

## **Praise for Beth Spencer's *How to Conceive of a Girl***

'Witty, emotionally powerful, and very crisp' — *Arts Today*

'If you immerse yourself and let the fragments accumulate, you get a new perspective on the messy, lateral workings of the human heart and mind. It's exhilarating.' — Jenny Pausacker, *The Age*

'A collection of writing that defies easy definition, combining short story, essay, montage and reverie, sometimes on the same page. Spencer moves from dreamlike fantasy to acute analysis... Rewarding and engrossing reading.'

– Phillipa Hawker, *Marie Clare*

'A prismatic and often stunningly drawn exploration of what it is to be a woman. As relevant today as it was when it was first published in the mid-90s, if not more so. Highly recommended.' -- author Kim Kelly, *Good reads*

'A writer of exceptional sensitivity, precision and courage... Beth Spencer has developed a mode of narrative which seems effortlessly to embody complex and intensely mobile ideas. Everything dances; I often use her stories as an illustration of what is possible for writing, and why writing is essential for the development of our culture. One of the most interesting and valuable writers working in Australia.'

— Peter Bishop, former Director of Varuna Writers' Centre

'...will appeal to anyone with an interest in ways of breaking out of sequential narrative. Her montage or collage assembly of incidents and reflections, rearrangements of time and place, attract me enormously...

The playfulness of the methods she employs and the self-questioning throughout... reflect an intellectual toughness that deserves to be encouraged and promoted.'

-- Michael Sharkey, *The Weekend Australian*

'This is something really special... written with an elegance and eloquence that is inspiring. Spencer writes in the grey area between essay and story and poem...Her best is quite funny and sad and erotic.' --  
*City Weekly*

'The reworking of a classic text, mixed with contemporary theory and other elements of a common culture, is characteristic of Spencer's style and its strengths... Spencer's relation to history is genealogical, concerned with the web of connections that form the present and its subjectivities, tracing the complex, post-60s shifts in Australian culture and society which have affected her girls.'

-- Peter Hutchings, *The Sydney Morning Herald*

'At times [Spencer's stories] made me laugh, they constantly made me reflect, once or twice they made me cry... a talented and inspiring writer.'

-- Enza Gandolfo, *Australian Women's Book Review*

'Go with the flow when reading this. One connection invariably leads to another and, despite jagged edges, the prose glides.'

— Nadine Cresswell-Myatt, *The Herald-Sun*

'Spencer writes with great verve and manages to weave together the threads of a colourful tapestry... *How to Conceive of a Girl* is an empowering, witty and incisive comment on the seventies and eighties sexual-cultural scene.'

— Thuy On, *Overland*

'By revealing that there's nothing "natural" about being/becoming/conceiving of a girl, by bringing this into language, literature and therefore culture, Spencer makes it more possible to rethink/renege the social contract... [There are] dangers involved in broadening gender definitions, in boundary crossing, in abseiling and hang-glidings from secure subject positions; that is, in bringing the unknown, the unarticulated, the disavowed into cultural consciousness. It's a serious business... and I'm always grateful and amazed, renewed in my attempts to continue doing this when I read work like *How to Conceive of a Girl*. You could say that it en/genders courage.'

-- Kathleen Mary Fallon, *Australian Book Review*

'Beth Spencer flings herself into textual free-fall in this strange, delightful book... the collection simply buzzes. More please.' -- *The Good Weekend*

### **Praise for *Things in a Glass Box***

'Beth Spencer... uses poetics to nudge fiction over an edge. Episodic, surreal, tender and tough, these poems traverse suburbs studded with the encoded artifacts or 'things' of family, popular culture, memory and desire... *Things in a Glass Box* is a complex, considered and fine first collection filled with mercurial imagery underlined by aptly-timed perky jokes.' -- Pamela Brown, *Overland*

'*Things in a Glass Box* is... full of life, and love, tolerance and understanding, although many poems expose human foibles and fetishes. She exercises a rather kind humour and shows through her speaker a singular strength of self... Beth Spencer's poems, though tightly written, are expansive, freely expressing what is often repressed, those silent most active thoughts contained within spilling out into her lines.' – Lynette Kirby, *Australian Book Review*

'The souvenirs of the everyday... are scrutinised through television screens, train windows, cameras and display cases. Apparent transparencies become splintered to create new optics: these "things" collected and contained, far from amortised, suddenly look back at the viewer. This is writing as surprising and familiar as the repressed when it erupts into life; as piercing as pleasure or pain.' -- Anna Gibbs

### **Praise for *Body of Words* and *Box of Words* (multimedia)**

'Accessible and at the same time richly complex to analyse.' – Graham Williams, UTS

'A terrific resource. The discussion notes are fresh and I can't wait to do the exercises with a class. Lots of material to build skills and build ways of seeing and analysing writing.' – Eva Gold, educator, NSW

'Beth Spencer's work spills out of containers and over boundaries, brimming with ideas and perspectives, social history and popular culture. English students and teachers will find much to work with here: characterization, setting, imagery, poetry, contemporary issues. The words are carefully wrought but the ideas are often tough and challenging; with the audio versions adding a compelling immediacy, a freshness of voice that is hard to get from a textbook.'

-- Warrick Wynne, poet and Senior English Teacher

'It was a wonderful experience to listen to this double CD. Beth Spencer has a melodic voice and combines this with stories that are interesting and diverse... Spencer's use of music and poetry, humour and sound

bites adds to the pleasure of these stories and their power to evoke memories and ideas.'

-- *Viewpoint: On Books for Young Adults*

'What makes this material especially powerful are the strong connections within the diverse material. Themes of memory, ways of looking, representation and desire are explored and re-explored... Listening to the poetry where the sound qualities are emphasised is just one approach employed to engage the viewer/reader. I think these two CDs successfully marry ideas with a powerful personal experience. They are certainly an excellent resource for teachers, but students, especially upper High School students, would also be entranced with the way poetry is presented.'

-- *SAETA (South Australian English Teachers' Association) Newsletter*

'An eclectic collection of essays, articles, reviews, poems and short stories. This rich repository of texts is designed by Beth Spencer to enrich and encourage wide reading on a range of interesting, colourful and often challenging topics and themes... The range of questions that accompany each text encourages the student to explore the layers of meaning in the work. Other questions get the student to reflect on how they draw on their own experience to make meaning. In the light of critical literacy, this can open the student's mind to what may be a difficult concept. Independent learning is not compromised as the questions guide the student into the work, not direct them. There is plenty of room for discussion and debate.'

-- *Fiction Focus*

'How do you begin to assess a vast smorgasbord of words – poetry, stories, essays, ideas, links to other works, student activities, sound-works -- a massive web - interconnected yet stand-alone? It's not easy to do this work justice in a small space... Don't be mistaken, this is no dull audio-book reading, each piece is alive with atmosphere; sounds which take you to the action, to the place where Beth Spencer wants you to be.'

Your senses embrace her experience; you see what she sees, feels, smells, tastes. These recordings bring life and passion to each word in a ways that books never can.

‘To say Beth Spencer writes about women, or politics, or life growing up in the sixties and seventies only skims the surface of her writing. The juxtaposition of the everyday, of her personal experiences, with wider issues of politics, sexual politics, feminism, class and racism ground these universal issues, making them real and personal.... deep and complex, often deceptively light and entertaining... For a teacher wanting to find a way into contemporary poetry, this package is a gift.’  
-- *VATE (Victorian Association of Teachers of English) Newsletter*

## **Praise for *Vagabondage***

‘So much fun to read. Warm, witty and profound.’  
– [Claudia Taranto](#), ABC Radio National

‘An unexpected gem...a memoir of moving spiritually and geographically, told in verse! Utterly unique, so Australian and such a beautiful work of art, Beth Spencer’s tale of selling her house and becoming a nomad spoke to me with a vivid kind of wanderer’s call. A perfect book to read on holiday, but be warned, it might change your life forever.’ — Walter Mason, [My Favourite Books of 2014](#)

‘I’d like to nominate Beth Spencer’s *Vagabondage* as my best read for 2014... I love this book for its thought-provoking portrayal of a mid life crisis writ large. It’s beautiful, it’s funny, it’s sad, and it speaks to all of us who aim to age disgracefully.’ — [Suzanne Donisthorpe](#), [Books & Arts Daily](#), [ABC-RN](#)

'Beth Spencer has a great eye and ear for detail, for small things with larger implications. This is a work that is very specific and personal and yet opens out in universal, fabulously recognisable and immediate ways. A book to read and re-read, and re-inhabit.' — [Philippa Hawker](#), Arts and Film writer for *The Age*

'[A] memoir told in glimpses and moments...It seems a miracle, a revelation, that out of moments of disparate experience, emerges a whole tale.' – C S Hughes, [Nerdalicious](#)

'A wonderful read.' — Emeritus Professor [Elizabeth Webby](#)

'The journey and the book gives Spencer the space (and time) to consider important issues... Vagabondage may seem serious (yes) and sad (in parts), but there is a humour that underlies the journey that turns its reading into an adventure... The photographs, too, tell a tale and are a great addition to the text.... This book doesn't belabour its wisdom, but instead opens us up through humour to all aspects of humans' being.' – [Angela Gardner](#), [Cordite Poetry Review](#)

'Nine gold stars and an elephant stamp. My only criticism is that it's five hundred pages too short, but I will remedy that by re-reading and gleaning.' — [Frank Veldze](#) (Sculptor)

'There are authors for whom writing functions as a form of truth-telling... We look to them for insight and intelligence and good humour, and a willingness to share – and Beth Spencer is one of them...*Vagabondage* is a short work that leaves you feeling you've read a much longer one. There are many reasons for this, not least her close-focused but at the same time expansive and warm angle on the universe... Plenty of story, and incident, as well as interiority and introspection... It's a marvellous blend.' — [Angelo Loukakis](#), Author and Executive Director of the [Australian Society of Authors](#)

'A terrific book.' — [Ron Pretty](#), OAM

This lovely collection of poems is at times hilarious and poignant... The book is rather like a good concept album – the poems stand alone well enough – but reading them as a collection (in order, as laid out in the book) adds a level of depth and connection that makes you feel as if you have travelled awhile with this person, and know them as a friend. — [Library and Computing News](#)

'This is why we read poetry. We share feelings and we align briefly to see through each other's eyes... [T]his is a collection discussing the issues of moving beyond the accumulations that we continue to hold on to merely because we have the space... How do we define ourselves when we have so few of the commodities and possessions that would make such definition easy? What are we when we are simply being? Good poetry is intimate and profound. By the end of it, you know a lot about the author. You have shared experiences and you have thought about yourself in new light. Beth's collection does all of this and is a great pleasure to read.'

— Nick Falkner, [This is Not Art This is Typing](#)

'Aiming to explore not only the idea of home but The Big Questions: love, family, the whole catastrophe... this slim volume displays Spencer's talent for catching moments in time and transforming them. A passing feeling, a wash of joy or pain...poems [that] reveal the secret at the heart of us: despite money, marriages, houses, the accumulation of "stuff," all of us pass out of this life unadorned... Verdict: Dreamy.' – [Susan Johnson](#), *The Sunday Territorian*