

## Somewhere a Cleaner

Edited by Adrienne Jansen, Te Rongomai  
Tipene-Matua, Joan Begg, Wesley Hollis,  
Nicky Subono  
Published by Landing Press, 2020  
Reviewed by Pat Lythe

**W**hat a delightful little book! The editors have focused on the hidden voices behind the essential services during COVID-19. They asked cleaners to submit poems on their experiences and have assembled this amazing collection of songs, rhymes, poems and moving stories.

The cleaners range from students working to save for fees, new immigrants unable to use their qualifications, Pacific families working to provide food and education for their families, to those for whom cleaning is a chosen way

of life. The venues cleaned also are diverse – hospitals, offices, homes, cars, schools, dishes, marae, boats, clocks and even sneakers.

Each contribution is mostly one page long, with a brief biography of the author added at the bottom.

The writers express feelings of invisibility, lack of acknowledgement, working late at night and work destinations.

They also talk of the pleasure of seeing shiny, clean surfaces, of being a listening ear to patients and the elderly, of pride in jobs well done, of advocating for better wages: all honestly expressed in remarkable clarity.

It's a book to be read right through at once and also to be dipped into regularly. You will never ignore cleaners again! 🗒️



## Passion Relics and the Medieval Imagination: Art, Architecture and Society

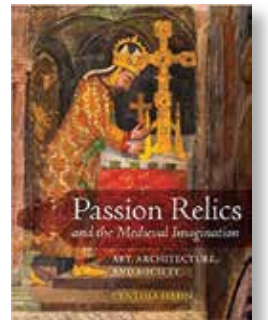
By Cynthia Hahn  
Published by University of California Press, 2020  
Reviewed by Ann Gilroy

**P**assion Relics, a beautifully produced and illustrated book, provides guidance for unlocking the meaning of religious relics collected and displayed in the middle ages. The idea of treasuring pieces of Jesus's cross or drops of his blood may seem macabre today, but the book reveals why they were more than museum artefacts and invites the reader to appreciate the imagination that created them and sustained the faith of generations.

The relics were not just things. They were experiences of God. Christians of the time could read every aspect of colour, design, material and aroma of the artworks as today we might become absorbed in a film.

The book is in two parts: the first focusing on Jesus's cross as the primary relic of that time and the second on the instruments of the passion – the nails, crown of thorns, etc. associated with Jesus's suffering and death. Hahn describes how the relics were obtained and contained, where they were housed and to whom they belonged, and what they represented to the faithful of the time. She illustrates her explanations with gorgeous photos.

Anyone interested in art, history, or the formation of religious devotion will find this book fascinating. 🗒️



## Sprigs

By Brannavan Gnanalingam  
Published by Lawrence & Gibson, 2020  
Reviewed by Meryn Gates

**S**prigs is a compelling and confronting read despite the violent gang rape of a comatose, young woman by members of a school rugby team. I could not put this book down.

*Sprigs*, set in 2021 Hutt Valley/Wellington, is divided into four parts. The first part requires some perseverance as it recounts the final game of the rugby season between the First XVs of competing schools – St Luke's and Grammar. It is difficult to avoid comparing the schools used by Gnanalingam with Wellington schools, but the toxic culture allowed to fester within these institutions will exist across New Zealand.

The second and third parts recount the consequences for the perpetrators, their families and the school communities, until we come to part four. In the preceding three parts the many voices are shared. Sometimes characters are not introduced and I found myself irritated, having to flick to the case list at the front of the book, to identify the person and their contribution to the narrative.

But in part four we hear from Priya. Uninterrupted, undiluted, sometimes stream of consciousness. Powerfully written, Gnanalingam gives us a window into the world of someone who has survived unspeakable violence.

I encourage you to read *Sprigs*; do not look away. We must think about how we can better equip our young people to deal with the multiple issues of racism, sexism, technology and that eternal need to fit in. 🗒️

