sighted somewhere along the foggy banks. Progress and industry leads to an unearthing of the ancient, the unknowable. I can picture the black vessels emerging slowly, one-by-one, from the seams of sand and blue clay, telling tales of a people that perhaps enable us to mourn them.



At high tide an assembly gathers at the river's edge. A seemingly pointless gesture. Singing to the river. Singing to those who sailed on the river. Freed of words, female voices keen in microtonal harmony. Patterns emerge, currents mix and separate. A rising. A falling. Lungs engage. A sound is heard. The tide covers, the tide reveals. Is this how memory works? Through a series of small gestures and motions the conductor engages the assembly. Buckets, rope and vessels. In a futile undertaking, he attempts to dredge the river. Water is gathered.

Water is taken to a round room. Glass vessels are filled to varying levels of fluid depth. A hand comes into contact with smooth glass. Circular motion is applied. Breath across glass. A sound is heard. A loop. An echo. Is this how memory works?