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BLOOD LINES

Rebecca Edwards, *Eating the Experience*.
Metro Press, Brisbane n.d. 19pp.
shane rowlands, *cicatriced histories*.
Metro Press, Brisbane n.d. 20pp.
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Rebecca Edwards and shane rowlands are members of separate tribes. What could be more different than a new mother (Edwards) and a self-proclaimed uzzi-machine-gun cultural activist (rowlands)? Although their topics and approaches are different, these poets share a similar underlying premise, in that both examine the duality of women's existence. Edwards' *Eating the Experience* is contemplative, fluid and disturbing, while rowlands' *cicatriced histories* is raw, immediate and complex.

Eating the experience is a great title for this group of poems. Edwards writes about experience which is both very personal and essentially female. Childbirth, poverty, death, life and love are sliced up and served raw for our consumption and appraisal, and some taste better than others.

In "For My Mother's Birthday," Edwards uses the image of the eggshell to symbolise woman's fertility, her delicate yet brittle emotions, and the sterile "eggshell white" hospital walls that surround her. Contemplating her unborn child, the woman thinks of herself in her own mother's womb and is drawn

back through her matrilineal heritage. She thinks to herself ... "You must consider/ your own finiteness/ a time before You." The poem ends with the poignant image of a flower offering to her mother. The recognition of bloodline is beautifully rendered.

During pregnancy and childbirth a woman must relinquish control over her body (often to a male doctor) in different ways. The intrusiveness of modern medicine is chillingly narrated in "Induction" and "Man Scan." Awaiting her impending induction in a cool sterile world, the woman in "Prelude" says that "[she] cannot hear the magpies/ slicing through the morning with their scalpel song." As an image of one contemplating the unknown, it is incisive.

"Dark Hour" and "Job Search" are heartbreaking tales of poverty, "Eating the Experience: A Warning" takes a wickedly amusing look at the female poet and her tendencies, and "Weird Sister Shortcut" is an edgy poem, reminiscent of a bad dream. Its strange and shocking imagery is colourful, if a little confusing.

The death of an unknown man left unseen by passers-by in "the brackish arms of oblivion" makes "For a Stranger" a compelling, yet disturbing, poem. Edwards' poems are a pleasure to read because her imagery is vivid and recognisable, even if the subject matter may not always be to your taste.

shane rowlands' *cicatriced histories* invokes responses that can simultaneously attract and repel. rowlands' poetry operates through gaps/spaces which allow the reader to look into a mind full of extremes overflowing with droll and disturbing imagery. These gaps are both typographic and allegorical, marking the author's awareness of "otherness," of being outside. But she is not just outside, she surrounds.

rowlands uses rhythms that are woven to suit her subject. Her language flows or jerks depending upon the chosen theme, Unusual cadence is used with good effect in "slutting with summer" and "branded," but falls short in "bed-time stories" and "cardiographies."

"slutting with summer" demonstrates a jerking rhythm and typographical imagery that make it more than just the written word, a picture that is absorbed by the eye as well as the brain. The shutters the woman hides behind are illustrated by typographical gaps. The text seeps into cracks and crevices, highlighting the negative/positive spaces of the poem and the woman's world. Heady and emotive, "slutting with summer" shouts of a secret that "promises to be cool...if [the woman] has the decency to stay quiet."

In "lake of suicides: pussycat, diva of grief, sings the blood-sucking blues" the poet uses nursery rhyme rhythms to introduce the reader into what should be a safe world. But *her*

pussycat is not "going to london to visit the queen," she's "Furious, frenzied for stalking a meal" and when you go down to the woods today you are "in for a big surprise" because the "Tears will corrode your eyes." Rowlands' rhymes belong to the street, not to the safety of the nursery world. She uses familiar illusion to introduce the shocking reality of suicide.

In "a modest knowing" the poet likens her tampon to an animal living in a nest, as her "palm cradle[s] [her] tampon/ inquiline born (to) desiring smuggler." The thought of a blood-soaked tampon as an incarnadine animal being vaginally smuggled is at once disgusting and amusing.

shane rowlands' imagery looks into women's lives and sees the shadows, the fury and the secrets, and tells us stories about them. The language is alive, vivid and full of dichotomy, as if she were stroking us with one hand and poking out our eye with the other.

cicatriced histories and *Eating the Experience* may be very different, but together they serve up timely depictions of the complexity of the female condition.

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