Australian Women's Book Review

Volume 15.1 (2003)

Debbie Harman Qadri, Textile 2002

Editor: Carole Ferrier
Associate Editor: Maryanne Dever
Editorial and Production Assistant: Tania Oost, Barb King
Editorial Advisory Board: Brigid Rooney, Margaret Henderson, Barbara Brook, Nicole Moore, Bronwen Levy, Susan Carson, Shirley Tucker
ISSN: 1446-7038

Contents

4. **Identifying Individuality: Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique,* Forty Years Later**
By Rachel Hennick

6. **Wildness, Diversity, and Feminist Politics**
Susan Hawthorne, *Wild Politics: Feminism, Globalisation, Bio/diversity.*
North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2002.
By Anne Elvey

9. **Janette Turner Hospital's Literary Thriller**
Janette Turner Hospital, *Due Preparations for the Plague*.
Sydney: HarperCollins, 2003.
By Sue Lovell

16. **Mahjar in Australia**
Eva Sallis, *Mahjar,* Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2003.
By Margaret Miller

18. **Vulnerable Customers**
Marian Wilkinson and David Marr, *Dark Victory*, Sydney; Allen and Unwin, 2003 and
Peter Mares, *Borderline*, Second Edition, Sydney; University of New South Wales Press, 2002.
By Sharon Pickering

22. **Spilt Milk: Stories Mother Never Told Us**
Fiona Giles, *Fresh Milk: The Secret Life of Breasts.* Australia: Allen and Unwin, 2003.
By Rhonda Shaw

27. **Battling Bodies**
Carol Bacchi, *Fear of Food.* North Melbourne: Spinifex, 2003.
By Alison Bartlett

30. **Feminist Thought for (Serious) Beginners**
Gender Studies: Terms and Debates, Anne Cranny-Francis, Wendy Waring, Pam Stavropoulos and Joan Kirkby. London; Palgrave MacMillan, 2003.
By JaneMaree Maher

34. **Fashioning Our way to Freedom?**
Ali Guy, Eileen Green and Maura Banim (eds.) *Through the Wardrobe: Women's Relationships With Their Clothes*. Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001;
Fashion and Beauty: *Feminist Review* (London) 71 (2002).
By Cath Darcy

37. **New Perspectives**
Joanna Murray Smith, *Judgment Rock*. Penguin Books, 2002.
By Jasna Novakovic

39. **Igniting the Flame of Adventure**
Rita Golden Gelman, *Tales of a Female Nomad*, Bantam 2001
By Paula Heelan

41. Cultural Crossings
Deborah Carlyon, *Mama Kuma: One woman, two cultures.*
St Lucia; University of Queensland Press, 2002
By Marilla North

44. 'Beauty in Decay': A Requiem for the Flightless
Kate Breakey. Small Deaths. Photographic Exhibition
8 November–14 December 2002
Flinders Art Museum, Grote Street Adelaide.
By Varga Hosseini

47. Debbie Harman Quadri: Cartoons

49. *Obituary*
Vale Sarah Campion, 1906-2002
By Elizabeth Lawson

Identifying Individuality: Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, Forty Years Later

By Rachel Hennick

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the publication of Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique, the first in a groundswell of books that would launch a second wave women's liberation movement so potentially threatening in its challenging of dominant paradigms that as, she writes in her 2000 memoir Life So Far, the FBI initiated an investigation of the women's movement in 1969 for subversive activity. As in Australia the degree of threat that the state identified in resurgent feminism was not apparent until classified police and documents became available decades later.

I sat bawling in the center of an empty, white living room, as I unpacked cardboard boxes and tried to settle into my new apartment. I felt worthless. After all, I was no longer a wife or a mother. I had just left my husband and two stepchildren that I raised as my own for five years. I came across a copy of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique,* which a high school girlfriend had once given to me. In a desperate pinch, I cracked the book open like a fortune cookie, hoping to find a message of wisdom to deliver me from that debilitating identity crisis. I read a paragraph, which disclosed that few women pursue higher education. 'That's it,' I decided. I will complete my undergraduate studies and pursue my Masters Degree or perhaps even my Doctorate. Immediately, I stopped crying, sank into a hot bath and concocted my future like a good witch preparing her brew.

The Feminine Mystique was written in 1963, but forty years later the work is still a significant analysis of the feminine sociological and political landscape in America. In the introduction Friedan discusses 'The Problem That Has No Name' which refers to the experience of American women who were gravely unfulfilled and secretively disconsolate about their roles as suburban housewives. According to Friedan, they were ashamed to admit that they did not find 'fulfillment waxing the kitchen floor.' The article seems to refer only to white, middle class women, yet the ideal described seems to have been subscribed to by most women in that era. Friedan does not directly label the problem, but she stimulates her readers to identify 'the problem' themselves by alluding to an image, not unlike the June Cleaver housewife. Although I was born nearly a decade after the *Feminine Mystique* was written, I myself, along with other women in my generation, was quite familiar with the old television shows and advertisements depicting women with their hair set, dressed in pearls and aprons, greeting their families with dazzling smiles, ready to serve. By demonstrating how unrealistic the dream is, rather than telling women the problem, Friedan pierces the deception perpetuated by the unattainable American ideal.

Furthermore, Friedan suggests that the problem experienced by millions of women is that they were unaware of their identity. She encourages communication by discussing how people began talking about 'it.' Like a good therapist and true democrat she teaches women to question what 'it' means for themselves rather than defining 'it' for them. She recognizes that women are individuals whose forsaken dreams, or repossessed aspirations, are not exactly alike and she inspires women to name the problem for themselves,

It is curious that at the time the *Feminine Mystique* was written, women idealized the homemaker, yet the previous generation infiltrated the workforce, replacing men during World War Two. This indicates, not even twenty years after the war, that either they wanted to escape the hardships of working both in

and outside of the home or that men created the mythical image of the gleeful homemaker to force women out of the workforce so they would not have to compete with women for jobs. I believe that few, if any women ever actually lived the 'dream image' presented by Friedan – which may have been precisely her point.

What is 'the dream image of young American women' today? The answer depends on the woman being asked the question. I cannot speak for all American women. I can only convey my experience and observations. As I examine the lives of colleagues, friends and co-workers I realize that each one of them has their own unique goals and ambitions. Some women desire a companion, but do not necessarily even want to get married. A few want children, but not husbands. These women view a male partner as a burden rather than as a supporter and choose to raise their kids as single parents. Other women prefer female companionship altogether. Still others express a deep longing for a mate and communicate feelings of incompletion if they are unmarried or divorced. Some women have traditional family values and strive to maintain family structure by sacrificing their own personal fulfillment for their children. They abandon choices of career advancement and formal education to allow more time for their husbands and kids. Often they do not view their decision as the right way, but rather as the option best suited to them.

The term is no longer 'housewife,' but is now 'stay-at-home mom.' Amongst suburban women, staying at home with the kids has become a luxury few women can afford. Friedan's, *Introduction* neglects to mention the single women who did not own station wagons and were without husbands to provide for them and their children but were instead forced to work menial jobs for meagre wages. However, the primary focus of her work is on getting women to recognize their ambitions, their talents, and their preferences. She challenges women to be honest with themselves. She does not belittle the role of wife and mother but, rather, liberates women from feeling that they are inadequate or deranged if they secretly desire to hold an occupation other than homemaker.

From Dr. Gobrail, a career counselor in Baltimore, I learnt that in 1975 Maryland was the first of many states to enact a law which requires states to provide programs for stay-at-home moms so they can improve their professional skills and make transitions from the home to outside careers. Dr. Gobrail explains that women never expect to find themselves alone. Women who have hobbies or volunteer within their communities seem to have greater satisfaction as stay-at-home moms than women who do not. Dr. Gobrail states that the amount of pleasure a woman derives from being a stay at home mom varies, depending on her personality, creative outlets, and sense of financial security. 'Not every woman can be satisfied waxing the kitchen floor,' Dr. Gobrail says. She emphasizes that women cannot be generalized. Women who are financially stable tend to have greater comfort in being stay-at-home mothers. A woman's adaptation to family life is dependent upon numerous factors including not only the woman's individual personality traits, but also society's demands, and her family's expectations. Dr. Gobrail points out that re-entering the workforce is particularly difficult for divorced women. 'The greatest challenge for these women is to develop higher self-esteem… Not only do they lack confidence, but their home skills are typically not viewed by corporations as transferable.' While most men may make career advances in their late forties, their former wives, who managed their households, may be starting from scratch. Dr. Gobrail adds that divorce rates are out of control in America.

Friedan wrote her account based on interactions with many suburban women. I have travelled to a dozen foreign countries and have become acquainted with women around the world. Self-reliance seems to be increasingly important to women who realize that all too often, for various reasons, they

must survive on their own.

One friend of mine is a perfect example. At the age of sixteen in 1952, Maggie began riding a motorcycle. While her sisters settled down immediately after high school Maggie rode her motorcycle to New Mexico with seven male bikers despite her mother's pleas. When her mother forbade her to join the Air Force, Maggie entered culinary school in Hyde Park, New York. 'That was unusual,' Maggie says. She was one of seven women in a class of four hundred men. Maggie says that the men were 'Nasty.' She remembers being told by her instructors that she should not become a chef because she is a woman and 'this is a man's world.' Maggie says, 'I dared anyone to tell me I couldn't.' She went abroad to complete her studies in France at Cordon Bleu.

Eventually Maggie married but her husband passed away unexpectedly and she was left to raise her four children alone. Maggie has a maternal presence. She always greets me with a hug and occasionally bakes me cookies that would make Famous Amos throw in the apron. But, nobody crosses her. With just one look she could send Mike Tyson home crying to his mamma. Maggie winces and points her finger at me. 'I tell you just like I tell my daughters. Never forget, you *always* need to be prepared to take care of yourself. Don't expect any man or your family to do it for you.' Fifty years later, at the age of 66, Maggie still rides her motorcycle to visit her mother.

It has been three and a half years since that evening when I sat bawling on the living room floor. When I was married I defined my self worth by how my husband treated me. I now monitor my esteem by observing how I treat myself. Preparing for departure for Australia to begin my Masters Degree in Creative Writing, I pack up my belongings and toss *The Feminine Mystique* into a charcoal-blue trunk ready to be shipped Down Under. I do not cry, I just smile.

Friedan's mother was discriminated against in small-town Illinios where she grew up, but it was her experience of isolation in suburbia after her marriage in 1947, sacked from a union newspaper for requesting maternity leave for her second pregnancy that produced her analysis of The Feminine Mystique. The most bought non-fiction book in the United States in 1964, it has sold three million copies in English language editions.

Rachel Hennick is studying Creative Writing with Tom Shapcott in Adelaide.

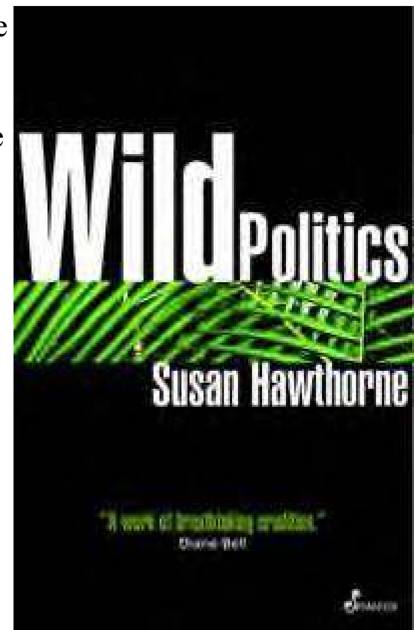
Wildness, Diversity, and Feminist Politics

Susan Hawthorne, *Wild Politics: Feminism, Globalisation, Bio/diversity*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2002.

By Anne Elvey

Wild Politics addresses a world shaped by the economics of global capitalism, an economics underwritten by the interwoven logics of consumption and colonisation. In this broad context, Susan Hawthorne seeks to open a space for a vision of economics and politics that might offer a life-sustaining and life-affirming alternative to a world order which produces the contemporary nexus of ecological, social and cultural destruction. Drawing on the notion of bio-diversity as a sustaining metaphor, she looks critically at the colonialist, appropriative and mono-cultural foundations of the contemporary economics and politics of globalisation and offers a vision of a different world shaped by a valorisation of bio-diversity.

At the beginning of her work she writes that a world structured from the ground up, from grass roots, through a wild politics, founded on a culture inspired by biodiversity and the diversity principle could lead western global culture away from the vicious cycles of violence that are perpetrated in international politics, in communities and inside family homes (2).



With a wealth of examples, Hawthorne sets out the practices of globalisation which have led so often to the interwoven oppression and dispossession of indigenous peoples, women, and many others, as well as to increased ecological pressure on and destruction of ecosystems. While many have identified the interconnected effects of a variety of global practices that disproportionately impinge on the lives and livelihoods of the many designated as the 'other' of the elite white Western man of reason, Hawthorne gathers these groups variously constructed as 'other' under the umbrella of 'the diversity matrix'. Her aim in doing this is to affirm the diverse cultures, experiences and agencies of groups usually undervalued and subordinated within the operative paradigm of globalisation. The 'diversity matrix', then, is intended as a point of reference or, better, a network of points of reference, from which to critique the operations of globalisation and offer a vision for any alternative future in which a 'wild politics' might work.

For Hawthorne the designation 'wild' has a number of resonances. Drawing from the fields of genetics, she describes the 'wild type' as 'a characteristic shared by most members of a species under "natural conditions" ' (21). The 'commonality of the wild type is also the source of diversity' (21). The 'natural conditions' to which Hawthorne refers, imply for her a lack of human interference. The question of human interference is key to the problematic character of the notion of the 'wild'. Hawthorne is careful to distinguish between human interference and human involvement. Like Marcia Langton in her 1998 *Burning Questions: Emerging Environmental Issues for Indigenous Peoples in Northern Australia*, she is critical of notions of wilderness that presuppose wilderness to be totally other than human. From an Indigenous perspective such as Langton's, what many non-Aboriginal environmentalists might

designate as 'wilderness' to be protected from human interference is, for its Aboriginal inhabitants and custodians, *country*: a space of human society and involvement. While critical of ideologies that create a dichotomy between civilisation and the wild, Hawthorne valorises the wild against colonising practices such as bioprospecting, genetic modification of organisms, and monocultural agribusinesses that tame or coopt the wild. But as Hawthorne notes, when 'wilderness' is designated as a place of refuge on the one hand *for humans* from the dehumanising aspects of contemporary Western societies and on the other hand *for non-humans* from the environmental damage of those societies, there can be a splitting between culture and nature. The notion of wilderness allows, moreover, for destruction of much bio-diversity because when a little is seen to be saved as non-human wilderness, the rest is 'up for grabs'. In contrast, for Hawthorne the notion of the wild supports a politics of diversity and connectedness. It carries, moreover, the resonances of rage and anger in response to the social and environmental injustices that *Wild Politics* highlights.

The book frequently works by way of examples. While many readers will be familiar with examples of the problematic work practices of corporations such as NIKE and the monocultural agricultures and practices of biopiracy that Vandana Shiva has systematically critiqued in *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*, there is also a wealth of analysis in *Wild Politics* of specific international trade laws, agreements and practices such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trades (GATT), of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), or Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs). Hawthorne also analyses ways in which international agreements, such as the Trade Related Investment Measures (TRIMs), designed to support local national economies, have been severely curtailed in practice (333). But as I read, I felt there was a relentless familiarity about Hawthorne's critique. It called to mind for me myriads of speeches at political protests and the kinds of analyses I had heard within women's reading groups. But there is indeed something relentless about the litany of social and environmental oppression and destruction that is part of the intersecting processes of colonisation, globalisation, monocultures, homogenisation, and appropriation. Hawthorne demonstrates the ways in which these processes are marked by dislocation, disconnection, disengagement, and displacement. Her steady gaze at the way these processes work in practice is a challenge to readers to look again and to ask what might be possible.

Wild Politics also looks to the historical roots of these practices. For example, Hawthorne scrutinises the intersection between the rise of 'private property', the introduction of patents, and the colonial practices of Britain and Europe. In particular letters patent 'enabled European monarchs to claim ownership rights to "newly discovered lands" through the granting of certain exclusive and open privileges to the carriers ' (315). This notion of patent underwrote the disconnection inherent in a practice of colonisation at a distance.

Underlying Hawthorne's study is an oppositional feminist approach. While aware of the diversity of women's experiences within the systems of global consumerist capitalism (differences of power, wealth, and expectations), her framework distinctively links sexist oppression with the oppressive monocultural economics she critiques. She uses a process of thesis, antithesis, synthesis in bringing together the theory and examples that she proffers, in order to present a systematic account of the ways in which the logic of disconnection and the processes of homogenisation that attack biodiversity at the level of ecosystems are reproduced at many other levels of the global economic system in equally destructive ways.

For Hawthorne 'the diversity matrix' is not primarily a network of victims of these oppressive economic structures and practices. Rather it represents a matrix of resistance to the homogenising influences she critiques. But I had a problem with the way in which 'the diversity matrix' was presented. Frequently it read as a litany of the 'other', and occasionally it involved a romanticisation of indigenous people. I am not sure, however, if litanies of the other and a certain romanticisation *can* be avoided in oppositional writing of this sort, which continues to be necessary in the face of the intersecting axes of oppression it critiques.

For anyone concerned with opposing these axes of oppression, the systematic critique presented in *Wild Politics* is invaluable. The book is written in a fluent and accessible style and offers a substantial bibliography. It is a book of interest not only to scholars but to activists. Because of its accessible synthesis of a vast amount of material concerning global economics, I would particularly recommend it for use in undergraduate women's studies units and in other programs involving feminist and ecofeminist approaches to economics and politics. I would hope that it would also reach other readers who would allow the evidence it offers to challenge and change their views.

Wild Politics, however, needs a companion volume. The final chapter sets out the parameters for Hawthorne's vision of a wild politics. From examples she offers throughout the book, the reader could conclude that wild politics is already operative at a micro level. But I felt on the whole that the critique of contemporary global economics as homogenising, dislocating and oppressive, overwhelmed the vision of wildness. How is the vision to be achieved? If the inspiration of *Wild Politics* is to become concrete in a world that would respect, nurture and sustain diversity, this vision needs to be as systematically presented and implemented as has been the critique that prompted it.

Anne Elvey is an honorary research associate in the Centre for Women's Studies and Gender Research at Monash University and an honorary research fellow with the Institute for the Advancement of Research at Australian Catholic University. She also teaches within the School of Political and Social Inquiry at Monash University and the School of Theology (Vic.) at Australian Catholic University.

Janette Turner Hospital's Literary Thriller

Janette Turner Hospital, *Due Preparations for the Plague*. Sydney: HarperCollins, 2003.

By Sue Lovell

Like her previous six novels, Janette Turner Hospital's seventh also draws on a rich and varied cultural heritage. Its black cover resonates well with the title as the word 'plague' allusively summons the appellation Black Death that history quickly bequeathed on the *Pasteurella pestis* bacillus. The title itself, however, comes from Daniel Defoe's childhood experience of the plague in 1664 and 1665 rather than its fourteenth century visitation. In addition to writing 'Journal of the Plague Year' (1722) Defoe produced the pamphlet 'Due Preparations for the Plague'. His vision is haunted by images of the dead, by an overwhelming powerlessness in the face of a virulent epidemic and, most of all, by the loss of many loved ones.

The first of the characteristic epithets that Turner Hospital has always employed to pay homage to her literary sources also draws upon Defoe's pamphlet: 'preparations for the plague', he says, 'are preparations for death'. These words provide one perspective through which the reader can enter what Liam Davidson called 'a literary political thriller . . . a densely layered tale of international terrorism, political intrigue and deceit in the mode of John le Carre' (*Sydney Morning Herald* 10 May 2003). Defoe's paranoia aptly anticipates the mood of a world struggling to be 'alert not alarmed' in an age of hyper terrorism. At Turner Hospital's fingertips *Pasteurella pestis* is transformed into a dark metaphor for a current international scourge.

The novel opens with Lowell Hawthorne teetering on the edge of a tempting oblivion that would close his mind to his annual confrontation with the anniversary of his mother's death at the hands of terrorists who hijacked Air France 64 thirteen years previously. For several chapters readers are caught up in the personal aftermath of terrorist activity as Lowell's recurring nightmares undermine his ability to take control of his own life. Lowell is 'highly infectious with doom' (13). His marriage has failed and on their access visits his young children, Jason and Amy, inherit his fears. In a few short chapters, Turner Hospital establishes the personal costs of violence, the way that its effects ripple in ever expanding circles from the point of contact, passing through time and lodging irrevocably in the lives of those who are both directly and indirectly touched by it.

Lowell is not the only victim, nor is he the only type of victim. Twenty children were released before the plane was blown up and they now form the Phoenix Club. Keeping in touch through a website, or meeting in a remote, swamp-enclosed boatshed, they attempt to deal with their shared trauma. Veterans of violence as much as any soldier, they are drawn together through mutual understanding hopefully to rise from the flames they witnessed. Some have already suicided unable to cope with the guilt of survival; others, like Cass, Jacob or Agit can barely connect with the world beyond their own pain so that suicide or psychosis is imminent. Samantha (like her literary forebear Defoe) has become

obsessive, driven in the attempt to collect every detail of the hijacking. It is this process that has Samantha constantly ringing Lowell. She believes she has uncovered a conspiracy that points to US complicity with the hijackers and this becomes another thread in an increasingly complex plot.

Before blowing up AF 64 the hijackers remove ten passengers as exchange hostages for ten Islamic 'freedom fighters' imprisoned by the French, Israelis and Americans. The hostages are given full chemical warfare suits and masks to protect them for twenty four hours from the sarin and mustard gas that has been pumped into their sealed bunker as the hijackers wait for compliance. It never occurs, however, because these ten are suspected by the US government of being members of a Paris based 'Islamic fundamentalist terrorist' cell. They were the initial targets of Operation Black Death; a joint venture of the US government and the terrorist mercenaries who double cross them.

Insight into the suffering of Lowell and Samantha facilitates emotional connection to the aftermath of the hijacking. A connection to the direct participants is also ensured however. Cass, Jacob and Agit have been introduced because their kin, like Lowell's mother and her new lover, are in the bunker. Together they become the subjects on the video called 'The Decameron Tape'. Like Boccaccio and his companions they face death with a narrative on their lips. Their final messages to their loved ones, or at least the tone of them, are Turner Hospital's deliberate tribute to those who perished in the attack on the World Trade Centre. She seeks to capture what she calls the 'radiant calm' of those messages as they appeared in the *New York Times* several weeks later, she suggested in a talk at the Mary Ryan bookshop in Brisbane on 28 May 2003.

Also trapped in the bunker are Tristan Charron (codename Tocade meaning whim) and Geneveive Teague (codename Geneva). Through these characters Turner Hospital sets up the possible existence of the Parisian cell. Both have nomadic occupations that lend themselves to suspicion in an age of paranoia. Charron is a French publisher of subversive East European writers (and, as it emerges, not coincidentally the love object of Salamander's French daughter). Teague is his on- again off-again Australian girlfriend. Representative of the *Wandering Earthling* travel company, Teague is a Génie directly linked to the lamp dwelling species (107) and to Turner Hospital's previous, more richly drawn, risk addicted wanderers (like Juliet, Felicity or Charade). She teaches English as a second language and smuggles love-letters between illegal immigrants.

Both Charron and Teague are manipulated onto the doomed flight. The crackling eroticism of their initial meeting in a Parisian bookstore (as they discuss the more courtly romances of Chretian de Troyes) is tracked through their interrogation at the airport, through their reunion, through the hijacking on the plane and through their transfer to the bunker. They are the last on the Decameron Tape to tell their stories as the gas disperses. They are also the only possible survivors. Though their fate remains unstated it is not sealed; for them the ending remains open.

At the same time that readers meet Lowell, and discover that he is being harassed by Samantha, Lowell's father dies, apparently of a heart attack at the wheel of his car. Hawthorne senior was a CIA operative (code name Salamander) who also 'knew in his bones he was doomed' (15). His life was a tangle of deceit and intrigue; his inevitable death was linked to betrayal by both the double agent, Sirocco and his own government. Unsurprisingly, the bleak tone of *The Wanderer* is another rich source upon which Turner Hospital has drawn in the making of the mood and atmosphere of this novel. 'Fate is a moveless thing' says the solitary protagonist of this Anglo Saxon poem as he feels 'old troubles, toil and lost battles and the murder of his kin' weigh heavily upon his heart. For this wanderer it seems that

'[a]ll the order of the world shall be in vain'.

For Salamander, however, sorrow is tempered by recognition of the need to atone. After his death, his psychiatrist is entrusted with a mission to give Lowell a key to Locker B at the airport. The contents force Lowell to confront his father's love as well as his involvement in the hijacking. The encrypted journal, the video tapes and records contained in the blue tote bag also make it impossible for Lowell to ignore the ever more demanding Samantha. Failure to do so would be a failure to bring about the conditions for his father's atonement and his own freedom from his misunderstanding of his father.

Due Preparations is perhaps the blackest and the most satirical work that Turner Hospital has written. A skit where the head of the CIA proposes to Osama bin Laden that they jointly 'bankroll a movie *Getting Osama*' (67) starring Harrison Ford and an Osama look-alike, is guaranteed to inflame debate amongst any far right nationalists who actually read the novel. At a more serious level, the subject matter reverberates across television screens and front pages every other day. It cannot, therefore, be relegated to the safe distance of the fictive or minimised by those who would prefer not to confront the possibility of evil and corruption at large in the world. It names names *without* codes: the CIA, Islamic freedom fighters, the United States, Iraq, Saddam, Tikrit, Osama bin Laden, Washington, Arafat.

This 'novel' has whole sections devoted to well researched, detailed and accurate recording of the thermal stress, the respiratory stress, the sanitary issues and the psychological trauma of remaining within a suit to protect against chemical warfare; it similarly records the effects of premature removal. It maps and charts the training whereby the hunters of terrorists learn not simply to think like the enemy, but to act like them; to the point that they become morally indistinguishable. Sadly Blakeney (?) reads the novel as 'a frightening exploration of the *moral ambiguities* that lie at the heart of the war on terrorism' (*Weekend Australian* 26-27 April 2003) but it may better be read as a reaffirmation of the need for a moral stance on recognising it *wherever* it occurs.

Although this novel retains some familiar themes (the question of the right response to suffering, the need for taking an ethical position, how to ensure psychic survival and retain an identity in a confusing world), *Due Preparations* breaks from Turner Hospital's previous novels in one way that may matter very much to some readers. It is less concerned with tracing the progress of a main (let alone a female) protagonist. Although Lowell's dilemmas are rendered sympathetically and his relationship to his father, his children and his ex wife deeply humanise him, he offers nothing to the reader that is specific to him as a character. Lowell's trauma equates with (although it is not identical to) Samantha's, and her trauma is aligned with that of Jacob or Cassie. Indeed, this ripple effect captures very effectively the suffering that races from the centre of a violent act such as the hijacking.

The shift from the present to the past when Tristan Charron and Geneveive Teague become equally fascinating central characters further disrupts any singular identification with Lowell and Samantha. As tortured and repentant as Salamander may be, as much as the reader may endorse his need to atone, he is a character who becomes known to both his son and the reader only vicariously through official documents or retrospectively through his own records of his guilt. The plot takes precedence in accordance with the genre of the political thriller, yet these strangely remote characters remain central to moral and psychic survival in a hostile world. At times, the tension between the two partly undercuts the effectiveness of each as the reader attempts to locate firm ground. This may all, of course, be Turner Hospital's intent: destabilising the reader inevitably destabilises the reading of what is accepted and *acceptable* in world politics.

For those who read Turner Hospital because of the literary richness of her work, however, there will be no disappointment here despite the generic shift. *Due Preparations* has its own specific puns: Locker B summons the Lockerbie air disaster that formed part of her research material, for example, and Genie works for *Wandering Earthling*, a travel company that has a specifically Australian accent. The fire imagery is consistent and resourceful: the Phoenix club seeks renewal in accordance with the legendary bird; the double agent Sirocco is named for the hot desert wind that comes out of Africa; Salamander, like the mythical creature for whom he is named, seeks to survive the heat of Sirocco's double cross by escaping morally unscathed from the flames of the hijacking through the appropriately named Operation Shadrach.

The text also abounds with what is a customary inter-textuality. There are bit parts for Alice in Wonderland and My Fair Lady; Dante is there more vigorously, though not so intricately and expertly woven into the fabric of the novel as he was in *The Last Magician* (that I write about in Hecate 28.2) and Virgil makes his appearance as a life saving taxi driver. Shakespeare is there, though not so profoundly or pervasively as he was in *The Tiger in the Tigerpit*. As Salamander confronts his own Carthage and, recognising the horror of victory weeps with Scipio for what he has done, his identity splits and Borges resurfaces to taunt those who have always found his influence in Turner Hospital's work frustrating and overly literary. Homer's Odysseus effectively becomes Salamander's alter ego, inevitably symbolising a heroic effort to return home unscathed to a place where soul searching can end and peace of mind ensue. Both Odysseus and Salamander face the perils of living in or travelling through a world that seems powerless in the face of the gods; although Salamander's gods are those who control oilfields and global economics. The Wanderer, Defoe, Boccaccio all structure the plot and the atmosphere of *Due Preparations for the Plague* in quintessential Turner Hospital style.

Finally, though, it is Camus who has a role as great as that of Defoe in terms of shaping the direction towards which this novel almost too subtly guides its readers. For, if Defoe provides the blunt affirmation that preparations for the plague are preparations for death, it is Camus who reminds readers that 'what we learn in a time of pestilence' is that 'there are more things to admire in men than to despise'.
If readers opt to follow the clues that Camus leaves in what may, more aptly perhaps, be called a literary thriller, they will find that 'due preparations' are intrinsically bound to the narrative act and the buoyancy of a creative human spirit able to face terror by confronting it with words. It is Camus who, true to his biography and his literary output, activates within this novel a point of textual resistance to alienation and domination by the false yet powerful 'gods' of terrorism.

Perhaps it is not so surprising, then, to find his name dropping from the lips of Tristan Charron as he defends his connection to an Algerian writer or, more pointedly, from those of Salamander as he trains his CIA operatives in an attempt to get them to retain a moral dimension. Indeed, in the very chapter 'Journal of S Encrypted' lies this clue to resistance. Within Salamander's lecture notes on Individual Protective Equipment, following the gruesome detail of how to protect the respiratory function, or shield the skin, what to expect from thermal stress and how to deal with the claustrophobia and distressing proximity to bodily wastes, there comes a reference to the power of the words of both Boccaccio and Camus.

For the former, words can become the means of escape: '*Let us flee the city and take refuge in the country and build a safe house of stories in which to hide and shelter ourselves*' (264). With these

words Salamander reminds his class of a process that the reader has already witnessed as Charron deals with the opening stages of the hijacking (150-161): the 'most crucial' aspect of deploying their 'personalized survival weapon' is to recognise that the 'body can be fooled by the mind'; that, at the limits of life, when death may be imminent, its horror may be mitigated by a capacity to 'step out into the uncharted abysses of your own memory and imagination, open parachute, create a floating world, explore its tunnels and byways, stay there until the All Clear signal sounds' (262). For those in the Trade towers who were able to stay calm, ring loved ones, speak in time to heal old wounds prior to death, this perhaps was a final means of standing against the horror.

Alternatively, narrative may be a necessary process of recording the survivors' responses to evil so that it is clear that a response has been made:

Plagues come and they go. They mutate and return in different forms. Camus [. . .] knew this. He might not have specifically foreseen hijackings, sarin, and mustard gas, but he knew the rodents and their toxins would reappear. And, like his narrator, Dr. Rieux, *he knew that the tale he had to tell could not be one of a final victory. It could only be the record of what had to be done, and what assuredly would have to be done again in the never-ending fight against terror . . .by all who, while unable to be saints but by refusing to bow down to pestilences, strive their utmost to be healers.* (264-5)

Salamander calls this personalised survival weapon 'Operation Shadrach'. This is his own path to redemption; his means of walking free of the moral torment of watching the flames of the hijacked plane light the sky. By making the records of US complicity available as his own 'Rosetta Stone to go through time' (267) Salamander walks from this furnace with an acknowledgement that the worst response to terror is 'seeing but not intervening', the intolerable decision is to vote '*acceptable collateral damage*' (268) when the innocent suffer.

Despite its debt to Defoe, then, *Due Preparations for the Plague* shares with Camus an insistence that 'due preparations' involve an ongoing analysis of the wider existential problems of both living and dying. Turner Hospital ends this novel with Samantha sitting on a bench in the very Manhattan park that will soon become the holding station for firemen to bring the survivors from the Trade Towers. Samantha's newfound resilience, her connection to and acknowledgement of those she loves, her commitment to action reminds readers, however, that due preparations for death involve living a life that enacts and articulates a personally sacred dimension.

Sue Lovell completed a doctorate at Griffith University on the novels of Turner Hospital in 2002 and teaches at Griffith and Southern Cross University (Lismore).

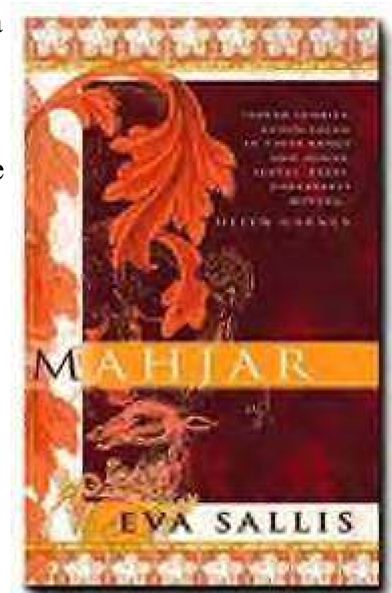
Mahjar in Australia

Eva Sallis, *Mahjar,* Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2003.

By Margaret Miller

Mahjar is a timely publication. Written by Eva Sallis, it is a collection of, at times, very loosely linked short stories, published as 'a novel' about the experiences of first and second generation immigrants to Australia from a variety of Middle Eastern countries. The stories are arranged in three parts with the first two providing a series of episodes about various families, their relationships, and the pressures of their experiences within the broader Australian culture as well as their specific migrant communities. The final part, not set in Australia, and apparently only tenuously connected to the earlier parts by the elaboration of one character's story, relays usually confronting, but occasionally hopeful, stories about a new wave of immigrants or likely immigrants, or about the horrors of life in often un-named homelands.

Sallis provides an explanation of the title in a prologue. Mahjar is an Arabic word that 'refers collectively to all the lands of Arab, most often Lebanese, migration. It has overtones of separation, renunciation, estrangement, and abandonment but, for the Lebanese particularly, it is a place-word redolent with pride in achievement as well as distance from homeland. Australia is one of the lands of the Mahjar.'



Eva Sallis has a gift for deftly turning a story on an innocuous object - a stiletto, a newspaper, a red handbag, a wedding dress - to explore a more weighty matter. The totally unexpected and bizarre use of the stiletto in one story becomes a means of signifying a sense of estrangement from Australia: the newspaper, a poignant mocking of one character's efforts to assimilate into Anglo-Australian ways. The red handbag signifies salvation from social embarrassment in a story about the freight of cultural obligations; the cutting up of a wedding dress signals anger and guilt in a story of deferred grief, dislocation, estrangement and, finally, fatalism.

The stories of the second part, turn predominantly on the complex relationships within families where a rebellious second generation interacts with Anglo culture, when intermarriages threaten the stability of traditions and the demands of parents and gossiping friends drive children to furtiveness and defiance. Part two builds up a sense of the dissonance of anxiety and unnamed dread, while it elaborates stories of loss and grief. Compassion is also elaborated, however, in the resolutions of many of these stories. The grieving Abd al-Rahman, a new-comer from Iraq, whose tragic story is told in part three, is consoled by the teenagers who initially seem culturally alien to him. In two stories, two quite different women are able to make gestures of reconciliation with their sons' Anglo wives.

Part three uncovers the dreadfulness of rent homelands and the relics and the atrocities of war. It reveals the motivations and the impulses of emigration, and exposes the reasons for the anxiety attacks and unspoken pains evident in some of the earlier stories. Abd al-Rahman's story takes the reader behind the newspaper façade of refugee stories and boat people into the horror of a failed emigration.

The stories articulate with each other in a variety of subtle ways, inter-weaving fables with stories of the 'everyday' world. The tales of the gazelle told to Rima by her father at different stages of her life have their precepts inverted at the end of the story in a re-visioned fable by Mohamed, her would-be lover. Mohamed, in offering his version of why she is like a gazelle, constructs an entirely different and, for Rima more acceptable, version of femininity. Mohamed's gazelle is not passive, 'feminine, vulnerable, fragile.' Nor is this gazelle one who will 'resign herself to God's provision and God's wisdom, and accept the gifts [of speed and beauty] that are her nature until the pre-ordained day of her death,' as Gazelle in one of the earlier fables was told, when critical of the arrogance and power of Lion. Mohamed offers a version of a gazelle who can defend herself against and overcome lions. A contemporary Rima can only be seduced by a fable about the assertiveness of women. Where Rima rejects a particular way of being in the world, so too does Zein. Both these women detach themselves from the strictures of conventional passivity.

The jackal story of part two, which is told by Farhan, a man who hates Australia and sees it as a prison, who is without family and who hopes to return to Jerusalem one day, resonates in various ways in the final stories of part three. One, The Cows, is an unbearable story about the atrocities and depravities of war where people seem worse than jackals. The other, Lions, is about two brothers, young throwers-of-stones-at-soldiers, who cross minefields and hills to seek the promised land of the City of Lions - an idyllic world reached by having faith. If we read the city of lions as Jerusalem, then there are even more uncomfortable resonances in this story - which is ostensibly one of hope.

The fables thus become a means not only of articulating Arabic culture but of linking disparate threads of the text. This is not a 'novel' that is interested in plot or characterization but in constructing different facets of the mahjar that intersect or converse with each other in various ways.

At times a reader may be a little disconcerted by the lack of specificity in relation to places or is a little wrong footed when, arriving at part three and finding new characters, direct connections to the particular families encountered earlier in the novel are not apparent. *Mahjar* offers much to a reader and invites reflection, for those who have no experience of migration, on being uprooted or impelled to journey to a foreign place, and on the tensions associated with responding to new places without being 'tyrannized by memory.'

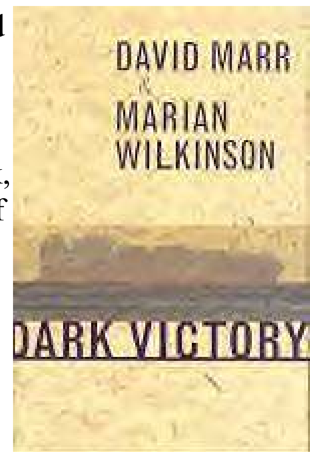
Margaret Miller is a secondary English teacher currently seconded to work in syllabus development. She is co-author, with Robyn Colwill, of a text book for called "Queensland Senior English: Theory/practice connections" which was recently shortlisted in The Australian Awards for Excellence in Educational Publishing 2003. She completed a Master of Arts degree in the writing of South African women through the University of Queensland.

Vulnerable Customers

Marian Wilkinson and David Marr, *Dark Victory*, Sydney; Allen and Unwin, 2003 and Peter Mares, *Borderline*, Second Edition, Sydney; University of New South Wales Press, 2002.

By Sharon Pickering

Making the invisible visible, questioning the simultaneous fluidity and rigidity of borders and calling the executive to account for the illegality and immorality of their actions is at the core of both *Borderline* (second edition) and *Dark Victory*. Bearing witness to the human tragedy that is now the routine product of Australia's refugee policy is the great strength of these works. In eminently readable detail and in the spirit of good investigative journalism, Peter Mares and Marian Wilkinson and David Marr lead readers through *the* national issue of the past five years. The authors humanely engage the individual stories of the refugee, the machinations of party politics, and the products of globalisation and the changing nation state.



Borderline covers the breadth of Australian refugee policy. Mares has pioneered what should only be the beginning of outstanding investigative journalism in relation to Australia's refugee policy. Mares weaves refugee narratives through the punitive outcomes of Australian policy from media representations of refugees, to the personal identification of refugee policy with Minister Ruddock, to legislative creativity and judicial activism. It includes compelling accounts of the policy of temporary protection, Tampa, the Pacific Solution, SIEV X, and the plight of East Timorese refugees in Australia. This updated edition extends the strengths of the first edition. Mares compassionately juxtaposes the hyper-mobility of the wealthy, *passported* individuals of the global North with the immobility of those *passportless* individuals rejected at the frontiers of fortresses such as Australia, Europe and North America. He concludes by arguing that both major parties, along with most Australians, 'close their eyes to the global reality of forced human movement. We want to wish asylum seekers out of existence… But whether or not they are visible, asylum seekers, refugees, and unauthorised migrants will continue to unsettle us with their presence' (264). My only overriding quibble with Mares' argument is that it can be read as absenting the wealthy nation state, and its peoples, in the creation and sustenance of refugee flows in lands far from its shores. Because in fact, nations such as Australia are intimately involved in the condition of the global South and refugee producing nations, and this must not be forgotten when we seek further to understand the condition of those who seek protection and the ways in which we deny it. When we reject refugees at the frontier, tow back their boats, refuse to count the dead on the high seas and reject international human rights obligations, we reaffirm our practices against the global South in the world order.

Dark Victory begins with ' the red dot' that appeared on the horizon, and focuses sharply upon what we now refer to as the *Tampa* incident. There are two great strengths of this book. First, it describes in great detail the conditions on board the *Palapa*, the boat that the Tampa went to assist, and how that boat began to break apart and its people became exposed to the seas. Wilkinson and Marr then undertake what will become *the* definitive account of the step by step rescue of the refugees from the *Palapa* by the *Tampa*. The logistics of this rescue were awesome. A ship the size of three city blocks came up alongside a tiny, fragmenting fishing boat. 'Rinnan positioned his ship to shelter the *Palapa*

from a fresh breeze and a 2-metre swell. He would remain on the bridge all afternoon manoeuvring the *Tampa* with its thrusters to try to keep the two boats together. Complicating the rescue was the need to keep the *Tampa's* aluminium ladder well above the *Palapa* to stop it being smashed to pieces as the little boat rose on the swell' (18). Second, the authors synthesise the volumes of material that have been put before a series of parliamentary inquiries into Australia's refugee policy generally, and the 'Children Overboard' and 'SIEV X' issues particularly. Making the details of these inquiries knowable to a broader audience is an act in the public good that helps the layperson make sense of the endless evidence that came before the various inquiries and committees.

In the questioning of borders and barriers to refugee protection and in challenging the legality of executive actions, the accounts point to an emerging gendered analysis. The enormity of state harm perpetrated against refugees, the violence of interdiction, the viciousness of militarised struggle on the high seas, the deaths of those fleeing persecution in the waters of a wealthy and robust nation are all gendered matters that indicate a need for alternative (gendered) frames of understanding.

In dealing with the transformation of refugee protection into a temporary protection regime for those that arrive by boat, both books begin a process of documenting the changed gendered character of those that seek Australia's protection. Both books dealing with the post 1999 situation (when the Temporary Protection Visa was first introduced) engage with the narratives of women, who came in increasing numbers as a consequence of the removal of family reunion from the TPV. As Wilkinson and Marr note: 'Rather than working as a deterrent to boat people, the new visas were turning wives and children into new, very vulnerable customers for the people smuggling trade' (225). As both books proceed, the stories of women became central in telling of the tow backs, children overboard, SIEV X and the Pacific Solution. At the very moment the enactment of Australia's refugee policy on the high seas required violent boundary inscription practices, the violence of these policies was increasingly being meted out against women and children. Those that the Australian Federal Police are said to be 'disrupting' in Indonesia are increasingly women and children.

But this changing gendered make-up of the refugee boats has never been lost on Canberra. The Children Overboard fabrication sought to demonise all refugees as being willing to sacrifice their own children to gain entry to Australia, but did so in a way that raised questions as to the maternal unsuitability of the mothers. The implied discourse of bad motherhood was a convenient and familiar discursive repertoire for a government set on discrediting those seeking protection.

Both these books will prompt other social and political commentators and academics to engage the detail of refugee policy with broader theoretical and ideological frames of reference. I want to make a few comments regarding what such a *gendered* engagement might incorporate, underpinned by the growing international feminist literature on asylum, and the changing nation state.

First, as refugee policy straddles the domestic and international realms, a gendered analysis should include the twinning of attacks on UN funding, the UN committee system and human rights mechanisms by the Australian Federal Government with assaults on the domestic non-government and community sector (dominated by women). The public response to the Tampa incident cannot be divorced from the systematic attacks on the community sector that has been routinely considered too 'soft', too 'touchy-feely' – too feminine in the neo-liberal moment of individual responsibility and 'choice'.

Second, the punitive turn in refugee protection in Australia has also been marked by watershed moments in relation to issues raised by, or in direct response to cases of gender based persecution. For example, the case of the 'Chinese Woman' linked Australia's forced deportation with China's one-child policy and forced abortions. Or, for example, the case of *Khawar,* where recognition of domestic violence as a form of gendered persecution prompted the legislative narrowing of the already narrow refugee convention definition of who can be legally recognised as a refugee. If you like, gender based persecution has arguably acted as *the* moment to usher in more restrictive readings of refugee protection for all those seeking asylum in Australia.

When examining processes of refugee determination I am not arguing for a 'gender sensitive interpretation' of refugee policy, of politics of non-entrée or even of the Refugee Convention. Sensitivity suggests a need for compassion, for kindliness, for the questionable 'tolerance' that Ghasson Hage has effectively deconstructed. I would argue that cases of gender persecution require complex and detailed knowledge of the ways human rights must apply to the multifaceted and diverse lives of women in a non-discriminatory way. While sensitivity is to be commended, perhaps even encouraged, women are not being turned away at borders or having their cases rejected by primary decision makers, because decision makers are simply insensitive. They are turned away because decision makers have been inaccurate and discriminatory in their decisions and have located themselves, their government and the woman applicant at a far distance from human rights.

Finally, the crisis of the sovereign territorial nation state is not disassociated from the crisis of the heterosexual, white male. The wealthiest nations of the world claim to be at greatest threat from everything - from disease (SARS), to terrorism, to unending 'floods' of refugees. The nations of the global North are constructed as being at the mercy of the peoples of the global South. Similarly, we see debate in our newspapers arguing that it is the heterosexual white male that is most hard done by from two or three decades of anti-discrimination legislation and changing workplace and familial arrangements. The heterosexual white male is now at the mercy of women, indigenous peoples, children, gays….

Both of these books are based on the critical questioning of misinformation and a willingness to call to account the executive, the parliament and, indeed, the courts for the illegality and immorality of Australian refugee policy. These are compelling accounts that make outstanding contributions to public debate. They richly deserve the awards and accolades they have received, and no doubt will go on receiving. But their role goes beyond what they present in their pages. The enduring legacy of both of these books will be to compel more nuanced, more theorised and increasingly challenging accounts, and to provide the impetus for gendered analyses to be at the forefront of these future works.

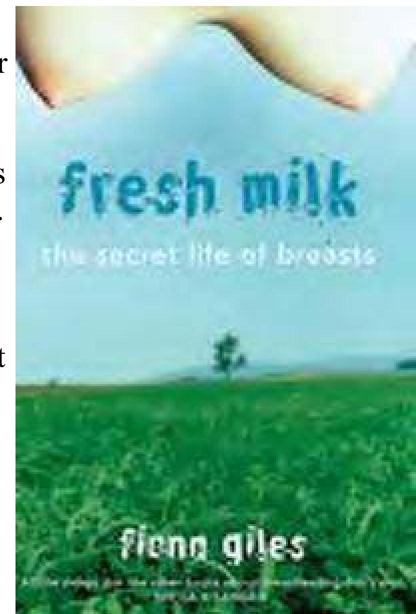
Sharon Pickering lectures in Criminal Justice and Criminology in the School of Political and Social Inquiry at Monash University. Her work has largely centred on women's interaction with the state in relation to criminal justice. Her doctoral work was based in Northern Ireland examining women, policing and resistance, and focused on the policing of conflict over the past thirty years. She has also published research on the complex responses of women activists in South East Asia to human rights and feminist discourses.

Spilt Milk: Stories Mother Never Told Us

Fiona Giles, *Fresh Milk: The Secret Life of Breasts.* Australia: Allen and Unwin, 2003.

By Rhonda Shaw

Many feminist researchers across the globe would agree that most breastfeeding research to date has been primarily undertaken from the perspective of medical and public health discourses. However, while breastfeeding still receives less attention in the feminist literature than pregnancy, childbirth, and body image, there is growing evidence of a shift in research on breastfeeding to qualitative studies that focus on the lived experiences of breastfeeding women. Australasian scholars have certainly been at the forefront of this shift. Not only have they begun to undertake in-depth qualitative research that seeks to represent women's voices themselves, they have also trail-blazed a unique cultural studies approach to breastfeeding and lactation analysis. As Fiona Giles, the author of *Fresh Milk: The Secret Life of Breasts* points out in the Introduction to her new book: 'the details of how we fit breastfeeding into our lives, or decide that it doesn't fit, are not well known. And the meaning of breastfeeding - as opposed to its nutritional content - is rarely discussed outside mothers' groups and pediatricians' waiting rooms' (xii). Giles goes on to say that 'there is much more breastmilk in our lives, in our bodies, and in our cultural imaginary, than we realize' (xv). Indeed, if the selection of stories in *Fresh Milk* is anything to go by, that much and more is true.



As feminist scholars have made clear for quite some time now, the lactating and nurturing breast which is the subject of Giles' book has for the most part been absent from public view. Not only are there few images of healthy breastfeeding women circulating in the popular cultural imaginary, but also breastfeeding in public in western society is often fraught with tension and met with varying degrees of disapproval. *Fresh Milk* seeks to reclaim this absented breast from its marginalised status in the private enclaves of women's (and sometimes men's) everyday lives. It also seeks to make space for those even more secret stories about people's encounters with breastfeeding and breastmilk that might otherwise have remained underground and untold.

Fresh Milk is a collection of 29 essays, memories, and personal accounts of attitudes towards and experiences of breastfeeding and lactation, compiled and interpreted by Australian scholar and feminist Fiona Giles. There are three special Recipes at the back of the text, which are followed by a selection of Suggested Readings. The tales in Giles' book are mainly visceral, frequently humorous, sometimes sad and troubling, often touching, and occasionally extraordinary. They deal with issues to do with pleasure and pain; sensuality, desire and the erotic; the relations between self and other; the 'self's clean and proper body'; bounded bodies and intercorporeality with others' bodies; cultural anxiety and regulation; the abject and the moral; social fragmentation and belonging. The stories included in the collection are diverse: some are more unorthodox and challenging than others. They range from discussions about the etymology of lactation; shopping for maternity wear; the difficulties of breastfeeding; the ethics of cross-nursing; the gifting and donation of breastmilk to strangers; the uneasy relation of sensuality and sexuality to breastfeeding; the hegemony of the 'Breast is Best' discourse and concomitant overmedicalisation of breastfeeding;

breastfeeding in public; lactation pornography; male lactation; and feeding triplets and toddlers. Interspersed with these accounts, which are mainly from respondents to Giles' research, are interpretations and vignettes by Giles herself. The closing essay, for instance, called 'White Chocolate', is a personal story told by Giles about her embodied relationship with her own mother. In this essay Giles wistfully speculates about the strengthening of her somatic memory with her mother and hence the affective bond between them if her mother had breastfed her longer than she did.

One of my favourite essays in the collection is adapted from an essay first published in the British journal, *Feminist Theory*, by another Australian feminist scholar, Alison Bartlett. Bartlett's essay, 'Thinking Through Breasts', draws on the work of feminist scholars such as Adrienne Rich and Jane Gallop, both of whom have argued that we need to give more serious attention to the specific features of women's differential embodiment. In particular, Bartlett invokes Hélène Cixous's provocative appeal that we need to write in breastmilk, and that we need to write with and through our bodies and not just about them. Without explicitly stating so, *Fresh Milk* also hints at the possibilities of Cixous's literal and metaphorical allusion. It attempts to articulate some of the contradictory positions that breastfeeding women experience as maternal subjects, and seeks to provide fresh insight into the materialities of lactating embodiment. It does this in a number of different ways, one of which is to intimate that breasted experiences, while socially and culturally specific, may also correspond to an embodied logic or intelligibility all of their own. In this way, I think, *Fresh Milk* represents breastfeeding and lactation as a source of empowerment for women, rather than natural instinct, duty, or drudgery. At the same time, *Fresh Milk* offers its readers a taste of some of the mixed pleasures and pains of that subset of maternity we call breastfeeding. This representation of the viscerality of breastfeeding lays bare some of the contradictions of maternity by connecting the stories of the men and women in *Fresh Milk* to the body of the mother and to the maternal in a way that begins to take us beyond old stereotypes. In my opinion, this is what makes the collection so captivating.

And as we read each essay throughout the text we are constantly reminded, as Giles suggests, 'that breastfeeding, though a function of the body, is deeply embedded in cultural practice' (15). In other words, and as Bartlett also says, the way in which breastfeeding is culturally practised 'is gendered'. While we may think that breastfeeding and maternity form a so-called natural pairing, Giles cleverly situates this couplet alongside non-maternal experiences people have had with breastmilk, encouraging us to think of lactation otherwise. Once we acknowledge that it is possible to decouple the bio-physiological act of breastfeeding – or at least lactation – from its relation of fixity to bio-genetic maternity then, as Giles states, 'we could expand the boundaries that constrain the body's genius for breastfeeding … [and] allow it to drift in and out of all our lives, and revel with grace in its pleasures' (249).

The same could be said for loosening our 'grip of outdated conventions and attitudes' (249) toward wet-nursing, cross-nursing, adoptive or 'surrogate' nursing and breastmilk donation. *Fresh Milk* invites us to rethink any preconceived notions we might have held about these situations too. The essays on wet-, cross-, and adoptive-nursing, as well as those on breastmilk donation, all demonstrate, in different ways, the sorts of investments women have in their social identities as 'mother' and how permeable the boundaries they may or may not construct around their maternal bodies can be in relation to this identity category. Among the stories included in this part of the collection is an essay by New Zealander Pam Sutton, who recounts a situation – now famous Down Under – in which a woman she barely knew breastfed her eight-month
old infant without her 'consent', while she attended a Parents' Centre conference dinner in New Zealand

in 1996. While I have argued elsewhere that Sutton's case is not as straightforward as it at first seems (*Body & Society*, 2003, Vol. 9 no. 2: 55-73), this particular incident and Sutton's recounting of it in *Fresh Milk* demonstrate just how socially and culturally contested the moral boundaries of our bodies really are. According to this version of Sutton's story, it is due to the fact that the cross-nursing act was non-consensual that it failed to enhance the social bond between herself and the other woman, and thus led to its further fragmentation. The other stories in *Fresh Milk* about wet- and cross-nursing arrangements, as well as the accounts of breastmilk donation, however, all involve varying levels of consent. In one way or another they reveal that as human beings we all have these corporeal openings out to other beings, and it is precisely these sorts of openings, enacted in the course of our everyday lives, that make us both social and human.

Given the sorts of issues raised by the eclectic set of tales *Fresh Milk* brings together, there is no doubt in my mind that it fills a gap in the current breastfeeding literature. It also speaks to an extremely wide range of readers in doing so; not only breastfeeding women who occupy a largely maternal habitat, but also the scholars and academics who write about those worlds, the health professionals and stakeholder groups who promote them, and the margin dwellers whose lives have been secretly but profoundly affected by 'the miracle of the lactating breast'.

One of the pleasures of reading this text for me, in my role as social theorist and researcher, was to follow the gentle unfolding of Giles' interpretive-descriptive approach to her material. While my own inclination as a feminist scholar would have been to analyse the breastfeeding and lactation practices discussed in the book more critically (particularly the material on lactation pornography) and with a view to possible theory-building, Giles faithfully records the voices of her research participants and lets them speak for themselves as much as possible. This enables her to document 'the vastness and diversity of people's experience with breastmilk' (xiv), as she puts it, as she lovingly weaves the words of the participants in her research alongside her own sometimes fictive interpretations, into a rich and believable descriptive narrative. Because Giles does this in a non-judgmental way, which not only makes *Fresh Milk* extremely readable, as well as affecting, entertaining, informative, and often provocative for the general reader, it also provides the academic with a valuable resource for secondary research.

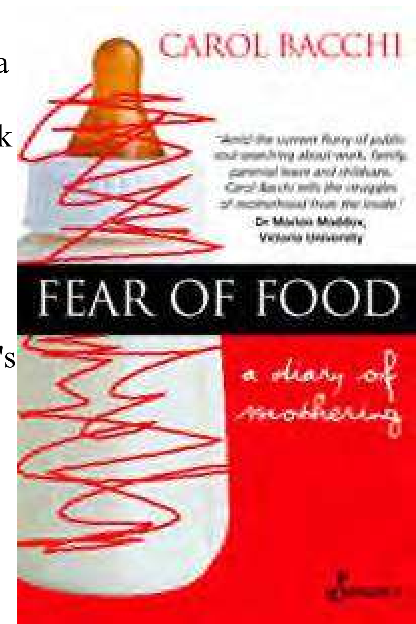
Rhonda Shaw works in the Women's Studies Programme at the University of Auckland.

Battling Bodies

Carol Bacchi, *Fear of Food.* North Melbourne: Spinifex, 2003.

By Alison Bartlett

Carol Bacchi is an academic in Political Theory who had a child at the age of 44, and this 'diary of mothering', as it is subtitled, charts the difficult terrain she encountered when her son refused food at the breast and the bottle.



It is an absorbing read and brought back memories of my own early days of mothering which, like Bacchi's, was a state of exhaustion with a baby who fed for an hour at a time and slept briefly in between. I'm certain these are not unusual circumstances, although as I read this book ABC radio was debating whether sleep deprivation constituted torture, in the context of the United States' treatment of an alleged terrorist. When I went back to university work in this state I was awed at the capacity of the human body to endure such conditions, and considered myself part of a large and secret community who went to their professions on only a few hours of interrupted sleep each night. Bacchi's son's rejection of food, however, sounds somewhat more pressing and traumatising, and mothering as a single woman has its own set of challenges. Bacchi's story mimics the structure of heroic epics by beginning *in medias res* - in the middle of her story - filling us in and then taking us further to the victorious end. Indeed, the book does narrate a battle, with herself as much as her son and the medical profession. The book is filled largely with her accounts written from that time (now eight years ago), which comprised a Feeding Record (which records times, quantities, along with bowel movements and sleep periods) and a Diary which endeavours to articulate her feelings and searches for patterns of normality in the erratic and time-defying life of a baby. These are fascinating to new mothers but do lose some of their urgency and interest after the event. While Bacchi reflects on her obsession with time, scheduling, routine and patterns, I started to skip over the lists of formula, sleeps and burps to seek more of the reflective narrative written in the present. This voice became more and more diminished, though, as the claustrophobia of eating and sleeping and burping, medication changes, hospital visits and the minutiae of babies' lives crowded in.

Bacchi's reputation as an academic sits awkwardly in this book, which was frustrating for me. As an academic, I wanted to read the book because it was written by a feminist theorist; my experience of early mothering was also confounding and I look to books and stories to make sense of it. The best birth present I received was an anthology published by Sybylla Press called *Motherlode*, which my former PhD supervisor gave to me in her canny knowledge that I would be hungry for words. Bacchi, however, constantly undermines this part of herself in the book, stating that it is 'the personal account of a mother who happens to work in a university', as if this were of no consequence. If she didn't 'happen' to work at a university and have an academic reputation, I suspect that this book may never have reached publication. Bacchi is apologetic about being an academic, 'confessing' it to the reader, and joking, when she takes extra time off work, that not all of us need to read feminist theory. On the contrary, I think more of us need to.

Bacchi's construction of an academic is the figure of Catherine Waldby's disembodied fiction: a caricature of rationality, control, organisation, public credibility – in fact, the idealised Cartesian male, struggling to control or confine the emotional, disorderly, primitive 'nature' of women which erupts in bodily and reproductive functions. Bacchi constructs herself like this: 'I watched myself become erratic, depressed, unstable. This really frightened me. After all, I was an academic. I was rational, in control.' This really frightens me. How can Bacchi theorise these structural and epistemic formations in her academic work but fall into their fictions in her 'personal' tale of mothering? Surely this is the point at which theory and practice, work and life, can usefully and radically meet to change lives, policies, cultures? I sincerely sympathise with Bacchi's experience – mothering a baby is demanding work and her situation was very stressful – but it's the entire social and work structure that needs to be interrogated so that maternal work is valued, supported, and respected. This doesn't mean celebrating motherhood: it means naming the values of a society through which public success and paid work are the chief constituents of our identity and social value; it means shifting those values so that social and human endeavour (like raising a baby) are realised as important work. Indeed, I think I've read some of these ideas in Bacchi's published work on embodied citizenship. This book does briefly address the incommensurability of competing needs of paid work and mothering work in the last 3 pages, mentioning family-friendly policies and paid maternity leave; but these are only the tip of the iceberg, and are too often regarded as merely 'accommodating' women in the workplace rather than valuing women's contribution in all spheres.

But maybe that's another book. Maybe this one does 'disclose', as it aims to, the 'frightening, exhausting and, even at times, downright demoralising' dimensions of early mothering, as well as functioning as personally cathartic as it was intended. Bacchi joins a number of academic women like Susan Maushart, Naomi Wolf, and others who have had babies and written about it, outraged at the conspiracy of silence concealing maternal work. I suspect, however, that the hard work of maternity isn't even remotely interesting to professional women before we become mothers. Bacchi's book is a brave one, and I hope her next one will be even braver in taking the personal and making it political.

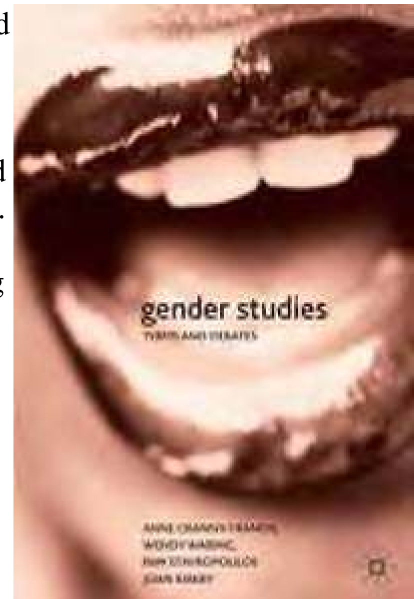
Alison Bartlett teaches literature at the University of Southern Queensland, Towoomba. Her most recent book was *Postgraduate Research Supervision: Transforming (R)elations*, edited with Gina Mercer.

Feminist Thought for (Serious) Beginners

***Gender Studies: Terms and Debates,* Anne Cranny-Francis, Wendy Waring, Pam Stavropoulos and Joan Kirkby. London; Palgrave MacMillan, 2003.**

By JaneMaree Maher

Gender Studies: Terms and Debates offers itself as 'an attempt to approach the study of gender both as an academic practice and as a feature of our everyday lives' (Preface ix). It admirably achieves these goals and presents readers with a valuable introduction to, and useful landscape of contemporary gender studies debates. *Gender Studies* also positions its readers as 'knowers' in that the practices through which people acquire their knowledge are clearly marked as understanding possessed by social actors (69). This move positions readers seeking to enter into the debates and employ the definitions in this volume in an already powerful position. In so doing, it reflects the emancipatory and politically practical orientation of the project of this text.



The clearest commitment to the 'everyday' is found in the accessible and open language. Throughout G*ender Studies*, the tone is conversational and engaged. Questions are used thoughtfully and well located to engage interest. Concepts are presented through several frames and approached through everyday situations. This commitment is reinforced in the chapter headings, which emphasise the uses of theories of gender. Chapter One is entitled 'Ways of Talking' and offers the reader a set of terms for engaging with debates around sex and the experience of being gendered. This pattern is followed in the subsequent chapters where ways of 'talking; reading; [and] seeing' track a series of applications for understanding how such terms allows us better to understand the impacts of gender on our experience of everyday life. Chapters such as 'Ways of Looking' offer a theorized account of the gaze, but also explicitly engage with the socially embedded practices of the subject. The ways in which we exist and interact with social and cultural norms are presented in concert with ways in which we might strategically and critically evaluate such norms.

Discussions about complex but vital areas for gender studies are thoughtfully tracked; they are also clear and accessible. Key limitations of certain theoretical formulations for understanding the impacts of race and class on experience are laid out and ongoing challenges in these areas for those interested in gender considered. In this way, readers are introduced to concepts in concert with the ongoing need to review and revise such paradigms for understanding. Rosi Braidotti's nomadic subjects, for example, are introduced with attention to the strategic possibilities of such thinking, but they are illuminated by bell hooks' concerns about the potential loss of 'history and the actual experiences' of some of those involved (34-5).

Headings and subheadings are used to point out important conceptual sequences that the reader is being encouraged to think through. Each tagged section, for example 'experience' (37ff), presents key concepts (subjective experiences of material, social and economic realities), important thinkers (de Lauretis, Scott, Stuart Hall) and important references. Each section is related to terms and debates

previously explored. Theoretical developments and directions are also related to intellectual currents and traditions previously noted. Each of the key concepts has a crisp and thoughtful definition attached. These definitions do not occur routinely at the beginning of the section, but are mostly part way through, or towards the end of discussion of the meanings and issues that center on each of these terms. This structuring means that debates are opened out and put in context before catchphrases are applied. This proves an effective tool for alerting the reader to the importance of avoiding simplistic application of such definitions. It reinforces the complex and interwoven terrain being examined. But it also facilitates the acquisition of frameworks that can be transferred and applied with a degree of certainty by those keen to use such definitions and concepts in fields of study and in everyday life.

For the reader already acquainted or even well acquainted with the fields of women's studies and gender studies, the questioning and thoughtful location of the debates and terms provides an opportunity to explore, revisit and even renew intellectual connections in commonly used paradigms. In addition, it offers a format for understanding how those keen to learn might most usefully acquire such knowledge. In the links it draws, its careful arguments about why terms such as heterosexuality need to be historically located and carefully considered, G*ender Studies* presents an admirable model for engaging interest and facilitating discussion.

The examples chosen to illustrate terms and debates span a broad range of political, economic and sociocultural moments. The development of 'heterosexuality' (18), and the abandonment of fixed rubrics of identity at a time when groups previously unable to access such identities were on the verge of acquiring them (75) are set up as theoretically significant moments that are deeply embedded in social and political currents. The influence of HIV/Aids on understandings of sexual identities and sexual practices (77ff) is but one of these effective examples. Various forms of cultural production (film, television sitcoms and written texts) are used, as are social science research, 'everyday' examples and, at times, extended conversational exchanges that draw the reader into self-reflexive examination of how gender is assigned (96). The reported exchange where the medical doctor in conversation with the patient challenged her on the sex of her children on the basis of the case notes (97) offered insight into Foucault's biopower, medical hierarchies and gender status in a wonderfully compact sequence.

Readers are also consistently referred to well-developed and significant critical applications of the definitions and terms being discussed. In 'Ways of Reading', the possibilities of resistant reading and rewriting the text are explored in the context of sci-fi novels, fairy tales and the uses to which audiences can put conventional generic forms like romance novels. Each of the examples is tied to a known point in their critical genesis - Radway for romance novels, James Tiptree Jnr for science fiction novels, and so on. Further applications and intersecting possibilities are then explored in a detailed study of the notable critical engagements of Henry Jenkins with the *Star Wars* fans' production of materials related to the television series (129ff). Jenkins' debt to Certeau's notion of poaching is foregrounded, various resistant uses of the existing *Star Wars* oeuvre by fans are examined and potential challenges to heterosexual and normative readings of *Star Wars* characters mounted in such uses are explored. Audience theories are thus encompassed within this extended examination of how practices of critical reading, textual and poaching have been applied both by fans (audiences) and thinkers (theorists) to a popular cultural instance that will be familiar to the vast majority of readers. In this way, G*ender Studies* successfully models that which it describes and illuminates the multiple uses of the critical tools it is outlining.

This location of theoretical premises within existing developed and important critiques has the effect of offering readers useful and specific ways to apply the concepts and debate they have been covering, but also allows the pinpointing of some topographical markers for further exploration of such debates. Given the diversity of applications for gender studies, and the diversity of disciplines and cultural materials for which such debates have critical relevance, these locating points are particularly welcome. The tension between the specific and the general is successfully negotiated and is supported by the small but thoughtful suggested bibliography at the end of each chapter. In addition, where concepts build on previously explored issues, readers are clearly directed back to relevant sections of the text and indications are given of the links that can be drawn. Where relevant, social movements important to conceptual developments such as the men's movement and studies of masculinity are also introduced with relevant references.

Each chapter features useful questions and scenarios through which readers who so wish can 'test' or 'try on' their understanding of the material covered. These questions engage both content and skill-based activities and, as such, provide useful opening exercises indicating how the terms and debates covered can be used.

In a pedagogical context where our students come with increasingly diverse pre-existing frames of reference, and where their time in the classroom is often compressed by the educational structures and their own external commitments, this text should prove an invaluable reference that will have application across a range of disciplines and interdisciplinary environments. Through its clear and well-organised discussions on issues critical to feminist theories and the study of gender in society, G*ender Studies* will facilitate theoretical exchanges and assist students to develop relevant critical frameworks that they will be applying, as well as assisting their teachers in the process of refining and defining the important tools that they wish to inculcate. Those engaged with student learning are usually working within structural and temporal constraints in the development and preparation of material. G*ender Studies* offers suggestions for thoughtful and valuable pathways to interlink important concepts in the fields of gender, sex, sexuality and culture. This distinguishes it from other reference texts such as Maggie Humm's *Dictionary of Feminist Thought*, where terms are classified according to more conventional forms. The choice by the authors here to navigate as they have done through the complex terrain, in a conversational tone with the putative reader clearly in mind, distinguishes G*ender Studies* and should commend it to students and educators everywhere.

JaneMaree Maher is a Lecturer in Women's Studies in the School of Political and Social Inquiry at Monash University.

Fashioning Our way to Freedom?

Ali Guy, Eileen Green and Maura Banim (eds.) *Through the Wardrobe: Women's Relationships With Their Clothes*. Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001; *Fashion and Beauty*: *Feminist Review* (London) 71 (2002).

By Cath Darcy

These two monographs examine the role of fashion in women's lives, addressing women's 'lived experience' of clothing as well as the wider social, cultural and political factors which inflect the production and consumption of fashion. The primary focus of *Through the Wardrobe* is on 'clothes as lived experience' (4), while *Fashion and Beauty* takes a far more materialist approach to the production and consumption of fashion, setting discussions of fashion's personal use-value within an interrogation of the 'commodified context' of the industry (16).

A major theme that recurs throughout the essays included in *Through the Wardrobe* concerns 'the extent to which women's clothing choices and experiences are dominated by the structure of the fashion system' (6). This collection leans away from arguments which represent the fashion industry as a repressive system in which women 'buy and embody the meanings' that the industry instills in its products, and 'thus transfer the created meanings to themselves as wearers' (7). *Through the Wardrobe* consciously resists the 'concept of the "taken-in" woman who colludes with her own oppression' (7). The editors write that '[t]he contributors to this book, while acknowledging that the fashion system is restrictive and can be oppressive, also argue that women can and do re-appropriate and subvert the meanings imbued in clothes. … [W]omen can, at times, choose when to conform and when to subvert' (7). A broad range of essays address this and other themes. There are pieces on 'Women and Body Art', 'The Wedding Dress: From Use Value to Sacred Object', 'Choosing an Image: Exploring Women's Images through the Personal Shopper', on lesbian women's clothing choices, and two pieces each on academic women's clothing choices and on the experiences of women who have had mastectomies. The pieces suggest that women are able to select from a range of options to project an image suitable to different individual moods and social occasions. The material of some of the essays, however, would seem to complicate this rather optimistic proposition. Alison Adam's discussion of the difficulties experienced by 'big women' in shopping for attractive clothing which could lend itself to 'an individual look', Jean Spence's discussion of the complexities involved in learning to 'fly on one wing' after a mastectomy, and Anita Franklin's piece about the discriminations suffered by black women dressing in African-style clothing in the UK suggest that 're-appropria[tion] and subver[sion]' of the fashion system is easier for white, professional, two-breasted women whose bodies conform to the 'average' size range. Nonetheless, the essays do acknowledge the complexities of race, class, sexuality, and age which are involved in 'play[ing] the fashion game' (27). Ultimately, however, I find it hard to believe that women might 'fashion their way to [*real*] freedom' through mixing and matching items in their wardrobe (7).

Fashion and Beauty is far more concerned with the fashion industry itself, while also paying attention to the uses women make of its products. The contributors to this collection concern themselves with the material conditions of the industry, and use their empirical research to theorise about the way that women's 'lived experiences' of the fashion and beauty industry intersect with the patriarchal and capitalist power structures of western culture. The contributors to *Fashion and Beauty* do not reduce women to the level of passive victims, as the editors of *Through the Wardrobe* might fear such an approach would do. They acknowledge the pleasures and personal benefits women may derive from both the use and production of the industry's services and products. At the same time, they are acutely aware of the positive effects for capital of women's consumption of the industry's products and values (including their purchasing of its products in order to 're-appropriate and subvert their meanings'). *Fashion and Beauty* concerns itself with 'the relationship between political economy approaches, and those concerned with culture and identity, and considers questions of production as well as consumption' (1). One of the collection's greatest strengths is what the editors describe as its 'full engagement with the intersectionality of gender, "race" and class in relation to experiences and structures of the fashion and beauty industries' (1).

The contributors to *Fashion and Beauty* offer a complex examination of the intersection between the personal, the institutional, and the political. In her essay, ' "Ordinary People Come Through Here" ': Locating the Beauty Salon in Women's Lives', Paula Black performs an analysis of women's use of beauty salons in the context of 'a number of key sociological debates including: issues of health and well-being; gendered employment practices; the construction and maintenance of gender identity and sexuality; body practices; and leisure activities' (2). Black interviews both salon users and beauty therapists to ascertain some of the main reasons why women use beauty parlours, and identifies four major reasons: pampering (the alleviation of stress), routine grooming (to enable the practice of an 'appropriate' femininity), health treatments (such as massage and aromatherapy to treat health complaints), and corrective treatments (once again to produce a normative femininity). Black acknowledges that there are a number of 'unmistakable' personal benefits which women receive from salon treatments ('[t]he salon offers pleasure, escapism, a means of 'coping' and sheer sensuality'), but she stresses that 'these exchanges take place in a commodified context' (16). Salon treatments cost money, and they feed into the world of work and domestic life. Black locates her female subjects' justification of their usage of beauty salons for stress relief and for the production of an 'appropriate' femininity within wider discourses of stress since the 1980s which 'encourage the worker to deal with their own stresses and emotional reactions, and to view the source of these emotions within the individual' (6). This new discourse of stress 'detracts from an analysis of stress as related to the structure and practices within the workplace' and the social structure (6). 'Learning to be a worker who is able to manage their own stress or emotions', she argues, 'can be a resource within some workplaces [as] [t]he individualised, and most importantly the self-monitoring worker, offers … herself as a model in order to gain promotion and other rewards' (7). This article clearly illustrates the complexity of the relationship between the commodified context of the fashion and beauty industry and the benefits that individual women derive from its products.

This piece is nicely balanced by Rita Rupal's brief description of the pleasures of attending the relaxed and female dominated, down-market beauty parlours which are 'everywhere' in India (88). While Rupal does not provide the same depth of analysis as Black, her discourse draws attention to race in the discussion of beauty parlours. Her 'feeling of not belonging' in English salons, which she finds 'cold and intimidating' with their 'immaculate white women in white coats, clinically perfect, either with their scrubbed English rose complexions, or their permanent tans', indicates the 'whiteness' of the

spaces discussed by Black (88). Nirmal Puwar also addresses the politics of race in the fashion industry. Her essay, 'Multicultural Fashion … Stirrings of Another Sense of Aesthetics and Memory', emphasises the complexity of mainstream western fashion's appropriation of traditional Asian dress. She examines this at the level of Asian women's personal feelings about seeing white women coveting the objects that they themselves have been reviled for wearing, and also analyses 'multicultural capitalism' at local, institutional, and theoretical levels (63).

Angela McRobbie and Juliet Ash look predominantly at production. McRobbie's piece, 'Fashion Culture: Creative Work, Female Individualisation', studies the destruction of 'the small scale, independent activities which formed the backbone of the success of British fashion design as an internationally recognized phenomenon from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s' by 'rapid individualization' of the industry and 'an increasingly harsh climate of neo-liberalization' (52). Ash's 'case study of Heba - an "alternative" mode of production in the UK fashion industry' offers a more optimistic outlook. Ash describes the classroom and on-the-job training which Heba provides for traditionally exploited textile workers (who are predominantly Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women), and the benefits that may be obtained as women learn a range of skills to enable their active participation in the industry.

Fashion and Beauty, then, offers a complex and interesting analysis of the relationship between women's 'lived experiences' of clothing and the material conditions of the fashion and beauty industries. *Through the Wardrobe* is also valuable for its deliberate focus on 'the complexities of the "wardrobe moment" ', the instant each day when women put together an ensemble before stepping out to face the world (5). The editors of both collections suggest that a focus on women's day-to-day relationships with their clothes is an important new area for feminist analysis of fashion. I would have been interested to see this analysis extended to include some consideration of the differences between women's and men's experiences of fashion. On the whole, however, both *Fashion and Beauty* and *Through the Wardrobe* present an interesting range of perspectives on the importance of fashion in women's lives.

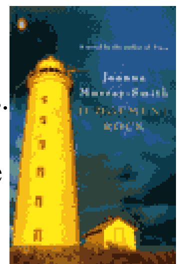
Cath Darcy is a postgraduate in the Department of Humanities and International Studies at University of Southern Queensland. She is currently completing her doctoral thesis on the reputation history of Helen Garner.

New Perspectives

Joanna Murray Smith, *Judgment Rock*. Penguin Books, 2002.

By Jasna Novakovic

Women portrayed as victims of destiny, of male insensitivity or social conservatism have been a cherished trope to a great many male authors, and favoured reading in western and eastern cultures alike. In societies which allowed woman no self-fulfilment other than through man, sympathy towards the 'weaker sex' was triggered sometimes by compassion, sometimes by covert misogyny. Women were sacrificed ritualistically and lightheartedly on the altar of the literary imagination, without a pang of consciousness let alone guilt. When a contemporary woman reverses the logic and writes a novel featuring a female hero, and chooses to victimise a man instead, it is still a rare idea or, rather, a conceptual ingenuity. Joanna Murray-Smith's *Judgment Rock* is a case in point.



The subversion begins where least expected: the location of the narrative. The novel sets off with a cliché of an island as a referent for isolation, eliciting instantaneous ambiguous response, reinforced by the repetitive syntax and occasional stumbling over iterated words. The transformation comes surreptitiously, like a spell; common symbols slowly evolve into literary archetypes rendering the signifiers of human predicament recognisable, hence credible, and what seemed to be a liability turns into an asset. On a large, unpopulated island, miles from civilization, a woman and a man can easily become larger than life. They can even assume the proportions of eponymous characters - mythical Eve and Adam or, as in this case, Iris, a metonym of nature and Noah, the saviour. With only indigenous plants and the ocean for company, they can be nothing other than themselves and cannot pretend, because they have no human shields to ward off the unpleasant Other, no mirror apart from each other to reflect in. If that mirror refracts the image and it returns distorted to the subject, disappointment is inevitable. And accommodation highly unlikely. The choice of a partner, in such circumstances, can become the matter of mental or even physical survival.

One of the worst scenarios in such circumstances is the coupling of a pragmatic, but insecure person with an introspective partner. A down-to-earth temperament needs a tangible purpose to feel worthy of being in a certain place at a certain point in time, and seeks constant reassurance that s/he is worthy of respect. Family, religion, occupation, all become means to that end. A goal remains synonymous with valuable achievement only as long as it is appreciated by the community. But when that community is reduced to a single individual, and that individual is perceived as an irreconcilable stranger, mounting frustration takes the form of a daily ghost. Rather than a promise of self-fulfilment, a location identified with the goal turns into a prison. And delusion becomes such a person's friend. In that respect Iris is a stock character who could appear in the guise of either sex. But in this novel it happens to be a woman who comes to an island and stays there because she wants to find three plants. She is, naturally, sharply aware of the uniqueness of the location and becomes tied to it. Iris seeks self-realisation through the fulfilment of a personal ambition. Only once does it occur to her that she might indeed be driven by ambition, but she is too confused to know what is motivating her, let alone her own feelings.

The man who falls in love with Iris is her antithesis and the two of them are as typical binary opposites as you can get. She is young and small and beautiful, he is large and middle-aged. It is impossible to tell whether he is handsome or not. When they marry, he simply says: ' “Iris is ...” he paused.... “My

wife.” This is a total unison for him, an amalgamation of the Self and the Other, like a parent's feeling for a child. She, on the other hand, is obsessed with her Ego and wonders if women marry 'to liberate themselves from the tyranny of the self, to relax into the reflexes of a shared life.' She is also judgmental all the time. Her complexes feed on denigration, so she keeps putting Noah down and assessing his actions and motives. In other words, he is the constant object of her self-projections and comparisons. She quizzes him about the plants and is 'impressed' by his understanding of them but, of course, this is mere condescension and arrogance. He never quizzes her. To him, language is a medium for discourse inviting reflection. He is trying to reach to her through reciprocal emotion manifesting itself in a glance, in a touch, in shared ideals. To solitary Noah, his role on the island is part of the eternal cycle of keeping the light burning against darkness. As a light keeper whose occupation is purely spiritual, he is reminiscent of Carl Gustav Jung's account of Pueblo Indians who believed they were helping the Sun rise in the morning. Noah is a dreamer who taps on resources from within to remain, in the third millennium, God's servant and the saviour. His wife wonders 'if Noah had ever read [the Bible]'; when he asks her if their island is God's land, she replies that it is Aboriginal. To him, it has a cosmological significance, to her, it can accommodate only one race.

The extent to which human consciousness can remain shut to intuitive perceptions of the Other is illustrated throughout the novel, and always from Iris's perspective. She realises, for instance, that Noah 'had faith which seemed to surpass her own'. But she totally misses the point when attributing his 'purveying of light' to his lack of interest in others, meaning herself. Hence a typical feminine complaint that Noah belonged to his work 'with an intensity that excluded all other relationships' and the concomitant question – what makes a woman so companionable to loneliness? In this context, the answer is simple: unreflexiveness. Although encouraged in women by patriarchal society, that limitation is by no means their preserve. Contemporary social practices and the growing accessibility of a wide range of jobs to women have proven that much. The problem, however, remains as long as an extrovert character expects an introspective person to respond in ways s/he cannot. Iris's silent discourse regarding Noah's love of opera is another typical example. He would occasionally speak to her about music, but never about the themes. To Iris, this is a flaw of character. She attempts to define his attitude to and appreciation of music in rationalistic terms, but because Noah communicates with music on an emotional level and does not feel the urge to analyse or define the substance of his pleasure, she cannot understand it. Consequently, she disparages his attitude and attributes it to mundane needs, to an extension of the ego: power. Whereas, Noah could lose himself in music. He could also grasp abstract ideas and had 'a feeling for the narratives of life, an appreciation of both destiny and morality.' His favourite books are grand adventure stories about man and nature, those by Herman Melville, Ernest Hemingway, Jules Verne. What makes such a character special is his understanding of the world. To him, rapport with nature does not preclude spirituality and reflection.

This process of inverse reading goes on and on. Thus it is Iris who believes that she is 'placeless and timeless', whereas Noah wants to 'anchor her'. Her delusion that they are 'trapped inside *small* expectations' would be dangerous to the survival of any relationship. The observation that, as the term of their marriage lengthened, each became more and more alone, comes as no surprise but she again reads Noah's growing aloofness as his disinterest in her. And yet she could not avoid noticing that 'he, too, was aggrieved by the feeling of being denied something.' The bottom line of this scenario is the delusion that there is a unitary truth. She 'did not have the kind of mind that relaxed into ritual and lost sight of truth,' says Iris. What truth, whose truth or why her truth instead of Noah's, are questions that never occur to some people. Late twentieth century theory has made a convincing case that there is no such thing as absolute truth, that we are always talking about someone's point of view: personal,

institutional, truth constructed by religion, by state/smen, by dictators. Only the kindred spirits can tip the scale and help resolve such controversial situations. Murray-Smith's novel ventures into a slippery territory of morale by proffering advice as to who is to judge them. From a personal point of view, of course.

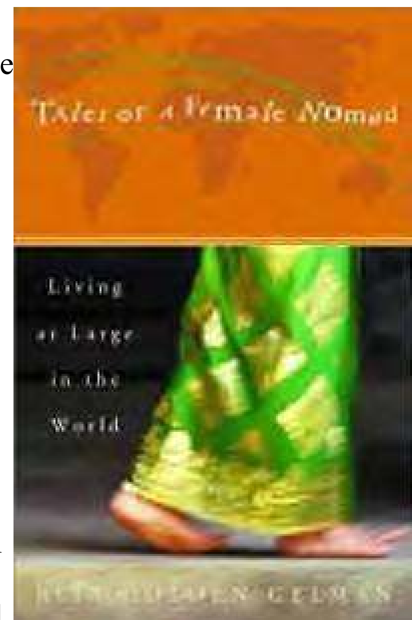
Jasna Novakovic is a freelance critic. She is currently enrolled in a PhD at Monash University.

Igniting the Flame of Adventure

Rita Golden Gelman, *Tales of a Female Nomad*, Bantam 2001

By Paula Heelan

On the verge of an unexpected divorce, Rita Golden Gelman, at 48, suddenly realised she was free. No longer needing to compromise or ask permission to do what she wanted, she tossed her privileged suburban existence to take on the unknown. With her husband gone and her two children living independent lives, Rita sold or gave away all her possessions and left Los Angeles for Mexico. She found the backpackers trail, a Latin lover and began the first of many amazing adventures. Now 65, Rita has been living the nomadic life for more than 17 years. As she travels she writes children's books (she has written over 70), which financially support her journeys.



Clenching a contract with an American publisher in 2000, Rita settled for 12 months in a small New Zealand village on the Coromandel Range to write her first adult book, *Tales of a Female Nomad* – which outlines her nomadic life to date.

She takes us on an intimate journey of discovery – filled with moving moments of joy, fear, laughter and sadness. As she visits places like the Galapagos Islands, Israel, an orangutan camp in the forests of Borneo, Nicaragua, a royal palace in Bali (she falls in love with Bali and stays for eight years), and the highlands of Irian Jaya, the reader is immersed in unfamiliar worlds. Since her first tentative trip to Mexico, Rita has been designing her own life, returning occasionally to the United States to visit family and editors.

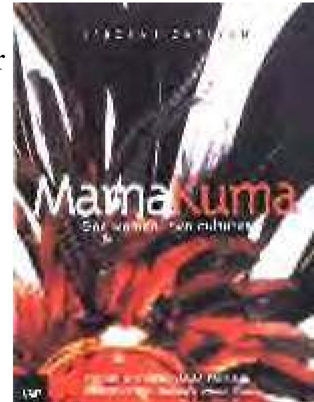
Her plan is to have no plan; she arrives in a country, makes friends with local people and then finds a family to move in with. Across the world she stays in remote villages, in thatched huts deep in forests, on tropical islands; she cooks on fires with women all over the world. She connects with people through instinct and trust, and stays to share their days and to know the seasons of their lives. Paying a small fee (she has a shoe-string budget) for accommodation and meals, Rita also volunteers to teach English. She teaches individuals or in schools - wherever there's a need. When she feels the urge to interfere, to change the way the people are going about their lives - she recognises that it's the time to move on.

Rita says she wrote the book to encourage people to dig up the buried person inside; to uncover the dreams and desires of the young man or woman they once were. For those who have experienced the backpacking trail, *Tales of a Female Nomad* awakens the spirit laid dormant. For those who have travelled little or not at all, this book ignites the flame of adventure. It's for anyone who has ever dreamt of escaping the everyday. Rita Golden Gelman plans to visit Australia before too long. Today, she is in Suriname, South America. A small percent of the population still lives in the jungle where their slave-ancestors settled after running from Dutch masters. She's planning to get in there before she leaves.
For more information and updates on Rita's travels, visit
www.ritagoldengelman.com

Cultural Crossings

Deborah Carlyon, *Mama Kuma*: One woman, two cultures. St Lucia; University of Queensland Press, 2002
By Marilla North

This is a biography like no other life-story. It is told with reticence, grace and profound respect for an ancient culture in the remote highlands of Papua New Guinea by a young Australian author who is the grand-daughter of its subject, Kuma Kelage, a New Guinean tribal chieftain's daughter who was born 'before contact' c.1928/9, and who died in suburban Brisbane with her family in 1992.



Deborah Carlyon is the second generation descendant, on her mother's side, of the union of Malcolm John Warwick, colonialist white Australian Patrol Officer taking a census of the PNG highlands during World War Two, and Kuma Kelage, daughter of Kelage Bosbe, Chimbu tribal chieftain of the Sina Sina region. Deborah's father, David Carlyon, is a Queenslander of European descent. Her mother is Kuma and Masta Warwick's child, Barbara or Ba (her Chimbu name), who was partly reared by Lutheran missionaries, Julia and Ralph Goldhardt, and was trained as a nurse in Brisbane. Deborah herself was born in Goroka in the PNG Eastern Highlands in 1970, where David and Barbara Carlyon had returned to live after their marriage in Brisbane in 1967.

Deborah was reared to love and respect her tribal relatives as she was her Lutheran/Australian kith and kin. She spent much time with Mama Kuma and the extended Chimbu tribal family until her fifteenth year when her parents returned to Brisbane for their children's education. It was a moment of great severance for the adolescent girl, caught between two cultures: 'I felt as though they were ripping away my whole existence; my being, my social life and the physical and emotional culture I had grown up in,' Carlyon writes, recalling Umbaikin (Kuma's half-sister, Deborah's aunt) pounding her breast and crying: 'Yu liwa long mi ya' – "You are my heart." ' (154).

'One of my clearest and warmest memories,' she recalls, 'was of Mama Kuma opening up a cheap plastic tattered purse to reveal my umbilical cord. She had dried it and carried it with her every day since my birth. Whether carried in her hands or in a pocket sewn onto her petticoat, my cord to life from my mother's womb was with Mama Kuma wherever she went. It was a physical reminder, a part of us. It encapsulated and communicated love so differently from hygienic mementoes.' (139).

Recalling the celebration of her own first menstruation or 'sikmun', the cross-culturally reared Carlyon relates that, when she was just twelve years old, as one hundred tribal relatives gathered before her at the celebratory feast, she was moved from a Western-acculturated 'embarrassment' to 'a quiet, secretive pride' when she was dressed by her Chimbu kin in a possum-fur pulpul , her body was decorated with shells and painted with ochres and pig grease and adorned in the head-dress of her great-grandfather, the feared chieftain Kelage Bosbe, with its elaborate crest of parrot plumes surmounted by rare black and electric blue Bird of Paradise feathers. (148)

It is this proud affinity with her grandmother's (and hence her own) tribal heritage of 'women's business' - of the rites of passage of the Chimbu female child from birth through to womanhood - that imbues the text with a fierce integrity based on rich and authentic cultural experience.

Yet it is Carlyon's careful crafting - her engagement with the mimesis of mythopoeic imagery - which gives the reader privileged entry into this rare life-story from a culture which is most decidedly Other. She evolves a style and tone that is reminiscent of village legends and even the stetl stories handed down from the old worlds of Celtic and Middle Europe. Carlyon's strategy permits at least some insight, some appreciation of the pre-lapsarian world view of its main protagonist, from the moment of Kuma's first contact with the mangare gage (spirit in a different skin). 'The mangare gage was looming forward. His shadow moved before him, taller than
a cassowary's long shadow yet with a peculiar restricted gait. Suddenly the spirit man threw something strange and heavy, like a banana leaf, before the girls' (30). Kuma returned that first offering of 'cargo' (it was a raincoat!) to the strange being and then, as she told her grand-daughter: '"I went and held his hand, and I was not afraid. I held strongly on to his hand." Overcoming her own fears and shedding those she had shared with her tribe, Kuma allowed the strength of her mind to rest in her palm. In that instant she learned that fear or strength could be chosen in a flash of
conscious response.' (33)

Carlyon writes with what is almost a 'collective' narrative voice, blending the kennings and the nuances from the `pidgin' oral history of Mama Kuma's and others' remembered or recorded story-telling with her own intuitive and vicariously experienced imaginings, as the grand-daughter whose duty it is - for the benefit of future generations - to construct the formal and enduring legend out of her grandmother's epic saga. And epic saga it certainly was: the heroic adventure of one solitary, motherless bush child-woman (albeit daughter of a chieftain) who married a white man, gave birth to his golden child, who was widowed and subsequently accepted the tribe's bush medicine rendering her infertile for the rest of her life, and who then sought a future for her only child (a future which she barely apprehended) by walking out of her village with her baby, crossing the sacred and forbidden Mount Elimbari (the geographical boundary of her tribe's world) and then, at Goroka, entering a plane and flying into the modern world. 'She took change by the hand, held it and led it' (3).

This myth-making evokes a wholly other order to capitalist modernity. Kuma's 'desire and hunger for the new' (36) can be read perhaps as a precursor to the awakening of the cargo-cults based on the access to power via materialist acquisition. For after all: 'Kuma was unique because she had access to Western materials' (64) and Masta Warwick paid a high bride-price for her (60). The
personality of Kuma which emerges from the narrative is that of a compassionate humanitarian leader of her people who also walked an inner path, and whose vision transcended the narrow, violent and partisan ways of her tribe and enabled 'the hundreds who depended on her to enrich their lives' (175).

The text is decorated with Carlyon's own primitif line drawings depicting Chimbu village life and the rituals of planting, food preparation and other women's activities; her graphic style is based on traditional motifs such as were used in tattoos, body art and the decoration of artefacts. Similarly, Carlyon's prose is crafted to imitate the measure and pace of the collective and individual indigenous cognitive task of assimilating the unexpected and massive cultural impact of the twentieth century upon their hunter gatherer/farmer society, and her poetics incorporate the tropes and strategies of ancient Chimbu storytelling. Yet her words also generate visual echoes from other
past, usurped cultures, resonances of every fast-fading but yet very-recent-past lifestyle, where the days at the beginnings of the story still belong to that eternal present of a `primitive' world which had remained intact for millennia - in this case for perhaps 40,000 years until the
sudden and disruptive violence of the early 1940s.

Carlyon's narrative techniques and her poetics are reminiscent of Okok p'Bitek's 'Song of Okol and Song of Lawino', a panegyric lament for the Acholi tribal experience of cultural dislocation in Uganda, as twentieth century Western 'civilisation' trammelled the fragile African village infrastructures of mud and grass and the oral tradition.

In her prologue, Deborah Carlyon elaborates her sacred yet political responsibility as her grandmother's her story teller: 'My relatives have never spoken as if they were found or discovered. In their minds they have always existed; therefore, it was they who made the discovery of white men, whom many interpreted to be lost souls, seemingly displaced' (1). Thus the empowering axis of her narrative will shift and re-focus the gaze of her readership, who are largely descendants of the white colonialists who 'tamed' PNG, enabling them to 'see' the 'truth' - at least a little - from the indigenous perspective. Fred Short's stories offer one example of a white man who attempts this.

And as in the beginning was the Word, Carlyon explains: 'Pidgin is spoken with much exaggerated metaphor. Mama Kuma and the many others who told me her story expressed themselves in this colourful way. I have tried to preserve some sense of their voices in this book' (xiii). Carlyon integrates pidgin and Kuman language - with appropriated and translated idiomatic imagery from both language sources ‹into a text which is not at all uncomfortable with its hybrid expression. Let C.K. Stead, critic, Keri Hulme (of the Booker-winning *The Bone People*) take note! Here is yet another testament to grandmother-love and the cross-generational yearning to preserve the 'ancient properties' of noble indigenous women in story. Here is the voice of a 'quarter-Chimbu' woman authoritatively speaking on behalf of her ancestry. As Hulme celebrates Maoritanga in her novel, Carlyon celebrates Chimbu heritage in this, her grandmother's biography.

As a post-colonial text this work also documents the moment of first sexual contact from the indigenous woman's perspective. 'It must have been overwhelming being the first woman in the area to marry a mangare gage. Years later Kuma's younger sister, Umbaikin, reflected on the special day: "When Kuma married John Warrick, there was no jealousy or bad feeling amongst the other women, because Warrick had different skin, hair, eyes and nose. They were all overjoyed. For our mother and father, their happiness was of a special kind ‹ They gave every pig so freely and the amount was so much. They gave it like it was nothing"' (62).

Although Warrick's blue eyes still engendered suspicion of his possible 'spirit man' origins, one fact could not be ignored: 'Kuma had experienced John as a man and was heralded for having dared. And one day she began vomiting terribly. It was then that John held her and told her, 'Yu gat bel' ('You are pregnant')' (68). Soon after this we learn of Masta Warrick's untimely death in a world at war.

But that awareness is the moment which resonates throughout the rest of the story with the 'thunderous pairup ... that hideous noise of the magic sticks' of the white men. 'The sticks were said to silence birds and produce smoke, and had killed some people at Masul.

'Some villagers were terrified when they heard of this magic stick. Others, whose ears refused to be deafened by the pairup, whose perceptions were not blind to the magic stick's cold essence, said it was evil because it distanced the spirits from their deed. Having heard that the mangare gages did not need to retrieve a spear , they realised that these spirits had eliminated the process of touching, examining and coming to know what they had done. This idea horrified the elders, as did the word "musket",

which they would soon hear the mangare gages call their magic stick' (23).

Carlyon leaves this symbolism to be resolved in her Epilogue. It is a true post-colonial moment. I salute her wisdom and her courage.

Marilla North is a researcher and reviewer, and author of *Yarn Spinners*. She is a PhD candidate at the University of Queensland.

'Beauty in Decay': A Requiem for the Flightless

***Kate Breakey. Small Deaths*. Photographic Exhibition**
8 November–14 December 2002
Flinders Art Museum, Grote Street Adelaide.

By Varga Hosseini

Majestic fauna of the plains
and skies
Your sojourns cancelled by
cruel fate;
You beckon a soul to mourn
your demise,
To collect, compose and
commemorate.

In 1995, artist Kate Breakey observed an injured bird die in her palm: a dismaying and harrowing moment that became the catalyst behind the artist's ongoing photographic series *Small Deaths*, a selection of which was showcased at the Flinders University Art Museum in early November 2002. Death and beauty are two contrasting but interrelated themes that underpin both *Small Deaths* and the process and practice of photography more generally. This review will analyse the peculiar nexus between beauty and death and their integral place within both photographic discourse and *Small Deaths*.

In the considerable literature produced on photography, numerous theorists have studied the role that beauty and death play in both the production and interpretation of photographs.[1] A brief account of two important expositions on photography is necessary in providing a theoretical background for analysis of Breakey's imagery.

Photography and Death:
Subtle killing: in their respective studies on photography Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes wax lyrical on the fatalistic attributes of the medium. The camera, Sontag pithily observes, is a weapon whose operation culminates in a 'sublimated murder - a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time'.[2] Although the camera does not kill in literal terms, the act of taking a photograph, Sontag insists, amounts to participating in another person or entity's mortality and mutability, whereby people or entities are violated, scrutinised and converted 'into objects that can be symbolically possessed'.[3] Subsequently, Sontag homogenises all photographs as *memento mori*, frozen moments that compile a register of mortality[4].

Similarly, Roland Barthes in his intimate and absorbing treatise *Camera Lucida* also reinforces the intrusive activity of photographers and the fatalistic quality of photographs. Barthes describes photographers who strive to document the world as 'agents of Death'[5] and, further, conceives of photographs as embodiments of the moment where one not only encounters his or her own mortality, but becomes 'neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object … a micro-

version of death … a spectre'.[6] Ghostly. Spectral.

Whilst death remains a sexy and perennial fixture of photography - one that lingers in more recent discourses on the medium[7] - beauty is also a popular and more complimentary quality connected with the activity of shooting film.

Photography and Beauty

> Before the camera's
> mechanical gaze
> You lie frozen, arrested and
> reposed.
> Meticulously adorned for
> another phase
> Where your magnificence will
> be exposed.

In 1841 William Henry Fox Talbot, one of several early pioneers and exponents of photography, patented the photograph under the name *calotype*: a moniker he derived from *kalos*, meaning beautiful.[8] Since then many other labels have been employed, but photographs remain both objects of aesthetic fascination and a vehicle through which different notions of beauty are sought, formulated and standardised.

Photographs, Sontag dutifully reminds us, do not merely furnish impersonal, neutral and objective evidence of 'reality', but are the products of certain tastes, codes and conventions, offering 'not just a record but an evaluation of the world'.[9] Photography's capacity to disclose information about our surroundings is intertwined with its propensity to stylise and aestheticise subject matter. For Sontag, even the most unposed, indiscreet and wilful photographs beautify events and entities, miniaturise and neutralise disorder and distress, and facilitate the emergence of novel and darker modes of beauty. Indeed, one of the notable and enduring achievements of photography - for Sontag anyway - has been its ability to democratise notions of beauty, or more specifically for 'discovering beauty in the humble, the inane, the decrepit'.[10]

Breakey, Beauty and Death

> With paint and pigment, you
> slowly acquire
> Your former nobility and grace
> The photograph can be the most
> beautiful liar
> With its blend of verity and
> artifice.

The inter-relations between death and beauty in the context of photography and photographic discourse are intriguingly played out in the work of Kate Breakey. In her Small *Deaths* series, Breakey wilfully

utilises the camera as a medium for commenting on mortality and identifying a certain model of beauty in the humble, the decrepit and the deceased. The selection of images from *Small Deaths* exhibited at Flinders University Art Museum included some thirty portraits of deceased fauna (a variety of birds accompanied by one solitary lizard) from two separate continents, namely Breakey's contemporary place of residence the United States, and her native Australia.

Measuring almost a yard square, each of Breakey's mounted and framed photographs comprise a black and white gelatin silver print that has been carefully hand-painted by the artist with oil pigment and coloured pencils. One of the most notable features of Breakey's portraits is the considerable scale of her subject matter. Breakey's collection of deceased creatures is photographed in extreme close up at different stages of their deterioration, and staged before the camera in a range of different poses, from the grandly heroic and noble to the sullenly humble and sedately supine.

Take Breakey's *Passer domesticis,*[11] House Sparrow II (1997) for instance (fig.1). With its head lowered, its gaze concealed from the viewer, beak slightly ajar, and its opulent cadmium orange plumage covering a portion of its figure like a majestic robe, Breakey's softly rendered House Sparrow assumes the stately guise of a soldier returning triumphantly from battle, or a magician cunningly concocting his next trick.

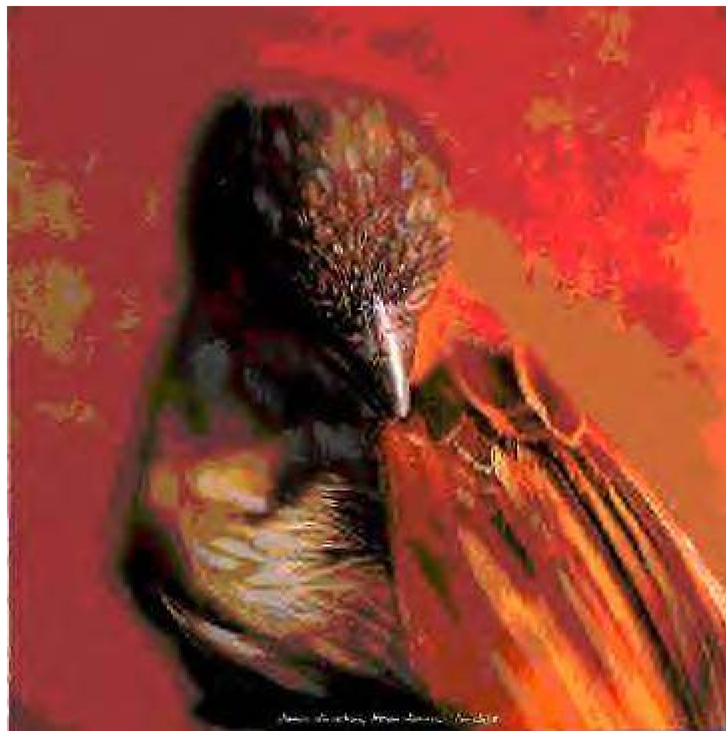


Fig. 1 Kate Breakey, *Passer domesticis,* House Sparrow II (1997), silver gelatin photograph with mixed media, 80 X 80 cm.

Alternatively, Breakey's *Eudyptula minor* (Little Penguin) (2002), closes its eyes and raises its head proudly into the air in a gesture of quiet elation, whilst the *Gymnorhina tibicen* (Australian Magpie) (2002), rests its spiky cranium on its slightly bloated chest, quietly asleep or perhaps mourning its own

demise. The face of decay: Breakey conjures a more explicit depiction of mortality in her bold and sombre of the *Quiscalus mexicanau* Great-tailed Grackle (1995). The brittle and badly decomposed skull of the Grackle (fig.2) confronts the viewer in a profile shot, the numerous holes scattered across its rough, craggy neck gaping out like the entrances of tiny, dark caverns.

Fig. 2 Kate Breakey, *Quiscalus mexicanau* Great-tailed Grackle,
(1995), Silver gelatin photograph with mixed media, 80 X 80 cm.

The intricate detail and imposing size of Breakey's portraits are indicative of the reverential and commemorative tone of the artist's project. In commenting on the magnitude of her portraits, Breakey explains, 'I make them my size, so that we're on equal ground and we can meet each other eye to eye. I do all this because it is my gesture towards these delicate creatures whose lives and deaths happen all around us without notice'.[12] In photographing the seldom-recognised deaths of departed creatures, Breakey also seeks to comprehend the physicality of her subject matter (the luminosity of feathers, the patterns of scales, the tactility of bones), to expose the fragility and beauty of her departed creatures, to preserve their withering bodies and to memorialise their senescence.

Breakey's fixation with the documentation and preservation of her subjects harks back to her early fondness for dioramas in natural history museums. The artist recalls her fascination with the manner in which animals were preserved and positioned in the synthetic environments of natural history museums, and conceives her own images as more individuated and dignified versions of the dioramas of her youth. Differentiating her work from the clinical, scientific gaze of museum exhibits, Breakey

insists 'my creatures are not merely specimens … they are individuals, each with a unique life story and a different tragic death, and each found in different stages of decomposition on their final journey toward dust - for there is beauty also in decay'.[13]

Dioramas aside, Breakey's *Small Deaths* portraits have as their historical antecedents the hand-coloured post-mortem daguerreotypes of the mid-1800s, and can also be linked to the more contemporary output of Frederick Sommer, Rosamund Wolff Purcell, Joel-Peter Witkin, and Jaye Hinds Bidaut. However, A.D. Coleman in his illuminating essay on the *Small Deaths* series traces the spiritual and philosophical implications of Breakey's exploration of mortality and beauty further back to the still life tradition of seventeenth century Holland.

In its beginnings as an art form, the Dutch still life tradition – Coleman insists – 'served primarily as decorative replications in oil painting of the trappings of the successful life of the emerging bourgeoisie'[14]. Later manifestations of still life were, however, not exclusively concerned with affluence and excess, but operated as visual reflections on mortality and transience. For Coleman, Breakey's depiction of her subject matter post-mortem not only derives from, and contributes to the latter branch of still-life tradition, but her undertaking also entertains more metaphysical connotations.

Mortuary rite: Coleman associates the artist's method of collecting and cleaning her subjects before photographing them and hand working the prints with embalming; that ancient funerary ritual of anointing, perfuming and wrapping of the cadaver as a final farewell to the departed and the preparation of its spirit for another phase of life.

Borderlines: Life, Death, Beauty and Photography

Removed from life with a final
breath,
Embalmed in a cool, 'Flat
Death',
You are preserved in portraits
that entice -
Even though the deceased
cannot die twice.

In a body of work that honours the demise of stricken and incapacitated creatures, one of Breakey's most ironic works is her rendition of a fledgling *Cyaccitta cristata* (Blue Jay) I (1998) (fig.3). This familiar, perhaps even sentimental representation of an infant Blue Jay with its beak wide open and tongue slightly protruding - perhaps in anticipation of food - is both a signifier of life and a subtle reference to the intertwined and interdependent relationship between life, beauty and death.

Fig.3 Kate Breakey, *Cyaccitta cristata*, Blue Jay (Fledgling) I (1998),
Silver gelatin photograph with mixed media, 80 X 80 cm.

In an essay on hybridity in the context of visual culture, James Moss singles out the introduction of photography as the pivotal 'hybrid' moment in pictorial representation, arguing that its emergence and proliferation photography was perceived 'to embrace both art and life, and yet it was neither. Its lineage, if any, lay in alchemy which was itself a hybrid mix of practical chemistry and mystical theology'.[15] Moreover, whilst photography appeared to demonstrate an abundant degree of verisimilitude, 'it was too much like death for it to be an absolute signifier of life'.[16]

Visually, Breakey attempts to amplify the liminal and borderline character of photography and its curious blend of science and mysticism, through the incorporation of oil pigment into her black and white prints. The artist considers the delicate, translucent layers of paint she smears onto the surface of her photographs as 'layers of emotional subjectivity - lies, dreams, delusions, exaggerations and embellishments'.[17] Elaborating further on the fusion of photography and painting in *Small Deaths*, Breakey asserts: 'If I am lucky the media combine, become enmeshed and inseparable, a curious marriage of what might be real and what is imagined or desired'[18].

The competently executed layers of pigment that adorn the figures in each *mise en scène* of *Small Deaths*, can indeed delude the viewer, offering them creatures whose beauty seems to deceive or deny death. If one important feature of beauty is, as Elaine Scarry construes, its life-saving and life-affirming power (a capacity to make 'life more vivid, animated and worth living'[19] and in doing so generate gestures of reverence and petition) then Breakey's portraits are not merely visual requiems to 'small

deaths', but images that simultaneously swerve towards another possibility: life. Summing up the affirmative and rejuvenating ambitions of her undertaking, Breakey concludes, 'my friends and their friends give me small dead things as gifts. It is because they know that I will try to give them life'.[20]

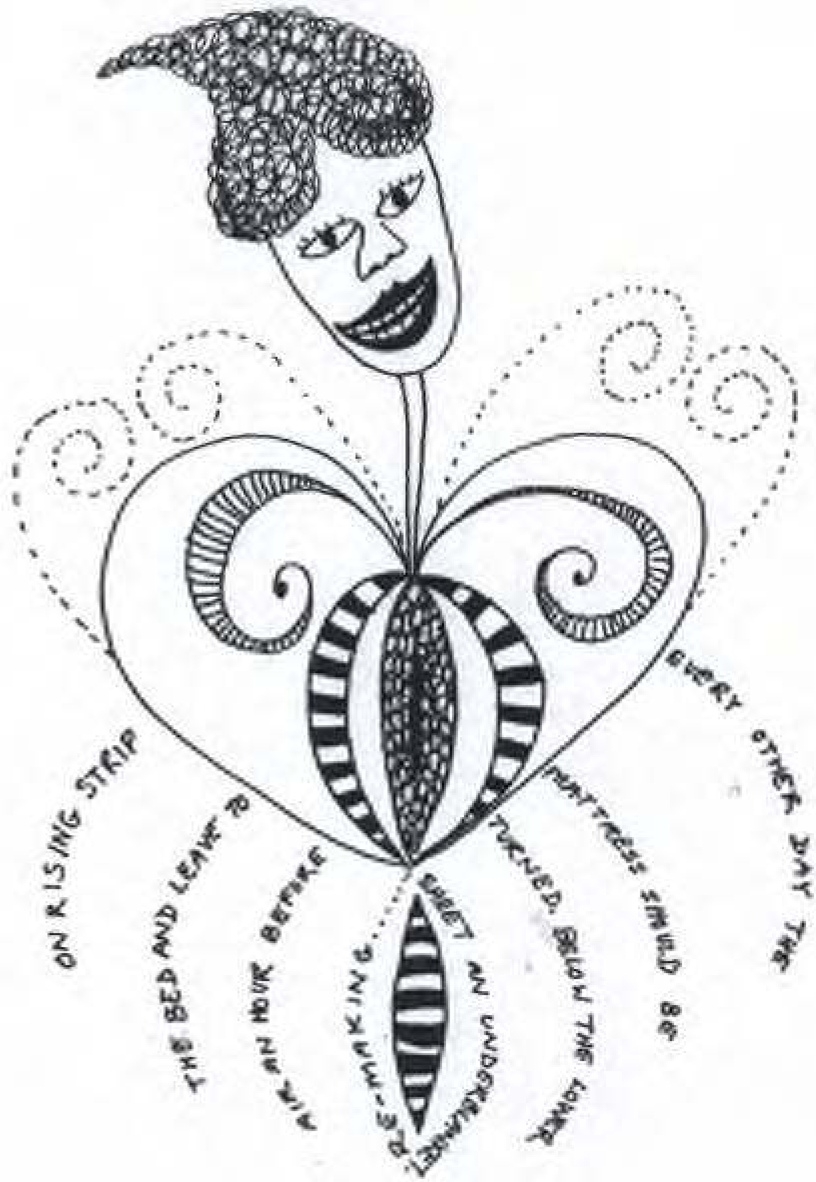
Varga Hosseini is an Adelaide based writer, and a PhD candidate at Flinders University.

I am indebted to Haniah Riazati for her generous assistance, invaluable advice and numerous readings of this review.

---

1 See R. Barthes, Camera Lucida, Vintage London, 1980, S. Sontag, On Photography, Penguin, London, 1977 and A.D. Coleman, 'Animal Longings' in K. Breakey, Small Deaths, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2001.
2 Sontag 1977, p.14.
3 Sontag p. 14-15.
4 Sontag p.70.
5 Barthes 1980, p.92.
6 Barthes p.14.
7 Refer to J. Moss, 'Heuristically Seeking Hybridity', in Broadsheet, vol.25, no.3, 1996, Pp.20-21, for a brief discussion of photography as a signifier of death.
8 Sontag 1977, p.85.
9 Sontag p.88-89.
10 Sontag p.102.
11 This particular work and the others featured throughout this essay have been reproduced from the exhibition catalogue Small Deaths: Kate Breakey, Flinders University Art Museum, Adelaide, 2002.
12 K. Breakey, Small Deaths, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2001, p. 165.
13 Breakey 2001 p.165.
14 Breakey 2001 p.14.
15 Moss p.21.
16 Moss p.21.
17 Breakey 2001 p.15.
18 Breakey 2001 p.15.
19 E. Scarry, On Beauty and Being Just, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 1999, p.27.
20 K. Breakey, 'Small Deaths', unpublished artist's statement, Flinders University Art Museum, Adelaide.

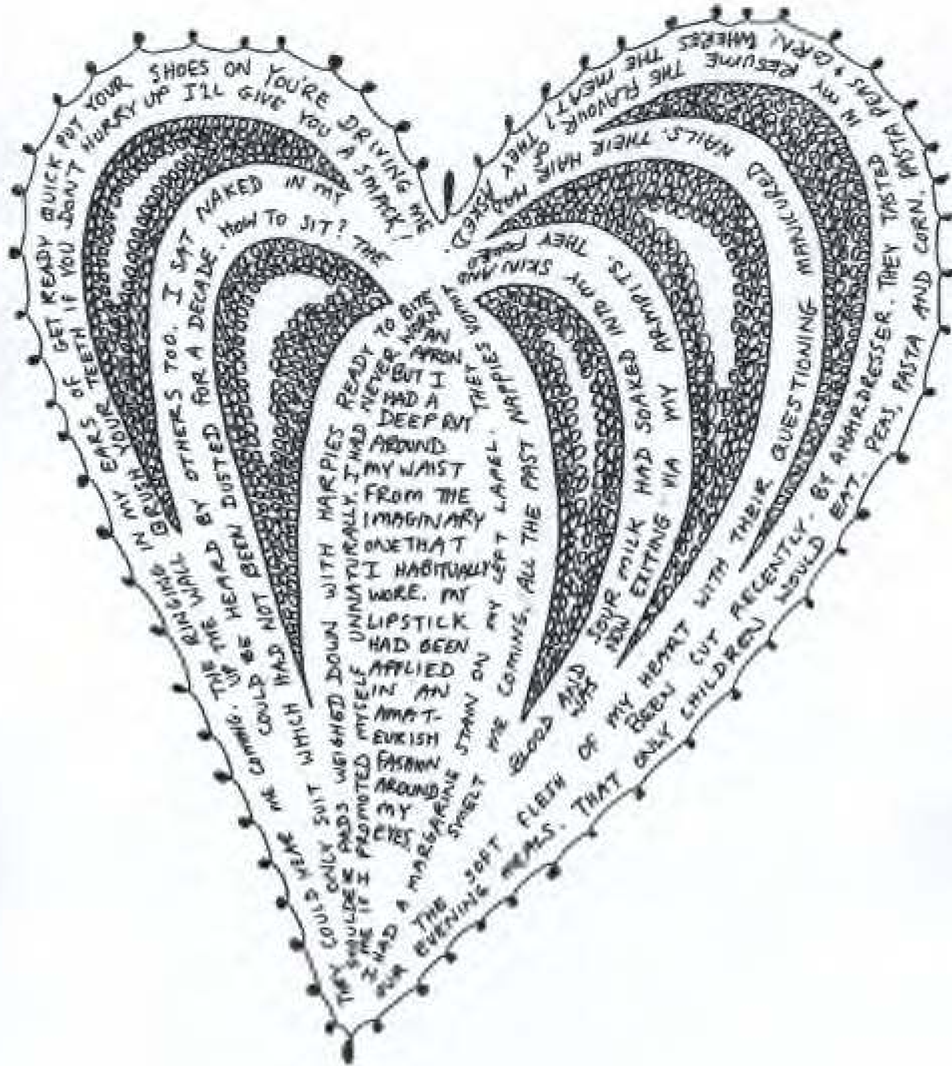
Debbie Harman Quadri: Cartoons


ON RISING STRIP
THE BED AND LEAVE TO
AIR AN HOUR BEFORE
RE-MAKING.....
EVERY OTHER DAY THE
MATTRESS SHOULD BE
TURNED. BELOW THE LOWER
SHEET AN UNDERBLANKET.

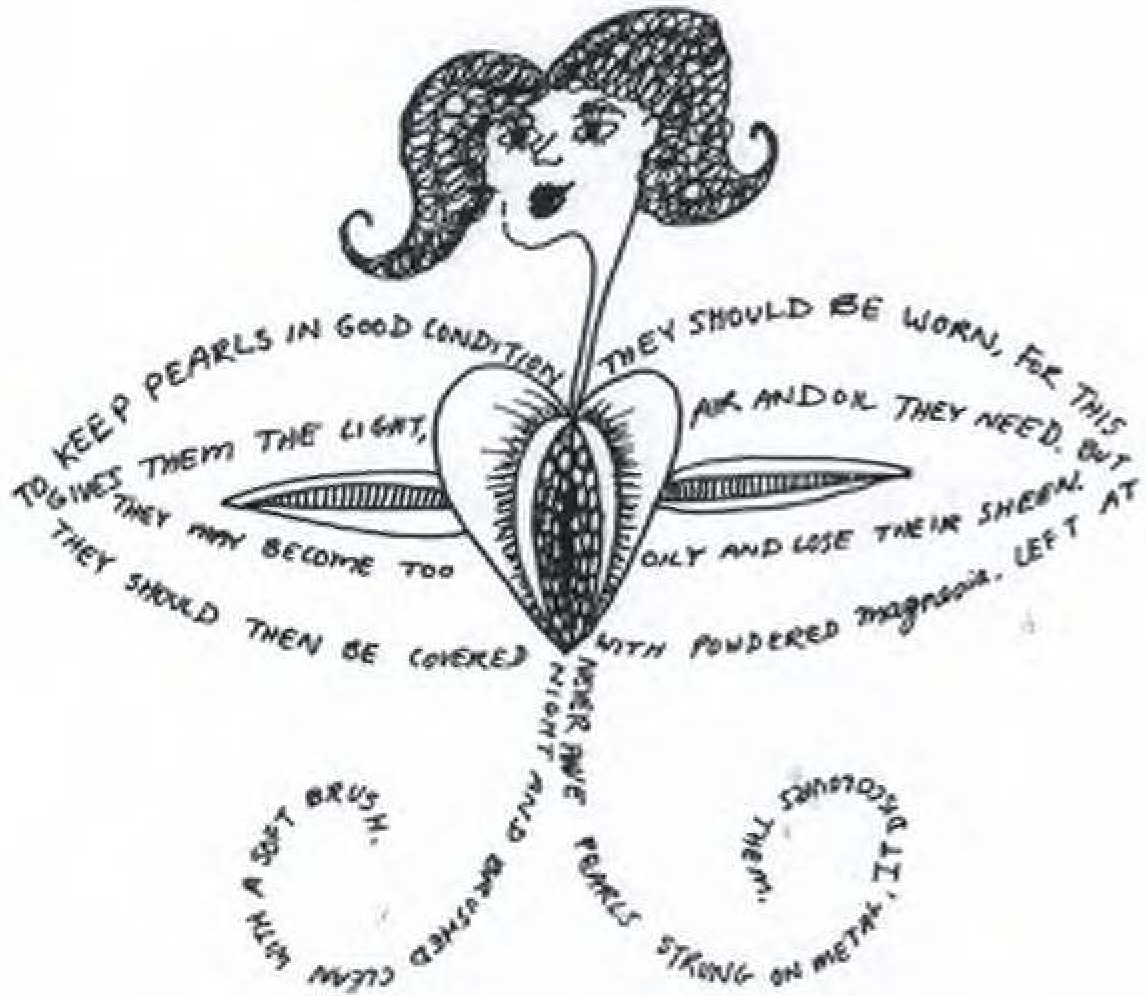
SHE FOUND HERSELF IN THE HALLWAY. WHY HAD SHE COME THERE? SHE DROPPED OFF THE KIDS AND WAS DRIVING HOME. SHE HAD TO DO A U-TURN ON THE MAIN R.D. OF THE WORLD. SHE WOULD BE LATE FOR WORK. THE WASHING SAT FOR DAYS IN THE MACHINE. THE LEAVES OF HER DIARY ALL SCRAWLED WITH LISTS OF THINGS TO BUY AND TO DO TO DO TO DO

SHE BANKED UP ON THE LEFT SIDE OF HER BRAIN AS SHE REMEMBERED SHE HAD BREWED HERSELF A POT OF TEA. IT WAS STONE COLD. SHE FORGOT TO PAY FOR HER PETROL AND THE CASHIER'S

THE WIND OF MADNESS WHISTLED IN HER RIGHT EAR. SHE COULD ... FISTS HAMMERED ON HER WINDOW. ALL THE STARRY-EYED FATHERS OF THE NATION SHOUTING OF HER REAMS OF MISCONDUCT AND FUMBLINGS TO PAY. SHE WONDERED WHY SHE WAS SITTING DOWN IN A CHAIR WITH A DOG IN HER LAP. HOW DID SHE GET THERE?


GET READY QUICK PUT YOUR SHOES ON YOU'RE DRIVING ME
IF YOU DON'T HURRY UP I'LL GIVE YOU A SMACK
BUT I HAD A DEEP RUT AROUND MY WAIST FROM THE IMAGINARY ONE THAT I HABITUALLY WORE. MY LIPSTICK HAD BEEN APPLIED IN AN AMATEURISH FASHION AROUND MY EYES.

IT WAS A COLOURLESS LUNCHBOX. THE RICE CAKES WERE OFF-WHITE.
IT WAS A COLOURLESS LUNCHBOX.
THE ARROWROOT BISCUIT WAS BEIGE, UNWRAPPED AND READY TO ABSORB THE DAMP AIR AS IT WAS JOLTED
WITH EACH STEP CLOSER TO SCHOOL IT MADE EDDIES OF FINE SOFT CRUMBS IN THE CORNERS.
IT WAS A COLOURLESS LUNCHBOX.
THE MILK
THE SALADA BISCUITS WERE LOVINGLY SPLODGED WITH MARG WITH A SHINE ON THE SURFACE, DARKENING
HAD MELTED INTO THEM AND WHAT REMAINED
THE BROWNER BLOTCHES OF THE BISCUIT. THE PRE-PACKAGED CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES HAD IMMEDIATELY BEGUN TO BREAKDOWN.
WITH THE MOVEMENT OF THE LUNCHBOX ~~IN THE SATCHEL~~. YESTERDAYS BRUISED BROWN PEAR WAS MUSHED UNDERNEATH.


TO KEEP PEARLS IN GOOD CONDITION THEY SHOULD BE WORN, FOR THIS
GIVES THEM THE LIGHT, AIR AND OIL THEY NEED. BUT
THEY MAY BECOME TOO OILY AND LOSE THEIR SHEEN.
THEY SHOULD THEN BE COVERED WITH POWDERED magnesia. LEFT AT
NIGHT AND BRUSHED CLEAN WITH A SOFT BRUSH.
NEVER HAVE PEARLS STRUNG ON METAL, IT DISCOLOURS THEM.

URINE: EITHER RUB ON SALT AND LEMON JUICE THEN WASH IN WARM SOAP AND WATER.
OR TREAT WITH A POT SOLUTION OF BORAX
BLOOD: SOAK IN COLD SALTY WATER FOR 1 HOUR, THEN RINSE IN WARM SOAP AND WATER.
WATER. TREAT ALL STAINS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER THEY OCCUR
TREAT SPOTS INDIVIDUALLY

Obituary

Vale Sarah Campion, 1906-2002
By Elizabeth Lawson

Sarah Campion, never the Australian citizen she once longed to be, belongs (less securely than she should) to our literary history for her six Australian novels and a handful of stories. Her *Burdekin* trilogy was published in the early 1940s by Peter Davies in England where Campion, English born and bred, was already an established novelist. The *Burdekin* novels were widely read in both England and Australia.

She was born Mary Rose Coulton on 1 June 1906 in Eastbourne, England to Rose Ilbert and then-famous medieval scholar and controversialist, George Gordon Coulton, from whose give-away name she escaped in 1935 with her first publication under the pseudonym 'Sarah Campion'. Brought up in Cambridge, she became an inveterate writer-traveller; initially through Europe where, until expelled by the Nazis in the late thirties, she taught English to people of the German Jewish community desperate for flight. She later lived, worked and travelled in Canada, the USA, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. In London in 1949 she married New Zealand writer, Antony Alpers (the first biographer of Katherine Mansfield) and returned with him and their son Philip to New Zealand in 1952. The marriage over, she revisited Australia with Philip in 1959 and then lived in Auckland till her death on 22 July 2002. Having abandoned novel writing on her marriage, Campion was well-known in New Zealand as a writer, commentator, short-term literary radio broadcaster and anti-racist political activist. In England she was most famed for her ironically unfilial yet indulgent biography of her father, *Father* (Michael Joseph, 1948) which became, like some of her English novels, a best-seller.

Campion's brief visit to Australia in the late thirties, passed mostly on the Atherton Tableland and cut short by the outbreak of the second World War, left her with the singular passion for Australia that produced her Australian novels, *Turn Away No More* (1940), the *Burdekin* trilogy, *Dr Golightly* (1946) and *Come Again* (1951).

The trilogy novels, *Mo Burdekin (1941)*, *Bonanza* (1942) and *The Pommy Cow* (1944), make up a significant Australian classic which, shadowed by Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* (1938), never quite registered with Canonical Authority (as Campion would have put it). At the close of the Introduction I wrote for the 1990 Penguin reprint of *Mo Burdekin,* I describe the Prologue to that novel as perhaps 'the most powerful passage of dramatic-evocative narrative in Australian bush fiction'. Today it is likely that only a handful of readers remember these rather breath-taking, racy *Burdekin* novels about the Shearer's Strike and gold-mining fevers of late nineteenth-century north Queensland and the similar fevers which carried Queenslanders away to the Boer war and William Lane's utopian 'New Australia' Paraguay settlement. With their compelling characters, ironic sense of comedy, fresh observation of land and society, political and social terseness along with a lyrical poignancy, these novels should still be read for pleasure and studied for their part in the history of Australian bush nationalist literature. They should not be forgotten.

Nor should the exceptionally honest, intelligent, dignified and rather magnificent person who was their author.

Elizabeth Lawson is a Canberra writer. Her retrospective essay on the life and work of Sarah Campion will appear in _Australian Literary Studies_ in late 2003.