

**Review by Bernard Levinson of
Strandloop by Norman Morrissey
Echoing Green Press (2016)**

When confronting a new book of poetry, my first impulse is to browse, pick out a poem, get the feel of the sound and shape of the verse, the mystical subconscious pull of the poem. Here for the first time, I have read Morrissey's poems in *Strandloop* from cover to cover. Almost non-stop. Moving slowly over 36 years of writing. Each of the poems, as they run through the years in chronological order, makes its own distinct imprint in my brain. I find myself reciting the poems to everyone I know! Some poems I know are impressed forever in my memory, echoing my own anguish, putting words finally to my own secret pain. What an amazing journey. The privilege of feeling the wondrous delicate change in the fabric of the verse over that time.

To spell out the magic of writing poetry like this:

Being a Poet

Being a poet is a bit
Like being a miner – for me:
The poem flashes on the dark sky
Like cleaved veins in rock –
The first draft
Sketches the retinated lines
Feverishly;
And then
It's patient picking
Down to
true ore
– Beyond memory –
To the lightning.

There is such an amazingly strong Zen quality and feel to many of the poems that I began to wonder whether Morrissey had ever ventured into Haiku. I turn the page and there they are! Astounding, soft, delicate and marvellously moving.

Solstice

The cold night settles
an old hen sinking to roost
ruffling new feathers.

Strawberries

Wound in tall wet grass
strawberries twine cool and tart:
I fetch a blue bowl.

Where shall I place Morrissey? I'd say he is a 'confessional' poet for sure. His poems bleed. He stands with the 'confessional' giants, like Anne Sexton and Robert Lowell.

Errant

It was then
I had to leave myself with you and go on alone
together

– my Mother,
who fought to keep me
as I grew

so the already-old depressive's split
yawned
to this schizoid thing,

this displacement
that's made me Herakleitos' conscious fool
– absent while seeming present,

never with self and soul
coinciding,
the world

a vision through binoculars
width the eye-pieces
out of tune.

And that's been my fight:
marry my halves together
– redeem that boy you still clutch

and never wanted
to
marry anyone.

Morrissey is truly a poet's poet. His best poems could be happily included in any anthology of poetry published anywhere in the world today. How wonderful that we have a poet like Morrissey in South Africa, now and in times to come, with his vision of a life lived in depth, in our human and natural environment. **Strandloop** is a great read, an astounding journey into the sensitive, unique imagination of Norman Morrissey.

Bernard Levinson 5 April 2017