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Contents

3. **Righting the Neoliberal Ecological Debt**

Ariel Salleh, ed. *Eco-Sufficiency & Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology*

London: Pluto Press and North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2009.

Reviewed by Bonnie Kime Scott

5. **Marginalised Realities: The Silenced Truths of Mothering**

Marie Porter and Julie Kelso, eds. *Theorising and Representing Maternal Realities*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.

Reviewed by Brooke-Lyn Down

7. **Criminal Mothers**

Lucy Sussex. *Women Writers and Detectives in Nineteenth-Century Crime Fiction: The Mothers of the Mystery Genre*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Reviewed by Kate Watson

9. **A Work in Nine Lives**

Jana Wendt. *Nice Work*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010.

Reviewed by Chloë Callistemon

11. **Critiquing 'Consumer' Feminism**

Nina Power. *One Dimensional Woman*. Winchester: Zero Books, 2009.

Natasha Walter. *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*. London: Virago Press, 2010.

Reviewed by Luna Dolezal

14. **Diasporic Greeks**

Eleni Frangouli-Nickas. *Athina and her Daughters: A Memoir of Two Worlds*. Writing the Greek Diaspora Series. Melbourne: Owl Publishing, 2009.

Reviewed by Jena Woodhouse

16. **Crimes of Honour**

Jasvinder Sanghera. *Daughters of Shame*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2009.

Reviewed by Cheryl Jorgensen

18. **Pilgrims' Progress**

Cate Kennedy. *The World Beneath*. Scribe Publications: Carlton North, 2009.

Reviewed by Margaret Saunders

20. **The Sky-Blue Stick of Poetry Goes Travelling**

Michele Leggott. *Mirabile Dictu*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009.

Reviewed by Susan Ash

24. **Changing the World through... Chick-lit?**

Anita Heiss. *Manhattan Dreaming*. Sydney: Bantam, 2010.

Reviewed by Alice Richard

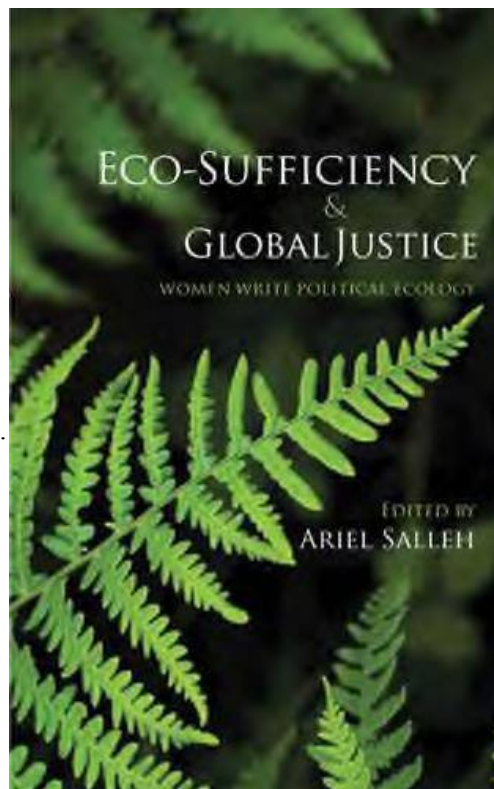
27. **Cover Artist: Lisa Adams**

Righting the Neoliberal Ecological Debt

Ariel Salleh, ed. *Eco-Sufficiency & Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology*
London: Pluto Press and North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2009.

Reviewed by Bonnie Kime Scott

Women of the Global South assume the leading role in this economically-focussed, nationally diverse ecofeminist collection, which both assesses the current nature/culture imbalance and offers significant reconstructive thinking. For this collaboration, Salleh has drawn together a set of contributors from meetings in the last few years, including the symposium on Ecological Feminist Economics at the Ninth Biennial Conference of the International Society for Ecological Economics in New Delhi, held in 2006. Global locations featured in case studies include Nigeria, India, Ecuador, Brazil, the Marshall Islands, Canada, and Australia. The book joins other studies of environmental justice pioneered by Vandana Shiva, including Rachel Stein's 2004 collection *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice*. Many of the contributors (such as Peggy Antrobus, Ewa Charkiewicz, Susan Hawthorne, Mary Mellor, Sabine O'Hara, and Salleh herself) have their own book-length studies in related global, economic, and ecofeminist fields. Gender emerges as an important concept, inflecting not just such obvious things as histories of wage labour, but even climate change, and hence offers a key to achieving sustainability.



With the conceptual rethinking that goes into the various chapters of this book comes a new vocabulary, including such terms as embodied debt, meta-industrial labour, eco-sufficiency, toxic immiseration, and metabolic value. Indeed, a glossary would have been a welcome element for the book since the terms are both challenging in their newness and promising in their utility. One of the most important resources for the bottom-up thinking called for in this collection is the 'meta-industrial class', comprised among others of household caregivers, indigenous labourers, and peasants, all of whom have been denied authority in Neoliberal economic thinking. Indeed they embody the debt of the industrial North. In places both academic and activist in tone, this volume bears witness to the reshaping of disciplines such as economics and political science. It offers substantial critique of Marxist doctrines, appropriation of Foucault, and engagement with influential environmental economists such as Herman Daly in order to respond to the current crisis of the environment through thinking more inclusive of cultural 'others', including women.

The sixteen chapters fall, sometimes rather roughly, into five sections, treating 'Histories', 'Matter', 'Governance', 'Energy', and 'Movement'. The content of the chapters varies, offering a balance of history, a mild amount of theory, and localised cases of environmental degradation and activism. The authors also make a sound contribution to ongoing rethinking of human relations with the environment. I can imagine using this as a text in undergraduate courses in Women's Studies, Political Science, or Economics, and would hope that it could find some presence among Business students who have demonstrated considerable enterprise, though with Neoliberal tendencies, on the environmental front.

While I cannot do justice to each and every chapter, samples from each of these sections will provide some idea of what the volume has to offer. Themes that emerge from the historical section include the various ways that women's labour, including the work of reproduction, have been manipulated by patriarchy over

time and geography, ranging from witch hunts, to slave labour, both North and South. Silvia Federici's 'The Devaluation of Women's Labour' ends with the upbeat observation that North American slave women developed a politics of self-reliance that continues to make its contribution to environmental justice. Hawthorne's 'The Diversity Matrix: Relationship and Complexity' supplies the sense of relationship she finds lacking in neoclassical economics, calling attention to the different, contextually rich, knowledge system of Indigenous Australians, a sense of responsibility that spans generations and species and makes responsibility rather than property paramount.

'Matter' takes up issues of pure water and toxic waste, situating each of its chapters in a local situation of women's labour, their embodied consequences, and their potential contribution to policy. Nalini Nayak follows the fortunes of women in Indian fisheries, as women are excluded from their normal, productive local work preparing the nets, and processing and selling the catch, with the introduction of modern, mechanised, large-scale operations that also deplete the supply of fish for subsistence. Zohl dé Ishtar recounts the long history of displacements and contamination of the natives of the Marshall Islands as part of the nuclear testing carried out by the U.S. military. Test results included the destruction of cultural as well as natural structures, and proved that monstrous birth defects were part of the fallout.

Institutional measurements come in for scrutiny in the 'Governance' section. Gigi Francisco and Peggy Antrobus point out that these include the Millennium Development Goals of the World Trade Organization, which sustain religious and economic fundamentalisms, neglecting such important measurements for women as poverty, HIV/AIDS, and access to abortion. Marilyn Waring and Sabine O'Hara consider other indexes. Waring finds the UN system of National Accounts neglectful of women's household work. The Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare offers greater sensitivity to domestic work, and drops 'growth' as its orientation. Nova Scotia's Genuine Progress Index is most promising. Similarly, O'Hara would replace GDP (Gross Domestic Production) with indicators of sustaining functions.

'Energy' offers perhaps the most provocative section, with Ana Isla questioning such Neoliberal ideas as the carbon credits endorsed in the Kyoto Protocol as yet another form of colonising, directed at the forests of the global South. Meike Spitzner argues that male-staffed institutions are the dominant consumers of energy, leading to global warming and calls for gender disaggregation in data collection. 'The Abuja Declaration', the product of Nigerian women's resistance to Shell Oil's polluting practice of gas flaring, as presented by Leigh Brownhill and Terisa E. Turner, also makes a case for the social relations of subsistence.

Basic changes to ecological economy emerge in the final 'Movement' section. Given the recent global monetary crisis, Mary Mellor's proposal of a locally-based economy based on needs, rather than the investment of money in money, has resonance. Leo Podlashuc focuses upon the transnational organisation SDI (Shack/slum Dwellers International) as an alternative communal strategy for accumulation that creates a locus of respect for the women who are the key players in this form of micro-credit. In closing her collection, Salleh attempts to induce the global North to consider seriously the patterns of environmental sustainability theorised in the global South. Offering 'reproductivity' in the place of various Neoliberal measures of 'productivity' and agendas for 'development', she holds up the model of regenerative eco-sufficiency, as practiced daily by the economic 'others', her meta-industrial class of home workers, indigenous, and peasant peoples. It is a dialogue that could move toward critical rebalancing of power and priorities.

Bonnie Kime Scott was Professor and Chair of the Department of Women's Studies at San Diego State University and George Watson Fellow at the University of Queensland in 2009. She is in the process of finishing a book length study of Virginia Woolf's uses of nature and teaches a course on women and the environment.

Marginalised Realities: The Silenced Truths of Mothering

Marie Porter and Julie Kelso, eds. *Theorising and Representing Maternal Realities*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.

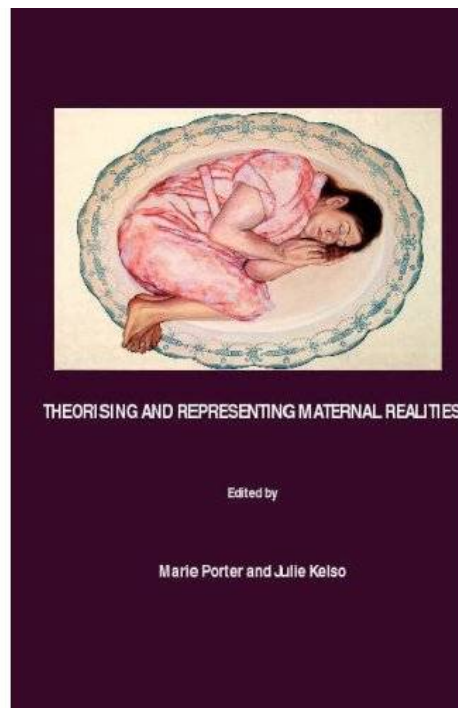
Reviewed by Brooke-Lyn Down

Despite being the world's oldest profession, motherhood has only recently experienced a quiet expansion of scholarship in the field. Although they are not the first to explore maternity within an academic context, the editors of *Theorising and Representing Maternal Realities*, Marie Porter and Julie Kelso, have collected a number of unique essays that position motherhood within the reality of the lived experience, thereby seeking to disentangle it from the patriarchal restraints that had previously defined it. Contemporary, honest, and significant in its exploration of contentious issues, this book shouts what has historically been silenced.

Although I am not a mother myself, the insights and the glaring omissions in previous academic work on motherhood that are highlighted in the introduction of this book seem obvious when they are presented. As a member of the 'I'm just not ready yet' Gen Y, the notion of the 1950s caricature of the perfect wife and mother seems comical and outdated, but as Porter and Kelso have clearly outlined, for the most part, the expectations still exist - they have just been packaged differently. Comparisons to Florence Henderson (who played the picture-perfect housewife Carol Brady in the 1970s family comedy *The Brady Bunch*) receive blank stares from the latest generation of mothers, but the notion of the mother as a martyr, perfect and self-sacrificing, is still all too familiar.

For the most part, this perpetuation of a redundant concept of what it is to mother stems from the fact that motherhood and motherwork are still bound by an archaic and useless definition constructed by men who counted themselves as experts in the field. What this book does is kick-start the process whereby mothers, those women who are actually experiencing mothering, are given the power to reclaim their own reality. As societies progressively change their views concerning appropriate gender roles and expectations, both in the ideological sense and through changes to accepted practices and attitudes, it can be expected that the role of the mother will alter too, so the publication of a work such as this is of vital importance. The maternal experience needs to be freed from the Symbolic framework, if for no other reason than to benefit those women who practise mothering, who up until now have voluntarily isolated themselves in silence, fearful of judgment and being given the dreaded label 'Bad Mother' (a label that is explored deeply within this book).

The idea of 'postmodern procreation' is the first subject to be delved into - and is perfectly positioned as the logical first chapter, as it is often assumed that motherhood begins at conception. What Rhonda Shaw has done, however, is shift the experience of maternal subjectivity, and focus on women's accounts of their participation in the process of donating reproductive material and services. Understandably, the debate surrounding ovarian egg donation, surrogate pregnancy arrangements, and other reproductive technology is shrouded in controversy with a number of stakeholders contributing their personal views. Shaw expertly discusses the diversity of issues that have been considered when it comes to human reproductive freedoms and presents a number of ideas that have, generally speaking, rarely been openly discussed.



Chapter two is of particular interest as it explores the repositioning of breast-feeding from maternal to sexual act. Similarly to Shaw's achievement with the first chapter, Fiona Giles challenges maternal subjectivity, but in a very different way. Breast-feeding has always been a contentious issue in terms of whether or not its presence in public is acceptable and at what age weaning should take place. The act of breast-feeding, however, has always been legitimated because of the nutritional benefit and the connection it strengthens between mother and child. By exploring its potential as an erotic act, Giles challenges accepted breast-feeding assumptions.

One of the greatest strengths of this collection is its frank depiction of realities that are undeniable but have been marginalised. The good mother/bad mother dichotomy is one that still haunts mothers today and has only begun to be freely discussed in recent times. Eva's story highlights this. Undoubtedly, hers is not an isolated experience: she is a mother who is forced not only to come to terms with a terrible tragedy in her family, but also the guilt and blame that societal expectations dictate she should accept. It is evident that mothers are suffering for no reason other than that outdated societal prejudices say they should. In addition to this, Eva's experiences, as well as others discussed in subsequent chapters, introduce the recurring theme of how a mother's circumstances drastically affect the way in which she is able to mother: for the most part, however, these factors are largely ignored, often to the detriment of the mother. Too often, when a mother is seen to struggle, she is seen as being personally lacking; her circumstances are rarely acknowledged.

Because, as I said, I am reading these essays from the perspective of someone who has never had children, I found some of the issues discussed were quite confronting, particularly those raised in Anne Morris' chapter 'Monstrous Mothers and Fearless Fathers: The Dynamics of Maternal Alienation Go Public.' Because mothers have unreasonable demands placed on them that society has deemed justifiable, fathers are positioned so they have the power to manipulate and persuade not only their own children, but the community at large, leading to unreasonable maternal alienation. The only reason these seeds of doubt can be planted is because mothers are still devalued and judged against staggeringly high standards. Anything less than perfection means that they have failed and are unfit mothers. The only way to combat this problem is to begin a discussion to debunk the myths and misconceptions that perpetuate the unfair good mother/bad mother dichotomy, and this is exactly what Morris has done.

Chapter nine, 'Musical Mothers: Exploring the 'Realities' of Conducting and Mothering on the Orchestral Podium', is another highly valuable chapter for its exploration of a woman struggling to consolidate her opposing realities. While it focuses narrowly on women conductors and their personal attempts to balance the subjectivities of both mother and conductor, there are clear parallels that can be drawn with any mother who is not only coming to terms with her role as matriarch but also trying to assert her independence in a profession dominated by men. The struggle for equality in the workplace is not one with which women are unfamiliar, but, as this chapter stresses, these pressures are only exacerbated for those women who are further marginalised and, too often, ignored because they are mothers.

The struggles that are discussed in *Theorising and Representing Maternal Realities* are not unique experiences; they have simply been silenced. By voicing their realities the women who have contributed to this book are giving other women who are experiencing motherhood the ability to accept their own reality and to remove themselves from a self-imposed isolation that only serves to alienate and devalue the work they are doing. When a mother truly acknowledges her lived reality, she can be accepted as mother, not other.

Brooke-Lyn Down is studying at The University of Queensland and is in her final semester of a Bachelor of Journalism/Bachelor of Arts dual degree. She has an ongoing interest in feminist studies with particular focus on motherhood and maternal scholarship.

Criminal Mothers

Lucy Sussex. *Women Writers and Detectives in Nineteenth-Century Crime Fiction: The Mothers of the Mystery Genre*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Reviewed by Kate Watson

As part of the Palgrave Macmillan Crime Files series, Lucy Sussex's book significantly addresses a gap in existing crime and detective fiction scholarship. While Sussex has already written extensively on many of the authors and themes included and considered in her newest book, this text accessibly and informatively brings them together.

There were many female hands holding writing implements during the infancy and formative years of crime and detective fiction. Men (such as Edgar Allan Poe, Wilkie Collins, and Arthur Conan Doyle) have long been perceived as the progenitors of this form, but women have been present in criminous discourse from the beginning. In addition to this, women were significantly adding to the corpus of crime and detective fiction as we now know it and are thus an essential (but often neglected) part of this construction. The aim is to look for and to find the woman - Sussex writes, 'cherchez les femmes' (taken from Alexandre Dumas' 1854-7 novel *Les Mohicans de Paris*) - and she definitely achieves it.

Critical texts have emerged which focus on one writer and their impact upon countries and regions, such as Lois Davis Vine's edited *Poe Abroad: Influence, Reputation, Affinities* (1999). In this study, Edgar Allan Poe's literary diaspora reaches twenty-one countries and regions including Estonia, Scandinavia, China, and India but, curiously, not Australia. The key word in this context is 'reputation': perhaps had nineteenth-century women writers been accorded the same status as male authors such as Poe - or even been acknowledged - then similar texts detailing women's international influence might have materialised. It was not until 2010 that Sussex filled the previously unmarked space with her book, which specifically looks at the many women writing criminographically, and includes those in Australia.

In more recent times there has not been the need for such reconceptualisation; there has been a strong literary presence of female crime and detective writers: the Golden Age of crime fiction (1920-1940) has primarily been associated with women such as Agatha Christie, Josephine Tey, Margery Allingham, Ngaio Marsh, and Dorothy L. Sayers. Other well-known contemporary female writers include (but are not limited to) P. D. James, Sara Paretsky, Patricia Cornwell, Val McDermid, and Mo Hayder. In comparison with this well-known modern feminine proliferation, the women who were writing at the inception of the crime genre were not or could not be recognized and accredited as such. This non-acknowledgement to some extent extends to present-day critical work on crime writing.

Work by women on women crime and detective writers and epochs does exist, although coverage varies. Critical attention has predominantly been on Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Anna Katharine Green, and, more recently, Metta Victoria Fuller Victor. In modern times, however, writing on individual authors has emerged; among others Alison Jaquet's 'Domesticating the Art of Detection: Ellen Wood's Johnny Ludlow Series' (2007) and Rita Bode's 'A Case for the Re-covered Writer: Harriet Prescott Spofford's Early Contributions to Detective Fiction' (2008) among others. Sussex and Stephen Knight have both written profusely on individual authors and the genre at this period.

Sussex's *Women Writers and Detectives* is comprehensive, setting up the beginnings of crime fiction, and then moving on to author-devoted chapters. These chapters discuss the biographical details and writing/s of authors such as Mrs Radcliffe, Caroline Clive, Frances Trollope and Catherine Crowe (UK), Mary Helena Fortune and Ellen Davitt (Australia), Metta Victoria Fuller Victor ('Seeley Regester', US), and Harriet Prescott Spofford (US), among others. Also included are the lesser-known criminous works by more well-known authors, such as Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood and Mary Elizabeth Braddon (UK).

Additionally, the text has a foreword by Val McDermid and interpolates many illustrations, including

portraits, scenes from narratives, title pages, police records, and caricatures. There is also a useful timeline of early true crime and its fictions. Sussex's book is an interesting read and a resourceful index for any crime/detective fiction and nineteenth-century scholar; it rightfully positions the mothers of the genre into the crime fiction canon.

Kate Watson is a Postgraduate Tutor in the School of English, Communication and Philosophy at Cardiff University in Wales.

A Work in Nine Lives

Jana Wendt. *Nice Work*. Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 2010.

Reviewed by Chloë Callistemon

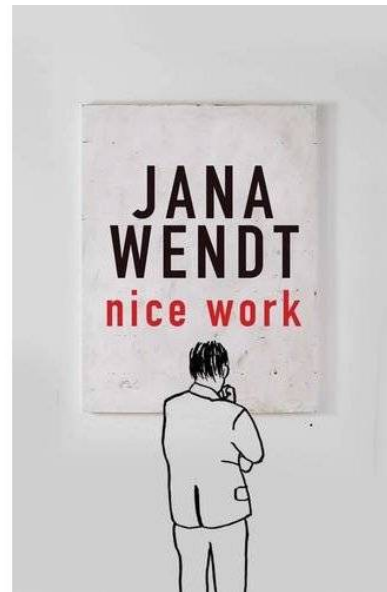
Four years after her exit from a television career spanning almost thirty, Jana Wendt, perhaps Australia's most well-known and respected female interviewer and presenter turns her sights on some of Australia's less well-known faces to explore the idea of profession as a life's passion in her second book, *Nice Work*. While Wendt's first book, *A Matter of Principle* (2007), looked at a range of high-profile Australians over a range of professions, *Nice Work* focuses on those with a passion for what they do, regardless of recognition.

Nice Work presents, with varying degrees of scrutiny, nine professions and the people who live their lives through them: a flamboyant priest is demoted to a smaller parish; an injury-beset boxer attempts a comeback; a weather observer mans his post for the night; a forensic anthropologist and her colleagues begin the identification process on the buried remains of a massacre in East Timor; the CEO of a cruise company fights a past and present scandal; a Foley artist creates sound effects for films in her junkyard studio; a sculptor sculpts Sir Donald Bradman and examines his life; an acrobat bounces into his first Circus Oz performance; volunteers at Melbourne's Jewish Holocaust Centre attempt to relate some of the reality of their unimaginable experiences to the people who walk through their doors.

Nice Work is an engagingly written, but ultimately disjointed, look into nine professions, and, more importantly, the nine interactions Wendt has had with the people living them. That Wendt is largely silent about her subjective experiences with these people does not negate the obvious effect of her presence in their lives. Wendt's presence is indicated more by her subjects' actions and words than by much explicitly subjective exposition on her part, and the absence is somewhat disconcerting. As someone who has had their passion as their profession, Wendt's own views in relation to the subject would be illuminating. Unfortunately, except for a few words in passing, they are missing. What are evident, however, are rhetorical elements, whether deliberate or not, that reveal to some extent (through the lengths of the chapters and the use of language) Wendt's feelings towards the various people and cases.

There is immense variation in the size and treatment of each profession. In the vast scope of professions worldwide, and even in Australia, nine is not a large number. And at a little over 200 pages, *Nice Work* is not a large book. The result is an uneasy balance between a relatively broad scope of professions, and an obvious interest in particular cases. Without starting to dwell too much on numbers, the weather observer's section is a fifth the size of the forensic anthropologist's, and the rest vary in size in between these two. The reason seems clear: the two largest sections - on the forensic anthropologist and the CEO - describe people embroiled in complicated affairs that are part of the Australian public consciousness. And while they are, in themselves, interesting to read, the stories displace the professions and even the people, leaving the apparent intention of the book to look at passion as profession far behind.

One of the most engaging chapters is that on the Foley artist. It is one of the shortest, but balances insight into the artist herself with details of her work and some back-story. The brief, heightened, but to-the-point style of the chapter highlights Wendt's writing at its most entertaining:



The Foley queen sits on the stool in her studio, her blazing brown eyes nearly as big as the screen in front of her. She could be a traveller whose gaze is locked to the front of a train or maybe a housewife addicted to daytime soap operas. She follows the onscreen nurse in pulling on a pair of rubber gloves (161).

These kinds of passages are wonderful for light entertainment and general curiosity, but do little to examine passion for work in depth. On the other end of the scale, the chapter on the forensic anthropologist is one of the most fascinating longer sections. However, this is largely because the particular case being undertaken by the forensic anthropologist is so fascinating, and could easily warrant a whole book to itself. In fact, many of the sections feel like brief trailers of someone's life: not rich enough to satisfy in themselves, nor matter-of-fact or various enough to form a compendium. To demonstrate a life's passion in work, the subject is likely to be either at the top of their profession or at the end of their life: either simply brings too much history to cover. Most of these kinds of people, and certainly each one of the nine people and their co-workers examined in *Nice Work*, could fill a whole book on their own.

While Jana Wendt has not had regular airtime since 2006, I still remember very well the pleasure of watching her draw her interviewees out, sometimes to extraordinary levels of disclosure. The results of this skill are evident in *Nice Work* in moments of surprising candidness, but the process of getting to them is unseen, and Jana Wendt as a person and a professional is barely evident in her writing. There is no direct address to the obvious fact that Wendt is one of these people who consider their work as a 'critical defining endeavour, a barometer of true worth, into which one invests every last drop of ability and hope' (ix), only the implication of it. So while Wendt's passion for other people's passion is clear, her own story is absent, and in being so, the core quest to understand why some people need a life's work is lost, and *Nice Work* becomes a fragmented collection of moments.

Chloë Callistemon is currently completing a Master of Arts at The University of Queensland exploring her fascination with the intersecting borders between land, identity, film, poetry, and other forms of writing.

Critiquing 'Consumer' Feminism

Nina Power. *One Dimensional Woman*. Winchester: Zero Books, 2009.

Natasha Walter. *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*. London: Virago Press, 2010.

Reviewed by Luna Dolezal

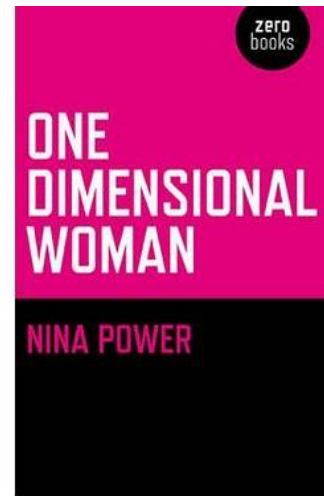
The recently published *One Dimensional Woman* by Nina Power and *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* by Natasha Walter are timely books which explore the consequences of an unfortunate marriage between consumer capitalism and feminism, where feminist emancipation has, in recent years, been equated with having the 'freedom' to acquire certain goods and the 'choice' to engage in certain cultural and commercial practices. Following Ariel Levy's 2007 *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, which thematised a trend towards 'raunch culture' and an unfettered objectification of women in mainstream Western culture, both Nina Power and Natasha

Walter put into question the assumption that through the alleged freedom to engage in hyper-sexualisation and hyper-femininity we are finally 'liberated'. They ask us if we are really to believe that women who own expensive designer clothes, undergo elective cosmetic surgery, take pole dancing exercise classes, enjoy porn, get Botox and Brazilians are 'empowered', and represent the supposed culmination of more than two hundred years of feminist struggles. They give insightful analyses of the current attitudes towards women, examining issues ranging across pornography, politics, consumerism, Sarah Palin, work, childhood, and scientific discourse, among others.

One Dimensional Woman and *Living Dolls* explore three central concerns: first, how the feminist rhetoric of empowerment, opportunity, and choice has been co-opted by many decidedly anti-feminist commercial groups who have a vested interest in objectifying and selling women's bodies; second, how women's subjective constitution and fulfilment is compromised by a constant and obsessive concern over body capital, that is, an obsessive concern with accruing the right type of body features - sexy, young, fashionable - in order to manifest a particular Sex-and-the-City sort of destiny; and third, how an essentialism around the categories 'woman' and 'girl' has invaded mainstream culture in recent times leading to an absurd determinism regarding sex differences. Through these discussions, among others, both books offer an important critique of 'consumer feminism' and current ideologies about women.

Nina Power's *One Dimensional Woman* is an energetic and angry book through which Power makes evident her contempt for 'today's positive, up-beat feminists' (1) which she argues have abandoned any serious or systematic political thought and offer a feminism about as 'radical as a diamanté phone cover', as she puts it (30). The book takes its title from Herbert Marcuse's 1964 book *One Dimensional Man*, in which Marcuse describes how the modern subject of capitalism labours under the illusory freedoms of consumerism and democracy. *One Dimensional Woman* argues that a similar fate has befallen women today; they are blinded by the rhetoric of consumerism and contemporary feminism and, hence, cannot genuinely thematise issues around work, sex, and politics: 'What looks like emancipation is nothing but a tightening of the shackles' (2).

Power argues that the discourse of the workplace has pervaded every sphere of life and that the model of contemporary womanhood is that of a woman who engages in an endless 'self commodification' (33), trying to make her body like an advert for herself. As a walking CV, the body then becomes the 'prime locus' for understanding how the logic of employment marks every aspect of our behaviour and comportment; in this way, one's 'looks, manners and appearance are all' (23). Power wonders whether it is useful to employ the



idea of objectification when discussing this phenomenon, as it is not evident that there is a still subjective interiority to be found when talking of women's bodies which are dominated so thoroughly by the logic of capitalism and economics: 'Objectification implies that there is something left over in the subject that resists such a capture... but it's not clear that contemporary work allows anyone to have an inner life in the way we might once have understood it' (26). Power's discussion of the forms of domination at play in consumer capitalism reaches a similar conclusion to Foucault's discussion of biopower, where the logic of employment and productivity controls the means by which we construct our personal states and everyday lives, down to the smallest details. In this way, the 'liberation' offered to women is already overwritten by the goals of consumer capitalism, and freedom becomes about as meaningful as the desire to 'buy more things' (27).

Natasha Walter's *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* starts from a similar premise. Admitting that she was 'entirely wrong' (8) in her earlier book *The New Feminism* (Virago, 1999), in which she argued that feminists could cease to be concerned with the private sphere - bodies, sex, appearance - and concentrate their efforts on achieving political, social, and financial equality, *Living Dolls* argues that it is precisely in the private sphere that the current hypersexual culture tries to convince women of their alleged 'growing freedom and power' (5). Through equating personal and social success with physical and sexual attractiveness, engaging in practices such as pole dancing, glamour modelling, lap dancing, and pornography are supposed to offer empowerment. Where Power offers theory and perhaps caricatured examples to support her often strong and sometimes polemic claims, Walter fleshes out this theory with the narratives of actual people she has interviewed, excerpts from websites and media stories, and her own experience as a mother and feminist. It is a compelling read which provides insight into the lives and minds of actual women negotiating the confusing demands of contemporary society.

Indeed, *Living Dolls* demonstrates that the world that young girls are growing up in today in the Anglo-American West is vastly different from that of the 1970s and 1980s. The book is divided into two main sections which explore, first, the renewal of a sexism based on objectification of women's bodies and, second, a renewed fervour for a discourse of biological determinism which happily concretises binary concepts surrounding male and female, masculinity and femininity, and thereby reinforces traditional gender roles.

Like Power's, Walter's discussion centres around a critique of the discourse of 'freedom' and 'liberation' in consumer feminism. In one of many exemplary references, she cites the website for Pole Dancing Hen Weekends that promises: 'Pole dancing classes are all about freeing yourself from the restrictions imposed on you in your everyday life and empowering yourself' (5). This rhetoric of freedom and empowerment equated with the realm of sexual objectification, she argues, 'is having a real effect on the ambitions of young women' (6). Indeed, the young women Walter speaks to are, for the most part, utterly pre-occupied with appearance, and in particular with a hypersexualised appearance that conforms to the standard of soft porn: 'a tanned, waxed young girl with large breasts ready to strip and pole dance' (37). Emulating this sort of girl and winning the admiration of others become real ambitions for young women, although as Walter sensibly argues, they 'reduce rather than increase women's freedom... this culture creates smoke and mirrors that prevent many people from seeing just how limiting such so-called choices can be' (37). Through her interviews with sex workers, lap dancers, schoolgirls, and aspiring glamour models, Walter reveals that living these choices reinforces old gender divisions and seems to lead to a false sense of empowerment; as Ellie remarks of her job as a lap dancer: 'The men in there are respectable, they are in suits, they have bank accounts; the women are not respectable, they are naked, they have debts' (49).

In the second section, entitled 'The New Determinism', Walter discusses the pseudo-scientific discourse regarding the biological necessity of certain gender attributes that pervades mainstream culture. She examines the media stories and the empirical studies that claim a biological or genetic necessity for traditional gender ideas. She uncovers the selective reporting in the media that reinforces the idea that men and women are congenitally endowed with a certain set of gender-specific skills and concerns; for every study that makes claims about some sort of biological essentialism, Walter finds at least one other that

debunks that claim. For example, mathematical ability is deemed to be a male attribute, but in tests where women are encouraged to think that they will perform as well as men, they do. In addition, she points to an inherent flaw in empirical analyses such as these, in which ‘much of the so-called research on this subject is not actually testing innate differences, because it fails to screen out the way we try, maybe without even consciously knowing we are doing so, to conform to social norms’ (172).

Both Power and Walter share unease and concern about the conditions that capitalism has set out for women in the name of freedom or feminism. These books are a call to arms for contemporary women to rethink what it means to achieve equality and to be empowered. Read together they provide a compelling story about how feminism has been led astray by consumer capitalism and they reveal an unsatisfying picture of contemporary womanhood. However, whereas Power’s book opens with the question, ‘Where have all the interesting women gone?’ (1), and offers a particularly contemptuous critique of certain aspects of modern-day womanhood - the symptoms of which she sees as things like chocolate, Playboy bunny pendants, bikini waxes, etc. - Walter offers a more balanced picture, in which the voices of actual women are heard, women who are struggling to live within and understand the conflicting demands of modern life.

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Diasporic Greeks

Eleni Frangouli-Nickas. *Athina and her Daughters: A Memoir of Two Worlds*. Writing the Greek Diaspora Series. Melbourne: Owl Publishing, 2009.

Reviewed by Jena Woodhouse

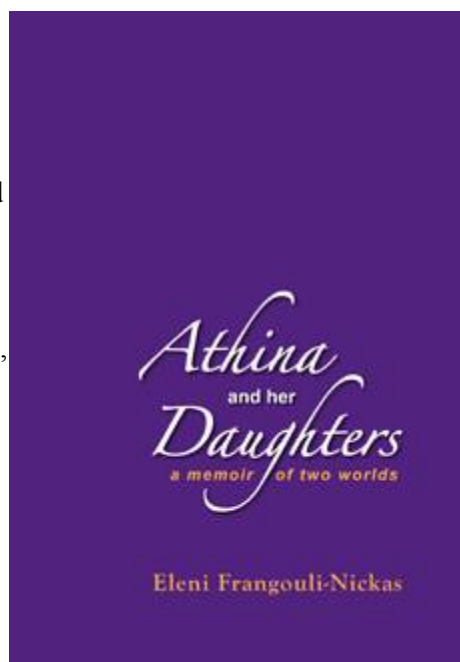
To describe the lives of many rural Greek women of Athina Frangouli's generation as inexorably arduous and precarious would not be an overstatement. In reconstructing the circumstances and conditions of her mother's life, Eleni Frangouli-Nickas allows the facts, insofar as she has been able to ascertain them, to speak for themselves. By giving a voice to countless women whose lives were similarly shaped and marked by the imperatives of time, place, culture, and the upheavals of war and civil war, displacement and rapid social change, the narrative acquires a resonance that echoes with the unspoken and untold experiences of many lives. The resulting memoir is engrossing and intensely affecting.

The life of Eleni's mother, Athina Frangouli, spanned the years 1910–1993, witnessing the turbulent years of Greece's transformation to a modern state and the concomitant social changes that had an unprecedented impact on the lives of women. For Athina's generation, however, the changes made little difference to village attitudes and mores. It was three of her daughters who responded to the lure of new opportunities and migrated to Australia in search of a life that would offer them more than the traditional rural woman's lot: in particular, education and remunerative employment.

It is from the perspective of a life lived largely in the otherland that Eleni looks back on her origins and pieces together the account of her mother's life. The result is a study in contrasts, in which Eleni is seeking to reconnect the filaments of her own life. For emigrants, the other life, the road not taken, seems to persist as a parallel existence at a conscious or subliminal level; and when the separation is from mother as well as motherland, it could scarcely be otherwise. So *Athina and her Daughters* may be seen in this context as a reconciliation between the actual and the imagined: a means of achieving inner coherence for the author.

Reading between the plainly written lines, the pain inherent in the situation of a mother of Athina's provenance and generation living in a different country, culture, and linguistic environment from several of her daughters derives not only from the mutual sense of loss, but also at times from feelings of abandonment on both sides, and the author's acknowledged pangs of guilt at not being able to be with her mother to provide support in her declining years. *Athina and her Daughters* is a story of lives rendered extraordinary by the times and events that defined them and dictated the terms of survival. Commenting on her narrative methodology in the Prologue, the author explains: 'I have composed this memoir, which spans almost all of the twentieth century, in a polyphonic way, with each of the six women - like characters in a play - relating a personal snapshot of particular events, while a central narrator provides the unifying connection.' This may have elements in common with women's 'braided' narratives of the Japanese Heian period.

In recounting one Greek family's diaspora, which may stand as a microcosm for the experience of their entire country, the author has devised a structural correlative of the phenomenon she is narrating, in which the mother is the unifying element and core of the story, and, in a sense, synonymous with Greece, or that part of it with which the sisters most closely identify. For Eleni and her sisters, the homeland is localised to their Thessalian childhood village of Sikourio, and Larissa, the provincial capital. Home is where their mother is, and where they live. Athens, where their cousins live, is like another country, a seemingly less accessible one



than distant Melbourne, especially in the years of austerity that follow the Second World War and the Greek Civil War.

Recent years have seen research into the phenomenon of chain migration from countries including Greece and Italy, whereby those who migrate first prepare the way for others to follow, so that sometimes virtually the entire population of an impoverished village would relocate to Australia or other favoured destinations, such as the United States, New Zealand and Canada. In the case of young single women migrating alone, as two of Eleni's sisters did before her, the challenge was further complicated by the fact that, if they had no immediate family in Australia, they were required to be affianced to an Australian resident (a requirement that survives to the present day in permitting the entry of prospective spouses, who are frequently from countries of Eastern Europe or parts of East Asia). However, in the case of young Greek women, the prospective bridegroom was invariably a Greek who had migrated earlier, and the betrothal was brokered by a matchmaker or member of the community from which both parties had usually come. Traditionally, the bride's family was also expected to provide a dowry.

Eleni's sister Vasiliki (Vicky) was the first to take the momentous step of migrating alone to Australia in 1962, having persuaded a neighbour's son who had preceded her to Melbourne to act as her fiancé for bureaucratic purposes, with no further obligation once she arrived. To make this journey possible, Vasiliki's father had to sell the family home in the village to pay the fare. Thanks to the well-established network of compatriots awaiting the new migrants at their destination, the arrival was often made easier than the departure. In Vasiliki's case, her skills as a seamstress and needlewoman meant that she landed a job in a Toorak boutique four days after arriving in Melbourne on the Arcadia. Another sister, Yiannoula (Yianna), was encouraged to follow in 1963, and then it was the turn of Eleni, a girl barely out of high school, who was eventually to realise her dream of attending university, and went on to lecture in Greek Studies at La Trobe University, and to found Owl Publishing as a vehicle for the many voices of the Greek Diaspora.

But the price paid by separation from loved ones, especially the mother and motherland, in order to pursue one's goals, can be costly; for Eleni, a few days at an international conference rob her of the chance to say farewell to Athina. She admits to feelings of remorse, although Athina, in the tradition of self-sacrifice that was a given for Greek women of her generation, had made it clear that she wanted her emigrant daughters to live their own lives and not to come rushing to her side in times of crisis. Despite the fact that Eleni could not be with Athina at the close of her mother's life, there had been long visits to Melbourne for Athina and many visits to Greece by her daughters.

As the author explains at the outset, this family narrative-portrait would not have been possible without the collaboration and information provided by her sisters - the two who migrated and the two who remained in Larissa, Thessaly - essential in piecing together the jigsaw whose pieces were dispersed by the Diaspora. Having the women tell their stories as multiple interlaced first-person narratives is therefore not only judicious, but also lends an immediacy to the many facets of their shared histories.

Black-and-white photographs further enhance the reader's acquaintance and sense of familiarity with the members of Eleni's family and their lives, while appended notes give a clear, concise account of the history of Greece from the struggle for independence from Ottoman hegemony in the 1820s to the post-dictatorship decade of the 1980s.

Readers who share Eleni Frangouli-Nickas's journey and the heartache of the belated homecoming will be enlightened and enriched by the experience.

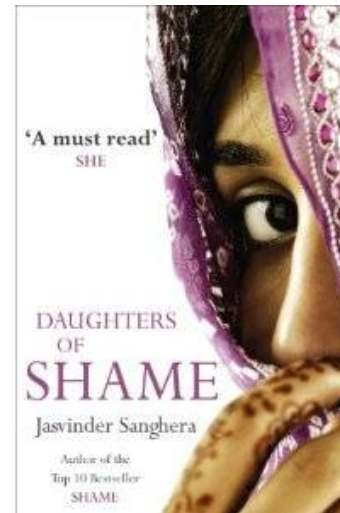
Jena Woodhouse's poetry and fiction have been widely published. Her most recent book is a narrative, *Farming Ghosts* (Gininderra Press, 2009).

Crimes of Honour

Jasvinder Sanghera. *Daughters of Shame*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2009.

Reviewed by Cheryl Jorgensen

Daughters of Shame is a collection of stories told to Jasvinder Sanghera by Asian women living in Britain who were victims of domestic violence, forced marriages, and the brutal, so-called *honour-based crimes*. In January 2007, Sanghera's bestselling book *Shame* was published. It is an account of her own escape from her family and an arranged marriage at age 15 to a man she had never met. Sanghera was in hiding from her family and her intended bridegroom for three years, her terror only ending when her sister committed suicide by setting herself alight as a result of repeated violence from the man *she* had been forced to marry. Though these events took place some twenty years ago, Sanghera has still not been accepted back into her birth family, so can understand the isolation and fear faced by other Asian women who have left the familiarity of homes and culture to make their own ways in what must sometimes appear an alien society.



Shame brought the issue of forced marriage into the public eye. Such stories helped push the Forced Marriage bill through British Parliament, so that despite “cultural sensitivities” it is now illegal for any woman in the United Kingdom to be forced into marriage against her will. Yet marriage is often still forced upon many UK citizens. To avoid trouble with the British authorities, young teenaged Muslim girls are often abducted or tricked into going on a family trip to countries like Pakistan, where they are imprisoned in a relative's home and guarded around the clock until the marriage ceremony has taken place. Each year up to 400 British subjects are repatriated from countries such as Pakistan because they have been forced into, or are at risk of being forced into, marriages arranged by others - usually members of her own family.

Sanghera co-founded Karma Nirvana, a community-based project supporting Asian women affected by domestic and honour-based violence. *Daughters of Shame* explains the work of Karma Nirvana and tells of Muslim women, often of Pathan or Kurdish origin, living in Britain, who are the victims of shocking violence, family-sanctioned rape, and sometimes even murder - because they do not comply with the wishes of their husbands or even distant male relatives. Though disturbing, the tales are often moving. An example is Fatima's story.

Fatima was gaoled for arson, though it was her brother who committed the crime - an attempt at intimidating another woman who did not want to be forced into marriage. Fatima's family decided that she should confess to the arson so that her brother did not have to serve the gaol sentence. Though initially terrified at the notion of prison, Fatima complied; but has since discovered that she actually prefers being incarcerated in a government correctional facility to living with her husband or even her own family, for here she has the freedom to go to the gym or the library - where she can read anything she likes. She can even watch *EastEnders* on television.

Currently five thousand people a year contact Karma Nirvana in Derby, England. From it the Honour Network Helpline was formed and in the first four months of its operation it received one thousand and sixty-nine calls for support. Eighty percent were from victims of forced marriage and in seventy-one percent of these cases, the perpetrators were immediate family. Sanghera risks her own life doing such work. She has had several death threats and human faeces smeared over the windows of her office building, but remains active, if vigilant. In 2007 she received a Woman of the Year Award and in 2008 received an honorary Doctorate from the University of Derby for raising public consciousness of the plight of some of her Asian

sisters. She quotes a colleague's observation in *Daughters of Shame*: 'the greatest fear for a Muslim woman living in Britain is not Islamaphobia or being mistaken for a terrorist, it's the threat from her own family.

Cheryl Jorgensen is writing a Ph.D. thesis on Janette Turner Hospital at The University of Queensland. She has an M.Phil. in Creative Writing and is the author of *The 'Brook* and *The Taint* and many written and broadcast reviews.

Pilgrims' Progress

Cate Kennedy. *The World Beneath*. Scribe Publications: Carlton North, 2009.

Reviewed by Margaret Saunders

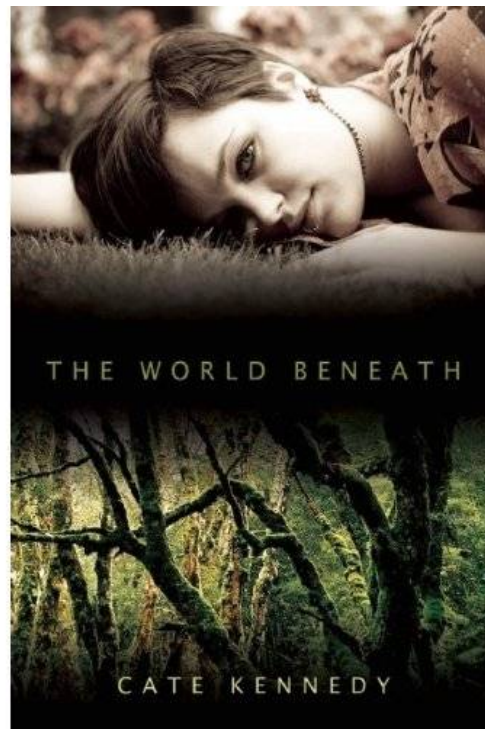
The World Beneath, Cate Kennedy's first novel, is a timely examination of relationships between humans, the planet, and each other. Rich and Sandy meet at the Franklin Dam blockade in 1983, an event that will prove to be the 'defining moment' (48) of both their lives. Drawn together by activism, idealism, and a pristine landscape, they commence a relationship, culminating a decade later in the birth of their daughter, Sophie. Shortly thereafter Rich departs, leaving Sandy on her own to raise Sophie, with whom he will have only sporadic contact.

Soon after Sophie's fifteenth birthday, Rich re-emerges, wanting to take Sophie on a six-day bushwalk in Tasmania. Sandy agrees, albeit not with good grace. The action then alternates between Rich and Sophie awkwardly getting to know each other on the Overland Track - what Kennedy describes as 'the raw, untried stiffness between them, unyielding as his boots' (115) - and Sandy's quest for self-knowledge at a parodic, Goddess-worshipping spiritual retreat.

As Sophie and Rich head off the marked trail and into the wilds of the Labyrinth, so too each character is drawn further and further into their own psychological interior. They each enter a landscape that is 'easy to get lost in' (300), a foreign environment where disorientation and confusion reign. Thus an encounter with primal landscape forces each character to confront primal fears, primal emotions and primal myths - the literal and metaphorical 'world beneath of the book's title. In this world, nothing is as it appears on the surface.

At this point, each character is revealed to be literally bewildered. The *Online Etymology Dictionary* defines the verb bewilder as meaning to 'lead astray, lure into the wilds'. Sandy seems bewildered by how to cope with almost everything in the world around her. She is characterised as drowning in a spiritual *mélange*, wholly reliant on outside forces and unable to take control of her own life, yet trapped by her 'old Catholic schoolgirl self-denial' and 'virtuous misguided principles' (104). Rich is bewildered by having lost 'the shot of his life' (186) and subsequent recognition as a photojournalist. In life, as in photography (the two not being clearly distinguishable to him), Rich fears 'everything [being] exposed and ruined' (296). And Sophie is bewildered by her father's early abandonment of her. Seemingly self-reliant, she veers between wanting to hang back and wanting to leap forward into space, wanting to lean and wanting to be leaned upon - the archetypal adolescent journey.

Kennedy makes skilful use of various archetypes and Greek myths, and acknowledges that she has organised the story around the myth of Persephone and her descent into the Underworld. She also uses humour and irony to great effect to question and unsettle prevailing cultural myths, such as a contemporary desire for 'wilderness' to be captive, commercialized, and sanitised in order to be appreciated:



That's what they want - staff on hand to ensure their every need is met, pull them out of any potential scrape as they play at roughing it, having their *wilderness experience*, floodlights and gravel paths guiding the way to each tent. Pandas washed and brushed clean like big cuddly toys. Trees that guaranteed to impress even the most jaded Bostonian. Sherpas bringing you a morning latte on the slopes of Everest (182).

Further irony arises from the fact that such declarations are often hypocritical and used to foreshadow later events.

Scenes between 'tenderfoot' walker Rich ('with the pack slumped on his back like a dead animal and his knees feeling full of hot gravel' [119]) and the more experienced Russell, whom Rich seems to dismiss as a 'bushwanker', are hilarious. In fact, they are so funny that, as readers, we're cleverly drawn into a temporary alliance with Rich. Even Russell, though, is not as he appears - or not as he appears to Rich, anyway, and this will have a crucial bearing on the plot.

The World Beneath is also refreshing for its non-masculinist depictions of the Australian bush. I've read so many stories where the Australian bush has been used as a crucible and testing ground for male relationships - a place where boys become men, sons prove themselves to their fathers, and mates forge bonds under the Outback sun that supposedly transcend all others. These depictions simultaneously exclude and alienate women, while paradoxically conflating the feminine with the dangerous unpredictability of the bush. Here, the central relationship that Rich and Sophie's odyssey prompts each character to evaluate is that with their mother. But Kennedy has spent too much time satirising visions of nature as all-nurturing Mother for this to be a reductive ecofeminist transposition. Rather, she reveals 'the world beneath' to be entirely uninterested in the sufferings and strivings of those who dwell upon it:

All these tarns and boulders and dead ghost gums staring back, implacable....

It was like discovering a world beneath the other world, holding you carelessly in its inconceivable fist. A world which showed you the underneath of everything with such supreme indifference that it squeezed the breath out of you. (319)

This is an ecocentric rather than anthropomorphised vision. Only by seeing the landscape and themselves as they truly are can the characters hope to 'move forward, and break the spell' (260).

It's ironic, then, to return to the book's cover photograph. It's the kind of otherworldly image that Rich is obsessed with and the effects of which Kennedy seems to question - and the cover was one of the main reasons I was drawn to buy and read this book. Perhaps it was indeed the precise image to best 'capture' Kennedy's intended readership - people like me and perhaps you, who may not be so different to Rich, Sandy, Sophie, and the 'too many walkers, just loving the place to death' (168) as we like to imagine.

Margaret Saunders is a writer and teacher who lives in north Queensland.

The Sky-Blue Stick of Poetry Goes Travelling

Michele Leggott. *Mirabile Dictu*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009.

Reviewed by Susan Ash

As the inaugural Poet Laureate in New Zealand, public listener, and writer, Michele Leggott must necessarily answer to imperatives other than her own, but *Mirabile Dictu* is much more than the requisite publication charting her experience. The collection opens with the poem, 'work for the living,' an account of her first public obligation in her new job, attending the funeral of the great Maori poet, Hone Tuwhare. What follows is a journey, at times intentionally mundane, at others miraculous and inspiring. We move with the poet who now must take into account a general as well as more literary reader, or at least consider meaning 'anyone might understand' (2). This collection shows Leggott using her time as Laureate to explore the shift from obligation to

desire and pleasure, incorporating hearing as well as writing, an opening out towards new understandings and even a new contract with life and its miraculous potential. In 'work for the living,' we realize that Hone Tuwhare's own funeral tribute earlier to the poet Bruce Mason portentously addresses Leggott as well:

A red libation to your good memory, friend.

There's work yet, for the living (3).

I see the line as pivotal in Leggott's oeuvre. A few weeks later she accepts this 'work' in a formal ceremony where she is presented with *matua tokotoko*, the official talking stick of poetry. As Leggott reveals elsewhere, it's a 'finely carved' treasure with 'gleaming insets of paua and mother of pearl,' a 'treasure' that will travel from Laureate to Laureate. She also receives her personal *tokotoko*, a blue stick carved by the same indigenous artist, Jacob Manu Scott, specifically for her to retain once the work is done. This one's a convertible pool cue, with white magnolias carved in relief, tipped in silver, that unscrews into pieces 'to go travelling' ('peri poeitikes / about poetry'). Both talking sticks wend in and out of the collection, as do narratives: the public and historical with the personal and autobiographical, punctuated by a central trip to Italy.

Poetry operates as an interface for language and affect, and Leggott's work in particular can move me to weep. This collection is no exception, but my tears start not with public funeral in the first poem, but in the title poem, 'Mirabile Dictu;' when black Pearl, the family pet, ('back legs beginning to fold ... stumbling/sometimes on a stone step') reflects death looming and deeply personal loss. Leggott's past work recorded the gradual decline of her eyesight, sometimes in quiet, exquisitely felt moments, at times loud with rage and crushing grief. 'Mirabile dictu' acknowledges the poet's choice to grieve so passionately for her eyesight: 'I took the road to anhedonia/ forgetting the child on my hip,' not feeling the pleasure of him 'burying his face in my shoulder' (9). However, positioned early in the collection, the poem also signals a year to come that offers Leggott an imperative for recovery and renewal. Countless motifs in the book would demonstrate, but the resonances signified with stone suggest the antitheses that jostle for consideration, from the funereal transient to enduring monuments, from stone eyes that are both unseeing yet insightful and appear on the book's cover. Again the interstices that Leggott loves occur on this cover as the wings of a stone bird on the shoulder of an angel conflate with the wings one imagines of the angel, paused before flight.



The collection suggests a progression from fear to confidence. In ‘peri poietikes’ bees accompany the poet as she makes her way:

cretan bee persons soar
above the white magnolia flower
how much can you see they ask
less than I could a year ago I say
and more than a year ago too (144)

Their ‘hum summery’ confidence, their ‘weightlessness’ an ‘inspiration,’ these bees nevertheless ‘terrify’ the poet now travelling ‘slow to be sure/ of the edge of the dug up crossing the overhanging/ branch’ (144). However, it is also the bees in this poem late in the collection that deliver the message first encountered in Tuwhare’s farewell to his poet friend. We read:

and the bees in their beautiful skirts
dip and lift above the white flower saying
yes there is more that is our job now go (145)

Thus, in the work, the fear to ‘put one foot/ where the other would have follow’ (144) gives way to flight and song; heartbreak gives way even to exultation at times. Leggott herself identifies this journey in her cover message to readers: her attempts to find ways of ‘making the return trip’ from darkness back to light.

On the way, this ‘poetic emporium’ (from the Greek *emporos*, traveller or merchant, Leggott informs, from *poros*, a journey) has its hilarious moments; for example the poem ‘taking it seriously’, when Laureate business gets the bathetic treatment as the poet converses with her tokotoko:

what shall I do I asked that stick
Te Kikorangi write them a poem what else
said the stick and went back to cooking up
a feed of mussels from Kawhia national treasures
can do that take a weekday trip
down the coast and go fishing
while the rest of us work for the man
oh and make it funny said the stick
you don’t want them dozing off and winked
too true Blue I said the mussels went down
and the feet went up the giver of advice
and good counsel settled in for a well-earned
nap why keep a poet and bark yourself? (24)

In this poem Laureate duties collapse into exigencies associated with academic life (how many dead grandmothers does it take for the professor to capitulate and allow essay extensions?); conversations move between existential concerns related to art and ‘channelling’ Turnitin. The poem culminates in an alliterative, I would say choreographed, culinary A to Z (the food offered in the arms of the graduating class) while the stick, Te Kikorangi (TK for short), challenges the poet to ‘bring on’ the ‘poems dance with your grannies’ and ‘feast with the gods tonight’ (27).

In short, *mirabile dictu* constitutes a public memoir of growth in one year – perhaps when least expected. In reading we catch the poet almost surprised by the new pleasure in writing (‘wonderful to relate’) in her role as public poet. Time flattens as generations of poets from Robin Hyde to Sonja Yelich all but collide on the North Shore in Auckland. Poems foreground compelling details, make visible what is lost or hidden: objects such as elephant skulls in old cupboards; the slip of rose handed on and preserved by the ‘old rose grower at Te Kauwhata’; Barney McGregor’s Darwin lectures; and three reluctant nuns. For me, no one collects and atomises ‘the bits and pieces that say here and now and remember this’ better than Leggott (‘peri poietikes / about poetry’).

It is not surprising, then, that as in previous collections, Leggott weaves in the familial stories. Earlier poetry had recorded the immediate family (‘Dear Heart’, ‘Tigers’, ‘Learning to Swim’). This work digs deeper into ancestry, collecting the ‘white-hot spaces the family remembers’ (14, 154). Thus, the process of recovery includes the stories of distant generations and the renewal of family ties, as a previously unknown niece presents herself, gift-like, to the family. The book draws to a close as the family drives north for her wedding, ‘knowing she has made us into something bigger and more precious than anyone could have imagined’ (148), pushing the momentum of a collection that reads almost like a novel into the future as well as the past.

Recent work such as *Milk & Honey* (2005) may suggest Leggott’s intention to enjoy (my own copy is inscribed by Leggott, ‘universe as circus’). Yet we should remember that one theme twisting through that collection, the fado, is a melancholy song, sometimes considered the Portuguese blues, sung to deflect pain in the face of ineluctable, cruel destiny. Not until *mirabile dictu* do we find a blatant statement that ‘what was “crushing” isn’t so bad,’ and I would argue, there is less mourning and more celebrating in this collection. Other pleasures present opportunities to write: gardens, fountains, canals, the limonaia. But we should also recognize that this book is also about language, about making and reading poetry. In ‘peri poietikes / about poetry’ Leggott calls this collection ‘noisy with the presence of others, poets living and dead, named and unnamed, stories that come and go (elephants, roses, doves, parrots) appearances and disappearance.’ Speaking of *Mirabile Dictu*, she also identifies principles of poetics that drive her work. For example, her ‘love of conjunctions (*come & go, dip & lift*)’ is part of her ‘longstanding interest in equitable making and joining.’ This concern underpins her scholarly work such as the 1995 edition of Robin Hyde’s poem *The Victory Hymn 1935–1995*, where Leggott practiced ‘negative editing’ (ix): resisting the urge to make arbitrary (unauthorised) judgments, cuts, and alterations to produce an ideal definitive poem. Instead, in *The Victory Hymn*, Leggott collated and commented on multiple versions to recreate an experience that she says resembles ‘how texts actually live in the hands of their authors (rather than at the hands of their editors)’ (*The Victory Hymn* 47). In a sense then, this love of ‘and’ and resistance to the definitive should warn us to also resist the teleological or any narrative arc with authorised resolution and dénouement, poet healed and happy. Indeed, she warns in ‘peri poietikes / about poetry’ that ‘there is something to say about the spring and twist of the line that likes to look back even as it looks forward.’

The page was a significant driver in Leggott’s previous poetry where she had to fight to secure the unconventional measurements: the nearly square book (21 cm wide by 20 cm long) in order to accommodate her desire for long lines, and ensuring the reader’s eyes travel across the page. Thus the vertical descent is postponed, delayed, deferred, making readers progress slowly across the page. ‘WHERE EXACTLY ARE WE’ in *DIA* insists the reader traverse the whole (wide) page: single, uppercase word by word. *Mirabile Dictu* is a more conventional shape, and lines seem to settle into a narrative style, telling stories, evoking moments, recombining, trying out the line as lure. In the poem ‘teatro della limonaia’, the stick ‘knows its business’ and so does Leggott. She operates around the parameters of porosity, the poet as transmutationist in ‘the honeycomb of white stone’ (la chaloupe / the boat [100]). Indeed, this collection will bear endless readings as each Leggott book constitutes yet ‘a bigger room/ with many people reading and talking’ (154).

Michele Leggott, 'peri poeitikes / about poetry,' *ka mate kaora: a New Zealand journal of poetry and poetics*, 8 September 2009, accessed 7 June 2010, www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/kmko

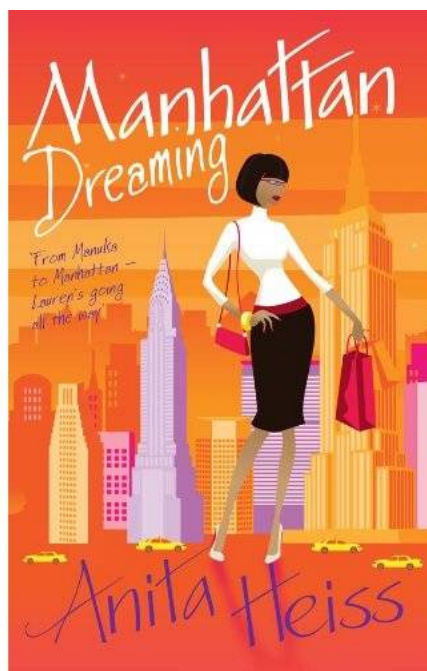
Susan Ash is Programme Director of the Arts at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. Her most recent publication on Michele Leggott's work was 'Archival poetics: Michele Leggott reads Robin Hyde,' in *Lighted Windows: Critical Essays on Robin Hyde* (2008).

Changing the world through... chick-lit?

Anita Heiss. *Manhattan Dreaming*. Sydney: Bantam, 2010.

Reviewed by Alice Richard

I have a confession to make: I wasn't looking forward to reviewing Anita Heiss's *Manhattan Dreaming*. I find chick-lit formulaic, unimaginative, and more than a little suspect from a feminist viewpoint. I won't relay the plot, suffice it to say that *Manhattan Dreaming* certainly did manage to live up to my expectations, genre-wise. It's full of the usual characters: the beautiful, successful, but emotionally crippled leading lady; her feisty, perpetually single friends who manage to be supportive while pointing out the various ways in which she's emotionally crippled; the no-good ex-boyfriend who doesn't realise what he's letting go; and the gorgeous but unattainable love interest. In fact, *Manhattan Dreaming* has all the elements one expects of chick-lit: female empowerment that paradoxically involves running from one man's arms to another's; an unexpected change of circumstances; heartbreak; a red-herring romantic pursuit; and, of course, the obligatory romantic twist at the end that sees the protagonist discovering that her happily-ever-after was right in front of her all along.



But *Manhattan Dreaming* also has one thing that other chick-lit doesn't: Aboriginal perspective. Heiss's main character, Lauren, is a Wiradjuri woman working as a curator in the (fictitious) National Aboriginal Gallery in Canberra. She has strong ties to her family and the Indigenous community in her home town of Goulburn, is proud of her Indigenous identity, and passionate about Indigenous art. *Manhattan Dreaming* is peppered with references to Lauren's identity as an Indigenous woman and commentary on issues facing Indigenous Australians. To me, this is *Manhattan Dreaming*'s strength, and a very smart move on Heiss's part.

By utilising the chick-lit genre, Heiss has captured a far larger audience than she might have done through, say, an essay in an academic journal. As much as the academic world might have a heightened awareness of the issues of Indigenous Australia, they represent only a very small proportion of the population, and any work written for an academic audience can only ever hope to influence a relatively small group of people. By targeting female readers of 'airport fiction', Heiss has cleverly expanded her readership, and in doing so is able to increase awareness of Indigenous issues and encourage a reassessment of stereotypes in (at least part of) the public consciousness.

It seems that Heiss was very measured in the way she chose to incorporate Indigeneity into *Manhattan Dreaming*. The cover itself reveals little of the Indigenous aspects within the novel: the blurb on the back doesn't indicate Lauren's race, only that she is a curator at the National Aboriginal Gallery, and the front cover bears a picture of a vaguely dark-skinned woman in front of a stylised Manhattan city-scape. Unless readers had heard of Anita Heiss as an Indigenous writer, or were looking for these subtle signals of Indigenous perspective, it would be easy to assume that *Manhattan Dreaming* was just another chick-lit novel, written by and about a white woman in a white society. As it is, *Manhattan Dreaming* doesn't obviously alert potential readers to its hidden message.

Inside the novel, Heiss continues her careful incorporation of Indigeneity. Her style is never preachy, and she threads Indigenous issues into the narrative in a way that is only occasionally clumsy or overt. Chapter 2, for

instance, is entitled 'The Exotic Other' - something I missed in my first reading of *Manhattan Dreaming*, and something that may be lost on readers who aren't familiar with studies in race. Discussions of Indigeneity occur in dialogue between characters, and this represents another way Heiss touches on issues of concern. Talking about men in New York, Lauren's friend Kirsten says:

'... they're not tainted by stereotypes of Aboriginal people from the media. Hell, most don't even know there's Blackfellas in Australia. Here we're just women, people.' (138)

Conversely, a passage in Chapter 12 fails to incorporate Indigeneity so convincingly: 'I started to think about how our material culture is often considered artefact rather than art and displayed in museums rather than art galleries. The Met did well to showcase both' (114). Similarly in Chapter 14: Lauren asks, 'What constitutes "Aboriginal art" and who is an "Aboriginal artist"? It's complex, and sometimes takes the focus away from the art itself, which can be problematic' (151). Of course, this kind of stilted dialogue is characteristic of the chick-lit genre, so really, it's not out of place in a novel such as this, but it does feel a bit contrived and perhaps moves the focus away from *what* is being said to *how* it's being said - not an ideal outcome.

In fact, the majority of my qualms about *Manhattan Dreaming* have to do with the genre rather than the subject matter. I have actually been greatly impressed by Heiss's decision to utilise popular fiction to her advantage. By creating an Aboriginal main character, Heiss challenges the traditional positioning of the Indigenous woman as other, and locates her firmly at the centre of her narrative, rather than at the margins. All the Indigenous characters are strong, intelligent, and articulate, but most importantly, human. By writing the Indigenous characters as individuals with equally valid hopes, fears, and faults to those of the non-Indigenous characters, Heiss allows room for non-Indigenous readers to recognise their humanity, and reconsider stereotypes of Indigenous Australians. This may help to change attitudes of Indigenous people as 'other' to non-Indigenous Australians by presenting them as being as normal and everyday as any other Australians, albeit with a different set of challenges to face in life. What I most admire is her ability to do this in a way that is non-confrontational while still being thought-provoking where it needs to be.

This is where Lauren's career in the art world comes in handy. As a curator of Indigenous art, Lauren's narration necessarily includes comments about the artworks she co-ordinates, many of which have a racialised element. This is another way Heiss incorporates Indigenous issues into her novel - again, without lecturing her readers. A passing comment about an artist's photography gives an opportunity to ask the reader to think, however briefly, about issues of skin colour: '...some of Julie Dowling's self-portraits, which would add commentary on identity and consider issues around Aboriginal people with fair skin' (165). For a reader who may never have thought about racial identity issues, this brief mention may encourage contemplation of such issues, and hopefully affect a change in readers' assumptions about the role of skin colour in racial identification.

Heiss's own background may shed some light on her motivations behind writing a chick-lit novel. She is an Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Western Sydney attached to the Badanami Centre for Indigenous Education, has co-edited *The Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature*, is an Indigenous Literacy Day Ambassador, and chaired the Australian Society of Authors (ASA) Committee of Management in 2008–2009. She's clearly well-respected in the academic world, and has been recognised with several awards and board member positions. So why would she choose to write a chick-lit novel? In a radio interview with Daniel Browning for Radio National's *Awaye* program, Heiss admits that 'there was a strategy in writing in this genre'. Acknowledging that the readers who buy Indigenous literary fiction are unlikely to be the same readers who buy chick-lit, Heiss says she thought to herself, 'there's a whole market out there that's not engaging with contemporary Indigenous women and issues, even though we share similarities in terms of the relationship sphere'. She does, however, object to the title 'chick-lit', preferring to term it 'commercial women's fiction'—although she does admit that she's 'happy to fit into a genre if people are still going to buy the book'.

But *Manhattan Dreaming* isn't aimed solely at a white audience. In creating the character of Lauren Lucas, Heiss says (in an interview with 702 ABC Sydney's Deborah Cameron), 'I want to have a character that young Aboriginal women around the country can be excited about and engage with, see themselves in'. She is very much aware that successful urban Indigenous women like herself rarely feature in Australian literature, and sees that, in creating characters that challenge the stereotypes that abound about Indigenous people, she can help to effect a change in attitudes. Writing novels that feature Indigenous characters has the effect of encouraging more Indigenous people to read. She shared with Daniel Browning that she often receives emails from Indigenous women who tell her they've never read a book cover to cover, but read her book in three days. She says, 'I'm absolutely aware of the need every day to produce material that's relevant to our people and to encourage blackfellas to read'.

Ultimately, *Manhattan Dreaming* won't set the literary world on fire. But I don't think Heiss ever intended that it would. It is aimed very squarely at a non-academic audience, which is obviously where Heiss sees a need for awareness-raising about Indigenous issues. If we want real change to occur for Indigenous Australians, then we need to challenge racist attitudes in all areas of Australian society. This may be one of the reasons Anita Heiss chose chick-lit as the genre for *Manhattan Dreaming*: it's the perfect medium for tapping into the consciousness of non-academic Australia. I think it's a brilliant tactic. In fact, it's given me a great idea for a feminist vampire novel.

[Anita Heiss interview with Deborah Cameron on 702 ABC Sydney](#) (accessed 23 September 2010)

[Anita Heiss interview with Daniel Browning on Away for Radio National](#) (accessed 23 September 2010)

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Lisa Adams (1969-)

Sparrow 2009

oil on canvas

65.0 x 75.0 cm

Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2010.

Reproduced courtesy of the artist and Phillip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane.

Photo: Carl Warner

Adams' paintings have been noted for their links to Surrealism, a connection the artist concedes but is 'not particularly comfortable with.' [1] A more apt point of reference, might be to the work of the photorealist painters who, in the 1960s and 1970s, conscripted photographs as the basis of their work. Adams' meticulous paintings are months in the making and crafted from multiple sources, many of them photographs taken by her or her husband, photographer Kim Guthrie. The paintings that emerge through her methodical processes are more than the sum of their parts. They are magical incarnations of Adams' encounters with her world, which revolves around the Noosa hinterland where she lives.

Adams' work is frequently self-referential and reflects the contradictions and incongruities she finds in life. *Sparrow 2009* encapsulates these concerns and is a metaphor for the battles she encounters in making her work: 'Painting comes with its problems but for me they are personal problems. My paintings never come easily... every day I've come to realise the endurance required to keep going.' [2] The camouflage print on Adams' dress speaks to the iconography of combat which is reinforced by the references to the ancient hunting sport of falconry. The viewer is struck by Adams' ambivalence towards the gauntlet she wears - the term has an alternate meaning associated with punishment and fortitude - and by the improbability of the sparrow that is tethered to her fulfilling its role as a bird of prey. The enormity of the bird's enterprise equates with the one Lisa Adams sets for herself as a highly realist representational painter. Clearly, she is up to the task.

Lisa Adams has been painting for more than twenty years. Her work was the focus of a solo exhibition at the Institute of Modern Art in 2000, and she shows regularly at Phillip Bacon Galleries. In 2008 her painting *Rose Gardern* 2008 was aquired by the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA), Brisbane, and shown in the GoMA exhibition *Contemporary Australia: Optimism*. That year Adams won the \$20,000 Tattersall's Landscape Prize.

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[1] Lisa Adams in Ingrid Periz, 'Lisa Adams: Outsider in', *Australian Art Collector* issue 48, April – June 2009, <http://www.artcollector.net.au/LisaAdamsOutsiderIn>

[2] Ibid.