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**HATCHET JOBS**  
BOOK REVIEW



Venero Armanno's novels have very frequently been described as 'vital' or 'full of life', but, of all of his books, **The Dirty Beat** (University of Queensland Press), his latest, would best fit this description – despite the fact that it's narrated by a corpse. As sometime drummer and *bon vivant* Max narrates his own funeral service, he also tells us the story of his life, with women as his reference point. Armanno's book takes us through Max's great loves – from his first girlfriend through a doomed, tempestuous love to his final fling, seconds before his death – at a breakneck pace. Armanno apparently drafted *The Dirty Beat* over the course of two weeks, and this tumultuous genesis shows in the novel's prose style (which sometimes tells the story rather than demonstrating it) and the odd spot of strange syntax (one character owns "a pack of cigarettes the brand of supermodels all over the world"). Such matters are more than forgivable in the context of the book's heady narrative, which follows Max's forays into (and failures within) the professional music world. It's a big, bold, gutsy book, and all the more realistic for the messiness of its characters' lives and emotions. Armanno manages to suspend the audience's disbelief (a tricky manner with a dead narrator) right up until the last few pages of the book, where an unusually neat plot twist demonstrates that *The Dirty Beat* is but a novel, and that Armanno still controls the characters' actions. Despite this flaw, *The Dirty Beat* remains, like its protagonist, an absolute tubthumper, pullulating with the mysteries of sex, drugs, music and life itself.