

range of human experience and whose roots go down securely to psychological depth. It is because Rob Riel's story, depicting the importance of "delusions" in life, has such roots, that it is not only witty and sophisticated, but also significant.

In *Maybe Tomorrow*, Boori (Monty) Pryor, another Townsville author, writes: "To hear stories from and about your own country gives you a strong sense of belonging." He is referring to the stories which only Aboriginal people can tell, but which, he believes, can be important to Australians of all backgrounds. Inheritors of the culture that has made both deserts and gardens of this land, the contributors to *Lord of the Parks* are also, in their different way, helping North Queenslanders "belong." One wishes them well as they grow in their craft, experience, and courage.



Marion J. Hulme

A JOURNEY OF RARE VISION

rear vision, shane rowlands & susi
blackwell. A limited edition artists'
book, 27pp., [Spindrift Press, 1997]

In her first collection of poetry *cicatrized histories* shane rowlands was an angry woman, her pithy and piercing social commentary was indicative of the "uzzi-machine-gun cultural activist" she confessed herself to be. Her poems in *rear vision* are reflective of her original style and have the same biting social context, but with a mature and personal edge. Rowlands is more relaxed with the world and its limitations. Life and more profoundly, death, are portrayed in these poems concerning the life of Susa and that of her grandmother Bertha Lina:

anchor-less
susa is raining
flooding swollen river tears
dissolving with her body's insight

my nana's bones mouldering in
 goondiwindi
my nana's bones home-sickening
 fractious with exile
my nana's bones lying cocooned in the
 dimples of my back

(susa's dimples)

"Susa's dimples" comes early in the collection and weighs in as one of its most profound and moving eulogies.

This book, no larger than a cd, speaks of the voluminous life of Berthe Lina through her granddaughter's eyes. And much more. Susa's thoughts, imaginings and rememberings are chronicled, her life and her grandmother's entwined. The girl's language is a puzzle which

leads the reader on a journey through Susa's mind and memories, leaving the traveller at an imaginary destination feeling the associated euphoria and inevitable jet lag.

The title *rear vision* suggests looking back. This remembering is done through a distorted mirror and is reflected in interwoven stories that unfold throughout the text. The stories/poems read like splintered memory. Only some of the poems follow on from one another, there are intersections, secrets and clues, text paintings and word maps. There are transparent pages that are difficult to read, "bone boxes" and annotated "secret sentences." All these multifarious signs and symbols go together to make up the jigsaw puzzle that is *rear vision*.

rear vision is not easy to read, with its many coloured paper stocks and text changes, photographic images and coloured type. Upon first encountering this collection I was tempted to dismiss it as a pretty picturebook. But, as I journeyed further into its world I found intrigue, adventure and a playfulness that was not evident at first glance. Within the collection, there is a wide range of poetic intent—from the myth of "the vapours" with its mocking depiction of Susa's "...torrents of snot suspended from her chin" to the reverential "rear vision" where her grandmother's life is written on Susa's bones. At the beginning of the collection

"re:requested" sits uncomfortably. It is a casual poem which has a hollow ring when compared to the deep and touching "gone wandering":

after visiting hours
sylvia plath ushers in the daisies
to keep vigil

in the arabian wilderness
the phoenix prepares its pyre

Haunting words which confront Susa's loss and reverberate further after turning the page to find Berthe Lina's piercing gaze and "the seance becomes a dance."

The annotative "secret sentences" with their emphasis on unexpected words, tell a story of their own. There is inherent wisdom contained in each one and connections with other poems within the work that are discovered inadvertently for example: "we dwell in the recollections of others", "hindsight is a gift with a rotten sense of timing" and "is this a journey or a holiday?" They tie the work together in a clever and unexpected way. The "secret sentences" are one of the keys to the traveller's chest.

Another key can be found in the "bone boxes." These boxes are situated on each page and contain an anatomical diagram and a description of the bone in question (NAME: Rib, true & false) followed by an explanation, with punning connections (DIRECTIONS: ring road off the vertebrae's main arterial. Take the

inland route to the heart). The seemingly logical structure of the "bone boxes" is belied by their whimsical contents.

rear vision is a vista conceived by two artists—Shane Rowlands who is a poet as well as a writer-performer, and Susi Blackwell who is a visual artist and graphic designer. This project had an integrated approach from its inception. The challenge Rowlands and Blackwell set themselves was to explore "the writerly dimensions of a designer's role & the design aesthetics which shape a writer's process." In this sense, "rear vision" is a stunning success. It embodies the artistic intent of a designer who cares about the content of the work, and illustrates the writer's desire to put forward a vision of her poetry that is not restricted by formal typographic structures. The sense of complete collaboration comes through—the word pictures, photographic images/questions and text structures unfold a unique concept that shapes a work that is not just "a book of poems" but a "poet's vision." It is a unique and inspiring artistic collaboration. *rear vision* will be appreciated by artists and writers alike for its innovative design and conceptual content.

rear vision is a rare vision indeed.

David McVeigh

ETHNIC ANGST

Sparring with Shadows, Archimede Fusillo. ISBN 014 038 656 4. Penguin Paperback \$12.95

A few years ago, when the hit stage production *Wogs out of Work* played to theatres here in coastal North Queensland, where Italian descendants are more than a little thick on the ground, I remember squirming every time I saw the TV commercial, featuring a matronly but animated lady with a characteristic accent trilling "vera good—vera narce" at the camera. It could have been an exchange direct from Archimede Fusillo's new young adult novel, *Sparring with Shadows*. As in the stage show, the racial taunt, "wog," is defused through its appropriation by young Italian Australians and by immersion in a colourful teenage vernacular.

Fusillo introduces David Martinesi, "a first-generation Italian Australian growing up in an inner-city suburb" engaged in an adolescent stunt—climbing the huge silos that overshadow his home, as a dare from Nathan Welsh, "the school tough kid." Language, like the silos, dominates the novel, and constitutes one of the "shadows" that Martinesi's Italian heritage throws over his life. Except for his sister, Rose, and himself, his entire family is marked with the Italian immigrant's