

READING AND RELISHING

Edited by Robyn Rowland

Like many poets, women poets in particular, I find the time to read poetry is constantly squeezed between snatched moments to write and the full tide of domesticity. It's interesting though, to have a look inside the reading lives of poets. Often, they give us directions in which our own reading might follow; often they introduce us to books and authors never discovered unless by word-of-mouth: our own e-mag. This section is a brief musing by a poet each month on their own reading of poetry, particularly the work they are enjoying. Hopefully, you'll want to go out and buy some more poetry!

Our second contribution comes from **Lizz Murphy** in Canberra. Lizz has published nine books including four collections of poetry. Her latest collection is *Stop Your Cryin* (Island Press, 2004). *Two Lips Went Shopping* (Spinifex Press, 2000) was written with the assistance of an ACT Creative Arts Fellowship for Literature. She travelled to Calcutta as part of the Australia-India Poetry Exchange in 2006, and again in 2007 with the support of a CAPO Singapore Airlines Travelling Grant. She was the NSW Poetry Development Officer from 2004 until 2007.

Lizz Murphy:

A change in circumstances this year is allowing me more time for writing and that equally essential delight, reading. I meander from the bookshelves to the compulsory pile by the bed to other waiting book heaps. I select unread and half read delectable poets from Britain (Carol Ann Duffy) and Ireland (Medbh McGuckian), and Bengali women in translation (The Unsevered Tongue, Nandimukh Samsad, 2005). I try to be a truly modern poet and visit blogs (but feel like a stalker) and online publications (consumed with gusto). I nibble and chomp my way through a gourmet menu of Australian poets.

In this dander through recent reading, I pause at poets I have heard in the flesh: Dan Disney and Jill Jones at the Fifth Australian Poetry Festival; Peter O'Mara at the Two Fires Arts and Activism Festival; Judy Johnson on a recent Poets Union tour to south-east NSW. Connections. Others come tapping at the door or rustling through the post.

Dipping into *A Steady Storm of Correspondence: Selected Letters of Gwen Harwood 1943-1995* (UQP, 2001), I'm reminded of Spike Milligan's Puckoon (Penguin 1963) — both Harwood and Milligan have alarmingly white legs — and Edgar Poe's raven. It's something about the way Harwood wings 'with

many a flirt and flutter' from anecdote, to dream, to family or literary escapade.

There is the basket of headless chooks with one claw unravelling a fellow tram passenger's mohair, the ride on a brown-and-white cow across Ireland with the aid of a flat green jewel, and a host of interactions with other poets, editors and critics. Of one she says, 'may a bunyip bite his balls off', wonders if she will ever try for publication again, knows she will although 'today she feels beshitted and bemedded'. Mental note: add *Gwen Harwood: Collected Poems 1943-1995* (UQP, 2003) to my must read list.

I sought out 'The Raven' after a hypnotising rendition at a night of music and poetry in Young (rural NSW). Exploring e-zines more recently, I drop into *Cordite*. Remembering Dan Disney's inventive writing from his 2006 Broadway Poetry Prize win, I click on his essay 'Trains'. We lurch from Romania to Manhattan to Auschwitz and India, past 'combed fields', 'broken-glassed industrial burroughs', and 'rivers moving slow and full of the dead'.

In the poetry section of *Cordite*, Jill Jones also writes of trains in her heady poem 'Sedition' where she is '... standing on the platform with the sick trains/there are laws all around me ...'. And again in the collection *Broken/Open* (Salt, 2005), where she is 'racing time and trackwork' ('The 7.17 Silver Machine'). *Broken/Open* begins with the tender poem, 'Birds/Updrafts'. A poet who walks at an individual tilt: '... every day is impossible/I struggle with the outline ...' ('Displacements').

In *Cordite*, Peter O'Mara also examines 'th[e] broken': broken promises, broken children and '... the broken sound of two mountains banging/together ...' I find more of his poetry at malleable jangle. 'Preservative (220) Added' is just a spoonful of words but leaves me wondering about all the ways one might 'block out the sky'.

Back on the lounge with a recent *Wagtail*, and poems with the power to 'make one rindless' — *What was Lost* by Anna Kerdijk Nicholson. Memorable images include: '... rice bowls melted together:/no one to cook soup' ('On the Exhibition of Yosuke Yamahata's 119 Photographs of Nagasaki').

Then Judy Johnson's *Nomadic* (Black Pepper, 2004). You can see I'm lagging behind in my reading. Johnson's writing is intimate, eloquent and lawless: 'to look up ... is to break the law of/hizontals and invite/a blade of sun across the throat' ('Nomadic: 5. Horizontals'). Johnson's verse novel *Jack* is on the top of my unread heap and as with the first poem, 'It's the Waiting I Can't Stand'. *The Road South* is also there. A collection of 61 poems, this experiment grew out of the 2006 and 2007 Australia-India Poetry Exchanges. Poets range from Jane Williams to John Tranter, Anita Heiss to Rosemary Dobson and to Anthony Lawrence: 'I finger the handline like a downcast kite,/translating each bite into possibilities' ('Trapping on the Foggy').

Oh the possibilities of poetry!

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