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This is the author's radio script of this article.

Vertigo. Amanda Lohrey. Black Inc. 2008.

Reviewed by Gillian Dooley for Writers Radio, Radio Adelaide, recorded 12 November 2008.

Vertigo is a new novella from novelist and essayist Amanda Lohrey, a modern fable about a couple seeking the simple life – and home ownership – away from the pressures of the city.

Liberated from the commuter lifestyle by broadband, Luke and Anna find a place on the coast, in a small settlement untroubled by tourism or development, with ‘a weatherboard homestead from the Federation era with a gabled roof and dilapidated gravitas they yearned to restore.’ Joining them from time to time is the strangely corporeal ghost of their child, whose hauntings they cherish. Their touching engagement with this lost boy and their negotiation of a future in which he cannot take part is the central thread of the novella.

Vertigo feels like the beginning of something bigger. There are many promising beginnings. We are introduced to their neighbour Rodney, a troubled, adulterous, dope-cultivating plumber, and there is the sense that a subplot is about to evolve. The local mansion is owned by a shadowy consortium said to have development plans with the potential to ruin the ecology of their newly-discovered paradise. But neither of these strands takes us anywhere. Luke finds a copy of Sir Frederick Treves’s book about Palestine, *The Land That Is Desolate*, and comes back to it through the novella. There may be parallels to be drawn between Treves’s journey and Luke’s, but Lohrey leaves this entirely to the reader’s discretion.

Vertigo is illustrated with black and white photographs by Lorraine Biggs. They seem to be accomplished photographs, but the scale is tiny: at less than six

centimetres across the detail is indistinct and little of their atmospheric quality can be appreciated.

And perhaps something similar can be said about the text. I don't remember ever complaining before that a novel is too short: the opposite problem is far more common. However, *Vertigo* introduces us to two likeable characters in an interesting situation, presents them with a life-threatening ordeal, and finishes abruptly before we have a chance to let them settle into our lives in that satisfying way fictional characters are sometimes able to do. The promise is all there but we are left wanting more – much more.