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*Swallow the Air*. Tara June Winch. UQP, 2006.

Review by Gillian Dooley, *The Adelaide Review* 16 February 2007, p. 16.

In *Swallow the Air* we meet a young Aboriginal girl, May, struggling through a difficult childhood, with an absent father and a disturbed mother who commits suicide, an alcoholic aunty and a brother succumbing to drugs.

Winch doesn't over-dramatise her heroine's sad little story. Vaguely political generalisations are made, but May finds kindness among white male truckies as well as crowded Indigenous city households and illegal immigrants. It is a simple tale of looking for somewhere to belong, with an almost fairy-tale resolution.

But the simplicity of the story is overburdened with poetic imagery: Winch's fascination with words gets in the way of a genuine connection with the reader. She clearly enjoys playing with words, and many of her images are startling: 'His smile poured out like curdled milk and brown theatre curtains.' But a simile like this (a random example) is not immediately evocative: it is clever in a way – describing the face of a black African – but curdled milk is an unpleasant image for a sympathetic character, and takes us no further than the visual, offering no illumination of a deeper truth. This kind of overwriting wins awards but struggles to touch a reader's heart.