

Book and Media Reviews

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pies (and that tenaciously occupy his thoughts). Conversely, his representation of pain from the struggles of love is clearly concomitant with harm done to the land and environment when he expresses, “The way the islands are wrecked / by tall sky-scrappers, and trees are / barren. The way the shores are polluted / and people die of strange disease, is / the way you have spoken your sad life” (87).

Reading *The Bond of Time* is often difficult, sometimes gut-wrenching, and ultimately a rewarding experience, especially in Pule’s sublimely beautiful lines. This reviewer was frequently looking up words and names, always finding that the references enriched and complicated his understanding. Since *The Bond of Time* ends with an apparent indictment of “something called Eschatology” (88), it is fitting to end this review by saying that Pule’s poem—in its beautiful new edition—offers no final answers to questions about love, language, time, and space, but many ways of experiencing them. Pule sends out a call for readers to dare more vision and to appreciate the richness of life in a heightened way.

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Dark Sparring: Poems, by Selina Tusitala Marsh. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2014. ISBN 978-1869407865, 98 pages, audio CD. Paper, NZ\$27.99.

My own father’s death in 2009 was unexpected, from a heart attack while out on a routine evening jog. Grief fell like dense rain forest—a more

rugged, shifting, and half-lit terrain than I could have anticipated. Prior to that, I had thought of death as the journey of the departed. Thereafter, I found it to be a journey of those remaining. Selina Tusitala Marsh’s *Dark Sparring* is about death and the journey through grief, perfectly paired like sparring partners. It exposes the narrator’s loss of a parent and her redemptive, albeit unusual, journey back through her involvement in Muay Thai kickboxing. *Dark Sparring* is superbly titled; the use of assonance is characteristic within Marsh’s poems, while this collection arguably progresses beyond her earlier works via the “sober realism” it exemplifies (16). There is a willingness, a readiness to sit with our dead. The collection *Dark Sparring* is purposefully narrow, cohesive, and dark; like a fly delicately spun in a spider’s web, it is a well-chosen meal.

The first part of *Dark Sparring*, comprising fifteen poems, explores place. It is deliciously local, traversing the region marked out by Epeli Hau‘ofa’s 1993 essay “Our Sea of Islands” and continuing a talanoa (conversation) by other Pasifika artists and writers seeking to make sense of Pasifika geographies and selves through space and place. In this section, Marsh also calls to mind Albert Wendt’s 1996 article “Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body,” which described the significance of the Samoan concept of va, or relational space: “Va is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving

meaning to things" (Wendt 1996, 18–19).

I am conscious of the relationality between spaces and bodies in Marsh's work. Her depiction of our islands traverses Waiheke, an island in the Hauraki Gulf of Aotearoa where Marsh lives; her homelands, Sāmoa and Tuvalu; and the Fiji Islands. I am drawn to the bright colors in her resonant descriptions of place, as in "Bound for Sigatoka": "children with red balloons / rush at the taxi" (13). There is a visceral and embodied sense of being in-place that these descriptions invoke. Marsh's form is at times aesthetically suggestive of scattered islands, particularly in "Afakasi Archipelago," a series of smart haiku (18–19). To build on Audre Lorde's term "biomythography," which conjures the relationship between self and reimagined stories and histories (*Zami, A New Spelling of My Name*, 1982), Marsh's work is perhaps a "biogeography," a poetic mapping of self through place, and of place via Pasifika imaginary.

Poems explore the complexities of Pasifika self and subjectivity as selves in motion as our geographies change. Our geographies change through migration, as in the poem "Niu Sila Skin" in which Marsh meditates on the in-betweenness of her uncle's belonging: "maybe uncle belongs / in the ocean / . . . / where his spirit / can frigate fly between the two lands" (12). Our geographies are transformed by climate change. The poem "Girl from Tuvalu" begins and ends with an enduring image of "girl sits on porch / back of house / feet kicking" in the rising seawater (23). There is a shift in the representation of the girl's

situational subjectivity from her name "Siligia" to the depersonalized "Girl from Tuvalu: Environmental Refugee" (23), which reflects the institutionalized gaze of development and foreign aid agencies, global media presence, states, and multilateral organizations. The ambivalent image at the poem's close—"girl sits on porch / kicking"—hints at both futility and the grace of presence (24). It draws us back to the embodied and lived experience of Tuvalu.

If part one of *Dark Sparring* is the "where" of Marsh's life, attending to her relationship with the outer world, then part two is the "how," attending to her psychic, emotional, spiritual, and physical journey through her mother's illness and death via Muay Thai kickboxing.

In "13 Ways of Looking At Mourning," there is subtle dark humor at play. The phrase "the boxing ring" is repeated through 12 stanzas, including the last, and in the 11th stanza it is replaced with the evocative image "A man and a woman / with a ring are one" (60). Sometimes this repetition has a lyrical effect—"The boxing ring aquiver in its raging" (58)—but the image also creates an odd, unsettling disjuncture between the mundane "boxing ring" within stanzas that sound psalmic or prophetic: "I was of three minds / Like three valleys / In which there are three boxing rings" or "O brown women of Hine-nui-te-po / Why do you dream dusky deaths? / Do you not see how the boxing ring / Ropes the feet / Of the men about you?" (58–59). The stanzas create a mix of curiosity and discomfort, but overall they build a convincing and saturated inner world where the

narrator channels her grief through the boxing ring.

There is something discomfiting and necessary about poetry that steps on the invisible fault lines of what we consider poetic; boxing seems almost anti-poetry, evoking the sweaty and visceral force of fist against flesh, instead of poetry's more subtle but manipulative symbolic force through language.

The sparring figure yields moments of unusual beauty, where the lapses between language and concepts in translation produce rich images, such as "Lifting the summer mountain / Old man holding the melon" in the poem "Master Tricks" (83). The poem "Floating Ribs" maps the human body via sites of potential kickboxing injury, with stanzas on the groin, the armpit, and the hollow of knee (84). Drawing on the schema Marsh has learned from Muay Thai kickboxing masters, this poem exposes bodily and human vulnerability. At this point in the collection, the reader is so immersed in the death of the narrator's mother that death has a meta-textual presence, floating over the poem.

Marsh's in-depth interrogation of the lived experience of loss extends our shared understanding of Pasifika being and identity. Recall Wendt's evocative lines, "Polynesians / Inside me the dead / woven into my flesh / like the music of bone flutes" (*Inside Us the Dead*, 1976, 7). *Dark Sparring* offers a finely tuned meditation on how our loved ones are "woven" into our being, albeit within Marsh's very personal and specific story of loss. The final poem "Salt" says "as if star by blue star / remembered the loss of each mother / and lit her face for a thou-

sand years" (96). The death of her mother is "woven" into the biogeography of the narrator; her relationship with the physical world around her has shifted to embed her mother in the night sky.

The opening page quotes a Tuvaluan invitation to dance—"E lei ma saka taua?"—along with boxer Muhammad Ali's famous quote, "The fight is won or lost . . . long before I dance under these lights." *Dark Sparring* is both a bout and a dance. I am reminded of Alice Walker's tenacious claim, "Hard times require furious dancing. Each of us is the proof" (*Hard Times Require Furious Dancing*, 2010, xvi). *Dark Sparring* is controlled; there is tonal definition between the different faceted surfaces of grief. It is difficult to resist boxing analogies for the collection. *Dark Sparring* packs a punch. It is a hard-working collection that punches above its weight.

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Being Māori in the City: Indigenous Everyday Life in Auckland,

by Natacha Gagné. Toronto:

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xvi + 345 pages, maps, bibliography, index, appendix, glossary, notes.

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With nearly thirty thousand Māori living in Auckland and little ethnography conducted on Auckland's urban Māori, Natacha Gagné's full-length study is long overdue. This earnest