

is no longer the home of childhood but not yet the new country either. This is reminiscent of the kind of emotional disconnect hinted at by postcolonial writers like the Asian-Canadian Vassanji and a powerful expression of the negotiation necessitated by emigration.

Although some of the poems in the collection suffer from awkward and forced rhyming there are also some bright jewels like "Crystal Clear" by Nika-Atherton Soymonoff. This is a prism of sheer beauty. The phrase "the strangler-fig photocopies into the lake" is just one example of this poet's eloquence. The work is like a photograph taken from above, mirroring every exquisite detail, vividly capturing a moment in the rich life of a lake abounding with life and poised in perfection. Diane Messervy is also a poet who uses words with great effect. "The Long Wet" powerfully expresses the oppressive weight of humidity and makes the skin crawl with its vividness.

So, as I finish reading this varied collection of stories and poetry with what impression of Northern Queensland am I left? It is clear first of all that this is a land of extreme contrasts. There is immense beauty in the landscape ("Christmas Decorations in the Rainforest," "Crystal Clear," "Forest Fantasy") but there is also drama and fear in natural events ("A Mother's Fear"). There is love of family and friends and a desire to be with them and nostalgia for old countries, but there is also a need to escape from family bonds and a reluctance to

return—a propulsion towards new adventures. The stories and poems deal with family love and family dissension, and travel that is both a quest for origins and for new horizons. This collection illuminated for me the richness of the land and hinted at its complexity, its beauty, its ferocity and its warmth.

This collection, then, is a wonderful and tantalising introduction for this reader to both tropical Queensland and to its emerging writers, many of whom represent the potential of this region to outgrow any kind of lingering regional or provincial stigma that might still dog tropical Australia. *Raining on the Sun* is an anthology of writing that showcases some best-kept secrets of FNQ.



Malcolm Tattersall

MASKS

John Hughes. *Someone Else: Fictional Essays*. Artarmon: Giramondo Publishing. ISBN 9781 920882259 ISBN-10: 1920882251. pp.184 Paperback. RRP: \$24.95.

An English gentleman who has recently been knighted for his services to literature wrote a brief essay explaining and lauding our need for story. Once we had enough to eat, he said, we started to look for explanations — for the thunder and lightning, for why we died and what happened afterwards — and when we went from explaining the explicable to explaining the inexplicable, we went from *homo sapiens* to *homo narrans*, storytelling man. By his standard, a story which does not somehow leave us wiser is no story.

Art is, from any point of view, the greatest of risks. (Jean Helion)

An essay is by one definition an attempt. The difficult must be attempted or nothing great will be achieved.

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1. If knowledge the reader does not possess is essential to the reader's understanding of the text, the text is, to that extent, opaque to that reader.

1.1. 'Synaesthesia' means a personal set of associations between modes of perceptions, 'hearing' blue and 'smelling' four, for instance. Given its etymology, it could equally well mean a personal set of associations between ideas.

1.1.1. If a text depends on this kind of synaesthesia

for coherence, it may be comprehensible to the author but no-one else; or it may be comprehensible to the author and those who share his education but no others.

1.2. At one pole is the perfectly hermetic text, understood only by the author; at the other is the universally comprehensible text, such as the road sign warning drivers of a sharp curve ahead. An author may freely choose where to place himself between these extremes but is foolish if he does not know where his text places him *vis-a-vis* his potential readers.

2. If knowledge the reader does possess contradicts the text, and the text seems to be unaware of its own departure from realism, the credibility of the text is diminished in the eyes of that reader.

2.1 As a musician, I can accept the Cage and Dylan essays but must reject the Satie piece as having no discernible connection with the composer or his music.

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The relation of author to model varies. "Kafka," "Cage," and "Wittgenstein" are the authors of their essays; "Bob Dylan" (considerably mythologised), "Cavafy," and "Dostoyevsky" (displaced to contemporary Sydney) are the protagonists of theirs. But what, then, of "John Hughes"? He is, surely, the author of the essays *about*

other writers, but is he the author or the “author” of the essays *by* other writers?

The relationship between an author and his readers is tenuous. What, after all, do (I)* the reader know of the author? Only what he chooses to tell (me) through his book. If he wears a different mask every five pages, how can (I) know what his face looks like? If, indeed, “*Someone Else* uses the essay as a form of autobiography,” as the back cover asserts, the writer would seem to have no values or opinions of his own and only a poor grip on reality. Perhaps he is simply lost in a library that has become both a memory-palace and a maze.

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Should I say that *Someone Else* has “beautiful moments but bad quarter hours”? No, that is too harsh; but the fact that it occurred to me may stand as a warning. At least this book is not so long as the works to which that epigram originally applied.

Should I say that *Someone Else* is “both good and original, but the parts that are good are not original and the parts that are original are not good”? No, that also is too harsh; but the fact that it occurred to me may stand as a warning. Many of the parts are very good indeed but *Someone Else* is too uneven and too dependent on others’ imaginations to be entirely satisfying.

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These observations stand to *Someone Else* as a conventional review stands to a novel. What I have done to Hughes in this review is what he has done to his subjects. My object was to show, not tell, the pleasures and frustrations of his approach, an approach which has made a pastiche of other books that have influenced the author on his imaginative journey. To that end, I have deliberately failed to give most of my references (and the footnote is deliberately unhelpful, too); deliberately been obscure; deliberately mimicked a variety of other writers. Readers equipped to enjoy Hughes will, I hope, enjoy my review and understand all I am saying about the book.

* Thank you, Ron-the-Elder, for this neat locution.



Joanna McIntyre

NOT A THING OF THE PAST

Zillah Eisenstein. *Sexual Decoys: Gender, Race and War in Imperial Democracy*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press. ISBN 13: 978 1 876756 63 5 paperback. pp.142 + ViiiRRP: \$AU 34.95.

For many years before the 2008 US presidential election ushered