

Cherie Imlah

IMAGES OF DESIRE

Beatriz Copello and Maralyn Rush (eds), *Sappho's Dreams and Delights*. Bemac Publications, PO Box 96, Earlwood NSW 2206. 2001. ISBN 0 9579697 0 8

The Australian anthology of Lesbian poetry, *Sappho's Dreams and Delights*, documents a broad cross-section of life. Erotic poems celebrate the female body with revelations of lust, longing and loss. Others open out to feelings and moods of place and atmosphere. Some speak with wit and irony.

A number of well-known poets are included but lesser-known and emergent poets stand up well in this company, in poems which engage, surprise or delight. Louise Maral's "Coming Home" traces a complex relationship of loss and proximity in painful counterpoint. "Trinity" by Kristen Hedgecoe recounts a threesome in which the male fantasy is used for female purposes. Jesse Blackadder's "Poem for the Hour" drips with the heat and sensuality of a tropical liaison.

The poems of Ruth Kharis are particularly engaging, combining wit and emotion with brevity. In "I Am Strong" she recounts "... still / I sing to the rain/call to the water babbling/and cry like no other." In "Free Fall" she takes risks "... not

knowing/when/I will hit concrete / always / surprised / when I land/on your smile."

The winner of the Bemac Poetry Competition (which led to the publication of this anthology), Eleni Prineas, has two poems in the anthology: "In Love with a Groovy Chick" and "Poem accompanied by Brick" deal with the vagaries of fickle relationship choices. In both, self-mockery and satire blend in a stylish and confident tone, as in "but that was before I met/lovely, luminous lorraine / and got / all / alliterative / again," and "it turned out/she didn't have the sun in her hands, after all, / and the perilousness of autumn had been exaggerated."

On a different note, Una Kali Shakti's two poems present other aspects of the Lesbian experience. "Train of Thoughts ... WoWhooooo" is unabashed eroticism while "One Size Fits All?" is a polemic to a rap beat on the otherness of a Black Woman in predominantly White Lesbian company, "I was coloured too strong / my hair was all wrong." The latter poem is one of the few in the Anthology to successfully incorporate rhyme; some seem awkward and contrived.

But due acknowledgment must be given to the imaginative range of well-known poets. Dorothy Porter's "The Emerald Leopard" smoulders with striking eroticism: "you want the cuff of her paw / you dream / of her weight on your chest." Jill Jones's

"The Night Before Your Return" evokes a lover's waiting time: "You are asleep and out of range./ Spiders work, their lines / arrange like poetry." Louis Wakeling's "Death in Marina Ròmea" recalls a less sanguine time as, "ceilings mimic the scrape/of chair-legs / or a child's aria of pain."

Two poems are of interest for content and style: Margaret Bradstock's "The Jessie Tree" traces the placenta as spiritual, mundane and culinary object while Gina Mercer's "Breasts" is a catalogue of recollected mammaries with amusing overtones as in "... how hers hung / at angles like the ears of a neglected dog ..." The poem is formed on the page as breasts, with the absence of punctuation facilitating the flow of memory.

There is a variety of experience in this anthology to interest most poetry readers. While the predominant eroticism immediately arrests the attention, it is in the more reflective poems, where imagery is subtle and inventive, that the complexity of love relationships is best expressed.