

Michele Nardelli, *Suburban Dreaming: Poems*. Brighton, South Australia: Chronicle Arts and Media, 2011. 30 pp. ISBN 978-0-646-56544-6.

This relatively slim, one might even say simple book, contains 18 poems in two parts with the headings “Home” and “Away.” While the first part represents the poet’s personal experiences at home in Australia, and more particularly Adelaide, the second records evidence of her travels.

The poet describes herself as someone with a passion for creative writing and the poems are referred to as private passions. The themes are indicated as being the following: family, places, people and the importance of travel, as well as the impact of new cultures. Thematically the poems may be seen in conformity with the two parts, in terms of the conflict between wanting to stay at home in “42 Sunset Crescent” (14), and the desire to leave even if temporarily, with a completion of the circle in fourth and fifth parts of the last poem in the volume, “Jetting” (24-29).

The poems are written in as direct impressions of first-hand experiences. The first part includes these such as the feeling of being boxed in an urban environment, while in some ways hoping to escape, or at least look beyond that limited space, hence the dreaming idea. Nature becomes an important consideration in “Winter Sun” (2) as well as in “Storm” (3). But most of the poems are personal. A good example is “AM Walking” (4). Yet even in the first part, the persona attempts to break away from the self into the environment as in “Tiny Dancer” (7). Overall, looking at the first part in terms of themes and content, the poems do not seem to meet the writer’s suggestion that they deal with all those themes mentioned above.

The poems in part two, “Away,” once again seem to fall short of expectations. In the case of the impressionistic piece “Life in Heaven” (19), the description of New Delhi takes into view a highly limited aspect of the city to which it does not do justice especially when the poet claims it as heaven in the title of the poem that in itself is misleading; nothing in particular about New Delhi appears in the poem. “Piers the Ronan” (20), a personal experience in hospital suggests the patient’s particular sense of confusion and isolation; there is little beyond that. This is also the case with the poems set in Istanbul. “Allah’s Song” (23) is particularly superficial and disappointing in this respect. The poem does not indicate any kind of detailed observation – just a superficial experience in a city of Muslims.

On the whole, then, as far as content goes, the poet achieves a certain sense of “belonging” in the poems set in Australia, but is unable to achieve any kind of significant relationship with the places she visits. The fact that the

poems are limited in number as well as scope may be partly responsible for this situation.

If there are weaknesses in her observation and description, these are offset in many ways by the manner in which the poet handles her language. Some of the language is striking, even original in its imagery, particularly where it comes to images derived from nature. The descriptions are good. The description of the moon, personified, is effective, but does not go beyond that. "Tiny Dancer" (7) has a good sense of rhythm, like the dancer herself. A strong contrast is provided between the dance and the urban landscape, in the form of the traffic breathing diesel, an interesting image. In "Nonna" (11) one encounters a good description of the older departed figure.

The one single striking thing about the poems, apart from her stylistic simplicity, is the tone, the sense of nostalgia. This gives the book a sort of unity. If one is looking for profundity in the poems then one is likely to be disappointed. Overall there is nothing serious in terms of content; the poems are meant to be enjoyed for themselves.

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