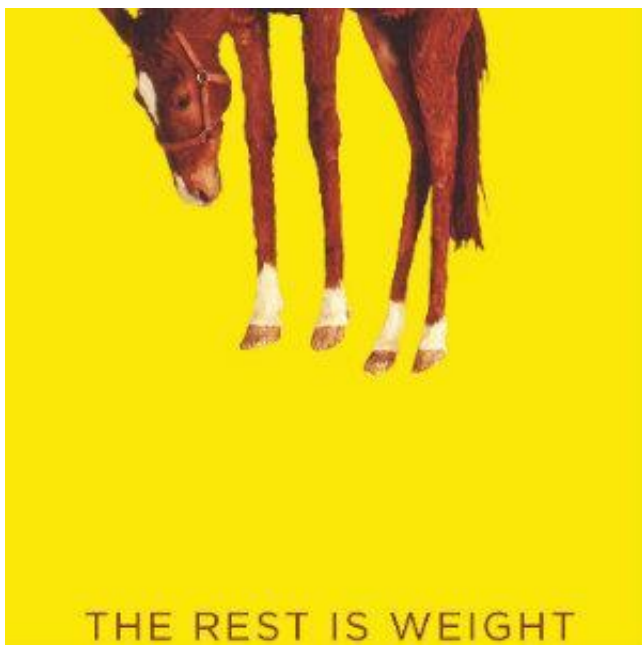


## The Rest is Weight

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ROZ BELLAMY

UQP: The award-winning stories in Jennifer Mills' first collection feature rich language, intricate storylines, and a fascinating variety of characters and settings.



The short stories in Jennifer Mills' first collection, *The Rest is Weight*, are powerful and beautiful. They showcase Mills' language mastery and skill, but also serve as a reminder not to disregard the short story form. In a world focussed on the latest novels on the best-seller lists, it is wonderful to read these captivating stories, featuring such rich language, intricate storylines and a variety of characters and settings.

The bright, striking cover by Design by Committee, who also designed the cover for Mills' first novel, *The Diamond Anchor*, features Maurizio Cattelan's art installation of a stuffed horse suspended in the air. Even if a reader isn't aware of Mills' writing, which includes three books published in four years and stories published in *Meanjin*, *Overland*, *Heat*, *Hecate* and many other literary journals, the unusual design and back cover summary are enticing hints at the many worlds within.

While the 27 stories are connected through themes of loneliness, displacement, loss and longing, and are melancholic in essence, there is more than enough humour and vivacity to counter this. The words and phrasing are lyrical and inherently poetic. It is

clear that Mills is as much a poet as a prose writer, based on her fluid language and stylistic choices, sensory images and thematic connections. She draws attention to seemingly trivial details and gives them depth and beauty. The sensory descriptions she provides, from the smell of horse blood to the harsh, specific sounds and smells in a hospital emergency room, not only provide context to each scene but firmly plant the reader in each world.

Mills' deep interest in people's actions and internal processes is obvious, and important to each story. Her characters range in age, sex, sexual preference, and location, with the many geographical leaps including the Australian outback, Mexico and Russia. Mills was Asialink's writer in residence in Beijing in 2010 and three of the stories in the collection were written there. This research and her experience lend authenticity to the setting and detail, and it never feels superfluous; the couple we follow in *Aperture* are compelling because of their domestic life in a setting where one tries so hard to belong, while the young inexperienced architect in *Architecture* is fascinating because we see her struggling in the strange, empty city she is helping to create and wonder with her why she is there. The stories range between surreal and experimental to 'realistic' stories of everyday life, and I found that this contrast and variety made me appreciate each story more.

The story that stayed with me the longest was *The Jungle Will Swallow Anything*, for the simplicity and innocence of the young protagonist's narration, while the touching relationship between daughter and mother contrasts with the darkness that surrounds them.

The stories contained within this collection are fascinating morsels that raise questions, get underneath your skin, and always leaving you wishing for more.

**Rating: 4 ½ stars out of 5**

***The Rest is Weight***

**By Jennifer Mills**

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Roz Bellamy is a Melbourne-based writer, reviewer and editor, with a passion for the arts and travel.