

As a collection, *Woodsmoke* mines this kind of duality with deft technique. Turner often writes along an edge or brink to give the reader sense of depth. These are poems that don't set out to obfuscate; here, lucidity, the pastoral and warmth of feeling prevail, and fine attention to craft pays off handsomely. I've focused here on the machinations of just four poems in this collection, but I think many of them will repay this kind of close reading.

→ Todd Turner. *Woodsmoke*. ISBN 9781876044862. Melbourne: Black Pepper, 2014. RRP\$22.95

Geoff Goodfellow and Carol Jenkins

Christopher Ringrose

Spending some time with these two volumes reminded me that it's a mysterious relationship that one establishes with a poet, a book of poems, or a single poem. Sometimes one adopts a listening stance, attentive to a compelling voice; at other times one's eyes are opened, like those of Howard Carter, to 'wonderful things'.

Geoff Goodfellow's *Opening the Windows to Catch the Sea Breeze*, drawing on his output from 1983 to 2011, seizes one by the elbow, tells a life story and catalogues a lifetime's writing achievement. Each section is prefaced by a prose introduction detailing Goodfellow's life, his family history, and his publishing successes ('Such was the success [of *No Collars, No Cuffs*] that it went through nine print runs . . . A first print run of 3,500 copies [of *Punch On Punch Off*] was seen by many at the time as ridiculous. The book is now out of print.')

The autobiographical format is well-suited to the task of connecting incidents and situations from common life, to standing up for those people belittled, ignored or oppressed, and refusing to kowtow to anything dressed up as authority. The tone may be belligerent, but the details are telling. 'i jerked the handle / of a sausage filler / for 5 quid a week', he says in the early poem 'The Apprenticeship'. The apprenticeship didn't end well, though he left on his own terms – after a fight over a stray comment from the butcher about the drunkenness of Geoff's Dad, a personage who crosses and re-crosses the pages of *Opening the Windows* like Hamlet's ghost. Dad is indelibly inscribed throughout the poems, whether it's when the teenage Geoff wrestles him, drunk, into bed before Mum slips him a couple of Mogadon, or when, himself damaged by World War II, he cunningly ensures that Geoff isn't sent off to National Service, or when he offers advice about fists: 'you've got these / learn to use 'em — / they might come in handy'. In fact, fists do figure throughout *Opening the Windows*, in obituaries for boxers, in noisy fights in the street in 'Learning to Live', or in a homage to a bouncer ('the customer with the / compressed cheek bone / calls him Sir now / the police Mister'). Geoff can't resist paying respects after Dad's death by having his father's voice assert his self-respect in pugilistic terms. He remembers his mates as 'hard bastards':

If anyone had spoken about me
out of turn you can imagine
what would have happened
those bastards would've

been fighting one another to see
 who was going to knock
 the loud-mouth out
 not to mention my own boys

All of which makes it sound as though *Opening the Windows* is posited on an unreconstructed old-style masculinity. This is not in fact the case. Geoff Goodfellow is a fine mimic, and there are complex, convincing voices (male and female) in the collection. If he dwells on things corporeal, and the physicality of work, disability and sickness, it is because the immense wear-and-tear and physical strain of work on building sites and elsewhere needs to be acknowledged and set down: both his own 'blow-out in [his] / L4 & L5 discs', and the effects on his fellow men and women that are wrought by heavy lifting (literal and metaphorical). What is more, even when you start to think a poem has gone on too long, a wry irony will surface, giving a lift to the closing lines, or casting a new light on the Goodfellow persona. This is most apparent in the closing section of the book, which deals with his treatment for cancer. Unflinchingly physical and unsentimental, these are some of the most powerful contemporary poems about illness. They are also political, and the account in 'The Seventh Doctor' (the title of which gives a strong clue about the content) gives a grimly humorous and dogged account of traversing the public health care system in search of dignity, accurate diagnosis . . . and treatment. Thank goodness for the seventh doctor. If you find yourself holding the book, you might look first at the penultimate poem, 'Reversing', and its description of a chance encounter with the twenty-year-old owner of a badly parked vehicle. It's surprising—and heartening.

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Carol Jenkins has followed up the success of *Fishing in the Devonian* (2008) and the chapbook *Night Croquet* (2009) with a rich, varied collection, *Xⁿ*. Like Geoff Goodfellow, she is excellent company, if at first she appears more reticent than him. Her poems unfurl in a sequence of witty surprises, teasing riddles, odd angles, and subtle sound patterns. The botanical poem 'Perianthetical Apple, Cherry, Plum' is phonetically luscious in the Hopkins manner, as she addresses the trees in blossom:

Be flower wrap, pollen pot, carpel king,
 tepal tide, bee bait and wasp impersonator

house of plum state, modified leaf palace that duples
 into picnics, prints, pillow words and porcelain . . .

Carpels, tepals and perianths are grafted appealingly on to more familiar poetic diction. *Fishing in the Devonian* attracted attention, in part, for its blend of the poetic and the scientific, and there is an element of that in *Xⁿ*. 'Evolution by Engulfment' makes phagocytosis intriguing (yes, I did look it up, to find that it was 'the ingestion of bacteria or other material by phagocytes and amoeboid protozoans'). 'Zero-vs-Nothing' and 'Exit Speed' neatly apply the language of mathematics and physics to relationships. The miniatures in 'Set Pieces' (the titles of Jenkins's poems are always worth a second look) work the notation of mathematical sets into conundrums. An ordered pair (a, b) is a set of mathematical objects, but

A disorderly pair approach a revolving
 Door, A says you go first, B says, no, you

C queued behind, huffs O it doesn't matter.
How many times will the door rotate before C leaves?

Such virtuosity means that Jenkins is able, Rumpelstiltskin-like, to spin straw into gold. A visit to the Butter Museum in Cork, Ireland, generates echoes of Donne, Marvell and Escoffier, the argot of butter ('milkers, maids and buckets / pails, skim-mers, dippers, creamers, / keeners, dashers, table churns . . .'), curious fossil butter and ingenious rhymes. The twenty or so poems that make up the virtuoso sequence on eggs leave one wondering what *can't* be brought within the orbit of the egg-as-subject-matter, whether it's irremediable catastrophes ('The egg is the great fall guy, exemplar of what *can't* be undone . . .'), unspecified mishaps ('believe me nothing is over easy'), or the shift into body chemistry of 'Miscarriage II':

my body was
home to you, and in that quiet sense
of each, you trusted me completely

back then your dark stains of wasted protein
held my throat so tight I could not think
to say goodbye.

In fact, such modulation of tone and subject matter is one of the features of *Xⁿ*. It is easy to highlight the cleverness and linguistic vitality of the collection, but it is also worth stressing the way that Jenkins's poems can embody profound and moving expression—of love, grief, desire, exuberance, or anxiety, for example—without relinquishing her characteristic wit. There is the meditation on marriage in 'Surrender comes with twenty different speeds' (as usual, the key word in the title is examined at many levels); the haunting airline journey in 'Owl Service'; and 'Parking backwards at Beauty Point', a poignant elegy for the writer Kerry Leves. Such poems (and one could cite many other examples) make you realise that Carol Jenkins is, finally, hardly more reticent than Geoff Goodfellow. There is no doubt that Goodfellow wears his heart on his sleeve (or would do, if his singlet had sleeves), but *Xⁿ*, too, draws you into its writer's orbit—into a relationship.

- Geoff Goodfellow. *Opening the Windows to Catch the Sea Breeze: Selected Poems 1983-2011*. ISBN 9781743052952. Adelaide: Wakefield, 2014. RRP\$24.95
- Carol Jenkins. *Xⁿ*. ISBN 9781922186201. Sydney: Puncher and Wattmann, 2013. RRP\$25