

# Poetry Reviews

Airstream Land Yacht  
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A Palace of Pearls  
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Live Coverage  
—Priscila Uppal

## Live Coverage

Live Coverage  
Priscila Uppal  
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Reviewed by Ewan Whyte



Priscila Uppal's fourth book of poetry *Live Coverage* is a gut-wrenching meditation on our times, executed with considerable artistry and depth of feeling. Military conflicts and economic excesses are discussed in eloquent lyric-narrative poetry and modern society's passivity in the face of violence and cruelty is put on display, then lamented and satirized. The first notable feature of *Live Coverage* are lines from actual news flashes interwoven with passages from Homer's *Odyssey* at the bottom of every page, which forms a lunatic news-crawl that follows the reader and compliments the poems throughout the book. As the news flashes continue, they form a poem in and of themselves, unifying its separate parts into a working whole.

Classical myth is woven beautifully into the framework of this book, which offers a delightful reworking of parts of the *Odyssey*. Although the *Odyssey* has been rewritten to the point of bathos, her interaction with Homer's epic is done so tastefully it is a pleasure to read her re-imagined world. There is substantial, if black, humour in many of the passages without trivializing the significance of the original stories, reflected in the titles "Arachne's Children Take it One Day at a Time" and "Jove on Probation" among others. Or in this example from "Penelope Asked the Suitors to Leave":

No means No. She tried to be nice.  
Tried to do as her mother taught her:  
gentlemen callers ought to be treated  
with respect no matter who they are...

The prosecutor never recovered  
the heads, ushered past the thousand  
quilts hanging in the corridor.

Like Homer, Uppal repeatedly explores anger as a theme and how it can become projected inward, hurting or destroying whatever is closest to it, a reverse parallel of the Greek Midas myth, as in "Poseidon as my Father in his Wheelchair":

Angry. More than any first principles he knows that he is angry, and circles the room like a magnet at the poles, dirt on his hinges. He wipes it off and keeps circling, not caring what sticks, what will never come away...

Can you blame him? The goddesses took his legs and ran away. His children do not know where to find them. Everywhere he turns there are traps and riddles and strangely familiar faces with one eye...

The accompanying news flash at the foot of the page is: *warmed forever with happiness at the thought of you/Crowd Marks Anniversary of Bosnian Massacre*, tying the madness of the ancient world to the madness of contemporary events, a function the news-crawl serves throughout. She also expresses the idea that redemption is found not only in the recognition that the first casting of stones is in our own hearts but that acceptance of this, whether conscious or unconscious, is the only way to avoid becoming a small-minded, stone-throwing Cyclops oneself.

Poetry of this kind is very demanding, but well worth the effort. This work is relentless in its outpouring of controlled emotion, almost like a composer creating wildly with allegro forgetting the existence of the gentler adagio altogether. However, this aspect is overshadowed by the quality of her poetry. The strength of utterance in her writing is startling and is telling of what will come.