



Snake Like Charms (UWAP Poetry)

Amanda Joy

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Amanda Joy's first book *Snake Like Charms* was five years in the making. It's grounded deep in reality as are the snake cultures and legends it draws from. Amanda Joy is a poet from the Pilbara and Kimberley regions of Western Australia, origin of the Rainbow Serpent, the Great Spirit that represents the world's oldest religious tradition. According to Indigenous song-cycles, a snake literally created this country. These lines from the poem 'Your Ground' carry their wisdom lightly "snake says / be still / stand your ground / it the only protection we have". This book quivers with snakes, consorting with birds and animals, in company with humans: "There's no animal alive / won't meet your eye". Also, like the Aztec serpent Quetzalcoatl, this poetry is all intelligence and sharp wind chained to the 'braille-like ridges' of the country by reality, where 'My friend's story is everywhere.' It contains wonders, 'Carnaby cockatoos feeding on wild radish in low grass', the erotic nature of a Blue Butcher Orchid 'made flesh', a poet gardener who is aware of 'the unseen deadline of morning like a tongue into a mouth/ stroking language'. There is rich onomatopoeia in many lines: 'Lumped gullet/ of migratory birds/ all algae and insects', and there's this lovely image of a 'Whelked helical of coral pink'. One feels the pain as you read this phase: 'an oracular migraine'. Anyone who has lived in Australia will recognize Joy's 'artillery of cockatoo cries'. There is danger everywhere, along with comedy on days when Cane toads storm the Kimberley. There is great empathy for the people who are doing it hard, 'The Long Dry.' This book is teeming with life, it's a celebration of families surrounded by animals, a book where ideas snake through the lines like arteries. Amanda Joy's variegated language explores rebellious ideas, delves into the underground but remains compassionate. This poet takes a hard look at the world now and yet comes up with a hugely optimistic book. ROBERT ADAMSON

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