



Destinations Unknown,
Melanie Busato. Self
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Reviewed by Patricia
Prime

Destinations Unknown is a first poetry collection by Melanie Busato. The poet has experienced ovarian cancer and some of these poems focus on her illness, others are concerned with nature, Asia, childhood and modern life. The book is divided into four sections: "Petits Four," "Destinations Unknown," "For the Love of Nature" and "The Cancer Collection."

In *Destinations Unknown*, Melanie Busato wrestles with language and ideas. Some poems navigate the dark labyrinth of illness whilst others create unusual images, make daring juxtapositions, and shake up our usual perceptions of how things are.

In "Petit Four" (divided into four parts): "Barista," "To Night," "Shadow" and "The Sand Poet"), she writes in "Barista":

*I drowned in a cup of coffee today
Somewhere between the macchiato swirls
And sugar crystals
While they hung your apron out to dry*

In "Lonely Satellite," we see the satellite overhead in the night sky:

*but still that satellite
makes her way over misty fields
by the light of paperbark moons
watched by the millions and millions below
reflected in the shadowy tears of earth's beasts
as they roam beneath her beckoning light*

Busato offers a feast for the mind but she does it with feeling, with integrity and with care. One example of this is the poem "Goddess River" where she explores the concept of how one may capture the language of love and whether the

loved one has "learned to let you love flow, wind and water free?"

The next section, "Destinations Unknown", contains three poems about travel: "Wet," "Suria KLCC" and "Maluam Minggu (Saturday Night)." This last poem is about the Indonesian night for dating, where "girls in jilbabs guard their figures jealously."

In "For the Love of Nature," Busato shifts, in the first six poems, from verse to prose poems. The last poem in this section, "When the Whip Birds Talk in Tongues" is honest and works well, striking a good balance between poetic observation and story-like narration. We're led from a woman "lying where the sun rarely penetrates", to "The grove of eternity from whence the world first expanded and to hence it will once again retreat. Nowhere and everywhere, all the same."

"The Cancer Collection" opens with three poems on the subject of cancer: "Opened Vein," "Silver Ribbon" and "Curls." The latter is haunting, elusive and humorous, as the poet unfurls, ravel and coils her curls through her fingers but, later at a party, someone remarks on her beautiful hair and she discloses that "Chemotherapy is how they came to be / a part of me!" The final poem, "The Truth about Mermaids" has resonant echoes raised by the refrain:

*The truth you see
The truth is that Mermaids
Are vampires of the sea*

which allows for a momentary ambiguity. "a wet maiden" may tempt and bewitch you, rain, salt and rum may drench you, but you will finally see the truth.

I'm not depressed or down-hearted by Busato's poems. Rather I am uplifted by their bleak honesty and the poet's ability with language. I revel in the dark scenes with her and feel suitably troubled, but there are plenty of lighter moments and humour to lighten her poems. It is a book one can return to again and again in order to remind oneself of how invigorating it can be to look at things with searing honesty.