

**Loveday Why**, a chosen young poet in the *Fiftieth Anniversary issue of Agenda* responds to the review of Don Paterson's *Rain* by Rory Waterman, a young essayist in *Agenda's Fiftieth Anniversary issue, Vol 44 No 4/Vol 45 No1*.

In the last issue of this magazine Rory Waterman found Don Paterson's *Rain* not as 'candid' as advertised, with many of the poems failing to reach 'any discernible significance.' I would suggest that he is not perhaps listening to them as attentively nor as casually as he might.

Paterson is a stylistic master, a musician and philosopher, in turns repelled by and hopeful about his human condition. There is a sort of species guilt in these poems, most brutally addressed in 'The Lie,' which, in grotesque couplets that clank like the chains the central figure wears, shows us existence as the mute, insistent arranging of daily life in all its shirking from the responsibility to address horror.

'I loved the living but I hated life,' says the ghost of Michael Donaghy in 'Phantom.' And yes, there is 'blundering' into lampstands and a pervading sense of disgust and sometimes dark amusement at corporeality: 'Aha! The zip / for that idiot-suit. / And inside? Zip!' But there is also faith in ultimately being taken back as part of the multiple space: 'We come from nothing and return to it.' Ideas of redemption through dissolution drawing on Buddhist thought are presented in classic images such as sea, air and the osmotic borders between states. So Michael Donaghy appears to him, in a dream, St Francis becomes agentless in his meditation, 'I would say the words are not his words. / I would say the skull is working him,' and Paterson himself may slip, in death, across a border back to the 'insulted air' and so be handed 'from dark to dark like a rope over a stream.'

Scattered through this collection are reflection and alternation, juxtaposition and coin-flipping. Like some kind of light installation artist or magician, in poems such as 'Handspring' and the Shakespearean 'Parallax,' Paterson turns our viewpoints upside down, placing thinking, questioning man at the centre of the world but without control, as if observation and expression are the only thing approaching mastery we can possibly have and this itself is doubtfully ours: 'The moon was in my mouth. It said / *A million eyes. One word.*'

What your reviewer refers to as the 'disappointing statements' of Paterson's poems are candid exposures of loss, balanced expertly with explorations of love and connection, with a red herring or bagatelle thrown in, probably not to unsettle us as much as to render the collection as whole as it can be. Casual seeming renku and the long riff of 'Song for Natalie Tusja Beridze' are spliced together, like those trees of the opening poem, with the rending simplicity of pain found in poems such as 'The Swing,' which reads like a love song. The erratic nature of his grief: the juxtaposition of defiance and vulnerability, delving and shrugging off will either alienate or enthrall. The two sides of him lie together in single poems as well. In 'The Day' he expresses pain or love with the ringing beauty of truth and then writes, 'this crap / of souls and gods and ghosts and afterlives' and spoils it all by turning off the music and switching on the light. 'Trees are all this poem is about.' No it's not, you want to shout, but actually it probably is.

Similarly, the title poem, 'Rain' is not 'disappointing' but a series of classic Paterson shrugs: the woman *or* the dress *or* the girl walking to her death - it could be anything. This is not a reductionist philosophy but a freeing one. Before getting caught up in the stuff and bother of living, before the film has actually begun, is this moment of stillness and possibility and nothingness, of on-the-brinkness that we might inhabit. 'The Day' is perhaps where we will find the answers to our questions about Paterson's philosophy and this collection. The point of these poems is that in some ways, unless you perhaps look upside down at it or let go of the grasping, there *is* no significance. We will all, as Keats knew, simply have written on water, scribbled on air, and this collection shows that it is in the electricity of frustration and then recognition, in the drop of meaning and loosening of salute that there lies boundless significance.

You can tell Paterson is a musician, not only in the rhythm and aural quality of his verse, but in his transcendental elevation of sense and spirit and his catching at the wordless in words. The amazing thing is he actually manages it. Like any decent poet, he is sincere and self-aware, he releases and then reins in and it is his mixture of confrontation, admission and dismissal of himself that is so powerful. He could be the two trees, not shouting about it either, just giving us this collection that we can take or leave.