This is Dorothy Porter's fourth verse novel. The first three have been spectacularly successful, and it’s easy to see why. Porter’s verse is seductive, allusive and totally captivating, and wraps her narrative in an intensity and clarity that would be difficult to achieve in prose.

El Dorado is the nom de guerre of a Melbourne serial killer who is lovingly and painlessly murdering young children, flaunting his crimes in poems sent to the newspapers. Detective Inspector Bill Buchanan is on the case but getting nowhere. He calls in his childhood friend Cath, a Hollywood fantasy-monger who he thinks might be able to help him. The story is about their friendship as much as about catching this bizarre killer.

The plot is intriguing but nothing new: such stories are the stuff of airport blockbusters. But Porter’s pared-down verse cuts away much of the pedestrian business of the novel: descriptions and settings are conveyed with a word or two, and the narrative springs easily from one poem to the next without needing the usual connective tissue. Narrative verse is an unusual art form these days, probably rightly so, because it’s hard to imagine many writers doing it as well as Porter.