

Susan Hawthorne. *Lupa and Lamb*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2014. 172 pp.

\$AUD 26.95

ISBN: 9781742199245 (Pbk)

<http://www.spinifexpress.com.au/Bookstore/book/id=268/>

### *Lupa and Lamb*: a review, in fragments

‘Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent.’  
Wittig, *Les Guérillères* (quoted in Hawthorne)

Susan Hawthorne begins her mythological poetry collection *Lupa and Lamb*, with a quote from Monique Wittig’s 1969 novel *Les Guérillères*. Wittig’s novel is ‘. . . a series of fragments depicting life in an Amazonian society involved in a war against men’ (Moi 79), it was the beginning of a feminist reimagining, or reinscription, of patriarchal narrative and linguistic structures. A contemporary of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, Wittig is often cited alongside these philosophers and psychoanalytic theoreticians as a proponent of *écriture féminine* (‘feminine,’ or ‘women’s’ writing), but this is a position that she strongly rejects:

What is this ‘feminine’ in ‘feminine writing’? It stands for Woman, thus merging a practice with a myth, the myth of a Woman. ‘Woman’ cannot be associated with writing because ‘Woman’ is an imaginary formation and not a concrete reality... Thus, ‘feminine writing’ amounts to saying that women do not belong to history, and that writing is not a material production. (Straight Mind 59–60)

In *Lupa and Lamb*, women most certainly do belong to history, because they are written back into it. In some ways, this collection is a continuation of Wittig’s work. Wittig is a writer who collects fragments, and lays them alongside each other to allow new meanings to be made. She asks us to read differently, to discover, to unearth, to dip in and out of her text, to take an aleatory path. If *The Lesbian Body* (Wittig 1973) is a ‘corpus’ (Nancy 53), then so is *Lupa and Lamb*. French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy says that to convincingly write the body,

[w]e’d need a *corpus*: a writing of the dead having nothing to do with the discourse of Death—only with this fact, that the space of bodies knows no Death (the fantasy of abolished space), but knows each body as a dead one, as *this* dead one, sharing with us the extension of its *here lies*. (55)

The women in *Lupa and Lamb* are the dead unearthed. They are *here lies*. Their stories are collected by the Curatrix:

my job as Curatrix of the Musæum Matricum  
is to excavate our history  
to find the unfound and the unfindable (10)

The Curatrix provides occasional commentary and side notes for her *Musæum Matricum*: a place where fragments, pieces of stone, crumbling papers and poems, are held lovingly and with respect. The *Musæum* is where lost texts assemble, and become found; it is where what is missing can at last be described; it is the poet in rapture; it is assembled around the reader,

in air, out of nothing, but contains all things. The *Musæum* stands on a ley line, and leads us to it. It gathers words from Italy and Australia, from then and now, and when we read, it takes our stories too.

Here now is my aleatory path. Here is my *here lies*. These are the fragments that called to me as I read, my own *Musæum Matricum* assembled from the pages of *Lupa and Lamb*.

your hundred mouths  
shouting (3)

I carry the stain (4)

wolf-bellied desire showing (5)

and this knee-capping lust (6)

the known world's  
fulcrum (8)

along my coat I curl into her belly  
seeking warmth (13)

we visit the rock wombs  
big enough to birth us both (14)

stories buried by rockfall  
by the passage of wind  
and time (16)

*when you've tossed them out*  
*walk away do not look back* (18)

night's death hour I wake (19)

I do not know up from down  
earth sways at my every step (20)

arrows and ravens who bring  
morsels of food augur well (22)

history is being rewritten  
it's not rape it's abduction (24)

even a look from me will save (28)

a crowd appears from nowhere (29)

she wrote it but she had help  
she wrote it but she's an anomaly  
she wrote it BUT . . . (34)

finally a love that knocks me sideways (35)

the next poem remained hidden  
she says (38)

cave canem beware the dog (40)

crying is human there is no way out (44)

at dawn it's hard to tell  
is it work or food? (46)

sing the wool  
vibrate the thread with bow (48)

they tried to scorch my skin  
but it blew back at them (56)

even the fire they lit would not burn  
and so they beheaded you (59)

the word itself asks to be revealed  
an old root (64)

she draws signs  
from entrails (70)

that's why I'm here  
to forge memories  
    avian  
    angelic  
    harpic (73)

each cavity a resting place (75)

she sings through her dead mouth (76)

in my dream the dragon  
does not bring harm I climb (79)

and if I were booty  
I'd be treated better (80)

the pain is unendurable  
shoots through me like an iron rod (83)

death a new beginning (85)

how can I say the words

when my body is the crime (87)

where lupa gave way to lupo  
some say her name means forgetful (91)

to the space between them and silence (93)

if only they knew how small we are  
our bones only half the story (95)

shoulder blades  
could be wings (96)

all I can do is listen  
to the echoing spill of the unheard (97)

reversals are all (104)

she catches her breath on bird wings (105)

leaving only fragments (106)

harpies support her feet (108)

in the heat everything rises the sun clasps you close  
when you try to find your way out (112)

the women invite the old ones to dance with them (119)

*always look for those who have to go underground* (120)

they stand listen to this song at the edge of hearing (127)

*see my scars* she raises her shirt (128)

read me  
from the feet up (130)

those names those names (144)

she falls and rises falls and rises (146)

our million mouths singing (147)

Now that you have read these lines, read the entire collection (which is itself a fragment, lifted from some other place). When you read, notice a deft reliance on line breaks to create pauses. You will not find full stops. Capital letters are reserved for Saints, God, paradise, and the main players. Only the Curatrix is afforded full sentences. When punctuation appears, it is in the peppering of colons, square brackets holding nothing (or everything). This is a mathematical text, and '[m]athematics can be sublime, just as poetry can be' (Hawthorne 69).

This collection is sublime. Read and you will be simultaneously transported and brought home. Read and you will know a history that is dense with women, with fragments that speak eloquently of the whole. Read and you will inhabit a corpus, and know yourself changed.

*Karina Quinn, La Trobe University*

**WORKS CITED**

Hawthorne, Susan. *Lupa and Lamb*. Melbourne: Spinifex P, 2014.

Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics*. London and New York: Routledge, 1988.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Corpus*. Trans. Richard A Rand. New York: Fordham UP, 2008.

Wittig, Monique. *The Lesbian Body*. Boston: Beacon P, 1973.

—. *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. Boston: Beacon P, 1992.