

Since I received a copy of "acrospirical meanderings in a tongue of the time", Chris Torrance's third book of poems, I have been in a state of intense excitement and interest. My (now) dog-eared copy has moved from pocket to hand to pocket to bartable to boring election address to trains going to Newcastle to horrible poetry readings and back here to my desk in the dread suburbs. I haven't been able to leave the book alone.

To acrospire means to throw out the first leaf sprout (1616); acrospire in 1674 is the first leaf that appears when the grain sprouts; and the adjective acrospirical relates to the young leaf shoot of the barley inside the grain when barley is being used for malt. Malt is the grainlike barley germinated and dried in a kiln. It flavours and colours beer, more than acting as an intoxicating agent. For the present, Chris has forsworn his extensive home-brewing activities because he is spending his time writing good poems.

The thirty three poems in this book shine with that "original gift of spreading the atmosphere of the ideal world over familiar forms and incidents". It is not the poetry of adorning the familiar with cute arabesques, but absolute fidelity to it. The poet's imagination communicates an air of marvel to the given. His communication with nature is a mutual one, "the hiding places of infinite power". A gathering which makes my real world spiritual, and my spiritual world real. So in this there is no feeling of the poems having been rushed, like battery hens, to meet some invisible demand, no sneaky sleight of hand exchange across the starry counter, where the obdurate spirits are breaking. So in the reading we are not duped by a quasi-religious glitter (say), or a witless seduction of the velvet sward; there are no namby-pamby founcing arcadian princes to be seen on the whole canvas, strung out on vegetative second with a chaser of down-home city paranoia: the lines are held down against the band, sure and steady. I mean, you can be awarded crusty farmhouse bread (just like your mother didn't use to make it) and cracker barrel cheese in your sunday supplement.

No no it's not artificiality I want
nor a flowing catalogue of nature

"DAY-BY-DAY POEM"

In no way are we merely accomodated - "just what we bargained for" - we are increased by the stirring of the spirit, made generous in return. There is no match, and we are brought towards. The way this "trueness" acts in the poems, and upon the readers senses, is that a gentle openness abides which yields a real joy - a freshness just like those first drops of rain which dispel the torpor. Torrance's canvas is now a larger one, and his perspectives arranged accordingly, so as not to be tight under the arms.

And the book itself looks good. Iain Sinclair's photos are green, soft and grainy. Val Torrance's drawings are lovely. The green print is a delight.

This single book is going to take me through Spring. So forgive me if you catch me looking in your pocket, and on your desk. I'll just be looking to see if you are in touch with one of the fine, clear and generous spirits of our time.

(c) Barry MacSweeney 1974

[A poem from the collection is reprinted on page 51]