

There's a medical name for this by Kerrin P. Sharpe
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I reviewed New Zealander Kerrin Sharpe's debut collection (*Three Days in a Wishing Well*) in these pages <http://londongrip.co.uk/2013/05/poetry-review-spring-2013-sharpe/>), and was delighted by the musicality, the fantasy, the metaphor, all in unobtrusive service to her memories, beliefs, philosophy. "Amid the music we hardly knew she was doing so. Poetry at its finest."

A poet's first collection is often from the gut, a self-discovery. A second collection moves to the head with poetic experiment, irony, and playfulness. Sharpe's second takes this path with a potpourri of poems that mainly show off the poet's range, making a mark apt to leave a reader impressed, even charmed, but ultimately unsatisfied.

American poet Tony Hoagland has called poems like Sharpe's the New Poetry, generally characterized by high-spirited choppiness, aphoristic, fragmentary jump-cuts, erratic, with odd typographies, and where any one line can be readily exchanged for any other. It's like watching one of Hollywood's super-sized action films: all entertainment without engagement. Let me cite individual stanzas from several poems that lead off the collection

the basilica [sic] is a waltz of stone
brutal and gale force
the wings of angels
collapse into smoke ["when gerry thinks of angels he hears their
wings"]

often the elephant
was photographed with hemingway
at a bullfight
so deep in conversation
you could not see him ["there were stars behind him"]

neither the monk
nor the station pony
with the green sledging satchel
found the spade in the position of prayer ["shantung"]

My mother is standing on the little tooth wheel of the pie cart. She has been warned never to visit/ houses on wheels, never to associate with brown paper bags. ["in the cart"]

You get the idea. We are by now well used to such work from our major poets: Marjorie Perloff, John Ashbery, Dean Young, Ben Lerner, Matthew Zapruder, and many others. The real test for New Poetry, says Hoagland, is memorability, a lasting impression beyond the cotton-candy taste.

Sharpe intermittently enlists her New Poetry style to the service of feeling and, when she does, the poems glow. A sequence of poems embody grief:

she carries him through the loom
of fields to the plain days
of the foundling hospital

and uses the stubborn wood
of a peg to prove his birth
he becomes the distance

between the oven
and the back door
the tiny teeth of light

[“a study of 18th century grief”]

Or, the New Zealanders’ experience of World War I, seen through the eyes of
of dumb, dutiful cavalry horses, where unadorned speech enters the heart:

because the horse expected nothing

because the horse
expected nothing
he was never spared
 flanders somme passchendaele

because the horse
never objected
he never bothered
 flies mud snow

because the horse
never wore hair extensions
he never groomed
 the guns the maps the strategies

because the horse
never saw a cenotaph
he never knew the soldiers
 inside his stone coat

Or this sensitive rendering of memory, as a sonnet:

to convince her suitcase vilma packs for prague

she had never enough dresses
to save her jewish father
never enough shoes
to forget the trains

she had never enough rope
to harness her coats
never enough belts
to hide the smoke

she had never enough
in the old czech way
to clothe her father's ashes
or open the dark wedge

of his stable door
to the sad eyes of snow

What makes these memorable is a focused intensity as the poems unfold moving down the page: *flanders guns stone*.

Unfortunately, many other less urgent poems get in the way of these moments. Overall, however, Sharpe remains an important poet, one to be followed.

Norbert Hirschhorn

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<http://londongrip.co.uk/2015/02/london-grip-poetry-review-sharpe/>