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Reviews contents

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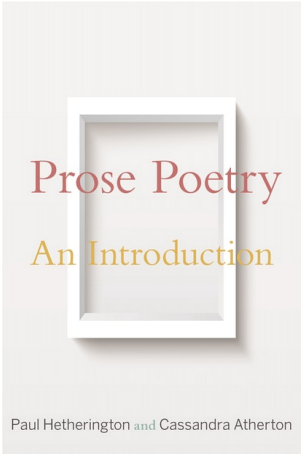
TEXT review

The literary form defining the Twenty-first Century

review by Moya Costello



Paul Hetherington and Cassandra Atherton
Prose Poetry: An Introduction
Princeton University Press, Princeton 2020
ISBN 9780691180649
Hb 344pp, USD$75.00

If national pride can be benign and non-parochial, then I'll admit that such pride is what I feel with the publication of this book. Paul Hetherington and Cassandra Atherton have pushed Australia into the international field (possibly dominated in the contemporary moment by the U.S.) of theorising the prose poem. Some of us with a specific interest in the prose poem would have witnessed the publication of essays and the editing of themed issues of poetry journals by Hetherington and Atherton, building up to this book. Further, the

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Prose Poetry Project was created in 2014 by the International Poetry Studies Institute of the University of Canberra, with Hetherington and Atherton involved. Their complementary volume, the *Anthology of Australian Prose Poetry* (MUP), displays Australian writers' *practice* of the form.

Some of us, too, may have speculated on or imagined how Hetherington and Atherton would have approached Princeton University Press (if it wasn't vice versa), what their answers to questions in a standard publishers' submission template might have been – such as, 'What is unique about the content of this book?' or 'Similar/competing titles'.

For the world is not awash with whole books devoted to the theory of the prose poem; comparable is the case of theories of the novella. Hetherington and Atherton's substantial Bibliography lists a few – notably Clements and Dunhams' 2009 similarly titled *An Introduction to the Prose Poem* (Firewheel Editions). Perhaps this scarcity has to do with hybrid and/or 'minor' literatures. Anna Gibbs (1997) has memorably complimented the 'indeterminate' form of the prose poem as 'literary detritus'. Hetherington and Atherton note that it is a 'contradictory or paradoxical' form (p. vii), a 'genre-crossing ugly duckling' (p. 22), 'always … in opposition to, or undercutting other, more established literary forms' (p. 26).

Hetherington and Atherton proclaim startling achievements for the prose poem. It has 'only fully emerged as a major poetic form in recent decades' (p. vii); is 'robust' with 'its literary currency … increasing' (p. 4); and has challenged 'conventional ideas about generic distinctions' perhaps becoming 'a defining twenty-first-century literary form' (p. 23): think of the way the novel was the form of the nineteenth century. '[T]here is no question in the last few decades [prose poetry] has claimed *some* of [the] territory' of the 'contemporary lineated lyric' (p. 26). (Nevertheless, they do examine lyric prose poetry, a term 'to name different forms and varieties of poetry that may or may not be lineated' (p. 211).)

For me, what is new and especially welcome about this book are its use of Australian examples of prose poetry to demonstrate claims; having a chapter devoted to 'Women and Prose Poetry'; and discussing in depth the prose poem's dis/connection from/to poetic prose and short forms such as microfiction.

For example, Hetherington and Atherton use Australian poet Jen Webb's prose poem '1973' to demonstrate metonymy. While poetry as a form, whether prose or lineated, uses figurative language, they quote Andy Brown, Professor at the University of Exeter, saying that the prose poem foregrounds such strategies, as it lacks stanzas, metre etc (p. 178).

A specific chapter on gender and the prose poem is justified because '[t]he critical tradition relating to English-language prose poetry … has tended to highlight the work of male prose poets' (p. 200). Recent scholarship by women has driven change.

Hetherington and Atherton explain the contemporary proliferation of short forms by, for example, referring to 'the persistent noise of technology and the twenty-four-hour news cycle' (p. 227). I am interested in the distinctions among various short forms, especially because the fabulous Spineless Wonders publishes anthologies as part of their joanne burns award. The anthologies are usually subtitled 'an anthology of prose poems and microfiction'. Atherton has judged the award and edited its anthologies several times. Hetherington and Atherton argue that 'nomenclature and labelling [matter] a great deal', 'not least because readers approach … forms in different ways' (pp. 235-236). They do 'confirm that prose poetry and very short forms of fiction are usually identifiable and fairly easily distinguishable' (p. 233), because the narrative drive of fiction is lacking in the prose poem which, rather, uses wordplay, repetition and metaphor to convey the momentum of action (p. 233). They also discuss the differences between the prose poem and poetic prose, the former characterised by brevity and compression, and the latter by, using British writer, editor and dancer Nikki Santilli's term, 'florid verbosity' (p. 6). 'It is only upon reading [prose poems] that surprises happen, and what appears to be a standard paragraph is outed as a prose poem' (p. 15).

Necessarily, another chapter gives an overview of the form's history, inevitably mentioning Baudelaire and other familiar names. I did wonder if there is an Eastern tradition of the prose poem. Under a chapter on closed and open forms is the subtitle 'Contemporary Reinvention of the Haibun and Other Prose Poem Varieties'; here, Hetherington and Atherton quote British poet Dennis Keene arguing that the prose poem in some form 'has a much longer history in Japanese than it has in French' (p. 91). In the chapter on figurative language, they use the work of the Malaysian poet Desmond Kon Zhicheng-Mingdé to demonstrate 'Prose Poetry and Postcolonial Intertexts' (p. 193).

Other chapters attempt to come to grips with definitions, characteristics, methods of writing, and explaining the affect/effect of the form on the reader.

The provocative and informative subtitles of chapters, some referred to above, require equal attention for the ideas they contain. Within the 'Introduction' is 'The Prose Poem and Subversion'; within 'Women and Prose Poetry' is 'Experimental Prose Poetry'; and within 'Prose Poetry and the Very Short Form' is 'The Contemporary Prose Poem and the Future'. And that future? 'The prose poem's time has come' (p. 245).

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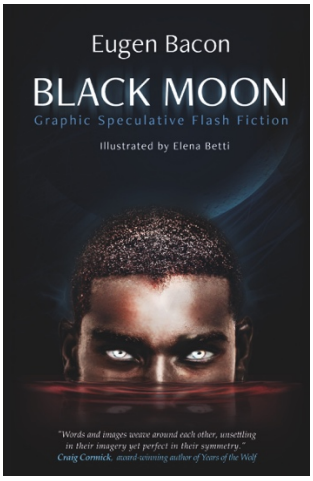
TEXT review

An end, a beginning, or even a middle… a promise, a yearning, a warning

review by Penelope Russon

Dominque Hecq and Eugen Bacon
Speculate: A Collection of Microlit
Meerkat Press Asheville NC 2020
ISBN 9781946154743
Pb 136pp AUD14.95



Eugen Bacon, illustrated by Elena Betti
Black Moon: Graphic Speculative Flash Fiction
IFWG Melbourne Australia 2020 ISBN 9781946154552
Pb 74pp AUD26.95

In the past 12 months, I have taught creative writing at three universities with flash fiction as an assessment. In undergraduate short fiction classes, flash fiction is often treated as a practice ground for longer, more ambitious works, but in fact the short-short story is its own rarefied skill, just as the miniature is not merely a replica of the real, but its own intricate world obeying its own laws of scale. In January 2021, I also taught flash fiction in a

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summer intensive to a group of postgraduate publishing students who were learning to both write and edit flash fiction, recognising it as a subgenre possessing its own formal qualities. My experiences speak to an increased interest in the form as a pedagogical tool, as wordcounts in assignments decrease to reflect other shortages – teaching hours, paid marking, and the perceived attention spans of the current generation of students when it comes to pre-reading. However, it also reflects increased interest in the experimental aspects of microlit, which academic, writer and editor of microlit Cassandra Atherton sees as an 'in-between' space where new things might be said and in new ways (2018, n.p.).

I've used the term flash fiction as if it's unproblematically recognisable, as if it doesn't cross over into other genres, other forms, such as the prose poem or the more traditional short story. Josephine Rowe writes very short stories (the luscious 'Brisbane' is only 500 words) that, while still relying on gaps in the telling, don't appear to foreshorten plot or truncate character as, say, Lydia Davis's lists or other fragmentary pieces do. One of my first experiences of the prose poem in an undergraduate classroom was the much anthologised 'Australia' by the late Ania Walwicz, who used the prose poem to construct a speaking position from the margins, performing the migrant struggle to find form and agency to express affective excess in the impoverished language of Australian English.

Flash fiction is the term Eugen Bacon uses for *Black Moon* (further modified by the adjectives speculative *and* graphic). It is interesting, then, that *Speculate* is labelled 'microlit' on the cover, which opens it up to new possibilities, allowing all sorts of crossovers, while also, perhaps, designating itself a more *literary* project. In the foreword, Hecq and Bacon further characterise the project as 'a dialogue between two adventurous writers curious about the shapeshifter we call a prose poem, that can be a hybrid of a poem and flash fiction' (p. vii). In this review, I want to explore the similarities and differences between the two books and their methodologies, seek out where the pleasure and interest lies in the form for each of these authors, and finally speak to how the texts might invite engagement in creative writing pedagogy and practice.

Writing in *Lithub*, Grant Faulkner describes flash fiction as

> a coyote that strangely appears in your backyard and stares into your kitchen window. You lock eyes, and the world is suddenly a little dangerous, a little less predictable. Something wild has briefly entered the safety of your domestic space and changed it forever with its feral threat. (2020, n.p.)

Faulkner's coyote hints at a vague blurring between the familiar and the strange, and assumes we begin grounded in the realm of the domestic. In *Black Moon*, however, Eugen Bacon sets her fiction adrift in the strange, and does little to ensure our safety as readers. Bacon blends earthy elements of the folk tale (Faulkner's coyote) with tropes of high fantasy and science fiction, paying limited attention to 'the real' (Faulkner's kitchen window). There is a story in *Black Moon* with an actual window, but its sentience and

agency unhinges it literally and figuratively from the domestic sphere. (As a reward to any fans, this sentient window also makes an appearance in *Speculate)*.

It's possible Bacon deliberately eschews the mundane to say something about reality: 'We're making winged centurions to signal Enough' writes Bacon, in 'The Real Deal', saying no to, among other things, 'homophobes, supremacists, anti-Semites, fat pocketed politicians and sleek-eyed priests…' (p. 9). Bacon ends her story with the phrase '*trop c'est trop*', the French equivalent of enough is enough, which can also be read as 'too much is too much'. The stories swirl with the extravagance of dark fantasy and its big themes: love, war, violence, vengeance, life, death and afterlife. Bacon goes beyond the micro-aggression, the hidden violence of the domestic, the daily drudge of #metoo, to explore the gravitational pull of dark matter at the heart of all things.

I found myself thinking of Virginia Woolf's 'matches struck unexpectedly against the dark' as I pondered the *flash* in flash fiction, a phrase Suzanne Ferguson uses to illustrate the structural centrality of Joyce's epiphany in modern short fiction (1982, p. 20). Sometimes a light in the dark only shows you how much more darkness there is. Bacon's matches are just that. In 'An Unnamed Story', there is the puzzle of a woman in a too-tight corset getting her period and using a sanitary pad – Bacon doesn't anchor us in time and place. And what this woman bleeds are tiny monstrous insects with eyes and human ears until 'the horror of blood begot a beast' (p. 27). Is the beast a single entity comprised of these small insects, or does the woman herself become something new, birthed from the horror of blood? The more we know, the more we don't know, and if we spend too much time wondering, the match will only burn our fingers. There is nothing formulaic in Bacon's stories, one story doesn't teach us how to read the next. Like the eponymous clay in James Joyce's story, however, there are images that thicken, around which the story satisfyingly coalesces.

Italian illustrator and graphic designer Elena Betti has responded to each story with a illustration. Like Bacon, Betti blends modes of old school pulp science fiction and high fantasy with a more contemporary dystopian, cyberpunk style. Betti's images are sometimes hard to read, combining specificity of detail with layers of colour and texture, contrasting light and dark in interesting ways, rewarding scrutiny. In *Speculate,* Bacon and Hecq each seek to make something new with the material they're given, in contrast, Betti's images render a visual interpretation of Bacon's fabula. Sometimes Betti literalises the metaphor, such as the dog with a skeleton in its mouth juxtaposing Bacon's 'Like a Dog with a Bone'; this has the rather startling and intriguing effect of stripping away nuance and turning the story into something more concrete and terrifying than if the words sat alone. The saturated colour image against 'The Book of Unfinished Parallels' primes us for the hyperreal, anticipating the shift in tone in the final paragraph of the story. While I wonder if 'graphic flash fiction' is quite the right way to describe the relationship between text and image in this slim volume where the words retain an air of authority over the artwork,

Betti's vivid, visual renderings of Bacon's worlds help generate the slippery strangeness and otherworldliness of *Black Moon*.

Speculate signifies a project more invested in collaboration and reciprocity. Hecq and Bacon set up a call and response. In the first half, Bacon composes an original piece of microlit, and Hecq responds. In the second half of the book they swap, and it is Bacon responding to Hecq. 'Call and response' is a methodology that blurs identity and traditional notions of authorship, foregrounding instead the social dynamics of creativity, seen in the interactive play of children, and the collaborative energy of the writer's workshop. *Speculate* is definitely doing something different to *Black Moon*. The pieces in *Black Moon* aim to cohere themselves as stories. In *Speculate*, language and imagery draw the reader along, and stories seem to happen somewhere off the page.

Keeping the reader invested is the warmth that evolves from the dialogical. In a title, Eugen Bacon tells us 'None of this is a dream' (p. 28); later Hecq writes: '…I've never been a finisher of fiction. I dig into my dreams and surface into the bare realities of pantries and sour actualities of fridges' (p. 49). It became clear, reading this, that Hecq and Bacon have different styles, different limbic drives as writers, but that they take a great deal of pleasure in the back-and-forth, and in each other. This is the real creative work – and play – of *Speculate*. Initially for me the interest lay in how the writer would make use of the limits laid down for them by the preceding piece. I was challenged on this when, in one of the final stories, I came across Hecq quoting Stravinsky: 'the meaning of poetics is the study of work to be done' (p. 116), sending me back to the beginning to observe that there is energy in the call too, and its anticipation of response.

Both *Speculate* and *Black Moon* invite creative engagement. Excerpts of each, along with Walwicz, Davis, Rowe and so on, could be used to generate student-led definitions of prose poetry and flash fiction, exploring the crossover between forms, or coming up with a class poetics of microlit. The relationship between image and text in *Black Moon* could be used to contextualise image-led writing; for example, providing an image from *Black Moon* as a prompt and then exploring the relationship between the student text and Bacon's story (which in turn 'prompted' Betti's imagery).

The real pedagogical promise, I think, is the combination of microlit and the call-and-reponse methodology of *Speculate.* Cassandra Atherton says:

> It is possible that contemporary culture requires such literary forms in order to speak truthfully about the crises at the heart of modernity centred on identity, the interpenetration and mixing of cultures and the need to find authentic ways of speaking. (2018, n.p.)

If microlit offers an 'in-between' space, call and response is a strategy for students to explore the way identities, voices, and cultures blend, blur, erase, support or suppress each

other in that space. Hecq and Bacon's methodology could be used in creative writing pedagogy to test Bakhtin's dialogical contention that: 'I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself' (Bakhtin 1984, p. 287). The model of collaboration in *Speculate* allows for the single-authored outcome still privileged in creative writing assessment, while also providing students with the experience of writing collectively in co-constructed play-spaces. Call and response may be a particularly meaningful exercise in online or blended learning as students seek to make connections and learn from each other. It could also be a way to promote cross-cultural collaboration between local and international students.

The two volumes offer rewards for any author fatigued by their own practice. These volumes inspire writers to experiment with what can be achieved in a single sitting as a writer, foregrounding curiosity and experimentation rather than laboured sentences and carefully erected literary structures. In a period defined by social isolation, Hecq and Bacon's model of 'low stakes, high reward' collaboration has social and emotional benefits for anyone, but I am particularly thinking of those writers stuck in the lonely grind of moving from one long-form single authored project to the next.

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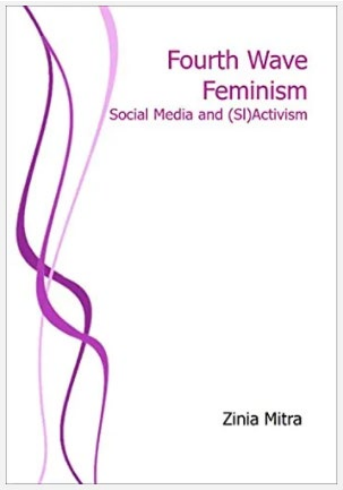
TEXT review

Riding the (Fourth) Wave

review by Philippa Moore



Zinia Mitra
Fourth Wave Feminism, Social Media and (Sl)Activism
Kitaab International, Singapore 2021
ISBN 9811805504
Pb 175pp AUD18.96

> I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is,' said the writer Rebecca West in 1913. 'I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute. (Walters, 2005, p. 3)

With all due respect to Rebecca West, one could not make such a claim after reading *Fourth Wave Feminism, Social Media and (Sl)Activism*. Zinia Mitra has captured the zeitgeist of this particular moment in time for feminism: her well-researched and thoughtful book navigates the movement's complicated and layered past and how that relates to present events and challenges.

The book opens with an engaging foreword from Amelia Walker and then, after an in-depth introduction that sets the scene, is divided into five chapters: Postfeminism and/or Fourth Wave Feminism; The Waves; Campaigns and (Sl)activism; Weinstein Effect or #MeToo; and Backlashes (as someone who came of age in the third wave, I had to smile).

Feminism is a deeply complex subject and Mitra somehow manages to unravel its many interweaving skeins with care and insight, posing many interesting questions for this juncture where feminism has now found itself. Is feminism at a crisis point? Perhaps – but Mitra is a knowledgeable tour guide through this terrain and provides numerous historical and contemporary examples of ruptures, debates, tensions, dissenting voices, resistance to change within each wave and strong reactions to the previous ones. This is nothing new, in other words, and Mitra does not simplify the complexities of gender inequality nor offer any easy solutions, for indeed they aren't any. 'There have always been several feminisms within every feminist wave,' Mitra states (p. 148) and while inevitable backlashes are both disruptive and influential in the movement they have 'never put an end to it' (p. 149).

The Fourth wave, Mitra argues, has been very much defined by the immense reach of the internet and the sense of community and solidarity offered by social media, so this is very much the lens through which the reader is invited to reflect on the events of the past nine or so years, since Laura Bates set up the website *Everyday Sexism* in 2012, which is largely acknowledged as the beginning of the Fourth wave. The third chapter 'Campaigns and (Sl)activism' discusses how social media has opened new ways to galvanise the women's rights movement by encouraging the sharing of experiences, either through long-form writing such as a blog, threads and discussions on Twitter and Facebook, and of course hashtags, and the easier organisation and dissemination of information (p. 112). While social media undeniably captures attention and builds momentum and enthusiasm for a cause, the ideal result is that is that online activism and street activism coordinate, and this doesn't always happen. Mitra explores the questions raised by many social commentators and other scholars about 'whether anything is accomplished in reality by these "likes" when very little thought or effort is required' (p. 86) and presents the argument that while 'slacktivism' has both positive and negative connotations, the power of social media to communicate messages, garner the attention of the world's media and put pressure on oppressors cannot be denied or overstated. It is also why it has been a vital tool in the stimulation of this new wave of feminist activism 'by enhancing accessibility and promoting participation and collective action' (p. 94).

Mitra also sensitively explores the notion that Fourth wave feminism – or the feminism of now – is inherently intersectional and, thanks to the technology that has defined it, crosses continents and cultures. Yet, despite this, it isn't entirely inclusive: 'the two most cited causes of the Fourth wave are the increasing disillusionment with the discourse of postfeminism and the dawning awareness of the social, political and cultural inequity still experienced by women' (p. 33). While its main tool, social media, removes many of the usual barriers to participation in the feminist movement, Mitra asks us to consider the potential ramifications of the Fourth wave's 'dependency on technology' and whether that will inevitably result in the most prominent voices being those with the greatest access to it (p. 142). 'The screen is a liberator as well as an oppressor,' she notes (p. 29).

Fourth Wave Feminism, Social Media and (Sl)Activism also contains some excellent examples of how Indian women have engaged with the hashtag campaigns, notably #MeToo and #TimesUp. While no one could claim women are overrepresented in media (in 2019, in a sample of political and government opinion pieces published in Australia, only 16% were written by female journalists [Price, 2019, p. 6]), it is true that the ones given the most attention tend to be white, English-speaking, and middle class. I really appreciated Mitra's insights and exploration of how Fourth-wave feminism and hashtag activism has played out in India with some powerful examples of advocacy and demands for change.

Mitra, as well as being an Associate Professor in English at the University of North Bengal, is also a poet of some distinction. It is therefore no surprise that the language in this book, while erudite and engaging, is also quite fluid and fragmentary in places – much like feminism itself, Mitra asserts, which is why she advocates for adopting a wave narrative as a means of understanding the chronology of feminism. 'I suggest a more reflexive and fluid understanding of the "waves," privileging its continuity, inclusivity, and multiplicity. Just like the waves' (p. 44).

I also appreciated the opportunity this book gave me to reflect on my own relationship with feminism. Mitra's engaging language and detailed chronology of feminism provokes deep thought about your own participation, your own use of social media and the internet, and where the turning points of your own life intersect with those of the movement. I am a little embarrassed to publicly admit how late I came to feminism and how long it took for me to realise that so much of my life had been spent mechanically striving towards patriarchal ideals; and, as a result, what a vulnerable young woman I had been. I was an undergraduate in the early 2000s and reading Mitra's analysis of where feminism was at during that time helped me to understand a bit more about why, at such a formative age, I leaned more towards 'a form of feminism that accepts a culture instead of fighting it' (p. 7).

Mitra quotes blogger and *New Statesman* contributing editor, Laurie Penny, associated with the Fourth wave of feminism: 'so many women spending so much time talking to one another online … is part of what led to feminist revival of the mid-2000s' (p. 30). It is very

interesting to consider and reflect upon my own participation in this context. In 2005, aged 24, lonely and living in a new city, I started a blog. In doing so, I created a public space where I was able to explore ideas, talk about my life and experiences, and cultivate an identity that I felt had been lost in the years since I'd left university. The internet was a space for women and girls and queer people 'to speak to each other without limits, across borders, sharing stories, and changing our reality' (p. 30) and blogging 'made activism accessible to young women who are instrumental in forming feminist identities' (p. 80) – indeed, the self-expression and identity-shaping I experienced through my own blog, which to my great surprise was read by a large number of people, is 'one of the defining characteristics of Fourth wave' (p. 80). I would say 99 per cent of the comments on my blog were authored by women, as were the blogs I read and commented on myself. It did feel like I had finally found my people; women I could open up to and share experiences with, and who all seemed genuinely interested in what I had to say. Knowing you have an audience, Mitra rightly states, adds 'a new dimension to the process of confessional writing' (p. 31).

Admittedly, the initial focus of my blog was yet another tool of patriarchal control – diet culture and weight loss – and I was naïve of the dangers (and lasting effects) that come from starting a narrative about your body in public as well as the fact that 'the heightened visibility on online media … is certainly not without its problems' (p. 80). Fifteen years later, I am now very cautious, and even a little afraid, when I write online. But that is another article in itself.

Analysing a worldwide movement in the socio-political context of the last two years is an unenviable task indeed, but Mitra naturally considers the impact of COVID-19 and the worldwide disruption caused by the pandemic in relation to the current wave of feminism. In February and March 2020, before the world as we knew it collapsed, major newspapers in the UK were running stories that suggested many women considered feminism to be 'dead', with many if not all of its objectives achieved. Yet one of the most horrifying (and unsurprising) statistics to come out of the pandemic is the surge in domestic violence and how it appears to be 'flourishing' under lockdowns and other restrictive measures (p. 35).

It is this for this reason, and numerous equally arresting examples she cites, that Mitra argues we cannot continue to justify distancing ourselves from feminism and its objectives, from true activism, from addressing social and political inequalities, and from holding our political leaders to account. 'When the world regains normalcy, much remains to be done' (p. 36) writes Mitra, and anyone who reads this book will undoubtedly come away with the same opinion.

Fourth Wave Feminism, Social Media and (Sl)Activism would be a valuable read for first-year media and communications students, as well as anyone interested in the intersection between media, society and politics. It also offers a practical resource for teachers of these

subjects at undergraduate level, with summaries of the various waves of the feminist movement, scholarly analysis of how the events in one gave rise to what came next, and how the current wave sits in relation to the original goals of feminism.

Mitra never shies away from the complex fact that the Fourth wave is currently unfolding around us, that 'we are in it together with all its critiques' and we cannot possibly know where feminism will go from here (p. 148). What we do know, however, is that it is a 'tumultuous, multi-faceted and disquieting' movement and it is currently thriving, thanks to technology that has removed the rigid socio-political barriers previous waves had to negotiate, and created the potential for women the world over to gather and work together as a collective (p. 148). Despite everything, it is hopeful and exciting.

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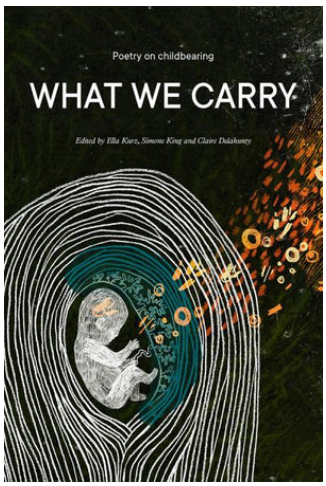
TEXT review

Not just woman's work

review by Emma Darragh



What We Carry: Poetry on Childbearing
Edited by Ella Kurz, Simone King and Claire Delahunty
Recent Work Press, Canberra 2021
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In the introduction to *What We Carry: Poetry on Childbearing*, the editors argue that 'the potential for childbearing, including infertility and loss to provide insight into human existence and experience' is 'an undervalued and uncelebrated aspect of childbearing' (p. 6). While there is a glut of information on the physiological processes and changes that occur to the human body during the course of a pregnancy and childbirth, there is a philosophical dearth. Philosopher Iris Marion Young (1984) writes: 'We should not be

surprised to learn that discourse on pregnancy omits subjectivity, for the specific experience of women has been absent from most of our culture's discourse about human experience and history' (p. 45). These thoughts are echoed, more than thirty years later by Lily Gurton-Wachter:

> [F]or the most part, motherhood is simply missing from our literary and philosophical tradition, passed over quickly as if it were an embarrassment when it even appears at all. An odd omission, given how many people in the history of the world have either had a baby or been one. Shouldn't we all be more interested in this? (Wachter, 2016, n.p.)

Contemporary philosopher Anna M. Hennessy suggests that there are several factors responsible for this lack of research on childbearing in the humanities, perhaps the foremost being that 'birth is a problem for many feminist scholars due to the issue of essentialism' (Hennessey, 2017, n.p.). Avoiding the risk of promoting a normative, essentialist view of what it means to be a woman, or, even more broadly, to claim that procreation itself is a necessary ingredient in a meaningful life is an important project. This avoidance does, however, refuse to acknowledge that childbearing is a life-altering event. Hennessey's description of the status quo, that the 'underrepresentation of research and art material on the theme of childbirth points to an ideological rejection or diminishing of the importance of the rite of passage that many women go through' is addressed by this collection of poetry (2017, n.p). The event of childbearing itself is the culmination of a physical metamorphosis, yes, but surrounding this event are deeply human, philosophical questions: Why should we bring life into this world? What are the physical and psychological costs of childbearing? To consider taking on a role in childbearing or childrearing is to reflect on one's sense of self, and necessitates contemplation of one's own life. Do I want to have a child? What can I give a child? These questions – along with the subject matter of motherhood and childbearing – are not new for poets, of course. To my mind springs the work of Sharon Olds, Erica Jong, Marge Piercy, and Anne Sexton and, more recently, there is The Emma Press's *Anthology of Motherhood* (2014); Ali Cobby Eckermann's *Inside My Mother* (2015); and Liz Berry's *The Republic of Motherhood* (2018). But here you will notice that I have conflated childbearing – the process of giving birth – with motherhood – the state of being a mother. *What We Carry*, edited by Ella Kurz, Simone King, and Claire Delahunty, makes no such mistake.

While midwife and scholar Jennifer Parratt expands the definition of childbearing to include 'the period of time when women experience: becoming pregnant; being pregnant; giving birth; and the early months of parenting', *What We Carry* is both more expansive and more nuanced (Parratt, 2010, p. 7). The collection considers childbearing as a physiological, psychological, and philosophical act and, in doing so, incorporates the experiences of men and non-binary individuals. With poems from more than 60 contemporary poets, the collection aims to illuminate childbearing experiences 'through the lenses of different ages,

genders, abilities, ethnicities and sexualities' and what these experiences can teach us about 'what it means to be human' (p. 8). Like Hennessey, the editors of this collection, argue that the experience of birth is a universal human experience – not just a female one – for, in Hennessey's words, 'childbirth is quite simply the foundation from which the human experience evolves'.

What We Carry is divided into sections: Origin; Conception and in/fertility; Pregnancy; Loss; Birth; Postpartum; Choice; and Power and place. Unfortunately, it is not within the scope of this review to give each poem, or even each section, the attention it deserves, so I will limit my discussion to the individual poems that unsettled and refreshed my own ideas about childbearing and its potential for insight into the human experience.

'Pregnancy'

As almost anyone who has been pregnant will tell you, it is not simply the physical body that changes during pregnancy. While the distended belly tends to steal the spotlight, the phenomenological changes are just as massive. The pregnant woman's experience of, and relationship to, her body is constantly changing. Iris Marion Young (1984) says: 'Pregnancy does not belong to the woman herself. It either is a state of the developing foetus, for which the woman is a container; or it is an objective, observable process coming under scientific scrutiny' (p. 42). Appearing more than thirty years after Young's paper, Esther Ottaway's poem 'Headless Portrait of a Pregnant Woman' speaks to this split in subjectivity, indicating that some aspects of childbearing have not changed:

> If the head means the individual, leave it
> at the system's door, with your umbrella.
> In particular, don't bring that troublesome mouth
> …
> … always entering
> the room belly first, in deference
>
> to your new label, where you have value
> only as a vessel. (p. 54)

The pregnant subject, Young goes on to suggest, is:

> decentred, split, or doubled in several ways. She experiences her body as herself and not herself. Its inner movements belong to another being, yet they are not other, because her body boundaries shift and because her bodily self-location is focused on her trunk in addition to her head'. (1984, p. 46)

This shifting of boundaries of self and other also appears in Ottaway's poem and is coupled with the physical pain and discomfort often experienced in pregnancy:

> Alone in this body's twinning,
> lonely in my body. *For* my body,
> Perhaps: there is little room left for me.
>
> My difficult houseguest
> tramples the body's furniture,
> Dances until late,
>
> Runs up enormous bills
> of oxygen and blood,
> punches the walls, urinates,
>
> peels skin from ribs by force. (pp. 54-55)

To be lonely for one's own body suggests a unique form of loneliness, even though the woman is never, it seems, truly alone. Not only is this experience alienating for the pregnant woman whose body now poses new limitations but there is also the pain and discomfort that is unique to pregnancy. The unborn child in this poem – the 'difficult houseguest' – is reminiscent of a rowdy rock star who, enabled by a sense of entitlement and grandiosity, trashes their hotel room, leaving someone else to clean up the mess.

On the other hand, in Simone King's touching poem, 'Carrying You', the experience of pregnancy is infused with love and wonder and transforms even the most mundane aspects of daily life:

> And although I'm not supposed
> to love you yet, you –
> who I've known for two short
> weeks, who may stay or go,
> crude cluster of cells –
>
> are constantly with me,
> an edge in every emotion,
> adding awe to my cornflakes,
> and staccato heartbeat and breath
> to once simple negotiations
> of kerb and route. Turning me,
> suddenly, into a protector
> of tiny, fragile life. (p. 41)

Rather than demonstrating the split subjectivity we see in Ottaway's poem, King's poem demonstrates dialectical thinking in the opening lines of the third strophe: 'And although I'm not supposed / to love you yet'. Here we see, embedded in the poem and embodied in the woman, the idea that the foetus is not yet a person but rather a 'crude cluster of cells', while at the same time the mother-to-be experiences a new sense of love, responsibility and protectiveness. As the woman's body moves through the world in this poem she becomes keenly aware of its tiny mechanisms as well as its fragility – and the fact that another being is reliant upon it. This kind of dialectical thinking is a philosophical act brought about by the state of pregnancy.

'Birth'

The poems in 'Birth' reveal that stimulus for philosophical engagement often comes from the ordeal of childbirth itself. In Ella Kurz's poem 'The One', the intensity of the pain all but eliminates the birthing mother's sense of self:

> When the serrations
> of thunderstone catch at
> tight knit muscle of womb
> when I am crushed
> against the edges of self,
> it is the women,
> kneeling in my orbit,
> who sing me through. (p. 99)

Anecdotally, many women speak of childbirth as an empowering experience, but what Kurz does here is more complex. The woman's strength to withstand the pain is portrayed as something elemental, something facilitated by other women, and something only achievable through this 'crushing' of the self. (Tangentially, this concept of the death of the ego has recently become a popular research topic in relation to psychedelic experiences – not so, it seems with pain and childbirth).

Jo Langdon's poem 'Transitioned', on the surface, crystallises the transitional phase of labour – the painful phase when contractions intensify and birth is imminent. The poem speaks of the birthing mother's intensely painful physical experience: 'I was a body / cresting waves before cliff walls, heights / impossible', the poem then goes on, self-reflexively:

> impossible – I'm sure
>
> I still lose myself

to language
like this, lose my head
to metaphor

but there had been water, hours
dimmed in plays of rippled
Light across a ceiling, somewhere. (p. 94)

The poem ends with an apology of sorts:

I never wanted to write
birth poems. I am sorry
to my other
Self for this palpable horror
that extends now
between us (p. 95)

We see here then that the birthing woman has transitioned – and been transported – through the intense pain of the first stage of labour via the metaphor of turbulent waters to 'Somewhere French' (p. 95), to land in the poem itself. She has transitioned, it seems, from a poet to a *mother* poet. She admits to never wanting to write birth poems, perhaps for the same reason/s many of us are might be hesitant – there is the nagging fear that this work is likely to be relegated to the classification of *women's work* by not being sufficiently universal. The poem shares the 'palpable horror' – of the physical pain of birth as well as the shock of the knowledge that she is irrevocably changed, transitioned, by this experience. Here we see it is not solely the act of giving life that is transformative, but that the trauma done to the body and one's helplessness in the throes of such pain are transformative too. The experience has transformed the birthing woman, and it seems that Parratt's claim is correct: 'During childbearing a woman not only gives birth to her baby but to a new version of herself' (2010, p. 7).

This transformation via the pain of childbirth can also be seen in Melinda Smith's poem, 'Woman's work':

It is beginning. Today is the last day of her life
and the first. She cries out with the toiling of it
...

A new body heaves from her into the light […]
Praise her, she has endured the great trial and renewed the life of the world.
She has crossed over, she is one of the wise. (p. 87)

Like the mother in 'Transitioned', the work and the pain of childbirth in Smith's poem is connected with the pain and 'toiling' of creating new life as the mother crosses the Rubicon into parenthood.

'Choice'

Beyond the aesthetic pleasure of the individual poems in this anthology, one of the key strengths of this collection is its attention not only to birth itself, but the attention it pays to the decision *not* to give birth, as explored in the section titled 'Choice'. This section is a highlight of the anthology for me, for it assuages another perceived risk in the celebration of childbearing: that by celebrating birth one may be misconstrued as promoting anti-choice views that deny women's reproductive freedom. The poems in this section attest to the importance of this freedom and the personal reckoning that occurs when making such choices. 'Choice' is subtitled 'Forking possibilities', taken from Durga Wolf's poem 'Relief'. Wolf's poem begins with a quote from a paper titled 'Decision rightness and relief predominate over the years following an abortion' and continues in a resolute, rational voice:

> I wouldn't be put under
> their oblivion spell,
> scooped out in a field of drapes.
> I wanted to be present,
> farewell the forking possibility. (p. 175)

The woman here is determined to be present and lucid while her pregnancy is terminated. There is no narrative of desperation or fear in this poem, rather there is the sense of there not being enough room in this house, this life, for this 'pearl of a baby' (p. 175). While there is no sense of regret here, there is the sense of loss. The poem embraces the ambivalence of this choice with its final line 'We would have named it Selma' (p. 175) By referring to the foetus as both a 'pearl of a baby' and as 'it', Wolf delicately embraces the pregnancy paradox of the foetus being not-quite a person, but, if wanted, a possibility that would have grown into its name, Selma.

Jacqui Malins's poem 'Could-be' (p. 174) is a striking concrete poem; the text is shaped like a foetus, perhaps, or the apple-seed that serves as the key image of the poem. This is not a baby but a *could-be*. Marlins's poem explores the 'forking possibility' of pregnancy, acknowledging its unstoppable impulse to transform the pregnant woman's body and her life: 'you were an apple-seed changing me from the inside out … stretching fresh blush tendrils of need to ready my flesh for your shaping. once i knew you were there i knew with rare clarity i did not want you' (p. 174). The poem is elegant and spare: the lack of capitalisation keeps the poem itself small – not even the letters have reached maturity. The

voice of the poem, however, is mature. It is the voice of a woman who knows what she wants, despite the poem's smallness – for the apple-seed, however small, is also poisonous, containing cyanide. While the *would-be* mother of the *could-be* baby is resolute and unwavering in her desire not to have the child, she takes this moment to contemplate what this experience – this form of carrying – might teach her about herself: 'i wondered what kind of person. of woman my certainty made me? it never wavered' (p. 174).

'Power and Place'

We arrive at the final section of the anthology – 'Power and Place' – having intimately witnessed childbearing in its many forms. This final section, in a way, returns us to the origins at the beginning of the collection. Here, however, the poems feel epic in tone and scale and, perhaps most importantly, reveal childbearing to be 'defined by its social, cultural and historical context' (p. 8). Childbearing in this section is not, in the words of Young, 'experienced for its own sake, noticed and savored (sic)' (1984, pp. 46-47). For a pregnancy to be experienced in this way, Young goes on to add,

> entails that the pregnancy be chosen by the woman, either as an explicit decision to become pregnant, or at least as choosing to be identified with and positively accepting of it. Most women in human history have not chosen their pregnancies in this sense. (1984, pp. 46-47)

Jeanine Leane's poems in this section form a triptych that reveals an experience of childbearing that is fraught with danger, shame, and trauma. Together, the poems form a narrative that explores and confronts the ongoing violence of colonialism. In the first poem of the triptych, 'Agony in the Garden', the voice of the poem is a girl tending 'foreign plants' as her 'womanhood blooms'. The girl is surveilled by the 'white women' and ogled by the men. The girl, womanhood barely in bloom, is transformed in the poem not into a woman in her own right but into an object of temptation:

> Evening's air hangs heavy with the scent of fruit unpicked.
> Long shadows of the Master creep and loom.
> Knowing heaven holds no pleasure like a woman ripe –
> he tastes my youthful flesh. (p. 186)

The girl, by virtue of not being white herself, is all the more vulnerable.

> The Master reaps the harvest's first fruit,
> while high above me on the clothesline the
> spotless underwear of white women
> dance in the wind.

What do Angels do in this situation?
Lie back and think of God's good women as
Immaculate underwear flies high to tribute their
modesty and restraint?

The garden gravel etches
agony into my bare back with every thrust. (p. 186)

This re-envisioning of Genesis and The Garden of Eden calls to mind the role of Christianity in the colonial project, where organisations such as The Aborigines Inland Mission set about converting – or giving 'Light to them in darkness' – the '80,000 Aborigines of inland Australia' (Long, 1943, p. 1). This practice sought to replace thousands of years of First Nations culture, language, knowledge, and spirituality with Christian – white – values. The Christian women in Leane's poem may appear to be immaculate, modest, and angelic but meanwhile the Indigenous girl at the centre of these poems is raped in this garden, the gravel etching into her – scarring her – 'with every thrust'.

The story of this girl continues in 'Crime and Punishment':

The new fruit is bitten and the
Master's had his fill.
I swell in sin and shame.
Women's eyes rekindle
igniting smoldering (sic) rage. (p. 187)

The girl's body swells 'in sin and shame', attracting the white women's gaze which is no longer 'vigilant' but 'smoldering'. To these women the pregnant girl is not a victim, or even a person, but a 'temptress', a 'she-devil … who comes to their Garden of Eden / luscious and ripe for the Master's feast' (p. 187). The childbearing in this poem is fraught and dangerous and results in the pregnant girl being punished for her white master's crime against her:

My swelling belly tells them that
white men have animal instincts
that can never be tamed by their temperance
or contained within their corsets.

Cursed is the fruit of my womb – where the
Master's dark desires will become flesh and
dwell among us.

Punishment is a long caged ride.

> Mother and Grandmother's country behind cold glass
> slipping past me. (p. 187)

Just as the girl is removed from her Mother and Grandmother's country in this poem, in the triptych's final instalment, 'Black Madonna', her newborn baby is stolen from her, and the violence continues:

> Between cold stone walls, legs in stirrups
> cruel implements cut and scrape.
> Black Madonna labours long, hard hours for
> her love's labour to be lost –
> stolen.
> For another little dark secret to see the light of day
> and break her back on the same realities as
> Mother and Grandmother.
> …
>
> Screams wake the dead and
> see the ghosts of Mother and Grandmother
> send their slender well-worn fingers digging through time
> from campfire to captivity to confinement and colonialism –
> still, a baby cries
> for Mother
> for Grandmother
> for Country
> for Home. (p. 189)

Following a series of poems that demonstrate either the potential of childbearing to impel philosophical enquiry or its potential to enrich and expand the lives of individuals, like the other poems of this series, this triptych encourages us to look at childbearing from a socio-political standpoint. Leane's poems allow us to see that the word childbearing can carry multiple meanings. Child*bearing,* as a portmanteau word, suggests that pregnancy, and even a child itself, is something to be *borne*: to be endured, to be carried. To bear something suggests that we, those doing the bearing, must survive it.

The individual poems in this collection are stunning in their artistry and nuanced in their treatment of the subject matter. As a whole, *What We Carry: Poetry on Childbearing* is elegantly crafted and delivers on its promise to illuminate childbearing as both a transformative act and a topic worthy of historical, socio-political, and philosophical enquiry. Childbearing – and this collection – is not simply, as Melinda Smith ironically titles her poem, 'Woman's Work'.

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TEXT review

To awaken the city from the dream of itself

review by Marion May Campbell

Monica Raszewski
The Archaeology of a Dream City
Balestier Press, London 2021
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Compelled to return again and again to Nadwodom, Raszewski's protagonist Martha seeks, to graft a phrase from Marx, 'to awaken the [city]from its dream of itself' (n.p). *The Archaeology of a Dream City* is exquisitely attentive to the tears in the fabric of appearances – it's here that the spectres of a traumatic past move; that shadowy matter speaks its enigma to the eye and to the camera. An aspiring biographer and photographer, Raszewski's

protagonist Martha travels by losing her way, engaging in a mode of dream archaeology via her cousin Klara, whereby fragments suggest what cannot be articulated – the language of ruin and decrepitude – and whereby recurrent apparitions become uncannily alive. From every rift of this fabled city of a fictionalised Poland come emanations of the Holocaust, but Raszewski's remarkable skill is in oblique evocation, in accruing suggestion upon suggestion, so that one feels the brush of ghostly trajectories down disintegrating stairways of the cousins' overlapping dreams and through the enigmatic windows of the actual city.

This novel fascinates with allegories, not of fixation, but of elusiveness; the reader finds radiant insight when lost in the tenebrous labyrinth of the forest – for instance, it's only through being lost that Martha and her grandmother can find their way to the kindergarten where learning might begin. But on arrival, they find that school is over. Belatedness, also a key motif of Benjamin's, seeds its ironies throughout the narrative. This is how, out of step, out of time, one finds the 'cool spot' (Benjamin's *die kühle Stelle*) from which one falls into a radically different sense of temporality, where one recognises the ultimate equivalence of all beings – whether 'animal' or 'object' (Benjamin, p. 110-11). Glimpses of others' stories, of layered histories within this one, induce space-time warps – things and beings miniaturise or grow according to psychic relativism. This is where one encounters the self as a stranger and the recognition of the other's pain materialises in shards of traumatic memory.

Here, the subtle exploration of haunting becomes a meditation on artmaking–both *photo-graphy*, literally *light-writing* of course, and writing itself, host the traces of others' lives, allowing the shades of the dead to play again on the walls of the living. Razsewski shows us the past as unresolved and unresolvable visitation – riddling apparitions in the rifts of the fortress of representation. Here the Beatrice leading Martha is the late photographer Marion Porter, of whom she hopes to write a biography, and whose family name, Porter, suggests how Martha is paradoxically *carried* by the burden of artistic inheritance. Perhaps this also suggests the corollary: that only in assuming the burden and the challenge of the history inherited can one make images respectful of the spectral ever-present dead.

The fabulist spirit of this remarkable work seems to me descended from Kafka, who appears here in the narrative as donor to a distressed Jewish boy artist and scholar; its cultural sensitivity and intelligence recall those of Kafka's great commentator, Benjamin; and its ethics resonate with those of the great Jewish philosopher of alterity, Levinas. This novella performs with extraordinary skill a fugal approach to the fragmentary narrative, without ever subordinating – in the name of integration and closure – the unknown, and perhaps unknowable, to the known. The work is thus driven by a poetics of the rift and the trace: saturnine, sleepwalking Martha provides the psychic aperture through which the dead return. And how radiant these glimpses grow through all the layers and rips… In fact, the archaeological trope of layering is figured early in in the image of an old dressing gown, almost a magical *dreaming gown*, which haunts Martha, especially once it is discarded by her mother. Its unravelling quilting is cherished in its very disintegration, in its decrepitude,

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and makes of it a dream-catalyst, its unstitched layers foreshadowing the delicate archaeological excavation practised by Klara. Together, the cousins offer a healing kind of love, walking finally as 'one person split' through Nowadan as archivists of the wounded place, marking the traces of lives painfully rescued and shockingly betrayed (p. 154). But in case this gives the impression that the work is slow and melancholic, I hasten to say that, at every turn, it is graced by delightfully absurdist humour, again in the spirit of Kafka.

Beguiling and compelling, *The Archaeology of a Dream City* is all the more moving for the subtlety and tact of its beautifully decanted writing, rare qualities that are sure, in turn, to haunt its readers. What is more, this haunting power is amplified in dialogue with Jane E. Brown's beautiful and subtly surreal gelatin silver black and white photographs. This fascinating photo-essay performs *light-writing* as the material trace of time in the pocked facades, forbidding doorways, bolted roller-shutters and uncannily stranded objects of a deserted European town: the hush these studies convey is ghostly and most eloquent, as if taken by a melancholic but exceptionally sensitive sleepwalker, just like Raszewski's Martha.

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TEXT review

Equal parts fecund earth and fine-cut jewels

review by Dominique Hecq

Eugen Bacon
Danged Black Thing
Transit Lounge, Sydney NSW 2021
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Since the publication of her first book, *Claiming T-MO* (2019), a collection of linked short stories set in intergalactic spheres, Eugen Bacon has reasserted her origins. She now defines herself as an African Australian author and computer scientist mentally re-engineered into creative writing. Since *Claiming T-MO*, which, incidentally, came out of her PhD, her work has roamed in space, time and style. It has won, been shortlisted, longlisted or commended in national and international awards. Unsurprisingly, the writing in her latest book, *Danged*

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Black Thing, has been described ‘equal parts fecund earth and fine-cut jewels’ (Lanagan, 2021, np).

This is a bold collection of genre-bending stories told from manifold points of views and multiple voices in a gripping combination of literary fiction, fantasy, noir and thriller. There are tales of coming of age, longing, encounter, coexistence, survival, dislocation, and grief. These strike a balance of exuberance and restraint, depth, and refinement, ranging from mythologies to gaming in razor sharp prose prone to lyrical flights. Here, Bacon ranges across unexpected premises, stylistic strategies and cultural references with a deft hand and inventive mind. *Danged Black Thing* is off-beat and experimental, yet firmly anchored in daily life, whether set in Africa, Paris, London, Melbourne, or fictitious nations. The juxtaposition of scenes sets the pace of the narratives – there is a vital and dynamic feel to then.

Lush colouring adds liveliness to each composition. In ‘Simbiyu and the nameless’, the collection’s opening story, the first word, *colour*, brilliantly sets up the dominant theme in self-reflexive fashion, drawing attention to Bacon’s touchstone technique of calling upon the five senses to set the scene, or flag changes in narrative direction:

The colour is full of shade and smells like crusts of fruit. crushed guavas, warm wet clay – that’s the sweetness and mushiness about the forest. A tepidness too. And then there’s a whiff of soured yam, unwashed body. Something old sniffling in the shadows.

Eyes pore over your hollow within, ticking, tickling with your heartbeat. But the hollow is dead cassava dry – all surface and dust. What sound will fall when you press you ear to its longing? Perhaps nuances of self-reflection beckoning the moon’s return. (p. 1)

In this story as elsewhere, the playful tone and clear-eyed point of view bely dark undercurrents. The reflections on racism and ostracism are humorous, yet poignant.

The stories in *Danged Black Thing*, some written in collaboration with other writers, including Andrew Hook, Seb Doubinsky and E. Don Harpe, are solid constructions built from concrete details that are imbued with myth and magic. They create a credible world in vivid prose enlivened by linguistic playfulness – the use of speech idiosyncrasies, dialects, other languages, and plain made-up words, for instance.

One of the distinct features of this collection is the way that several stories expand the notions of selfhood and identity, rejecting racial stereotypes and social hierarchies, thereby also challenging how we read. A striking example of this is ‘Messier 94’, co-written with Andrew Hook. Consider this excerpt from the point at which the protagonist wakes up in a strange room after what may or may not have been a wild night:

At first I thought the skin on the person in the mirror was black, actually a chocolate velvet. Then it went white, speckled with freckles. No, a hue of caramel. Differences, nondifferences, appearing from nowhere. The hickey on my neck was rosy, now dark truffles. The lips stayed soft and full, whichever gender, just one set lightly painted in pillow talk, then bronze, sometimes peach. The eyes vacillated between crisp emerald and deep charcoal. The hair … there was no hair. Now fragments of a man, now a woman, looked back at me, comparing notes, confusing me with someone, something. (pp. 83-84)

Here the choice of detail and breakdown of binaries conspire with grammar to blur the distinction between self and other. Am I or not? Am I black or white? Am I woman or man? Am I or something else?

One other distinct feature of this collection is the versatility of voice, tone and style, which reminds us of what a shapeshifter the short story can be as a genre: there are auto fictional, allegorical or fable-like tales in this collection and some fragmented texts, but all spring from a distinctive approach to voice.

Consider, for example, how two voices tango in 'Messier 94' between Bacon and Hook as they do too, in 'The failing name', between Bacon and Seb Doubinsky in a tantalising bilingual story. But voices merge in the title story 'Danged black thing' and 'De turtle o' hades' two stories co-written with E. Don Harpe from America's deep South. Compare this ventriloquist phenomenon with 'A taste of Unguja', a moving story about womanhood, motherhood and grief told in a mother's anguished voice. Here, the mother whose life is turned upside-down and her sanity at risk is the conduit for a blurring of narrative registers: the immediacy of realism and the dreamscape of surrealism as the telling mingles with sweet taarah music. Grief seeps through this real unreal tale; yet how different in tone it is from 'Still she visits', another grief-fuelled narrative. Set these fictions against 'Unlimited data' where a woman gives everything away for her family in Old Kampala, her voice clashing with that of mock legalese.

At the heart of the collection is a concern with belonging, love and loyalty, themes that runs through Eugen Bacon's long and short fiction from *Claiming T-MO* onwards. This is fiction that falls out of generic habits. At a time in global history when many assumptions about who we are, how we live and how societies function are being questioned, it will appeal to readers avid of realities, virtual realities, augmented realities and alternative realities that reflect the same interrogative light as movements like #metoo and black lives matter.

Danged Black Thing is a tour de force of fictions within fictions and a rare treat – poetic, fantastical and pungent with characters of many pasts, presents and futures. In it, Bacon displays her boundless imagination and magical use of language. Her prose sometimes has the sharpness of imagist poetry but its purposefulness, with and humour preclude mere dazzlement; the exuberance of the five senses is untarnished by self-consciousness.

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TEXT review

Going above and beyond

review by Melanie Myers

James Vicars
Beyond the Sky: The Passions of Millicent Bryant Aviator
Melbourne Books, Melbourne VIC 2020
ISBN: 9781925556520
Pb 272pp AUD34.95

Pioneering aviators, even if their specific achievements cannot be readily cited by most people, sit in the public consciousness as almost folkloric characters. Kingsford Smith Drive is one of the busiest arterial roads in Brisbane. Visit the Kingsford Smith Memorial on Airport Drive and you can see Southern Cross – the carefully preserved aeroplane Sir Charles made the first trans-Pacific flight from the US to Australia. The names of early female aviators of the 1920s and '30s are also readily remembered: for example, Amelia Earhart – the America aviator who disappeared somewhere over the Pacific – and

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Australia's Nancy Bird Walton, who was the youngest woman to obtain a pilot's license. Yet, Millicent Bryant – the first woman in the Commonwealth outside of Britain to gain her pilot's license – is a name only the most ardent aviation history buffs are likely to know.

Bryant's relative obscurity in the annuals of aviation history is the starting point for *Beyond the Sky,* but as the title suggests, it is much more than this. The work is biographical in the sense that it traverses, though not chronologically, the life of Millicent Bryant. Rather than a straight biographical account, however, author James Vicars, Millicent's great-grandson, chose to write the book in the 'form of a story' (p. 9). Using the historical sources available, which he describes as 'fragmented and unbalanced' (p. 9), Vicars opts for the more immersive and arguably more challenging form of historical biofiction (otherwise known speculative biography) to depict Millicent Bryant's life story. Like creative nonfiction, historical biofiction powers its storytelling with the narrative modes of fiction to recreate scenes, imagine dialogue and speculate on the interior lives of its protagonists, hence the 'fiction'. As a contested genre of biographical writing (Brien 2015), authors who use biofiction to narratise the life of an historical personage often add an afterword explaining, and even justifying, that decision, and to assure the reader of their ethical approach to re-animating that person in imaginative and subjective ways. Brien (2015) suggests the practice of writing speculative biography, where 'narrative evidence' is 'fragmentary, ambiguous and contradictory', allows space for 'the speculative biographer to relay not only how uncertain, contradictory and confusing real lives are, but also to reflect on the nature of the biographical enterprise itself as a holistic mixture of the archival and the creative' (p. 15).

Vicars is no exception, supplying a 'To the Reader' note at the start of the book (in addition to a foreword) as well as an 'Author's Note' at the end. In 'To the Reader', Vicars explains that writing Millicent's story 'in this way [as biofiction] could help readers meet her more fully and for her voice, as it comes through in her letters and other writings, to be heard' (p. 9). He also assures the dubious reader, who may take issue with their inability to discern 'what is factual' and 'what really took place', that he has 'worked fully with the record, not against it', which, in Part 1 at least, is largely drawn 'from Millicent's letters and writing' (p. 10). Vicars signs off this missive to the reader with a reference to 'responsible imagination' – a term coined by American author William Styron – to distinguish this work from 'freely-imagined fiction' (p. 10). What comes through in this earnest appeal to the reader, is not just Vicars' compelling desire to tell his great-grandmother's story, but the considerable thought he has devoted to how this would be best achieved, with a promise to the reader that, guided by the historical record, he is committed to telling it as truthfully as possible.

Vicars' 'Author Note' is more expansive about 'imaginative writing' as means of recovering lost stories, and where he goes into further details about his sources, and some of the liberties, he took in re-animating Millicent's life in narrative form. Here, Vicars explains

the project of writing his great-grandmother's life began was one of 'rescue and recovery'; a theme foreshadowed in the opening scene that places the reader at the immediate aftermath of the Greycliffe ferry disaster in Sydney Harbour on 3 November 1927. The Greycliffe – the ferry that ran between Watsons Bay and Circular Quay – sank after it collided with the steamship Tahiti. Forty people, including Millicent Bryant, at just 49 years of age, died in what is still the deadliest incident on Sydney Harbour.

In the opening scenes, we meet Millicent's youngest son, 16-year-old Bowen, who is searching for his mother in the chaotic aftermath and eventually identifies her body at the Coroner's Court: 'All that's necessary is for you to say whether or not this is Millicent Maude Bryant' (p. 17), the morgue attendant asks Bowen before opening the drawer with her body. Later, Bowen collects his mother's belongings, which includes a leather-bound notebook embossed with MMB. The policeman tells him that it, 'Looks like she might have been holding it' (p. 19). Both moments allude to the narrative questions of the book: Who was Millicent Bryant and what were her secrets? How Vicars chooses to answer these questions makes *Beyond the Sky* a masterclass in how to structure a work of historical biofiction, so it reads with the verve and tension of plotted fiction.

The structure of *Beyond the Sky*, beginning with Millicent's terrible death as a victim of the Greycliffe ferry disaster, is a triumph of reverse engineering. After the dramatic opening scenes, it would have been tempting to start Millicent's story from the beginning – that being her grandparents' migration from England to Australia in the mid-19th century – and working forward from there. Astutely, however, Vicar's devotes the first half (Part 1) of the book the final two years of Millicent's life, beginning with her first exhilarating passenger flight in an aircraft piloted by a friend of her two eldest sons. Millicent soon decides to take flying lessons, becoming a regular face at the Australian Aero Club in Mascot, and obtains her pilot's licence. The 'movement of Millicent's life' during this period is, Vicars says, 'constructed closely from her writings' (p. 340), and the result is a forensically drawn portrait of a woman finally coming into her own after a lifetime of service to others. Part 1 finishes with Millicent boarding the Greycliffe in a pensive, yet hopeful, mood, thinking about 'the many opportunities for records [in aviation] for a woman, and she was the first in Australia who would be ready to take them' (p. 131). For Millicent, these records were not to be, of course; instead, Vicars suggests the richness of the life she has already lived. Sitting in the ferry saloon, Millicent pulls out her notebook to sketch some rough notes on a sheet of paper for an autobiographical novel – 'A Life' (p. 132) – she's been working on: 'Her own intensity and longing struck her; nothing was simple. But that was why it mattered: there was so much to be written, to be explored' (p. 132).

The second half of the book is a more imaginative chronicle, built on 'known events' (p. 341), of everything that came before 1925, beginning with the Harvey family history. This ancestral backgrounding and the years dealing with Millicent's childhood could have been tedious reading had Vicars not secured the necessary interest in Millicent in the first half of

the book. Here we see how her role as the eldest daughter of an ambitious farmer-settler, Edmund Harvey and his wife, Georgina – a woman who bore seven children and largely raised them on isolated homesteads – shaped the woman Millicent became. Millicent grew up cooking, cleaning, caring for, and even educating her younger siblings, and she brings this sense of duty with her to an unfulfilling marriage. In many ways, Millicent, born in 1878, was a woman of her time, who didn't much question her lot, or the role of women in society, at least until 'her lot' became unbearable, and she had to find the inner resources to start again after the breakdown of her marriage; here we meet an adventurous woman discovering her own agency. There is narrative satisfaction in the way Vicars juxtaposes Millicent as a middle-aged woman who finds freedom and independence in her ability to fly an aircraft, with the curious, overburdened child who rides horses and reads books to escape. Much of this achieved through the careful rendering of Millicent's voice. Constructed and calibrated by Vicars from her writings, Millicent's interior life, from childhood to middle age, evolves with an elegant sensibility as she ages and matures. The voice is especially adept at conveying her disappointments and the depressive episodes that plague her as she gets older, without ever falling into self-pity.

As with any book that details white settlement in Australia, the stench of colonialism is pervasive and unavoidable, even if it is mostly in the subtext: white men claiming vast tracks of the Australian interior that did not belong to them. As Millicent's father, Edmund Harvey (1850-1933), accrues various homesteads in western New South Wales, the family's wealth and social standing as 'landowners' increases exponentially. It is uncomfortable reading, and it also highlights a particular limitation of biofiction when speaking from the perspective of the colonisers: the author-narrator is limited in the ways they can intervene to condemn the historical prejudices and actions of their subjects, as they might with a straightforward biography. They must let their subjects inhabit that world as it was, which can mean minimising or countering, with fictional interventions, the racism of their point-of-view characters and saving any explanation for these choices to the afterword, as Vicars does in his 'Author's Note'. 'Johnny' (a stockman) and 'Mimsie' (a domestic), the two Aboriginal characters who work for the Harveys, are, as Vicar hopes, portrayed 'respectfully' (p. 341), but their servitude to a white family and their dispossession from the land, are still facts that cannot be erased, though many have tried, from the historical record.

This 'positive' relationship between servants and colonisers also includes a visit by some Aboriginal children to the homestead where, during a storm, they 'squatted together on the verandah' (p. 162) with Millicent while she showed them her books. This fictional scene is, by Vicars' own admission, a 'counterpoint' (p. 341) to the conversation that follows between Millicent and her mother, Georgina, after she sends the children away. Georgina tells 7-year-old Millicent her grandmother, Margery Harvey, rescued a white child from an Aboriginal clan: '"Grandmother says it was known for Aborigines to sometimes take white children," her mother said' (p. 163). As Georgina tells it, Margery 'induced the gins to give her this child' so she could give it a 'badly-needed wash', where upon she 'realised it was a

white child!' (p. 163). Georgina continues: 'Thinking and feeling for the mother of the child who may have been at that moment yearning for the baby "so cruelly stolen from her" as her grandmother put it, she treated the mite as she would one of her own...' (p. 163). It's a discomfiting scene, both for its naked racism and ironic acknowledgement of the Stolen Generations, but Vicars deserves some credit for including this account, which, he says, 'was Margery's own experience' (p. 341), as it would have been easier to exclude it and pretend it wasn't embedded in the Harvey family history.

Despite this unease and perhaps others, *Beyond the Sky* is an exemplary work of historical biofiction and does much to advance the genre as a legitimate form of biographical writing. Vicars' retelling of the forgotten story of Millicent Bryant is both fulsome and eloquent, and while some may take issue with its fictionalisations, what can't be disputed is the author's passion for his subject and the project that became this book.

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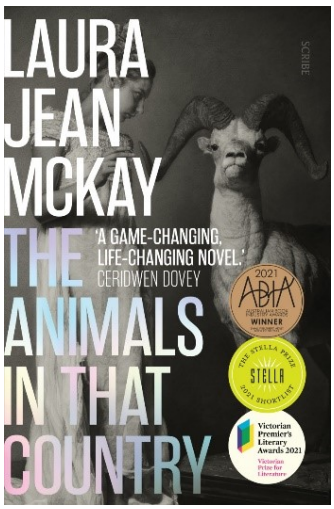
TEXT review

Speculative pandemic challenge to human exceptionalism

review by Josephine Browne



Laura Jean McKay
The Animals in That Country
Scribe Publications, Melbourne VIC 2020
ISBN 9781925849530
Pb 288pp AUD29.99

The title of McKay's debut novel will alert creative scholars to McKay's intertextuality, and the situation of her work within an ongoing conversation. Named for both the titular poem in Margaret Atwood's collection of 1968, and the name of the collection itself, the use of this title sets the scene for a philosophical querying of human relationships with other animals. This adds to emerging work that shifts the position of 'animal stories' as childhood

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concern, to the realm of adult readers seriously attending to human-animal relations (in Australia, for instance, Dovey's *Only the Animals*, Celermajer's *Summertime*, and Coetzee's work with Australian novelist 'Elizabeth Costello', beginning with *The Lives of Animals*). Like Atwood, McKay imagines a world of altered relationships, 'where the animals have faces', but in McKay's imaginary, this world is not an Indigenous Canadian past, but an Australian dystopian future; presciently, the threat to human society comes from the emergence of a zoonotic pandemic.

McKay's novel was released in March 2020, during the first national Covid lockdown. It describes a flu spreading north from Melbourne through the continent. It is, in the tradition of other Australian fiction (for instance, *Floundering*, *Swallow the Air* and *Blood*), also a road trip novel, but with singular companions. In this road trip, the travellers are not of the same species. The choice of protagonist in Jean, a hard-drinking tourist guide from a northern wildlife park, and her attempts to learn to effectively understand Sue – a significant, if dingo, deuteragonist in her own right – accord s opportunity for the humour of miscommunication misunderstandings throughout: 'Hang on,' Jean tells Sue. To which she replies, 'Where/does it hang.' (p. 85). This humour situates the novel within an Australian tradition and provides a necessary tempering of the wider philosophical implications of the significant issue of human-animal relations.

McKay's decision in representing these communications between humans and other animals is sagacious. As Jean reads on social media, 'Infected humans appear able to communicate (encode) and translate (decode) previously unrecognisable non-verbal communications via major senses such as sight, smell, taste, touch, and sound with non-human animals' (p. 35). This draws the reader's attention to hitherto diminished human senses, a decentring of the autonomous human subject, in order to reconsider the world from the perspectives of other species. In thinking of Jean's granddaughter, for example, Sue's 'body sings a picture … bruises on the girl's scrawny legs … freckles not yet appeared on her skin, like the wee that will need to happen in an hour, like the washed sheets she slept on, and the sting of adventurous fear when she took Lee's hand' (p. 112).

Jean, gradually succumbing to zooflu, realises the animals' communications challenge all the assumptions she has hitherto made about what other animals are thinking, needing and wanting. Mice bred and gassed to feed the birds of prey in the park 'sit up on their haunches, alive, horrified… They scream bloody murder, the death of everyone, death in the cages and death in the walls' (p. 75). Jean's humancentric assumptions and infantilised speech for other animals has been a significant part of the bond between her and her young granddaughter, Kim, with whom she dreams of opening a no-kill animal shelter, *Kim and Granny's Animal Place* (p. 39). When Kim eagerly says, 'I want the flu, Granny. Don't you?' Jean replies easily, ''Course I bloody do' (p. 37).

Jean and Sue share a seven-year history. Jean found Sue with her brothers 'cuddled like beans under a bit of tin' (p. 5), and when the pup's eyes open, Jean is her first sight. When Jean's son Lee takes Kim to follow whales in the south, the road trip to find them demands a tracker with real skill. Jean must rely on Sue to locate her kin, among the 'broken roads and orange dust of a country so big I'll never see the end of it, never find such a small girl' (p. 167).

While McKay acknowledges the work of Atwood, this novel engages with questions of human relationships with other animals in ways that develop Atwood's conflation of human faces with value and personhood, to philosophically examine the question of language as the distinction on which notions of human exceptionalism are frequently posited (Harroway 2016, Wolfe & Mitchell 2003). The structure of the narrative enables subversive critique of relationships between species, destabilising normative boundaries, on which a range of hierarchies are founded (Chang & Corman 2021, Probyn-Rapsey 2015), while also linking to Atwood's work through a similar examination and despair regarding the limits of human empathy.

Jean has behind her a life of addiction and fractured relationships: her connection with other animals as the 'rescuer' of those with 'problems' has hitherto dominated her life, becoming central to her relationship with Kim. In McKay's establishment of Jean's 'voicing' of the animals around her, she demonstrates a foundation from which to consider what it might mean were humans actually able to hear what the other animals are saying. Jean avows she loves other animals: she rescues them, works with them, and includes them in her home, relationships and imagined future. The discrepancy between what Jean has understood she is doing among other animals, and what the zooflu brings to her attention, becomes a riveting, confronting and often humorous narrative, 'You think it'd be easier now that we can talk' (p. 82), she thinks ruefully. The use of the road trip across the desert enables McKay to include a vast range of other animal encounters and communications within the narrative, slowly building a sense of the world as a crowded, multispecies environment, where the lived experiences of many species we have learned to ignore, kill or eat are now included. This capacity of dystopia to exaggerate an aspect of the present in order to expose its flawed logic is richly rendered in this new world that Jean and Sue's experiences gradually create for the reader.

Jean and Sue encounter Australian wildlife, mice bred as raptor food, farmed pigs, dairy cows, chickens, rats, domesticated cats and dogs, bats, flies, mosquitos and whales. McKay's decision to depict communication as multi-sensorial and fully embodied, challenges the concept of communication itself, and particularly the common valorising of human language, in drawing attention to an embodied subjectivity in the worlds of other animals. Here, in a view from an alternate angle, humans appear both limited and inadequate, compared to other animals: 'If I've got my mouth, she's got all her flesh and bones' (p. 84), Jean admits of Sue. Jean struggles to comprehend these emerging

communications, 'like some language I barely remember' (p. 84), fumbling to piece together the rich mixture of signals: 'The smell from Sue's hairy armpits, the microscopic sounds in her throat, the quiet and constant song for blood across her gums' (p. 117). McKay enables the reader to enter this struggle for comprehension, rendering the communications in series of poetic lines: 'Gasping/ over the/ lock. (I'm/ mingy.) It'll call me and/ I'd like/ to get a drink of/ it.' (p. 82).

McKay's communication between animals and humans eschews sentimentality. It is as raw and real as Jean and Sue: 'The feeling of everything I ever wanted rushing at me like night birds,' Jean realises, 'Scratching and ripping – no joy' (p. 72). Sue is a carnivore for whom packs and hierarchies are normal – an animal with needs to eat and mate, eagerly seeing her next meal in many of the other animals they encounter, such as a cat: 'I'll/eat your skull. (Claws in/my/throat.)' (pp. 201-202).

Jean's relentless confrontation with the numerous 'entanglements' (as Critical Animal Studies scholars describe them) of humans and other species is at the heart of this unsettling narrative (see Gruen 2015). While Jean is carnivorous, her confrontations with a truck load of pigs, for example, provides McKay with a way to explore the disjunct between eating for sustenance, contemporary intensive farming practices and animal sentience. But there are no simple answers here; these pigs are already genetically modified for the sake of consumption, and any intervention by Jean is ethically fraught. Conscious she is lying to the pigs, she releases them into the desert scrub and a slow death, assuring them, 'It's all good… Just keep going' (pp. 128-129). Passages such as these resituate attention toward notions of interdependence that are often deliberately rendered invisible in capitalist, colonialist discourses, as described by research in the environmental humanities (Plumwood 2002, Bekoff 2014, Gaard 2017).

Jean does not experience any transformative epiphany; she fondly mocks the 'silliness' of her son, Lee, 'always talking like he invented inspirational postcards (p. 61), 'a free spirit' (p. 68), and derides, '[t]hose animal nutters' (p. 129), the animal liberationists. Increasingly ill and frantically trying to locate Kimberly among the chaos of a disintegrating human society, Jean has little time for introspection. With a festering bite from Sue on her hand, she is frequently inebriated, hallucinating, or overcome by grief.

Other humans in the world of *The Animals in That Country*, however, have various reactions to this pandemic, often eerily mirroring the Covid world into which the book has been launched. We see masks, fear, government lockdown orders, antiscientific and religious interpretations of the events, as well as enforced and novel 'cures' that promise an easy return to 'normal'. In addition, McKay represents a vast range of human responses to being able to understand the mutliplicitous messages emerging from other animals' bodies: some stampede zoos and wildlife parks, in an effort to release captive animals, others stare, fixated at the ground, or at tree bark, as the micro insects become explicable for them. Most,

however, plug their ears with government-distributed earplugs to avoid the madness that comes with the knowledge of what has been unheard: the grief of dairy cows for removed calves, the promise of humans as carrion for birds of prey, or the disgusted powerlessness of animals kept as pets. In the most extreme example, a religious community bores holes in human heads and eats domestic dogs in a refusal to consider any moral implications arising from hearing the voices of the many animals around them. The realism in this range of awed and fearful human reactions to pandemic goes well beyond the childhood fantasy of being able to 'talk to the animals': McKay's text gestures to a necessity to both confront and reconsider a range of unsettling implications about normalised relationships with other animals, particularly in the light of zoonotic pandemics, as human populations come into more frequent contact with multiple species.

Reminders of the animal status of humans abound in this novel. Sue, having been raised at the park from a pup, sees Jean as her kin, even as Jean seeks '[t]he real ones' (p. 15), while later admitting '[h]eaven could fall down on me, and I'd still be looking through the debris for Sue' (p. 263). When Sue and Jean stop at a roadhouse, they both get drunk, along with the owner of the bar, Jamie. Later, Sue and Jamie, animals both, urinate inside. The human as animal has been established in this pandemic world, reinforced by whale calls to 'come home' to the ocean (p. 207). Jean's status as she travels home with Sue confounds normative human/animal boundaries, as she finds herself howling with the dingoes; 'crawling from the hay bed with my gob open … the sound that comes out of me is strong' (p. 243). By the novel's denouement, soldiers deployed to administer the antidote ask people if they remember how to talk, or if they've 'gone animal' (p. 271).

On their trip back north, which their lack of petrol requires be a walk, Sue is the one to provide food for them both, able to hear small animal heartbeats underground and sniff out eggs. Now, Jean is presented with what Sue considers 'food', as Sue has been by her, such as 'another putrid mouse' (p. 261). Jean now feels the desperate need for Sue's companionship, for the kinship that Sue has expressed toward her throughout the novel; 'Its pack is/ my/ pack pack' (p. 204). Until now, Sue's claim of kinship has been resisted by Jean, who has insisted that her 'kin' are only and wholly human, but their relationship becomes inverted among the chaos of the collapsing human world, with Sue demoting Jean to a 'Good cat … ready to want my shit' (p. 262), asserting her authority in their pack with nips and demands. Now, Jean yearns for Sue, fears when she is away: 'Heaven could fall down on me, and I'd still be looking through the debris for Sue' (p. 263).

Atwood's poem ends in the present, with the bleak lines, 'they have the faces/of no one': McKay's distance between our country and 'that country' where animals are promoted by having human faces is not so stark. While many humans have died and others have been driven mad by the zooflu pandemic, and still others long to return to 'normal', it is difficult to imagine the post-pandemic future for McKay's characters, despite Sue being labelled 'the dingo' as Jean's ability to understand her fades. Having created a world of pandemic chaos,

and muddied boundaries between human and other-than-human worlds, McKay's reworking of Atwood's 'animals with the faces of animals', is suggestive of a world that cannot be reconstituted or returned to. While this gestures to the dystopic nature of the novel, it also raises another question: what for the humans is a madness-inducing dystopia may be experienced by the other species, now finally understood, more akin to utopia. At the same time, the narrative is pessimistic regarding human empathy, and whether it is necessary for other animals to be understood in *human terms*, rather than on their own terms, for the human species to consider other ways in which we might live together. In the light of the conflated crises of Covid and climate change, these questions have never been more pressing.

McKay's vision, then, is not the sweet comfort that talking with other animals implies from our childhood fiction. Instead, she exposes the implications of what attending to other animals' communications might really be like – abject horror and potential madness for humans. It makes *The Animals in That Country* a sobering, unsettling read, despite its many moments of humour. McKay's genius lies in the form and characters she has chosen for this novel, rendered more urgent by the coincidence of publication during a zoonotic pandemic that underscores many of the questions raised by the narrative. This is a haunting dystopic work, a sophisticated literary philosophical enquiry, and a welcome contribution to the literature promoting ongoing interrogation of human relations with other animals.

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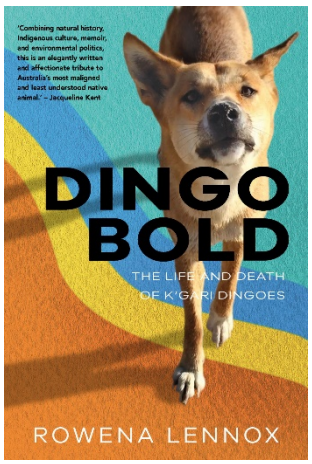
TEXT review

Matters of life and death

review by Simone Lyons



Rowena Lennox
Dingo Bold: The Life and Death of K'gari Dingoes
Sydney University Press, University of Sydney NSW 2006
ISBN 9781743327319
Pb 292pp AUD35.00

It is more than 40 years since Azaria Chamberlain was taken by a dingo near Uluru in the Northern Territory. This tragic event drew widespread attention to the proximity with which people and dingoes exist in Australia, and to the potential for interspecies conflict with devastating consequences. Understandably, other instances of dingo–human interactions have since gained much public attention, perhaps none more so than the fatal mauling of 9-year-old Clinton Gage by dingoes on K'gari, the large sand island off Queensland's east coast (also known as Fraser Island), in 2001.

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Rowena Lennox sensitively addresses these incidents in the first chapter of *Dingo Bold*, providing a fitting lead-in to an exploration of dingo–human relations in Australia and, more specifically, on K'gari. *Dingo Bold* documents Lennox's quest to learn about people's views of and feelings about dingoes, and how these affect the co-existence of dingoes, conservation, and tourism on K'gari. The book encourages greater awareness of the effects of European settlement on dingo–human relations, and especially the fraught and sometimes fatal interactions between people and dingoes. It also demonstrates the usefulness and versatility of life writing forms to enhance understandings of non-human animal others and people's relationships with them.

Dingo Bold is Lennox's second book. It follows from *Fighting Spirit of East Timor: The Life of Martinho da Costa Lopes*, Lennox's (2000) biography of East Timorese Catholic leader and political activist, the late Dom Martinho. While *Dingo Bold* does not fit so neatly into one genre, the book's unconventionality is part of its appeal. An approach that tests the limits of genre conventions suits the subject matter, since the dingo also resists being easily categorised. Pest or icon, native or introduced, wild or tame(able) – people's perceptions of the dingo are often divided and divisive. Narrated from a first-person perspective, *Dingo Bold* could best be described as memoir, but one that pushes boundaries – perhaps like the dingoes who challenge boundaries imposed on them by humans. Lennox effectively combines elements of personal and family memoir, biography, narrative journalism, historical nonfiction, travel writing and academic research to present a compelling and comprehensive account of the lives and deaths of dingoes on K'gari.

Dingo Bold opens with a brief prelude in which Lennox depicts a nervous but exciting encounter with a K'gari dingo. She describes the dingo approaching then looking up at her, seemingly 'asking for something' (p. xi), before moving behind her and walking off. Accompanying the prelude are several photographs of the dingo, all taken at some distance, with Lennox further explaining: 'I wish I had an image of his face when we conversed but photographing him would not have been conversing with him' (p. xii). The sentiment expressed here aptly sets the tone for the rest of the book – in particular, the respectful ways in which Lennox writes about other people, non-human animals, and the environment. With consideration of different views and experiences, a key message of the book is that dingoes, as much as anyone or anything else, belong on the Australian land – that this country is the dingoes' home.

From the outset of *Dingo Bold*, Lennox identifies as a writer and researcher, and as someone with a long-held fascination for and affinity with dingoes. The first chapter begins:

> There was never a time when dingoes didn't exert an illicit pull in my mind. In the 1970s when I was growing up in an outer suburb of Sydney, people were not allowed to keep them as pets. They had a reputation for being impervious to human control, a

> law unto themselves – qualities that appealed to me. Our family had blue cattle dogs, who counted dingoes among their ancestors. (p. 1)

Lennox goes on to explain how, when undertaking research about dingoes for a piece she was writing on her own dog, she became aware of the intensity of people's feelings towards, as well as the violent treatment of, dingoes. Lennox notes sheep farmers' distress resulting from dingo attacks on their stock, and government responses that enable the killing of dingoes and wild dogs. 'This violence,' Lennox observes, 'is part of the shadow story of my country' (p. 2). Recognising that many Aboriginal languages identify tame, companion dingoes separately from wild dingoes and, referring to Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) information, Lennox notes how colonisation and Aboriginal dispossession has led to companion dingoes no longer existing on K'gari (p. 22). Only wild dingoes supposedly remain on the island, and human visitors to K'gari are asked to respect the dingoes' importance to the island's ecosystem by keeping their distance from and not feeding these dingoes. In contemplating how dingoes might be coping with such human-imposed conditions, Lennox returns to her own encounter with the dingo on K'gari, advising the reader: 'Here is my story of the dingo I called Bold and how I came to know him' (p. 23). Lennox's subsequent narrative about this dingo, after whom the book is titled, is intertwined with stories of other K'gari dingoes as well as various people and places relevant to dingo–human relations.

Lennox recounts travelling to K'gari and the nearby Hervey Bay area twice in 2015 to talk with people on different sides of the dingo management debate. The anthropocentric concept of 'managing' other species apparently pervades much of the narrative around K'gari dingoes. Among those whom Lennox meets with are QPWS rangers, Butchulla people (the Traditional Owners of K'gari), and animal welfare activists. Lennox attends a forum at Hervey Bay where farmers share gruesome details of dingo attacks on livestock, as well as accounts of symbiotic relations between farmers and dingoes (pp. 36-39). She also describes taking a two-day 'safari tour' of K'gari with a group of mostly international tourists, explaining:

> I was there to be a credulous tourist. ...I wanted to be as dispassionate as I could be, to hear and see different perspectives. I also just wanted to talk about dingoes. I thought of the tour as research. (pp. 173-4)

Through a wide-ranging and balanced approach to research, which includes drawing on various interviews, official reports, existing scholarship, personal observations, anecdotes and photographs, *Dingo Bold* provides important insights into people's diverse views and feelings about dingoes and how these affect the treatment of K'gari dingoes.

In straightforward terms, Lennox details the methods and bureaucratic processes by which QPWS deals with dingoes and dingo–human encounters on K'gari. These include the practice of fitting dingoes with different coloured ear tags that enable people to identify

individual dingoes more easily. For example, the dingo whom Lennox calls Bold is referred to by QPWS as PurpleGreenYellow (shortened to PuGY) to correspond with the colours on his tag (pp. 118–20). Lennox details a further coding system that QPWS applies to rate and record individual dingoes' interactions with people, and the anthropomorphising and criminalising of dingoes' behaviours recorded in 'dingo interaction reports' – for example, dingoes' actions might be described as 'loitering', 'soliciting' and 'stealing' (p. 91). The human subjectivity at play in reporting and acting on dingo–human interactions is also alluded to, with Lennox noting: 'If humans approach, lure, feed and hit dingoes, or throw things and drive at them – all actions recorded in the interaction reports – dingoes are culpable' (p. 91). Those dingoes whose behaviours are deemed too risky for people – who infringe human-imposed rules – are themselves at risk of being killed by government authorities, as evidenced by Lennox's recounting of reported incidents that led to the killing of certain dingoes. While recognising that QPWS rangers are tasked with 'trying to keep people safe and trying to preserve a sustainable dingo population' (p. 217), Lennox appropriately and respectfully questions this system.

Lennox describes QPWS's dingo management strategy as 'a struggle', the essence of which 'is the human insistence that dingoes need to conform to human ideas about how they should behave' (p. 213). While the attention here is on K'gari dingoes, Lennox's observation is consistent with broader understandings in the field of human–animal studies around perceptions of wildlife, such as the assertion by scientist and animal behaviourist Marc Bekoff that those animals regarded as 'wild' are expected to stay beyond the borders determined by humans and that 'conflicts arise because wild animals are curious, or hungry, and they don't necessarily recognize the boundaries we put up' (2010, p. 33). Animals who fail to conform to people's expectations of them can become, as Lennox notes with reference to the labelling and categorisation of species and to animal studies scholar Fiona Probyn-Rapsey's discussion on ferals, 'killable' (p. 17). *Dingo Bold* tackles the realities of these kinds of conflicts, and their consequences, resulting from the impositions that people place on non-human animals.

Lennox apparently sets out to seek greater understanding of, specifically, dingoes' experiences in relation to people's perceptions of them, yet *Dingo Bold* achieves much more than this. It brings into focus the complex entanglements at play between humans and other species, effectively promoting consideration of the importance and agency of non-human animals in an interconnected world. In doing so, *Dingo Bold* also highlights the cross-disciplinary relevance and reach of life writing practice, including for such fields as human–animal studies. With this book's contribution to understandings of human–animal relations, and Lennox's original and rigorous approach to the subject matter, *Dingo Bold* sits well within Sydney University Press's Animal Publics series. In the foreword to *Animal Death* (eds Johnston & Probyn-Rapsey 2013), another book in the same series, Voiceless Patron the Hon Michael Kirby points out that 'animal welfare and protection, and death' are topics that most people would rather not think about, and that the combination of these is 'likely to

upset, repel and distress many readers' (p. xi). This assertion may be similarly pertinent to *Dingo Bold*, given the book's detailed coverage of the lives and deaths of K'gari dingoes. Yet with Lennox's considered handling of these matters, *Dingo Bold* ultimately offers hope for the future of dingoes and dingo–human relations.

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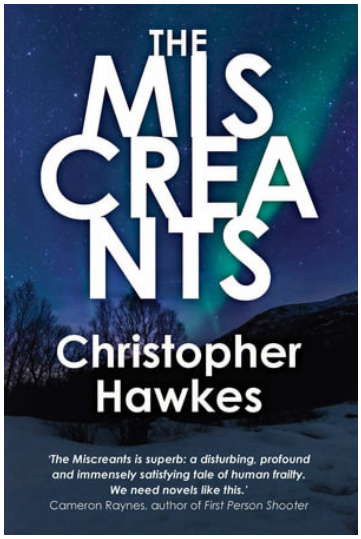
TEXT review

A narrative of loss

review by Reuben Mackey



Christopher Hawkes
The Miscreants
Glimmer Press SA 2021
ISBN 9780648463528
Pb 268pp AUD27.99

From the beginning of Christopher Hawkes' debut novel, *The Miscreants*, the reader is thrust into a desolate world, seemingly without hope or reprieve from the foreboding tenor of grief, punctuated by a landscape of indifferent, ever-falling snow. The very first line sends us tumbling into this world: 'Of all that was involved, the snow was the least of it' (p.

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9). Harry and Ethan Walker, half-brothers, are out walking with their father in what can only be described as an idyllic scene of family tranquillity: 'From the top of Primrose Hill, London was momentarily beautiful – the black shoestring of the canal; the sprawl of the zoo through Regents Park; the landmarks of the Centrepoint building and BT telephone tower just visible through the freezing air' (p. 9). Within a page Harry and Ethan's mother, Nat, has thrown herself off the balcony and committed suicide, shattering of the tableau of domestic life; the festive season transformed as Ethan sits 'kneeling beneath their balcony in a splash as red as Christmas, frowning determinedly, as he tried to push pieces of his mother back in place' (p. 10).

The ripples of her suicide move out through time, turning a happy family into a fragmented one. The narrative leaps forward fifteen years to 1994: Harry is away in Canada with his girlfriend, Sam; Ethan is supposed to be at university in Brighton, but he hasn't been in communication for a long time; and their father is drinking himself to death, alone in the same flat, except for the help of his neighbour, Grace. For the first half of the novel, we are with Harry as he drifts initially through Canada, sleeping in his girlfriend's parents' basement. Sam's family provides a parody of what Harry desires: a connected, orderly family. Their house has an 'almost supernatural cleanliness' (p. 16), situated within a 'neighbourhood [that] was monochromatic' (p. 17), presided over by a prototypical patriarchal figure in Mr Polanski, Sam's father, who even provides Harry with the opportunity of work so he can stay in Canada. The contrast is further heightened by Harry's father's drunken calls, pleading him to come home, their conversation overshadowed by the sound of the apartment's blaring television.

Harry, though, can't settle, seemingly set in his ways of being a titular miscreant. Back home, he and his friends made money selling drugs, while in Canada, in order to afford money for his visa application, he steals traveller's cheques. The revelation of this to Sam is what ultimately sends him scuttling back to London, getting back home before the police can find him. Back home, though, the desolateness of what he tried to escape seeps back into his life: his father wasting away, his friends pulling him back into the drug trade, and the never-ending snow. He drifts through life, a young adult without any overriding narrative, constantly in search of anything that might give his life shape and meaning, a figure who constantly 'lapsed into tense silence and … crunched through the snow again alone' (p. 41). Everything in the novel seems tensed with this sense of desolate isolation, clutching at anything that might give life a semblance of possible meaning. Young mothers move through the landscape, 'pale, harried, their children hardly visible beneath all the blankets – and a sad tiredness move through them' (p. 40). Or, later in Brighton – where the West Pier is described as 'a ruin' (p. 54) – Harry watches 'a seagull on the pavement in front of him disembowel a bin bag, pick through its guts and fly off with half a Cornish pastry as its prize' (p. 57). For human and animals alike, it is a world of desperation, as if all that mattered were mere survival. As Harry feels later on, it was like 'picking his way

through a shipwreck. …Rain was falling outside, a damp, spectral world that he stumbled into' (p. 62).

In his attempt to find Ethan in Brighton, though, at least Harry is stumbling towards something, even if it might be a vain attempt to create a sense of order. Ethan, meanwhile, is not in Brighton, having seemingly vanished without a trace, his apartment abandoned except for some photographs half burnt left in the sink, 'shrivelled and black and collapsing at his touch' (p. 64). However, this is not the only thing he finds: 'From the perspective of the doorway, he saw it – the same triangle diagram from the book, marked out in charcoal, the wavy lines just about the skirting board, the UFO or meteor an equal distance from the ceiling, opposite where Ethan would have slept' (pp. 64-65). The mark is from a book, 'an old sci-fi paperback called *Quest of the Iridiumites*' by Xavier Priestly (p. 23), that Ethan had sent Harry just before he left Canada. Appropriately, Harry's search for a narrative and his search for Ethan will be guided by a narrative, and excerpts from the novel are reproduced for the reader.

Priestly, though, isn't just a novelist, but the founder of the religious doomsday cult, Iridiumism, named after the metal. Later in the novel, a website informs Harry about the particulars of the cult:

> Iridiumism combines Christian mythology with elements of ecological and New Age movements. In their theology, Earth is a garden that a transcendent but physically ailing alien race has planted with the seeds of consciousness, and that humans – the most sentient of all the species – have been coaxed up the evolutionary ladder by the appearance of leaders, the last of whom being Priestly, the offspring of the periodic mating of aliens and humans. Once a sufficient level of consciousness has been attained, the chosen will be transported to the aliens' paradisiacal home planet and escape Earth's looming destruction. (p. 84)

One of the other aspects of the cult is the embracing of polygamy, but only for Priestly, who ends up fathering over thirty children with a number of different women of various ages. The excerpts themselves provide much needed comic relief, written in a cliché drawl of bad sci-fi tropes: chosen ones, visions of utopia, charismatic leaders, long voyages to new lands, and a disease that threatens to wipe out the population.

From this point on, Hawkes' writing accelerates the already well-established nihilistic mood. In desperation, Harry ventures to Sweden where he hopes Ethan is with his girlfriend, Gretta, but Ethan is long gone, leaving behind a heavily pregnant Gretta. Harry, confronted with another defeat, is even more lost, struck as he staring at a mirror where 'the face looking back at him was his own, but he felt no relation to it, as though it was that of a stranger or an anonymous body washed up on a distant beach' (p. 98). Or, further on, still in Sweden, he realises with dismay, 'The core of him, his constant, the internal star that had guided him nowhere' (p. 106). And his actions throughout the rest of his section mirror this

disorientation, a burning match that can never settle in any one place, which will have potentially dire consequences both for Gretta and himself.

The second half of the novel shifts to Ethan's perspective, alternating between his time at university in Brighton in the past and his present attempts to forge a new family with the children of Priestly in the small Norwegian village of Å, the same place where *Quest of the Iridiumites* ends. In the same way that Harry has been trying to give his life coherent meaning – a narrative to live by – Ethan has been actively trying to turn a fiction into reality. As one of Priestly's wives tells Harry, 'Towards the end [of the novel], they go to an island. This is where the spaceship meets them. Your brother had come to the improbable conclusion that the island was not a fiction. That it was real, and the location of a safe-house built by Priestley' (Hawkes, 2021, p. 124).[1] What draws him to the island is the promise of narrative, of order, of family. What has left him disillusioned and adrift for so long – the death of his mother, but also the lack of knowledge about his father—is answered in the belief that Priestly must be his father; a fiction he must make true at the expense of everything, endowed as he is by the blessing of his mother: 'Who was he? So much of what he could remember of his mother was her telling him that he was chosen, that he was special, while his brother was just another child' (p. 172). And this sense of being one of the anointed pervades his entire view of the world, whether it's his belief that people who see him walking by will be 'remembering him again when they [see] his headshot on a book jacket in years to come' (p. 165) or thinking that everyone could be reduced to 'meat bags waiting to spill' (p. 180).

The myth that he has come to believe, derived as it is from Priestly's novel, is of an impending plague of apocalyptic proportions, which makes for an unnerving context given the malaise of the last two years. The impending destruction filters Ethan's every thought and perception, so much does he have to believe in its reality. A trip to a shopping centre opens up an apocalyptic vista: 'Looking up, he no longer saw the shopping centre but a dreadful waltz of flashing teeth, set to beeps and bells and ringtones, a dance of death, whirling in this ever-brightening light, about to flare out and take with it cloth and skin' (Hawkes, 2021, p. 234). Escaping to this small Norwegian town with his motley group of followers – his new family – is designed to protect against the impending doom, a self-sufficient community where they can holdout whilst everyone dies and begin again. This is Ethan's vision: 'And with it a great silence would breathe from the land, yielding a wind

[1] One of the strange things about the use of Priestly's name is the way it is spelt differently depending on the context. From what I can tell, it is 'Priestly' in relation to his book or when the narrator and certain characters, such as Harry, are speaking, but becomes 'Priestley' when one of his wives or Gretta is speaking. This could be a mere typographical coincidence or a sign that only those who are initiated in the cult know the 'true' spelling of the leader's name. But then again, in the website entry that Harry reads, the different spelling is used interchangeably, so it's probably just an error.

that would circle the earth. There would be space, an abundance that hadn't been known for thousands of years, a new age beginning. He wished it would come soon' (p. 160).

It is only through this apocalypse that a desired Utopia can be formed, an idea that pervades Priestly's *Quest of the Iridiumites*. Humankind has become endemically sinful and a purge is the only chance at a reckoning. As Priestly's surrogate, William, tells the novel's narrator: 'The cancer has grown so large that it is greater than the animal itself. It is a host we would well be rid of. …We offer you Utopia' (p. 52). It is worth remembering that narratives of apocalypse work through the metaphor of regeneration: the past and present are sick, degenerative and bring about their own downfall, ushering in a new age of health and prosperity. The danger, as Frank Kermode argues in *The Sense of an Ending*, is that 'Fictions, notably the fiction of apocalypse, turn easily into myths; people will live by that which was designed only to know by' (1966, p. 112). In Kermode's thinking, fictions are narratives that we know to be fictive, whereas myths are fictions that we have forgotten are fictions. Instead, they take on the force of reality, and that reality must be made to conform to a fiction, so 'that fictions are to be justified or verified by their practical effects. Thus the world is changed to conform with a fiction, as by the murder of Jews' (p. 109).

In *The Miscreants*, Ethan's conviction that his vision of the world is true must be preserved at all costs, and his behaviour becomes an increasingly desperate attempt to maintain the truth of his narrative. Tragic accidents become 'rite[s] of initiation,' events that 'were meant to coincide' (p. 192). At the same time, the world must be conformed to his will, as though he were a parody of the Nietzschean *übermensch*, personified in a dream where he is 'chasing down prey': 'It didn't matter what or whom, only the catching and killing mattered, the rending of flesh with claws and teeth. It was a dream of freedom because killers were that free. Free and powerful' (p. 174). It is an image of himself that can only end in pain and suffering, as the reader is given a sense of powerful foreboding as Ethan's narrative begins to crack and fray. The power of the novel resides in this tension of inevitability, knowing where it will end, powerless as we are to change anything. In a novel about the way family distorts the progression of life, a hopeful, redemptive future seems forever out of reach. Instead, we are left remembering Yeats's image of apocalypse in 'The Second Coming', as the novel slouches towards its conclusion:

> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned. (1990, p. 187)

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TEXT review

Exceedingly uncomfortable and always amorous…

review by Sarah Pearce

Gabrielle Everall
Dona Juanita
Buon-Cattivi Press, Adelaide SA 2020
ISBN 9781922314017
Pb 170pp AUD24.95

Gabrielle Everall's *Dona Juanita* is a visceral, slightly mad book that explores sex, love, lust, abject shame and shamelessness. In its simplest form, this verse novel is an unrelenting examination of unrequited desire. Everall's characters, particularly Werthergirl, lust after boys who do not love or desire them back. Lot, the first crush we meet, is 'highly ranked in angelology' and our protagonist 'wanted to kneel before his eyes' (p. 27). Several pages later, her 'paltry vagina' throbs after him; in the old power station, 'he won't allow me to kiss his

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lips only his cock' (p. 30). Our protagonist debases herself before him, her desire for him. As I read further, it becomes clear that Everall is meditating on desire for desire's sake – that her protagonists are turned on by their own desire, revel in their own desire. Much later, the current protagonist explains this about Adymson, her second major crush: 'even when / he told me / to fuck off / he aroused me' (p. 64). Everall's descriptions of the masochism of unreturned desire are unrelenting: 'I bash my head against the resounding walls of unrequited lust and jealousy. I press my loaded gun of Alba's actualised desire into my third eye' (p. 31-32).

As has perhaps become clear already, this is an exceedingly uncomfortable book. As the chapters and experiences of our protagonists wear on, I realise that I am reading a book about abuse: the more mundane forms of abuse inherent in loving and being loved through to self-abuse, institutional abuse, rape and incest.

Regarding some of the heavier content, Everall refuses to hold back. Lines like 'I was raped / in a Nick Cave t-shirt / when I was only 19' are surely intended to sucker-punch – they hit hard and fast and linger pages later. Lines like this echo and ricochet against all that I have read so far and all that is to come. Everall does desolation well, and ardently; her brevity is, at times, stopping, frightening: 'I am as neglected as a poem. / It's just nothing and rape' (p. 83).

Beyond these visceral descriptions of trauma, abuse and sado/masochism, Everall also engages more philosophically with lust. Discrete sections of the novel examine desire as a politicised artefact. My favourite prose poetry passage in the book, 'The Heterosexual Knack', explores desires in relation to epistemophilia, fan fiction and queer theory:

> I desire in reverse of the heterosexual knack. Reading queer theory in bed simulates having it off with a lover… Wow that's great, she responded to the queer theory, like it was her lover after bringing her to orgasm. Telling her to stop reading French post-structuralist theories was like telling her to stop breathing. She reads lesbian erotica to be politically correct, secretly imagining a man as the leading female character… A man. A man. It has to be a man. (p. 36)

Everall points to something slippery here – the interface between female heterosexual desire and feminism and just how the (mostly) heterosexual subject feels about her own desire for men. Her barefaced admission of this desire to appear lesbian and be politically correct, and particularly her secret substitution subterfuge, is refreshing and highlights a conversation that I believe to be very worthwhile. How do we reconcile sex and politics in an increasingly compartmentalised and politicised world?

Everall's discussion of queer experience, through Kewpie and Venetia, in the second part of the novel is similarly frank and exhilarating:

> Back at the bunker Venetia and Kewpie bathe to the masculinity of Fugazi. Small shreds of Venetia's womb inhabit the bathwater like grated beetroot. (p. 49)
>
> Kewpie scuba dives down on Venetia thinking her cunt is the duskiest cunt she ever tastes. Venetia smokes from the leftover remains of Kewpie's rollies. Tasting Kewpie's taste between burning fingers remind her of her mother. Never to be blood brothers always saliva sisters. (p. 49)

Descriptions of queer desire are visceral in a different way to unrequited heterosexual desires. These two characters are saturated in blood and food metaphors, 'a multi-layered cream cake' (47) of 'straight off the press hot pressed love hot caressed love treacle dripping maple sickly sweet syrup ten stacks waffle pancake love' (p. 9). This is a rich, overflowing, satiated, perhaps too-much kind of desire; it sits in opposition to the distant, desperate craving for men exhibited throughout much of the rest of the text.

Inevitably, however, Venetia morphs into Werthergirl, 'as soon as Venetia sells her dyke status for straight girl fantasies' (p. 55), after (re)encountering those patriarchal figures of division – Freud and Lacan (pp. 51-53) – and perhaps, crushingly, after satisfying her desire to fuck girls. Much later in the text, Everall gestures again towards the links between politics and sexuality – she lives in 'a lesbian feminist separatist witch / household' and 'we were all incest survivors / it was incest / for breakfast, lunch and tea' (p. 96). This tension between politics and sexuality, desire and lack and fulfilment, is never resolved by Everall – because how can it be?

Everall's use of language is dizzyingly varied throughout the novel. As she moves from a more discursive prose style to starkly minimal stanzas, this variation in style is unsettling. One example that disconcerted me long after reading was this: 'desire peeled off her body like grated skin petals of lust' (p. 55). The heavy, almost un-poetic repetition (and unnecessary similification) of this line exemplifies Everall's refusal to shy away from the ugly and the monstrous. At times, she seems to delight in a kind of clunky over-writing or heavy-handed deliberation that contrasts surprisingly with her astute and spare stanzas about language itself.

Late in the novel, this stanza captures something central about the aim of the text:

> language is heteroglossia –
> under one layer of
> talking shop is a layer
> of lay (p. 79)

She wields various 'glossia' deftly throughout *Dona Juanita* – the queer, the hetero, Dona Juanita, Werthergirl, Venetia and Kewpie, the siren, the whore, the unlovable, the unfuckable and the prized. Thus, Everall sits neatly among post-structuralist peers, avoiding reductionism

by expressing many pluralities simultaneously. This multiplicity can be a little confusing, but I rather think this is the point. Everall's protagonists return, always, to the this 'layer / of lay' – to the sex that runs through their minds, their and the book's veins, and gushes through every encounter with these crushes and lovers, from Lot to Lacan.

Inspired as it is by Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* (1978), *Dona Juanita* can be viewed as an 'affirmation' of the lover and her experience. Like Barthes, she offers:

> a portrait – but not a psychological portrait; instead, a structural one which offers the reader a discursive site: the site of someone speaking within himself, *amorously*, confronting the other (the loved object), who does not speak. (Barthes 1978, p. 3)

Dona Juanita is obsessed with sex and with obsession itself – it is often overbearing, often confronting and always *amorous*. Everall constructs her protagonists in relation to the loved other, who remains largely and ominously silent. She centres the desire of her protagonists over the voices of these others, perhaps in the attempt to redress (at least in part) the power imbalances and abuses she observes in the world around them.

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