

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 Melbourne poet **E A Gleeson**.

Anne grew up on a Soldier Settlement farm in the Western District of Victoria. She is an award winning poet securing places in competitions including the Henry Kendall and John Shaw Neilson Awards. Over the last ten years, her poems have been published in Australian, Irish and American literary journals. She reads regularly at Victoria's premier poetry venues and occasionally in other places when she travels. E A Gleeson lives in Ballarat where she spends two-thirds of her working life as a funeral director and one-third as a writer. Earlier this year, her manuscript won the Best First Book award by Interactive Press. This collection of poetry will be published later in 2008.

E A Gleeson

I am a big fan of the audio book. I love having a story in my head as I whiz down to Melbourne or across this gorgeous landscape of country Victoria. Slow traffic takes on a whole new perspective when I'm gripped by a story but what I really love is being read to. Of course being read to is better if it comes with a glass of wine, a log fire and preferably a deep baritone, but hey, a CD book is a good thing. I've just finished *The Voyage of their Life* by Diane Armstrong; it is the story of the SS Derna and its cargo of refugees who arrived in Australia from Europe in 1948. Armstrong weaves the saga of the physical journey on board this refugee ship with the lives lived before and afterwards. At times it is a harrowing story, but there are great moments of triumph too. It is a book that has changed my understanding, giving me an insight into the complexity of the decisions made by people in Eastern Europe during the 1940s.

Another of my literary indulgences is to re-read a book. If a book doesn't get me in, I don't persevere but I happily re-read a book. Waiting in line is *The Rose Grower* by Michelle de Kretzer. I read/listened to this book when it first came out and I've listened to it twice since then. This will be my fourth reading but first print reading. I'm curious about that. When I discovered *The Rose Grower*, I couldn't understand why everyone in Australia wasn't talking about it. It's a great narrative, beautifully told and once again, the subject matter is fascinating.

I have two print books on the go. One is a collection of essays by Clifton Fadiman. I bought this book in a wonderful second hand bookshop at Barkers Creek outside Castlemaine. Fadiman has put together the readings (short stories/essays) that have meant most to him. So I suppose it has the element of gossip that satisfies our curiosity about how others behave, but none of the stigma of confessing to reading the social pages of popular magazines. This is a very special book for a different reason. It is a beautiful thing. I love sitting in my lounge holding its clothbound covers, turning the smooth "hardly there" pages.

Fadiman's book is not a book for bed but Thomas Lynch's *Booking Passage* is. Lynch is a writer and funeral director from Michigan who has a passion for exploring his family's story as do I. So we share interests and occupation and I like to think if I keep working at it, the parallels will not end there.

After reading a review of a short story collection by Kathryn Lomer, I popped into Readings and bought it. For me she is a 'found' poet. I've never read anything about her or heard people talk about her but over the years I've come across good poem after good poem. I've read three of the short stories and I'm glad I bought the book.

And the poetry. I read more poetry than anything these days. I've had a bit of a Whitmore press splurge lately, so I'm enjoying Paul Kane's *Slant of Light*, A Frances Johnson's *The Pallbearer's Garden* and Brendan Ryan's *A Tight Circle*. *Heat* arrived today so I've dipped into one or two poems. I was very taken with the collaborative work *Streuman* between Jane Gibian and the East German poet, Ulrike Sandig.

The book I have in my handbag is *Poetry of the Committed Individual*. It is not just the compact size that suits me; it is an anthology that is full of stirring poetry that has me hunting for more work from these authors. How about this from Marina Tsvetayeva?

From the fair pine-trees hot
resin drips, and in this
splendid night there is
a ratchet going over my heart.

Read and relish:

Armstrong, Diane. *The Voyage of their Life*. Bolinda Publishing, Australia, 2003.

De Kretzer, Michelle. *The Rose Grower*. Vintage, Australia, 2000.

Fadiman, Clifton. *Reading I've Liked*. Hamish Hamilton, London, 1946.

Indyk, Ivor (ed). *Heat*. Giramondo Publishing Company Artamon, NSW, 2008.

A. Frances Johnson. *The Pallbearer's Garden*. Whitmore Press, Geelong, 2008.

Kane, Paul. *A Slant of Light*. Whitmore Press, Geelong, Australia, 2008.

Lomer Kathryn. *Camera Obscura*. Univeristy of Queensland Press, Australia, 2008.

Lynch, Thomas. *Booking Passage*. Vintage, London, 2006.

Meehan, Paula. *Pillow Talk*. The Gallery Press. Loughcrew Ireland, 2004.

Ryan, Brendan. *A Tight Circle*. Whitmore Press, Geelong, Australia, 2008.

Silkin, Jon. *Poetry for the Committed Individual*. Penguin England, 1973.