



The Lonely Nude
by Emily Dobson.
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Reviewed by Janet
Newman.

It is fitting that a poetry collection called *The Lonely Nude* should begin and end with a bare bottom – at least the image of one. The first

is in the poem “Mapua” which evokes a childhood memory of swimming naked in a river. Here are its final lines:

I pulled myself along a thick rope
against the current

my pale bum bobbing

The last is in “The lonely nude, I” which ends the collection:

Buck naked
I am standing
on the flattering sole
of one foot.
It’s nothing
but blue sky
and a soft bottom
in the plain light of day.
I smile like a madonna.
I am nothing like a boulder.

The final line, ‘I am nothing like a boulder’ tells much about the ‘soft’ and ‘flattering’ body of the nude model, while simultaneously alluding to the boulder’s hard surface and containment. It refers back to the adjective in the title which Dobson reports in her author’s notes ‘comes from Janet Frame’s *Daughter Buffalo*.’ It is hard to imagine feeling anything but lonely when you are the only unclothed person in the room, and the four short poems that describe the time Dobson worked as a life model reveal introspection and isolation. ‘Rude Jude goes nude,’ which is sourced from ‘a *Women’s Weekly*-type magazine’ (notes), offers a quite different take on nudity, using and satirizing the language and attitude of the gossip column:

Jude Law you bastard!
Sienna’s running away up the street in tears.
You had hot sex with the nanny on a pool table
which is now for sale.
And now you take your clothes off at your parents’
house!

Another poem dealing with the body,
“Comedogenic”,¹ is enigmatic and ends:

The wind keeps me
awake, and I tear at
(there’s no nice way to say this)
my weeping anus.

The self-conscious address in brackets, keeping the reader close, is typical of the conversational tone of the collection of mostly confessional poems. They follow a period in the life of the poet who is the autobiographical poet speaker.

The collection is divided into clearly demarcated time periods. These are childhood memories in the section called “Prehistory,” time spent as a life model in “The Lonely Nude,” the self-explanatory “Holiday in Mexico,” then “Fall in America,” “Winter,” “Spring,” and finally “Going Home.” The back cover blurb reports Dobson travelled to Iowa as the Glen Schaeffer Fellow in 1985 after completing a MA in Creative Writing at Victoria University.

The elegant, dual-coloured cover featuring a photograph of a nude exposing their back, and yes, their bottom, is perfect for this collection. The poems are like snippets of memory or conversational asides – a thought, an image, a moment recalled. A distinction is the number of quoted lines from a variety of sources listed in the author’s note.

This is Dobson’s second collection. Her first, *A Box of Bees* (2005) was unified by its focus on a bee-keeping business and sexual undertones. *The Lonely Nude* is less integrated with many shifts in geography, season and interspersed quotations.

Nevertheless, the poems are satisfying, particularly the longer “A real ‘piece of work.’” This is a love poem that stitches together desire and the making of a quilt and ending magically with a fine apology for a love bordering on containment. Here are the final two stanzas:

I made a spell,
winding a rope around your heart.
And now I stitch you into every stitch
of this quilt, which will wrap itself around you too.

Oh, my darling,
forgive me!

Reviews



This poem shifts beyond the surface view to an emotion more intense than the coolness and disconnection of the lonely nude, to something deeper, something that lies beneath the ‘pale bum bobbing.’

- 1 Comedogenic : A word that means, ‘tending to clog pores especially by the formation of blackheads,’ (Merriam-Webster Online).
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