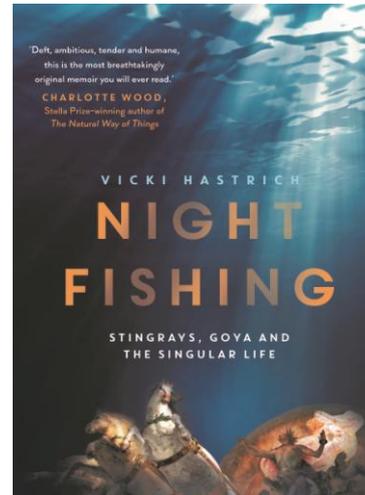


Vicki Hastrich

Night Fishing



The protagonist of *Night Fishing* is a woman alone and contentedly in place – in this case, in an unassuming coastal town near Woy Woy, on the Central Coast of New South Wales. This may seem an unexpected setting for a book of essays, but the protagonist here is ensconced in the ideal conditions to think and remember and dream; it's unsurprising, then, that the essays that make up the book are also largely concerned with place. They centre on nature and landscape and water, and how we negotiate and navigate our histories and selves as we move through and within the environments that surround us.

Many of the essays are about boating and fishing – about sitting in a patched-up fibreglass dinghy (called, wonderfully, *The Squid*) and watching the watery landscape change according to the tide or time of day, observing and recording the sea life and seaweed that the boat passes by. Vicki Hastrich's writing is often lyrical, and beautifully attentive, making a case for the importance of this kind of consideration and care, especially in a world where our climate and environment are so terribly threatened.

Underpinning this landscape, and Hastrich's attending to it, is an interest in family, in personal history and ritual, and in grief. Hastrich's charting of this landscape is also a charting of her past – this particular place is one in which she and her family regularly holidayed, and it is coloured with all the mythic qualities of childhood memory; so, too, does fishing provide a connection to her father, whose sudden death is the subject of one of the collection's most powerful essays, dealing tenderly and skilfully with grief, inheritance and time.

Elsewhere, the essays weave in material about art and natural history, about amateurism and camera operation (Hastrich worked in this role for the ABC in her "first proper job"), about lawn-mowing and boat shows and dreams; a failed novel is a recurring motif. *Night Fishing* is eclectic in its scope and outlook, and this is one of its charms. Not all of the essays, however, have the internal cohesiveness or emotional force of Hastrich's writing at its best; some feel as if they are overreaching their material. But they are all imbued with an energy and curiosity that drives the book, making the essays a pleasure to read.

Fiona Wright

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