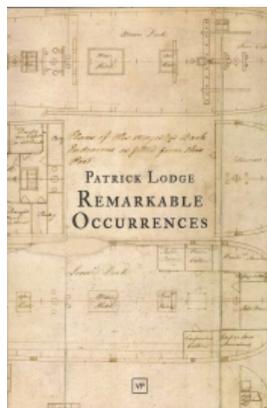


THE LAKE POETRY REVIEWS SUBMIT INFO & NEWS COMMENTS POETRY ARCHIVE

NEWS

Reviewed in this issue Jason Eng Hun Lee's *Beds in the East*, Patrick Lodge's *Remarkable Occurrences*.



Hannah Stone, *Sŵn y Morloi*, Maytree Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-9160381-0-3. £6.00. 32pp.

Topographical poetry can sometimes be pedestrian but this is far from the case with Hannah Stone's *Sŵn y Morloi*, whose twenty-two poems are vivid and finely-crafted, standing on their own regardless of the places with which they are connected.

Each poem takes as its subject a named location, in each case a particular bay on the Pen-caer peninsula on the west coast of Pembrokeshire. *Sŵn y Morloi* is Welsh for "sound of the seals". It is also the name of a cottage that Stone uses as a writing retreat. The cottage is depicted in a striking and atmospheric painting by David Coldwell on the cover of the booklet. Like the cover, the production values adopted by Maytree Press are of a high standard, ensuring the book is an item of value in itself.



As one might expect from a collection which takes a topographical perspective, visual imagery figures prominently. Indeed this is sometimes taken to an ekphrastic degree, as in *Pwll Deri 1 Framed*:

*Each evening, over the dinner table,
a different picture framed
in a deep cut window – a sunset glazed,
or mist, eluding capture by lens and brush.*

Stone can also be trusted to create images that embody what Eliot referred to as the "objective correlative", as in the encapsulation of "the relics of a small death" that brings to a nicely judged close the poem *Ty-Croes – An Interlude*:

*Overnight, a moth folded its damask wings
into a downy scrap of tapestry;
it rises and falls in the draught.*

She also has an eye for the observed detail of the natural world, which she sometimes renders with the precision of a naturalist:

*that burst of gorse on the cliff,
the flags of ragged robin fluttering in the hedge,
even the yellow spirals of a landsnail's shell.*

While this flair with visual imagery is to be applauded, one shouldn't ignore Stone's ability with the tonal aspects of poetry, a facility which is often ignored by some practitioners who seem to have a poor ear for euphony. Stone, however, demonstrably has a very good ear. There is never any question that what is to be found in this collection are the consolations of lyrical poetry. Don't run away with the idea that what we have here is pure filigree, quite the opposite in fact. Any impulse to pure ornamentation is firmly held in check by a language that is rooted in everyday discourse. The quality of her work in this respect is exemplified by the short poem, *Porthsychan*, which I give here in full:

*wind is pinned briefly,
reclaimed as seals giving voice,
sounding from the bay*

*yapping, crying, calling out,
but beached whales barking*

This is a soundscape with synesthetic intensity. It is not enough to point to the technical effects employed here. One can overstate the effectiveness of such devices. Alliteration for instance is not enough to guarantee that a poem will be successful or worthy of consideration. The song *Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep* employs alliteration by the bucketful but I suspect there are not many people who would lay claim to it being a masterpiece. *Porthsychan*, however, does achieve to my mind that status.

Elsewhere in the collection, the poems are occasionally leavened with a dry humour. A poem set on a rainy day, opens with the line: "This morning, take a rain check." Two poems about invasions, the first in 1797 by the French revolutionary army satirically offset by the later invasion by 20th century film crews.

This a slim book that delivers much more than many longer collections I have encountered. In searching for comparisons, the voice of Elizabeth Burns came to mind, another fine lyrical poet. Hannah Stone is of equal stature.

David Mark Williams

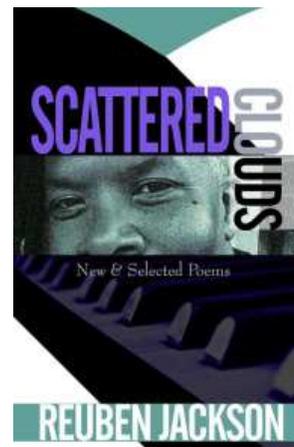
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David Mark Williams writes poetry and short fiction. He has two collections of poetry published: *The Odd Sock Exchange* (Cinnamon, 2015) and *Papaya Fantasia* (Hedgehog, 2018). For more information go to www.davidmarkwilliams.co.uk

Reuben Jackson, *Scattered Clouds: New and Selected Poems*, Alan Squire Publishing, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-942892-18-2. \$13.99. 120pp.

Reuben Jackson's "self-portrait, 1988" reads:

*i am
stubborn,
broke,
but mean well,
and am trying
hard to fuse
my passions
with the world's
conventions,
but ain't no
offers for a man
capable of
singing
every solo
wayne shorter's
committed
to record
come my way*



The poem highlights Jackson's self-deprecating sense of humor at the same time that it shines a light on his passion for jazz and the constant human struggle to fit into the world in a meaningful way. That year, 1988, was just before he began his twenty-year tenure as Archivist and Associate Curator with the Smithsonian's Duke Ellington Collection in his hometown, Washington D.C., and sure enough, his obsession with jazz *did* fuse with the world's conventions of making a living. Since 2009, Jackson has been Jazz Archives Specialist at the Felix E. Grant Jazz Archives at the University of the District of Columbia. The poem "self-portrait, 1988" also displays his penchant for writing verse in short lines, sometimes, as in "A Skinny Trio," a newer poem from the third section, just one-word lines, like notes from a saxophone solo.

Scattered Clouds is composed of three sections, including the full text of his 1991 collection, *fingering the keys*, for which he was awarded the Columbia Book Award by Joseph Brodsky. ("i am back beside the / master soloist, // a protégé quietly / fingering the keys," the eponymous poem concludes.) Music is a potent theme throughout this book. The titles of the other two sections, indeed, are "city songs" and "sky blues."

Jazz, particularly, is an important musical expression in Jackson's poems. A number of the poems address jazz legends: "for duke ellington" ("music is your mistress"); "i didn't know about you (for johnny hodges)" ("that alto horn / could be / dreamy"); "thelonius" ("he tilled song / like it was earth, // and he / a gardener / hell bent / on raising // any beauty / waiting / on the other / side."); "For Ben Webster" ("Cymbals that rattle God's earlobes / Like kisses.") and others.

Other poems address musical styles and issues, such as the humorous "open letter to gato," in which he laments Herb Alpert's influence on Gato Barbieri's music ("our affair is over, gato barbieri. / you have abandoned the tango / and those searing mambo themes."). Or "r&b," a hilarious poem that begins "grandmother's stern interpretation / of the scriptures ruled our house." The poem goes on to elaborate her disdain for the "indecipherable tongue" that is "currently babbled in the name of music // or as you young folk call it / r&b." "Kind of Blue," named after the Miles Davis album, includes the immortal lines: "People act like you going to get all Norman Bates on / them and shit!"

"Elegy for the One Step Down" praises the legendary D.C. jazz club:

*Where did the jukebox go?
Its scratchy disks older than time.*

*Each song a séance
Bringing Count and Billie back.*

Being African-American is another potent theme of these poems. Jackson has lived through times of racial turmoil in the United States (then again, when *hasn't* there been racial turmoil in the United States?), growing up in the second part of the twentieth century. Poems like "on the road" and "shankman's market," "1957" and "white flight, washington, dc, 1958" address the casual racism that pervades American society. Others, like "How to Be a Black Man" and "This African American Life," which concludes the collection, celebrate Blackness:

*I hope I live as long
As the nails
Of the sister
Sitting beside me
On the crowded
Subway.*

Others celebrate African American culture with Jackson's trademark sense of humor. Take the poem "after the dance," named after a Marvin Gaye song (Gaye was likewise a DC native). Gaye's song is about a guy hoping to set up a date with a girl at a dance ("So why can't we get together after the dance?"). Jackson's humorous take on a similar situation, at a poetry reading, addresses African American stereotypes with wry irony:

*are you an ethnic poet?
she asked*

*(eyes glued to my
zipper)*

*what do you mean?
I countered*

*I mean
do you fry your
imagery in fatback
whose silhouette
is illuminated
by an inner-city
streetlamp
under which
several young
brothers
most of whom*

*will soon die or
go to prison
harmonize
until dusk
when they are
called in
by overweight heads
of households
who can cook like crazy
and are heavily
involved in
the baptist church?*

sometimes.

*wrong answer,
she said sadly,*

then walked away.

Reuben Jackson's marvelous collection also includes recent work on Amir Yasin, a Detroit barber, and his love, Khadijah Rollins, who may or may not be real people posting on Jackson's Facebook page, and his moving poem, "For Trayvon Martin." This is a delightful and insightful read.

Charles Rammelkamp

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Charles Rammelkamp is Prose Editor for BrickHouse Books in Baltimore, where he lives, and edits *The Potomac*, an online literary journal. <http://thepotomacjournal.com>. His photographs, poetry and fiction have appeared in many literary journals. His latest book is a collection of poems called *Mata Hari: Eye of the Day* (Apprentice House, Loyola University), and another poetry collection, *American Zeitgeist*, is forthcoming from Apprentice House.

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