



The Female Factory

Lisa L. Hannett (Co-author) , Angela Slatter (Co-author) , Alisa Krasnostein (editor) , Amal El-Mohtar (introduction)

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In The Female Factory, procreation is big business. Children are a commodity few women can afford.

Hopeful mothers-to-be try everything. Fertility clinics. Pills. Wombs for hire. Babies are no longer made in bedrooms, but engineered in boardrooms. A quirk of genetics allows lucky surrogates to carry multiple eggs, to control when they are fertilised, and by whom—but corporations market and sell the offspring. The souls of lost embryos are never wasted; captured in software, they give electronics their voice. Spirits born into the wrong bodies can brave the charged waters of a hidden billabong, and change their fate. Industrious orphans learn to manipulate scientific advances, creating mothers of their own choosing.

From Australia's near-future all the way back in time to its convict past, these stories spin and sever the ties between parents and children.

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What Are the Twelve Planets?

The Twelve Planets are twelve boutique collections by some of Australia's finest short story writers. Varied across genre and style, each collection offers four short stories and a unique glimpse into worlds fashioned by some of our favourite storytellers. Each author has taken the brief of four stories and up to 40 000 words in their own direction. Some are quartet suites of linked stories. Others are tasters of the range and style of the writer. Each release will bring something unexpected to readers.

Nightsiders by Sue Isle

Love and Romanpunk by Tansy Rayner Roberts

Thief of Lives by Lucy Sussex

Bad Power by Deborah Biancotti

Showtime by Narrelle M Harris

Through Splintered Walls by Kaaron Warren

Cracklescape by Margo Lanagan

Asymmetry by Thoraiya Dyer

Caution: Contains Small Parts by Kirstyn McDermott

Secret Lives by Rosaleen Love

The Female Factory by Lisa L. Hannett and Angela Slatter

Cherry Crow Children by Deborah Kalin

The Female Factory Details

Date : Published November 15th 2014 by Twelfth Planet Press

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Author : Lisa L. Hannett (Co-author) , Angela Slatter (Co-author) , Alisa Krasnostein (editor) , Amal El-Mohtar (introduction)

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From Reader Review The Female Factory for online ebook

Kristian Thoroughgood says

Fascinating and entertaining, bizarre and grotesque, this is a great collection of four speculative fiction short stories from two Australian authors. Touching on topics that some may find challenging, this book explores aspects of body horror and dark fantasy from a very female perspective.

A slightly longer review (500 words) is available here: <https://uncertaintales.wordpress.com/...>

Nicole says

Strong writing with my order of enjoyment - Vox (hands down), Female Factory, Baggage (these two are kind of tied), then, All the Other Revivals.

John Devenny says

Another fine addition to the excellent Twelve Planets series from TPP. This collection features four pieces of short fiction all of which are somewhat disturbing looks at parenting in the past and the future.

Mark Webb says

This review forms part of my contribution to the Australian Women Writers 2014 Reading Challenge. All my 2014 AWWC reviews can be found [here](#).

The Female Factory by Angela Slatter and Lisa L Hannett is the 11th book in the Twelve Planets series by Twelfth Planet Press. The series aims to showcase Australian women writing speculative fiction and has produced some stellar, award winning work over the last 3 years.

Hannett and Slatter have collaborated before, most notably in the collection *Midnight and Moonshine*. *The Female Factory* has the polish of a well practiced collaboration, where the voice of the stories is smooth and doesn't show any seams between the two story teller's work.

The collection is made up of four stories:

- *Vox* - where the souls of children that are never born are used to give voice to electronic devices.
- *Baggage* - in a world where the very rich are willing to pay big money for a baby, Robyn's ability to undertake multiple, simultaneous pregnancies **should** be an asset.
- *All the Other Revivals* - a haunting story where people born in the wrong body can make a change in the waters of the local billabong.
- *The Female Factory* - we all know about genetic engineering and the possibility of designer babies. But

what about designer mothers?

In most of the stories the collection puts a strong emphasis on fertility, and the mother-child relationship. It provides perspectives that I found fresh and very engaging. It is a mature treatment of topics that are often glossed over or ignored completely.

The writing is very sophisticated, and the authors are able to draw the reader into the protagonist's world view effortlessly, portraying them very sympathetically while still showing the warts and all. The language is deceptively simple, while still creating imagery and atmosphere that I found compelling.

Another excellent addition to the Twelve Planets series, and one I have no hesitation in recommending.

Regular readers will know that I am an occasional contributor to the *Galactic Chat* podcast. Back in September 2014, one of the authors, Angela Slatter, was interviewed for the podcast. The interview was conducted by Alex Pierce, and contains some very interesting insights. You can find it [here](#). And if that isn't enough, Sean Wright also interviewed Lisa L. Hannett for *Galactic Chat* just before Christmas 2014 (the interview can be found [here](#)).

I also reviewed this book on my website.

Shana DuBois says

This collection will make your brain buzz.

After each story I had to pause and give myself time to reflect and absorb what I had just read. Each story packs a gut-punch of a premise. The reader will experience thought provoking ideas and concepts, some of which might be hard to swallow, but ALL are worthy of reading and attention. Do yourself a favor, buy this book, read it, and enjoy some of the most powerful short stories to date.

Alexandra says

["Vox" is incredibly chilling, probably the most of the four stories, and on two

Deedee says

<http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/pl.cgi?4...>

Pages: viii+149

Amanda NEVER MANDY says

[I found myself torn between rooting for the children and being horror stricken at the thought of what all that entailed for them. (hide spoiler)]

Elizabeth says

This review was originally published on the Books and Pieces blog.

I was once taught that, in the gothic, the grotesque body can be encapsulated by things that are 'of the body and yet not of the body'. Hair on your head is good, cut hair on the floor of the barbershop is repellent. The female body is accordingly a more grotesque body than the male. It is a leaking vessel - bleeding, producing milk, and, worst of all, birthing children. Pregnancy is a very literal moment of a body containing something that is of the body and yet not of it and children are the walking, talking embodiment of it. The female body is thus a creator of gothic.

As a theory it's at once hideously sexist and incredibly cool. Because who doesn't want to be Cthulu-mama? (Behold my baby demon spawns - rawr!)

Anyway.....The uncanny nature of reproduction is captured in these four stories in a way that leaves you feeling like they really could just come true at any moment. They are gleefully, creepily, almost normal.

The IVF treatments controlled by giant corporations, unwanted embryos captured in software, risking death to change our trapped selves, female bodies controlled, taken apart, and constructed by those around them. Something in each story feels very familiar and despite their fantastical or science fictional settings. It's that little hook back to real life that leaves you wondering, worrying, waiting for it all to come true.

4.5 stars.

Rivqa says

A fine, creepy SF-esque collection about women, their bodies, and different kinds of birth.

Katharine (Ventureadlaxre) says

This collection contains four short stories that, as one can expect from our best writing duo in Australia, absolutely blow the reader away. I don't think I've come across a bit of their writing yet that hasn't been perfect - haunting, leaving an impact, horror-filled and yet still somehow beautiful... this has it all. Hannett and Slatter have it all, and I can't wait to see and love everything they do in the future.

Vox

A couple, Kate and Nick, go to a fertility clinic - though it has a few differences in their slightly more futuristic world, than our current one today. Though most of their money and months of trying every possible thing they finally conceive, and though there's dawning happiness, Kate feels niggles of worry that she then feels guilty for.

The advances and plot points of this story make it hard to discuss as the spoilers are what's most interesting and gripping about this new world, and the issues it brings with it. Pregnancy can be a scary, heartbreak thing.

Baggage

Robyn thinks of herself as old Robyn and new Robyn - old didn't wear subtle makeup, she mispronounced things, had bleached hair... New keeps quiet and polite more often than not, charms the clients as she's been trained, and doesn't tell her handler to fuck off. New is also a walking talking incubator for the rich and famous - at the time of her next appointment, she currently has six chances of life inside her, and uses carefully controlled pills to keep the opportunities in stasis until the full payment has been rendered for each.

This is utterly creepy with the power and control that's involved, and how it all seems so possible. Set mostly in rural Victoria we still see that outside Melbourne it's still dusty and remote, which certainly makes it seem like it's not overly far into the future. And, like the first piece in the collection, we see human nature is both ruthless and greedy for the same things, still.

All the Other Revivals

Baron is considered weird by everyone around him, except for his 'mother' who has now passed on. Baron is from one of the women with an ungodly womb (like how we've seen in the previous short stories) but was raised by a lovely woman and an incredibly wealthy man who practically runs the small-ish country town, which doesn't buy much affection for Baron. Too weird even for boarding school, when home, Baron avoids the other kids who don't invite him to join in anyway, and wouldn't be able to even if they did ask.

There's a billabong. And with it, comes 'a swimming'. Not very often, and it's talked of in whispers and gossip the whole town shares within 24 hours. Baron witnesses one occur, and with a little knowledge of them himself he is good at keeping secrets - until he's not, at least. And then things take a turn for the worse...

What gets me, about Hannett and Slatter's work, is that things don't tend to have a happy ending or a explosive ending... they're just all realistic, fading into black, leaving the real ending up to the imagination of the reader.

The Female Factory

Bridewell Female Factory is a place for criminals and their children, organised by rank which determines what work they'll do while incarcerated. There's also a band of children that secretly do the matrons work, which involves digging up the dead and bringing them back in secret to the surgeon, who dissects them - both he and matron have their own goals in mind through this grisly work.

We see multiple points of view and goals in this piece, from the children to the matron herself, and see what drives them all - knowledge, a better life, something they're all missing...

Being Hannett and Slatter though, this one is more grisly than the rest, being the novella-length piece in the collection beside the previous three short stories. We have a fuller landscape and more attention for all characters, drawing you in for a longer burn as we get to a conclusion I'm not sure I'm ready for. Their writing is powerful and some of the best we have in Australia, so get this collection - you won't be disappointed.

Stephanie says

The Female Factory is the eleventh book in the Twelve Planets series from Twelfth Planet Press, this collection authored by frequent co-authors Lisa L. Hannett and Angela Slatter. The Female Factory collects four short works which are unrelated in terms of plot but very much related in terms of theme.

Vox opens the collection, and is a truly chilling story. Kate, our protagonist, is somewhat obsessed with lending inanimate objects life (I particularly liked her talking to the last two Tic Tacs in her container, telling them that "all of your friends are already inside me"). Kate and her husband are also struggling with fertility issues, and she and her husband seek help from a fertility clinic. When she conceives successfully with three embryos, the two of them are forced to make a difficult choice. For many other authors, this could have been a trite story, but Hannett and Slatter give it their own, almost disturbing twist (which I absolutely will not reveal - this one is best read with no prior knowledge). Probably the standout story in the collection for me.

Baggage also explores fertility, and takes place in a world where fertility in general has decreased, but where women exist with the ability to produce multiple ova, and with the help of medication, store them until the prospective parents are ready (or have paid enough) to have their child brought to term. Robyn is one such woman, and we follow her as she visits the father of one of these children for an assignation with shades of The Handmaid's Tale to complete the assignment. Robyn is a fascinating and at times repulsive woman, with her attitude to the "cubs" she is carrying reflecting the horrific nature of the world she lives in.

All the Other Revivals is a story which explores gender and sexuality through the eyes of Baron, someone who does not define himself (for want of a better pronoun, but it is the one Hannett and Slatter use for Baron) as being either male or female, but rather somewhere in between. Baron finds himself drawn to a strange billabong where people can dive down to a wrecked car beneath the water, and emerge changed - in particular, we witness him watching a girl he knows, Andrea, submerging herself as a female and rising again as a male. This is a truly striking and haunting story, and one with imagery that lingers long after the words themselves have finished.

The last story in the collection, and the longest, is The Female Factory. This story has a historical setting, taking place in the Tasmanian workhouse for female convicts known as the Female Factory, and explores the lives of the women and children incarcerated there, as well as that of the Matron Avice. There are obvious literary influences in this story (which I will not elaborate on, since part of this discovery is deeply entwined with the power and horror of this story). This story truly reflects what a brilliant writing team Hannett and Slatter are together, exploring the themes of motherhood and family in a setting made the more horrific by the real history which took place there.

The Female Factory won the 2014 Aurealis Award for Best Collection, and the award couldn't be more well deserved. For readers new to the work of Hannett or Slatter, it would be a brilliant place to start with their work (though I warn you, you will then go on to devour everything both of them have written, both individually and working together). It is a fabulous continuation of the Twelve Planets series, highlighting

two more of Australia's best female writers and is highly recommended.

Scott says

The Female Factory is filled with lyrical language, beautifully disturbing images and memorable characters. It is a standout collection among the most import series of genre books being published today.

Anna Hepworth says

bitter and cynical - I'm getting a little tired of reading about how horrible the future is going to be for women. And with great angst about declines in fertility, and what happens for those who are fertile, etc. And yet, a very good collection. The first story is chilling and horrible - left me quite unhappy and disturbed, and what happens when obsessions start ruling our lives. The second and third stories fit inside that genre of Australian fantasy by people who don't seem to like Australia, although in this case the scenery is painted with more love than usual. But there are no loveable characters in either of these stories, no characters that seem worth the time. Yes, there are people who are the under-dog, who have been exploited, but they are just mean with a good reason rather than none.

The last story is to some extent redeems the collection. Very Dickensian in its extolling the dreadful conditions the poor (in this case, convict women in Van Dieman's Land) live in, but with motivations that were comprehensible. Maybe it says something about me as a reader that a story about a woman who nearly destroys all in her attempt to have children left me flat, but a story about children who nearly destroy all in search of a mother was easy to identify with.
