

## 'Fragile Words Linger'

*Tracing the Distance*, Andrea Moorhead (54pp, The Bitter Oleander Press)

This book is a quartet of slow, accumulative, long prose poems that touch on landscape, personal experience, geography and philosophy. Sectioned and/or paragraphed, they gradually build up encounters with 'Landscapes. Subtle shiftings of reality.' These shiftings come from attention to detail, consideration of change, the seasons, the weather, how the light falls, and of how humans engage with the world around them.

Moorhead is interested in her own place in things, and in *place* itself, willing to be both scientific and emotional, rational and speculative, and to grapple with the unknown, in an attempt to allow 'this existence to be full'. This fullness of experience, of course, means dealing with ups and downs, winter and summer, light and dark, the desired-for and the unwelcome. Death and mortality are part of nature, as is longing, absence, memory and anticipation; our own stories make sense of our lives, and '[f]ables frame the day'. Moorhead is well aware that '[t]his insistence on recollection alters the perception of light, changes the angle, lifts the dark shades to a brighter hue', and she willingly brings that self-awareness to her texts.

But her self, her ego if you prefer, is pushed to the background throughout this writing. Moorhead gazes outwards, sits still and observes, walks and watches. She is well travelled and well aware of ecological damage and devastation, in fact it informs her work, but her work is mostly sitting still, looking and thinking about what she can see, and putting it in to language. 'Sometimes', she writes, 'the day itself wobbles, sometimes everything wobbles, oscillates, shimmers and shivers along some axis that isn't readily apparent.'

She attempts to explain how history, geography and language – 'remarks' – 'have a way of escaping [...] perhaps dissolving into what people call thin air, the substanceless extension of lived space.' Moorhead is busy trying to document what is missing, push beyond the surface of the world into the past, the now, and the elsewhere, but '[t]he physical world preserves its mystery' and only 'fragile words linger', perhaps not for long.

Much as Moorhead does her best to watch and understand, think and engage, she admits that '[t]he hallucinatory boundaries are unclear; illusion, mirage, hope and expectation reek havoc with the mind.' We cannot escape what we have done and are doing, our shared responsibility, or leave our assumptions and wishes, our selves, behind: 'flesh is slow to absorb what flickers across the mind'. But in this wonderful book Moorhead attempts to 'narrow the gap between lost reflection and the insistent weight of the body', to earth herself and us in time and place, the very now of where and how we live.

Rupert Loydell

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