

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!

The month's contribution come from Brendan Ryan who lives in Portarlington, Victoria. Brendan's most recent collection of poetry is *A Tight Circle*, is published by Whitmore Press, 2008. *A paddock in his head* (Five Islands Press) was published in 2007. His poems have appeared in various journals and *Best Australian Poetry* 2007, 2006 and 2004. He was awarded a Longlines residency (Varuna) in 2007.

Brendan Ryan

The reading of poetry for me is a necessary thing. It is solace at the end of the day, an antidote to the reading that I have to do for teaching, which occasionally involves poetry, and it is also a spur for my own writing. When I have time from reading and preparing for school at night, I have been dipping into the following books.

A book that I have been returning to this year is Robert Hass', *Time and Materials*. There are some wonderful poems in this collection, for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. A number of narrative poems are circular in structure and so involve different sub-texts. 'State of the Planet' involves meditations on Lucretius, a girl walking to school and environmental catastrophe. It traverses a wide territory, and like other poems in the collection sweeps the reader along.

So easy, in imagination, to tell the story backward,
Because the earth needs a dream of restoration ^
She dances and the birds just keep arriving,
Thousands of them, immense arctic flocks, her teeming life.

I first came across Philip Levine's poetry years ago in Gary Geddes' anthology, *20th Century Poetry and Poetics*. I finally bought Levine's seminal collection, *What Work Is*, this year and it too has been great to read, mostly before bed. He gets so much of the world into his poems. It is a reality not every poet may want, but it has an intensity that is compelling.

I'm the man who gets off the bus
at the bare junction of nothing
with nothing, and then heads back
to where we've been as though
the future were stashed somewhere
in that tangle of events we call
Where I come from.

('Scouting')

An Australian poet's collection I've been reading is Jane Williams, *Begging the Question*, Ginninderra Press. Her poems are immersed in a world that is closely observed and laced with her ironic humour.

I'm a five-dollar dare hardly worth the smile
I throw into the bargain
But he's not I suspect so much in it for the tips.

('Business as Usual')

I've also been complimenting my reading of poetry with Anthony Lynch's short stories from his collection *Redfin*. Raymond Carver appears to be an influence and the stories are remarkable for their restraint and what seems to occur outside the stories. In the first story, 'The Argument', a couple eavesdrop on the arguments their neighbours are having in a block of flats. As the arguments are reported through the eavesdropping couple's discussion of next door, the reader is left with a sense of others words not being reported, included their own, or their pasts, as the ending delivers an outcome that carries its own logic. Like Carver, Lynch has those passages or phrases that the story seems to swivel about. 'A friend once told me that you only ever know five per cent of what goes on between a couple. He said it as if five per cent was the absolute proven limit, and the figure stuck in mind and put a shroud over something ordinary, something unshakably common'. This is writing that remains with you.

Finally, I have also resurrected *Moby Dick* and am determined to finish it this time. I love the book for its compendium view of the world, for the great images of pursuit and the details.

Bibliography

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