Australian Women's Book Review

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Detail from Eileen Halley 'Utopia'

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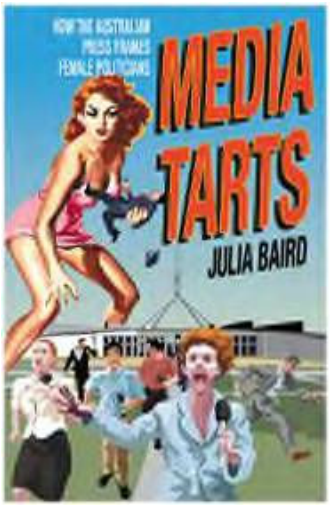
Symbiotic Exposures

Julia Baird, *Media Tarts: How the Australian Press Frames Female Politicians*.
Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2004.
By Jennifer Curtin

Media coverage of things political is always most frenzied during an election campaign, so the publication of an assessment of the media's portrayal of political women - which is what *Media Tarts* provides - could not have been better timed. On 29 August 2004 a federal election was called for October 9. Candidates were preselected, preference deals were made and our political leaders began to sell their wares. Howard talked up his support for Meg Lees, Pauline Hanson emerged as an independent contender for a Queensland Senate place, and Tasmanian candidate Christine Milne looked destined to become the third Greens Senator. Yet overall, little attention was given to women (apart from the 'doctors wives') in this campaign. Policies targeted at women voters were primarily couched in terms of the family, while leading women politicians were largely invisible. One exception was a brief media focus on Julia Gillard and her political jousting with Tony Abbott at the National Press Club. The other was the active participation of political wives in promoting the qualities and credentials of their respective husbands.



Would Baird argue that this invisibility is a bad thing? Perhaps not. In this well written and insightful book she acknowledges that we live in an era where women politicians are no longer unique. The heyday of the women's movement has long since passed and society has moved on and become used to seeing powerful women. Moreover, Baird argues, the current crop of political women has chosen to be less visible *as women*. They have learnt a few hard lessons themselves, or from others who went before them, about how much media attention they should seek, and how they should manage the spotlight once under it.

This work is drawn partly from Baird's doctoral thesis of 2001 and supplemented with additional interviews conducted since that time. However, the book is not a revised thesis published for those inside the academy, but is an accessible account of the ways in which women politicians over time have been both victims and victors (although few have been the latter) in their relationship with the media. As such, the target audience is that of an interested layperson. While this approach means that engagement with critical feminist media literatures is absent, it does ensure Baird a wider audience which is an important end goal if we are to learn more about the real world of being a woman parliamentarian.

Baird writes from her position as an 'insider' rather than from the perspective of an outside academic. She is a journalist with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and this enables her to provide an interesting perspective on issues and events. For example, she refers to how certain Letters to the Editor are chosen, and she regularly recalls conversations about women and politics that she has had with media colleagues. She includes much direct quotation from the numerous political women she has interviewed, and from the various journalists and opinion leaders in the press gallery. At times she refers to her own feelings about particular events or interviews, and how she herself once wrote an article on the disappearance of David Kemp's beard (p. 133). However, her closeness to the profession seems to prevent Baird from critically analysing the intermittent fickleness and conservatism of some in the press gallery, and in other positions of 'authority' in the media.

Baird begins with Margaret Thatcher's visit to Australia in 1976, and the treatment she received from the Australian press. With this prelude, Baird sets the scene. To be a regarded as a serious, successful, woman politician in the early 1970s the image portrayed had to be one of strength with sufficient femininity; physically appealing without too much sexuality; and an ability to pander to traditional views of what makes a 'good' woman (or wife), without undermining her capacity to work in the 'male' world of politics. Margaret Thatcher appeared able to convey all these messages - indeed, she had to in order to become Conservative leader. But she became a hard act to follow for those who admired her and a nemesis for those who did not. What becomes evident through Baird's analysis is that these categorisations, stereotypes and contradictions emerge and re-emerge throughout the decades that follow. While they are most blatant during the years when women's presence in parliament is still a novelty, even when the numbers of women begin to increase, there remains an underlying gender obsession amongst many in the media. The difference is that this obsession is transferred to not just any woman politician, but to those that have a hint of ambition or leadership potential.

The first six Chapters are dedicated to the specific imagery associated with the media representation of women politicians. There were those with steely ambition, which was seldom seen as virtuous (such as Bronwyn Bishop); housewife superstars who were charged with 'cleaning up' politics (including Joan Child and Kathy Sullivan); Florence Bjelke-Petersen, the political wife turned politician on the basis of her baking prowess; superwomen who combined politics and motherhood with an emasculated spouse (for example Ros Kelly and Janet Powell); those who were explicitly feminist (Janine Haines); and those who were just too glamorous and sexy for their own good (too many to name). In these Chapters, Baird unravels how the depiction of particular images, indeed most images, of the 'womanly' or 'wifely' sit at odds with the perceptions of what it takes to be powerful and politically successful.

The next four Chapters deal with three contemporary political women and the role the media played in their rise and ultimate fall from political grace: Natasha Stott Despoja, Cheryl Kernot and Carmen Lawrence. In these chapters, Baird's subject matter and provocative style ensures riveting reading. All three were political leaders, all were women of substance and all suffered from being at first favoured, and then burnt, by the media coverage they attracted - albeit for different reasons but significantly, Baird suggests, because they were women, indeed ambitious women. One of the strongest sections of the book is in the Chapter which deals with the revelations of Kernot's affair with Evans by Laurie Oakes. Here Baird unpacks and carefully analyses the motivations of Oakes, and assesses the extent to which they could be considered consistent and valid.

However, I found the chapter on Natasha Stott Despoja both the most provocative and the most disturbing. Baird maintains that Stott Despoja was the 'ultimate media tart journalists eagerly pursued then did not respect in the morning' (p. 137), and suggests that much that went wrong for her was a result of her over-zealous recruitment of media attention. I found this position unconvincing for several reasons. First, it becomes clear in this Chapter that there were some in the press gallery that more or less despised Stott Despoja, and this must have clouded their analysis of her as a person and as a politician. Second, Stott Despoja attracts criticism for directing her energies at media other than the mainstream print media, yet from the very beginning of her political career she made it clear that young voters were important to her. Communicating with these voters is more likely to happen through alternative rather than mainstream media outlets. Third, the question remains why over-exposure is acceptable for some political leaders (for example John Howard on talk-back radio), but not others. Baird herself acknowledges that charismatic leadership is important for minor parties. Indeed, perceptions of (strong) leadership have become a major feature of politics and election campaigns. In part, this demands the advent of some kind of personality cult. Yet this is a path which Baird says women must avoid at all costs, otherwise they will end up like Natasha Stott Despoja. Perhaps that's why

Lyn Allison talked down any 'personal lust for power' when accepting the Democrats leadership (*Age*, 5 November 2004: p. 4).

Baird's penultimate chapter offers readers advice on how to avoid various pitfalls associated with being a woman in politics. In particular, she suggests: be serious about policy; be yourself; avoid stories or shots that focus on your personality, your body, your personal life or your gender; and assume journalists are your friends but don't expect women journalists to be more friendly than men. She claims that the best way for women to handle the media is to adopt an approach that blends the strategies applied by Vanstone and Kirner. That is, rough it out, be tough, and fight the boys at their own game; 'learn to play the system as it is now and attempt when possible to transform it' (p. 250). But Baird's own analysis suggests that attempts to transform, through criticism, are ultimately doomed. It seems women need to respect the press and not seek too much from them. One reading of this position is that women politicians should not 'lead' the press on, as they will be in no position to criticise or refute the portrayals that may later emerge. The response is; they asked for it. Now, 'I am not a (radical) feminist, but…' doesn't this position smack of old-fashioned misogyny?

Baird then provides a postlude that examines Pauline Hanson's treatment by the media. Hanson was actually disendorsed in 1996 but was listed as a Liberal on the ballot paper. (Had she been, as Baird claims, disendorsed in 1995, her election as an Independent would have been most unlikely.) The book concludes with a summary of the gendered stereotypes that have waxed and waned in popularity over the last thirty years. Here Baird briefly addresses the criticisms that could be levelled at the press gallery: but she is ultimately too kind. However, her conclusions are instructive. Journalists like the world black and white, and need simple messages to make a good story. But Baird's message is quite the opposite. Political life is just not black and white; women are not wife or politician, mother or politician, woman or politician. Women are all of these things but the media cannot, or chooses not to cope with such complexity.

There were two issues left unanswered by this book. First, is there a party-specific difference in the way political women approach the media? We know that Liberal women do not like to play the gender card in selection processes for fear of attracting the tag of tokenism, and their ideological perspective values the ideals of individual opportunity and advancement based on merit. If Liberal women politicians are feminist, it is a feminism informed by these principles, and usually practiced in a way that will not alienate the more conservative Liberal voters. By contrast, parties to the left of centre have been more open to collective approaches to feminism and recognition that gender does matter. So should we be surprised that in the main it has been 'feminist' women who have been targeted as whingers by the media? Second, while Baird notes that women journalists may be no more enlightened than their male colleagues, I yearned for a more nuanced analysis of the gendered dimensions of media reporting as well as media representations.

The book finishes by looking forward. Baird remains optimistic about the future possibilities for women politicians and part of her faith rests in the public's increasingly high expectations of media coverage of our political leaders. However, in the post-election wrap up, it seems there is still a way to go. John Anderson welcomed the Nationals' 'beautiful ladies'; Liberal Sharman Stone was congratulated on her promotion to the ministry by the Governor General who suggested her housewife qualifications would be useful; Labor's (lack of) selection of women to the shadow ministry positions was welcomed by some and criticised by others. Clearly Baird's categorisations will continue to have resonance for some time yet.

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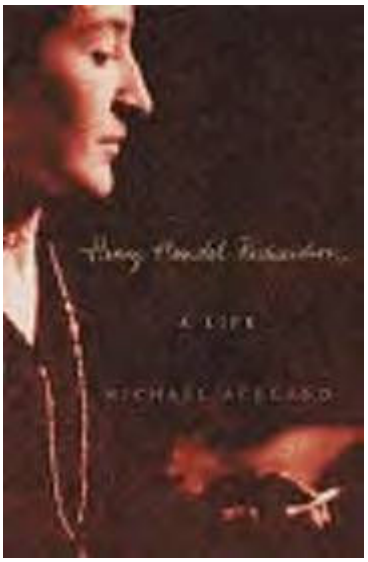
The Whole Truth About HHR?

Michael Ackland, *Henry Handel Richardson: A Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
By Sylvia Martin

In an article entitled 'I Don't Really Like Biography', Meaghan Morris identifies the sort of '*humanistic* biographies' that 'assume biography is capable of going back into the past and revealing the truth about the actions and feelings of a dead person' as among those that have the effect of '*dis*interesting' her.[1] The overriding problem with Michael Ackland's biography of Australian expatriate writer, Henry Handel Richardson (1870-1946), is that he sets out on a truth mission. Taking his cue from a remark of Richardson's (which may or may not have been ironic) he wishes to reconsider her life in order 'to progress further towards the tantalising but elusive goal of "the whole truth".' Seeking this ultimately unachievable end is an inevitably reductive exercise; to rein in a person's life to verifiable facts - with all the messy, contradictory and incoherent business that life involves - denies the inherent instability of the genres of biography and autobiography.



The conventional and conservative form of Ackland's text is somewhat surprising to encounter in 2004, but this form of scholarly biography is resistant to change. Although impeccably researched and incorporating previously embargoed material, it shows little or no engagement with the last two or three decades of feminist, post-structuralist, psychoanalytical and auto/biographical theory, which have rendered problematic any claims to objectivity and unitary truth based on a clear dichotomy between fact and fiction. Yet this is exactly what this biographer does claim when he seeks to find clues to the truth of Richardson's 'personality' in the gaps between historical fact and its 'refiguration' in her autobiographical writing. He bases his 'interrogation' chiefly on her unfinished autobiography, *Myself When Young*, which was written in her seventies when she was dying of cancer. That the writing of autobiography is as much a process of the imagination as an account of historical fact is not considered; in psychoanalytic terms, 'the writing of autobiography is…a dramatization of the self's difference from itself'.[2] Feminist work on the importance of gender in the construction of autobiographical narrative is also not considered. And Ackland's own subjective position is hidden behind the conventional mask of biographical objectivity, precluding any self-reflexivity and awareness of what might be involved in a male biographer's writing the life of a woman and a feminist.

The reclusive, somewhat aloof HHR is not a figure to whom one warms easily. By her own and others' accounts, Ettie (Ethel) Richardson was a disagreeable child; in many ways she grew into a less than lovable adult, negative in her attitude towards most other people and prone to self-aggrandisement. Ackland, however, takes very literally the comment from the author that he uses as the book's epigraph: 'How I do hate the ordinary sleek biography! I'd have every wart & pimple emphasised, every tricky trait or petty meanness brought out. The great writers are great enough to bear it.' As a consequence, for about the first half of the book, he takes issue with the writer's autobiographical account of her childhood, proving her wrong in a relentlessly punitive way. Nobody wants to read a hagiography, but Ackland's hectoring tone is extreme. He speaks time and again of his subject's 'bias', writes of 'her distorting lens', says she is 'liable to selective blindness' or even just a plain liar.

He is particularly damning of her 'determined bias' against her mother, Mary, who is portrayed throughout as an 'exemplary mother'. Mother/daughter relationships are notoriously difficult and fraught with ambivalence and even the most exemplary mother will suffer in women's stories of their adolescence. A more sensitive and imaginative reading of *Myself When Young* might explore such issues instead of simply berating the daughter for being ungrateful, indeed perpetrating 'a rank calumny' at one point. (The casting of perfect mother figure against ungrateful daughter perhaps says more about this 'objective' biographer's unrecognised cultural prejudices than his subject's biases. In addition, Ettie's more pliable and pretty sister, Lil, is characterised as 'more adaptable, charming and better natured'. Ah, the fate of the unruly woman! Strong-featured and dark-haired like Ettie Richardson, this woman has many sisters in nineteenth-century literature. Think of Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill On the Floss*, for instance.)

Feminist theoretical work notes the preoccupation in many women's autobiographies, almost to the point of obsession, with their mothers. Richardson was familiar with Freudian theory and it could be suggested that in her adult refiguring of her childhood she was playing out the daughter's painful separation from the mother in a particularly unkind way. Her short story, 'The Bathe' (which Ackland uses as a springboard to his account of Richardson's life), is redolent with the ambivalence of daughters' feelings towards the bodies of their mothers, whom they will become. It is also suffused with a female eroticism, both fascinating and repulsive to the prepubescent child of the story. That fascination became an important part of Richardson's life and writing. Perhaps one of Ackland's problems with *Myself When Young* is that its author writes in a detached, matter-of-fact style more commonly associated with men's writing (and this could have been another interesting gender dimension to explore).

Ettie lived in several places as a child as the family's fortunes declined and the sisters and their mother suffered through Walter Richardson's gradual decline into madness as a result of tertiary syphilis. In relation to her descriptions, Ackland asserts that 'what Richardson offers as autobiographical fact is more accurate as an account of her psychological state than of a specific location.' I agree. Why wouldn't it be? However, doesn't his pointing out that Koroit in Victoria's Western District was not just 'the small, mean, bare and ugly place' of the autobiography but also boasted notable Botanic Gardens and rich volcanic soil, border on the pedantic and even slightly ludicrous? And this is not the only instance where Ackland pits local history and guidebook knowledge against Richardson's descriptions of place. It is obvious that he is much more comfortable with his lengthy geographical descriptions and population statistics of the towns and cities Richardson inhabited in Australia and Europe than with bringing his difficult subject to life.

Biography should be a process driven as much by imagination as by a plodding search for verifiable facts, in order not wilfully to invent but creatively to interpret the complexities of a life. Otherwise, it remains as dry and dusty as the archives that provide the biographer's resource material. And I'm afraid that after all his huffing and puffing Ackland doesn't reveal any more penetrating insights into Richardson's 'personality' than Axel Clark does in his more compassionate and lively account of her childhood and adolescence in his 1990 biography. Perhaps it might have behoved Richardson's new biographer to draw more from another passage in HHR, from *Maurice Guest*, which he points out is accompanied by the marginal note: 'Das Ich spricht (here I'm speaking): "You think a thing must be either true or not true? You are wrong… Truth? - it is one of the many miserable conventions the human brain has tortured itself with, and its first principle is an utter lack of the imaginative faculties".'

Only the fact that I was commissioned to review this biography made me resist the temptation to put it aside half way through. Ultimately, this was a good thing as, by the time Ettie Richardson has left behind her unsuccessful musical career in Leipzig, married John George Robertson (George), moved to London and become Henry Handel Richardson and a writer, the biographer

relaxes his hostility towards his subject and the writing becomes livelier and more interesting. It could hardly fail to, with HH and her sister's involvement with the suffrage movement (Lil's on an active level), and with Henry's pursuit of Spiritualism. Much of the liveliness is due to the extensive drawing on the biographer's part from the *Impressions* of Olga Roncoroni, HH's companion for the last twenty-six years of her life, and also from the letters Henry Handel wrote to her old school friend in Australia, Mary Kernot.

We hear about Richardson's strict daily routine as she spends each morning in her sound-proofed writing room where neat rows of pencils await her, sharpened by the devoted Olga. (Small wonder she was the envy of other women writers such as Miles Franklin, who wrote to her friend, poet Mary Fullerton: 'It would make your mouth water to read of the life H. Richardson has had. Means to be free and study music for four years in top conditions of the world, and next set out to write and save herself for that and nothing else. Wish we cd be so situated.'[3]) We also hear about George's devotion to his wife and his importance to her writing as her first, astute critic. On a lighter note, we read about the antics of the resident poltergeist at the Richardsons' holiday house at Lyme Regis. Henry's devotion to animals is dwelt upon, as well as her shyness and dislike of small talk and socialising, although she does reluctantly entertain, usually other writers, in her comfortable London home. HHR becomes human and lifts off the page at last and there is some fine writing by the biographer.

Unfortunately, when Ackland reluctantly comes to deal with the problematic area of her sexual preference (twelve pages before the end of the text when, in chronological terms, she is ill and in her seventies), his narrow approach of rationally weighing up the 'evidence' is quite inadequate to such a fluid and intangible subject as women's sexuality. The arguments he marshals to make his decision that 'much…speaks against a sexual relationship' with Olga Roncoroni are well-rehearsed and tired: that adolescent 'same-sex bonding' such as we see in *The Getting of Wisdom* and *Myself When Young* does not preclude later heterosexual relationships, that HHR had a happy marriage with George, that her major novels deal with 'great heterosexual relationships.' The final statement that Richardson in 1942 was 'hardly an attractive sexual partner' smacks of desperation on the biographer's part. In any case, what about the previous twenty years Olga lived in the Richardson household?

There is much writing available now on women's relationships of the time that might have allowed for a more imaginative approach towards the situation of Henry Handel Richardson. Two well-known marriages - those of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson and Virginia and Leonard Woolf - incorporated devotion (if not passion) on the part of the women towards their husbands as well as Sapphic attractions. HHR's 1934 short story, 'Two Hanged Women', which Ackland mentions, need not be read as strictly autobiographical to be important; what it does show is that its author certainly understood the dynamics of lesbian desire. There are many more fruitful avenues to explore on this subject, but in the end we probably cannot say definitely that HH and Olga's relations included a sexual element any more than we can assert with authority that George and his wife's did. What is clear is that Henry Handel Richardson contested in her writing and her life the rigid dichotomies of masculinity/femininity and hetero/homosexuality. What about her pseudonym that became her everyday name? What about the three-year correspondence with her French translator, Paul Solanges, in which she maintained the male persona of her pseudonym? Compare this with Miles Franklin's Brent of Bin Bin persona and we might learn something about the anxieties concerning the gender expectations forced upon women by society and how such women writers played with and subverted gender definitions that confined them to the domestic sphere. I digress, but perhaps Henry Handel Richardson now deserves a feminist biographer after two major biographies by male writers, with Clark's multi-volume work incomplete, sadly, because of his death.

The presentation of this expensive hardback is one of understated elegance; there are copious

notes, a bibliography and index for scholars to use as a resource, and interesting photographs, although it is surprising that editors did not pick up the transposition of numbers in the caption of one that reads 'Ettie and George Robertson in Munich, 1986'. Is this a vision from beyond the grave? It is also surprising that there was no editorial intervention in the biographer's habit of assuming readers are so familiar with his subject's life that characters are dropped into the narrative without being properly introduced, often leading to confusion. This happens on numerous occasions: to give just one example, the first mention of Olga Roncoroni occurs on p.195 as 'Roncoroni's contention', a few pages on we hear in passing that 'Olga Roncoroni' was 'a young woman who joined this inner circle in the 1920s', but it is not until p.221 that she is given an extended introduction. This lack of appreciation of narrative conventions is symptomatic of the approach of a biographer who, on the whole, favours a particular form of scholarly argument over readability.

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1 1 In Susan Magarey (ed), *Writing Lives: Feminist Biography and Autobiography*, Adelaide, Australian Feminist Studies, 1992, p.14.

2 Suzanne Raitt, *Vita and Virginia: The Work and Friendship of V. Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, p.63.

3 21 January 1930. Miles Franklin Papers ML MSS364.

Conversations With the Waiting

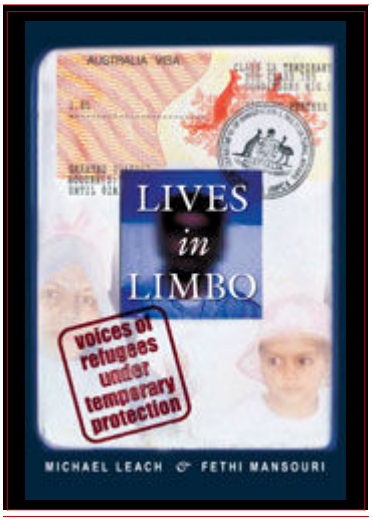
Michael Leach and Fethi Mansouri, *Lives in Limbo: Voices of Refugees under Temporary Protection*. Sydney: UNSW Press, 2004.
By Anna Szörényi

'Australians don't know anything about asylum seekers, there's no one to tell them about us.'

These are the words of 'Hasan,'[1] one of the refugees interviewed for Michael Leach and Fethi Mansouri's book *Lives in Limbo.* This book is designed to help remedy such ignorance. It examines the effects of Australia's Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) regime on the lives of those who are caught within its enforced limbo. The Temporary Protection Visa, applied to those who arrive by boat and seek asylum on-shore, creates a second class of refugees who are denied assistance with employment, housing or language, refused family reunion or even visitation rights, and condemned to a life of uncertainty and ongoing application processes. The book is based on interviews with 34 refugees living under the TPV system, who tell of their reasons for fleeing their original homes, their journeys to Australia by boat, imprisonment under Australia's system of mandatory and indefinite detention for on-shore asylum seekers, and the hope-destroying effects of separation from family and threatened future deportation. The situation of living on the TPV is shown to be anything but a 'release' and only inaccurately described as 'protection'; rather it represents another three-year sentence to uncertainty, separation from family, and social and financial hardship.

The back cover of *Lives in Limbo* states:

> You may think you've heard everything there is to be told about these boat people. Certainly we've all heard more than enough from politicians, radio shock jocks, conservative newspaper hacks and even sympathetic refugee and human rights advocates. But we have rarely heard from the people themselves…



Over the past two years this statement has, fortunately, become less true. *Lives in Limbo* joins several other projects which portray refugees 'in their own words': *From Nothing to Zero*,[2] a collection of letters written by asylum seekers in detention; *Dark Dreams*[3] a collection of 'Australian refugee stories' written by young writers, including some by refugees themselves; and *Another Country*,[4] an anthology of poetry and prose by detainees. *Lives in Limbo* is distinguished from these projects not just in that it focuses explicitly on the experience of those living under the TPV, but also in the way the contributions of its protagonists are framed within an extensive description and analysis of the situation in source countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan; the details of international and Australian refugee law and policy; immigration statistics; and research on the social and emotional effects of the TPV. The authors state that: 'In adopting this approach we have sought to avoid 'academic dryness' on the one hand, and decontextualised 'lists' of personal stories on the other' (p. 11).

The result is a very effective intervention into refugee debate. Throughout the book prominent myths about asylum seekers and 'boat people' are explicitly addressed and demolished. Chapter One, for example, titled 'the push factor', explicitly addresses the impression propagated within the mainstream media that asylum seekers are simply trying to get a piece of the Australian lifestyle. This Chapter emphasises the fact that the main priority was not to come *to* Australia but to escape *from* life threatening situations elsewhere.

The statements by asylum seekers on this topic, and others, are often detailed and dramatic in effect. This is due less to their style, which is on the whole understated, than to the extreme nature of the experiences they describe. *Lives in Limbo* pulls no punches about the necessities which forced asylum seekers to flee, or about the deeply damaging effects of the TPV regime. It is shown to be discriminatory and unnecessarily abusive, both practically and emotionally. Ali expresses the general result:

> 'For me, the TPV is a prison. Our life is without hope, or purpose. The simplest thing that a person wants in his life is hope. Without hope, life is meaningless' (p. 98).

Many of the stories included in *Lives in Limbo* are difficult to quote out of context without simply sounding sensationalist. The story of Abdallah's attempt to escape from Iraq is one of these: a nightmare of a journey involving 8 countries, 5 forced deportations back and forth between Indonesia, Malaysia, Iran and Thailand, and the constant threat of return to persecution in Iraq. Such stories make it clear that blithe statements by immigration ministers about asylum seekers 'forum shopping' in order to select the best destination are not only inaccurate but, when propagated by those in a position to be better informed, malicious.

My difficulty in choosing quotations from *Lives in Limbo* is a reminder of the complexities involved in representing other people's traumatic experience. Allen Feldman has written about the 'trauma aesthetic' which makes stories of the trauma of 'others' ever more marketable, and suggests that those others are simply destined to be victims.[5] It is to Leach and Mansouri's credit that the extensive analysis and background information in *Lives in Limbo* goes a long way towards minimising this tendency, preventing refugees from appearing as essentialised or passive by making explicit the historical and political decisions which have produced their suffering.

Nonetheless, it is difficult when combining academic analysis with personal statements not to position the quoted speakers as 'native informants', who may provide the information needed for the analysis but are positioned, in Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray's words, as 'naïve transmitters of raw experience', rather than as speaking subjects with the ability to interpret their experience.[6] This dynamic allows 'informants' the right to 'tell stories' about their personal experience as 'individuals', while the 'authors' take on the role of expert, describing the situation as a whole. Such a structure was perhaps necessary for a project such as this, which is devoted not only to giving the perspectives of refugees, but to providing an authoritative analysis backed by research of the kind generally undertaken by professional academics. Nonetheless, Peter Mares' declaration that the book 'gives voice to Australia's "temporary" refugees' (quoted on the back cover) should be taken with caution. Trinh T. Minh-ha reminds us that 'giving voice' is a patronising term, which implies that the recipients of this gift were somehow incapable of speaking before the intervention of their benefactor.[7]

Given this, *Lives in Limbo* is at its best when it does not simply offer up the words of asylum seekers as 'proof' of the authors' argument, or as human interest to make the discussion more immediate and entertaining, but also gives them status as interpretations and authoritative statements in their own right. Fortunately, there are many occasions when the quotations are positioned in such a way that they actively move the argument forward, or when the TPV holders are credited not only with recalling, describing, and feeling, but with the analytical and authoritative acts of 'explaining', interpreting, judging, and 'making points'. Majid, for example, 'explains' the effects of the Taliban's persecution of educated people (p. 30). Adel 'comments on the dilemmas facing non-government organisations' (p. 92) and Sharif is described as 'adding' his perspective to a quotation from well-known journalist and refugee advocate Peter Mares, thus joining in a conversation rather than being an example discussed by others (p.119). It is also to the authors' credit that they conducted the interviews in Arabic and Farsi, subsequently translated into English, which allowed the interviewees to express their ideas with fluency.

The analytic role taken by the interviewed TPV holders is most telling in the final chapter: 'Strange Words -- Refugees Respond to Media Representations'. Here government-propagated labels such as 'queue jumper', 'illegal immigrant' and 'economic migrant' are challenged as inaccurate and offensive. The concept of 'queue jumping' is demolished clearly and finally by the refugees' own knowledge:

> 'I looked for that queue when I was in North Iraq and they told me that I couldn't apply for asylum in my country. I also looked for it in Iran, Malaysia and Indonesia. I didn't have a place to stay and believe me, if I could find a safe way to come, I would have waited, but the truth is, there aren't any queues' (Hamid, p. 119).

Abdallah's statement about the term 'illegal immigrant' highlights the impossibility of the situation for asylum seekers:

> 'I don't know what they mean by it. If I came legally, and with a formal passport, how would I be an asylum seeker? What's the point of seeking asylum if I could legally leave my country with my passport? I think that asylum seekers have to be illegal because they have to cross the border of their country illegally' (p. 117).

Lives in Limbo is an ambitious book, undertaking political and historical analysis, comparison with international practices, policy critique and advocacy, research into the practical and emotional experiences of TPV holders, and the presentation of refugees' own statements. Such a project requires careful negotiation between different speaking positions and, in general, Leach and Mansouri have achieved a balance which is highly informative and offers an understanding of the immense hardships facing TPV holders, while mostly stopping short of positioning them as spectacles and passive victims. The result is a book which conveys immensely important information in a sober, but deeply incisive, mode. The overall argument is unassailable and backed up by sober analysis and appropriate outrage. The TPV regime is shown to be discriminatory, unnecessarily punitive and deeply damaging, and the responsibility for this damage is laid squarely at the feet of the Australian government. *Lives in Limbo* is necessary reading for anyone concerned to counteract the misinformation about refugees constantly spread by government spokespeople and propagated by the mainstream media, reading rendered all the more urgent by the recent election result. While it may be problematic to describe it as having 'given a voice' to TPV holders, it will hopefully encourage *listening* on the part of the book's readership. As a strategic intervention in the refugee debate, *Lives in Limbo* is thus a valuable contribution. I will close by quoting a comment from Nadia; the final words of the book:

> 'I was welcomed by the Australians in all the places that I went to: Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne. Only the government didn't want us there and is punishing us. When will the punishment stop? We don't know, we're still waiting' (p. 141).

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1 The refugees quoted in Lives in Limbo have been given pseudonyms for their privacy and protection.

2 Meaghan Amor and Janet Austin, eds., *From Nothing to Zero: Letters from Refugees in*

Australia's Detention Centres, Footscray, Melbourne: Lonely Planet Publications, 2003.

3 Sonja Dechlan, Heather Millar, and Eva Sallis, eds., *Dark Dreams: Australian Refugee Stories by Young Writers Aged 11-20 Years*, Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2004.

4 Rosie Scott and Thomas Keneally, eds., *Southerly (Another Country)*, vol. 6.1: 2004.

5 Allen Feldman, 'Memory Theatres, Virtual Witnessing and the Trauma Aesthetic,' *Biography* 27, no. 1(2004).

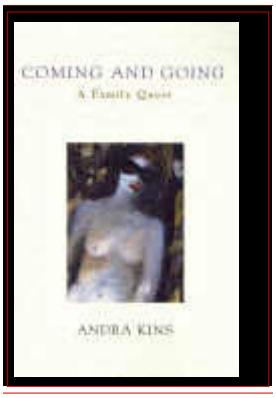
6 Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray, 'Survivor Discourse: Transgression or Recuperation,' *Signs* 18, no. 2 (1993): 260.

7 Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*, New York: Routledge, 199: 60.

Havens in Heartless Worlds Revisited

Andra Kins, *Coming and Going. A Family Quest*. Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2004;
Natalie Andrews, *Clara's Witch*. Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2004.
By Jennifer Mitchell

The convoluted theme of 'being at home' in Australia is at the centre of two new releases from Fremantle Arts Centre Press. These stories from rather similar women with very different life experiences, contribute to a growing body of contemporary women's writing which touches on the ways women bring meaning to their lives through creativity. Feeling at home in a new country is for these writers strongly linked to the act of 'making' a home, in both practical and emotional terms. Having the power to act on their own to 'create' safe places for self expression, is the key to these stories of displacement and discovery.



Andra Kins writes as a daughter and grand-daughter of Latvian refugees who fled the Second World War in Europe to make a new life in Australia. Natalie Andrews also came to Australia as a result of the same war, leaving Scotland and a childhood marked by fear to live with her mother's family in Adelaide. Both narratives reveal the experiences of migration and of fleeing war; Natalie reliving her own displacement and the spectre of abuse, and Andra conveying the myriad consequences of her grandparents' decision to leave Russian occupied Latvia. Trying to be 'at home' in a place clearly not home, is a task both these writers take on and make meaningful through the lens of art.

Andra Kins' story *Coming and Going* follows the threads of four generations of women whose lives have been shaped by displacement. The lives of Berta Klavins (Oma) Andra's Grandmother and Gunta Parups, her mother, are woven in and out of Andra's own story; all three stories being first person narratives. Drawn mostly from their diaries, the older women's tales tell of travelling to Australia and of struggling to make their homes here. The ongoing traumatic process of coming to a new land and going from an old one suffuses these snapshots of past lives, as it suffuses the lives of those who come after. Andra's sense of not belonging in her parent's adopted country, as well as her sense of herself was shaped, she realizes, by the eternal sadness of the exiled refugee.

For the refugees and migrants who made up Perth's Latvian community where Andra's grandparents came to live and work, home was located in the lost homeland in a lost past. Exile weighs heavy on the refugee, and life in the new land is 'a dark night of the soul'. Real life would begin again, it was understood, when Latvia was free from Russian occupation, and free from what they saw as the blight of Communism. The small and exclusive family space of the exile became the displaced site for expression of Latvian-ness. As Andra says, 'Oma conveyed to me that everything outside our house was dangerous and unwholesome'.

For Gunta, Andra's mother, surviving the dark night of the soul that was exile in Australia meant painting. Yet she never embraced the natural landscapes or tried to capture the light and airy 'outside' which so characterized the most well known Australian painting at the time she arrived. Gunta's art reflected a 'deep and brooding sadness' that was the loss of her identity, her home and her sense of peace. In artistic practice she finds a sort of balance and a way to move through the sadness. She also finds a means to control the anxiety of uncertainty. Yet the sadness that shaped Gunta's paintings was not contained there in the flow of paint on canvas, but flowed on through the visual images to be inherited by her daughter. The unwelcome legacy of exile leaves Andra without the means to create a positive sense of home, and with a long-unfulfilled task of finding a place to feel safe.

In her poetry writing, Andra acknowledges the burden of taking on her mother's grief, yet she does not wish this added complexity away when a simpler way of living beckons, because for her simplicity seems shallow. 'Why is the liberating force of simplicity so hard to bear, and the constraining force of complexity so seductive?' As a creative woman Andra knows quite well why, as did her mother. In her diary entry for September 1986 Gunta wrote about the experience of creativity:

> The creative endeavour is worthwhile because of those moments when something else takes over and paints with me, through me.
> That's what there is in art…This element of the unknown that is real and works in mysterious ways. It's nowhere else, just in art.

For the artist, complexity gives substance and meaning to the creative process. For the artist in exile, the routine and process of creativity takes on the lineaments of home.

But this series of interwoven narratives is much more than a reflective look at the way contemporary memories of past events shape the way realities of self and others are perceived. *Coming and Going* also engages with issues of deep significance to contemporary Australian society. This story brings into light not only the history of refugees coming to Australia, but the way refugees' lives and stories continue to shape our culture, and contribute to the ongoing debate about what home means. The displacement of people by wars, whether half a century ago or right now, is something that affects individuals, and their families and communities in the new land, as well as the land left behind, for generations after the initial exile occurred.

Andra Kins' story addresses two key questions which have resonance in wider Australia. These relate not only to Latvians or other Europeans displaced by war, but also to the many exiles that make up our population, not the least of whom are the so called 'asylum seekers' from many war-torn countries locked up in detention centres. The first question Kins asks comes after Gunta's death and a visit to her aunt and cousin in Latvia. Who was worse off she asks, who suffered more: the exiles or the ones who stayed at home and were oppressed by the Russians for having relatives in the West? The idea of home is destroyed for the exile in this perpetual ambivalence, and the only clear feeling is of being 'not at home' in the new land.

The second question relates to the first. How then, can a new idea of home be created by exiles and their descendants when their persistent identity as 'placeless' people prevents them from making a new home? Kins makes the point that 'asylum seekers' are cast as always looking for sanctuary: kept in limbo, kept placeless by, she says, a government with a displaced soul. 'The humanity of asylum seekers has disappeared from the moral question,' she argues. Instead they are labelled and categorised as disembodied seekers with no place of their own, and then prevented from creating one. 'Doing', Andra equates with 'being'. Only by making can someone become. By making her own way through her own form of creative expression; a way of being she passes on to her daughter Maija, Andra breaks free from the past and ceases to be an exile. She makes a place for herself at last.

Safe places and the struggle to find them is a key theme in Natalie Andrews' autobiographical narrative *Clara's Witch.* Written in the first person about Clara, not Natalie, the text reads as memoir yet has some characteristics of fiction. The rather detailed reminiscences of a very young Clara suggests that while the broad outlines of the story are probably accurate, it is in the finer points of the narrative where the author has made her creative re-envisioning. This nexus is acknowledged in the publisher's categorisation of the book as a 'creative memoir'.

Enduring seemingly pointless terror inflicted by her father with her mother's complicity, is Clara's earliest memory. Power and control, it seems, are the primary objects of her father's existence

until the outbreak of war brings the opportunity of escape for Clara, her sisters and brother, as they are split up and sent to the safety of the country. But Clara brings with her from Glasgow an overwhelming fear of Hitler and the Jerries, which transforms over the course of her life into a shape-shifting terror that torments her: Clara's 'Witch'.

Some happy times come Clara's way as she lives with Pop and Mum Henty in the Scottish countryside. With Pop, Clara feels safe and loved. Mum Henty on the other hand is a strict disciplinarian who demands obedience. When Pop fails to stand by Clara in a moment of unfair punishment, Clara's feelings of safety recede. The patterns of fear and mistrust instilled by her parents' abuse re-emerge. Back in Glasgow at the end of the war, Clara finds she no longer recognises her family. At school a teacher introduces Clara to the joys of music and singing, and suddenly there is a light in the life made dim by the shadowy danger of a drunken and sentimental father, and a slowly diminishing, ailing mother.

At the age of nine, Clara and her sisters and younger brother leave Scotland to go to Australia to live with their mother's parents in Adelaide. Clara feels sure the Witch cannot make it across so vast an ocean and the adventure seems to promise a release from fear. And so it proves for a while until Clara becomes ill with a debilitating disease that keeps her in hospital for many months. While she is in hospital, her mother dies in Scotland from the same illness - and her father comes to Australia. Clara is again an unwilling subject to forces beyond her control.

With her father's return to her life, Clara's Witch seems to make a return also. Clara frequently finds herself caught up in situations where the wills of powerful adults or rigid rules come into conflict with her own path through life. A neurotic teacher keeps her in, and her Nan wants chores done; later as a trainee nurse she is torn between a strict Matron and the temptation to stay out past curfew. Three attempted rapes, including one by her father, also leave their mark of helpless terror on her. Clara feels all these conflicts with intense emotional, even physical pain. One after another these battles weigh down her resilience. But the worst and most lingering pain she suffered appears to be her father's refusal to let her take up a music scholarship that would have enabled her to learn to sing professionally.

What stands out in this story is the resistance Clara puts up to the forces of domination trying to control her, but when her Witch finally catches up with her in later life, Clara loses momentarily her characteristic rebelliousness and submits to the chaos of madness. Family life did not appear to fulfil Clara's search for safety. The lack of a safe place to be herself appears as an absence she must fill with something else, and for Clara that something was singing.

This is a very complex story of survival against the odds. But I feel it stops just short of being what it could easily become: a clichéd story of triumph against abuse. It has the added texture of being partly fictional, and presented from the perspective of a mature, accomplished woman whose language is unsentimental and spare. Andrews does not indulge in psychology or self pity, and is rather skilful in bringing clarity and beauty to often obscure and ugly events. She also has a discerning eye for illuminating social and class inequalities in their contexts, and not falling into the trap of judging past actions against the criteria of the contemporary era. Nor does she judge her father harshly, but recognises what haunts many victims of family abuse, an element of love and pity for the inflictor which remains intact inside the hurt, fear and confusion.

In both these stories, fulfilment is discovered in something other than romantic relationships and family. These women look outside the traditional boundaries which might keep them contained in domestic routines, finding the means to bring art, beauty and accomplishment into their lives. Not settling for the haphazard paths laid out for them by their fallible parents, the authors of these works make their worlds dynamic, challenging and meaningful all on their own. Andra and Clara eventually overcome the difficulties of settling in a new land faced by the migrant, and make

homes for themselves in the contexts of work and creative expression. Making and creating are active choices these women undertook over the passive choice of simply taking what life handed out to them and merely 'making do'.

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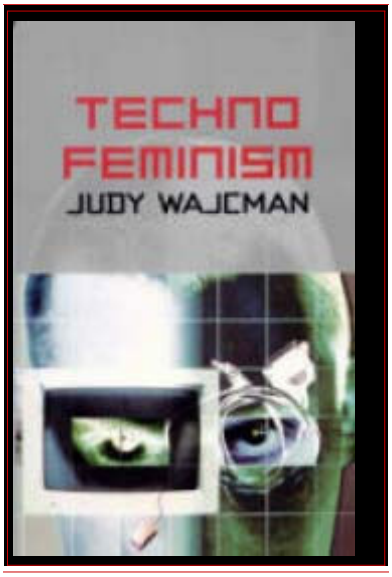
New Frontiers in Gender and Technology

Judy Wajcman, *Technofeminism*. Cambridge: Polity, 2004.
By Kim Toffoletti

It's not often that an academic text evokes memories of my '80s childhood. Watching Video Hits or walking down Chapel Street maybe, but academia, no. That was until I picked up Judy Wajcman's latest book, *Technofeminism*. It's really kind of appealing - the cover, that is - with its red, block script. Reminds me simultaneously of *Tron* and the Soviet Union, surely two of the great symbols of the 1980s and the technological future. As a kid, the Russians were fixed in my mind as the guys who sent dogs into space. Obviously this meant that they were on the cutting edge of technology. As for *Tron*, it elicited a vision of the digital age synonymous with synthesised voices, flashing cursors and those weird, square computer letters. Back then, I was oblivious to the associations between masculinity, warfare, power and technology. Years later, Wajcman's *Feminism Confronts Technology* (1991) set me straight, changing the way I thought about missiles forever.



In *Technofeminism*, Wajcman offers a new formulation for interpreting women's relationships with emergent technologies such as biomedicine, virtual reality and digital worlds. Described as a theory that 'fuses the insights of cyborg feminism with those of a constructivist theory of technology' (103), what she terms a *technofeminist approach* seeks to 'offer a way between utopian optimism and pessimistic fatalism for technofeminism, and between cultural contingency and social determinism in social theory' (6). In her technofeminist framework, Wajcman has developed a theory of gender/technology relations that reconsiders conventional feminist models used to explain the engagements between women and machines. By arguing that gender and technology are mutually constitutive, a technofeminist approach revises conventional interpretations of women as either victims of technology or liberated by it.

Characterised by 'an emphasis on the contingency and heterogeneity of technological change' (7), a technofeminist framework rejects the notion of technology as monolithic and neutral. Not simply is it a matter of how technology is used and by whom that determines its effects, but the social factors that shape the design and production of technologies. As Wajcman notes, mainstream technology studies 'have generally assumed that gender has little bearing on the development of technology because the masculinity of the actors was not made explicit' (45). Wajcman reviews the concept of sociotechnical networks to illuminate the role of gender in shaping the processes whereby technology and society are constituted.

At the heart of her argument is an interrogation of relations of gender and power in the digital realm. While much has been written about the emancipatory potential of new technologies to liberate us from the flesh, and dismantle power hierarchies across class, race and sex, Wajcman questions these assumptions to ask 'what might these imaginings about the future reveal about contemporary gender relations? How does the social and political revolution in women's lives relate to the digital revolution?' (3). By considering the extent to which emerging technologies have benefited women, *Technofeminism* highlights the nexus between information technologies and a feminist political project.

In formulating her technofeminist account, Wajcman maps the recent history of technology and society from a gendered perspective. By charting the development in feminist thinking on this issue, she establishes a framework for understanding current engagements between gender and

technology. Wajcman identifies feminist scholarship on technology as broadly falling into two camps - those who interpret technology as a male domain that perpetuates women's subordination, and those who reclaim technology as enabling and productive for women.

Chapter One, 'Male Designs on Technology', is devoted to the former. Early feminist analysis of technology's impact upon gender relations reveals the associations between masculinity and technology. Wajcman writes:

> Feminists have identified men's monopoly of technology as an important source of their power; women's lack of technological skill as an important element in their dependence on men. Whilst there is broad agreement on the issue, the question whether the problem lies in men's monopoly of technology or whether technology itself is inherently patriarchal remains more contentious. (12)

Deploying liberal, radical and socialist feminist perspectives, Wajcman clearly guides the reader through various feminist interpretations of how technology both reflects and perpetuates gender inequality. While liberal feminism seeks to redress the structural barriers that limit women's participation in the areas of science and technology, radical feminism rejects technology as inherently patriarchal and, hence, incompatible with women's experiences and ways of being. Socialist feminism, as Wajcman explains, explores the impact of technology upon the gendered division of labour. Despite the diversity of these approaches, early feminist studies of technology have been critiqued for locating women as irrevocably estranged from it (Wajcman's 1991 monograph, *Feminism Confronts Technology*, shares this tendency). By concluding that technology is detrimental to women, early feminist debates neglected the productive possibilities of technology for women - both in terms of identity politics and in challenging gender power relations.

More recently, post-structural and postmodern approaches to gender, identity and power have re-evaluated the assumption that technology and women are incompatible. The later chapters of *Technofeminism* are devoted to outlining the key shifts in feminist thinking about technology over that past decade. Moving away from the negative and often deterministic evaluations of earlier feminisms, cyberfeminism suggests that virtual technologies like the internet may be useful and productive for women. Rejecting the notion of women as victims of technology, theorists such as Sadie Plant, Donna Haraway and Sherry Turkle propose that new information, media and communication technologies operate as sites of female empowerment, agency and pleasure. As Wajcman notes:

> technological innovations have been pivotal in the fundamental shift in power from men to women that occurred in western cultures in the 1990s, the so-called genderquake. Old expectations, stereotypes, senses of identity and securities have been challenged as women gain unprecedented economic opportunities, technical skills and cultural powers (63).

Although Wajcman advocates the agency of the female subject, she is wary of an 'utopian imagining' of cyberspace as liberatory for women (75). In particular, she disagrees with Plant's argument that women are more suited to a digital economy (73). Wajcman maintains that Plant, by equating the technological and the feminine, contradictorily espouses a 'fixed, unitary version of what it is to be female while, at the same time, arguing that the self is decentred and dispersed' (73). So, too, does the author challenge the use of metaphor in cyberfeminist discourse to imagine an alternative female identity, questioning the potential of this model to effect social and political change in gender relations.

Claiming that cyberfeminists articulate a vision of the subject that ignores women's lived experience of technologies, Wajcman appears to favour a materialist analysis of the relationship

between women and technology. While stressing that these engagements can't be spoken about in general terms, Wajcman views technology as ultimately replaying 'old stereotypes of gender and technology' (74). For Wajcman, material existence operates as the limit point for theorising gender and technology. In this respect, her project doesn't veer significantly away from earlier engagements with the topic. Rather, as she articulates in the preface, the concepts in *Technofeminism* are for the most part an extension of those developed in *Feminism Confronts Technology*. It functions as a kind of updating, if you like, to address new feminist debates on information technology, biomedicine and virtual reality through a social constructivist framework that pays lipservice to cyborg feminism.

Although Wajcman claims to draw on the insights of cyborg feminism to augment her materialist approach to gender/technology relations (103), there is little suggestion that she does so. Chapter Four, 'The Cyborg Solution', offers a sustained engagement with Haraway's writings on science studies beyond the now ubiquitous cyborg model of techno-female existence. While the optimism of cyborg and cyberfeminism are seen as a positive antidote to the deterministic negativity of a previous feminist analysis, Wajcman is mostly critical of the cyborg as a limited formulation to transform gender/technology relations in society.

Central to Haraway's account of technoscientific figurations such as the cyborg and Oncomouse is the contestation of the category nature as 'other'. Wajcman applauds this gesture as a means of moving beyond the codification of woman with an essential nature, yet is ambivalent about the usefulness of such figurations to transform the gendering of the sociotechnical sphere. In Wajcman's evaluation, technological imaginings such as those offered by Haraway and Plant to formulate new spaces and alternative subjectivities, 'is a limited form of politics' (101). Rather than deeming such theoretical devices inadequate, perhaps a more useful approach would place greater emphasis upon the interconnectedness of semiotics and materiality to a feminist political project (as Haraway endeavours to do). *Technofeminism* presents a convincing argument for 'technologies to be properly characterised as contingent and open, expressing the networks of social relations in which they are embedded' (108). Our understanding of gender identity is influenced by semiotics; by representation, myth and metaphor, and this surely informs the social processes that determine women's relationship to technology.

For those students and scholars unfamiliar with feminist technology studies, *Technofeminism* stands as an accessible introductory text, offering a concise overview of past debates alongside current concerns in the field. It is, however, much more than a survey of what has been written on the topic thus far. By assessing the historical, social, cultural and economic contexts in which technologies are formulated, produced and used, as well as theoretical shifts in feminist identity politics, Wajcman encourages us to formulate new ways of thinking about the interconnection between the development of technology and contemporary gender relations.

Technofeminism illustrates the necessity for theorising women's relationships to technology beyond good or bad. By advancing a theory of gender and technology that mediates between utopian and dystopian discourses, Wajcman offers a framework for a better articulation of 'the process of technological change as integral to the renegotiation of gender power relations' (103). Its value for feminism lies not only in its attempt to account for the often contradictory and increasingly complex ways that women engage with technology in the digital age, but also in linking this process back to questions of power and agency in a feminist political project.

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The Girl Industry

Anita Harris, *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
By Margaret Henderson

At the university where I work one of its PhD students, a twenty-four year old female scientist, was recently named 'Young Queenslander of the Year.' The way her image was used by the media and by the university in publicity and advertising material illustrated a key contention of Anita Harris's analysis of girls and young women in *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*.

Harris argues that 'young women are being constructed as a vanguard of a new subjectivity' because they are supposedly ideally positioned to cope with the cultural, economic, and social shifts characterising late modernity (1). Further, as they can 'cope' with these changes, they also help to ease our concerns with dramatic socioeconomic reconfiguration, and our ongoing anxieties surrounding 'youth'. The public relations frenzy over the 'Young Queenslander' I initially interpreted as yet another emanation of the marketing strategies of the university, that brand the institution as a meritocratic 'winner'. After reading Harris's book, however, the construct made a great deal more sense. The image of the young, female, high achieving scientist exemplifies the successful half of the bifurcated identity Harris describes as the Future Girl: in this particular case, a persona that represents hard-work, scientific skill, a rewarding and challenging job, her research into skin cancer suggesting civic mindedness and humanitarian values. And indeed her image does seem to fulfil the other role of Future Girl: supposedly allaying a range of social fears, whether concerning girls and science, young women and the labour market, unmarried mothers, young people and drugs, or apathetic and selfish youth.

Future Girl aims to chart why young women are being positioned as *the* vanguard subjectivity for the West in the twenty-first century, and how and where this fundamental social and discursive shift is occurring. Harris's framework is a feminist sociology, with a particular emphasis on class and on race. Her methodology moves easily among the macro social structures of late modernity, micropractices of teenage subcultures, and emergent discourses of consumer and youth cultures. This broad view and her emphasis on class and race make for a compelling and tough reading of the contemporary phenomenon of girl power and the 'new' young woman. Harris refuses the populist option, much beloved by some versions of cultural studies, of an uncritical celebration of newly empowered young girls. Rather, she tells a less sanguine story about the construction and recruitment of a particular type of girl/ young woman as enabling 'the successful transition to a new social order', namely that of consumer, late, or global capitalism (2). Future Girl is to be the ideal subject of, but also subject to, this social order. It is these twin processes that Harris traces.

Future Girl's argument is premised on a definitive split between industrial modernity and postindustrial late modernity, with late modernity being characterised by deindustrialisation, privatisation, marketisation, and individualisation (3-4). Drawing on the work of Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, Harris argues that a major social effect of these economic shifts is widespread insecurity and uncertainty, which coalesce into the 'risk society' (4). Because of the decline and/or disappearance of employment security, the welfare state, and strong communal ties, the individual becomes paramount, and the sole agent in negotiating the opportunities and dangers of the risk society. The individual must rely on processes of self-invention and self-transformation to survive the changed social and economic circumstances (5). Youth, and specifically female youth, are imagined as best able to cope with this altered scenario. As Harris explains, it is an uneasy confluence between feminism and the requirements of late modernity that has made the girl a central figure in the contemporary imaginary:

> First, changed economic and work conditions combined with the goals achieved by feminism have created new possibilities for young women…. Second, new ideologies about individual responsibility and choices also dovetail with some broad feminist notions about opportunities for young women, making them the most likely candidates for performing a new kind of self-made subjectivity. (6)

Future Girl is, therefore, about the unexpected legacies of the women's movement and how ideological cooption can proceed on a subtle, yet fundamental level - namely, in the process of subject formation. Indeed, I found this one of the most fascinating aspects of the book, and one that complicates the usual analyses which focus on the iconography of girl power (whether they read it as a commodification of feminism, or a resistant, empowering practice). *Future Girl* makes clear that late modernity cannot be fully understood or conceptualized without a recognition of the impact of feminism, and that some versions of feminism have been quite complementary to the reproduction of capitalism.

Harris argues that Future Girl has two identities: the 'can-do' girl and the 'at-risk' girl (14). The 'can-do' girl is the ideal, the success story of the late modern economic and gender order: flexible, self-motivated, a good consumer, a serious and ambitious worker, delaying motherhood until just the right time in the career path. She is the perfect worker of flexible capitalism (38), the apolitical daughter of feminism, and the one whose image now proliferates throughout culture. Her sister, the 'at-risk' girl, is the failure of the family: she is marked by the scourge of 'disordered consumption', early pregnancy, less 'interest' in a carefully planned education and career trajectory, lack of self-discipline, incorrect choices, or poor family circumstances. Her failure to be the normative 'can-do' girl is thus personalised and individualised, rather than being seen usually as a result of structural inequality. What both types of young female share, however, 'is the necessity of surveillance and management, and the understanding that whatever problems they may suffer are personal in cause and solution. The result of these interventions is to construct a normative trajectory of young women's success' (35). As Harris describes throughout, the new girl/young woman is a site of intensified surveillance and regulation, whether from educators, counsellors, advertisers, market researchers, social philanthropists, social workers, welfare policy makers, retailers, employers, or parents.

Future Girl begins by tracing the emergence of the young woman as ideal subject and her bad sister. It then examines their location in education and employment, debates around citizenship, the spaces of education and leisure, and the attempted colonisation of their interior lives by an incitement to discourse, with a final chapter on girls who resist the trajectory of the 'can-do girl'. The book begins strongly with the chapter, 'Jobs for the Girls? Education and Employment in the New Economy', demolishing the utopian platitudes surrounding the new economy. It details the collapse of the youth job market, and the accompanying ideological and educational shifts, specifically the discourse of limitless choice as obscuring the realities of class stratification. Harris reveals where the jobs really are, and how few can actually become 'can-do' girls.

'Citizenship and the Self-Made Girl' charts the meaning of citizenship for youth now, in terms of the attenuated pathway to a full-time job and, hence, social and civic maturity. This chapter shows how youth and specifically young women are constructed into the citizen consumer, a bearer of responsibilities more than rights. In readings of defence force recruiting campaigns, youth club leadership contests, and young women's entrepreneur camps, Harris explains how a young woman's supposed qualities makes her the ideal citizen for the new consumerist social order.

The chapter, 'Spaces of Regulation,' contains insightful analyses of elite girls' schools and their methods of producing success and managing failure. It also focuses on the management of 'at-risk' girls in training schemes and detention centres. This is required reading for all 'aspirational'

parents. Perhaps the strongest statement of adult anxieties concerning young women is in 'Being Seen and Being Heard: The Incitement to Discourse' chapter, which analyses how young women's interior lives are regulated by being put on display. Harris suggests that young women are prime targets for confessional politics, whether through cell phones, reality television, an ethos of 'living large', or by well-meaning youth workers or policy makers. This incitement to speak and display their interiority, is a controlling strategy by corporations and government. It may unsettle the public/private binary, but not in the way feminists intended.

The final chapter examines various sites and practices young women use to critique the normative trajectory assumed by 'can-do' girls and consumer capitalism, and tellingly, these are overwhelmingly cultural practices. Not surprisingly, Harris emphasises web sites and zines as prime places for a new politics, or for those who simply want to opt out of 'making it' Thankfully, she avoids reiterating the generational divide conflict in feminism and, to her credit, she does not overstate the political import of these strategies. The textual analysis is sometimes a bit pedestrian, restating what is obvious in the quotations that are used. However, the anarchic, creative and, often, very funny voices she discusses give some hope.

Future Girl joins an increasing number of books exploring the contemporary location of the category, young women, and it is one of the best. Harris's thesis of the young woman as vanguard subject is original and insightful, if disturbing. Her emphasis on class to demystify the growing mythologies of young women is much needed and refreshing, and she manages to blend a materialist analysis with a discursive and cultural one. The sites she investigates are wide-ranging and productive, and build up a convincing and unsettling picture of young women and contemporary western culture. *Future Girl* is a powerful corrective to gender-blind accounts of youth subcultures of the disciplinary society (namely, Michel Foucault) and of postmodernity (as in David Harvey).

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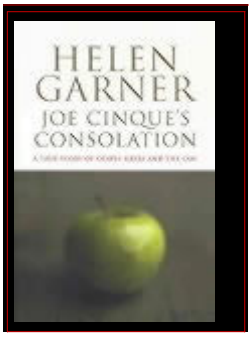
Hanging Out for Judgement?

Helen Garner, *Joe Cinque's Consolation: A True Story of Death, Grief and the Law*.
Sydney: Picador, 2004.
By Maryanne Dever

When I crossed the corridor bearing this book in my arms several of my colleagues sprang back uttering the words 'no way'. They thought I was going to ask one of them if they'd like to review it and they were quick to assure me they weren't even going to read Garner's latest after 'the last one'. In contrast, I was keen to read *Joe Cinque's Consolation* precisely because the dust has been so long in settling on *The First Stone*. A long-time admirer of Garner's beautiful, spare prose and quirky outlook on life, I was sure that whatever else the book might offer it wouldn't be a bad read. Months before the book appeared, I had heard about it in general terms and assumed - or hoped - that perhaps it would turn out to be an extension of some of her memorable earlier essays on questions of death and mortality. And I was hoping to find that the author had moved on from the preoccupations of *The First Stone*.



In an era when most commercial publishers in this country happily serve up under-cooked, under-edited and frankly bad prose to long-suffering readers, Garner's undeniable skill as a writer shines through. And there is no question that she can tell a story: this one is a page-turner. And it certainly offers the best contemporary representation of central Canberra I have read. But throughout I was challenged time and again to ask, *why this story*? By her own account, Garner was in the doldrums following the break-up of her third marriage when she was invited by a journalist friend to consider writing about the death of a young man called Joe Cinque. Cinque's girlfriend, Anu Singh, a law student at ANU, and her best friend and fellow student, Madhavi Rao, were to stand trial for his murder in the ACT Supreme Court in early 1999. Rumour suggested that the death had been planned in advance and talked of openly over a dinner party with friends in the week before Cinque died from a massive overdose of heroin allegedly administered by Singh with the knowledge and/or assistance of Rao. When offered the story, Garner did at least reflect on the ironic connections to her previous work:

> He didn't spell it out - you're *interested* in women at the end of their tether - but I saw at once why I was the writer he had called. Four years earlier I had published a book of reportage called *The First Stone*, about two young women law students in Melbourne who had brought charges of assault against the head of their university college…The parallels between that story and this one were like a bad joke.

Despite the fact that she goes on to declare, 'no way was I going back there', that is precisely what she does. She freely admits that the story, as offered, was newsworthy because it held a 'bizarre touch' in the crime's apparently cavalier premeditation. What she does not comment on is the fact that it was also newsworthy as a statistical aberration. While women in this country routinely die in domestic homicides, they rarely commit them. Male violence towards women in this society may be naturalized and normalized to the point where it barely rates news coverage, but the exceptional case of a woman who commits an act of fatal violence is accorded the status of a media event. That Joe Cinque's death was horrific is undeniable; that it was more deserving of the media's sympathetic representation, of Garner's detailed analysis, and of our moral outrage than all those other deaths - women's deaths - that go largely uncovered in the media is a rather more questionable proposition and one that Garner chooses not to tackle. Neither does she dwell on the fact that a history of domestic violence provides the principal social context for most of the tiny minority of women who do kill their partners. In fact, in the course of this book she repeatedly dismisses out of hand Anu Singh's claim that she had been 'terrified' of Joe Cinque.

Billed as 'a true story of death, grief and the law', *Joe Cinque's Consolation* is in fact the artfully told story of how Garner became involved in and wandered around with this case for more years than was probably wise or useful. She sits through the trials of both women, pores over transcripts of trial judgments, comes to know Joe Cinque's family and friends, makes unsuccessful attempts to interview Anu Singh and her family, confronts members of the judiciary with her concerns, and worries whether all this time and research will ever result in a book. That the final product could ever have been, as the back cover suggests, the true story of 'how and why Joe Cinque died' is doubtful. And that is precisely because Garner is a good story-teller who knows how to gather up events, impressions, conversations, witness testimony, and transcripts of '000'calls and deploy them for maximum irony and maximum effect. Gripping, yes, but I can't help feeling that, just as she did in *The First Stone*, Garner here carries the privileges of fiction across to the genre of non-fiction (true crime stories) to produce not truth, but a series of well-honed truth effects.

The resulting narrative is painful, confronting and at times highly manipulative. It remorselessly pits the figure of naïve and trusting Joe Cinque against that of the scheming and seductive Anu Singh. Around them a hierarchy of good and bad 'multiculturals' emerges wherein Cinque's salt-of-the-earth working class Italian parents outstrip the professional middle class Singhs who appear pompous, moneyed and generally undeserving of sympathy. The Cinques' halting and ungrammatical utterances are generously quoted in the interests of establishing their quiet integrity and their dreadful pain. In Garner's hands, Singh's father's 'slurring accent' just doesn't have the same earthy charm. Without doubt, the Singh parents' confusion, grief and desperation exists on an entirely different plane from that of the Cinques, but it is neither inexplicable nor unworthy as we are invited to believe here. Had the Singhs known who Garner was (they patently didn't) or had they read *The First Stone* (which they obviously hadn't) they would have known the considerable price to be paid by those who refused her access to their dinner table, their feelings, and their stories.

Anu Singh herself is characterized by Garner in the opening pages of the book as 'the figure of what a woman most fears in herself - the damaged infant, vain, frantic, destructive, out of control'. But more importantly, as in *The First Stone*, here again is a young woman who, in Garner's view, refuses to take responsibility for her own actions and their devastating consequences. After all, as the book's sad refrain goes: 'Joe Cinque was dead'. While the shiny green apple adorning the cover of the book may be a reference to the ones the wholesome Joe liked to consume, no one can miss the obvious reference to the Garden of Eden and the age-old story of evil, feminine appetite and woman's sinful undoing of man(kind). As a figure of feminine 'evil' - a word Garner all too readily deploys throughout this work - Singh cops the lot. Garner baulks - just as she did in relation to the two protagonists of *The First Stone* - at the singular physical beauty of the youthful Singh. But while the voluptuous young women of *The First Stone* were merely charged with refusing to recognise the playful powers of Eros, Singh's beauty here ties her to Thanatos or - since we are never permitted to lose sight of her over-determined ethnicity - perhaps it is the goddess Kali. Singh's pleasing appearance becomes a finely calibrated measure of her apparent moral degeneracy and as she sits in court the arrangement of her fine, serpent-like limbs and her 'dark mass of hair' are obsessively monitored by Garner. The 'motherly' Madhavi Rao and the 'bouncily talkative' young female court reporters should be thankful they lacked Singh's disturbing good looks and could therefore be accorded slightly more textured coverage. But Singh, well, throw out the presumption of innocence: she's altogether a bad lot and you can pretty much tell that just by looking. 'I was hanging out for judgement to be pronounced on *such a woman*', writes Garner before Singh's verdict and sentence are announced.

While she remains vitally concerned throughout *Joe Cinque's Consolation* with what she takes to be the lamentable inability of the criminal justice system to deliver justice to the families of

victims of violent crime, Garner herself very early loses sight of one of the cornerstones of our legal system - and indeed of a civil society: the right to a fair hearing. Indeed, if the criminal justice system could be said to have shortchanged Joe Cinque's family by failing - as it so often does - to mete out punishment that fits, Garner equally shortchanges the very same justice system in her (mis)representation of its operations. The adversarial system employed in courts is not designed to establish the truth of what actually happened in a particular event, but to establish whether sufficient evidence exists to find a defendant guilty of the charges brought against them with respect to their alleged role in that event. In a strange misreading of this system - one which requires a defence team to secure a fair hearing for a client by putting the strongest possible case in their favour - Garner bristles at the apparent 'excuses' for her actions that Singh's barrister has the 'gall' to offer in the course of establishing her defence. Again, failing to acknowledge that evidence is not just given in court, but must also be tested if guilt is to be established 'beyond reasonable doubt', Garner condemns Singh's barrister for conducting what she considers to be a 'mauling cross-examination' of witnesses for the prosecution. Given this type of emotive rhetoric, readers unacquainted with the general operations of the criminal court and/or the specifics of this case could be forgiven for coming away from this book with the erroneous impression that a substantial miscarriage of justice had transpired, when in fact nothing of the sort had happened.

Joe Cinque's Consolation seems to stumble under the weight of the moral scaffolding it erects around a case that is unquestionably tragic, but which in the end it does not have very much new or different to say about the nature of crime, criminals and the courts on the one hand, or the nature of good and evil on the other. That our criminal justice system cannot deliver justice to the families of the victims of violent crime is no revelation in itself. Nor is the fact that the punishments handed down by courts often do not appear commensurate with the crimes (or that some people are weird and do bad things for which they should be punished). Garner endeavours to push beyond the specifics of this case towards a series of larger moral questions. But the mere posing of these questions ('what was "simple wickedness"?' 'is there only forgiveness?') without any substantial exploration ultimately leaves readers just peering voyeuristically - like Garner herself - into the private and increasingly claustrophobic sadness of the Cinque family.

What is it about the actions of these young women and those represented in *The First Stone* that grabs Garner's attention? Arguably, the books she writes about them always end up being more about herself than the young women in question. In fact, both books could be said to be elaborate exercises in shadow boxing as Garner tantalizingly hints to readers that she has her own story of youthful misdeed, chaos and damage to rival whichever one she is engaged in telling. Again and again in *Joe Cinque's Consolation* Garner alludes to the 'wreckage' she left behind as a young woman, to her 'selfish cruelties' and the 'terrible waste'. While she remarks that these memories represent scenes that she '[does] not care to examine', perhaps there might be a virtue in delving directly into this past rather than excavating it by proxy as she does again here. If we accept that her early fiction, however autobiographically informed, was nevertheless fiction, room - and a readership, I suspect - exists for that story she seems reluctant to bring into the full light of day. I can only hope that when she asks in this book whether 'we identify with a criminal in that we too secretly long to be judged?' she is walking around, sussing out, sniffing at the prospect of telling her own 'true story', opening herself up to judgment. Better the devil you know…

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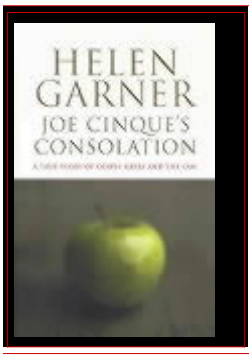
Interview with Helen Garner

Greedy for true stories — Garner's creative non fiction

By Suzanne Eggins

Helen Garner is greedy with biscuits. So she tells me, over coffee and shortbreads in her hotel room in Sydney's Rocks area the week *Joe Cinque's Consolation* is released. Hard to believe, I think, as I study this trim, energetic sixty-two-year-old whose nationwide publicity schedule would leave most of us grasping for something much stronger than a cookie. As Garner talks generously about her thirty year writing career, it seems to me that her real greed – if she has one – is for shaping meaning from the complex, often incomprehensible stories of real life.



It took Garner five years to write *Joe Cinque's Consolation,* so complex were the events that allowed Joe Cinque, a twenty-six-year old Canberra engineer, to be drugged and then given a lethal injection of heroin by his twenty-five-year-old law student girl friend, Anu Singh, in 1997.

Singh, a manipulative, middle-class woman with a history of drug use, eating disorders and narcissistic delusions, as the story goes coerced her "mousey friend" and fellow law student, Madhavi Rao, into helping her research suicide methods, and confided in her a plan to kill herself and take Joe with her. After the second of two 'farewell' dinner parties – where some guests were aware of Singh's apparent suicide plans – she drugged Joe with Rohypnol and shot him up with heroin, causing his very slow death.

At her trial in 1999 Anu Singh was acquitted of murder but convicted of manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility. Sentenced to ten years jail, she served a little over four. Madhavi Rao, described by Garner as a "moral wraith", was acquitted and now lives overseas.

Murders fascinate us, Garner suggests, because they show us ordinary people who 'crack'. But she also had very personal reasons for becoming interested in the Cinque case. At the time of Singh's trial Garner's third marriage (to writer Murray Bail) had just broken up "in a welter of desolation". "I felt sympathetic towards women who kill blokes," Garner joked at her book launch. But as she sat through the trials of Singh and Rao, Garner's sympathy shifted towards the dead young man:

> Whatever the reason, I sided with Joe Cinque. I searched for him in all the documents. But every place where he should have been was blank, without scent or colour: a point where nothing resonated. His direct speech is rarely recorded. He is forever upstaged by Anu Singh. As the transcripts' tapestry of versions unfolds, she kills him again and again. Attention always swings back to *her:* why she did it, what sort of person *she* is, what will become of *her*. She gets bigger, louder, brighter, while he keeps fading. He blurs. He sinks into the shadows and leaks away, until all that is left of him is his name, and the frozen, saintly lineaments of a victim.
> (*Joe Cinque's Consolation*, p178)

Joe Cinque's Consolation is Garner's attempt to reinstate Joe Cinque. The Cinques are pleased that Garner has dispelled the rumours that circulated after Joe's death from heroin. It took a writer of Garner's particular skills to sift through the complex story of his killing and articulate it for them – and for us.

"They told me that when people – their family in Italy – asked them, 'Well, what happened? What actually happened?', they found it almost impossible to tell the story because it's the sort of story you don't believe," Garner says. "When it's sketched out in blunt strokes, it just sounds like a trashy movie. But when you go into it and tease out all the details, you can see how complicated

it is."

The story certainly is intricate, chilling and almost unbelievable. Is this really staid old Canberra? In 1997? Private-school educated middle-class students? Is this really how our lawyers behave? How our justice system works?

At her own expense, Garner travelled repeatedly to Canberra for the trials of Singh and Rao. She waded through thousands of pages of legal transcripts, and interviewed family members and friends of the dead man and the accused, as well as police and the judge who delivered the verdicts in the two cases. To Garner's disappointment, neither of the accused would agree to an interview.

Garner admits publication of *Joe Cinque's Consolation* made her "anxious". Not without reason. Her first non fiction book *The First Stone*, published in 1995, caused an outcry that she said hurt and surprised her. In *The First Stone* Garner explored the case of the Master of a prestigious Melbourne University College who was accused of sexually harassing two law undergraduates during a party at the College.

Garner was criticised for expressing sympathy with the Master before she began the book, and many feminists took exception to her interpretation of the case as a conflict that illustrated how "younger feminists" had become "punitive" and "afraid of life". Many involved in the events refused to speak to her – including the two students.

"I think one thing I've learned *not* to do from my experience with *The First Stone* was to pester somebody, to keep insisting that they speak to you," she says. "I tried that with some of the people in *The First Stone* and that made them feel even more hostile and defensive and it was counterproductive."

Yet Garner wonders whether she should perhaps have persevered, given Singh's attention-seeking personality. Days after publication of *Joe Cinque's Consolation* Anu Singh – just released from prison–told ABC radio that she should have been consulted. No one who reads *Joe Cinque's Consolation* will be impressed by Singh's claims, nor does Singh show any signs she is ready to answer the questions Garner would like to ask her: Does she feel remorse? Has she made amends? How? And to whom?

The fascination and horror in the Joe Cinque case is not just why Anu Singh killed her loving boyfriend, but why the circle of student friends around her did nothing to prevent the tragedy.

"I did give that a lot of thought," admits Garner. "All the way through the years I spent working on this book, a thousand times I asked myself what I would have done in the situation."

Denied an interview with Singh, Garner struggles to reconcile the judge's manslaughter verdict and light sentence (on the grounds that Singh was "seriously ill psychologically") with her own judgement, that "in the speech of any ordinary person, what Anu Singh had done was called murder".

The conduct and outcome of the trials leads Garner to question whether our criminal justice system has become detached from its ethical base.

"I suppose that was one of the scariest things I learned from the whole experience," Garner admits, "especially when you look at Madhavi Rao's defence". In *Joe Cinque's Consolation*, Garner describes in shocking detail the way Rao's barrister Mr Lasry argued that Rao had no *legal* responsibility to intervene to save Joe Cinque, even when she saw him close to death.

“There was a hole between ethics and law and he just drove his defence straight through it,” says Garner. “And I mean if you were a good lawyer that's what you'd do. The law is written there and that is what you've got to wield, but it's very chilling to see.”

To make this convoluted tragedy accessible and moving, Garner draws on the resources of fictional narrative, rather than traditional reportage. She describes lawyers, witnesses and relatives as if they were 'characters' in a story, and the events of the week of Joe's death become as suspenseful as the 'plot' of any crime novel. Courtroom interrogations become riveting 'dialogue', and with Garner as our first-person narrator we share the high drama of moments such as the judgement in Singh's trial:

> Justice Crispin entered on a tide of seriousness, not with his habitual hasty sweep, but slowly, almost grandly, looking sombre as always, but also paler, and with his head held higher, giving more eye contact: offering his face. He bowed and sat down. Laying his papers on the bench before him, he raised his eyes to the room, and launched into it without prologue or preamble.
> 'I find the defendant not guilty of murder,' he said, 'but I find the defendant guilty of murder.'
> Mrs Cinque uttered a choked cry.
> A stunned, thick silence filled the court. What? *What* did he say? How can she be guilty of murder and yet *not* guilty of murder?
> Mr Pappas leapt to his feet. 'Your Honour,' he said. 'I believe your Honour has made an error. You said “Guilty of murder”, but with respect, your Honour, you meant “Guilty of *manslaughter*”.'
> Three beats. No one breathed. The judge had made a colossal, clanging Freudian slip.
>
> (*Joe Cinque's Consolation*, pp68-9)

We see Canberra with new eyes, as Garner shows us that the 'setting' for the crime is the seedy heroin capital of Australia:

> Garema Place, the very centre of the city, swarmed as usual with junkies–gap-toothed, lank-haired, tattooed, with bruises and scabby lips. Many of them wheeled babies or toddlers in pushers. They didn't both to cover the scarred, wounded elbow crooks, but slunk or barged about blatantly. The city's heart belonged to them now, their 'chasing', their buying and selling and using. Some civic hope had been abandoned. It was a plague that raged unchecked.
>
> (*Joe Cinque's Consolation*, pp223-4)

Excerpts like these remind us that Garner's career began with fiction. Her semi-autobiographical novel *Monkey Grip*–about sex, drugs, and shared households in the 1970s–won the National Book Award in 1977. Further acclaimed fiction followed, including the short novels *The Children's Bach* (1984) and *Cosmo Cosmolino* (1992), and the short story collections *Postcards from Surfers* (1985) and *My Hard Heart* (1998).

But since the late 1990s Garner has become arguably Australia's leading exponent of what is variously referred to as 'creative non fiction', 'new journalism', 'literary journalism' or 'narrative journalism'.

It's a career direction Garner was forced to take. Her brief career as a high school teacher ended in 1972, when she was sacked for discussing sex with her students in the classroom. Since then, Garner has often earned her living through journalism, with some of the best examples collected in *True Stories* (1996) and *The Feel of Steel* (2001).

Non fiction writing has not only helped Garner pay the bills, but also satisfy her writer's curiosity.

“I like poking my nose into other people's lives,” Helen Garner admits. “It's a terrific privilege to be able to see into somebody else's life.”

Already an accomplished fiction writer, Garner enjoys exploring innovative non-fiction techniques. From the American literary journalist Janet Malcolm, Garner says she learned to draw symbolic meaning from interviewees' everyday behaviours, and to look for psychoanalytic 'readings' of what people do and say.

The example she gives brings us back to biscuits. When writing *The First Stone* she went to interview a retired member of the College Council. “He obviously didn't want to get me off-side because I was writing this book,” Garner explains. He offered her tea, and brought out a jar of biscuits.

“I took one and then I took another and I took another,” Garner tells me. “And he was talking and got up and he just absentmindedly walked across the room and screwed the lid back on the jar. And then suddenly said, 'Oh, I wasn't, I didn't put that on to stop *you* from getting in there.'”

The symbolism of his attempt to prevent her 'taking the lid off' the traditional institution of the College was not lost on Garner.

How intriguing, then, that when it's time to go Garner insists her publicist and I take away the left-over shortbreads. There's a frantic search for a paper bag. As we leave, biscuits in hand, I can't help wondering what Garner would make of her own anxious efforts to stop herself eating too many bikkies. I've no idea, but let's just be grateful that she's displaced her compulsion for biscuits into writing compelling true stories like *Joe Cinque's Consolation.*

Getting It Off At Home

Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
By Fiona Giles

Love Online is a painstakingly detailed dissection of the many different kinds of relationships - from chat-room flirting and one-night cyberstands to cyber-marriage - that currently take place via the Internet, and how these are both similar to and different from what the author calls offline relationships. The book looks first at the many different kinds of cyber-communication, then considers their emotional and ethical consequences and predicaments. He then concludes with some tentative predictions about the effect of online relationships on marriage and its variants. His work is based on a diverse range of psychology and philosophy texts, and is punctuated by quotations from people actively engaged in Internet affairs, though these are taken from secondary sources.

Ben-Ze'ev is Rector of the University of Haifa as well as Professor of Philosophy and Co-Director of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Emotions. His most recent book prior to *Love Online* is *The Subtlety of Emotions* (MIT Press, 2000) about which one reviewer stated:

> Concentrating largely on psychological and some basic philosophical issues, he has succeeded in bringing together a most thoroughly elaborated list of references and combined it with his own insights. The outcome is a lengthy written textbook with a nice selection of livening up quotes. Nevertheless, after 632 small print pages a strange feeling of dissatisfaction has overwhelmed the reviewer.[1]

My own reading experience was similarly unsatisfying, as Ze'ev's writing, though pleasantly straightforward, is marked by unnuanced descriptions of complex human feelings and behaviour. The book reveals an undertow of liberal concern for individuals' emotional wellbeing during a time of intense change, but has a reductive quality perhaps inevitable in any project that seeks to itemize such slippery concepts. The funnest (as my sons would say) parts of the book are the well-chosen epigraphs that head each chapter, indicating the potential to dramatize what remains flat elsewhere. One example is Candice Bergen on the professional faking of orgasms. 'I may not be a great actress but I've become the greatest at screen orgasms,' she says. 'Ten seconds of heavy breathing, roll your head from side to side, simulate a slight asthma attack and die a little' (83).

Sadly the bulk of the book is not so riveting, with an unfortunate universalising of the emotional repertoire of humans, together with bald generalizations which fail to convince. Ben-Ze'ev writes, for example: 'A significant difference between offline and online personal relationships is the greater role of imagination in the latter' (93). This may seem obvious, since Internet affairs preclude the exchange of physical and tactile information; on second thoughts, the role of the imagination in offline affairs seems equally if not more important if one considers the evolution of sexual intimacy and psychological complexity over time. Indeed, the possibility of truly knowing someone can seem to become more elusive the longer we spend time with them. And empathy is based on nothing if not imagination. My ultimate thought on this point was that this man has obviously not dated an emotionally autistic Australian male, about whose inner life the imagination can only begin to wonder, even after countless real-life barbeques and years of sex.

Similarly, on the subject of regret, Ben-Ze'ev writes:

> We may distinguish between two types of regret - short and long-term regret. …In the short-term, people regret their actions more than their inactions, but when people look

> back on their lives, those things that they have not done are the ones that produce the most regret. (91)

It may be that I am not the ideal reader for this kind of exegesis, but I cannot help but think immediately of the many exceptions to rules such as these, such as the person who chooses to catch the train which crashes (resulting in long-term disability) or to have the one-night stand (resulting in long-term divorce/disease/name your possible negative consequence). It seems to me that the emotions simply can't adequately be captured in this particular form of linguistic and methodological amber. When Ben-Ze'ev claims that in cyberspace, 'the other perceives you as almost identical to the way you describe yourself' (191) my suspicions are confirmed that here is someone with an unsophisticated view of the hermeneutic process.

Another problem is that in attempting to provide a taxonomy of the emotions, they are delineated in a socio-historical vacuum, which seems paradoxical given that the research is angled at a new frontier of technologically assisted interactions, and their effects on what are assumed to be age-old human feelings. If the emotions are conceived of as ahistorical, is there really any point to looking at how they might be changed through technology? Ben-Ze'ev seems to suggest that ultimately all that can change are the physical permutations of couplings and the practical arrangements agreed to therein, rather than the timbre of those interactions.

He is, however, optimistic about these effects, particularly about the influence of online relationships on offline couples. He writes:

> The Internet has dramatically changed the romantic domain; this process will accelerate in the future. Such changes will inevitably modify present social forms such as marriage and cohabitation, and current romantic practices relating to courtship, casual sex, committed romantic relationships, and romantic exclusivity. We can expect further relaxation of social and moral norms; this process should not be considered a threat, as it is not online changes that endanger romantic relationships, but our inability to adapt. (247)

As with the last sentence here, Ben-Ze'ev's conclusions are nothing if not tepid, which is something of a disappointment following the minute and careful accounting for all the sexual and romantic permutations he identifies, and the large amount of empirical research to which he refers. Together with this, you might wonder what he means by adaptation once the emotions are universalised and rendered ahistorical.[2]

One of Ben-Ze'ev's more interesting predictions is that the Internet 'will increase the number of international, intercultural, and interreligious marriages, ultimately modifying global social norms - in the main making them more flexible' (245). Additional to this is the increase in the flexibility of definitions of marriage itself, and romantic couplings, which he also carefully delineates.

Here Ben-Ze'ev argues that the Internet might hold the key to solving what he calls the Marriage Paradox, that is, its simultaneous need for stability and change, to keep alive both sexual satisfaction (based on emotional complexity and security) and desire (based on novelty). Facilitating extra-marital online relationships, he speculates, 'may enable marriage to become at least as sexually satisfying as other forms of relationship' (242).

Another of the author's most interesting observations is similarly historical: he sees Internet affairs as in many ways akin to courtly love of medieval times, as it was a form of clandestine adultery within the frame of proclaimed monogamy. This is an arrangement he seems to favour, pointing out that 'in one study of people who were currently engaged in extramarital sex, 56 percent of the men and 34 percent of the women said that their marriages were happy' (230).

There are *some* insights in this book along the way, so that, along with the quotations from Internet users and the witty epigraphs, it is not without reading pleasure. Ben Ze'ev's distinction between the uses of the telephone which he sees as enabling communication and that of television, which he sees as an impediment to it, is one of these. Yet further thought makes you falter, thinking of the many long-term couples whose one great treat of the week is to cuddle together on the sofa in front of the television. As Danny Katz put it recently in his *Good Weekend* column, maybe the last time some long-term couples touched 'was when they reached for the TV remote control at the same time'.[3]And who's to judge whether this form of intimacy is better or worse than any others?

Inside this book is a cultural commentary about online sexual relationships that is struggling to get out, but is buried under masses of structural-functionalist definitions and formulae - dissections of feelings that ultimately left me cold. For me, it seemed to fall between a socio-cultural profile of Internet behaviours and a psychological journey through the emotional labyrinths. Perhaps if it were read in conjunction with David Schnarch's *Passionate Marriage* and Easton and Litz's *The Ethical Slut*[4] one could get a better sense of how people are managing the many shifting complications and developments of their intimate lives.

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1 Thomas Raab, 'Judgment Day: A Review of Aaron Ben-Ze'ev's The Subtlety of Emotions', Psyche 8 (18), October 2002,
http::psyche.cs.monash.edu.au/v8/psyche-8-18-raab.html.
Accessed September 13, 2004. In the review, Raab goes on to identify several problems including Ze'ev's dependence on 'cognitive theories' resulting in a largely descriptive book that 'lacks a unifying conceptual framework', an assessment which equally applies to Love Online.

2 I should acknowledge that my own position on this is uncertain, though I would speculate that a complex and shifting mix of biology, history and socio-cultural norms would be involved in any understanding of the conventionally accepted emotions.

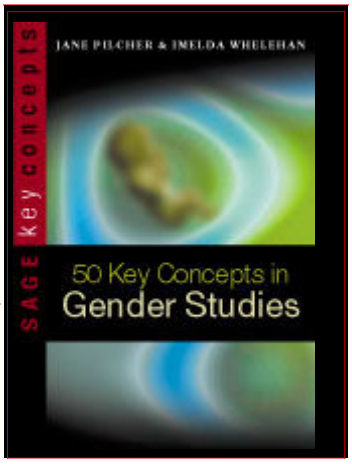
3 Danny Katz, 'We Have Made Our Bed, But Is It A De Facto One?' Modern Guru Column, Good Weekend, September 4, 2004, p. 17.

4 David Schnarch, Passionate Marriage: Keep Love and Intimacy Alive in Committed Relationships (Melbourne: Scribe, 1997); Dossie Easton and Catherine A. Litszt, The Ethical Slut: A Guide To Infinite Sexual Possibilities (San Francisco: Greenery Press, 1997).

Making Sense of Women's Studies

Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan, *Key Concepts in Gender Studies*. London: Sage Publications; New Dehli: Thousand Oaks, 2004; *Women's Studies in the Academy: Origins and Impacts,* Robyn L. Rosen Pearson (Ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2004.
By JaneMaree Maher

Both these texts offer a point of entry to Women's Studies but do so in very different ways. *Women's Studies in the Academy: Origins and Impacts* documents the historical story of women's entry into higher education in the US, of issues of racial and sex-based discrimination that hampered the entry of women into universities and continue to impede their progress there. Robyn Rosen comments that 'women's studies had come from...a long struggle for access to and then reform of higher education' (vii) and this is the central focus of this edited collection. *Key Concepts in Gender Studies* also seeks to map the development of women's studies and gender studies. Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan introduce the reader very early to the controversies and conflicts that this shift in some places from women's studies to gender studies has generated inside the academy and among feminist scholars and activists. While they present the arguments against dropping the naming of women as central to this body of scholarship, they focus on gender studies.



Women's Studies in the Academy is divided into two parts. The first addresses the history, development and incursion of women's studies in the academy. This section contains a series of critical historical texts on women's struggle to gain entry to higher education; the related but different struggles of African American women and American Indian women; of strikes and curriculum development that changed the acquisition and ultimately the production of knowledge. For example, Catherine Beecher's 'Educational Reminiscences' is in the first part, while Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar appear in the literary studies section in the second part. *Women's Studies in the Academy* presents snapshots of specific moments of challenge within the academy itself, using crucial essays, documents and speeches to do so. The second part is entitled 'Women's Studies in Action'. Here, *Women's Studies in the Academy* offers accounts of the various disciplinary structures that have been challenged and changed by the incursion of feminist perspectives; history, psychology, and anthropology amongst others. There are also sections entitled 'Communication' signaling the interdisciplinary nature of Women's Studies, and the changes it has participated in and encouraged in the academy. This text is structured as a workbook - there are critical questions at the end of each section where students are asked to reflect on what they have read and are encouraged to consider their own educational experience and the ways in which sex and gender impact on them.

Key Concepts in Gender Studies also seeks to locate the development of women's studies in an historical context. It explores the relationships between political activism and feminist scholarship, and documents how the drive to change academic institutions has resulted in women's studies being deeply embedded in those very institutions. Like Rosen in *Women's Studies in the Academy*, Pilcher and Whelehan are keen to show students the origins of women's studies/gender studies, although it is the latter term they prefer. Pilcher and Whelehan chart how women's studies moved from 'filling in the gaps' in social sciences and humanities where women had only been present in ancillary roles prior to the 1960s, to a fuller 'contestation of knowledges under patriarchy' (xi). They identify that arts and humanities were key sites of change and incursion since 'women's existence in such numbers [there] was itself the result of the gendered logic of the workplace' (x), offering valuable social and political context. This work is highly readable; each concept section is

clear and thoughtfully structured. Each offers a potted history of the 'concept' with key dates and key thinkers identified and a concise working definition provided. For 'backlash', for example, Pilcher and Whelehan give a dictionary definition, cite Susan Faludi's crucial 1992 work and identify *Fatal Attraction* (1987) as the exemplary backlash text. They also talk about why backlash is difficult to challenge and what the potential social and political impacts of backlash might be.

The authors choose fifty central 'concepts' which, they point out, reflect their 'account of gender studies, both as an academic specialism and as a broader perspective across a range of disciplines and knowledge boundaries' (xiii), and they present these concepts alphabetically. The chosen concepts include political and cultural ideas like 'backlash', described above, more theorized concepts like 'difference' and others that are more technical in their focus like 'dichotomy'. Pilcher and Whelehan also offer definitions of post-colonialism and first-wave feminism, thereby drawing attention to historical developments of the field of studies as well as the limitations of various moments in that development. The selection of key concepts while 'not random and value free' (xiii) does provide a thoughtful introduction to central themes in the study of sex and gender.

Both of the texts identify as student focused texts, designed to assist contemporary students understand the genesis of women's studies and understand how Women's Studies came to be located inside the university structures in the ways that it is. But there is a substantive difference in how these two texts seek to accomplish that work. Rosen is resolute on her focus on women; addressing race and economic deprivation, but devoting relatively little attention to more postmodern feminist theorizations and debates. *Key Concepts in Gender Studies* centres these strands of feminist thought; examining identity politics, postfeminism, and queer theory. While the authors always locate the central debates for gender studies in their women's studies place of origin, their focus on gender, masculinity and men's studies indicates that this text has moved forward into 'gender' noting that 'a monolithical model of "woman" can only exclude and affirm inequality, and gender studies is one way of addressing this' (xii).

Both texts seek to underline the impacts that feminist scholarship has had on academic knowledge and to recognize the crucial link with feminist activism that saw the generation of women's studies scholarship in the first place. Both suggest that this link may be absent from the understandings of many students currently in gender studies and women's studies classrooms. But *Women's Studies in the Academy* locates itself firmly within the US context, and there is little reference to developments in Europe or elsewhere. This means that Rosen's stated wish for the text, 'that [she] wanted her students to know where women's studies had come from' (vii), is an aim that is achieved, but almost in a narrow literal way. The specificity of this focus means that other students, not from the US, would struggle to gain an understanding of where the Women's Studies/Gender Studies texts they are currently studying actually came from. For feminist educators in the Australian context, the application of such a book in my view would be substantively limited by this focus. While *Key Concepts in Gender Studies* is similar, in that the US and the UK form the focal point of women's studies/gender studies as explained, the structure renders this issue much less significant. *Key Concepts in Gender Studies* is arranged to maximize utility; it presents definitions and potential applications of a key set of ideas and concepts in the study of sex and gender. In this way, it does address all audiences of women's studies and gender studies scholars, and offers itself as a very useful introductory text for students in the field.

I have read and reviewed a number of texts like these two in recent years. Many of them, like *Key Concepts in Gender Studies* and *Gender Studies: Terms and Debates* (Palgrave, 2003) do a very useful and critical job in assisting students to develop an overview of important debates and ideas in women's studies and gender studies. These debates and ideas are crucial in what we teach them and in what they learn. I invariably draw out definitions and constructions from these texts that prove valuable in my classroom, and assist my students to arrange the knowledge and ideas I am presenting. But I do consider that the production of so many versions of women's studies or

gender studies 'primers' points to an underlying issue; one that is central to the stated desire of both these texts to teach students where women's studies and gender studies came from and how they are positioned within the universities. Part of the utility of *Key Concepts in Gender Studies* is the substantial concluding bibliography as well as the 'further reading' guides at the end of each 'concept'. These reading guides pick out key historical texts relevant to the development of each 'concept', and offer places to begin exploring central debates. They usually cite a contemporary edited collection where students will gain further information about the 'concept' they are exploring. Pilcher and Whelehan position this resource in hopeful terms, suggesting that students may be prompted and inspired to explore the literature that undergirds the clear and concise concept explanations provided in *Key Concepts in Gender Studies*. But I have also found that such texts also act as necessary shortcuts, where the depth of reading to develop an individual understanding of 'gender', for example, cannot be achieved within the compressed unit hours mandated by university structures and the other life demands that students are currently facing.

These introductory texts are critical and valuable tools; they direct attention to the centrality of feminist scholarship in the critique and production of knowledges inside and outside the academy. But they also signal the difficult conditions under which we seek to communicate with our students. Broader social discourses suggest that equity has been achieved and feminist activism is unnecessary. Students are increasingly constructed as customers in the higher education market. The focus on the origins and development of women's studies and gender studies is particularly crucial in this context. Assisting students to recognize the change in women's social position since the 1960s in Western countries, to identify the continuities in women's disadvantage and to be alert to the racial and class-based discrimination that undergird our societies is vital. Texts like *Key Concepts in Gender Studies* and *Women's Studies in the Academy: Origins and Impacts* offer important introductions to the relationship between feminist scholarship and social issues, but they also point out the challenges that we face in keeping that relationship vibrant and active.

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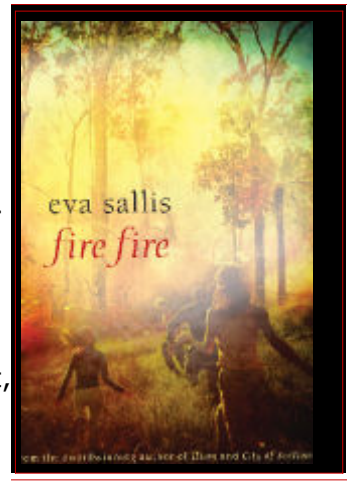
How To Kill Imagination

Eva Sallis, *Fire Fire*. Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2004.
By Jasna Novakovic

Symbolism surrounding the flames of fire survives around the world, and Eva Sallis' novel *Fire Fire* is a story about an aspect of human consciousness that stays entrenched in the Dark Ages in spite of centuries of enlightenment. It has to do with children's upbringing practiced in good faith yet irreparably damaging. Sallis penetrates into the minds of children in order to explore the faculty of imagination for which they are repeatedly condemned by their parents, primordial custodians of Truth. She sets her novel within a framework of reality informed by fairy tale where wisdom, history and fiction converge. Like all stories of mythical proportions, *Fire Fire* has to be read almost till the end before it discloses the full dimensions of what it sets out to convey.



This is an excruciating book that lingers in the mind, because it is informed by memory that all inheritors of classical traditions share. Sallis invokes the precious fairy tales of our childhood and invents others to remind us of what it is like to be a kid. In 'Wolf and the Seven Little Kids' the mother goat, remember, does everything to protect her children and yet the wolf manages to eat them all but… Sallis' story, just like theirs, takes place in a solitary house on the outskirts of a town that the mother believes to be a place of refuge. The point is, she alone does. Yet an artist within her should know that reality is the function of personal experience and can be seen in many different ways. What is more, apart from being a painter, the mother figure is also a disciple of 'the spiritual masters' of the Indian sub-continent. Her preoccupations are with insight, creativity and fantasy, that is, with imagination – as her married name, Houdini, aptly signifies. The greatest magician perhaps of all times can only symbolise a fleeting identity and that impression - compounded by the family's reverse image in the name of Tarsini, the family's *dopplegänger* - calls to mind the great Italian violinist and composer, Tartini. The father of the family is indeed a viola player, himself a great musician once. The game of associations coupled with the evolving fragments of children's consciousness goes on and on, meticulously revealing, little by little, the harm a parent can inflict on every single member of the family.

Not that we do not already know it. But Sallis goes into children's minds, all seven of them, to alert the reader to how it is that people are often tricked into missing the obvious. And the obvious here is that a lie is an obscure concept to small children. For them, it is a way of being, of achieving heroic deeds, of being an adult or, simply, a way of playing around; that is, communicating on the only level of which they are capable. When they grow older they will, of course, find out that their mental world is called imagination and, when still older, that it has to do with creativity, artistic and scientific creativity especially. And this is what Sallis' novel so beautifully depicts. It is even structured as a piece of music, by association again. The sections it is composed of are titled in terms of music: Prélude, Aubade, Crescendo…Coda. Indeed, the realm of the unconscious and its 'resident' emotions that, when brought to consciousness, affect the formation of human personality are as abstract as music itself.

This book captures the spirit of art, while demonstrating repressive and abusive practices, in an outstanding example in this genre. It draws a line between delusion and imagination exposing adults' unawareness of their propensity for making self-centred judgments, of their doubtful values, and their inability to accommodate the idiosyncrasies arising from their children's own needs for self-expression. Discourses of creativity traversed by the widely practised forms of subversive behaviour illustrate the process that tends to destroy ingenuity by killing the imagination. Just how tricky it is to tell the difference between delusion and imagination, is subtly

suggested even by the names that the mother herself and her children bear: Acantia, Beate, Gotthilf, Arno…. Each is victimised by Acantia precisely because of clinging to the language informed by imagination, yet none of the blame for it is directed at her. The children's pain and their anger are associated with the home that fails to provide a sense of comfort. The house, an object, takes on all the responsibility for the deprivation, molestation and abuse they suffer. From the start, it is a ghostly, mysterious, eerie place. Sallis' *Fire Fire* is a heart-rending testimony of the unconditional love of children and the conditional love of their parents. That message is encoded both symbolically and by a clear example: the mother scrubs the floorboards, but no one in the house is allowed to use soap.

Yet *Fire Fire* is not the mother's discourse. If there is a dominant perspective, it is that of her daughter, Ursula. The Houdinis' seven little kids all make equal efforts to adapt the real world to the realm of their imagination, not vice versa, and Ursula understands. Sallis makes you live the agonies of their learning processes, of finding out how to tell the difference between a lie and the truth, between imagination and reality. She also makes you feel what a glorious gift imagination is. But also how easy it is to kill. Above all, she makes you aware of the hypocrisy of love responsible for staying blind to the misery inflicted on 'loved' ones - as broken families, delinquent children and growing numbers of homeless explicitly show. By looking into the mirror of art, she looks into personal truth and the truth, delusion and essence, bringing her reader into awareness of what it means to be beaten merely for living in the realm of imagination. The mother figure in the book is Australian, the father is not. Such choices are never accidental in literature. Roughly twenty years ago, Dorothy Hewett wrote a similar tale about children condemned for dwelling in the *Golden Valley* of their imagination. That stage play and even more so her *Susannah's Dreaming* both celebrate the mark of innocence of children, and it is to them that Sallis' novel is also dedicated. Significantly, all three narratives have a mythical character. Roland Barthes showed a generation ago that myth was as pervasive, alive and delusional as ever. Yet naturalism has tricked us into believing otherwise. But, then, has it?

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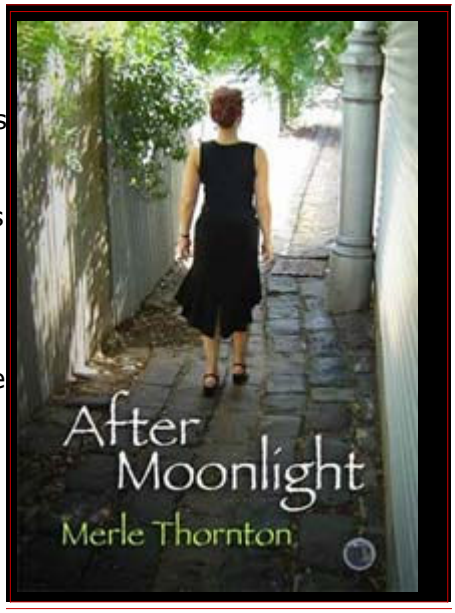
Stories within Stories

Merle Thornton, *After Moonlight*. Brisbane: Interactive Press, 2004.
By Gay Mason

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of many universities to deal with the problem of harassment, the recidivist academic who considers his students 'fair game' for his sexual exploits is still a problem. Not surprisingly, in recent years the topic of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions has received the attention of a number of writers, but Thornton does new things for the Australian novel in making it her subject.

After Moonlight is a story about one woman's experiences of a long term consensual relationship gone wrong. Claire, the heroine, a postgraduate student, part-time academic and video producer in her late thirties, has succumbed to the charms of Roger, her erstwhile lecturer. This has led to a live-in relationship followed by its inevitable breakdown several years later when she realises her lover is a hopelessly obsessive philanderer. Relentlessly she stalks him on the phone, at the university, and in the bookshops and coffee bars of Melbourne's inner-city Carlton, as he pursues his numerous romantic liaisons.



But this book is more than a story about harassment. The plot follows Claire as she deals with her turgid past in rural New South Wales, her clinically depressed brother, and a new relationship with Jim, a senior ranking University academic who is mesmerised by a desire to establish his new career in the cut-throat world of Hong Kong commerce. In this regard the author sadly ponders the demise of the academic intellectual who enjoys the journey of learning and discovery for its own sake, and the rise of the academic entrepreneur who exchanges ideas for profit and commercial empire building.

A rich tapestry of colourful characters weaves its way through the strands of the novel which, like Claire's story is 'plaited and spliced and plied and cabled and cobbled into my burred and fractured spine-story'. Thornton seems to be asking: Can we choose our own stories? Can we choose our own realities? And, indeed, are we choosers of our destinies?

Stories within stories are a major structuring device for the unfolding of ideas and events within the novel. Discourses of film editing and script writing are a signifying feature in the dialogue between the major characters, in Claire's musings to herself. There are frequent jump cuts and flashbacks within these, much like the visual movement within a film. The perceptive reader might well wonder if this is a book which tries to close the gap between literature and cinema as the fiction moves in a space between novel and screenplay.

Such is to be expected, given the background of the writer. After many years working as a political philosopher and academic at the University of Queensland, Merle Thornton turned her focus toward the writing and production of stage plays and documentary films. She has written episodes for television drama, most notably the *Prisoner* series, in addition to her numerous academic publications. Thornton is however, a writer committed to both praxis and political theory. In 1965, as a protest against the exclusion of women from public bars in Queensland (in a story narrated in *Radical Brisbane*), she and Ro Bogner chained themselves to the bar rail of the Regatta Hotel in Brisbane where, appropriately, *After Moonlight* was launched earlier this year. Then followed the establishment of the Equal Opportunties for Women Association and a successful campaign to eliminate the 'marriage bar' in the Australian career public service.

Thornton brings to life the wealth of her experiences as she leads us through the journey of Claire. She delights in jibes at Foucault, existentialism and the absurdities of academic commercialism. This is a book with humour and substance and the ending does not disappoint. In short, it is a welcome addition to the bookshelves of Australian contemporary literature.

Gay Mason worked for many years in the Equal Opportunity Office at the University of Queensland and is now working in the Equal Opportunity Office at the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba.

Thinking and Breathing

Jayne Fenton Keane, *The Transparent Lung,* Flaxton: Post Pressed, 2003;
Ashlley Morgan-Shae, *Love Trash*, Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2002;
Laura Jan Shore, *Breathworks*, Byron Bay: Dangerously Poetic Press, 2002;
Penelope Evans, *Cross-hatched poems*, Earlwood: Bemac Publications, 2004;
Beatriz Coppelo, *Meditations at the Edge of a Dream*, Brisbane: Glass House Books, 2001.
By Liz Hall-Downs

Queensland poet Jayne Fenton Keane's third collection is a verse narrative, or long 'poem for voices', told from four different points of view, that documents a family's confrontation with the life-threatening illness of one of its members. A father is diagnosed with lung cancer. His reactions, and those of his wife, son and daughter are told in short, filmic episodes, all in the first person. Each short poem is preceded by directives such as one would find in a film script, specifying, variously, 'montage', 'close-up', 'claymation', 'through a megaphone', 'mise-en-scène', 'back projection', 'body double', and 'black and white', or by metaphorical positions such as 'wife-woman on a call sheet', 'tarot', 'reflections of a mother in broth', and 'deck of stubbies'. These directives serve to add an extra component to the reader's experience of the poetry, containing each poetic episode within a visual or emotional structure that approximates the feelings of the speakers.

JFK is well-known as an accomplished and intense performer of her own work, and the evolution of these poems as texts for performance, as well as poetry for the page, owes much to recent developments in contemporary poetics towards the stage, the internet, and hypertext in particular. The work is intensely 'modern', recognising and exploiting the contemporary reader's familiarity with filmic, episodic structures, an approach begun in her previous collection, the verse novel, *Ophelia's Codpiece* (Post Pressed, 2002). The earlier work, however, though containing powerful phrases and metaphors, was often, to this reader, somewhat obfuscatory, as if the poet was attempting to communicate impressions and feelings while simultaneously being self-protective. In much the same way as Plath's early, wordy work evolved into the straight-talking and emotionally risky *Ariel*, JFK seems to have been motivated in this new work to jump feet-first into dangerous emotional territory, splaying out the facts and feelings of a family confronting illness, with all that experience's hope, despair, and sense of loss of control over both the body and external events, without flinching. This clarity is a strength, and it is fitting in relation to the subject matter. Cancer is a diagnosis well-known and much feared, and JFK's clear-eyed truthfulness allows us an intimate glimpse into the characters' inner turmoil.

Metaphors are extended throughout the collection: the father's doctor has an 'important hand' that appears to be 'conducting' his patient's life like a musical score. The cancer patient has an 'eel' inside him, 'eating my nerves / swallowing me / from the inside' ('Eel', 46). The daughter's desperate search for cures using herbal and Aboriginal recipes, and her affinity with the growing things in her garden, is punctuated with a sequence on flesh-eating plants that mirrors her perception of what is happening to the father. The son's world is inhabited by fish, the act of fishing, a lover who is tattooed all over as a mermaid, a fishhook that pierces a tongue. The wife searches for ways to bridge the long-held silences in her relationship with her husband in broth-making, and distances herself with puzzles.

The financial and emotional tolls of diagnosis and treatment are confronted with humour as well as pathos. In 'Talk and Grow Rich' (43), the father considers what he will do if he is cured: 'If I

survive this / I will cruise the / seminar rounds / with snapshots / of my before / and after body'. The plight of the terminally ill in general is railed against by the daughter, providing a broader societal canvas that refers to the recent 'right-to-die' debate, reinvigorated by the death of Nancy Crick and the beliefs of her supporters ('Daughter contemplating nietzsche', 41): 'I don't want my father to end up in Medicare's gutted / chambers. Not in this age, where 75 percent of older / people who kill themselves, choose death by hanging.' The realities of an overburdened and under funded health system are communicated in angry lines about 'superannuation gluttony' and 'hogs-at-the-trough CEOs' and their 'carnage of avarice'.

This is a clear and unflinching look at a terrible and all-too-common experience; that will be welcomed by cancer sufferers and survivors, as well as regular readers of poetry, for its bravery and raw honesty. (Part-proceeds of the book have been pledged to cancer research.) My only criticism of this powerful and accomplished collection is of the final poem, 'Last Word', which seems less a poem than a list of the feelings and lifestyle changes associated with such illness, culminating in the statement: 'After cancer there is also / life, friendship / forgiveness, / love / opportunity / and hope'. It is a fact that, for many, after cancer comes *death*, and this rather glib evocation of 'hope' seems to be playing to the reader's perceived desire for a happy ending. My inside knowledge that in JFK's own experience there was no such happy ending somewhat weakens the final impact for me. Perhaps it's a case of the narrative having to end *somewhere*, and that the complexities of grief and loss will be fertile ground for seeding a subsequent collection. Regardless, I look forward to the next instalment in the development of JFK's strong and original poetic voice.

Melbourne poet Ashlley Morgan-Shae's *Love Trash* is an altogether lighter and more flippant collection. The author is a life model and a connoisseur of all things old - clothes, magazines, the notion of 'bohemianism' itself. The 'trashy' life she chronicles is filled with alcohol, drugs, eccentric personalities, actors, musicians, poets, and lovers who can't (or won't) commit. This uncertain and nihilistic existence is chronicled in 'Synthetics' (21), where the synthetic vintage clothes she loves are juxtaposed with a synthetic love affair: ' ... we talk and tease / about other people we have met that we could / have, tell about our artful ambitious steps / to be recognised'. Elsewhere, she states: 'Love is a bloodsport and life is a game' (5). The poet is presented as a carefully-constructed object of desire, self-conscious to the point of parody, as she dances to show her suspenders at a party, or carefully unveils her naked body in a slow dance for art students. One gets the sense of the poet being 'the watched' rather than 'the watcher', which imbues this work with an unrelenting (and *very* Melbourne) narcissism.

Having said that, the poetry in *Love Trash* is well-worked and competent, rich in metaphor and visual imagery, and no doubt quite potent in a performance setting. But would the poems fare as well without the poet's dominating physical persona (via the naked author photo and drawings)? I suspect that with the wane of youth and physical beauty, this poet's real mettle will be tested. Hopefully, future collections will go within a bit more instead of so artfully and cleverly skimming life's surface while providing less real emotional substance.

Laura Jan Shore's *Breathworks* is a first poetry collection from Byron Shire-based press Dangerously Poetic. The poetry takes us on a journey through the poet's life, from a northern hemisphere childhood in the shadow of the Cold War, through an angst-ridden and suicidal adolescence, marriage, parenthood, divorce and grand parenthood, culminating in a mid-life retreat to the rainforests of northern New South Wales.

Shore's poetry is pithy and direct. Despite her long experience as a rebirther, these are not painful 'cosmic hippy poems' of the kind often encountered from the rainbow region; rather, they are considered meditations on a life spent in pursuit of personal growth and the discovery of the capacity for happiness within the self. The text works as a whole narrative of an individual life -

begun in the 50s, influenced by the cultural mores epitomised by Barbie dolls and foxes, and the real-world terror of the Cuban Missile Crisis, coloured by the teenage experimentation during the 'Summer of Love' under the shadow of Vietnam conscription, the disappointment of failures in life and in marriage, and, finally, the embracing of nature and its nurturing fecundity and the acceptance of death's inevitability. In 'After I'm Gone, What Remains', Shore writes 'My whisper / caught in the eaves of houses I have loved. / Fingerprints beneath wallpaper, / oil of my palm on banisters / ... / Footprints in the garden, / upturned toes of my old rubber thongs. / Bubble of last breath / mingling in the breeze'. This is a satisfying, positive and life-affirming collection, that chronicles the growing wisdom life gifts us with as we age.

Artist and potter Penelope Evans' first collection, *Cross-hatched poems*, contains concise, spare poetry in a mature and understated voice. The poems deal with subjects as diverse as ageing, the compassionate observation of the entropy of friends ('Fish Fight', 53), portraits of a sculptor, a prisoner, and a teenage girl undertaking a test. Evans has an astute eye for the telling detail, and an active engagement with the natural world. Sydney is her city and she writes of its people and places with obvious affection and deep familiarity. 'Bourbon Beat', for example, is a very good urban poem teeming with particularity and wry social comment: 'Mandy Sayer, Louis Nowra / drift on by, and up Macleay / a he or she in red tu-tu, flaps / the middle of the road, weaving / hazardous between slow cars /', and 'and the buzz confers a dizziness / to junkies staggering a side-street / lousy with scum infiltrators / stitching seamy deals; / ... / brisk business for the safe injecting room / some few doors down /.' Wooloomooloo, Circular Quay, Kings Cross, Macquarie Street, the Tropicana, and the fur seal who took up residence outside Harry's Cafe all rate a mention.

The collection is let down somewhat by a number of obvious typographical and/or spelling errors, (e.g. 'eery' for 'eerie', and an irritating 'thru' instead of 'through' in otherwise conventional poems), and by the rather cringe-worthy titles to its three sections ('Musings around Kings Cross and Sydney', 'People, Places and Politics', and 'Poetic Ponderings'). It is a shame that the incorrect use of apostrophes to indicate possession was not picked up pre-publication by an astute editor. Occasionally Evans resorts to cliché, spoiling otherwise strong poems ('as if there's no tomorrow', 3), but these are relatively minor criticisms of an otherwise satisfying collection.

In the more political poems, such as those on asylum seekers and war, Evans is not quite as assured (though she is not, thankfully, didactic or polemical). 'Villawood' is an exception, with its rich subtext underlying a simple account of teaching canasta to the inmates of the detention centre, a poem infused with pathos and compassion. The most poignant piece, for this reader, was the short 'Ricky' (39), about a couple losing a son in a sporting accident: 'In black despair they leave for home / alone, to eke out the remainder / of their time as best they can'.

Also Sydney-based, Beatriz Copello's second verse collection, according to the cover blurb by Margaret Bradstock, deals with themes of 'mortality, childhood, love, truth and freedom'. The most successful poems contain observations of small moments of great import: walking with a lover at midnight, she steals gardenias from a neighbour's garden (16); a portrait of an elderly couple watching a winter ocean together (13); the loss of a father in a truck accident (19). Like Evans', Copello's is the voice of a mature woman, with all the wisdom and resignation, the nostalgia for lost youth, that age brings. The cycles of life and death are graciously accepted, though such events still bring sadness. In 'On the Road to Queensland' (30), she recalls a moment of eye contact with a young backpacker, whose youth and passion confront her: 'as she marches away from me. / I stay there aching / and dreaming of freedom / a freedom only allowed to the young.'

Some of the more ethereal or philosophical poems are less successful; I always baulk at generalities in poetry such as 'our inner beings', 'unspoken questions', and 'understanding the

meaning / of our own existence' (32); this is the stuff of cliché rather than poetry, lacking the specificity of detail that fixes an idea or image in the mind. Conversely, I was taken with striking imagery such as: 'we vomit /pebbles made of madness' (35); on the loss of youthful certainty and the ditching of rigid ideologies: 'luggage full of lies / written by Sartre, Camus, Freud and Marx'; and on the nature of truth: 'Let me tell you I know now / the truth has many faces / like the moon circling the planet' (40).

Each of these five books has pleasures to offer, but for sheer inventiveness and innovation in her approach to poetic composition and discourse, my bets are on the continually evolving JFK.

Liz Hall-Downs' poetry, stories and essays have been published in Australia, the USA, the UK, and online. Her most recent poetry collection was *Girl With Green Hair* (Papyrus Publishing, 2000). She works variously as an editor, freelance writer and reviewer, performance poet, community artist and workshop leader.

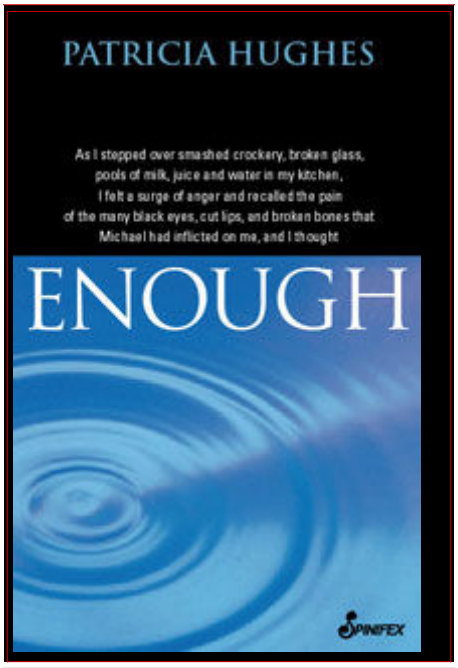
Wanting Your Life Back:
Why Do Women Live With Violence?

Patricia Hughes, *Enough*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2004.
By Rosemary Calder

Enough is described on its back cover as 'both an inspirational story and a first hand guide for any woman in an abusive relationship'. It is both of these, and yet will struggle to be well used in the latter role, as is clear from the story it tells about women living in abusive relationships.

Author Patricia Hughes writes of her own experience, living with and in an abusive relationship. The most telling lesson of this vividly written and searingly open account is that of the devastation that relationship abuse wreaks to a woman's sense of self and to her sense of ownership of her day to day existence.

So often, those who work with, report on or research relationship abuse in society hear the refrain; *'why don't women just leave?'* This book is now 'answer enough' to those who ask this, and especially to those in our communities who assume that 'she must like it/cause it - or she would leave'. Sadly, because women in this position are damaged - often but not always physically and, even more pervasively and devastatingly, psychologically - it is unlikely that many women in abusive relationships will buy this book themselves, or be drawn to read it if introduced to it. As the author says: ''fear, confusion, dependency and anger …surrounds the relationship and freedom seems impossible' (xiv). Of the women so trapped, the overwhelming message of this book is that they struggle to acknowledge their circumstances and to accept help, or advice until, and if, they reach the point where 'you've got to want your life back so bad that you'll do anything to get it'(111).



Hughes' account confirms the available statistical evidence and research. Recent Australian research indicates that women who experience physical, psychological or sexual assault are unlikely to seek professional help while they are in the abusive relationship. In 1996 the Australian Bureau of Statistics surveyed 6,300 Australian women for the Women's Safety Survey. The survey asked women about their experience of actual or threatened physical or sexual violence and found that, of the women who reported violence by a male partner in the survey, only nine per cent had sought crisis help. Only nineteen per cent had reported the crime to police. Eighty per cent sought no professional help at all. [1]

A 1998 study, *Against the Odds: How Women Survive Domestic Violence* [2] found that the traditional view of women as 'passive victims', accepting or somehow agreeing with the abuse and violence inflicted upon them, was unjustified. Women do try to manage or control the violence, or to cope with it, in a variety of ways. Most (72%) of the women experiencing physical assault had spoken about the violence to family, friends, neighbours, work colleagues and other non-professionals.[3] The study found that the major deterrent to women telling anyone about the violence was fear for their safety and that of their children.[4] As Hughes says in her epilogue, given that nearly half of all women murdered by their husbands are, at the time, separated or in the process of separating, fear of

telling anyone or of leaving is understandable.[5]

Against the Odds established that women were also concerned that the person they disclosed to would try to make them leave the family home and relationship when they were not ready. Regardless of the violence in their lives, some women continue to have strong emotional bonds to their partner or feel committed to their marriages. What they want is for the violence to end rather than the relationship or family.[6] When women do speak out about domestic violence – often at a point of crisis when the situation has become unbearable – the response of the person they confide in is absolutely crucial.

Patricia Hughes writes in the first person and as an astute observer with keen hindsight in relation to herself. As author of an earlier autobiographical work, *Daughters of Nazareth,* in which she described her life as an abandoned child, placed first in a harsh orphanage and then in a series of loveless foster homes, Hughes has been described as a having a remarkable ability to tell a story and draw the reader into her personal experience and perspective. This is true of *Enough,* and only the most distant and sceptical reader will be able to stay just an observer of this woman, her story and her life experience and not experience, with her, her emotions and reactions, her torment and raw fears, her slow response to the support of others, and her physically painful and fearful route to freedom.

The book follows the story of the abusive relationship into which she entered after the break-up of her first marriage. The relationship is presented chronologically while the opening of the story is both an introduction of Hughes personally, and the beginning of a conversation with a young women, wanting a cheese and tomato sandwich in Hughes' coffee shop, whom Hughes recognises instantly as coping with a bruised face and a battered psyche. The gentle reaching out by Hughes to this young woman, and her sensitive encouragement to her to recognise her circumstances as abuse, and beyond her capacity alone to change, is woven through the unfolding of Hughes' own experiences. Encouragement was given to Hughes, through the critical response of a caring woman friend, and the encouraging and supportive actions of hospital staff who enabled her safely to report the violence to a knowledgeable police officer. This helped Hughes make her first slow steps towards freedom; she tells this story to the young woman, and the book closes with an optimistic indication that it may be acted upon.

Hughes' interweaving of her interaction with the young woman in her coffee shop, with the chronology of her relationship, underscores that women who are locked in violent or abusive relationships can be supported to consider leaving, or to seek help with the relationship, when individuals and services are aware of the issue, of the woman's experience, and of the importance of accepting the woman's experience and affirming her with support and encouragement.

And this is the challenge that Australian society faces, if there is to be a serious and effective commitment to reducing relationship violence in this society.

Australian federal, state and territory governments, since the 1970s when the women's movement forced attention to the issue, have all separately and collectively endeavoured to develop responses to domestic violence. These responses have commonly been the provision of services to assist women and their children who leave violent or abusive relationships, and usually become impoverished and homeless in direct consequence of that departure. As Hughes says: 'Economic dependence is by far the main reason a lot of women stay.… All too often, a woman knows she will be pursued by the enraged man, aided and abetted by his financial superiority and his friends. She has to uproot herself and, quite often, her children; all with varying degrees of shame, low self-worth and low self-esteem.' For these reasons, initiatives by governments have helped those women with the desperation *enough* to leave, but there has been limited help for those who cannot see a way to leave, or for those who become convinced that the violence is their fault, that

they are the cause.

The Federal government in 1997 established and funded a collaborative approach to Domestic Violence, to work with State and Territory governments to do better than just respond to women's needs when they had left, or were ready to leave or seek help. The collaborative program, known as *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV)*, has been in place for six years, with more than $50 million for a range of research, policy and service development initiatives. The projects undertaken have included services for men, perpetrator programmes, and interventions for children and young people. Projects have identified and disseminated good practice models for existing services, contributed to potential new service models, and developed new insights and understanding of this issue. Importantly, the work of PADV has continued to raise community awareness of domestic violence and relationship abuse, and there are encouraging indications that more people, women and men, are able to acknowledge the effects of violence in their lives – and, in particular, that victims are more willing to act.[7]

A meta-evaluation of the first phase of work under PADV identified the range of theoretical approaches that have explicitly or implicitly underpinned many of the original and continuing services for women and men living in or having left violent or abusive relationships. These have commonly been: psychological, assuming individual pathology, that abusers fail to manage anger and victims fail to seek or want an equitable relationship; sociological: that abusive relationships are a reaction to social and structural stresses in an environment that promotes the use of violence; and/or feminist: that male structural power is the cause of women's oppression and violence against women. The PADV evaluation identified the need for a broader approach, seeing relationship abuse as arising from a complex interaction between pervasive political and social structures in which women generally have less power than men, and on the other, individual responses to these structures. Taking an interactive systems approach enables an emphasis on the use of violence as a choice in context. The context then includes the effects of patriarchal ideology on a man's beliefs, his sense of masculinity and what it means to be a man, the use of and acceptance of violence, power and control in various facets of his life, and the structural forces on individuals and families related to their material and social circumstances. Both psychological and sociological categories of experience are applicable in this framework without detracting from the focus of the abuse of power in relationships.[8]

The relevance of this to Patricia Hughes' account, and to the application of the powerful images and messages of this book, is that the focus of interventions and responses to individuals living with violence or abuse must also be in context. There are clearly multiple causes of domestic violence, and these 'require a comprehensive range of individual and systemic responses'- including a criminal justice response, that domestic violence is seen clearly as a crime, and a therapeutic response, working with individuals and families to change the impact of social and structural factors in their lives.[9] Overall, there must be a societal response, bringing relationship abuse into the open as a major physical and mental health issue, recognising that domestic violence is not just extreme abuse or violence towards a partner – it is an everyday event.

The ABS Survey showed that, in 1996, more than one million women in Australia reported having experienced violence during a relationship with a male partner, and 60 per cent said they had lived in fear during the relationship. The survey also identified that domestic violence occurs throughout the population, in any age group, ethnic group or socio-economic circumstances. Of women who experienced violence in the previous twelve months who also used services, 52% had post-school qualifications and 61% were employed on a full or part time basis.

The women's campaigns of the 1960s and '70s led to the establishment of many national, state and territory programs and services, but there has been no coordinated overview and, prior to PADV, little knowledge of what actually works best to prevent or ameliorate domestic violence or

achieve optimal outcomes for all those affected by it.

Much of the policy, law enforcement and justice apparatus, and many of the services, centrally for women victims of abuse and, to a lesser extent, for children experiencing an abusive parental relationship and for men who are abusers, are the responsibility of individual state and territory governments, and there is wide diversity in the structures and approaches in place across the different jurisdictions. There are disparate criminal laws, organisation structures, and departmental procedures. Approaches in the non-government sector are equally diverse.

In other words, in response to the campaigns of women's organisations, Australia has established a diversity of good treatment services, just as if providing for a health condition that was quite common, and needed good services, but not one in which we have invested in educating the public about its causes, nor in the best and most consistent approaches to prevention. We take a public health approach to conditions such as skin cancers, and adult onset diabetes – both largely preventable – but not to domestic violence. And yet the analogy with a public health issue is clear – that domestic violence affects a large proportion of the population, that it can be prevented and reduced, and that investment in treatment after the event, rather than in prevention and early intervention, results in costs to the health and justice system, as well as to the individuals affected, that could be prevented or reduced.

Public health approaches are widely used, not just for diseases that are preventable and treatable, but also to promote good health. The Federal, State and Territory governments are collaborators in the National Public Health Partnership, established in 1996, in which the governments and other stakeholders agreed to work collaboratively on agreed health issues. Priorities are to reduce disparities in health status between social groups and to influence the underlying social, economic, physical and biological determinants. The Partnership promotes public health practice that informs and empowers individuals and communities, and creates healthy environments through the use of evidence-based strategies, best practice and quality improvement approaches, and effective governance and accountability mechanisms. All of these are not just relevant to relationship abuse – they are the essential, if little appreciated, elements of the national collaboration already in place, Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, and they are the critical elements to achieving widespread community awareness of relationship abuse and reducing community tolerance of it, as well as warning and encouraging women and men to reject violence at its onset.

Patricia Hughes' revelation (Chapter One) that her new friend was capable of inexplicable and extreme anger, and potential violence, brought the immediate inner response that she was to blame. She made herself believe that somehow she had fuelled his anger until he exploded. She convinced herself that her past experiences were the cause of her inadequacies, and that these were the cause of his first outburst of extreme anger towards her. So alone, and in the absence of any community information that reached her, she tried to understand her partner better, and improve how she managed their interactions.

As each stage of the relationship is unfolded, chapter by chapter, Hughes identifies her own stages of awareness, of her overwhelming sense of responsibility at first, then of her confusion at her partner's remorse after each violent episode, of her initial attempts to 'break the spell; and of feeling trapped, like an animal. Of finally fleeing, to a friend, and starting on the road towards acceptance that she could make a choice not to tolerate the situation. Then the slow, painful, forwards and backwards, of her moves towards freedom. Of the significance of the understanding of hospital staff, when her ribs are broken, of the forthright and gentle advice of a male police officer who came to the hospital and then sent a woman police officer who had lived with, and finally left, a violent relationship, to sit and talk gently and encouragingly to her. Then again of the inability of local police to understand, or to offer her protection, when her now ex-partner, subject to a court order to stay apart from her, began stalking her home, entering it at night and

terrorising her. Finally, her capacity to summon financial and psychological resources, to use legal avenues and then to face him when he invades her coffee shop, achieves her freedom, by convincing him he no longer has a hold over her.

Patricia Hughes is a talented, articulate, insightful writer, and a woman of strength and resilience who could, nonetheless, become trapped 'like an animal' by her own lack of self-esteem and a lack of awareness that abusive relationships should not, in any circumstances, be tolerated. Hughes has written to women living in her former predicament. She offers them encouragement and seven steps for them to take to freedom.

When our society clearly and unequivocally defines relationship abuse as an unacceptable societal ill, when it defines physical violence in relationships and abusive control as criminal behaviour, rather than a 'domestic' and therefore private problem, Hughes book may be more readily taken off the bookshelves by women of all ages experiencing abuse in their relationship – women may be more aware that relationship abuse is not their responsibility, and that it is definitely NOT okay. For this to be achieved requires our governments to take a collaborative and non-political public health approach to this issue, and not allow piecemeal, service and jurisdiction focussed initiatives to be their best response.

For the present, the most powerful role for this book will be in informing those 'front line' professionals to whom women living with violence or other abuse will occasionally turn, when desperation or despair forces them publicly to admit their circumstances. Overwhelmingly, these are local police, appealed to by women after an episode of violence or the threat of violence to their children. Sometimes it is the woman's general practitioner, sometimes a child care worker or teacher. This book should be read by all in the front-line of human services for women, children and men.

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1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Women’s Safety Australia, 1996, p.36.

2 Keys Young, Against the Odds: How Women Survive Domestic Violence, PADV, Canberra, 1998

3 ABS, 1996, op. cit.

4 Keys Young, 1998, op. cit.

5 Wallace 1986 cited in Mouzos, Femicide: The Killing of Women in Australia 1989-1998 (AIC 1999)

6 In a 1993/94 survey of 3,000 women attending 15 Melbourne general practices, Dr Gabrielle Mazza found that only 27 per cent of abused women had disclosed the abuse to their GPs.

7 Commonwealth of Australia: Partnerships Against Domestic Violence. Annual Report 2000-2001. A Substantial Beginning to a New Commitment. Canberra, August 2002.

8 Commonwealth of Australia: Working Together Against Violence: The First Three Years of Partnerships Against Domestic Violence.' Canberra, 2001.

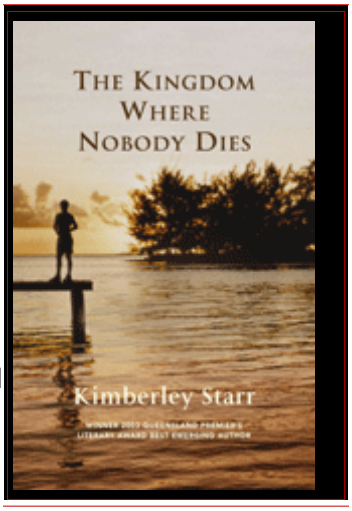
9 Ibid. p.11.

Dark Places

Kimberley Starr, *The Kingdom Where Nobody Dies*. St. Lucia: U of Q Press, 2004.
By Rachel Slater

Kimberley Starr's first novel is set largely in Brisbane and its suburbs, a literary turf also inhabited by, among others, Jessica Anderson and Thea Astley. The story moves between the 1980s and the present day with the novel's main protagonist Madeleine Jeffries - a psychologist - called to Brisbane to assist the police in the case of the 'Brisbane boy killer'. The situation compels Maddy to confront her past and a time when, as an emotionally distant teenager, she was exiled to her grandmother's home following the death of her mother and the departure of her father for work overseas. During her stay in River Pocket, a young local boy, Cameron Seymour, disappears and the once quiet community becomes a breeding ground of sorrow and dread.

Brisbane, its river, and the locality they evoke have a central function in this story. The interaction between Maddy and her neighbourhood, the small topography of her grandmother's home and those of the people who live around her, enable the troubled girl to explore her own interior landscape. Maddy hates her grandmother's house, a traditional Queenslander with a front door 'as heavy as gloom… I hated crossing the dim space that was temporarily my bedroom'. The Queenslander is important with its suggestion of impermanence - it seems transitory, little more than an improvised tree house, creaking with age and heat. The teenage Maddy feels constricted by its closeness and considers herself to be merely 'passing through' this makeshift home; yet the house remains standing and holds a place in her life long after she has moved away from it and the ghosts of memories it represents. The river that bears silent witness to the events of that summer and future summers, the landscape of rooms, objects from her mother's childhood Maddy scarcely believes existed, as well as the family members, neighbours and friends who come together in this phase of her life combine to produce a miniature world of their own, a physical world which recreates the non-physical and inexplicable world of myths, beliefs, loyalties, anxieties and affections that shape Maddy's life.



The family and childhood are places where, as David Malouf, another writer renowned for his 'Brisbane' works suggests 'we first discover laws that apply to the world at large'. The novel portrays several family groups - all fractured, all defined by absence. The reader meets families with bonds 'stretched and broken' by death, divorce and withdrawal. Maddy finds her grandmother unknowable and, for much of the novel, does not wish to make a connection with her mother's mother, she cannot find a way to communicate with her. The reader is also kept at a distance and is offered little information about the grandmother's background, her appearance, or her way of dealing with loneliness and loss, although her environment helps to define her. From the 'fusty' smell of her home and the preserved childhood bedroom of her deceased adult daughter, to the sealed TV room, she is a woman characterised by her grief. These portraits of grief, guilt and responsibility proliferate in the novel - each character is touched by loss and its reverberations.

Maddy's attempts at exploration and interpretation are illuminating experiences on a personal level, and are conveyed through the crossing of borders, fences and thresholds. She escapes from her grandmother's house and breaks into Bridget's; together they cross the threshold of Kevin Mather's home on more than one occasion. The girl's intrusion onto Mather's property is amplified when he in turn trespasses on the most sacred thing in the community - the safety of its children. Having unwittingly influenced events through her thoughtless teenage actions, Maddy must deal with their terrible consequences and learn the burden of responsibility.

As an adult, Maddy has employed a 'deliberate forgetting' of the past in order to act effectively in her present; but personal experience is central to this novel and Starr pushes her main character to explore the depth of knowledge to be had from her own history. In doing so, and in confronting the shadowy experiences of her childhood environment, Maddy draws nearer to self-discovery. The idea of provenances and the journey back to her beginning in the world is important in Maddy's self-definition. Maddy's experiences at River Pocket take her across the boundary into adulthood and bring her greater understanding of the people in her life. In the words of Maddy: 'we don't leave anything behind. We bring the past with us, towing it along. For a while we may not pay attention, but it never goes away. When life makes us look in the rear-vision mirror, there it is.'

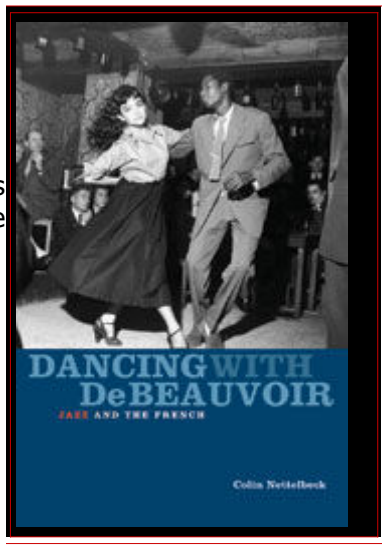
As winner of the 'Best emerging Queensland author' category in the 2003 Queensland Premier's Literary Awards, the novel has had an auspicious start. The judges of the prize describe the novel as 'a page turning mystery' a misnomer that does the novel a great disservice. This is not a 'whodunit'; in fact very little imagination is needed to work out either the name of the killer or the identity of Madeleine's ex-husband. The novel works on many levels, but also disappoints in places. It is in need of a good proof-reader for there are several errors, which make an otherwise polished piece look careless. Some of the characters are vaguely sketched; Ken Richardson in particular is without any real substance. The adult Madeleine's illness, designed perhaps to reinforce the novel's preoccupation with family and the things we inherit, or the things we take for granted but may yet vanish, seems an unnecessary addition to the story. The book's strength lies rather in the evocation of the myth of childhood, of fractured relationships, grief, memory, and the coming to terms with the sense of self that emerges out of these.

Rachel Slater is a freelance reviewer and is currently working on a PhD in contemporary women's literature in the School of EMSAH at the University of Queensland.

All *That* Jazz?

Colin Nettelbeck, *Dancing With De Beauvoir : Jazz and the French*
Reviewed by Elaine Lewis

Dancing With De Beauvoir is a seductive title for a book about *Jazz and the French* and, as an artifact, the book itself is also seductive with its rich blue cover featuring a stunning photograph by Robert Doisneau of a pale-faced young Frenchwoman jiving with a tall, African man in what is obviously a small jazz cellar in Paris. The iconography of the cover speaks volumes and inside are a further twenty-seven photographs which, viewed sequentially, convey the spirit of the development of jazz in France.



The book is divided into two parts and in the first section the author gives us an excellent mini-history of the development of jazz in general and chronicles the visits of American jazz musicians to France alongside the development of French jazz musicians. In the introductory chapter he writes that 'live jazz arrived in France towards the end of World War 1' – but fortunately in the next paragraph admits that any statement about the birth of jazz or about its arrival in France must remain contentious. Jazz in America grew out of a mixture of African influences, rhythm in particular, and European harmonies and instruments so in many ways it is unsurprising that it was well-received by Europeans, and easy to understand why, at the end of World War 1, James Europe's black US army band might be seen as representative of American liberation and hope for the renewal of France. But, as the author says, if we look back to the 1840s in Europe we find Louis Moreau Gottschalk, a New Orleans Creole musician, in Paris composing works which drew on 'traditions from the New Orleans melting pot' – grand opera, French dances, African-American syncopation, Creole melodies and the 'jerky sprightliness of street and folk musicians'. Minstrel shows, ragtime, the cakewalk, the instruments invented by Sousa and Sax were all known in Europe and had already influenced French music and dance in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

It is certain that jazz flourished in Europe in the period between the two World Wars and was interpreted by many as a metaphor for freedom. The author suggests that the difference in France when compared with other places which also accepted jazz was that it was an internationally recognized cultural space; it provided a recognition and acceptance of African Americans at a time when they still had difficulties in the US and it played a foundation role in categorizing and historicising jazz. The first discographies and specialist reviews appeared in France and led eventually to the funding of popular culture and the formation of the National Jazz Orchestra in 1981 (under the auspices of Jack Lang) and the acceptance of jazz into the archives of the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1986. *Jazz Hot* (1935) is acknowledged as the first 'specialist jazz review in the world' and critic Hugues Panassié went so far as to say that although 'jazz was born in the United States …it was in Europe that it gained its artistic legitimacy'. Although this attempt at cultural appropriation is generally regarded as extreme, it is an example of the power of the written word to legitimise French culture and there were numerous other early French commentaries on jazz.

Part two of *Dancing With De Beauvoir : Jazz and the French* is concerned with the influence of jazz on French art and thought and specifically explores its influence upon modernism, literature, feminism and cinema. Jazz was a welcome part of the artistic break from the past which was accelerated by the First World War, but was already evident in the works of Picasso, Miro, Kandinsky, Debussy, Satie, Stravinsky, Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* and others. Cocteau participated

in the event, *Parade*, in 1917, with Satie, Picasso, Appolinaire, Diaghilev and Ansermet and first heard a jazz band at the end of that year in the Casino de Paris. He supported jazz all his life and writes of it as a 'cocktail' with a 'blending of unexpected ingredients'. For Cocteau, and some of the mainstream composers like Satie, jazz was a source of inspiration but not itself an art and the author rightly states that the impact of jazz on the modernist movement was complex and uneven.

At the beginning of the chapter on jazz and literature Nettelbeck borrows from Yannick Seite to make the distinction that 'the influence of jazz on literature was in many cases no more than anecdotal (texts using jazz as local colour were abundant during the 1920s), but was more often fundamental – serving as inspiration for deeper reflection on the nature of the literary act'. He describes Céline's persistent metaphorical use of jazz as evidence of the influence of jazz upon his writing and finds that his free use of sound and rhythm with 'images and snippets of phrases' in *Guignol's Band* has all the 'inventive capacities of jazz'. He continuously reminds us that Céline was not a jazz fan and his interest in it was marginal but demonstrates satisfactorily that his verbal expression may instinctively have absorbed jazz influences. The author makes a case for the indirect influence of jazz upon Sartre, Queneau, Jarry and the Pataphysics and OuLiPo movements but it is the writing of Boris Vian which is 'more immersed in the world of jazz than any of his colleagues'. Both Ollier and Butor acknowledged the direct impact of jazz on their writing as did Perec when he wrote about free jazz. Jacques Reda established himself as a 'professional jazz commentator and as a distinguished poet' but it is the author's use of a primary resource, a personal interview with Echenoz, which gives us deeper insights into the influence of jazz upon the writing process.

And so we come to the chapter from which the book takes its title, *Dancing With De Beauvoir*. Here the author makes a case for the relationship between jazz and the emergence of French feminism mainly because of its association with freedom. Whilst Beauvoir herself was not a musician she was attracted to people who were. In her memoirs she writes of exploring all kinds of music and being impressed by Sartre's musical talent and a quotation from *La force de l'âge* illustrates her view, at that time, of jazz as the *other* within herself and ' the vast cultural *other* represented by the United States'. Over a period of time her perceptions changed and at one time she wrote that white women dancing with black dancers 'ended up looking like hysterical zombies'. During her visit to the US in the years preceding her writing of *The Second Sex* she explored jazz clubs and met musicians in Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Santa Fe, San Antonio and New Orleans. The author tells us that her notes from this time reveal a 'fixation' on traditional black New Orleans style jazz, and a rejection of bebop as 'a perversion introduced by white American jazzmen'. He compares this preference with her 'traditional' style of writing. Jazz was a part of her exploration of race relations as well as 'a window on American culture', and in the introduction to *The Second Sex* she describes the '*profound analogy* between the oppressed situation of the blacks and that of women'. During the late forties, we are told, Beauvoir visited the United States several times and Nelson Algren encouraged her to develop her essay on women into a full-length work. In France she remained friends with Boris Vian and his family, and said that she learnt a great deal from Vian. Nettelbeck acknowledges that it would be 'excessive to claim that *The Second Sex* is uniquely or directly involved with jazz', but he clearly demonstrates that jazz was a source of relaxation and pleasure in Beauvoir's life and that it is used in her later novels to capture the mood of postwar Paris. He believes that jazz provided a powerful energy in Paris which she absorbed and 'ultimately appropriated, transforming it in ways that allowed her to shape and alter her own culture'.

The direct influence of jazz upon French cinema is more evident. Examples include an extensive discussion of many of Louis Malle's films, including *Ascenseur pour l'echafaud* which, with the contribution of novelist Roger Nimier added to a soundtrack provided by Miles Davis combined his three passions - jazz, literature and cinema. Nettelbeck links Jean Luc Godard's creative aesthetic

to the later developments of jazz – bebop, post bebop and free jazz – and illustrates this with a splendid analysis of *A bout de souffle*.

Nettelbeck writes both as a jazz fan and a cultural historian and, as such, is concerned with exploring the space and time in which two cultures meet; he sees jazz as a metaphor for Franco-American cultural and political relations, at least until well into the fifties and expresses the hope that 'in the spirit of the jazz that originated it, dialogue can always begin anew – provided that there is the courage to go to the heart of things'. He uses the failure of the encounter between Ornette Coleman and Jacques Derrida in 1997 at the Paris Jazz Festival at La Villette to underline 'the difficulty of meaningful intercultural dialogue in the complex and fraught realities of today's world', and compares this with the image of Hemingway dancing with Josephine Baker in Le Jockey Bar. It is tempting to use these images as cultural metaphors but, as the author himself says, it is 'drawing a long bow to portray this encounter between Coleman and Derrida as a historical representation of France's relationship with jazz' – nor of France's relationship with America, one could add. *Dancing With De Beauvoir* evokes vividly the atmosphere of successive periods in Paris when jazz was at its most influential, and it leaves the reader wanting to know more. Fortunately there is an extensive bibliography and the endnotes are an essential part of the whole. The energy of jazz and its association with freedom permeate the book and I was reminded of Mike Zwerin's *Swing Under the Nazis: Jazz as a Metaphor for Freedom* (Cooper Square Press, 2000), which could be added to the excellent bibliography to be found in *Dancing With De Beauvoir*.

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Otherworldly Songs

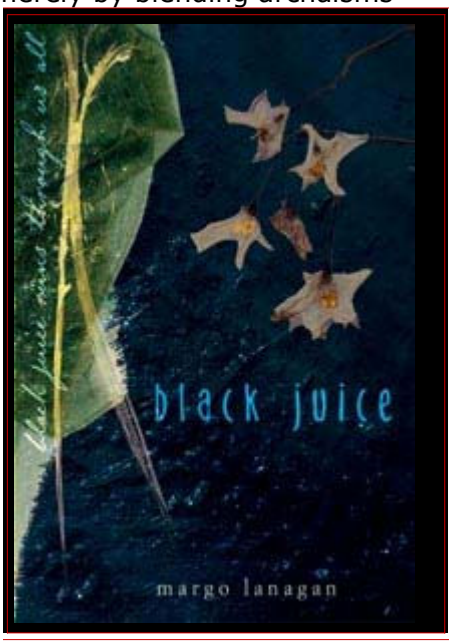
Margo Lanagan *Black Juice,* Allen and Unwin 2004

Reviewed by Dominique Hecq

Margo Lanagan's *Black Juice* is a collection of ten otherworldly stories that enhance our capacity to be affected by the effects of history.

Black Juice can be loosely described as fantasy. Although it is pitched at a teen readership, it is complex enough to be enjoyed by an adult audience aware of the intricacies of post-colonial ideologies. Each story has its own original and disturbing voice and the haunting quality of poetry.

Lanagan is aware of the conventions of the mythical, folktale genre and is able to work against them in order to undercut the reader's expectations, especially in relation to setting. She creates hybrid "otherworlds" that often seem archaic or mythical and yet could just as well be post-apocalyptic. These worlds are never fully elucidated, nor the rules that govern them fully explained. The otherworldliness of the settings is often achieved merely by blending archaisms and neologisms. Or thematically by referring to rites and rituals. Lanagan's ability to convey ethnographic differences and complexities is quite remarkable. Her skilful creation of oral/primitive worlds is particularly disturbing, for it forces the reader to consider the arbitrary nature of her own society's rituals, pitching so-called primitive worlds against no less superstitious post-industrial capitalist worlds.



"Singing my Sister Down", the opening story of the collection is one such oral/primitive tale. "Singing my Sister Down" revolves around one arresting image – a woman's body sinking into a tar pit. The story is narrated by the woman's younger brother, who, alongside their mother and other siblings, is watching Ikky sink. A crowd of relatives and friends also gather round whilst a rival assembly watches from afar the spectacle of what might be pay back. We learn that the sinking ritual is Ikky's punishment, possibly for killing her husband with an axe, though this is never fully explained. Ikky's progressively sinking body becomes a structuring principle, a tension gathering timeline for the story.

The power of "Singing my Sister Down", as with all the stories in *Black Juice*, lies in the spare dialogue and simple syntax. Lanagan is careful to align the reader with the young and immature narrator, who, we feel, is seeing things with the shock of incomprehension the reader is at first experiencing. Idiosyncratic words such as "bonty" and "pothering wind" lend the story a sense of close knit community and intimacy: rather than estrange the reader, they draw her in.

Many of the adolescent protagonists in Lanagan's stories do not belong to the traditional nuclear family. In "Earthly Uses", for instance, the young protagonist lives with his tyrannical Gran-Pa and frail Gran-Nan. Introverted and miserable, he relies on voyeuristic fantasies for sustenance. But this is a rite of passage story: our boy's mission is to set forth on a journey and offer a lump of cheese to an angel so that his Gran-Nan's life may be saved.

Lanagan is at pains to emphasize the abject in this story. The angels themselves are oracular sexless beings who smell like shit and vomit up money pellets. Much to Gran-Pa's disgust, these also encourage those who seek their counsel to write poetry instead of paying taxes. The reader senses that these angels are somewhat crucial to the protagonist's quest to establish his identity

and escape his tyrannical, sexist and politically vile Gran-Pa. And indeed, at the close of the story, he returns triumphant, buries his Gran-Nan, and is free to begin the "real" journey through adulthood. This he has to thank the money-spewing angel for, of course.

"Yowlinin" is the collection's most violent and terroristic tale. It is also the story that is most open to political and allegorical interpretation: it is a kind of parable of economic rationalism. By the time Evil rears its ugly head, the young orphaned girl is already exiled from society. Not being a "Luckie", her crime, and the reason for her exile, is simply that she is poor. We hear that her parents were killed the last time the man-eating beasts known as "yowlinin" swarmed through the village. We also learn that a villager named Thatcher usurped her inheritance. As the plot progresses, we see that the villagers themselves care nothing for social justice and equality. They are so concerned with making money that they remain blind to the impending "yowlinin". Only the exiled orphan and Goodman Harrow realize that a calamity is looming. This is a most chilling postmodern epic fantasy if ever there was one.

Though the overall outcome of *Black Juice* might be called a dark fantasy, it might be best qualified as a narrative of post-colonial modernity.

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Debbie Harman Qadri: *Bad Mother*, vols 1-4.

This book, containing more than a hundred catroons by one of the wittiest of Australia's cartoonists, can be purchased by sending $20 to Debbie Qadri, PO Box 111 Sterling Drive, East Keilor, Vic 3033.

Here is a sample for those not already familiar with Qadri's work.