

**Can you describe the journey to your first book being published. How far back do these poems go and how smooth was the process of selecting works for this debut collection?**

These poems have been written over the past seven years. I started the 'Jennifer & Angelina' dramatic monologues in 2009, but some poems take many years to get right, and those poems are a good example of slow poems. They were first published last year and I was working on them right up until that point, so they were six years in the making. Other poems came fast, but that is a rare, and lovely, experience. I'd like more of those! Choosing poems for the collection was a process – it could feel a bit like glaciers shifting. I've been moving poems around in a "collection" since 2014. Some new ones have been added and some poems I liked and thought were good enough were left out because they didn't fit, or were too similar in tone or form to other poems in the book.

**Which poets have most influenced your work (contemporary Australian and/or historical)?**

That's a big question. There are many poets whose work I love and carry with me. Whether those I most admire have had any influence on me is for others to judge, I think. Since I was a teenager, the poets I have come back to again and again include Coleridge, Hopkins, Rilke, Ted Hughes and Elizabeth Bishop. Judith Wright, Gwen Harwood, Dorothy Porter and Judith Beveridge are the Australian poets that formed my poetic frame of reference. Two UK poets working now whose poems I greatly respect and admire are Jo Shapcott and Don Paterson. Kei Miller and Fiona Benson are also wonderful and I'd thoroughly recommend their work. I'm also on a bit of an Edna St. Vincent Millay bender at the moment, too.

**How have your local surroundings in the Northern Rivers had an impact on your poetry?**

A huge impact. I moved here with my husband eight years ago and soon afterwards we adopted our baby son from Taiwan. All of the poems in this collection were written since we moved here. It's been an incredibly fertile time, and very challenging, too. Lots of the animal and landscape poems in the book are directly inspired by the country and the cows, swamphens, echidnas, snakes, cats, horses, mice and dogs we live with, and near. But not always in the romantic way people might associate with poetry: one poem was inspired by my feelings of horror at a children's birthday party at Macadamia Castle..... There is a sequence of poems inspired by an exhibition of Philip Wolfhagen landscape paintings I saw at the wonderful Tweed Regional Gallery in Murwillumbah, and the actual gallery itself is just as important as the paintings to those poems. But there are plenty of Sydney and London poems in the mix too because they are both cities I lived in prior to moving here. And the Angelina and Jennifer monologues are set in Venice and LA (of course!).

**How important is how a poem looks on the page to you in terms of its form and spacing etc? And is accessibility a priority for you?**

How a poem looks is important, but no way near as important as how it reads: poems are always composed in a particular form. For me, sound, metre and rhythm are much, much important than how the poem looks on the page. I find most concrete poetry pretty ho-hum. That's not to say I advocate performance over solitary reading. I believe the primary relationship in poetry is between the words on the page and the reader. But those markings on the page denote sound and rhythm, like musical notation. The sound of a word, the metre of a line, the rhythm of a phrase, all carry meaning in a poem.

Accessibility is a priority for me, but not at the expense of intelligence, nuance or complexity. But I do I abhor poems that are deliberately opaque, or "clever" – that's just a parlour game being played by an irrelevant coterie. And it happens a lot in the poetry world. I love poems that are genuine, that are striving to say something and to engage with the mysteries of life. If a poem is genuine and it's a good poem then it can't be paraphrased. It's not about something, it is something. So I want my poems to be accessible, but by that I just mean that I want a reader to be able to engage with the poems, to find something there. That doesn't mean the poem is easy, or able to be explained.

I think all good poems are accessible because they dip into the deep pool of language and meaning and cultural reference that humans share. When a poem dips into that place then all sorts of connotations and associations reverberate for a reader, way beyond anything the writer consciously had in mind when they were composing the poem.

For example, I wrote some poems last year about roses. I knew the roses were important, symbolically, to the poems, but I was also acutely aware that they've been done to death in English language poetry. I was really careful as I was writing, trying to avoid falling into cliché and also trying to avoid what I thought I should be saying. Writing a poem is a process of discovery. For me, I can pretty much guarantee that if a finished poem in any way resembles my initial idea for the poem then it will be a failure – it's vital to allow the poem to open up and take me somewhere unexpected.

Some time after I finished writing I found myself reading T.S. Eliot's 'Four Quartets' for the first time. I probably shouldn't admit that, but although I love Prufrock I'd been burned by 'The Wasteland' and so had steered clear of 'Four Quartets' in reaction. Needless to say, it was a very humbling experience. Everything I had been exploring and straining to say in my poems about and through roses had already been said by T.S. Eliot much more skilfully and beautifully, a hundred years ago. And I don't say this in a postmodern way ("There's nothing new under the sun," etc), what I'm trying, clumsily, to illustrate is the deep tradition and lineage that every poem ever written taps

into. Roses have many cultural meanings. And that's why good poems that are written in good faith, poems that are genuine and wanting to communicate with a reader are accessible, even if they are difficult. This is not to discount the big and real questions about dominant discourses and there being a real need to subvert the cultural meanings that exclude or subjugate particular groups in society; as a woman I am very cognizant of that - of the political and economic and gender and racial realities behind the cultural meaning of roses. Who shovels the shit and who gets to smell the roses, for example. Who gets to write the poem about the rose and who is the object, being compared with a rose. But the great thing about poetry is that those dominant discourses can be engaged with and subverted too, within the poem.

**What was your intention with, or interpretation of, the book's title?**

And that's one of the things I wanted to do with the title: signal that this is a book of poems written by a woman, but I hope the themes and subjects are universal – I'm writing for earth boys as well as earth girls.

I decided to call the collection *Earth Girls* as an idiomatic response to the Martian school of defamiliarisation that I have always found disrespectful and awfully pleased with itself. I don't think Anglophone poetry needed a Martian perspective to freshen up its stale and pompous tendencies, it just needed to give more space to good poets writing excellent poems with a perspective much more from the margins. I think the perspective of an earth girl is more strange and "slant" than the perspective of a straight white guy in Oxford masquerading as a Martian.

The title comes from one of the poems in the book – a dramatic monologue in the voice of an alien, lamenting that, in his experience, earth girls are definitely not easy.

**Finally, given the relatively small audience there is for poetry, what are the key ways you anticipate promoting the book in the coming months?**

I am willing to promote the book in any way I can! I might do a sponsored roll around Australia just like one of Chris Lilley's characters in *We can be heroes.....*

But seriously, I would love to read or speak at festivals and events both here in the Northern Rivers or further afield.