

# READING AND RELISHING

*Edited by Robyn Rowland*

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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!

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Our fourth contribution is from **Brook Emery**. Brook has published two collections of poetry. *and dug my fingers in the sand* (FIP 2000) won the Queensland Premier's Prize for Poetry and was short-listed for the NSW Premier's Prize. *Misplaced Heart* (FIP, 2003) was short-listed for the NSW Premier's Prize. His third collection, *Uncommon Light*, (FIP) will be launched this month. *Misplaced Heart* and *Uncommon Light* are available from Gleebooks in Sydney and Collected Works (and perhaps Readings) in Melbourne or from FIP (PO Box 1015 Carlton Vic 3053; rpretty@unimelb.edu.au) or from the author (brookemery@ozemail.com.au). *and dug my fingers in the sand* is out of print.

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## **Brook Emery**

I'm reading and re-reading. Hopping as usual between past and present, re-evaluating, questioning my own judgement, looking for pleasures, wondering whether I suffer from eclecticism, relativism, obtuseness, restlessness or adult ADD. One kind of pleasure is found in David Malouf's *Typewriter Music* (UQP, 2007) and David Brooks' *Urban Elegies* (Island Press, 2007). These books are marked by gentle thought and mature craft. Both are poised, controlled meditations which reach for serenity despite the madness of the world. I've only just started on J S Harry's *Not finding Wittgenstein* (Giramondo, 2007) in which her naïve rabbit Peter Henry Lepus is 'provoked into trying to use his mind', and thus 'his sense of deracination and disorientation becomes more pronounced' as he travels and tries to understand the world of humans – the poems are formally various and a mix of whimsy, wit, satire, politics and provocative ideas. Another pleasure is found in *The Incoming Tide*, a first book by Petra White (John Leonard Press, 2007). This also has poise and craft and thoughtfulness much beyond the author's years and a striking immediacy of moments and places and people – an ability to think into and through the poem. I'm also excited by reading the chapbooks by the Poets Union's Young Poets Fellowship holders, Ivy Ireland

(*Incidental Complications*) and Nick Powell (*of Fallen Myth*). They crackle with energy, surprise, risk-taking and challenges and are just hot off the press (see the NSW Poets Union website). A first book which has particularly intrigued me is *James Stinks (and so does Chuck)* by Nick Riemer (Puncher & Wattmann, 2005). I especially liked the speculations of 'The Fence' and the extended sequences 'Mayan forecourts' and 'Rain Bethlehem' and the whole edgy mix of philosophy, self-deprecating humour and linguistic cleverness. I've been re-reading three American books I found in Elizabeths, a secondhand bookshop in King Street, Newtown. Years ago I had been stunned by the uncompromising directness, realism and emotional power of Mary Karr's *Viper Rum* which - imagine this, Australian poets - has been republished at least four times, and includes the combative essay 'Against Decoration', so I was pleased to see an earlier book *The Devil's Tour* (New Directions, 1993) on the shelves. The first poem, 'Coleman', is a knockout and the rest of the book is good but it didn't have quite the same tension and vigour of *Viper Rum*, or perhaps I was just jaded. I had a similar reaction to C. K. Williams's *Repair* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999) which I found one shelf down on the same day: the first poem was terrific and reminded me of all the things I had liked about Williams but the rest of the book left me underwhelmed - the poems seemed to be observations without a sense of urgency or need or pressure. A third book found on the same day was *Deposition* (Graywolf Press, 2002) by Katie Ford, someone I'd never heard of. I'm still puzzling over its mix of the theological and the personal; I find it stark, moving and mysterious and I like being in a mystery as promising and resonant and strangely real as this. I also keep dipping into John Koethe's *The Constructor* (Harper Flamingo, 1999) which I found at a different secondhand shop (Sapphos) and about which, again, I knew nothing at the time. I like the way he works with abstraction and the way he traces the movements of the mind, the thoughtful inwardness that reaches out, the 'thinkingness' of the poems. I'm also re-reading *Crime and Punishment*. I'm up to page 497, but that's a different story.