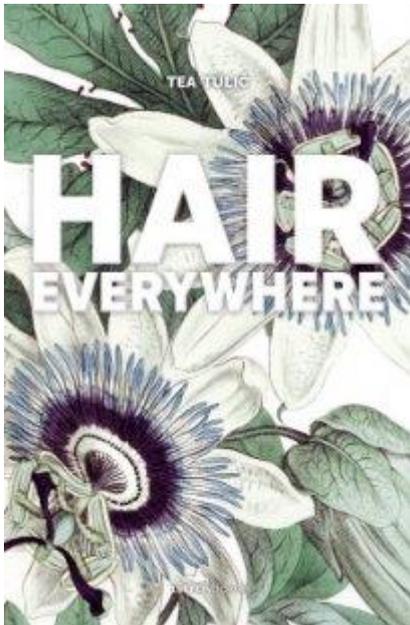


**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**

BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



Hair everywhere (2017)

Tulic T (Petkovich C, translator).

London: Istros Books, 2017.

146pp.

ISBN 9781908236319.

£9.99.

Average star rating 3.3 (out of 5)

**Macmillan Cancer Support
89 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7UQ**

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“Hair everywhere”, highly emotive, written from the daughter's perspective, and possibly autobiographical, directly relates to the experiences of a woman with terminal cancer, the mother of a family with a strong Catholic resonance. It could appeal, paradoxically, to anyone and to no one. Such is the nature of it. It could be categorised under health and wellbeing, oncology, literary short prose, or even possibly poetry. It reveals glimpses into the everyday family environment. One thing it is not is a source for medical advice or information.

It would appeal to anyone who is in the unenviable predicament of watching the demise of someone they. In particular, older children and adults caring for a parent in the last stages of terminal illness. Alternatively, anyone with a keen interest in any kind of creative prose would find it engaging.

The prose is mostly written in the present tense, as if the author's main character – the daughter – is desperately trying to freeze time to escape the day when her mother will no longer be with her. It only helps to exacerbate the vulnerability, fear of impending loss and that ultimate state of feeling bereft, eventually followed by quiet despair that comes with the onset of grief. It is only the very end of the book that suggests that the account has been a chronological one, possibly spanning a year. So, there is some sort of logical timescale to it.

The fact that many of the pieces are written in the present tense makes it almost seem like they could apply to one single day of time. The shortness of each piece makes it seem like they could be the daughter's diary entries. Each entry is given a title that alludes to that entry, which creates the impression that this is a book of not one story but a selection of very short stories.

Given that it's been translated from Croatian (the original being "Kosa Posvuda"), the language is easily accessible to adult and younger readers alike. Although I doubt that the content matter would suit very young readers. The book itself is about A5 size, like that of the average generic popular novel. It's also quite thin and could be digested by any eager reader in one sitting. The attractive, illustrated cover depicts a passion flower, alluding to an alternative remedy that the daughter uses to try to take away her emotional pain. There are no graphics inside; they would not sit well and

are not required with this kind of literature. The title speaks for itself, so I imagine anyone could pick it up and get a good idea as to the content.

Tulic gives us a mere peek into the experience of a child losing a parent way too early in life. However endearing it is, this book is relatively short and doesn't give away a great deal – it might leave some readers feeling a little short changed? It isn't particularly useful in the conventional sense. But then this isn't a very conventional book. It needs to be taken on its own merits as a piece of prose alone. I feel compelled to give it a five-star rating, as a way of acknowledging its bravery and creative approach in tackling such important yet painful life events in such a subtle yet candid way.

Former carer to terminally ill mother with grade 4 glioblastoma (36-45) (March 2018)

This is a short but fascinating read; it is unusual in its layout and style, but I would recommend to anyone who is living with, caring for, or supporting someone with cancer. It isn't a factual book as such but explores the emotional impact of diagnosis on all the family and considers how it can affect family dynamics. Although the focus is on cancer and terminal illness, it could also interest anyone who is keen to explore the interplay between past and present and life and death and our responses to it.

The cover is contemporary, positive, light and appealing. It doesn't necessarily shout that this is a book about cancer, but the design and the title awaken a curiosity and a desire to find out more. My initial thoughts on reading the first few pages, was that it was disjointed and not a quick, easy read. At a quieter moment, I came back to it and became totally absorbed, not wanting to put it down. The author uses language that is evocative, thought provoking, and honest. There is a depth and clarity of writing that draws you in so that you "feel" the experience and identify with the observations.

To some degree, there is an order to the book in that it takes you on a journey that has a beginning, a middle and an end. In the beginning, we find the daughter contemplating the ordinary and mundane things in life, e.g. the neighbourhood, car parking. It gently slips in to her mother being diagnosed with cancer. It then considers the impact of this on three generations of women: the mother (who has cancer); the daughter; and the grandmother. Finally, it deals with death and dying and the uncertainty and fear that surrounds it. The writing and observations are immensely powerful and astute. Interestingly, it is quite gender specific. The writer explores the relationships between the three women and how their individual differences manifests itself during a crisis, i.e. the diagnosis of cancer. There is a brief mention of dad and a brother, so they do have a presence, but very much on the periphery.

The narrator aptly describes the position she finds herself in. She is forced to make a very quick transition from child to adult and undertake the role of carer, and protector. Yet the child in her is still ever present. Throughout, she reflects on past experiences, the death of a hamster or a mouse, and these memories become entwined with the anticipated death of her mother. The daughter struggles with what she sees and hears and tries to make sense of it and respond to it appropriately. But she can only draw on the resources and experiences of her young life. This is extremely powerful

in that it captures so well the position of many young carers. The mother struggles to maintain her independence, she wants to go home, stroke the cat, do normal things. She doesn't want her daughter to take on so much responsibility and so, they both struggle to care for and protect each other in the reversal of their roles. An example of this is on page 41 where the daughter says, "Let me help you wash your hair. Let me wash your cup. Don't smoke. You're my child, now."

Alongside this, the writer also examines the role of the grandmother, considers her vulnerability and frailty but also her strength in wanting to keep a stiff upper lip and a sense of control over the situation. The grandmother falls back on her religious beliefs and there is a sense that she tries to keep her emotions buried to protect her daughter and granddaughter. Similarly, she doesn't want her granddaughter to cry "you'll make your mother depressed".

The book helps us to question how we manage uncertainty, grief, and pain, and it forces us to consider how, as a society, we tend to store our emotions away, hiding them, keeping them to ourselves to maintain a level of control. The daughter expresses her feelings beautifully by stating that "all her organs are full up" – she doesn't know where to put it. And, "I go out in the rain, the drops on my glasses don't worry me, my ribs hurt."

I recommend this book. It is a beautiful, powerful piece of auto-fiction. It is not about the "facts of cancer"; it is more a study of human emotions and reactions to dying and death. It agitates our deepest thoughts and fears about terminal illness and death, but it does so in a beautiful contemplative way.

Survivor of bowel cancer (2001) (56-65) (January 2018)

This book is suitable for anyone interested in loss. I would not want to see it limited to breast cancer patients or an "end-of-life" care category, although it deals with anticipatory loss and the experience of a mother being terminally ill with cancer.

I was immediately drawn to the cover with its drawing of a passion flower. The chapters are very short, sometimes just a paragraph; they may look like fragments of a bigger whole but are complete and satisfying in their brevity. The language is simple yet creates beautiful and poetic images. As different cameos are evoked, a deep and rich story unfolds that stretches beyond the sparsity of the words.

The honesty and exploratory nature of looking at loss appealed to me. As Tulic reflects on one moment, other moments flood back, enriching or questioning the moment she is in. Although her "other" life still exists, it is hard to be within it as everything is clouded in the new awareness of her mother's illness. It is a description of her and her family's life that shifts into different perspectives, knitting together the past and present. I like the free associations between one moment and other life events that augment and enhance ordinary routines and feelings into a poignant story. The sum of all parts is far greater than each chapter, though each chapter is entire and rewarding. I did not think of this book in terms its usefulness. Like CS Lewis's "A grief observed", it is a book that contains few pages but monumental honesty and reflection on a situation that tears at the heart of the family.

This unusual book does not shy away from expressing feelings of pain, guilt denial or bewilderment. It touches on contradictory emotions, from being an age when we are embarrassed by our parents, to wanting to protect them, even if our expressed emotions might have been ambiguous a moment before. It describes healthcare professionals who avoid eye contact or hurry away to exempt themselves from giving bad news or supporting those in need. There appears to be no taboo regarding observations, or making connections between past and present, the holocaust and a dead mouse. The title of one of the last chapters – “Am I crying for you or for myself?” – sums up the pain of mother, daughter, family, and how the sadness seeps into all aspects of their lives. Pain mingles with ordinary routines and taints all aspects of life even when these connections cannot always be fully explained.

Nurse (56-65) (August 2017)



This is more of a reflective account in an artistic style, perhaps only for those open to a unique style of writing. It is quite difficult to understand and quite abstract.

The cover has a pleasant design and the layout is unusual but easily readable. I like the authentic approach; it is imaginative and different and makes a change from the usual personal account. However, I didn't find it an easy or compelling read. I appreciate that it is artistic in its approach, but this didn't make me want to read it; it was a chore rather than a pleasure. Parts are engaging but overall it is quite obscure.

Friends and relatives living with cancer (46-55) (March 2018)

This is very unusual book gives an insight into how family members react but wasn't for me; I prefer more factual books. It looks interesting and is easy to pick up but I'm not sure the content is in a logical order. It jumps, and I wasn't always sure where we were. I wasn't that keen on it. It's quite interesting but I am not sure of its audience.

A relative of cancer patients (46-55) (December 2017)

This is not a book to read to learn about cancer. It is nevertheless beautifully written. It is a collection of “vignettes” of one person's regular observations of life, including some thoughts about the cancer that is affecting her mother. There is no specific medical information about cancer. Instead, just some words about how the author perceives the situation.

It is a small paperback with a pleasing cover, showing flowers in purples and greens. There are no photos. There is a small amount of text on each page. The book has been translated from Croatian to English. Whether this book loses something in the translation from Croatian to English or not, I cannot know, but the words do seem abstract and vague, rather than practical. It is not at all down to earth. Instead, it is flowery and at times, rather confusing. However, there is certainly no jargon.

Although not useful as such, it is artistic and poetic, and I think many people will enjoy it for its poetic qualities. However, I struggled to reach the end as I lost interest quickly. If you are seeking information about cancer, or even any insights about family issues that may be relevant to a cancer diagnosis, this is not the book for you.

If you are planning to buy a copy of this book, beware! The title is the same as another book about puberty. I discovered this because my puppy chewed my review copy, and I bought another one to replace it!

Friend, Carer, Former Health Professional (56-65) (June 2017)

Because this is written in a very unusual way – almost poetry, each chapter is no more than a page, sometimes much less – it is an interesting but unusual read. It is an interesting and diverse take on cancer, faith, and family and the problems that these can create as well as the solutions, but not necessarily a useful one for patients or their families. It is no ordinary straightforward book about a cancer patient, so anyone could read it at any time. I like that it is different, but it is bleak.

This is an unusual read as it's a translation. The format of a chapter per page makes it very readable, but the bleakness that it conjures up – illness, hospital, people, religion, life – makes it hard going, but necessary to read to find out what happens. Some strong characters are portrayed well, but it is so sad and miserable at times.

Living with cancer (myelodysplastic syndrome) (46-55) (June 2017)



Although very touching in parts, this book is difficult to understand as it goes off topic and it is quite difficult to grasp if it is about a particular cancer. It is visually pleasing and easy to read because each chapter is only one page long, but it jumps between different times, places, and people.

I believe that the author is quite young (mid-teens, early twenties). At times, the tone is angry, emotional, upbeat, as I think you are when you are experiencing cancer. It is touching in places and sometimes funny and it displays mixed emotions, which may be useful for someone caring for a cancer patient; however, because it swings backwards and forwards in time it can be a hard read.

Friend/Relative of family members who have had bone, throat, lung, skin cancers (46-55) (April 2018)

This could be seen as an interesting meander through a relative's journey with terminal cancer. It is, however, sometimes difficult to read, or understand the logic. I don't know who would find it useful – it is difficult to understand its purpose.

It is a series of short, fragmentary stories about the author's mother's cancer. There doesn't appear to be a logical order, although it does follow the order of treatment, looking for alternative remedies, and eating problems. The design is good, and the layout makes it easy to read. Some of the language might not appeal to some readers (occasional swear words). The tone is like a child's meandering thoughts.

I like the shortness of the stories/memories, but the book is disjointed. Some stories might be pertinent to readers with cancer, but they are hard to find. The brevity of the stories might be helpful to some readers, but it is difficult to identify the audience that would appreciate the content of this book.

I chose this book because of the review on the cover. However, this does not give a view of what the book is really like. It is perhaps the nature of the writing – neither prose nor poetry – that makes it sometimes difficult to access.

Pancreatic cancer patient (56-65) (March 2018)

This is an attractive and eye-catching book, but I found it difficult to read. It is badly translated, which is frustrating for the reader and interrupts the flow. Because of this, I didn't enjoy reading it and wouldn't recommend it. This is a shame as the story itself is one of beauty; a descriptive journey from a child's perspective of watching her mother with cancer, and the effect this has on three generations of women.

NHS professional and relative/carer of someone living beyond cancer (26-35) (January 2017)

Further information

Why does Macmillan Cancer Support review books?

We use reviews to help us compile a list of suggested cancer books, the [Macmillan Core Book List](#). Cancer information centres and public libraries can use this list to select appropriate and relevant books for people affected by cancer.

We add reviews to the [Directory of information materials for people affected by cancer](#) so that people affected by cancer can see what others in a similar situation think about a book. You can also see details of all the books reviewed in the [Book reviews listing](#), which also has links to all the reviews.

We recruit most of our reviewers through the [Volunteering Village](#) and the [Cancer Voices Network](#), people affected by cancer who have signed up to help Macmillan Cancer Support in a number of ways. Volunteers are a vital part of our book review process; since 2007, over 1,500 Macmillan volunteers have written more than 6,000 reviews of over 500 different books.

If you are a health professional who would like to review books for us, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Information and support for people affected by cancer

If you are looking for support to help you live life with cancer, you may wish to contact one of [Macmillan's cancer information and support services](#). Or you can call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** (Mon-Fri 9am–8pm). We have an interpreting service in over 200 languages. Just state, in English, the language you wish to use. If you are deaf or hard of hearing you can use textphone no 0808 808 0121 or Text Relay.

You can also email us using the [website enquiry form](#). Alternatively, [visit our website](#).

Feedback

If you have any comments, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Being told ‘you have cancer’ can affect so much more than your health – it can also affect your family, your job, even your ability to pay the bills. But you’re still you. We get that. And, after over 100 years of helping people through cancer, we get what’s most important: that you’re treated as a person, not just a patient.

It’s why we’ll take the time to understand you and all that matters to you, so we can help you get the support you need to take care of your health, protect your personal relationships and deal with money and work worries.

We’re here to help you find your best way through from the moment of diagnosis, so you’re able to live life as fully as you can. For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit macmillan.org.uk

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