

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!

This month our contribution comes from **Jayne Fenton Keane** from Queensland.

Jayne is a poet, new media artist and composer who takes poetry to different spaces with her poetry-sound fusions, installations and performances. The author of three poetry books, *Torn*, *Ophelia's Codpiece* and *The Transparent Lung*, Keane is an award winner in several genres, and is completing a doctorate on embodiment and spatial poetics. She is founding Director of National Poetry Week and has received a Varuna Writers' Centre Fellowship and radio playwriting mentorship. In addition to writing manuscripts, experimenting with soundscapes and developing her website, JFK has maintained an interest in embodiment of texts on the stage. She has featured at the Australian Poetry Festival, Queensland Poetry Festival, Brisbane Writers' Festival, Seattle Arts festival, the Detroit Literary Festival, the Festival of the Imagination in New Orleans, and Wordstock, a spoken word festival in New York. In 2005 she had an Asialink fellowship.

Guilty Pleasures

As a reader of poetry books I am probably statistically rarer than an underwear snatcher and perhaps just as compulsive. I can't help it. I know there are little intimacies lurking in the kinky surfaces of each page. A recent rummage through my drawers of poetry yielded an old 'Imago' where John Kinsella was caught in the act of peeping
at an empty night and paddock
for here stillness shivers and moves
like frost moves the shattered
flesh of quartz
(Kinsella, 1994 20)

Coincidentally, I've been cleaning out drawers and emptying the bookshelves which have been taken over by blue-green colonies during this year's relentless monsoon. The humidity may be marvellous for the garden but it's a tragedy for the book. I am confronted by ethical dilemmas as rain leaks through my whirlybird and splashes onto the pages I'm trying to read. Under the dripping whirlybird I feel like the biggest loser as the mould beats me in the battle between biology and text. I reach for the other book I'm reading at the moment 'Discovering Dowsing and Divining' by Peter Naylor (1980) "It will take a considerable amount of delving into the undergrowth and hedgerows to find the perfect twig" (18) he says. Yet inside his book every word performs as a perfect twig for mould. The mould is taking over the words so intimately breathing on each other between the sheets. The mould is closing in and I cannot read my precious books in time. It's as though the ghosts of old pulped trees are haunting the books and begging the ants to stuff their tiny jaws with poetry.

My library has become a hospice for poetry books infected by decay. I want to relieve them of their suffering but every time I pick up a pillow I am compelled to rest a book against it, not smother the book. Euthanizing my books feels like a crime if they are forced to die unread. What I read this week are books on the edge of decay in transit to the karma of the kerbside recycling wheelie bin. I'm forced to read books on the verge of crossing over into compost due to my bloodstream's immune response to mould. Compelled to say a few words at the funeral I cite the following gem from my soon to be exited anthology by J.H Mathews (1966):

Soon, however, the critic who has played at living,
responds to the influence of Mona. "Despite her death,
Mona continued and continues to live," he writes, "because
she was identified and is identified in me with the
image of an explosion in which every appearance is a
disappearance - a gulf - every disappearance an appearance
- a specter" (Jouffroy cited 169 in Matthews)

Fighting against the ruin of my library has involved buying ionisers and vacuum sealed bags that suck the oxygen from the air and retard the mould. I've spent hours spraying the edges of my books with eucalyptus oil trying to inoculate them against ruin. I know, I know. I sound like a desperate lover clinging to a relationship that's already lost. Still, relationships have not been designed to be easy and some books are worth it.

The house lives with the terrible truth.
We can't look her in the eyes.
We're careful with our words, quiet
when we laugh. We whisper. We tread lightly.
When the kids visit we herd them outside.
(Close, 1994 6)

A Handbook of Dreams and Fortune Telling by Zadkiel and Sibly (1995), *Learn Zulu* by Sibusiso Nyembezi (1988) and *Scar Country* by Rebecca Edwards (2000) are triaged as emergency re-reads on the critical bookshelves of my little home. Dear friends and loved ones, we are gathered here to witness the departure of significant and lovely words from the drawers and bookshelves of Jayne Fenton Keane's library.

Today I wrote a poem
with all myself.
Every muscle, every nerve
and every bone

racked me
like I was being broken by the sea
(Edwards, 18)

imbuzi (goat)
inkabi (ox)
indlovu (elephant)
inyoni (bird)
(Nyembezi, 60)

The following snippets are from Zadkiel and Sibly (1995):

Goats - You will have enemies, and many trials through deceit but your mind will be happy under all. (58)

Ox - To dream that you see a herd of oxen is the harbinger of great prosperity and success in your engagements, particularly if you see them grazing... (110)

Elephant - To dream of an elephant denotes health, and strength (43)

Birds - For a wealthy person to dream of birds flying, is very unlucky, it denotes a sad reverse in their circumstances. (20)

Dearly beloved books: repose in peace.

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