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Why I Write

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Why I Write

Abstract

I write, in the first instance, to sort myself out, to further my discovery of who I am. This means often positioning myself at edges, thresholds. It also means attending to patterns of continuity within experience: self as story. Secondly, I write as an act of engagement with the human world in which I find myself. In *Metamorphoses*, my focus was on exposing the distortions of image and perception which underlie sexism - the arena of emotional and physical violence which has most impinged on my life and awareness.



Diane Fahey grew up in Melbourne, lived for some years in Britain, moved to Adelaide in 1986. She is at present Writer in Residence at Ormond College at the University of Melbourne. Her collections of poetry are: *Voices from the Honeycomb* (Jacaranda, 1986), *Metamorphoses* and *Turning the Hourglass* (Dangaroo, 1988 and 1990), and *Mayflies in Amber* (A & R/Harper-Collins, 1992). She has won various awards including the Mattara Poetry Prize, and has received three Writer's Fellowships from the Literature Board of the Australia Council, and two from the South Australian government. In 1993 she was a fellow at Hawthornden International Writers' Retreat.

DIANE FAHEY

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Secondly, I write as an act of engagement with the human world in which I find myself. In *Metamorphoses*, my focus was on exposing the distortions of image and perception which underlie sexism - the arena of emotional and physical violence which has most impinged on my life and awareness.

I believe it is ultimately impossible to separate sexism from the other imbalances and oppressions which are also the subject of an ever-growing movement of human consciousness: race, sexual identity, economic status, political freedom... A feature of all such oppression is the imposition of negative projections on to the feared other. Within that fear, and fuelling it, is, so I understand, the fear of being and becoming - of accepting mortality, working with boundaries and difference, and the unknown or unborn parts of oneself.

The degree of integrity I have in owning and clarifying my own projections determines the firmness of the ground on which I stand in this wider personal-political process. Thus the process I began by describing is the basis for all else. Ask the hard questions of oneself first - so I remind myself, often.

How can one sustain oneself in the work of facing so many difficult realities? If I were to try to imagine 'kingdom of heaven' as an immanent reality, I would think of what is known and experienced in moments of communion - with the self, the loved other, the natural world; with poetry itself along with all the arts; and perhaps, one could say, with time itself...

The dance of connection between the elements of creation is both glimpsed and amplified at such moments. In my work as a poet, I've attempted to record some of those moments, occasions, glimpses, as they've been available to me. So this is the third reason why I write - the search for a vision of paradise. That search involves forms of meditation, and play...the play out of which new configurations arise, thus subtly transforming the whole.

In particular, the world of nature has become an increasingly powerful magnet for me. This is the fourth reason why I write: to witness to, celebrate, and - since this is the century of the death of nature -

commemorate, the natural world. Even the most successful order of creatures on earth, the insects, of which I have written in *Mayflies in Amber*, is not invulnerable to the contagion of extinction – it too composes a picture with specks and larger areas slowly fading and becoming invisible.

Presently my creative attention is on sea creatures, for a future book, *In Praise of Sea Horses*. I can only say I am connected to such work by a compelling psychic energy. Believing as I do that all created beings and things are expressions of an energy that has an imaginal counterpart in the human psyche, I see the latter as not only a microcosm of the world, but as holding a potential for healing and restoring some of the human damage done to the world through work on images. The world is both real and symbolic, and if human consciousness can re-enter creation with fresh vision – re-see it – then the symbolic order has some power to transmute the realm of fact.

I do not and cannot separate body and psyche; the personal and the political; the ethical and the religious; the symbolic and the real. Working as a poet helps me to explore the relationship between all these dimensions of human life, resonances of the world.

Poetry has been for me a great learning experience, a journey into body and psyche and the interconnected life of this planet. As one defines, through moments of gift and clarity, one's place on a map, the map itself grows larger, becomes more unknowable...more challenging.

In the very physical maze of language, one searches for connection with one's origins, and a grounding experience of home, in this place of so much tragic dislocation. For the poet, words are the trail of seeds one leaves behind as one enters one's own and the world's darkness – seeds that are also beads of amber, arisen from the depths and therefore able to hold and refract light.