

acknowledging the relationships between the different habitats in the mosaic of Moreton Bay. This is particularly true for species associated with Moreton Bay fisheries and commercial use, where McPhee's experience and ability to provide an insightful summary truly shine; these chapters constitute an astute introduction to the ecosystems and species of Moreton Bay.

Having described the history of Moreton Bay and some of its inhabitants, McPhee uses the final three chapters to discuss the human influences on Moreton Bay and to discuss what needs to be done in future to maintain Moreton Bay for future generations. Different kinds of fishing and the effects that these have on the environment are described, with McPhee's ability to guide the reader through a multi-faceted system being keenly demonstrated as he describes the complex interplay between the needs of the human population, the effects on the environment and the guidelines established by legislation. The pollutant, sediment and nutrient accumulations in Moreton Bay are discussed in the next chapter, and again McPhee's encapsulation of the available information provides the reader with a clear understanding of the various processes involved. The final chapter is a series of recommendations for how Moreton Bay can be managed to maintain the health of the natural components of the bay while still allowing the local community to benefit. These final suggestions consolidate the various challenges that are described in each chapter, and McPhee expresses very clearly why measures such as ensuring public access to Moreton Bay and appointing a ministerial position dedicated to managing Moreton Bay are steps that would create a Moreton Bay that is rich in nature and meets community expectation, while remaining open to the public as a place for tradition, recreation and natural beauty.

The aim of this book, consolidating the current knowledge of Moreton Bay across disciplines, is certainly achieved. Readers with an academic or professional interest in Moreton Bay will find this book useful as a starting point and context for further reading or research, and an interested casual reader can expect to leave the book with a greater knowledge of the forces that influence Moreton Bay, although at least some knowledge of marine and environmental sciences is recommended to fully appreciate the detail. *Environmental History and Ecology of Moreton Bay* is a brief but informative and passionate description of Moreton Bay that unites the interdisciplinary work on one of Queensland's most significant locations.

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Shastra Deo, *The Agonist*, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2017, ISBN 9 7807 0225 9746, 87 pp., A\$24.95.

The winner of the 2016 Arts Queensland Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize, Shastra Deo's *The Agonist* provides an idiosyncratic mixture of poems that revolve around the human body. Drawing inspiration from the famous nineteenth-century medical

text *Gray's Anatomy*, Deo meditates upon the body's interior life — one that in many ways is a secret world unto itself. There is a perpetual tension going on in *The Agonist* involving the collision of actions and feelings, bodies and objects. Faithful to the etymology of 'agony', there is much conflict in Deo's poetry, and it is pleasing that she provides no reconciliation for an existence that is often irreconcilable.

The three sections that comprise *The Agonist* cover both the hidden and visible terrain of our biology. Appropriately beginning with the throat and mouth, organs of speech and breath, the book then moves to the region of the hand, where one can reach out to others, and finally to the location of the heart, terrain shared by lovers, stalkers and most strangely, taxidermists.

A bodily drama as well as a drama about the body takes place in *The Agonist*: soldiers and boxers bleed, punch and tremble; lovers move in and out of beds and minds. Sometimes there is a brutal physicality in poems that foregrounds the violent impact of bone against bone and skin against skin. Take, for instance, *The Boxer's Son* (2): 'I broke Paul's nose for what he said/ about my mother/ He couldn't have known/ That I threw punches/ with rocks clenched in my fists. The skin/ stretched over my knuckles' (2017: 38). At other times, Deo's writing evokes the violence of a deeper pain, as when the melancholic *6 PM* registers a lover's absence: 'the empty space/ your body has left/ in my bed' (2017: 25).

The technical precision of Deo's medical language strangely coheres with the whimsy of alliteration and assonance. The opening lines of *Anatomy of Being* are exemplary of this: 'An anatomy of/ being: organs/ constructed of cells and stored in the/ dorsal and ventral cavities, lined with/ epithelia and ebullience. Each cavity/ fluid-filled' (2017: 24). 'Epithelia', 'ebullience' and 'Each' lead eye and ear through a procession of sounds and images where a connective tissue nervously rests upon the elongated persistence of the 'e' vowel.

Although *The Agonist* presents a motley collection of poems, there is a singular voice whose dark and meticulous imagination contours and conjures a very different kind of body—one that has a chemistry and interiority that is yet to be charted. This is seen in *The Soldier* (3), where medical classification is thwarted by 'a hidden landscape' of feeling and sensation (2017: 41). Deo is a gifted poet whose juxtaposition of medical and poetic language interweaves science and art. Yet the obscurity of some of her surgical terms also reminds us of the gap between representation and embodiment. The tactile reality of our bodies may bear the scars of violence and experience, but there is yet another realm: an invisible sphere that medicine is yet to conquer. *The Agonist* ushers toward this idea in a final section that addresses the many shades and meanings of the heart.

Inventively, *The Agonist's* third act dispels literary tropes and mythologies around the heart's symbolic association with romantic love. One might assume that the concluding section, headlined by a quote from D.H. Lawrence, would champion the desire of lovers and beloveds. But the heart is not an organ of transcendence: it is so material that it can be 'gutted like a mackerel/ on a Sunday afternoon' ('Salt, Sugar', 2017: 78).

In many ways, *The Agonist* is a confronting volume that dispels certain literary conventions, such as idealising love. Deo powerfully reminds us of the materiality of our bodies — conveyances that feel pain, age and die. This style of writing has a keen intelligence and wisdom, and sometimes carries echoes of the metaphysical poets in its yoking together of heterogenous things. There is also a nod to T.S. Eliot

in the poem ‘Tenebrae’, where ‘after the war’ the speaker can only see a dull country of ‘hollow men’ (2017: 46).

Deo knows her literary history and generic antecedents. She is also keen to innovate. The three-act structure of *The Agonist* certainly enables her to experiment with style, subject matter and language. The violence of her imagery may also be shocking at times, but those familiar with slasher horror films will recognise the influence of this cinematic style, where the insides of bodies are brutally exposed. In light of this, the butcher is another character whose carvings and incisions lay bare, ‘trembling, meat and bone’ (‘Chine’, 2017: 77) Deo’s world is truly awash with blood.

Intertwining ideas and images from literary and popular culture, *The Agonist* is a strikingly unusual, pleasingly fresh volume of poetry that challenges us to embrace the messy biology of our humanity.

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Exhibition: *Magnificent Makers*, State Library of Queensland, 9 December 2017 to 3 June 2018



Figure 1
(Colour online) The Jenyns corset display at the State Library of Queensland’s *Magnificent Makers* exhibition. (Photographer: Janis Hanley).

‘It’s marvellous how she helped women’, the gallery visitor whispered to me. I’d been sitting staring at the corset on display — beautifully crafted and intricate, but surely a great imposition on women. I recalled my own grandmother’s daily corset struggle, and wondered aloud why women’s bodies are never good enough. Instead,