

# Vehicle: a verse novel

*Jen Calleja*

Vehicle

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In a time when looking into the past has become a socially unacceptable and illegal act in the Nation, a group of scholars are offered an attractive residency to allow them to pursue their projects. When the residency transpires to be a devastating trick, these Researchers go on the run, and soon discover that their projects all relate to one major event: the Isletese Disaster – the decline and subsequent devastation fifty years earlier of a long-forgotten roaming archipelago called The Islets.

One figure emerges as central to all of their work: Hester Heller, a reformed cult musiker turned student recruited from the Institute for Transmission as an agent of the state and tasked with gathering reconnaissance on the Disaster by using her old band Vehicle as a cover. Heller is the key to the Researchers' collective story, which they try to piece together while evading their pursuers.

Compiled from the Researchers' disparate documentation, recollections, and even their imaginations, *Vehicle* is a metafictional work of literary speculative fiction, and a timely and daring exploration of xenophobia, exploitation, the writing of histories and legacies, and the politics of translation.



Photo: Robin Silas Christian

Jen Calleja is a poet, short story writer and essayist who has been widely published, including in *The White Review*, *The London Magazine*, and *Best British Short Stories* (Salt). She was awarded an Authors' Foundation Grant from the Society of Authors to work on *Vehicle*, and was shortlisted for the Short Fiction/University of Essex Prize for an excerpt from the novel. She was also longlisted for the Ivan Juritz Prize for Experimentation in Text. Her short story collection *I'm Afraid That's All We've Got Time* for was published by Prototype in 2020.

She has been shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize, the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize and the Schlegel-Tieck Prize as a literary translator from German into English and was the inaugural Translator in Residence at the British Library.

Calleja played and toured in the DIY punk bands Sauna Youth, Feature, Monotony, Gold Foil and Mind Jail spanning a period of over a decade as both a drummer and a vocalist.

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PRAISE FOR *I'M AFRAID THAT'S ALL WE'VE GOT TIME FOR*

'Calleja's writing combines wit, guile and style – social intricacies and powerplay are explored and exploded in this formidable collection.' – **Eley Williams**

'Calleja creates worlds where “there is so much space between molecules that we never really touch anyone or anything.” Reading about busses on detours, short windows opening and closing, erased identities, air kisses, blank books and books yet to be written, I felt held at arm's length of something crucially important. Deferral and near misses are at the core of Calleja's writing, yet this collection entirely hits the mark. I loved it.' – **Isabel Waidner**

'Comic, inventive and surreal, *I'm Afraid That's All We've Got Time For* renders a world unfamiliar yet familiar with each bright shard of a story.' – **Sophie Mackintosh**

Prototype, established in 2019, is committed to creating new possibilities in the publishing of fiction and poetry through a flexible, interdisciplinary approach. Recent titles include Yuri Felsen's lost modernist novel *Deceit*, in its first English translation by Bryan Karetnyk, Lucie Elven's acclaimed debut novel *The Weak Spot*, and *The Boiled in Between*, the debut novel by Turner Prize-winning artist Helen Marten. Lucy Mercer's debut collection *Emblem* is The Poetry Book Society's Summer Choice for 2022, and Lila Matsumoto's *Two Twin Pipes Sprout Water* was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation for Winter 2021. Recent titles from House Sparrow Press, an imprint of Prototype, include Derek Jarman's *Through the Billboard Promised Land Without Ever Stopping*.