Susan Hawthorne reviews Flying into the Hands of Strangers by Jeltje Fanoy

Jeltje Fanoy, Flying into the Hands of Strangers. Melbourne: collective effort press / ftloose productions, 2018. ISBN: 9780959375503

Susan Hawthorne

Jeltje Fanoy's book is a book of contrasting experiences. There is great happiness in here, from the beautiful cover photo through to the CD of music and sound poems in the back of the book. A variation of the cover photo is repeated inside in which the bird flies into the hand and it also flies away. This sense of the fleetingness of experience, the comings and goings, the gains and losses is one of the enduring themes of this collection.

The happiness that comes is no superficial happiness; rather it is a kind of life joy that arises from surviving tough experiences. These experiences such as migrating to Australia in the 1960s and as Jeltje says in the second poem

Daydreams about wiry, yet-to-be-befriended class mates

Her sidekick to loneliness among other children, presumably mostly Anglo-Australians, is an acknowledgement of a child's sense of 'unbelonging' without the inevitability of falling in to despair. Time and again in the poems there is a sense of being left out, of the weather not being the way it should be, or a sudden perception of displacement.

Her diptych poem 'Mirror image' shows that experience in the shape of the poems and the last three lines:

Them...took...us...from...to To...from...us...took...them

Them to

Took from

Us

The taking from continues to this day and this last stanza of four in this visual poem makes the experience visceral. Jeltje Fanoy's words draw a stark line around the current government's asylum seeker policy.

The visual keeps appearing. In 'disappearing world' the jigsaws don't quite work

To them

From took

Us

in a disappearing world we lay our jigsaws, retrieve pieces that are missing, some break off, fall from the edge, we re-imagine them at night, clutching at straws, hoping they'll turn up out of the darkness, we have pens by our bedside, we have books with blank pages, just in case, for the missing piece, the one that melted away after a glass of wine, the one we always miss in recounts of all the pieces, the one that slipped away, shines brightly in another person's jigsaw (the shape is right, but the details are all wrong!)

Jeltje's poems are also full of movement, leaving the house, catching a train or a tram, flying free, riding a bicycle, swimming and driving. These are poems going places, acutely observing everything as she passes through (at whatever speed).

But then the walls come up, whether it is the increasingly armed inspectors on public transport, the barriers between people as well as the walls of hatred, derision and condescension. There are battles to be waged against the world, external ones cars that blow exhaust fumes at pedestrians, and internal ones when feeling trapped.

th language hurts

it's a form of torture, it's a form of torture

painted into a corner not letting go its a form of torture

without a name and holding on not letting anyone down th

Poems about her parents' memories of World War Two appear late in the book with improvisations of living. She writes:

Waiting for my mother

after World War Two

I taught myself to walk/fall/walk

It's this resilience that shines through the poems, as well as through the land, the birds, trees, beaches and the Merri Creek where John Batman made a treaty with the people of the Kulin nation.

Flying into the Hands of Strangers is a collection of poems with political resonances, but they are also playful. They would make a wonderful resource in schools because of their different forms and poetic method, it would send the message that poems are about real life. A serious message embedded in joyful existence. Read and listen to her poems.

Susan Hawthorne is a poet and publisher. She is the author of eight collections of poetry including, *Cow* (2011) shortlisted for the Kenneth Slessor Poetry Award, *Earth's Breath* (2009) shortlisted for the Judith Wright Poetry Prize as well as a verse novel *Limen* (2013) and most recently a novel, *Dark Matters* (2017). Her forthcoming collection, *The Sacking of the Muses* will be published in 2019.

