

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Dog Latin:
A collection of poems by
Norman Morrissey
(Echoing Green Press)

NORMAN Morrissey is a countryman through and through: he grew up on a farm, lived and worked in the landscape that gave the title to his prize-winning poem (“farmsteads with gunslit windows,/Khoi valleys grazing Xhosa herds,/ants skirmishing in the dust,/blades of grass clashing for light.”), and now he has five acres in Hogsback in which to meditate, more attentively than most, on the human and animal condition.

Take *Old Spice* as an example of his accessible way of being witty about nature and people. “A stand of trees,” he tells us, “know when one of them’s in trouble:/acacias boost the tannin in their bark when they scent one of them’s under attack.”

The bark becomes poisonous, and “impala die of it in bad drought”.

Now come the punch-lines: “the SADF troepies couldn’t wear aftershave in the bush/Or Swapo trackers would scent them:/but what did the trees make of Old Spice and Mum for Men?” – *Nigel Bell*

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