



***The Continuing Adventures of Alice Spider* by Janis Freegard. USA: Anomalous Press (2013). RRP: \$20. Pb, 32pp. ISBN: 9781939781000. Reviewed by Sue Wootton.**

Janis Freegard is a Wellington poet whose collection *Kingdom Animalia: The Escapades of Linnaeus* was published in 2011 by Auckland University Press. *The Continuing Adventures of Alice Spider* is a chapbook of prose poems selected from a longer version of the same name and published by the small US-based publisher, Anomalous Press.

I've been carrying Alice Spider in my handbag for weeks. She is small, but she's curious, forthright, eccentric and altogether a delightful companion. She's reminded me that the world is a funny place: funny ha-ha and funny peculiar. Through Alice's compound eyes quotidian sights and tasks are revitalised. Post Offices are funny (especially when cows go in to pay the car registration); burglars are funny (especially when they wrap your cutlery in tissue paper); Alice, her friends, and perhaps especially her Nanna, are extremely funny. Alice is frank and tart (actually "she's a trollopy little tart"). She's sharp as a tack. She sets traps with words and makes you wriggle like heck when you get caught. *Alice Works* ought to be pinned above every writer's desk. It tells what happens when Alice gets a real job. After a while Alice concludes: "Work is the sale of strength, of thought, of dexterity. Alice takes up writing. She sells her soul."

Alice's interests are 'fucking and fighting'. Her lover sings "Alice the Camel has two humps", which is an action song, says Alice. She's everywhere and nowhere at once, both elusive and ever-present. She is, among other things, weaver, webster, spinner of lives, spinner of lies, wearer of cloaks, tiger, wild child, old as the moon and just the right age. Perhaps this makes her sound exasperating and impossible – so many contradictions. But, as Czech poet Vladimír Holan once wrote, if you have no contradictions you have no possibilities. Alice proves the point: she is the vibrant soul of limitless possibility. As such, she's linguistically explorative and stylistically

inventive. "Alice is Alice is Alice. And she is truly alive."

Freegard's writing in *The Continuing Adventures of Alice Spider* is a creative delight. I suspect that I'm channelling Alice when I declare that it puts the joy back in earnest. This little chapbook is something to treasure.

Anomalous Press has details of purchase at www.anomalouspress.org/books/alice.php *The Continuing Adventures of Alice Spider* is also available as an e-book and an audio book.