

A first book is such an achievement. It's the result of a huge amount of hard work and in that sense it's the end of something, but it's also the beginning.

I was the supervisor for Louise's MA in creative writing, which she completed at the Institute of Modern Letters up at Victoria University. This course is a magnet for very good writers and a number of them have books accepted for publication as a result. This book – *Since June* – has at its core the poems Louise wrote for her thesis.

I want to talk a bit more about being Louise's supervisor in a few minutes, but I want to say to begin with that this was the nicest and easiest job I've ever had. It involved meeting Louise every few weeks at the Lido and talking about poetry. This never felt like work. From the time Louise showed me her first poems I knew she'd be fine. I felt she was already 'there' as a writer – there was a sureness to her work that I loved and she had such a strong voice of her own that there wasn't really anything for me to do except enjoy our conversations together.

It's wonderful to now have these poems in print, and I love the image Louise has chosen for the book's cover. She told me that when she saw it she knew it was perfect. I haven't asked her why, but I agree.

For a start there's the teacup. For those of you who might not have studied the cover, there's a very large teacup with a pattern of ducks flying around it and beside the cup there's a very small man dressed in a coat, carrying a red suitcase, reaching up towards the ducks in flight.

Louise is a great tea drinker. I know this from our meetings at the Lido. I always go for coffee, so I wondered if Louise was asserting the superiority of the cup of tea.

But then there are the ducks. The ducks fly around this great big teacup and it seems they might just take off into the sky once they've swooped around the curve of the china. The man is tiny in relation to the cup, and the ducks. He's dressed for a journey. He's got his raincoat on and he's carrying a red suitcase and he's ready. He's leaning forward, up on his toes and his arm's raised and he's reaching out to the ducks and you feel any minute now he's going to lift off and fly with them. He wants the duck experience. He's going to lift off from there and go wherever the ducks take him.

It's a very odd and engaging image. It's full of hope and melancholy, like the first poem in Louise's book, called 'Going Back' in which a person returns to a place of childhood and finds everything looks small – the lines read:

The town seems so small now
like everyone should really
get out.

And maybe the man on the cover is from that small place and this is him leaving, with his belongings, for other places and other experiences. I feel he might have spent some time sitting on the bench, which is resting on the saucer, looking out over the town, and he's decided it's time, now, to go. Maybe it's the same park bench that Louise is seated on in the lovely photo taken by Rory Mearns, on the back cover.

There's always something melancholy about ducks flying overhead. Their flight signals the end of something. But then ends seem to lead to beginnings and the fact that the man has his coat on, and has packed his red suitcase, seems to mean he's really ready for this. He's going to make the leap of faith (which is the same leap of faith you make when you write) and he's going to enjoy the duck view along the way to wherever it might be that he lands.

Place features largely in this book. People leave places, they go home to them. There are streets and suburbs and countries. I think this reflects Louise's very strong sense of home. She's always spoken with so much love about her family and friends and I think this sense of having a place in the world comes through really strongly in her work.

This sense of place also gives a kind of confidence (the same kind of confidence and bravery you need to take off with those ducks). It's the kind that means Louise is able to stretch out in this book – these poems are inventive and surprising. They're funny and odd and moving and sometimes they're all of these things at the same time.

In one of her poems 'Career Quest' she does a career questionnaire five times and each time it gives her the same answer – she should be a detective. She did express an interest in weapons or explosives, so I'm pleased it steered her away from those.

Detectives are meant to be smart, and good at looking and thinking and piecing things together. They pay very close attention to the physical world but they also have to carefully consider psychological and emotional states, so I guess in a way Louise has found her vocation. What I love about the poem is that Louise then goes on to say that if she's good at being a detective, she might also be good at being a thief.

This looking at things from another direction, or turning things on their heads is something Louise is really good at – she's able to be on both sides – there's kindness and menace in her poems. She has great skill with language, and when language fails, she works that failure with great success.

I just want to say one final thing before asking Louise to read.

People often talk about first books as being like giving birth. I've never been too convinced about that one, but I was thinking about it and remembered that when our son Felix was being born, our doctor arrived at some point during the labour – she appeared in the room in jeans and an old jersey and her hair was all over the place and she was covered in bits of tree. She explained that she was in the middle of trimming her hedge with a chainsaw, and after a few minutes she headed off saying she'd call in again later.

She did, and rather amazingly she also made it to the birth. She arrived in a great rush, with her sleeves pushed up to her elbows and our baby was delivered with bits of hedge falling all over the place.

I've mentioned this because I think my role as Louise's supervisor was like this. I stuck my head around the door every now and again, but really Louise just got on with what she instinctively knew how to do and now she's got this great book that we can all admire and get to know.