



Review for Envoi

Carrying Fire by Oz Hardwick
Bluechrome
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This book of poems from Bluechrome is Hardwick's 2nd collection, and one in which there is much magic at play. Full of great titles that suggest a visionary quest, such as (The Thunder Never Forgets), (The Lost Songs), (At Madron Well), (Merlin's Cave), (The Fairford Mermaid), (Walking With Ghosts), (Stormcrow), (Stonefish) and (A Key To Clouds), the book is divided into three sections.

The End of Sharp Distinctions - builds upon sharp epiphanic sketches and surrealist impressions of Brussels, it skirts along the edges of a love affair that ends in the deceptive dispersal of vapour trails.

This Is Slow Lightening – The most overtly mythic and mysterious of the three sections, each poem reasserting the value and the allure of fairy tales and legends for grown ups. Here lies the archetypes of the dark wood, Jack Frost, the Miser and grey cloud gods to remind us *'about angels and the power of dreams'* (Faithful)

Love and Coincidence – here is the mature man standing 'Downstream from the Past' reflecting upon the loss of innocence and the instability of memory, and finding *everyday magic; more precious for its modest arrival* (A Time For Magic)

The sequences are varied and contain tensions and contrasts. Hardwick demonstrates an acute eye for detail and a sure hand at constructing sharp images that linger and resonate in the mind.

At the bright end of the bar, people try / not to notice each other; back-lit, each / clinging onto their shadows. (She's so not)

A lyrical poet, Hardwick has a clear love of the language, his poems are packed with rich sound patterns; alliteration, assonance and consonance and a steady rhythm which drives many of the poems. I have heard him read live and while not an out and out performance poet the oral qualities of his work often come to the fore. There are clear echoes of Manly Hopkins and Dylan Thomas at work.

We sleep in the dream of the hand that twists / the warp and weft of the knotted stone / strung from cloudless sky to eye... (The Dream of the Architect)

out on the hills blown / to the mills with the race of the rush / of the Force of the fingers / that would draw the child... (The Good Shepherd)

However occasionally there is a tendency to over stretch the musicality leaving some of the poems feeling overwrought and which comes at the expense of the images they build.

Streaked windows splash on the sea with stars, / swirl with the eddies, ephemeral, embracing eternal. (Last Bus On The Island)

I feel the '*ephemeral, embracing eternal*' is superfluous ornamentation to an otherwise honed observation. Similarly I have a problem with some other lines and phrases that seem to fall back on easy romantic cleche and avoidable generic vagueness, e.g. '*unimagined depths*' and '*unknowable deep*' (Cross Currents), '*unimaginable desires*' (The Mechanical Ballet) '*unfathomable waters*' (The Dyad's Song).

While I enjoy the exuberance and play in most of the more lyrical pieces, particularly (Song Cycle), (The Lost Songs), (The Balance), (The Good Shepherd)and the pantoum (Haunted), and the title poem (Carrying Fire) is a highly evocative spell-like incantation; it is the starker often shorter snapshots that I feel are the most poignant, such as (Das Blaue Haus), (Depero Unexpected), (Without), (Aubade) and (She's so not) where Hardwick himself seems far more present.

There is much to praise and enjoy in Carrying Fire, and much to rekindle the embers of an imagination that's been smothered by a long day of reports and forms and data bases. Despite a few minor reservations I have about the loss of focus in the sheer exuberance of his word painting Carrying Fire is the work of both a craftsman and a storyteller who illuminates the dull cave of our dim sympathies.

Bob Beagrie