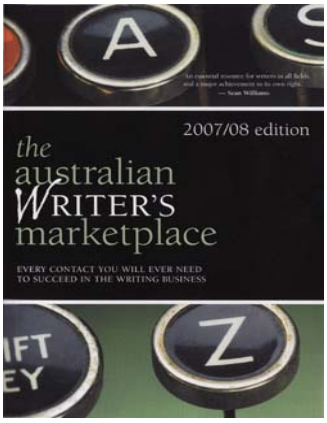
**TEXT Vol 11 No 1 (April 2007)**

## Reviews contents

***TEXT* Review**

# Writer's guide makes for easier homecoming

## *review by Valerie Jeremijenko*




*The Australian Writer's Marketplace: 2007/08 edition*
Compiled and edited by Queensland Writers Centre
Queensland Writers Centre, Brisbane, 2006
ISBN 0-646-45994-5
790 pp. Pb. AUD 49.95

When I was a graduate student in an MFA program in the States my teacher insisted that by the second semester we were submitting our final stories with evidence of having sent them to at least 50 different journals. To help us on our way she opened her little black file box of contacts and, lingering over each card, telling stories of rejection with each of them, she presented us with ten she thought would work for our pieces. We were on our own for the other 40. So referring to the early 1990s edition of the US-based *Writer's Market* I combed through the close to 7000 entries, checking submission guidelines, deadlines and the dream possibility of pay, to identify a possible home for my story. That first semester I got 49 rejection letters, but even without the one acceptance that finally came this requirement to submit was perhaps the most valuable lesson of my studies. Not only did it make me write, rewrite, and rework each piece in preparation for publication, but it taught me to drain my bank account if necessary for postage, to treat checking my mailbox as the highlight of my day, to identify a rejection letter from the thickness and smell of the envelope and, mostly, to own, treasure and keep current my edition of the *Marketplace*.

Now as I start my slow but inevitable return to Australia, finding and studying *The Australian Writer's Marketplace* has been invaluable. Not only do the articles included reinforce and reiterate all the lessons that I learnt in 'grad school' (write, never stop, submit) but the over 2200 listings reinforce the growth, dynamism and potential in the Australian market. Subtitled *Every contact you will ever need to succeed in the writing business*, the *Australian Writer's Marketplace* includes listings for magazines, journals, newspapers, publishers, literary agents, and writing

services. It includes information on industry organizations, script markets and (new this year) a section on publishing services. For the emerging writer there are lists of literary courses. For the established writer, a comprehensive calendar of competitions, fellowships, grants, and literary events. All the sections are tabbed and all the listings are indexed, making it relatively easy to find the type of training, event, or home you are seeking for your piece.

*The Australian Writer's Marketplace* is also available online at www.awmonline.com.au for a minimum subscription rate of AUD19.95. In addition to the listings and articles found in the book, the on-line version includes blogs, downloadable templates, fora with writers and publishers, live updates on the contacts and many valuable links.

To be honest, as a writer who began my admittedly still limited publishing career in the States, moving back to Australia has been edged with trepidation, but becoming familiar with the *Australian Writer's Marketplace* and a member of the online *Australian Writer's Marketplace* has convinced me that the opportunities are there. I just have to keep on with the lessons I learnt way back when - writing, submitting, and smelling the rejection in my email headers.

*Valerie Jeremijenko is currently pursuing her PhD in Creative Writing Fiction at Griffith University as a distant learning student. She is the editor of* How We Live Our Yoga: Personal Stories *(Beacon Press, 2002) winner of a Virginia Commission on the Arts Fellowship, and her short stories have been published in several literary journals. She currently lives in Doha, Qatar, but is returning to Australia soon.*

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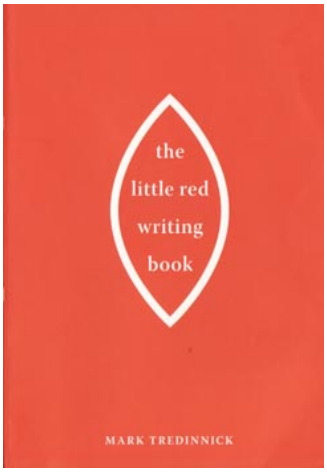
***TEXT* Review**

# Tredinnick's Little Red Book

## *review by Scott Downman*




Mark Tredinnick
*The Little Red Writing Book*
UNSW Press, Sydney, 2006
ISBN 0 86840 867 0
262 pp. Pb. AUD29.95

It seems logical that a book about writing should be well written. But this is often not the case. Authors, in their efforts to coach would-be writers in the ABC of fluency, tend to pitch their books to a certain ideal, to a certain philosophy or to a certain pedagogy. Although Tredinnick does do this to some extent, his volume takes a turn that is a major breakthrough for books of this type: he pitches it to a broad audience who simply desire to write better. The approach is best summed up in the first chapter when he says: 'Let's not teach our students to be writers, let's just teach them how to write' (22). The learner-centred approach he uses is not rocket science, but the result is a personable investigation into the basics of language that serves to place an emphasis on both the value and power of words. Tredinnick does not 'lord it over' the reader, but seeks to simplify the writing process in a bid to remove writer's anxiety, which he acknowledges can cripple creativity. To achieve his aim, the author breaks writing into its most basic forms: words and sentences. He encourages the writer to value them one at a time, rather than being distracted by the overall goal, whether it be writing a job application, tender or book.

The volume, which would serve as an excellent introductory text, does not brim with grammatical jargon or linguistic terminology, although it is obvious the fundamentals of grammar are important to the author. He laments the removal of grammar instruction from Australian schools, and highlights the consequences of that decision: 'In the absence of real knowledge about grammar, we hold fast to the few half-truths we seem to recall from somewhere' (58). The author recognises that power writing is

not the product of creativity alone. Power writing is the product of the balance that comes from creativity and the discipline of using appropriate grammar.

There is no substitute for experience, and as you read through the book's countless writing tips, many carefully disguised as colourful metaphors, you realise the author has given the reader access to his own private, writing world. The volume is not just the product of Tredinnick's career as a professional author; it is the product of his lifelong learning. 'It is the upwelling of what I've learned over twenty years as a book editor, as a writer of essays and books and poems, as a teacher of creative and professional writing, as an instructor in composition and grammar, as a reader, and as a scholar and as a critic' (12). This nakedness creates a connection and warmth that makes *The Little Red Writing Book* more than a writing grammar guide and more than a writing manual - it highlights that writing is alive. And better still, it spurs the reader on to the conclusion that we are all capable of improving our writing efforts.

Tredinnick's motivation for writing the volume is made clear from the start. He is a passionate writer, with a love of language and a grave concern about the future of the written word. He says:

> I'm not the first person to notice that we have entered deeply into an era of bad language. I fear we will live with the consequences of this bad language for a long time if we don't do something about it now. Democracy - not just art - depends on the lucid expression of careful and independent thinking. (12)

He cites similar criticism and fear from the likes of George Orwell. Somewhat controversially, he argues that bad language has today become the norm and that most people are immune to good writing. 'After a while we stop noticing how ugly and inexact, how pompous and flabby it has all become. By then we're writing that way ourselves' (48). Although this conclusion could be seen as a generalised broadside, it is a criticism that is borne out of the author's frustration. It is not directed purely at those who consider themselves professional writers but Tredinnick's criticism is directed at journalists, at politicians and at those in the workplace who communicate with the written word. It is directed at the community-at-large and, frankly, it needs to be said. As a teacher of the next generation of journalists, I share the author's concern and admire his courage in acknowledging and addressing these concerns. For Tredinnick, writing is an issue of heart and he has implanted his heart into this work. He does not pretend to offer a panacea, but does not ignore what he sees as the fundamental issues necessary to improve the quality of writing. This style makes what could be dry and intimidating, refreshingly digestible.

There are aspects of this volume that are sobering. It will not surprise if some find the arguments about grammar and bad language distasteful because the challenges presented in the book are confronting. The author's style forces you to review and reconsider your own writing style. Several times while reading the volume I found myself nervously reading on to see if I was guilty of some of the writing pitfalls the author highlights, particularly in the sections critical of newspaper journalism. I was forced to ask: 'Am I perpetuating bad language through my writing?' However, Tredinnick does not put the reader on a guilt trip, nor does he make the reader feel inadequate. His style is to reassure, correct and refine. He does not pretend writing is easy but recognises how easy it is to take good

writing for granted. To get the most out of this volume the reader must take a position of humility and open-mindedness.

Whereas in the past volumes of this type tended to use complexity to explain the so-called simplicity of language theory, Tredinnick chooses to use real-life examples and provides exercises throughout the volume so the reader can apply the principles he has illuminated. Under the heading 'Try this' there are more than 80 exercises in the book aimed at improving writing practice. The only criticism is that some of these exercises lend themselves to specific answers and there are no answers within the volume. Perhaps an accompanying website with answers would maximise the worth of these tasks. The other valuable strategy the author uses is breakout boxes on key subject areas such as: 'Ten ways of saying the same thing well', 'Twenty-four troublesome words and phrases', 'A litter of verbs' and 'A box of clichés'. These highlighted boxes emphasise key aspects of his argument, break up the text and act as an easy-to-find resource for the reader.

Reading Tredinnick's volume was for me like discovering El Dorado after a five-year quest to find a suitable book about writing for my journalism students. Although *The Little Red Writing Book* is not targeted specifically towards the journalism genre, it contains an original approach to writing that makes it achievable for all - and that is its brilliance. The format of the volume also contributes to its readability. Each of the eight chapters features sub-headings that successfully guide the reader through the pages. Each section is precise and the paragraphs are kept small, which cleverly holds the reader's attention. Although the linkage between some of these sections could be improved, Tredinnick has succeeded in giving the reader an experience, which ultimately serves to improve the writing craft. When I was first given *The Little Red Writing Book* to review I put it on my desk and stared at its cover for two months. Having read scores of books of a similar ilk, I was reluctant to read another. But after reading the introductory chapter, it became obvious that this was a fresh take on an age-old subject. Tredinnick in the opening chapter urges the reader to not just tell a story but to make their writing sing: 'In song, it's how you sing, not just what you utter, that counts. And so it is with writing' (26). *The Little Red Writing Book* offers a commonsense approach that, if heeded, ensures our written efforts will hit the right notes with those who read them.

*Scott Downman is a lecturer in journalism and public relations in the School of Arts, Griffith University, Gold Coast campus.*

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***TEXT* Review**

# Novel lesson fails to inspire

## *review by Theresa Lauf*

*13 Ways of Looking at the Novel: What to Read and How to Write*
Jane Smiley
Faber and Faber, London, 2006
ISBN 0-571-23110-1
591 pp. Pb. UK£16.99

Jane Smiley's *13 Ways of Looking at the Novel: What to Read and How to Write* may be of interest to readers and first-time writers.

Pulitzer prize-winning Smiley is clearly passionate about the novel and keenly discusses the history, psychology and morality of the novel while offering personal suggestions about her own reading and writing journey.

The book does not give insights into advanced writing techniques but is an eclectic distillation of her personal writing and reading experiences. It may offer an interesting read for lovers of memoir and literature review. However, it offers little practical guidance or assistance on the actual process of writing.

The title suggests that the guide will provide some clear discussion of writing practise. It also references Wallace Stevens' poem '13 ways of looking at a blackbird'. Smiley was clearly looking for an external form as a medium for her to explore a vast array of novels in order to understand what makes a novel 'great', or 'striking' (in the absence of greatness) (p.200). More about greatness later. Thirteen is the eccentric number. There are clearly many ways of looking at a novel. Structuring the book around this referential number, however, contributes to a less than cohesive view of novel writing.

What are the thirteen ways of looking at a novel, you ask? The headings of the thirteen chapters to this book are as follows: Introduction; What Is a Novel?; Who Is a Novelist?; The Origins of the Novel; The Psychology of the Novel; Morality and the Novel; The Art of the Novel; The Novel and History; The Circle of the Novel; A Novel of Your Own (I); A Novel of Your Own (II); *Good Faith*: A Case History; Reading a Hundred Novels.

The subtitle is particularly provocative: *What to Read and How to Write*. This is such a big claim.

Essentially, Smiley brings together some interesting trivia and points of view on the novel in itself, the novelist's life, a case history of her own work, and a précis of the hundred novels she read during a September 11-induced case of writer's block. This work took her three years to complete.

Only twenty-five pages (204-229), are dedicated directly to answering the second part of the subtitle, namely 'how to write'. Here is the opening paragraph to Chapter 10, 'A novel of your own' (I):

> Now that you have decided to begin your novel, you may congratulate yourself. You have not been asked or groomed to write a novel. You have not gone to novel-writing school, nor taken a standard curriculum of preparatory courses. Chances are, no one wants you to write your novel - if they say they do, they are just meaning that you should get it over with or get on with it. The people you know actually dread reading the novel you are about to write - they don't want to read about themselves, they don't want to be bored, and they fear embarrassment for everyone. You are therefore, free. (204)

It would have been helpful to have had this clearly stated at the beginning (or indeed, indicated in the title). This is a book for people who haven't even begun writing. Instead, one had to wait until page 204 to find out.

Based upon her reading of *Middlemarch*, *The Trial*, *Vanity Fair* and *Wuthering Heights*, with reference to 'The Clock' (or the 'circle of the novel') at page 179, Smiley makes some conclusions about 'greatness' at pages 200-203. Some of her thoughts are as follows:

> There is no single quality that the "great" novels share other than the biographical quality - the sense that the reader comes to understand a character completely, better than the character understands himself or herself. (200)

> What seems to be happening is that the author's voice and his or her protagonist's potential fit one another and illuminate one another in a unique way. But in fact, capaciousness works for the novelist in several ways. When he includes many components in his novel, he stimulates his own thinking as he tries to get the parts to mesh - dilemmas of narrative as simple as time sequence and cause and effect require the author to think about the complex connections between his parts and to express these complexities in his style, which becomes more probing and more idiosyncratic. (201)

> *The Trial*, though, shows that radical simplicity and focus, resulting in an intensity of intimacy that is thoroughly original, is another path to greatness. What Kafka understands better than anyone is the simple power of narration - a story is constructed one image and one incident at a time. Once the images and incidents are expressed clearly, they exist powerfully and in some sense ineradicably in the reader's mind. If they are sufficiently compelling, the reader cannot help contemplating them. To qualify them in any way, even by relating them to other ideas, is to muddy them. *The Trial* is an effective answer to

> E.M. Forster's lament that attention to 'What happens next?' inevitably renders a narrative too common or pedestrian to be truly profound. (202)

> Greatness in a novel does not depend upon perfection of the object; perfection of the object is merely an added dimension to the greatness of certain novels. But every great novel offers incomprehensible abundance in some form - even *The Trial*, only a couple of hundred pages long, is abundantly meticulous, abundantly intimate, abundantly strange, and abundantly original. (203)

Smiley's book does not contain writing exercises, nor does it methodically deal with every commonly accepted element of the novel (see chapter 10, which touches upon a writing 'pyramid' and chapter 9 for 'The Clock', with the twelve different types of discourse that can be incorporated into a novel). It is an idiosyncratic representation of the author's own conceptions of the novel. It is too broad-ranging to be of direct service to beginner writers (other than as a source of 'yes you can do it' motivation or general friendly wisdoms) and not detailed enough for advanced writers. However, having said that, had the title and purpose been different, one could have said that this was a book that could have contributed towards making better readers. This would include average reading enthusiasts and novice writers. Smiley speaks passionately about the form. Perhaps, for some readers of this work, that will be enough.

At the end of 'A novel of your own' (II) Smiley states:

> The feeling you are looking for as you decide whether you are finished is exhaustion. I do not mean literal physical fatigue as much as the sense that you have used up your inventiveness, your intelligence, and your ideas with regard to this story and these characters. While you are still interested in them, you have thought every thought you are capable of about them. Chances are your novel is *not* perfect, and someone else will have a good idea of how it can be improved or at least be done differently the first time he reads it, but you have come to the end of your relationship with it. Print it out; go to a bookstore and buy a book about publishing, which is a whole subject in itself.

While this book is interesting, it ultimately fails to deliver. Unfortunately, the title promises the moon whereas the book itself delivers only its reflection in a bucket of water. This is a well-intentioned (but inaccurately named) book of hearty advice to would-be writers and reading enthusiasts.

*Theresa Lauf is a Master of Philosophy student in Creative Writing at Griffith University, Gold Coast campus researching women in the Australian legal profession, and novelistic research and writing practice.*

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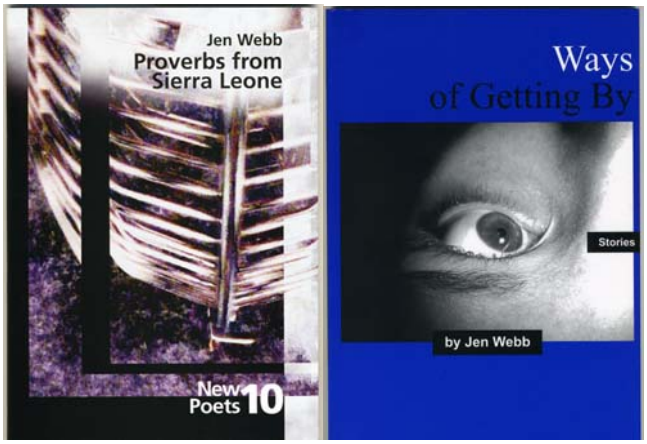
***TEXT* Review**

# In the World under a Soft Cover

## *review by Moya Costello*




Jen Webb
*Proverbs from Sierra Leone* (New Poets 10)
Five Islands Press, Wollongong University, Wollongong, 2004
http://www.australianbookgroup.com.au
ISBN 1741280575
33 pp. Pb. AUD9.95

Jen Webb
*Ways of Getting By*
Ginniderra Press, Charnwood, ACT 2006
http://www.ginninderrapress.com.au
ISBN 1740272435
95 pp. Pb. AUD18.00

What is the sensibility that speaks through these poems and stories? What is the tone, a tone that can't be easily and singularly labelled, yet nevertheless is immediately recognisable as that of a writer *in the world*? And what is the significance of receiving these poems and stories from small presses?

Under its New Poets program, Five Islands publishes six small books of poetry a year by poets who have been publishing in magazines and newspapers, but who have not yet had a first book of poetry published. Over twelve years as a feisty operator, Five Islands has selected award-winning poets, including Webb, whose poem 'The eternity knot' won the 2003 inaugural ACT Poet of the Year award.

Five Islands is an independent publisher specialising 'in contemporary Australian poetry'. The title of Jen Webb's first collection is *Proverbs from*

*Sierra Leone*. So here is Australia in the contemporary world, with the marks, like those of birth, of global life.

Webb originally came from South Africa and the poems more than occasionally are defined by, incorporate, or situate as a title a proverb from Sierra Leone, available on the Sierra Leone website. One such proverb is 'one man can't fill a box', centred in the collection's opening poem, 'The celebrant', about the death of the poet's father. As with all proverbs, transcendence and immanence, presence and absence, wisdom and banality combine in an unexpectedly powerful way to wound like an infected needle, causing an ache of recognition in us when we hope to escape, unaffected, with the barest of responses to the expected engagement required of ' … or so they say.'

Webb's spirited tactical response to situations such as 'when my father was cold/they took him to the grave' is to refuse to turn away. She refashions the challenge:

> I will dress in red,
> I will wear the grace
> of blind expectation.

As the coupling of 'blind' with 'expectation' indicates, she faces the situation with what become credentials, but of vulnerability:

> Darkness.
> A pause.
> And then the wait.

Her poems invest in and attest to being in the world. She is our 'humble correspondent', even though sometimes there is no news from the front, only the sound of her own heart speaking to her: 'cor/respond' ('News has no feet, but it travels'). For we simultaneously emerge from and are integrated into the routine and the chaotic: 'small colloquial crime[s]' and 'curfewed massacre[s]' ('What the pumpkin knows'). Within these poems there is no pretence at mastery-we are 'mislaid long before our end' ('The Mandela principle'). We live both in an improvisational and incorporated way within specific contexts, our open future contingent and unpredictable. So a convolvulus, in its famed rampancy, races 'over the house', and as a consequence:

> … we sit in the darkness of leaves,
> listening to nothing,
> before we stumble back to sleep. ('Every day')

Or the poet is immersed, playfully, in the therapeutic and curative effects of the sea to come out 'sea-blind'.

Australia shares with Africa similarities of geography, climate, space and light. Both continents experience heat and humidity, 'hard-cooked ground' and 'tropical breeze[s]', and sand-laden winds from deserts; they contain coastlines, plains and hills, and 'implacable space' to traverse ('Coming home'). In Australia, traversing space is done on a bush track, in Africa on a 'snake-trail', 'judder of ruts', 'journey of giraffes, half thought/thorn-tree graded snail-pace goat-race', 'string of holes' or simply a 'dust tide'. And on a difficult journey in such country, especially a familiar one, South Africa, that the poet returns to, she puts her foot on the brake, stopping suddenly, unexpectedly, 'always too late', where that interruption is the shock of

defamiliarisation of what was formerly taken for granted, symbolised by the commonly named and figured/seen: 'Brandt's ossewa' or 'Sipo's goats'.

This journey, where you need to - as a poem's title exhorts - 'Be aware', is a longing that is itself continually cut short. For memory 'slides' across the highway and ideas 'across the tar', and, with every 'shift in light', time is 'tick tocking you back from unquiet dreams'. On the one hand, you are almost able to grasp what 'lies just below thought', as in these poems which, while being neither wholly sparse nor rich in surface texture, foam like the waves in 'Sea blind', advancing from the deep, then breaking over rocks. On the other hand, you run from this thing that is 'unnamed' - the snake that you have been warned to look out for. While you'll never quite know what hunts or haunts you, the hunter/haunting in turn has an enviable knowledge:

> - There is nothing about the inside
> of the pumpkin
> that the knife doesn't know. ('What the pumpkin knows')

Webb's eternity knot - or a 'twist of soft thread' or 'baby curls' - from the poem of the same title, is meant to bind us to safety forever, protect us from the hunting and haunting. But we can only do what we can:

> You can survive … once, twice,
> even seven times;
> and then you're done.

'Getting by' is another way of saying this. 'Angel dust' opens Webb's collection of short stories, *Ways of Getting By*, and is a good choice, since it is archetypal as a short story. Its totality as meaning is elusive, at best ambiguous. And it's a short story that stays with you, pleasurably, as short stories should do, compressed, compacted, resonant, mysterious and poetic in its impact. The last line of 'Angel Dust', 'And after the light, what's next?', is enviable in its composition and placement. For what could be more ordinary yet unexpected in this historical moment of spin and immoderation than angel-human congress? So much of our present moment is insupportable, yet also full of, as yet, unimagined potentialities.

It's the insupportable that Webb examines in this collection. And death, self-induced, is clearly, inevitably one of the ways of getting by, as is some form of madness. So the strategy for linking this collection, as in Frank Moorhouse's early- to mid-career discontinuous narratives, is the narrator - in Webb's case, a therapist. She and her clients grapple with getting by, with how to live reasonably, ethically, within the parameters of the sane.

The eerie, subtly sci-fi, partially surreal setting of the stories is what Webb has called a parallel-present, or dystopic quasi-future in Australia or quasi-Australia - an 'unAustralia', as the recent Cultural Studies Association of Australasia Annual Conference at the University of Canberra named it. The landscape is denuded, dry and overheated, overly developed, undernourished, and ravaged by extreme weather conditions. In unAustralia, ways of getting by have to be formulated and induced by the disenfranchised, the fearful, the vulnerable, the sensitive, the thinking, the caring. In 'Jobhunting', those looking for work where there is none attempt to morph themselves into the employed whose capacity for defining identity becomes unattainably magisterial and mythic by contrast. The theorists, icons in 'Althusser's wife', who practise what Terry Eagleton has described as 'a reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding

assumptions', become, likewise, acquainted, in a comic-tragic, black-humoured way, with violence, madness and suicide.

When the therapist enters the sea in 'Back from the brink', sees frogs returning to her garden in 'A floating doll's house', and when she confronts and acknowledges ageing and death as the common condition to being human, as she does in 'Ways of getting by', she is, for the duration of the world of the stories, getting by.

The stories are disturbing because of their surreal edge, yet also because they channel today's (un)Australia. Webb has invested in her narrator and characters to lay out a study of the tempered nature of trying to survive on ethical terms. Her poems offer a similar stance. In her delivery, the short story displays its remarkable characteristic of vivifying intense moments of engagement.

Together, the two collections, poetry and short stories, are a resource that offer an insight, by one author, into the multi-skilling across genres, as well as an insight into the function of small presses in Australia's literary culture.

While a probable lack of resources has affected production values of *Ways of Getting By* (aesthetically, the cover and internal design are in a home-brand vein), I'm nevertheless grateful to Ginninderra Press, an enterprise not dissimilar to Five Islands. Small, independent presses incarnate abundance, because as a reader, my reading world would be so much diminished, strangulated for want of breadth, depth, scope, interest and difference, without their input.

*Moya Costello has two collections of short stories published, as well as a short novel. She assists in the administration of the Creative Writing program at the University of Adelaide, and teaches for the Flinders University of South Australia and online for the University of Canberra.*

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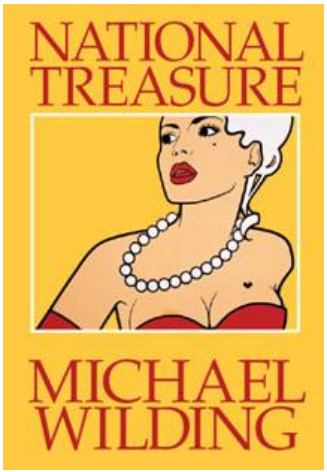
***TEXT* Review**

# Publish and also perish?

## *review by Nigel Krauth*




Michael Wilding
*National Treasure*
Central Queensland University Press, Rockhampton, 2007
ISBN 1-921274-00-X
240pp. Pb. AUD26.95

In the wake of *Academia Nuts* (2002) - where Michael Wilding satirised Australian universities and the follies of their academic and administrative practices - the acclaimed author turns his scalpel-eye to the literary world, and particularly the world of fiction-writing in Australia.

Clearly reflecting several decades of insider knowledge of the pressurised life of the novelist, Wilding conjures up a brightly dark world of excess, inconsistency, jealousy, fraud and paranoia. What he reveals is wonderfully laughable, sadly appalling, and (worst of all) fully educative as he peels back the onion on writers, publishers, promoters and readerships.

In this study of the wild and woolly writing industry - the practice, the publishing, the promotion, the power-plays - the message comes through clearly for the besieged novelist: Publish or perish, or put up the perfectly impenetrable pretense.

The setting is Sydney. Pill-popping, put-upon, big-selling author, Scobie Spruce, is a recognised national treasure, but everyone is out to exploit him - the multinational publishing industry, the media, his own family, and even his new assistant, whom he employs in an attempt to shore up his fading reputation and income.

All the problems writers of fiction face these days are canvassed here. Majorly, these are problems of change. Corporations (e.g. those involved

in publishing) handle change-culture through focus groups and symposia for their management staff and employees. But writers are loners: most are self-employed and work as ferals on cultural borderlines. It's on the borderline that the next world-shattering great novel will be found. Being so outlandish and ostracised, literary novelists are vulnerable.

This novel pokes fun at literary folly; gets serious about business and government and media exploitation and the dismantling of literature's value in the current context; but also reveals the tragedy of the personal plight of the creative writer in today's culture.

And there's a built-in guessing game. Spot the real writers the characters are based on! Disconcertingly, you can't nail down Wilding's generic characters to specific personalities - and the problem is clear. All novelists currently suffer from this kind of handling by publishers, all novelists' families have put up with this sort of behaviour from their novelist relatives, and all novelists have received this kind of family and public treatment.

*National Treasure* is a penetrating look at the world of fiction writing and publishing today.

*Nigel Krauth teaches creative writing at Griffith University, Gold Coast.*

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