

Quinn Eades, *Rallying* (UWAP, 2017)

In the opening poem of *Rallying*, Quinn Eades quotes the French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray: 'Call yourself. Give, yourself, names.' then presents us with a fourteen-page poem in which the poet moves swiftly, however fragmentedly, from a little girl who cares for her sister, to a heroin addict and sex worker, to a male writer. There are other identities, too, that fall in between, each as crisply visualised as the one before. It's called 'How to disappear in your name', and it's an adapted form of haibun, where memories are a rush of prose, and reflections in short-stanza verse follows. And it's stunning. It's closely aligned with Eades's ficto-critical(ish) 2015 debut prose work, *all the beginnings: a queer autobiography of the body*, a book of non-fictive feminist poetics, a highlight of my reading last year. They were written side by side and they cover the same territory, but rather than see *Rallying* as a new way to write *all the beginnings*, I see it as a new way to write the body: the body as child, the used and addicted body, the mothering body which has its foundations in the female birthing and therefore the nourishing and giving body, the body in love, the trans body. In a single poem, which, unlike the rest of the poems in the book is not bracketed by a titled section but stands alone as its own body, so to speak, Eades paints the person who held each name, and each name comes together to culminate in 'Quinn', and in Quinn.

She is PK/Francis/Stevie/Rayne/Persephone/Sarah/Mama/Karina/ Quinn. She takes them all and holds them inside her skin. She is all names, for herself: she is no one named.

If 'rallying' is the action of coming together to support a person or cause, or the action of digging into the depths of one's capability to keep going, then in this first book of poetry, Quinn Eades is in full-on rallying mode, supporting the body in writing it raw, and writing it raw in order to keep the body going. The poet writes that he learned to 'carry myself like a wound' (16), a sentiment echoed throughout the book. Though, like the poem's title, 'Shine on me', suggests, the book basks in resilience. This body, in its abjectness, belongs; this body, in its push and pull, loves.

Rallying has its foundations in feminist theory, and I read it as a book that could easily be added to the canon of Australian feminist poetry, but the debate on whether or not trans bodies are bodies that can speak for feminists is real. That being the case, *Rallying* is Exhibit One for why transgendered people can identify as feminists. Eades writes about mothering from a place of such brutal honesty that I can't separate the personal confessional from the cultural political:

Sometimes, in the yawning day (because time is like breath) I would have a shower. It was an activity for us, like pram walks and tummy time. There was the undressing and dressing, busyness, blessed movement, and in between, this: water. My back against the lime scaled glass, thigh become plug. The sound of the shower tray filling. The way Zach would press his whole body into mine, clinging limpet rockling darling downy gosling lost against my chest. Stinging water dreaming warmth me singing

take these broken wings and learn to fly, all your life,

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you were only waiting for this moment to arise.

It made a beautiful picture. My voice. The water. His curling trust. But in my head I was doing this: laying him down in the shower tray and watching as the water rose, tickling at his ears, then covering his cheeks, pooling over his eyes, entering his mouth and nose. It's not that I wanted him gone: it was that I couldn't go on. I couldn't go on but there was no choice. What really happened was this: I kept singing. He kept curling. (51-52)

Poetry like this makes women question our place as natural ascenders to unconditional lovers of our children. No doubt the 'unconditional' in this poem is present and powerful, but so is having the strength to say that there is nothing natural about it.

And so we come back to the body. Babies are part of the body because they begin in it, are extracted from it, then take from it, and so these poems of babies that lend themselves to poems of love and domesticity – and they do make up a significant portion of the book – are always, again and again, about the body.

When we get home I decide to bury
the placenta – it has been defrosted for this moment.
I expect love but find instead the gag from leaking
bits of blood onto the brick.

The animals gather, Penny licking.
The burying, the gagging, the burying. (35)

This burying of the placenta is a burying of the body, just as children's neediness consumes the body:

It is almost unbearable,
the nearness of these children. The feeling
that they are trying to swallow me. (42)

Children invade the body, almost like a sickness might, embedding themselves, feeding themselves, trying to get back in once they've been successfully removed.

And so we shift seamlessly to the ill body, where sickness is so intrinsically a part of the body that there is no separation until one – either body or sickness – is killed:

You bloom, necrotic, spotted, carrioned.
Dead egg carrier you torse, you double, you
shout at the tear that is my
groin back ribs leg knee throat back
back back back back.

He can't find you. They talk
about us in third person not knowing
we are fourth person poetic split by pain.
They want to send us home.

Dragonfruit: bloom, split, tear, twist, turn.
But they do. Find you. They spear
you and bag you. Pull you through
a hole in my belly after their metal scissors
snip at your talk. Dead moon. Distended.

And then.

And then you are gone. (109-110)

But what happens when serious illness is taken away from the body? Like a child who has died, the illness, though gone, will always live within the body. These things – children, illness, addiction – leave such lasting traces within our bodies that they help form our identities. Eades is about this: identity.

So much of this book depends on writing, which may sound an obvious thing to say, but Eades also writes about the writing body and its crucial place in his enduring identity.

I grab at text like it is making meaning where I lie. Like it will still be
here
later. When I leave. When every part of me is dustmaker and you can't
remember the colour of my eyes
the way I sound when I cough. That stretch. I grab. At text. (115)

Text sustains the body and will replace it when the body is gone.

Less successful in *Rallying* are poems that concentrate on foreign place. In these poems, such as those found in the section 'Away with Them' taking the poet out of the safety of the domestic space of tea, Callistemon, climbing-children and love, is akin to taking him out of his own skin. The body is lost, reflection is stilted; the poems feel distracted, as if something is missing. A poem like 'To be kissed', however, works because though Eades relates an experience of being kissed on the cheek by and kissing back a woman on the streets of Lisbon, he sees himself reflected in the woman: body as recognition of body.

This is a striking debut, heralding the arrival of a new voice in Australian poetry that has plenty to say and does so with a rare blend of research and lived experience, theory and memory. His choice of form, too, is unique, and it's here that I want to mention the book's final poem. Just as 'How to disappear inside your name' is an introduction that prepares us for themes to come, 'Tender Bodies' is a conclusion that summarises the themes (the sections are titled 'Boycunt', 'Writing' and 'Love'). Both poems are prose poems in paragraphed stanzas, though verse twists its way through in the form of traditional stanza poetry in 'How to disappear' and lines 'lifted/loved/taken' from Gertrude Stein's 'Tender Buttons'. Both are also poems of the body as trans. For me, they're the most expansive and exciting poems in the book. The opening of the section 'Boycunt' reads:

The difference is spreading.

WHAT IS IT

People want to know at dinner but suppose dinner is a house and the work is never
done and no one will eat the rainbow shards thrown by crystals hanging in the floor.

Suppose the floor is a rubbery hollow. Suppose you have made yourself a hole that is not a hole that wants to be empty and full and eaten and revered. Suppose you are that hole. (142)

‘Hole’ and ‘habitus’ and ‘change’ repeat throughout the dense seven-page poem so that even the easily-lost-in particularly difficult poetry can return to the core, which is the body in its lacking, in its social positioning, in its transition and, as the poem ends, as ‘Re/produced’, also a play on the poem’s structure.

It’s not an easy time to be an Australian poet. As our government resists the arts through unsupportive funding schemes, most publishers won’t take on poetry. It’s too difficult to financially rationalise; it simply doesn’t sell. In 2016 University of Western Australia Publishing made a bold move to oppose this trend and established its poetry series. In 2016 they published four books of poetry and this year a whopping fourteen. The idea is to create a diversified list of established and emerging poets, some who are lyrical, some experimental, and really showcase what’s happening *now* in Australian poetry. Thank goodness for diversification and hats off to UWAP for recognising Eades, because *Rallying* doesn’t comfortably fit into any type of poetry I’m aware of at the moment, and it needs to be read; Eades needs to be heard.

Heather Taylor Johnson