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**Richie McCaffery** (28) lives in Stirling, Scotland and has recently completed a PhD on the Scottish Poets of World War Two, at the University of Glasgow. He has published articles and academic work in *The Dark Horse*, *Scottish Literary Review* and *Etudes ecossaises*. He is also the editor of *Finishing the Picture: The Collected Poems of Ian Abbot* published Kennedy & Boyd in June 2015. His collections are: *Spinning Plates* (HappenStance Press, 2012), *Ballast Flint* (2013) and *Cairn* (Nine Arches Press, 2014).

**Will Stone:** *The Sleepwalkers* (Shearsman Books, 2016, £8.95)

First of all, it seems necessary to get a truism out into the open, that Will Stone is a highly regarded and prolific translator of European men of letters, such as Emile Verhaeren, Georges Rodenbach, Joseph Roth and Stefan Zweig. All these men seem well-known on the Continent, but arguably lesser-known in England, rather like Stone himself. He has been well and truly tarred with the ‘translator’s brush’ which has led to the neglect of his own original verse. I hope that *The Sleepwalkers* (his third collection) brings back into discussion and circulation an important European poet whose work has for too long been eclipsed by his successful translation projects. Indeed, Shearsman Books seem committed to such an endeavour, having already reprinted Stone’s previous two collections (*Glaciation* and *Drawing in Ash*) which were rendered out-of-print when Salt ceased publishing single poet collections. I am inclined to praise Shearsman on securing for their lists a signal and liminal voice in European letters, a poet with a foot planted firmly in both his native country as well as those countries he visits regularly, such as Belgium, The Netherlands and France.

This brings me onto my first point about this collection, that many of these poems are set abroad and at a distance from England. The opening poem is entitled ‘The Sea off De Haan’ and from the outset shows that Stone’s poetry is not of the vapid poet-gone-on-holiday sort, but that he occupies these places (in this case the Belgian coast) both physically and intellectually as his own territory. It is hard not to read these following lines and not picture one of Leon Spilliaert’s intensely atmospheric and Symbolist paintings of the same strip of coast:

Solitary walkers on the silver shore,  
a dog shape that cavorts, lovers  
forced apart by the moon’s  
strengthening blade of bone.

But this poem is not mere scene and mood setting, it introduces from the start Stone’s more Blakeian or apocalyptic vision - that humankind is ultimately doomed, and fated to some sort of great abasement and all the poet can do is observe, report, warn, mourn and regret:

Have no fear child to come.  
A place is held in dawn’s aquarium  
for our last ripple, our final  
tail fin twist.

It would be too easy and indeed erroneous to dismiss Stone as a mere misanthrope, because this whole collection is powered by its range and its emotional contrasts. Stone's voice fluctuates from arrant rage through to tenderness and the poems all contain a Manichean or binary charge, of light and dark, Eden and banishment, innocence and sin, idyll and dystopia. In 'The Hour of the Deceived' Stone is in complete eschatological mode, in a modern city where life is meaningless and we are given this image of the speaker/author:

On the brow of the hill I see the terrible glittering  
of their spears, the most powerful army assembled.  
The rest stand in the graves they are preparing.  
I am there stripped to the waist, wielding a shovel.  
That's my mud-streaked face, and those are my eyes  
weakened prey, pounced on by the camera.

In 'Entertaining the Unconscious' Stone's pessimism surfaces as the Larkin of *High Windows* where 'the many too many slide like seals / into the dark ice holes of history' mirrors 'He [the priest] / And his lot will all go down the long slide / Like free bloody birds'. It is tempting to say all the spirits of the miserabilists are here: Larkin in 'Entertaining the Unconscious' and James B.V. Thomson (of *The City of Dreadful Night* fame) in 'Human Art Installation' where 'the belly of the sow, the city night / is slit again and spreads her fiery entrails' and:

We are all going to end up in urns,  
yet the department store perfume seller  
once again begins her advance.

In 'Raft Armada' it seems to me that Stone takes his prognostications for the end of the world to their ultimate conclusion and produces something that reminds me of Harry Martinson's *Aniara* (1956) where humankind is forced to flee the dying earth in search of somewhere else. Here is Stone's vision of humanity absconding from the earth they have ruined:

The future lays its nets, space  
sucks in the craft with men on board.  
Mesmerised, they stare into the silo,  
at the stored silence of the world.  
While below on the ended earth, come  
the red shoots of its last dancers,  
and out there by the clanging buoy  
the shark's eye rolls back powerfully.

However, it is to do the book a great disservice to merely stress this pessimistic or apocalyptic strain. Quite often the most pessimistic or gloomiest poets are in fact the most optimistic – they write with scorching honesty because they are meliorists, and wish to see the world improved. We are reminded of Gerard de Nerval in 'Le Chateau de Valgenceuse' where the French writer 'once carried out / from here a bulging sack of hope / until beside the Acheron they laid him out'. While there are times here when I think Stone has abandoned all hope, the next poem turns out to be a tender celebration of family life, such as 'Departure of

the Loved Ones' where Stone sees his parents off at the airport and imagines a time when they will depart from him, forever:

Now I watch them recede in a chaos  
of technology and systems, of guards  
and glass and people who do not know.  
They have slipped through now,  
out of sight, can only imagine  
the angel who refused my explanation  
guarding them so tenderly  
under his great wing.

One thing, apart from family life, that Stone clearly has faith in is the power of song. There are many mentions of the primacy of song in this collection such as in 'The Singer' where song can 'draw us out like poison'. While I draw no political parallels between Stone and the late Alan Clark, it is worth noting that in the midst of all this suffering how much of a moral voice Stone projects when it comes to the wellbeing of animals over humans, rather like Clark's vegetarianism and animal rights campaigning whilst also being Minister of Defence and supplying arms to Indonesia. There is the poem about bear-pits in 'Bear of Bern' which shares a close kinship with Rilke's 'The Panther' and in 'Zurich' 'cold women [are] made colder by furs'. The central part of the book, devoted to the cold, dark legacy of Nazism and the Holocaust is perhaps the best way of reading Stone's lack of faith in humankind, and these poems are all harrowing but necessary and also form central sections in his previous two collections.

Stone seems haunted by the question of how to write meaningful poetry after this unequalled act of horror. Here, however, some of the poems are made more chilling for being disguised as something else, as in 'The Cripple King' where a disabled man is left on a wicker chair while everyone else in his town is driven off to the death camps, and we at last are given the image of him being lifted by Nazi soldiers 'like a king' onto the truck. 'The Gang's All Here' makes no explicit reference to the camps or the Nazis, but simply talks about the rambunctious leisure time enjoyed by camp workers after a hard long day of murdering Jews. In 'Treblinka Zoo' we hear of the rushed attempts to cover the land up and disguise its horrid purpose and where, years on, archaeologists 'gamely hold up muddy combs'. It is as if we are ill-equipped to deal with such a legacy, but Stone's poems give us a strong starting point in their unflinching detail. For me, however, the most horrific of all the poems here is 'Field Report', which is a found-poem of sorts, composed from lines found in an SS *Einstazgruppe* commander's report from a 'cleansing' unit on the Eastern Front, 1941. The lines make no reference to the crimes committed, and remind me very strongly of our own current, dehumanising managerial speak that can cover up anything:

Always in an orderly manner  
under difficult circumstances,  
but with honourable decorum  
my men carried out the operation.

This collection is a challenging, but necessary reading experience and showcases a vitally European poet of tremendous intellectual, historical and emotional range. There is little solace to be found here, but an uncompromising vision and striking aesthetic the likes of which I believe are very thin on the ground in poetry, anywhere, today.

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***The Ways Of Empathy:***  
**On Fiona Sampson's *The Catch***

'The acting out of articulation is dance. Dance is the pure profile of freedom, for spatiotemporal beings like ourselves.... In dancing we make angles, strange ones, surprising and unfamiliar (to others and to ourselves); we show by doing how far our freedom reaches; sometimes we create new joints altogether.... And all this newly found freedom must be supported by solid muscles....

.... freedom is... a connective... A variety of behavioral structures are appropriated wholesale, and what I am is the particular capacity that belongs to this being... of combining them in certain patterns and not others, of reaching from one to the other along certain specific paths. And my growth, the deepening and expanding of my liberation, consists of appropriating new structures and creating new paths....

.... to be really playful and creative, one must let automatisms take over, and just intervene at key times to redirect them ever so slightly, to have them cross each other's path.... This of course takes a lot of trust....'

Ermanno Bencivenga, *Dancing Souls*<sup>i</sup>

'...being complicit...'

'Collateral'

A long-time reader and admirer of the work of this eminent poet, Fiona Sampson, I was somewhat caught by surprise on reading this latest collection, *The Catch*. While previously an extremely sophisticated poet, there was always the sense, perhaps, that the woman herself was not quite revealed, was slightly hidden, behind the glorious limpidity of image and theme, technique and reference that have always been redolent in her poetry. To put it in a nutshell, to grasp the kernel of the matter, the first impression any reader will get on reading and going-through this collection, will be of a woman who's come into her own; a woman who – either overtly, as poet on the page, or implicitly as person behind or beneath the new effects and the tint and tone of the (same) sensibility – is just more *answerable*, and primarily to her-self and those parts of her-self she loves: flora, fauna, persons, memories, and so on...

This response-and-responsiveness, for all of us, let alone that particular tuning-fork known for a poet, involves trust in certain ways – trust of oneself, and trust of the world in which that self is beveled, of which it is a part. So when I invoke the concept of ‘empathy’ as the beeline of this article, I am not lagging into some trite notion of femininity; in fact – *though not* thematically or in terms of attitude and feeling – technically or stylistically, Sampson’s footsteps in this collection are the most strident they’ve ever been; the path she walks down, her avenue, is perceptibly more adamantine.

There are many senses of ‘empathy’, taken poetically, which I hope to show are evinced by this collection: from syntactical, grammatical, verbal, conceptual, experiential, temporal, spatial, and of course holding all these together, the birth of a new style. The epigraph from ‘Sir William Cornwallis’, which involves the eponymous idea of a ‘catch,’ suggests the simultaneity of ending and beginning, or, the ‘brightness / between the trees’ (‘The Catch’ – last words of the collection.) However, one way it seems to me of eliciting this dominant homonymous structure, is to think of Sampson’s aesthetic here, her revealing and answerable sensibility, as a form of ‘continuous discontinuity’ (a phrase coined, or at least signally-used, I believe, by Theodor Adorno). In fact, the interplay, the mutual-immanence of pattern and structure with the unraveling or river-ing of new experience in new forms of representation, is actually a mirror for how empathy works, built as it is on trust.<sup>ii</sup> You needs must allow a certain distance of respect, be it with the outer world, or with one-self, in order to truly be ‘complicit’ with either, or both.<sup>iii</sup>

all day the wind soughs below you  
in the trees and in your mind’s ear  
sound of distance and of home  
making its promise that the breath  
you hear is your own.

(‘Bora’)<sup>iv</sup>

So... The catch is: that between beginning and ending. In the first poem ‘Wake’ we open by waking ‘again.’ So: both *a new wake at the start*, given that a wake is a funereal valediction; and opening, as well, simultaneously, the death of the previous waking as we awake again. This sounds convoluted, but opening as it does, it foreshadows much such self-looping senses peppered across the collection; a dance between givens, repeated across lines, rhythmically, and tweaking those givens in (implicitly) vertiginous ways.

Moving on: after waking (again) to first light, we learn of a ‘dark’ ‘that won’t give up the night / where roots go down’ (two mo(u)rnings, then), and yet how here we’ve ‘another,’ ‘feet fall feet lift / nothing to it.’ The literal walking steps and the poetic feet are so one – that ‘nothing’ is some-thing. Poem and poetic tale, like wake and wake, border on both sides a movement which encompasses by implication or by indication so much more than the mere twelve lines which open the collection. One way of putting this latter point is to say that there is both a knowing music within and between the lines of this collection, as well as a more global implication of music’s more infinite terrain.

There is much syllabic play in this collection, much acute music, but it is not quite 'playful.' The music is essential to the sentiments expressed. There is no sense of technical prowess covering (and thus slackening) the 'solemnity' of these 'creatures great and small' coming 'into the light,' 'all of them strangers / all of them naked as the white / moths that skitter...' ('The Border').<sup>v</sup> In fact, the above or the beyond, and the below or the beneath, find places throughout this collection of mutual-trust, mutual-empathy. We've already seen in the opening poem how the night sky goes down into the earth like 'roots.' In this second, border poem, which ends on 'the brink of dream' creatures across 'your bright path' are

knowing themselves seen  
in the headlights  
but not by whom staring through you  
as if starstruck

The poet, too, we learn, arriving 'once again at / astonishment.'

Indeed, in that last poem, the small things of the world are given dignity, as 'emissaries.' Much like as in 'At Bleddfa', the 'dogs / wander like clouds', 'familiar // of the kitchen / as of the wet and sunny grass.' Not only do dogs do a very humane business here, wandering, like clouds above, but they 'settle things / into place....' You see, as we learn towards the end of this poem the poetic persona holds and beholds enough trust to admit fear of newness, enough trust, thus, to admit it in, and let it out, there becoming here, here becoming there. So, closing this third poem:

I was afraid  
and not afraid  
of how the day hung

above the still house  
how in my mind  
there was nothing  
but a stilled sky.

And then, here's some music, a toying across the structured lines, both within (between) the poem, 'Neighbors', and across to other moments in this at times contrapuntal collection; this, as it were, catching collection. *And again*, to boot, hale amphibolies between above and below, and between now and then....

...the voices  
of my neighbours  
at the paddock gate

arrive clear and baffled  
by grass  
as they sounded all my life  
singular

and clear  
voices in the great room  
of outdoor voices  
that will guide me

when I'm old as when  
in early memory  
they arrived  
while I was lost...

To put it tartly, the world of time and the world of space not only neighbor each other here, but permit neighbourings within each other's own realms. To be, Sampson seems to indicate, is to be 'complicit.' At the end of this piece, the 'pansies', the 'lion faces / black and gold / these were new / as I was new.' Indeed, '...sometimes / small things reveal to you / how you're alive and how you live...' ('Daily Bread').

There is very little punctuation in this collection.<sup>vi</sup> It results in both continuity and discontinuity, simultaneously: the music of ending beginnings and the beginning of endings. In a simple sense, when the reader is confronted by lines like, 'Sometimes it's just the daily bread / of thought just the visible / being itself,' ('Daily Bread'), he or she can read senses in homonymous ways (I won't elaborate). In other words, while literally or empirically continuous, the lack of punctuating marks spurs the reader to make distinctions, even liminal and blurring ones. As one title has it, we are 'Visitors' in this collection, both new guests (visiting) and made to feel at-home, well-hosted.

And yet, Sampson having a known past career-path in music, I do want to make one more emphatic point about the (empathic) music of this collection. We read, again in 'Daily Bread', of the coffee's 'blur of steam like a breath

and the word lying below it  
waiting to be spoken you can't  
quite make it out what is it  
humming all day out of hearing...

Or later, to reprise the same theme (of a kind of reprisal), in 'Noli Me Tangere' we find ourselves:

wanting to touch  
something that's shifting  
out of sight  
even as you  
recognize it  
if you do...

Or closing this latter, then, with 'what is moving', which is

there already  
passing so close  
it could almost  
touch them  
as it goes.

These lines about transcendence, going-beyond the empirical, typify music and its naughtiest lovechild, poetry. In everyday experience we use what Hegel called ‘speculative concepts,’ imaginary constructs to story and shape our daily lives. Concepts like the ‘unconscious’ or like ‘society’, which are empirically unverifiable, being metaphors – go beyond, like music, or that staggering of line-music that is poetry, not by positing some transcendent being or way of being: but go ‘beyond’ the literal, empirical, atomistic, by being *thoroughly through* the latter; being ‘complicit.’ Indeed ‘Daily Bread’, with all it implies of sacred liturgy, is directly associated with ‘just the visible’ ‘a cup of coffee.’ Or, in ‘Stucco’ a ‘bright patch of wall’ speaks with its ‘light on the yellow wall’ a voice ‘speaking to you quite distinctly.’ Sampson, as I say, seems less to be trying to master her surrounding universe in this collection, and seems more to seam and be complicit with it, more negatively capable, as it were.

rolled by an imperative  
deeper than sleep  
he rolls over like a wave  
that turns itself over

sleepily within the sea’s deep

Here, in ‘Drowned Man,’ the syllables enact the conceit. Music, after all, has no inside or outside. Indeed, ‘his dreams swim among hers where / she hears his breathing far...’ And then to end, at the beginning of day, we read how she drags him up ‘out of deep tides crossing / their legs once more and morning lies / motionless to the horizon.’ The use of line-endings (or their lack) is essential to this music. The use of the catch: as it were. For there are many peripatetic senses, evidently, which overlap or dovetail in that last quotation, and this polymorphous effect is yet the effect of a quite strident artistic intentionality. The morning for these lovers ‘lies’ in both senses, both senses’ legs entwined.

There is music, within/without in ‘Rite’ as well. Like Bishop’s pun at the end of ‘One Art’, between ‘writing disaster’ and ‘righting disaster’ – here’s the oneness of a humane condition, conditioned by beginning and ending:

from here it’s too far  
to see too cold  
too long ago  
our forefathers  
and mothers

making their way  
as if towards  
us as if  
towards some other  
destination.

Again, the homonymous effect of 'us as if' being placed on the same line is exemplary of the whole collection, making there and here the same, making them and us the same; music; 'being complicit.' Indeed when the 'end is air' ('Dante's Cave') it's no wonder that (in 'Visitors') 'the smells of sleep / still clinging to us /

half awake  
we saw ourselves as they had dreamt us  
walking between them  
as they walked between us.

And then, again typifying this continuity of discontinuity, we end 'Street Music' with another touch of ambivalent music:

so the lamplight from the street  
breaks  
so all the shining things  
tremble and break.

Which is to say two logics, or two grammars for the two 'so's' – complicit in how they break from each other (in order to share in each other.) For, as in 'The Song Of Those Who Are To Come,' we are always ending with a kind of beginning, so to speak:

we bless you

our parents wandering  
the valley as if you  
have just arrived as if  
you understand nothing.

The reader, caught again.

Still, though, allowed to wander / to wonder. Indeed, that kind of musical avenue (radically-empathic)<sup>vii</sup> I've scented so far as the dominant scent of this collection is close to *named* in 'Arcades.'<sup>viii</sup>

the way arcades go  
linking and pouring linked  
and poured their speech is one  
continual discourse  
raising hands to gesture

speaking on and on  
in the shade under  
the cypress trees they do not  
know the morning or the evening  
when it comes  
they only know this speaking  
that rises and falls  
in them like song.

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<sup>i</sup> Ermanno Bencivenga, *Dancing Souls*, Oxford: Lexington Books, 2003, p. 99-101.

<sup>ii</sup> See 'At The River,' which ends: 'is someone there / watching the water / move and stay move and stay?'

<sup>iii</sup> Sampson is a known aficionado of T.S. Eliot. Indeed, the idea expressed above is *a form of* the central idea expressed in 'Tradition and The Individual Talent.'

<sup>iv</sup> See, as another brilliant instance, the poem 'Bear Dancing', which opens, 'What is bear and what / is the dancing man / inside the bear skin....'

<sup>v</sup> I'd like to note that the 'skitter' here is a typical boon of Sampson's poetic mind. Throughout much of her oeuvre she makes use of very idiosyncratic (yet engaging/ telling) verbs; it is one of her most gifted gifts to us.

<sup>vi</sup> Indeed, the vast majority of the poems are single-sentenced, unpunctuated poems, each with, on the whole, a regular number of beats or stresses; the exceptions, I am informed, belong to an older version of the manuscript, since-discarded.

<sup>vii</sup> Note that the second, far shorter section of the collection is titled, 'A Path Between The Trees.' Perhaps: the trees of life and that more moribund tree of 'knowledge.'

<sup>viii</sup> Indeed, semi-eponymously here, see 'Leap' which is about (logically, topographically) such 'leaps.'

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**Peter Carpenter's** new chapbook, *Peace Camp*, is published by Maquette Press. Previous collections include *Just Like That* (Smith/Doorstop), *The Black-Out Book* (Arc), *Catch* (Shoestring) and *After the Gold Rush* (Nine Arches). His poems have appeared in many literary journals and magazines including the *TLS*, *Poetry Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Stand*, *The Rialto*, *the Independent* and *The Independent on Sunday*. He is a co-director and editor of Worple Press.

### Tributary Senses

**Kieron Winn: *The Mortal Man*** (Howtown Press, Oxford, 2015; ISBN 9781910693315; £13.50)

**Andrew Wynn Owen: *Raspberries for the Ferry*** (Emma Press, Oxford 2014; ISBN 9780957459656; £6.50)

Kieron Winn's long-awaited first collection is wide-ranging and memorable; his technical expertise matches a spirit of reverence and celebration. It is meticulous yet unfussy. Winn moves with equal ease and control from the contemplation of aesthetics, to Hopkinsque epiphanies in response to the natural world, to unlikely, moving, or sometimes achingly funny parodies and pastiches. The most obvious customer here is 'Heaney's First Collaboration with Eminem', itself a beautifully turned sonnet, that contains lines in response to Heaney's 'Bog Poems' which make Geoffrey Hill's meeting with rap in 'Speech ! Speech!' look like 'prentice work. Here is a couplet, but go seek the whole thing:

Met a man from Grabualle who'd pissed his tribe off  
And brought back the springtime allegedly (cough).

The assimilations of the diction and tonal inflections of other forebears such as T.S. Eliot and Wordsworth are subtler and the mark of a poet who has by heart their rhythms and preoccupations. Winn is a terrific portrait-painter. Go to the vignette of Eliot 'In Lausanne', or the poet in later years in Bermuda; take the latter's wonderful subdued allusion to the mermaids and the 'pair of ragged claws' of 'Prufrock':

Swimming, as ever, helps with all my ailments.  
My tender wife is singing in the bedroom.

I have become a classic. I look at my book  
And contemplate changing the species of crab.

Many other poems are intensely moving: Winn's love poems are understated and all the more powerful for that (these include 'Walking' and 'Lost in Rome', the latter with its veiled homage to Donne's 'Ecstasie'). The glimpses of domestic scenes and family backgrounds are finely-tuned and poignant (as in 'First Photo' and 'In the National Gallery', for example). Winn eschews the confessional mode; his poetics are more in tune with the notion of impersonality fostered by T.S. Eliot. This does not make the poems the product of a 'cold eye'; the reverse is true: the use of traditional forms lends a sense of control to reckoning the turbulence of 'powerful emotions'. What Winn manages time and again is to return to a spot of time and revivify, whatever the subject matter of the poems (love, at-one-ness with the natural world, a humble Banda machine, reckonings between Art and Life). He is somehow both romantic in spirit and modernist in learning. Many of the poems had me thinking of Larkin, not the mistaken caricature of a miserabilist, but the chronicler of the 'strength and pain of being young', and of beauty under duress in this world of ours. At the heart of Winn's superb collection lies a fascination with the nature of what has gone, with the tugs of memory and a corresponding urge to preserve, following intense and sustained work with his material, language:

I cannot bring back a bucket of rock-pool creatures  
And have him beam at me and understand,  
But it dies hard, wanting someone to say  
All will be well, with the power to make it so today.

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What Miroslav Holub, the late Czech poet and scientist, called the spirit of 'serious play' is evident throughout Andrew Wynn Owen's collection; in the terms of Auden, it is like an '*expensive delicate* ship that must have seen/Something amazing'. Richard O'Brien's excellent introduction puts it well: '..[the poems] execute a difficult balancing act, between the lightly-borne weight of his literary forebears – John Betjeman, W.H. Auden, Paul Muldoon, Glyn Maxwell, and further back, the rusty glimmer of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse – and the pure pleasure of their own formal invention.' I would add to that list, Ted Hughes and Lord Byron. As well as formal invention and playful ambiguity, metaphysical conceits, dizzying shifts in register and tone, there is an informing pathos and speculation concerning the human condition, and an uncanny ability to capture the world, or world view, of a diverse array of characters – Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charles Bovary, Nureyev, Icarus, for example. Take 'Icarus', a villanelle that really works, able to support a tremulous tenderness in its listed instructions for homage. Here is the final quatrain:

Grieve, resent it, cry in secret  
But gather lilac, scatter lupin,  
Sprinkle Calpol, bandage, blanket,  
And set him in a floating basket.

With other poems puns and patterns are pursued and make one purse one's lips in delight or astonishment (that 'how did he get away with that ?' moment); thus with 'Footage of Nureyev' topped and tailed beneath:

The moment he died, Nureyev's feet  
Turned into the clockwork carousels  
The American papers really wanted them to be.  
I can hear the shoes whistling in the coffin...

*Soon*

The dancer without defect would defect,  
Dashing the door off the land of the living.

The greatest sense I have from the poems is joy: that 'whistle-in-wonder-at-invention' joy. As with the near rhymes and obsessional twists and turns over the ten eight-line stanzas of 'The Insomnia Song' as guilt toys with its victim:

I've caught forty winks on the back of a yak  
And copped a few Z's at the wheel of a truck  
But, darling, that's nothing to how I was pained  
When guilt called me in for a piece of his mind.

Or the stunning apostrophising couplets in praise of a pet tortoise, in 'Terragogous':  
Strong, striking pillar, salad killer,  
Desert tracker, can't walk back-er.

Tortue, fought-few, end due, never new,  
Stronghold, bulky bold, winter-told.

This is writing that is itself bold to come into the page's clearing. It is a bit like very early Dylan riffing in rhyme, or those early and wonderful Muldoon poems, so rich that they require pauses between poems for a sip of water. To paraphrase Dr Johnson, Andrew Wynn Owen is able to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar. A rare gift, now recognised.

This pamphlet of 18 poems and 24 pages from the excellent Emma Press ('small press, big dreams') was this year rightly awarded an Eric Gregory Award (for outstanding collections of poetry by poets under the age of 30). We look forward to the press's future productions, including Wynn Owen's collaboration with John Fuller, 'AWOL'.

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### **Nothing hides in the abandoned places: Karen Solie and Thomas A. Clark as visual artists in love with landscape**

Karen Solie: *'The primary political act is to pay attention.'*<sup>viii</sup>

Thomas A. Clark: *'The pace of a walk will determine the number and variety of things to be encountered... and the quality of attention that will be brought to bear upon them.'*<sup>viii</sup>

Human-environment interactions are pertinent for poets, but poetry with a purpose can tend towards didacticism or sentimentality. Karen Solie and Thomas A. Clark avoid both of these extremes, while encouraging the reader to appreciate the world more fully through their eyes. Both are primarily visual, landscape artists, observing the world closely, and using specialized language to depict precise 'noticings'. Through reflection they also create parallel strands of human imagery, which help to reach out to the reader. Although unsentimental and unromantic, they highlight human frailties and environmental concerns in poems that are, ultimately, intensely humane and affecting. Their worlds, viewpoints, formal choices and approaches to the human element are distinct, however.

Seán Lysaght considers how language acts to describe the spiritual links between humans and nature as key to the practice of historic and contemporary eco poetry.<sup>viii</sup> Neil Astley, in his anthology *Earth Shattering* states 'Ecopoems dramatize the dangers and poverty of a modern world perilously cut off from nature and ruled by technology, self-interest and economic power.'<sup>viii</sup> By both these definitions, Solie and Clark could be called eco poets, but their work is less purely political than the label suggests. In her anthology of 'poems for the planet', Alice Oswald makes a clear case against romantic(ising) poetry using the land simply as a conceit, and describes a continuum from poems of man working within the environment to those with man as part of the environment.<sup>viii</sup> Neither Solie nor Clark is a romantic poet and both see the intrinsic value of landscapes, but I would argue they sit outside Oswald's continuum, as observers who *make landscapes human*.

Clark's world is wild, highland and island, Scotland and his vision that of a lone landscape photographer, admiring mountains, lochans, grassland, woods, flowers, rocks. 'Nothing hides / in the abandoned places' of old farmsteads within the landscape, either (p.73). Solie moves through varied environments, more as a film-maker; her equivalent might be Walter Salles, king of the road movie, lingering on landscapes, with people affected by environmental and socioeconomic conditions. In line with Jones and Swift's assertion of a "long-standing Canadian cultural myth" of Canada's poets as "part of the country's geography"<sup>viii</sup> (p. xiv) I do see her work as influenced by its wide open landscapes of monoculture and primary industries, between distant cities.

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In terms of what is noticed, Clark uses macro mode to record and classify distinct geology: ‘sandstone basalt granite’<sup>viii</sup> (p.12), or species: ‘moss campion’ ‘cyphel flowers’ (p.35). This delight in precise technical language could be felt self-indulgent, but these are not just *rocks* or *flowers* – each has a particular value, form and impact that Clark wants us to appreciate. Interestingly, his classification of hues is less precise – his key colours are named, presumably for the collection’s coherence, simply as *blue*, and *yellow*. Solie zooms-in on less positive details, including ‘underpants, men’s, size XXL, in the gutter’<sup>viii</sup> in ‘Erie’. She also names specific places: ‘Oakville’ and ‘the Dixie Mall’ in ‘Rental Car’ to place her narrative, in a way that Barry described as a loco-specific ‘geography’, as opposed to a more generally atmospheric rendering of ‘setting’<sup>viii</sup>. Her poems will have wider resonance for locals, but specificity also helps ground other readers in the location. Solie also uses brand names such as ‘Nabisco’ in ‘Casa Mendoza’ in a similar way to Frank O’Hara. Clive James suggests that as both concrete and poetic, brands have been used by poets including E.E. Cummings as satire, and Betjeman for ‘the laugh of recognition’<sup>viii</sup>. Solie is going a stage further, however, by using brand language, and quoting from product catalogues, to critique consumption and its human impacts: The Buhler Versatile 2360 in ‘Tractor’ is ‘fully compatible’ – an ironic comment given that the tractor breaks down, needing expensive parts and repairs.

Clark and Solie are thoughtful organisers of words on the page. Although Clark’s tone of voice is quieter than Solie’s, his innovative use of form positions him as a visual artist. His descriptive fragments, without punctuation, capitalisation or clear syntax, emphasize the ‘noticings’. They could be notes taken in the field, but are framed into miniature poem-stanzas, roughly square in shape, which claim and focus our attention into the detail. Arranged as photographs around a gallery wall, the poems cohere and build the structure of an idealised day of walking, from ‘a morning early’ to ‘the light / of the full moon’. In contrast, the most interesting flow in Solie’s work is *within* each poem. She uses strings of imagery in short sentences, and detached phrases that could be taken from *Yellow and Blue*. Skilful line breaks foreground emotional double meanings: In ‘Sick’, the speaker after ‘You left/’ is ‘in my *semi-detached* / not quite myself/’ She uses varied camera angles, from aerial shots to right within the action: ‘The Road In Is Not the Same Road Out’ moves from ‘Land of the four / corners’ to ‘a filthy / violent storm under the hood’.

The poets’ precise description is deceptive; after observation of concrete details they reflect (as Wordsworth discovered ‘emotion reflected in tranquillity’). This leads effectively to Wallace Stevens’s ‘twanging a wiry string that gives / Sounds passing through sudden rightnesses’. As visual poets, however, Solie and Clark’s reflections discover a second visual vocabulary, distinct from the technical and rich in human connotations. The two strands align in parallel so the poems work in 3D, projecting from the page out towards the reader.

The poets’ ratios of land: human vocabulary differs. The superficially objective quality of *Yellow and Blue* is due to the absence of personal pronouns, until near the end. He is primarily describing the natural elements he sees. Solie’s poems more directly consider the human – place – human interaction but, as Michael Hofmann says, it is to animals ‘that Solie’s special respect and admiration goes out’<sup>viii</sup> Both Clark and Solie provide only broad

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caricatures of people (as in Clark's 'big red men' and Solie's 'The Girls'), preferring instead to confer human qualities onto landscapes and objects.

Clark's poems tend to move from pure description of the land to human insights, when he sees the landscape in human terms. For example, on page 32, he describes 'a bed of calcareous rock / drilled blasted screened washed' to leave 'an open scar.' Although not an original image in this context, following the purely technical 'to aid in the manufacture / of silicon carbide abrasives' 'scar' is shocking and powerfully human. It works as a metaphor for injury to the land, plus the reader infers his feelings about the damage, and about humanity's use of natural resources. In a less successful example, he uses increasing personification:

speed of the running wave  
composure of the standing wave  
wit of the rippling wave  
delight of the breaking wave.

Here, Clark is looking closely, and consequently the reader sees the different characteristics of the waves through his eyes, but it is less affecting than the land scar, where an aphoristic insight seems to arise out of observation and lead us to think beyond the visual. As pathetic fallacy, we could see the observer himself as delighted by the charming scene of a dog barking at waves, or possibly aware of a delight he is not feeling, but it is not as resonant.

Clark also hints at human factors happening outside the frame of the walk, but nevertheless on his mind, by describing things in ways with potentially human meanings. The first instance of this, on page 9, is a striking description of a personified storm's effect on the landscape, in one beautiful snapshot-sentence.

a tantrum or gale  
threw rocks at the gable  
tore out the garden  
that sat above the sea  
in lovely ferocity  
poured over breakwaters  
piled up plastic  
against the blue door

Here he imagines a storm as a child's tantrum, and describes its damage to a building and garden that he knows well. Perhaps he is also talking about a human tantrum or storm – 'lovely ferocity', suggests he feels some affection for it. The next stanza hints at an emotional change: without punctuation there is ambiguity about whether the 'new place' or 'morning' is 'strange'. In any case, something is no longer 'intact' after the storm.

it is a new place  
this morning strange  
in a light that knows  
nothing of the old place

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By page 12 he describes undeniably human feelings: ‘dissolution / of being together’ in ‘desolation / by a lonely shore’ – further evidence there has been some emotional impact. This slightly soft-focus human imagery accretes throughout the collection. On page 61 ‘amid storm damage / a debris of quiet’ implies the fallout of an argument, debris of guilt or hurt felt in solitude, while ‘the attacked heart healing / picnic on a log’ suggests the simple pleasure of a walk helping to soothe the pain. By the first direct address to a human ‘if you were mine’ at the end of the book the reader is conscious of, and intrigued by, the human storm which happened outside the frame. I feel the collection’s arc of mood and reflection is essentially moving and satisfying.

Solie creates bolder, more unsettling and original imagery than Clark, which leads the reader to make new associations. Black ice tempts a driver to speed in ‘Skid’. In ‘Tractor’, a poem referencing fracking, Solie describes the machine ‘aspirating’ to highlight its animalistic qualities. Here, the tractor is a potent symbol for dominating human economies of agriculture and fuel extraction – ‘it manifests fate [...] the diesel smell of a foregone conclusion.’ She interlaces complex metaphors within description; surreal, humorous or against expectations, and flipping between land and human modes. This takes advantage of what Kapos describes within metaphors as ‘an unlimited fullness of many meanings at once’<sup>viii</sup> to startle with new recognitions.

In ‘Medicine Hat Calgary One-Way’, Solie is at her descriptive best, casting her eye over the horrors of a long distance bus journey. Solie has discussed time spent travelling long-distance (see note 1) so safe to assume the poem is based in experience – its detail is certainly convincing. It has a relatively straightforward narrative arc, but is rich in allusion, and works on several levels. The opening ‘The bus is a wreck.’ implies an accident as well as a falling apart. The poem is a bold critique of the human impact of environmental disasters, with the journey symbolising increasing degradation. The route described passes through agricultural land and oil fields, to Calgary, home of the headquarters of Canada’s oil and gas companies. Solie identifies the passengers as broad types: ‘unfortunate, poor earners, procrastinators, the criminal element’ travelling cross country at the mercy of schedule 0063. Although witty, this is characteristic of her tendency to caricature. However, it also depicts the passengers as powerless, as Solie reflects on the paths humans take in lives with little choice.

Her view focusses on ‘industrial calamities, unmistakable turquoise PVC of the deadly prairie waterslide’ - something is wrong with the water, and the sense of threat is palpable. Like passengers’ lives and landscapes outside, luggage is ‘loose and poorly tied’. Nature offers some relief: ‘bright hawks balance on warming / updrafts’. The musicality of this language, with repeated ‘awe’ sounds and alliteration is different from much of the rest of the poem, which relies more on a rhythm of tightly packed stresses to emphasise frustration. The contrast suggests nature as on a higher plane. A ‘young sun tosses its jewelry’ brings to mind a weak morning yellow of low-carat gold, but like Clark’s waves, has only limited resonance. Though Solie claims this is ‘the duller stretch of highway / on earth’ she revels in packing in concrete details, that map and *show* the reader edge-land, strip mall landscape. Long sentences with lists highlight the relentlessness of the journey, further reinforced by the poem’s one continuous, airless, stanza.

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Solie uses disruptive line breaks ‘staggered / plans’ and negative, halting syntax ‘neither / before’ to mirror the periodic delays and stops. The reader is kept waiting to find out that a landscape is ‘perfunctorily / treed.’ This witty phrase is striking for its originality, plus effectively portrays a token effort to green new-build developments, amidst pollution. Solie critiques nature commodified into ‘Ducks Unlimited’ wetlands, and a damaged future through the pathetic fallacy of a ‘skyline / sunk in brown fog’. Including the implausible slogan ‘Dow Chemical Corp is devoted to fostering community leadership’ contrasts PR against reality. More worryingly ‘Downtown is deserted as the coda / to biological disaster’; with the end already here, this journey still has a way to go.

More lists detail endless, uncertain waiting: ‘Purgatorial boredom’ in unnatural and unhealthy environments ‘beige food, beer in cans’. Then the ominous ‘nowhere you’d want to walk’ encourages the reader to insert their own worst fears. This asks even more of us than working out the associations of her unusual metaphors. But the ‘you’ here is also the narrator talking to herself - ‘you leave’ provides escape to the airport. The recognition of a privileged freedom prompts the key question to the narrator *and* energy businesses: ‘is it not possible / to look with love upon your fellow travellers?’ This moral question underpins the conscience of the poem. The narrator sits separate enough from the other passengers ‘They’ to criticise them, and yet is angry at being in the same...bus. Yet, ‘you leave’ and have a one-way ticket so won’t be returning this way.

Personification of night shows the powerful dark world outside the bus and highlights its lack of humanity, but night is the metaphor’s vehicle, so it also confers its uncertainty and dangers onto the passengers. This is an original and complex, double metaphor similar to Byron’s ‘She walks in beauty like the night’ that ‘strikes the imagination’ as described by Borges.<sup>viii</sup> The night’s ‘aches, dark thoughts and anticipations’ are the passengers’ problems as they experience a troubled, sleepless night. They wait, unsafe, in the dark, and suffocating exhaust fumes, before returning to the tight, but light, space of the bus. The reader feels their pain. Finally, ‘you’ looks back, hopeful for a way out, along with all the others on the journey fearing the end won’t make them happy – but you still get on the bus, as you have ‘a destination to live up to’. This parting recognition adeptly saves the poem from being too cruel, too patronising of humanity, but Solie has made her point.

In conclusion, both poets care about how man affects landscapes. Their concrete and precise description means we accept their word as objective observers. Both are not uncaring, but unsentimental – writing cold for maximum impact. When they use human imagery, it is done for a reason, and therefore more affecting and humane. Both reward slow, close reading, as their poetry has depth and layers. Her strategy of interweaved chains of more surreal and unusual imagery is riskier and more complex, but ultimately richer and more rewarding.

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