

Creative Review of Amelia Walker's Alogopoiesis

Kendrea Rhodes

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Résumé de l'article

This review of Amelia Walker's *Alogopoiesis* is an interdisciplinary response, reflecting Walker's own creative approach of employing both form and content. Creative nonfiction, critical thinking, and a mixed media artwork response to *Alogopoiesis* reflect the effects that reading it has had on me as a creative, as a researcher, and as a living being. It is a happy coincidence that I chose to open the book in a café on Mount Myoko in Japan, and, as I climbed through the pages, I discovered a multitude of connections to my many worlds. I began walking beside each protagonist, nodding, feeling, staying. The word *alogopoiesis*, made up from *alolia* and *poiesis*, is an apt portmanteau for this body of work. *Alogopoiesis* renders an unsilencing. A slow-rebuild, remaking, and sensing of gaps where the unspoken reside. This book sharpened my outlook. My in-look. Replacing my rose-coloured glasses with recognition as I sank into stories of mental distress, violence, abuse, heartbreak, and prejudice.

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CREATIVE REVIEW OF AMELIA WALKER'S *ALOGOPOIESIS*

Kendrea Rhodes
Flinders University
Kendrea.Rhodes@flinders.edu.au

This book review was written on the unceded lands of Peramangk and Kaurna Country. The author acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country, their storytelling, customs, spiritual connections, history, and the injustices that have and continue to endure.

Kendrea Rhodes (she/her) is an artist, writer, and creative writing PhD candidate at Flinders University, South Australia. Her thesis, "Footsteps and Corridors: Walking with the Asylum Gene" explores how creative practice adds new dimensions to Mad Studies. It focusses creatively on the fragmented and silenced histories of the Ballarat Asylum. Visit KendreArt.com for a snapshot of Kendrea's work.

Abstract/Artist Statement: This review of Amelia Walker's *Alogopoiesis* is an interdisciplinary response, reflecting Walker's own creative approach of employing both form and content. Creative nonfiction, critical thinking, and a mixed media artwork response to *Alogopoiesis* reflect the effects that reading it has had on me as a creative, as a researcher, and as a living being. It is a happy coincidence that I chose to open the book in a café on Mount Myoko in Japan, and, as I climbed through the pages, I discovered a multitude of connections to my many worlds. I began walking beside each protagonist, nodding, feeling, staying. The word *alogopoiesis*, made up from *alogia* and *poiesis*, is an apt portmanteau for this body of work. *Alogopoiesis* renders an unsilencing. A slow-rebuild, remaking, and sensing of gaps where the unspoken reside. This book sharpened my outlook. My in-look. Replacing my rose-coloured glasses with recognition as I sank into stories of mental distress, violence, abuse, heartbreak, and prejudice.

Keywords: lived experience; poetry; silencing and gaps; mountains; creative research

Alogopoiesis by Amelia Walker is a macro-poem in form, supported by components of life writing, flash fiction, lyric verse, prose poetry, and tearstain. Streaks of blood. Blue. Green. Bodies, ephemeral presences, and hope.

The themes of *Alogopoiesis* include domestic violence, physical and mental abuse, queer heartbreak, invalidation, mental illness, vulnerability, identity, displacement, and prejudice. But in truth, it is all heartbreak for the reader upon the realisation that we are reading about ourselves—in one character or another, one action or another, one judgement or another, one situation or another, one word or another. This is clever audience inclusion. The reader finds connections, transforming from object to subject, protagonist to antagonist, character to narrator, observer to observed. In this way the book demonstrates the flexibility of lived experience art and storytelling through its ability to morph into individual reader-centred experiences. This book places the reader at the precipice to tread their own path.

Alogopoiesis slows time. It uses repetition. It builds a mountain. Stone by silent stone. Slowly. Repeating. Just one step ahead of the climber. It builds characters deftly. So familiarly, that you already know them. Each micro writing, with its minute particles, supporting struts, and flakes of solace and symbolism demonstrate robustness, but together they emanate a compelling synergy.

The word alogopoiesis is a portmanteau, and thoroughly apt as the title of this book. Alogia is about speech. An absence of it. Obstruction. Silence. And poiesis is the making part, the building part. Making sense from silence. Building mountains of sense from gaps and unspoken words.

Alogopoiesis contains many gaps, in both form and content. And the further away in time I get from my first reading of it (on a mountain in Japan in January 2024), the deeper it sinks into me. The more it makes sense and becomes harder to articulate. It turns into art, green swirls, and music in my mind. It turns into footfall in the night. It builds an island to rest my weary imaginings in sunshine and rainbows. Right before it smashes everything to pieces with lashing violent storms and consuming grey seas. Then art, swirls, and music, again, as it tells of fractured crockery and mouths, and how you might think differently about cracks. And realities. Then there's a little girl who needs to pee in the night—a night that is one book long: "The clock says two" ("Naming the Tortoise, Part One"), but we all know that 2 am will repeat the next night. And the next.

Repetition and rhythm feature subtly throughout *Alogopoeisis*. Its very form encourages readerly meditation, just as going up a mountain seems slower than coming down. One thought after another. And, when presented with the opportunity of a place to rest, such as numberless pages brimming with emptiness, then rest is advised.

Intermission

Sometimes there's nothing
for it but to go
climb a mountain

—find some other side
from which to come
down
("Intermission")

Figure 1

Making Sense (Kendrea Rhodes)



Notes: Mount Myoko, Japan; *Alogopoiesis* and climbing mountains. A mixed media artwork by Kendrea Rhodes, comprising charcoal, oil paint, digital art, and photography.

This book is for your subconscious to sort through. It matters because the themes matter—and we drown in them on the outside. At the bottom of the mountain. Blinded to the daily deaths of women at the hands of their beloved monster. Blocking out statistics of child abuse, slogans of “care”, pharmaceutical infomercials, jargon, endless stories of violence, mental illness, injustice, and prejudice. The hourly news. Box ticked because we watched it. Knowledge locked away and voices silenced. Everything simple again. Just follow the rules and start at the start.

The Beginning

A sentinel stands at the gates of *Alogopoiesis*, waving poetry with a white flag. It's the “Kite”, expressing a desire to parley. This is the physical beginning of the book and the start of my reading journey. The sentinel takes my hand, gingerly at first—or so it seems—leading me through the gates, all the while draping metaphors around my shoulders for comfort.

This will be a nice read I think to myself. A pleasant way to spend a sunny morning atop Japan's snow-covered Mount Myoko.

It's 9 am. I read “Kite” closely. My protective instincts are on high alert within the first sentence: knife, violence, small, trapped, but still arcing and diving. Fighting for life. Still dancing. A bird? A child? A vulnerable person? Is my heart breaking already? This is no ordinary overarching metaphor.

Time passes and I peer out the café window, noticing the air. Thick. 3-D, laden with snowflakes. I can see every layer of air because of the sparkling, floating, flurries of snow. The air, previously silenced by sunshine, now “turn[s] tempests into art” (“Kite”).

A teenage girl interrupts my thoughts: Are the vending machines all cash? I have no cash. My mum and dad are on the other side of the mountain. I have no cash. How can I get a drink without cash? I don't speak Japanese.

Her red-rimmed eyes reflect clouds of snow descending upon the mountain.

She has ice in her hair.

The snow on her shoulders weighs her down.

Instinct kicks in—first things first: Let's get you a hot drink, I have cash. What would you like?

She drinks her hot sweet coffee, grateful for a moment's reprise from the unfamiliar snow-covered land beyond the café window. I watch people struggling outside now, when not three hours ago, the sun shone, and the noiseless landscape appeared struggle-free.

I think of the kite and the protagonist (a girl in my mind now), trapped on either side of the window: "It will not stay trapped long, will not wither like the leaves. / Any moment, this kite will corkscrew *Up! Up! Up! . . .*" ("Kite"). I instantly feel the convergence of the protagonist and the kite, regardless of a pane of glass.

The girl says she doesn't like skiing.

This is her first time, and everything is lost. Everyone. She just kept going up and down chairlifts until she got to this café. And now, look at the weather. She doesn't want to ski anymore. Being lost wasn't as bad when you could see.

I expected *Alogopoiesis* to tug at my heartstrings through themes of vulnerability, injustice, invalidation, abuse, and loneliness, and I expected a fleeting tune in my mind to that effect. But my disobedient head pounded with the screech of an off-beat symphony when I met MaggieMem ("The Lady with the Disobedient Head" all parts and versions). She had nowhere to hide from an overstimulated mind. World. MaggieMem was not lost. There were no gaps. They were all stitched and sewn and glued and I had dipped my toe in. Before I knew it, I was swimming offshore, skiing off-piste, thinking outside the box (joining my body, finally), feeling off-kilter and relieved. I saw me and I didn't hate it. Off-beat is not bad.

It was the doubling down of form and content. Like this lost girl on the mountain, safe in a café. Not lost but lost. The weather mirrored her emotions. Form reflecting content. Making it worse for the girl, who felt isolated in a Japanese café with at least ten people in it. All of whom could ski, had mobile phones, a landline, and some with vehicular means of getting back to the village. But still. The girl's thinking and fear were real.

I spiralled within the imagery of *Alogopoiesis*, as I realised there were gaps in my world. Between the snowflakes. There were many more Ds in my 3-D air. But the gaps were invisible, silent, unremarkable. Why do I ignore them? Why don't I just ask the girl about the gaps in her sentences? The one-million whys. Hows. Do I need to know? I see her standing there. I see her melting into the carpet, gaps and all.

"Why don't they just get up, get out and away?" ("Women Like That").

I know this sentence wants a reaction from me.

But this sentence is playing the long game.

It's not a flippant comment from a shallow monied woman in a safe relationship. Although it could be. It's not just a poetic provocation; a hook for all who have ever thought it. All who have ever thought that life really is that simple. It's educational. Instructional. And "Women Like That" goes on to show you how complicated the answer might be to "Why don't they just . . .".

"These things do not stop happening just because nobody sees or records" ("Island, Part one, Version one"). Also, they do not stop when somebody does see. Does record. Wits and worlds are slow healers, not like bodies. Just. Get. Out.

But

how is big.

Bigger than this café on a mountain.

Bigger than the sky. And tiny too.

So tiny that you cannot see it, but it stiiings.

So different for everyone.

How can I leave this thought now it has been thought?

Just put the book down.

How?

It's in my head.

At first, I had wondered why the girl didn't just go down the mountain and wait at her accommodation for her family—send them a message to that effect.

Then I look at the girl's silent smart phone. She has no internet, no Wi-Fi. Why? Who cares—it's a Japanese café in the snow. It has coffee for cash from vending machines. And windows.

And the girl's how was huge.

Skiing was walking in the snow. She could not walk.

The snow and air were thickening. She could not see. Could not breathe.

Wi-Fi meant communication. She could not connect. Could not talk.

She was tired, cold, and thirsty. Her family was on the mountain, on this same pile of inspirited earth. If she left, she left them.

So, I go back to the drinks vending machine, with its red for hot and blue for cold, its bright illuminations and bubbly tunes. I dance with the buttons in an acceptable order and get another drink for the girl.

"New Beginnings" ("Hungry" all parts and versions); everyone seemingly wants one. Striving, progressing, upgrading, improvements, growth, change. Place. Identity. But those rewards belong to people who conform. Fit in. Behave. Look right. And think right,

according to the new rules (new beginnings have new rules). This matters to me as I wonder who I am outside of my culture. I wonder if making it to The Official's box is at the expense of others.

I decide to share my mobile hotspot.

She contacts her parents. Text, message, email? Or perhaps Snap-chat or Snap-map? I don't know. But I witness the change in her body as she speaks into her smart phone. The snow on her shoulders melts and, in its absence, she inflates, growing taller, "Up! Up! Up!" ("Kite").

She turns to me. Thank you. Thank you so much. They are coming. We both smile and I leave the café.

I don't know the ending. Someone was on their way. She was safe in a café of vending machines. That was enough.

When is the ending anyway?

Is This the End?

The moment I finished *Alogopoesis* I had to start again. The second time, the sentinel at the beginning actually growled at me. A growling kite, not a white flag. A trigger warning. Now you know, do you want to venture back in? Again?

My initial thought: a nice read. Nice. An underwhelming word choice.

This is a *necessary* read; to feel the machinations of another's thoughts pound through your body. To bathe in the mists of metaphor and let the meanings soak into your skin. To sense why another person seeks solace in their doings and thinkings. To pick apart your judgements. Prejudices. To get out of your head and feel your way. To get back into your head. Your body. To understand your way/how and put them into practice.

Alogopoesis is no easy glide across the ice; this book is a technical black run for experienced skiers, therefore, as a perpetual beginner, I am only capable of it in my head. For now.

I aim to practice.

"Graceful as a knife, yet the opposite of violence,
A small kite is trapped in the tree outside my window,
Arcing, diving through the morning air."
("Kite")

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