

***The Moth Is Moth This Money Night Moth***

**By David Berridge**

***The Knives Forks and Spoons Press***

**Reviewed by James Davies**

David Berridge's *The Moth Is Moth This Money Night Moth* is a real delight. The work seems to me to mix minimalist and expressionist concerns. It is a work that chooses and places words which stand for themselves and also work pragmatically. Words also often seem to stand for the materiality of other words. This is achieved in misspellings, use of brackets and asterisks, thus extending the connotations within a single set of graphemes much in the same way that Geof Huth's *ntst* does and some of Aram Saroyan's seminal work from the 60s. So for example the second page reads:

gleen gnouth fnow  
t (longue) l (lake)  
night (night)

The words in the poem are easily readable as other words. So that *gleen* = 'green'. *gnouth* = 'mouth'. *fnow* = 'snow' and 'for now' as in 'f'now'. *t (longue)* = a long tongue. *l (lake)* can be read as an example of stuttering, perhaps a reconfirmation that the word on the page, and that the image denoted, is indeed 'lake' – maybe a specific lake to Berridge but in leaving the lake unlabeled it is very much the reader's lake, whether that is a named lake or the concept of 'lake'.

The book reads as a sequence, not of fragments but as a whole; a sort of narrative. Yet the memories are not totally cohesive. The events are blurred or disguised in order to make the sensations stronger for the reader and make the experience far more democratic. It is the reader's responsibility to choose whether they make the work confessional or not; confessional from Berridge's point of view, or whether *Moth* triggers an event which the reader remembers. By this I mean that 'lake' in this poem seems to be a romantic symbol. By not being labeled it is so open that it can be substituted for any other romantic symbol of the reader's making: beach, hill, bedroom, etc. With leanings towards romance (and also Buddhism) one is transported into one's own memories – not Berridge's. A minimalist poem has this power – we *are* the subject. DB gives something to *me*. A gift. However Berridge's experience is clearly in there and thus *Moth* has expressionist tendencies too.

*Moth* is a world full of sense and cross-sense sensations, of feeling the inner light of the body or that of another's body. On page 1 it is suggested that the body is one with the lake:

feet lake green lake mouth lake felt lake night night lake tongue lake

Reading left to right 13 words are strung across the page with every other one being 'lake' until the pattern is broken on the tenth word with 'night' replacing 'lake'. This could be seen as the lake disappearing from eyesight as the night falls. 'night' was also the ninth word and this also promotes the idea that night falls. But 'lake' then reappears as the eleventh word. Perhaps this represents the coming of morning. Or perhaps a viewer focuses on 'night' and then switches his gaze to 'lake'. The lake then reappears out of sequence and is taken over by 'tongue' and then consumes 'ongue' in the thirteenth word 'lake'; surely an erotic image. Also 'lake' coming out of sequence is a glitch; again the reader chooses the implications of this glitch. It could be read as the haziness of memory or perhaps the way 'perfect events' have 'wobbles' in them.

Page 4 in part reads:

wnow                  outh

These work as heavy signs for 'wow', 'snow', 'now', 'know', 'south', 'mouth', 'moth' where again the reader chooses referents whilst being aware that what is actually on the page is actually a nonsense of no semantic value. As we move through *Moth* there are recurring motifs: 'night', 'green', 'tongue', 'star'. But there are intrusions: 'money' and 'fashion' which appear often after page 4. A Money Moth by the way is a moth which is often associated with bad luck as it eats crops. This use of the word 'money' and its association with 'the moth' is a sudden negation, and imperfection, into what has been up until now idyllic landscape and mood; there is no such thing as perfection it suggests, all joy is transient.

However these intrusions never dominate in *Moth*. If we look at part of the middle pages:

t\*o\*n\*

g\*u\*e

we see a visual play of snow falling on the tongue. And later on the same page:

snow = star

Snow is star and vice versa. The mass noun of 'snow' stops this image being personal as it is not fixed in a particular moment. It is about the idea of 'snow' and therefore we have to read star as the idea of

'star'; perhaps their equivalence and perhaps combination. The reading of this short passage is made more difficult as it could be we are meant to assume an article is attached to star and if it is we are not sure if 'star' is definite or indefinite. The same ambiguity applies to 'snow' as it could be 'the snow'. This again shows that we can take the objects/words in *Moth* for what they are and also for what they could be.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that a sadness pervades here and there in the collection, Berridge's landscape is not completely filled with joy - 'money' and 'fashion' interrupt 'snow', 'stars' and 'lakes' - but more regularly than not we move beyond colour and experience happiness. That's good. *The Moth Is Moth This Money Night Moth* is a really fine book go experience it.

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<sup>1</sup> Similarities to other poems immediately occur. Yoko Ono's poems/proposed performances in Grapefruit memorably use these two key elements of snow and star: yellow and white; the celestial. And Robert Grenier's drawing poems are also connected. See <http://www.paramettermagazine.org/grenier.htm> for my take.