

'The elasticity of subjective time'

Sanchez Ventura, Simon Collings (29pp, Leafe Press)

Lockdown Latitudes, Steven Waling (40pp, Leafe Press)

Simon Collings has taken the name of a historical character who was a friend of Luis Buñuel and then abandoned any biographical information and reinvented him as gaucho in the dream world(s) of Teresa and others. Sometimes he is a gaucho, other times a used car salesman, and sometimes an absence: words cut out from the fragments of narrative we are privy to. Films and music feature, as well as writing about writing, collage about collage, language with the word 'word' missing; this text is obsessed with itself but also namedrops several paintings as well as books by Edmund Burke and Mrs Beaton.

In the end this is an exercise in episodic surrealism, each short section only tentatively linked to any of the others. Sometimes a character reappears, sometimes there is an aside regarding an image we've seen before, elsewhere a painting comes to life or a narrative strand continues from much earlier. The opening page suggests it is all metafiction, with the character C in a secondhand bookshop 'searching for something out of the ordinary to read'. He finds it and 'opened the book at random and began reading'. Perhaps, despite the book being 'the work of a Latin American writer whose name he did not recognise', we are reading that book, or indeed are characters within it? Either way, it's an enjoyable, slippery and disorienting fiction.

Collings' world may be surreal and disjointed, but Steve Waling's is just as strange, even though it is much more down-to-earth. Waling's poems move in orbit around lockdown, remembering better days, imagining the past and future, meditating on the mundane, everything in sharp focus during the author's daily walks.

It's wonderfully structured, full of pauses and jumpcuts, sideways moves and mordant wit. Here are facts and fictions mashed together as an autobiographical prose poem, here is Jesus shopping for pants and trying to avoid the evangelical preachers on the street outside, here a poem about a girl who looks like an ex-girlfriend the narrator can't even remember the name of.

As it says in 'On This Route', 'there's lots of farting about', lots of filling time and considering 'When Were We 3-Dimensional', as the world shrinks and slows to near standstill. Waling is reduced to composing a poem entitled 'Ten Lancashire Words To Be Reintroduced To The Language' and similar pastimes, well aware of how ridiculous it all is. Don't get me wrong, it's a great poem, a mix of dictionary entries, autobiography and asides. (I was going to say I think mizzle, one of the ten words, is Cornish, but online dictionaries suggest it can be traced to either Dutch or Middle English!)

Gradually, the book emerges blinking into daylight, vaccinated and with a sore arm, desperate to visit a secondhand bookshop and start to live normally. Once again, Waling has produced a heady mix of the personal, social and political in clear, forthright poems. It's good stuff.

Rupert Loydell