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Cavalcade: Literary Travels

This collection of stories and poems presents writings either produced from the 1995 Deakin Literary Writers’ Weekend or shared at one of the Society’s 1995 meetings in Melbourne and Geelong. As the editor puts it in his introduction, it ‘thematises the energies of a literary society’.

Raw energy and, indeed, a wry kind of humour seeps through the poetry of Trish Veale, Connie Barber, and Clarissa Stein. A more pensive, almost contemplative, mood is what characterizes the energies at work in the writings of David McCooey, Cameron Lowe, and Paul Lowie. Enthralling is the sensuous energy in Edward Reilly’s ‘Equinox’, like some of his images: ‘black buds which burrow themselves into stones’; ‘that blue glint may be a mote of copperstone or your eye’s reflection’; ‘What is it, the nape of your neck, or the bluestone ring and watchband which sit to one side as you knead the dough and dispense favours?’

Let me briefly focus on ‘Aerobics’ by Anna Sput-Stern which is a humorous account of the events in two days of her life. In less than two pages, the author manages to detail the character’s self-image, quirks, fears, likes and dislikes, and to give the reader an idea of her relationship with other people. All of this by exploring a common experience: going to the gym. The contrast between Anna, the character, and those she meets at the gym not only highlights her insecurities, and the shallowness of the gym scene, as the reader half expects, but also a more fundamental problem of communication.

Like ‘Aerobics’, ‘Our Boy’, by Bryan Dwyer, is told from the first person perspective. And like ‘Aerobics’, this is a witty tale. However, striking is its format: a collage of short, apparently disconnected sentences which confer a quirky, zappy, rhythm to a story revolving around a conventional theme, i.e., the generation gap and its ravages. Here, the Baby Boomer of a father expresses only disappointment and scorn for his generation X of a son until he is forced to reassess his values. The father’s attitude towards his son is nicely captured in the punch line: ‘Any fool can write a book of poems but to print one is an achievement’. A short, clipped and strangely moving piece.

There are some dried up energies in this collection, too. I found ‘Arrivals and Departures’ full of overused figures of speech. Rather tiresome prose. This, however, must be the ghost in a cavalcade of colourful texts.

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