



GIRAMONDO PUBLISHING

## BEVERLEY FARMER

**Beverley Farmer**

***This Water: Five Tales***

**Giramondo Publishing**

**Fiction, Paperback, 280pp, \$26.95**

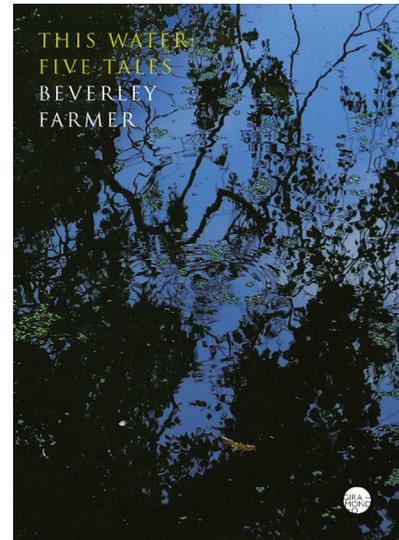
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*This Water* is the last work of fiction by Beverley Farmer, one of Australia's great prose stylists, and a pioneer of women's writing in this country. It is a collection of five interwoven tales, three of them novellas. Each has a woman at its centre: in each the women speak, act, think for themselves, in opposing or escaping from an oppressive authority.

One tale, set on the south coast of Victoria, is animated by the legend of the Great Silkie; another finds its rebellious princess in Lake Annaghmakerrig in Ireland; a third has Clytemnestra as its central figure, mourning the daughter sacrificed by her husband Agamemnon so that he could go to war with Troy – surely one of the great laments in Australian literature.

References to water and stone, ice and fire, light and darkness are woven throughout the collection, as are figures and images from myth and fairy tale – kings and brides, swans and seals, a ring of gold, 'the blood red of her silks' – their power evoked by repetition and resonance, and the remarkable rhythms of Farmer's language.



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Beverley Farmer is the author of three collections of short stories, including *Milk*, which won the NSW Premier's Award for Fiction, the writer's notebook *A Body of Water*, and the novels *Alone*, *The Seal Woman* and *The House in the Light*, which was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award. Her most recent book, *The Bone House*, a collection of essays on the life of the body and the life of the mind, was published by Giramondo in 2005.

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These are richly imagined, beautifully wrought tales that celebrate the power of story-telling to nourish, disturb and enchant. They are tuned with poetic precision to create haunting visions of the human response to time and change.

The tales offer closely defined perceptions of individual journeys and a sweeping vision of reiterated patterns of 'tribal' circumstance: the politics and performance of desire, sexuality, revenge, spirituality and nurturing. The tales ebb and flow, like blood and water at the heart of life itself, in a finely calibrated tapestry of story telling.

An American critic interviewing Beverley Farmer about her writing once observed 'You are not a casual writer are you?' To which she replied. 'No I'm not. There has to be a grain of truth in the fiction for me to feel it's worth creating'. This capacity to observe precisely, then to orchestrate images to create 'otherworlds' which mirror human truths and unveil constellations of meaning is what fine art does. And Beverley Farmer's art is very fine. Writing slowly and painstakingly, she has made a body of work since her first publications in the 1960s that, while relatively small, is highly regarded for its clarity, lyricism and experimental use of language and form. There are recurrent preoccupations with place, gender, relationships, cultural myths and practices, life, death and renewal, and constant engagements with the processes of story-telling that sustain or transform lives.

In *This Water* each tale is discrete but there are interlinking elements, images, colours, and patterns of immersion or flight that resonate, never for mere elaboration, but to reflect on wider circumstance. The centrality of water, blood, and language, as the vital food of life is central. In *This Water*'s first seascape, 'A Ring of Gold', the narrator walks the beach recalling the past, reviewing the significance of images and stories that 'cling' while making new discoveries daily. And in some ways these recollections are the seed bed for the tales that follow as childhood reading is transformed in the light of adult experience. The gold ring lost and found in the first story, acquires new significance in the final story of the 'marry game' 'The Ice Bride' just as dreams of flight or blood precede the complexities of 'This Water' and 'The Blood Red of Her Silks'. The lament which is at the centre of the collection is a cry of rage, vengeance, frustration and grief for lost life from a dead queen of a murderous household as Farmer revisits Greek tragedy to give voice to Clytemnestra's 'tongue of blood'.

Lyn Jacobs, author of *Against the Grain Beverley Farmer's Writing*