

Hannie Rayson's Launch Speech for the Launch at Readings Hawthorn of *Make Cakes Not War*

I feel so pleased to be here tonight to launch this delicious little book of whimsy, nuttiness and heart, "Make Cakes Not War".

Something weird happened this weekend. I've been working obsessively for months and months on a play and a film about the first world war. So I've been in the trenches thinking and breathing that whole bloody, muddy theatre of war. But on Saturday it was my boy's 20th birthday and when I opened my diary on Saturday morning it just said "Make cakes". How spooky is that?

That's an indication of how this book works. It intersects with your life in magical and unexpected ways.

When you peruse this collection, you can't help wondering what it's like being inside Judy Horacek's brain. I mean that is my profession. As a playwright I spend all my working life trying to imagine myself fully inside someone else's head. But Judy Horacek presents a challenge.

The rest of us watch Australian Idol on TV. Judy watches it (I presume) and draws a cartoon. She has a panel of three people giving their assessment of a person who has just finished singing a song. The panellists say: "You look great and that was an excellent song choice for you, but we're an engineering firm." In Judy's world you make a phone call and receive a recorded message: your concern about global warming has been placed in a queue and will be answered by the first available government that gives a damn about the environment. (Mind you our very own PM holds environmental issues very close to his heart as of one week ago). When Judy reflects on human desire and yearning - dreams and wishes, she has a genie coming out of a bottle. And the genie's opening words are "Please enter your four digit pin."

She understands that a perfect sunset is spoiled by the lack of decent mobile phone reception. And in case you think she's getting cute, she draws a woman in a restaurant ordering a slice of life and some milk of human kindness, please. To which the waiter replies: I'm sorry madam, but this is a metaphor-free restaurant."

I wonder when she first realised that she was an unusual person.

Judy has dedicated her book to "peace-loving cake-makers everywhere". And that's me. But this weekend I was a little agitato as my son had invited so many people to his party, so I did what every normal, modern, busy, feminist, peace-loving cake-maker does – I rang my mum and barked down the phone "You have to help me. You have to make cakes!! There are at least 30 Goths coming to this house and as you know those kind of children don't eat salad."

What Judy does is restore an aura of enchantment to a disenchanting world. So in her fairy tale pop culture, she has a frog telling a beautiful girl, "If you kiss me, I'll turn into an artist formerly known as Prince."

How gloriously funny is that? In her head I imagine there is a very fecund bewilderment. I identify with this. As though one is actually wandering through life going "Huh?" "What?" But this produces a view of the world which in Judy's case is wholly original and truly humanist.

For the party, my mother made a huge trifle. It was gobbled up in an instant. It was like a cartoon in a newspaper. Easily consumable. Instantaneously hitting the mark. You see it, get it, chortle and turn the page. A trifle. And yet my mother's trifle is not a trifling affair. It's deep. It's complex. It's inspiring and consoling. And it links our most intense inwardness to the most unabashedly cosmic of questions.

And so it is with each of these drawings. Profound trifles. Recipes for the nourishment of the soul.

My husband is an historian and he once told me that you know you understand an historical period when you read newspapers from the time and you laugh at the cartoons. I know this to be really true. I used to think they weren't as funny in the 1890's as we are today. It never occurred to me with my superior grasp of comedy that I just didn't get them. What hubris!

And so it is with this book. It speaks to who we are now - in so many ways.

In conclusion, I want to share with you my disdain for the opinion that a picture is worth a thousand words. Naturally as a wordsmith I *would* mount this argument. But your average film director wants us to believe that when an actor looks out the window - it says it all. Excuse me? My character's troubled relationship with modern Zionism and secular Jewish ideology can be summed up by - meaningful staring? I don't think so.

So it was with great pleasure I discovered that Judy composes with the words first. Thousands of words come and she has to distil all that meaning into a caption, which she composes with exquisite precision. And then comes the drawing. And if this isn't enough talent on display - she also has exemplary hand-writing.

You'll be pleased to know my son's party was a raging success. I went for Grandma Prowse's Jubilee cake - 3 eggs (very extravagant) says the recipe. I went for history, family tradition and a lot of fruit.

So here's to making cakes, drinking champagne, and toasting to Judy and her sublime imagination which gives heart and cheer to all of us.

HANNIE RAYSON

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