

Australian Women's Book Review

Volume 21.1 (2009)



"Mouth to the tattoo, he sucked once more 2007" - Amanda Marburg

Editor: Carole Ferrier

Associate Editor: Maryanne Dever

Editorial Advisory Board: Brigid Rooney, Margaret Henderson, Barbara Brook,
Nicole Moore, Bronwen Levy, Susan Carson, Shirley Tucker

ISSN: 1033 9434

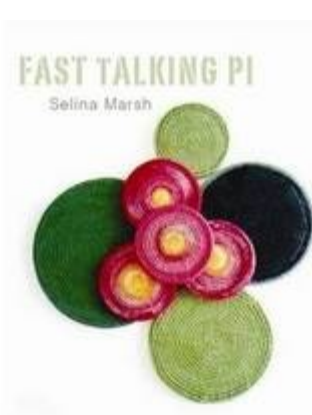
Contents

3. **Mo'olelo, Talkstory: To Cause The Spirit To Fly Between People**
Selina Tusitala Marsh. Fast Talking Pi (Poetry Collection with CD). Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009. Reviewed by Cath Koa Dunsford
7. **Not Working in the Bedroom?**
Bettina Arndt. The Sex Diaries. Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2009. Reviewed by Kirsten McLean
10. **History Matters**
Maria Simms. The Dead House. Gibbes Street, an imprint of New Holland Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd. Reviewed by Carolyn Van Langenberg
12. **Headlong into Grief**
Susan Varga. Headlong. Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia, 2009. Amanda Lohrey, Vertigo, Melbourne: Black Inc., 2008. Reviewed by Elise Croft
14. **Craft Works**
Enza Gandolfo and Marty Grace. Women Craft Wellbeing:-- It Keeps Me Sane--. Carlton North, Vic: The Vulgar Press, 2009. Reviewed by Adrienne Sallay
16. **An Incisive Indigenous Voice**
Ali Cobby Eckermann. little bit long time. Australian Poetry Centre, Balclava, 2009. Reviewed by Terry Whitebeach
20. **Don't Forget Poland**
Fiona McGregor - Strange Museums. University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, WA, 2008. Reviewed by Kit Kimberly
23. **Some Other Destiny**
Gabrielle Carey - Waiting Room: A Memoir. Melbourne: Scribe, 2009. Reviewed by Maryanne Dever
26. **The University of Queensland Image Attribution**

Mo'olelo, Talkstory: To Cause The Spirit To Fly Between People

Selina Tusitala Marsh. *Fast Talking Pi* (Poetry Collection with CD). Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009.

Reviewed by Cath Koa Dunsford



The poetry of Selina Tusitala Marsh is well known throughout Aotearoa, the Pacific and beyond. Yet how many poets with a first collection could garner heartfelt praise from some of our top Maori and Pacific writers such as Albert Wendt, Sia Figiel, Witi Ihimaera and Karlo Mila? Sia Figiel compliments Marsh's dedication to the 'recognition of Pacific voices that have been historically silenced as well as giving breath to the urban realities of the Pacific diaspora'. Witi Ihimaera calls her a 'sassy hip hop streetwise Samoan siren of South Pacific poetry' while noting her work is also world class. Albert Wendt loves her 'challenging new fusion' of Aotearoan/Pacific poetics, while Karlo Mila notes that she 'joins the "calabash breakers"' of the contemporary New Zealand literature

scene and does not leave it as she found it.

As a Maori (Nga Puhi) and Pacific Island (Hawai'ian – Pahala, Ka'u) 'calabash breaker' of the seventies who was dubbed by the critics as a 'literary activist', I welcome Karlo Mila's astute comments on Marsh's work and also affirm the honesty and power of Selina Tusitala's voice in breaking down some of the academic and literary traditions that get in the way of enjoying empowering, confronting new Pacific voices that refuse to be boxed up in some academic's Post-Colonial Paradise.

Since poetry is, in essence, Talkstory, or mo'olelo from my own Pacific heritage, the Hawai'ian Talkstory, literally meaning 'to cause the spirit to fly between people' there could be no more apt description of Marsh's work, especially considering that 'Tusitala', in Samoan, embodies te rito, or the heart, of talkstory. All power to Auckland University Press for presenting this collection with a CD of the poet performing her own poetry, which brings the nuances alive for the listener/reader and leaves no doubt of her intention to challenge and confront the reader's assumptions.

Fast Talking PI (Pacific Islander) celebrates a wild range of verse, from the Maori/Pacific diaspora to the grunty urban realities of inner city life in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Marsh also confronts inherited Western traditions where she and Pacific people, especially wahine/vahine, have been raped/ripped off by Western colonialism. The symbol of this in the collection is the painter Gauguin:

Gauguin
you piss me
off

You strip me bare
assed, turn me on my side
shove a fan in my hand

smearing fingers on thigh
pout my lips below an
almond eye and silhouette me
in smouldering ochre.

(Two Nudes on a Tahitian Beach, 1894).

I recall the irony of seeing Gauguin's work in Tahiti while protesting French nuclear testing at Moruroa and Faungata'ufa Atolls and suddenly the whole fusion of French colonialism hit me as a procession of colonised voices/images descending from the ripped skies while the airport at Tahiti Fa'a'a was being rioted and burned by Maohi protestors, claiming their mana whenua, their land rights and protecting their kai moana and seas from radiation poisoning.

Gauguin, who is often seen as romanticising Pacific women, is here labelled a 'rapist', just as France was drilling shafts half a mile thick for their underground nuclear tests, raping Papatuanuku, the land/the women, with enough explosives for another Hiroshima. After my Tahitian experiences, I wrote *Manawa Toa*, an eco-novel detailing the indigenous protests against French nuclear testing and in one passage of that book evoked purakau/talkstory about Muriranga-whenua giving her jawbone to Maui so he could fish up the island we now live on, Te Ika a Maui. This extract shows how we honour the wahine/vahine who created us as tangata whenua, yet France could still tunnel shafts into Papatuanuku, our Earth Mother and blast her apart, in language reminiscent of Marsh's rape imagery:

She strolls over the dunes in the haunting moonlight, toward a cave at the mouth of the harbour. From within, voices, waiata. Then silence. She enters the cave, drawn by a power from within. At the far end, a pinpoint of light. She walks toward it. Nearing, she sees a rounded piece of bone, light shining from its centre. It appears suspended in mid air. She moves closer. The bone hovers at eye level. She reaches out her hand. The bone is placed in her palm. It is in the shape of a fish hook. Light shines through the ribs of the old kuia. A piece of one rib is missing. Cowrie looks down. Her own hei matau lies safe on her breast bone, next to the carved turtle. She clutches it in comfort. A warm glow emanates from the bone, heating her hand. She lies awake, the moon slanting down through the nikau trunks, lying across her body like bars. Then she remembers Moruroa. Invasion. Rape. They tunnel shafts deep into Papatuanuku, put nuclear explosives capable of another Hiroshima into them, blast apart the atoll, and say that the tests are totally safe. She moans, turns over, but cannot sleep. She tries to imagine sailing a waka into the test zone, women from all the islands on board. Gradually, her body begins to relax and she falls into a deep sleep. (32)

Throughout her collection, Selina Tusitala Marsh comments on variations of this essential theme of 'rape' that underlines the essence of all colonisation, whether this be the rape of te whenua, the land, or wanine/vahine, the women, or the rape of images, ideas, imagination. She peppers her poetic narrative with the rhythms and staccato of urban hip-hop beats, in tune with slick contemporary themes and voices, showing her and their disregard for the romanticisation of the past and for the politics of the present.

Marsh often questions the inherited power of the patriarchal poets and writers, as in 'Things on Thursday' which opens:

If Updike could do it
why couldn't she?

She astutely comments on the 'forest of books' that were 'lining his house', insinuating that for indigenous forests to be slaughtered for the sake of his hallowed words might indeed be a political act, and one that could well be challenged. Then she begins to list all the tasks of a woman writer who has to do so much else than be a writer - manage an entire household of kids and work and also get to her desk ... she ends by saying 'yeah right'; echoing the impossibility of 'yeah, write', which is always so much harder for the woman who has to mother, be a wife, a breadwinner and handle a thousand other tasks beyond just sitting down at the desk.

Then there's the humorous 'Hone Said', which refers to words of the late and great Maori poet, Hone Tuwhare, who was reputed to have talked about the only land that he is being the land he stands on ... which is then transmuted and changed via many other voices ... ending up with one who felt that another kiwi (European) poet, Ron Mason had said these lines first. I am tempted to add, as Marsh says in her Tuwhare poem, 'Yeah, right', as we see again the assumption, consumption and colonisation of an Indigenous poet, Hone Tuwhare, by his pakeha colonisers.

Marsh's tribute to the 'Calabash Breakers' is an energetic poem celebrating literary subversion. Long may this last as she asserts the vital importance of these voices in determining what really is a true voice of Aotearoa/the Pacific, te whenua.

'Googling Tusitala' brings up a fascinating range of cross-cultural, cross-referential instances, showing the vast responses to any subject as well as the maze of wandering topics that can confuse the unwary internet explorer. After reading this, I did a google search for 'Cathie Dunsford', and found over 10,000 entries, listing overseas bookfairs, performances and book sales, ranging all over the world from Turkey to Africa to Europe, USA, Canada, the Pacific, Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand - many countries and continents which I and my various translators have traversed and performed within for my international publishers.

However, it still raised fascinating new areas of Google-land. The one continent I had never traversed was Africa and yet it seemed there were many African readers of my work ... no doubt due to Amazon.com and the reality of International One-Breasted Warriors of Books! Try this yourself and be amazed at the results. Marsh, yet again, delivers us a modern talkstory of the net, with her hip beat and mo'olelo chant.

Marsh's poem 'Afakasi' evokes her work for the *Niu Voices* collection published by Huia Press. I wrote of that collection in the University of South Pacific's Literary Magazine, *Dreadlocks*:

Editor, Selina Tusitala Marsh, comments in her afterward on the differences between the first *Niu Waves* collection based in Fiji and *Niu Voices*, where the Pacific voices are located/dislocated on these islands of Aotearoa. The feeling of being ripped out of warm islands and being thrown onto wind ravaged shores like those of Poneke, Wellington, are reflected many times in this volume. This becomes a metaphor for the difficulties in negotiating the spaces between those Pacific and Aotearoan waves, some carrying the writer forward, some hurling him/her up on this strange shore. There are even some faint echoes here of Allen Curnow's poetry where the child lands upside down on these shores and has to negotiate from a strange and foreign place. That could be explored further.

But this volume immediately stands out from other literary voices. Despite the struggles in negotiating a waka through unknown seas, these navigators, unlike their ancestors, do not always have the inner knowledge of the stars, the seascape, the landscape and they have to make new maps for the mind and the senses. They are negotiating multiple identities. This is where the collection becomes fascinating and the writing truly evocative.

This is relevant here for she is traversing past voices and also charting new territory in this current collection, *Fast Talking PI*. Yet some of the themes are rooted in her earlier work, including Afakasi:

Selina Tusitala Marsh sets the challenge in the opening of her terrific story Afakasi pours herself afa cuppa coffee: ‘That was it in a coconut shell. But how to flesh it out? To scrape out the meat? To flake out the metaphor, imagery, symbolism and a message?’

Niu Voices has grounded the waka in Aotearoa. The journeys from here, navigating new identities in these islands and between all our islands, looks to be as fantastic and memorable as all the navigations, past and present, where our words speak to each other about our differences and our similarities, our dreams and our aspirations, our continual rebellions against the forces of colonisation in all their myriad forms.

It is fascinating to draw on both *Niu Voices* and *Fast Talking PI* to see the links between the individual voice of poet Selina Tusitala Marsh and the connexion to the Indigenous Pacific poets in *Niu Voices*, to affirm that the themes of challenge and subversion of the colonial, patriarchal, literary imperative are vital for new Pacific voices to emerge, fresh and unsuppressed, from the iconic coconut shards of the past.

Only then, as in Marsh's poem, ‘Spare the Rod’, may we see the ‘semi-buried petroglyph’ (or ki'i pohaku) of the new child's body fly into the skies ‘sentenced to freedom’ and ‘trilled by sun and wind’ so that a new reality of Pacific existence, embracing the old island lives and the new urban beats, may be released into freedom so that all can live embraced by the past but nurtured by future imagination.

Indeed, as Pacific writer Sia Figiel says, Marsh is ‘a poet with a deep dedication to the recognition of Pacific voices that have been historically silenced as well as giving breath to the urban realities of the Pacific diaspora.’

Renowned and much loved Maori writer, Witi Ihimaera, best sums this up as ‘her aesthetics and indigenous politics are meld-marvellous and her ideas will blow you away.’

Pacific poet Karlo Mila talks of her vital ‘language genealogies’ where ‘under her pen, the precision and principles of Western English literary tradition sway rhythmically with the fluid and flowing oratory of Polyneisa.’

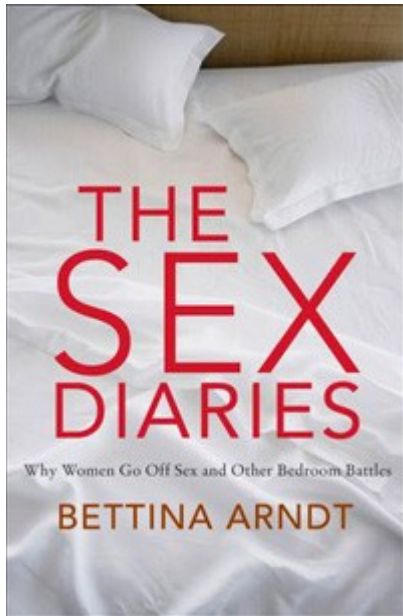
I would go even further to say they consciously and subversively undermine the flow of the Western academic tradition and reclaim indigenous voices of the Pacific in an era where this is essential to our future survival as Pacific Peoples, as tangata whenua (people of the land) and as vital voices of our combined future survival in Aotearoa and throughout the Pacific. Tau ke, awesome, Selina Tusitala Marsh.

Cathie Koa Dunsford (Nga Puhi Maori/Hawai'ian & Pakeha ancestry) is author of 22 books in print and translation in USA, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and Turkey, including the Cowrie eco-novel series featuring strong indigenous wahine toa from the Pacific region www.spinifexpress.com.au. She is director of Dunsford Publishing Consultants, which has brought 192 new and award winning Pacific authors into print internationally: www.dunsfordpublishing.com. Recipient of two literary grants from Creative New Zealand Arts Council, she was International Woman of the Year in Publishing in 1997. She has taught writing and publishing at Auckland University since 1975. She tours the world performing from the books with traditional Maori waiata and taonga puoro. Contact: dunsford.publishing@xtra.co.nz

Not Working in the Bedroom?

Bettina Arndt. *The Sex Diaries*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2009.

Reviewed by Kirsten McLean



Man's best friend. Anti-feminist. Rape cheerleader. Bettina Arndt has been called them all since the release of her new book *The Sex Diaries*. Arndt admits she knew *The Sex Diaries* would be a controversial book, and while in many ways it is, it doesn't really tell us anything new about men, women and their sexual relationships.

Arndt's book is based on the 'sex diaries' of 98 Australian heterosexual couples of varying ages, although some partners didn't write for Arndt or, indeed, know their other half was diarising their sex lives. Arndt encouraged her diarists to write as little or as much as they wanted about their negotiations of sexual intimacy over a period of six to nine months. The main theme emerging from these diaries was the enormous difficulties many of the couples experienced in negotiating what Arndt calls "the sex supply". In most cases it was the men, unsurprisingly, who wanted far more sex than their female partners. Most of the men expressed enormous frustration at this situation, whilst most of the women expressed

similar amounts of frustration about the expectations of sex from their male partners.

This finding, of course, is nothing new – for years, popular psychology and self-help books have been offering a multitude of solutions to overcome the apparent discrepancies in sexual desire between men and women in contemporary heterosexual relationships (see for instance, John Gray's *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom*, 1997). Arndt's book, however, adds little to these debates. The reason for this is partly Arndt's overreliance on common biological understandings of the sexes for the crux of her discussion. According to Arndt (and many others before her), women's low libido is biological and results in women going off sex after some time in a relationship. Men, on the other hand, have a high libido because of high levels of testosterone and, as a result, rarely experience the same decline in libido. The problem, however, is that Arndt uses these biological explanations to support her claim that it is men who suffer the most in not having their sexual needs met: women, it seems, are the sexually powerful gender in being able to reject men's sexual advances and in refusing to have sex, or only agreeing to sex sporadically, are leaving countless men suffering from a lack of intimacy in their relationships.

The book is then a call to women: in her most contentious argument, Arndt says that women, despite their low libidos and lack of sexual desire, should "just do it". Arndt adds a disclaimer to this call – she does not advocate non-consensual sex – but her argument implies that it is women who should learn to accommodate men's higher sexual needs. (Even John Gray balanced his proposal that women cater for men's sexual needs and agree to 'quickie' sex by suggesting men needed to reciprocate with long, sensual sex sessions with lots of foreplay to satisfy their female partners.) Arndt claims that men, in going without the amount and kind of sex they so desperately desire, are already accommodating

women's low libidos, and now it is women's turn. Arndt argues that the belief that women need to desire sex in order to have sex lets everyone down: instead, women should 'just do it' and they might find they actually want sex once it starts. She backs this up with comments from her female diarists who have 'just done it' despite a lack of sexual desire, and who have eventually found themselves enjoying sex with their mate. In spite of this, one gets the impression that it is only a few of her female diarists who report that the 'just do it' technique has revolutionised their sex life.

Furthermore, while Arndt pauses to briefly acknowledge that: 'Social relationships, cultural and family values and future aspirations have a far stronger influence on sexual behaviour than sex hormones alone' (51), these factors are not explored in the book. This is a shame, as many of the diaries – and Arndt's interpretation of them – raise a number of issues about the role of the social in constructing male and female desire. For example, an examination of the role social learning plays in encouraging men's sexuality whilst applying restraints on women's sexuality would have been far more useful than the repetitive platitudes about the biological differences that lead to discrepancies between men's and women's sexual desire. Indeed, there are clear examples of men and women in the book who buck the biological trend – men who have low libidos (Arndt calls them 'celery stick men') and women with high libidos ('juicy tomatoes') – and while they are a smaller group than her low-libido female diarists and high-libido male diarists, they clearly demonstrate that desire and sex are far more complex than her generalisations show. But Arndt fails to explore the hows and whys behind these differences: what were the cultural, social or other factors that may have shaped these men and women's sexualities?

The book is also hampered by Arndt's glaring biases and favouritism, and it is women who lose out on both fronts. Women are criticised for their unrealistic expectations in relationships that lead them to divorce men they are unsatisfied with (the implication being, of course, that they are using this mechanism far too much), and for withholding sex from men who just want to show them love. Women expect men to know how to please them, and then get angry when they don't. By comparison, the male diarists, and men in general, are rarely judged. There is no balanced discussion of some of the historical and contemporary gender inequalities that have seen women endure the burden of responsibility for the emotional and domestic labour within heterosexual relationships, nor of men's complicity in maintaining these gender inequalities for their own benefit. Arndt clearly also favours the stories from those with active sex lives. In one chapter, Arndt tells the story of retired engineer Michael whose wife Heather dresses up in corset and suspenders every evening and 'totters around on her high heels, preparing dinner, offering Michael his evening drink, laying the table, doing a few chores' (16). This couple, in Arndt's assessment, sets the benchmark for a healthy and long sex life. Other couples who manage regular sex sessions with each other are also applauded for their successful relationships. Arndt clearly delights in the retelling of stories from sexually-satiated couples and the details they provide about how they keep the sexual fires burning.

The book is aimed at a general audience and thus it may be unfair to judge it by academic standards. The problem, however, is in the strong message the book sends to women, many of whom Arndt readily admits aren't that fussed about their low libidos and sexless relationships: it is up to women to fix things in the bedroom, or the relationship is doomed. Women are told to 'just do it'. Arndt's high-libido female diarists are told to 'just do it' and initiate sex with their 'celery stick' men. (Dressing up in corsetry and stilettos will also help.) Apparently women need to be doing all the work in the bedroom, regardless of the level of their libido. The implication is that women with low libidos who don't fulfil their male partner's needs are the problem. But in an era where women are expected to be perfect partners, employees, and mothers, the last thing women need is more guilt, this time served up as 'self-help'.

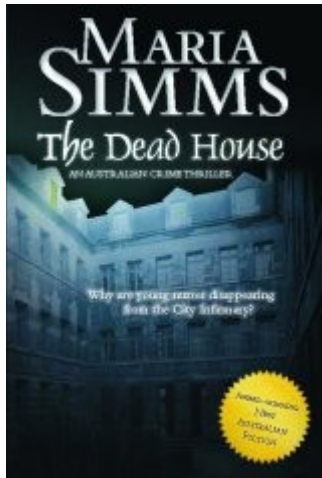
I was left to wonder, upon finishing the book, if the problem in many of the diarists' lives wasn't the supposed imbalance between their libidos, but that they just weren't in love anymore. Many of them expressed anger, shame, bitterness, and jealousy that spoke of problems far deeper than the frequency or quality of their sexual encounters. No amount of 'just doing it' will save a relationship that simply isn't working.

Kirsten McLean is a Lecturer in Sociology in the School of Political and Social Inquiry at Monash University, Melbourne. She teaches and researches the areas of sexuality and gender and is currently working on projects mapping same-sex couples in Australia and examining the pedagogical and methodological issues involved in teaching and researching sexualities.

History Matters

Maria Simms. *The Dead House*. Gibbes Street, an imprint of New Holland Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd.

Reviewed by Carolyn Van Langenberg



In *Why History Matters* the eminent British historiographer John Tosh argues that ‘... history is the property of “the public” rather than academia, in the sense that the laity are the principle audience. He also makes an argument for the place of history as historical narratives and ‘edutainment’ television programmes in an era when citizens are increasingly required to understand their national histories. Sometimes this takes the form of knowing about famous battlefields, like Anzac Cove, or about sportsman, like Donald Bradman. Emphatically, this knowledge forms the basis of the citizenship tests migrants are required to pass in many nations — Australia, Britain, Denmark and many others. The aim is to assess the intending citizens’ knowledge of the nation they are aspiring to join. National identity is examined in understanding a few points about the history that formed the nation as well as something of national institutions and laws.

Historical fictions, whether in written or videoed form, are a primary source of historical knowledge for the audience that Tosh identifies as ‘the public’, the laity that likes to be entertained as it picks up a detail here, an atmosphere there or the names of historical characters and their place in the drama of history. Judging by the extensive acknowledgements at the beginning of her first novel, *The Dead House*, Maria Simms did the spadework of historical research, successfully writing a sprightly thriller set against the background of the turbulent beginning of nursing as a profession in Australia. One of the principal characters is based on Lucy Osborn. She was selected by the Nightingale Committee to be the Lady Superintendent of the Sydney Infirmary, where her task was to establish the Nightingale system of nursing. Lucy and the five other nurses who came with her to Australia are fictionalised in the novel.

The Dead House is set in Sydney, a small and rough town during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Electra, the sleuth heroine, is a country girl seeking an escape from financial difficulties her family encountered when the farm had to be divided after her father’s death.

Plots and sub-plots combine to lend freshness to what is after all a genre novel. There is rivalry among the English nurses. The kitchen staff is eerie. Nurses mysteriously die. To solve the mystery of their deaths, Electra teeters on the edge of a romance with the handsome young doctor Julian Craig, an intrigue that leads not to marriage but the possibility of a career in medicine.

Libby Carlyle as Lady Superintendent battles to keep her hospital clean and orderly. Men assume authority, sometimes nastily, to undermine Libby who has the full support of Henry Parkes, but not that of the alcoholic John Blackburn, the manager of the City Infirmary. The Hospital Board is open to his manipulation. Blackburn won’t allow male staff to assist the nursing staff with sanitation and quarantining. Nor will he allow nurses regular water to wash themselves. And the floorboards of the City Infirmary creak with rot and vermin.

Flying through the tale of political machinations, dead nurses and patient suffering, an ugly scandal is unearthed by the spirited Electra. She solves the crime, aided and abetted by the Italian Detective Delano, a further hint at how well researched *The Dead House* is. Italians were part of nineteenth century Sydney life. Not all were seeking gold or economic reprieve. Like Delano, some were political refugees.

Maria Simms offers many insights into the rough and tumble of 1870 Sydney. Small details such as the pedestrian toll for people walking to and from Ultimo to the area around the present-day Domain, for example, alert the reader to the difference between the familiar present and the past reality.

The characters are light and bright, swiftly stepping into the larger character of Sydney itself, perfect for a television drama.

My one quibble is that the editing suffers from haste, the bane of the electronic age, denying the final novel a polished gleam.

The history is sound, providing the laity, the public who constitute the audience for the historical thriller, the readers curious about early Sydney and how Australian institutions struggled to begin, with an entertaining thriller that gently teaches.

The Dead House is a lively success.

Carolyn van Langenberg lives in the Blue Mountains and has travelled widely in South East Asia and Europe. Author of four novels including *Blue Moon* (2004) she now concentrates mainly upon poetry.

Headlong Into Grief

Susan Varga. *Headlong Into Grief*. Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia, 2009; Amanda Lohrey. *Vertigo*. Melbourne: Black Inc., 2008.

Reviewed by Elise Croft



Grieving is a skill of sorts and she never did learn how to do it. Perhaps she feared she'd drown in a lifetime's accumulated grief. So she kept busy, always busy with the next step in the survival game. (*Headlong*, 194)

Although a part of natural existence, the pain of grief associated with loss and death continues to haunt the human psyche independent of the evolution of knowledge gained through science and history. It does not seem to matter how closely we can observe the deterioration of the human condition; death still shocks and grieves us. Susan Varga's latest work, *Headlong: a novel*, explores the control of this grief and how it forms our own histories and History itself. Varga's story draws many parallels with Amanda Lohrey's sea change novella, *Vertigo*, although the latter touches on the subject with an effective delicacy not quite achieved in *Headlong*.

Headlong is seen from Kati's eyes as she attempts to cope with her suicidal, grieving mother, Julia. The almost autobiographical, journal-like lilt of the prose gently draws the reader in until they are firmly seated in the rollercoaster drama surrounding Julia's suicidal grief. Varga's skill at describing the family and domestic dynamic is not lost in this novel as she describes the breakdown of Kati's familial ties with Julia's deteriorating condition.

The novel really is a thrill ride through grief. The images of Julia as she writhes and fades, in and out of hospitals and institutions, and of the breakdown of Kati's own relationships as she commutes back and forth from her home in the mountains to the city, impose on the reader a part in the traumatic experience. Even when Kati escapes to her own seaside retreat the recollection of her experience continues to disturb her sea change relief. Varga's description of the experience is vivid, raw, and far from subtle.

In contrast *Vertigo* delicately touches on grief in the tale of Luke and Anna's sea change escape from the city. The move is supposed to precipitate a change for Anna's health but they find more than this. The new, satisfactory and possessive experience of owning a home uncovers hidden fears of loss they were not expecting to meet. Lohrey neatly describes the difficult domesticity of rural life. The reader is constantly aware of a silent, shared grief between Anna and Luke and Lohrey places it deftly in the harsh, surrounding environment.

That night she trawls the net in search of further knowledge and finds that the casuarina is indeed a fireweed. It burns hot in a spangled dance of embers and is reborn from a white bed of ash. 'Some Australian species respond to fire as others do to rain,' she reads, and the casuarina is one of them. 'There are instances of species, thought extinct, that fire free from a near-fatal dormancy.' Australia, it seems, is a land of phoenix trees: fertile in extremity. (*Vertigo*, 79)

As bushfires surround their coastal community Anna and Luke's denial of grief comes to a climax as they fight for the survival of their new life against Lohrey's compelling description of the closing catastrophe.

Both of these books are quite short and can be easily read in one sitting and *Vertigo* exalts in all of the renowned features of a short story: each word appears to be skilfully placed, there is no room for heavy reflection and yet the reader is provided with a beautifully crafted, full narrative. *Headlong* pales in comparison to Lohrey's stunning prose. However it still provides a nicely written, compelling story.

Of particular interest, in both of these novels, is the snapshot of the political climate of the time the stories are set. *Headlong*'s main story is paralleled with references to the Tampa and the stories of the pro-refugee movement, and Kati struggles to continue her involvement in something she views as an important global issue while dealing with her personal struggle with her own and her mother's grief. Iraq is invaded and as Kati is caught up in her own issues, Varga uses Kati's partner to continue to embed the struggle of the refugees into the story. The contrast between global and local grief continues to become meshed as we learn more about Julia's Holocaust experience and Varga does well to bring the issue of these contrasting losses to the reader's attention without offering an answer to the question of the weight of personal grief against the bigger, global issues.

There is little room in *Vertigo* for the same parallel stories given in *Headlong* but Lohrey seems to hint at a similar guilt of allowing the story to concentrate on the characters' grief. Anna and Luke live in contemporary Australia where broadband internet and cable television are accessible even in their small coastal community: they represent a globally connected society. As Anna flicks through the BBC and CNN, her connection to the outside world, and watches the devastation in Iraq, she starts to balance her grief. This is extended when she and Luke witness the aftermath of the bushfire on the surrounding land: communal grief aids them to deal with their personal grief. This is shared in *Headlong*:

I've been collecting stuff from the papers about stories like ours, even remotely like ours. I need to understand better. I need some sort of community. (192)

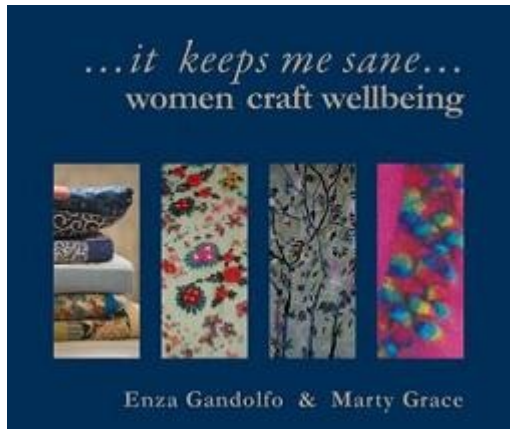
Varga and Lohrey have provided two great examples of new Australian writing that deals with the complexity and universality of grief; balancing the concept as a global issue and a personal one.

Elise Croft has just completed Honours in Mathematics at the University of Queensland. She is due to start her PhD in Mathematics at UQ in September. She misses literature very much.

Craft Works

Enza Gandolfo and Marty Grace. *Women Craft Wellbeing: It Keeps Me Sane*. Carlton North, Vic: The Vulgar Press, 2009.

Reviewed by Adrienne Sallay



A new book about domestic crafts, *Women Craft Wellbeing: It Keeps Me Sane*, is part of a wider research project, *The Everyday Creativity of Women Craftmakers*, that documents the role and meaning of craftmaking in women's lives. Published by Vulgar Press, the project has been assisted by Victoria University, Spotlight and Docklands Press. The book includes key themes that have emerged from the research of two Victoria University academics, Enza Gandolfo and Marty Grace, highlighting the link between craftmaking and wellbeing.

From Mrs Beeton's cookbook to Debra Adelaide's *The Household Guide to Dying* (2008), women have celebrated

a range of domestic work, from doing the laundry or planting a garden to making a wedding cake. However, Gandolfo and Grace's research narrows the field to that of craftmaking, allowing for an in-depth exploration of a variety of craftworks. It includes interviews with women who work in areas of craft such as embroidery, knitting, patchwork, appliqué, mosaics and crocheting.

Women Craft Wellbeing provides a well-researched definition of craft and a discussion about its meaning and importance for women. Issues addressed in the book include the joy of making things; seeing something grow from your own hands; the skill of paying close care and attention to an object; the making and giving of gifts; the preservation of cultural elements; and the freedom to use one's imagination in providing a creative outlet that ends up with a functional object.

Psychological aspects to emerge from the women's discussions are those of the conviviality of craftwork (sewing circles, quilting bees), the constancy of it, and the healing nature of it in times of stress or hardship. Another positive aspect of craftwork that women mention is the portability of some forms of craftwork, making it easy to interact with others while they work.

The connectivity of craftwork is a recurring theme: to other craft workers; to our past; and to our future. Quilter Vicki Cameron says: 'Because my family means so much to me, I'd like to be able to leave them a memory of me that's tangible. Something that is not just a picture. Rather than have a gravestone, I'd rather them have a quilt' (42).

Craftwork also provides status for women. It enables them to enjoy a certain reputation amongst other craftworkers, at the same time as it gives them a sense of autonomy and ways of contributing to home and family. In addition, while the tactile, concrete nature of the materials differs from words on a page, crafts can sometimes become vehicles for political expression.

Women Craft Wellbeing explores the craftworks of fifteen women and their feelings about their work. It also looks at the work of a group of quilters, the Wednesday Quilters. It examines the joys implicit in the creation of each craft, and most importantly, the sense of wellbeing that results from involvement in a craft. As Gandolfo explains, 'at particularly stressful times in my life the act of making has

provided time out and relief' (6).

One of the contributors, Linda Rohrs, has a passion for knitting: 'I love the craft. I love knitting. I love the way you can do things. I just love making things... When you're sitting in a tram or trains knitting, very often it's a way of communicating with people. [They] have an excuse to say something to you (29).' Rohrs' work, knitting functional and artistic pieces, and making carpets and rugs, reminds me of Anne Bartlett's 2005 novel, *Knitting*, in which the protagonist knits a large horse and hangs it from her lounge room ceiling.

With so many colour plates, the A4 landscape format of *Women Craft Wellbeing* lends itself appropriately to the material. It contains clearly written, accessible text on each left-hand page and includes colour photographs of each contributor. On each right hand page there are colour photographs of whole craftworks, with some close-ups to reveal details. I especially liked the detail of wool embroidery on a woollen blanket by Angela Monitto (25) and the cross stitch sampler by Marilyn Sullivan that reads *This house is protected by a layer of dust...* (53).

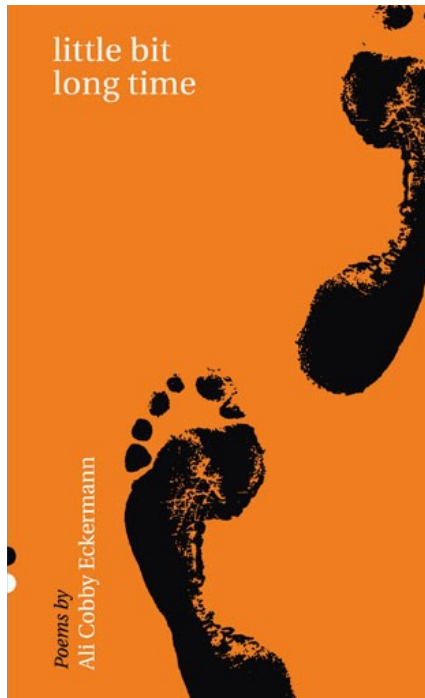
Like my friend, Reet, who celebrates the art of drawn-thread work with a group of women that meets each week to work on the curtains for their Estonian church, women use crafts as a way of preserving cultural heritage, connecting, creating, giving and staying sane. This delightful book, based on well-researched material, provides colourful visuals and useful insights that elevate women's craftworks. The outcome of the research concludes that craftworks are vital for some women's mental health and wellbeing.

Adrienne Sallay has a PhD in Creative Writing from Macquarie University. In the last ten years she has published essays and short stories in *Best Stories Under the Sun*, *Emerge*, *MUPRA Survival Guide*, *Yellow Moon*, *NewsWrite* and *Southerly*. She has received awards for her short fiction, has completed a historical novel, *Loaded Hearts*, is working on a second, *White Wedding* (a domestic drama examining wedding preparations and their aftermath), and is developing a collection of short stories, *The Change Room* (tales from six women who attend aquarobics at the local pool).

An Incisive Indigenous Voice.

Ali Cobby Eckermann. *little bit long time*. Australian Poetry Centre, Balclava, 2009.

Reviewed by Terry Whitebeach



Ali Cobby Eckermann has burst onto the literary scene as yet another rapidly ascending Indigenous literary star. She took the recent poetry festival at Castlemaine by storm with her strong, compelling, hard-hitting and heartfelt poems. Bob Adamson writes: ‘When I first heard Ali read these poems I wanted copies immediately so I could spread the word.’

little bit long time, Ali Cobby Eckermann’s first poetry collection, takes as its subject the difficult history of Indigenous people since colonial times. Both the four decades of her own often hard and confronting personal experience, and the lives of Indigenous people over the last two hundred years are the furnace in which the steel of Ali Cobby Eckermann’s incisive poetic voice has been tempered. Her language has the sureness of one who both knows her subject matter intimately and is able to speak authentically, having reached some sort of resolution in both life and in art.

These poems are ‘the song of a soul that came through’, the distillations of one who has been as relentless in finding the true home of her particular voice and striking exactly the note to convey meaning and feeling as she has been in her search for

identity and true home and family.

Witness the almost implacable strength of following lines:

and gain my strength
by skin,

What I need, the way we grieve, proper way out bush

kill hide hit deny

speak to that man, even that one

Grey bitumen
lies
dead

under galah

pink sky

These are the offerings of a writer who has journeyed with great determination through apparently irretrievable loss, through chaos, disintegration and desolation, who has harvested the gifts of insight and emotional and spiritual intelligence and compassion, and who now reveals these insights to the eyes and ears of others through lucid images and punchy language. Nowhere is the cost of the personal journeys Ali Cobby Eckermann has undertaken and the rewards these journeys have yielded more succinctly demonstrated than in the final joyfully triumphant rhyming couplet of 'First Time (I Met My Grandmother)':

I'll dance with mob on this red Land, munda wiru

place

I'll dance away them half-caste lies 'cos I got my

Nanas face!

Ali Cobby Eckermann, like so many Indigenous children, was removed from her birth mother and 'grew up in the white man's world'. 'Circles and Squares' tells the story of her dislocation in relentless detail:

We lived in a square house we picked fruit and vegetables from a neat fenced square plot

we kept animals in square paddocks we ate at a

square table we sat on square chairs

I slept in a square bed

I looked at myself in a square mirror and did not know who I was

The poet then describes her reconnection with family who 'gathered closely together by big round campfires ... and slept in circles around our fires', but the final lines of the poem make clear the cost of the early separation.

My heart is Round ready to echo the music of my

family but the Square

within me remains

The Square stops me in my entirety.

Ali Cobby Eckermann looks clear-sightedly into her own and other people's lives and unreservedly recounts the losses and the gains. The realities are often hard to accommodate. But these 'poems of self compassion' (to borrow the phrase) don't preach; they invite us instead to unsettle our certainties and they compel us to consider the world in a new way. In 'I Tell You True', the poet takes on the persona of someone in the thrall of alcohol, and challenges the reader:

So if you see someone like me

Who's drunk and loud and cursing

Don't judge too hard, you never know

What sorrows we are nursing.

Ali Cobby Eckermann's poetry is as frank in its joys as in its sorrows, but there is nothing self-indulgent and maudlin about it. In common with the work of many Indigenous writers the poems are alive with humour and redolent with muscular strength: in '2 Pelicans', for example, the poet pokes gentle fun at herself and her over-anxious attempt to find a spiritual sign of hope, after days of agonising worry at the hospital bed side of a seriously ill friend.

I drive out to Amoonguna to tell the family he
is right
I sit down with his Aunty, round the campfire, in
the night
I ask her to explain the pelicans and the meaning
of the sign
She laughs and whispers 'Arrangkwe just 2 pelicans
in the sky!'

Two aspects of the work that appeal to me greatly are the dynamic aural quality of the verse and its strong narrative strain. Like Melbourne poet PiO's work, these poems beg to be read aloud, so that actual people may be heard, speaking of actual situations, in country well known and well loved by them; country which generates a multitude of stories, from the appealing account of going to the 'great shop' to pick up a new baby sister, in 'Karen', to the bewildered, pained monologue of 'Intervention Payback', its fragmented and interrupted rhythms powerfully conveying the shock and disruption that have resulted from the Northern Territory Intervention. From the opening, 'I love my wife', to the shocking finale, 'I might hit her first time', the narrative of violence perpetrated on Aboriginal people unfolds itself with devastating clarity. Within the irrefutable logic of the narrative we come to understand how violence has bred violence. I first heard Ali read this poem at Alekerange: it stopped people in their tracks.

little bit long way is also a book to take out bush with you; to sit quietly and look at the land, and ponder its simplicity and breadth, its mystery and efficacy. The strength of Ali Cobby Eckermann's connection to country is quietly but powerfully affirmed in such poems as 'The Mountain':

A bird comes.

I ask nothing

'Dingo Eye':

The dingo vanishes
with fading dusk

'Shrine':

I weight every stone
in my gaze

and 'Messages':

Every grain of sand in this
big red country
is a pore on the skin
of my Family

Nor does she shy away from the numinous, the multi-layered immanence of overlapping worlds: In 'Cloud Storm' the poet shows us 'the cloud skin' of 'the oldest wedgetail in the world' with a 'string of men ... resting on the eagles wing', a mythological context that makes sense of the world in which people often 'sit broken together' and 'darkness waits'. Such visions and realms offer more nourishing and sustaining realities, such as in 'Black', in which:

My nana opens windows
Weaving songs
And gently tells
Real myths.

Ali Cobby Eckermann is a graduate of Batchelor Institute's Creative Writing program, which is where I first encountered her. I was impressed then (as I still am) by her determination to give voice to her story, her insights and experience through art, and her dedication to her development as a writer. She has another powerful and important book waiting in the wings, about growing up as a brown child in a white household: this book I am sure will have as big an impact as *little bit long time*.

Don't read Ali Cobby Eckermann's work if you want a comfortable ride, but if you are prepared to land on the bedrock of truth, to confront life with no holds barred, and if you're ready to have your heart suddenly lifted by moments of lyricism and connection to country and to the mystery and miracle of life, you will find much to savour in *little bit long way*.

Terry Whitebeach writes novels, poetry, plays, biography, essays and reviews. Her most recent published work was *The Versatile Man, The Life and Times of Alexander Donald Pwerle Ross, Kaytetye Stockman*. She coordinated Batchelor Institute's inaugural Indigenous Creative Writing program.

Don't Forget Poland

A review of *Strange Museums*, by Fiona McGregor. Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2008.

by Kit Kimberly



Central Europeans consider their culture unique in Europe, particularly in that narrow corridor formerly known as the Soviet Satellites. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Hungary (and/or the various regions, kingdoms, duchies, etc, that comprise them), self-identified as the Vyšegrad Four, have both individual and collective histories quiet different from those of their neighbours on either side. Each has been—or has formed the centre of—an empire; each has been buffeted by turmoil, both internal and external, throughout the last 2000 years; each has a rich and diverse mythology that contains commonalities with the others. And each has reacted to the events of the last 20 years through its own unique cultural idiom.

Czechoslovakia, now Czech Republic and Slovakia, where I lived for seven years, has kept its characteristic low profile (even the separation of the countries was almost completely without animosity), while at the same time producing periodic slaps in the face of propriety via dissident artists and rogue politicians. A case in point is the recent installation commemorating the CR's presidency of the EU by David Černý (of Pink Tank fame), which ridicules in subtle and not-so-subtle ways some of the horrors and hypocrisies of the member states. Like former dissident President Václav Havel and his outspoken mistress-cum-wife, Daša Havlová (ne Veskrnová), Černý creates controversy that Czechs can outwardly condemn while inwardly tut-tutting at the prudishness and pretensions of its critics.

Poland, it seems, is both more low key and yet more radical. Rather than presenting such challenges to the outer world, avant garde Polish artists rebel against their own society. Long under the yoke of the Catholic Church (which the Hussite Czechs threw off in the 14th century), the Poles found an ally there against the Communists.

Having a Polish pope for the last 11 years of Communism wouldn't have hurt this alliance, nor would Lech Wałęsa's solidarity movement, which relied on the moral authority of the Church as its foundation. But, as throughout Central Europe (and the world), the events of 1989 changed all that. While the Polish John Paul showed more tolerance and compassion than has been seen from the Catholic Church for many decades—and was greatly beloved for it—even he would not (could not?) sanction the most radical elements of art and expression that arose in reaction to 40 years of Communist repression.

Fiona McGregor's *Strange Museums* catalogues this alternative Polish culture in a memoir-travelogue of her tour through the country with senVoodoo, a performance art troupe. Formed in 1999 by McGregor and creative partner (and former lover) AñA Wojak, senVoodoo began in Australia as part of the fringe culture that grew up around the first wave of HIV discrimination and subsequent activism—long before the concept of "living with AIDS" became mainstream.

“It was,’ writes McGregor, “a politics of hedonism, a dance with the Devil ... bawdy larrikinism and emphasis on diversity. Mostly queer, yet mixed up in that idiosyncratic Australian way Nothing was proscribed, sexual liberation a constant’. senVoodoo “wasn’t so much a culture of the body beautiful as the body free, in all its atypical glory’

By 2006, however, McGregor notes that “Howard’s vision of ordinariness ... filled the horizon’, and funding for such art dried up. With distances so great and audiences small, senVoodoo was less viable. So she and AñA went to Poland at the invitation of Interakcje, an international action art festival.

In Polish (as in Czech) piwo (pivo)—beer—is essential vocabulary, one of the first foreign words a traveller learns. But McGregor and AñA find other elements of their tour strangely familiar: “the tiny backrooms and toilets of grungy venues have stood us in good stead’. senVoodoo’s self-mutilating, bloody body art calls for sterile instruments and back-up medical personnel as they puncture themselves to bleed on cue. Differences from Australia, however, include the nurse who demands an early, triple payment, then disappears upon witnessing the first act of the show. Polish alternative culture has not, apparently, infiltrated the mainstream medical profession.

Go to the bars of a place to understand its living. Go to the museums to understand its dead.

Somewhat shockingly (although the people McGregor meets don’t show shock so much as resignation—typical of people who have resigned themselves to much over the last century), the museums she visits reflect little of the diversity of culture, ethnicity and sexual orientation she encounters in the art circles. In the Museum of Ethnography, a map of Europe marks the routes travelled by different tribes over the millennia. Neither Roma, Moors nor Jews are recognised, despite their presence in the region for more than 1000 years: “[It] resembles a high school project obedient to the dreams of a white, Christian Europe It is interesting how perfectly this Communist museum plays the tune of Catholic propaganda.’

At Auschwitz-Birkenau, the quintessential museum of the dead, there can be no denying “other’ ethnicities. Even its recognition of the horrors—each nation involved (except Greece, despite having deported 50,000 Jews) has its own exhibition—reveals national prejudices. McGregor notes that both Austria’s and Italy’s presentations are years out of date (1978 and 1980, respectively). Central European Gypsies (Sinta) and those from the Southeast (Roma) were not commemorated until 2001, despite the fact that the proportion of Gypsy lives lost was greater than that of Jewish. Nor is there an exhibition recognising homosexual victims, either here or in the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin.

I was at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1994, and I don’t remember any such national exhibitions. I may have been, simply, too horrified and overwhelmed (unlike McGregor, I did “make it to Birkenau with its wooden barracks and ruins of gas chambers, its ash pond and crematoria’). I remember asking the Polish guide how long she had been giving tours (15 years—it was allowed under Communism) and how she could continue to do so.

“It’s too important,’ she told me. “We must never forget, must never allow the world to forget.’

Not forgetting—or rather, not being forgotten—seems of crucial importance to the Poles. When George W. Bush was accused during the 2004 presidential campaign of having little international support for the war, he answered with, “You forgot Poland’, which contributed (according to McGregor), 194 elite troops to the initial 2003 invasion, rising to 2500, but back down to 900 by 2007. The phrase, “You forgot Poland’ became the taunt of Bush- and US-invasion haters around the world, suggesting “weakness and inanity’—much to the chagrin of proud Poles.

Says McGregor:

Being forgotten underwrites all of Polish history: it is their Achilles heel. Poland wants so desperately to matter. The hardline Catholicism of the Kaczynski government sits very comfortably with the Christian morality of Bush, Blair and Howard. Poland has not, will not, cannot forget ...

[As the book was written in 2007, there is no speculation as to the future of Polish government allegiances since those three leaders have been replaced.]

Disturbingly, however, the author finds that Poland's memories of those people, those perspectives, which do not fit in with that very strict Christian morality, are buried, ignored. She and her partner get blank stares when they ask about homosexuals and Roma. Even AñA, who returned to Gdansk for 9 years in the 70s-80s, admits that she, her *babcia* (grandmother) and her husband never talked about the Radon strikes, the concentration camps near Gdansk. "There was so much going on, you have no idea ...".

So perhaps the true slogan should be, "Don't forget, Poland". As every society even loosely associated with the Nazis, let alone the Communists, tries to distance itself, truths are buried beneath self-righteousness and theme park-style memorials funded by Steven Spielberg and Roman Polanski. McGregor struggles trying to explain this cultural amnesia, this selective remembering.

As is essential in any work of this nature, McGregor also lets the Poles speak for themselves. She cites conversations with Polish artists, performers, academics, cultural historians, and her hosts (friendly, welcoming and generous wherever she goes). She also includes a representative sample of poetry from radical Poles such as Tadeusz Różewicz, Tadeusz Kantor, and Wisława Szymborski—all men, not out of place in this unquestionably patriarchal culture; yet full of the universal melancholy of oppression, along with a (un?)healthy dose of uniquely Central European absurdism.

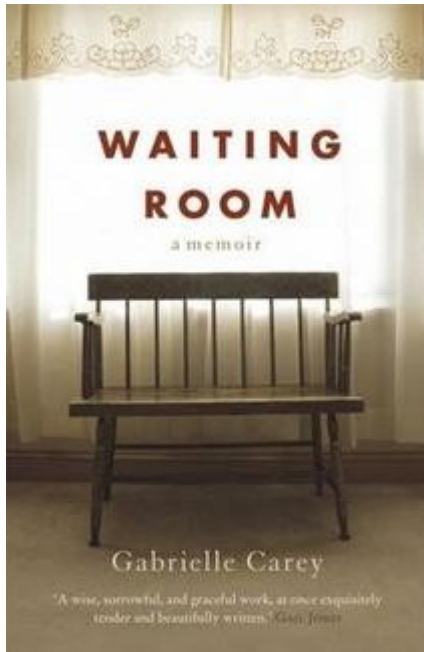
There are a few inaccuracies, the bane of modern publishing with its lack of budget for fact-checking and proof-reading. In a section remarking on Keltic influences (an ancestry proudly claimed by many Slavs), McGregor mentions the 'Sheila-na-gig', more widely known as Sheela-na-gig. Another such mistake is the reference to "Poland's most famous freedom fighter", Tadeusz Kościuszko who, McGregor says, fought in the US Civil War. Since the US Civil War did not begin until 1861, and Kościuszki died in 1817, I assume she refers to the American Revolutionary War, 1775-1783.

Strange Museums is a disturbing catalogue of a difficult—though inspiring—journey during uncertain times. Few, if any, other periods of human history have been so ambiguous; rarely has moral authority been so fragmented. McGregor and her fellow performers try to both convey and comprehend the times through art and expression. Whether or not they succeed is, perhaps, not so important as the sincerity of their effort: Their willingness to reach out to audiences everywhere so that we will not be allowed to forget.

Some Other Destiny?

Gabrielle Carey, *Waiting Room: A Memoir*. Melbourne: Scribe, 2009.

Reviewed by Maryanne Dever



Caught between caring for her ailing mother and attending to her demanding children, Gabrielle Carey wonders in the middle of *Waiting Room* when she will be able to ‘squeeze in a bit of life’ between these duties. Then she is struck by a terrible thought:

...Maybe this *is* life. Waiting rooms, traffic lights, family squabbles. What else did I expect? Something bigger, greater, more meaningful, perhaps? Why was I convinced that I was missing out on something? That there was some other destiny for me out there that was far more structured, far more directional, more ambitious than this dull, day-to-day management of appointments, housework, and student assignments? (p. 124)

Waiting Room is an account of the period in Carey’s life when her mother was diagnosed with a massive brain tumour. As she observes this fiercely independent woman struggle in the face of devastating memory loss and increasing dependence, Carey is struck by how little she really knows of her mother’s life and family history and how little time may now remain to correct this. But *Waiting Room* is more than the story of her mother’s illness; Carey’s urgent desire to know her mother’s life experiences more intimately is woven into a meditation on mortality, on family legacies, on the nature of creativity and on the unfolding meaning of life. This is Carey in mid-life looking around and assessing what it is that makes life, families and writing meaningful when on a day-to-day basis they all can seem to lack, if not purpose exactly, then the satisfying order or shape one often imagined they would assume.

Waiting Room is the latest in a series of works in which Carey turns a critical lens on aspects of her personal life. Her teenage rebellion was famously chronicled in *Puberty Blues* (1979) which she co-authored with Kathy Lette. This was followed by *Just Us* (1984) which traced her relationship with long-term prison inmate, Terry Haley, and *In My Father’s House* (1992), the painful account of her relationship with her father who suicided the day before Carey returned from years of living overseas. In some respects, *Waiting Room* can be read as a sequel to *In My Father’s House* and, if it is a slighter work, it remains a striking one. *In My Father’s House* expressed anger and incomprehension at the loss

of her father in such an untimely fashion and *Waiting Room* similarly captures Carey's anxiety that she may suddenly be deprived of the time she needs to examine – and perhaps even celebrate – the never straight-forward bonds of familial intimacy.

The bonds she traces here are those between mothers and daughters and she brings to this touchy and often awkward terrain a quality of scrutiny that successfully skirts the sentimental. It is the thought that she may soon lose her mother altogether or, at the very least, access to her familiar personality and memories, that troubles Carey as she accompanies a now forgetful and fretful woman on her rounds of increasingly distressing medical appointments. At the same time, Carey's concerns for her mother's failing health and the stories she has never told her daughter about her past are intertwined with her own anxieties about what kind of mother she may be for her own teenage daughter. What are the legacies, she wonders, that are shared by generations of mothers and daughters? She has a lingering sense that her mother's family deprived her of a rightful share in family property which prompts an extended meditation on the complex nature of inheritance, one of the more significant themes explored in *Waiting Room*. Thinking of her growing daughter, Carey reflects:

I knew Brigie wouldn't inherit much from me financially, but I hoped that she might inherit something else. Because inheritance is not just about the final will and testament: what we inherit materially, from our parents and grandparents, is really only a small part of all that we receive, willingly or unwillingly, from our forebears. Inheritance is also about temperament, character, intelligence, habits, dispositions, genetics, artistic inclinations, religious impulses, philosophical leanings, and cultural traditions. (p.158)

While she has enjoyed and even preferred to think of herself as nothing like her own mother, as events unfold Carey is forced to recognize that they might instead be just 'two of a kind...peas in a pod'. The same secrecy and refusal of intimate confession that she knows frustrates her own daughter about her is no different from her mother's refusal to supply even such mundane details as where she had met Carey's father. They are, she realizes

both mute and constantly in fear of being psychologically exposed, of being caught out, of being seen not as we wanted to be seen – as responsible and in control – but for what we really were: naked and needy, like everyone else. (p. 187)

Carey is by turns tormented by the idea that her own daughter may not have inherited very much from her ('I had to admit, I was a little disappointed that I could see nothing of myself in my daughter', p. 159), and relieved to discover – in light of her own adolescence – that Brigie is 'so completely and utterly normal': even if it is a mystery to her that some much could have 'been completely erased in the period of a single generation' (p.158). Interestingly, beyond her passion for clothes and all manner of similarly superficial things, one marker of Brigie's apparent 'normality' is that she shows none of the qualities of contemplation and reflection that Carey associates with the writing life. 'I didn't want my children to experience the driven, internal, intellectual, literary, solitary, individualistic existence that I had led' (p. 160). And this is another important strand to Carey's reflections in *Waiting Room*: the

challenges and disappointments of the writing life. Alongside the doctor's appointments and children's meals Carey keeps returning to a 'To Do' list that contains the note: *Send draft novel to publishers*. She admits that this item, like so many others, is a permanent fixture on an unchanging list of major enterprises that are routinely displaced by infinitely smaller and more pressing daily demands. Her life, as represented here, is reminiscent of Tillie Olsen's famous formulation of the woman writer's existence as 'part-time, part-self' where moments for creative endeavour are sandwiched between children, paid employment and the domestic round. When in the midst of her mother's illness, she receives a pointed request from the publisher to return the advance on her now overdue novel, there ensues a further crisis in her already faltering confidence in her ability to 'produce':

Would I ever be able to finish a book again? I wondered if I really knew anything at all about writing, whether I was just having myself on, whether my few friends and (fewer) fans were just humouring me. Maybe I needed to go out and buy one of those books I'd seen in the self-development section of the local library. *How to Write a Novel in Weekends*, for example, or *Unleash the Novelist Within*. Or perhaps I should have been a nurse, like my mother. (p.106)

Clearly *Waiting Room* represents the resolution to this crisis for it is the work that ultimately emerges from that period rather than the stalled novel. And it is in many ways a worthy resolution: Carey has created a simple and moving tribute to the complexity of family relationships, to the frustrations and mystery surrounding small family secrets and to the always tortured realms of mother-daughter love. If, in the end, the revelations about her mother's past are somewhat anti-climactic, the journey towards them is not.

Maryanne Dever is an Associate Professor in the Centre for Women's Studies & Gender Research at Monash University and a co-author of *The Intimate Archive: Journeys Through Private Papers* (2009).

The University of Queensland Image Attribution

The high resolution image of this work is supplied to Carole Ferrier for the purpose of reproduction as the cover of the Australian Women's Book Review, an online journal edited by Carole Ferrier, Professor of English and Women's Studies at the School of English, Media Studies and Art History at The University of Queensland. Permission has been granted from the artist for this purpose.



Amanda Marburg

Born 1976 Melbourne, Victoria. Lives and works in Melbourne, Victoria.

Mouth to the tattoo, he sucked once more 2007

oil on linen

122.0 x 168.0 cm

Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2008.

Reproduced by permission of the artist and Rex Irwin Gallery, Sydney.

Photo: Carl Warner

Guillaume Lecasble's surrealist tale *Lobster* (2005) begins on the *Titanic* with the sexual awakening of the novel's heroine Angelina by an amorous lobster. Separated by tragic events that occur in the wake of the sinking of the *Titanic*, Angelina spends most of the novel in an opium-induced haze in search of her crustacean lover and the elusive orgasm. A story of star-crossed love, the tale ends with Angelina throwing herself in desperation into the Seine. Marburg's painting, *Mouth to the tattoo, he sucked once more*, from her *Lobster* series, draws directly from the novel's concluding lines.

Amanda Marburg's practice is characterised by the metamorphosis of one thing into another. The scene is first modelled in plasticine. This diorama is then photographed in low, evocative light before being re-incarnated as a large oil painting. Marburg's deft handling of paint delivers a scent and a taste to this visceral scene. Beneath the smooth, flat surfaces of the final painting lurks the solidity and presence of their sculptural origins.

Lisa Slade adapted from catalogue essay in Helmrich, M., (ed.) *NEW: Selected recent acquisitions 2007–2008*, The University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane, 2008.