

Grocott's Mail



18 JULY 2008

SOUTH AFRICA'S OLDEST INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

R4.00

Review by Dan Wylie in
Grocott's Mail (Grahamstown), page 16, Friday, 18 July, 2008
 of

Triptych by Norman Morrissey

Echoing Green Press, Empangeni (2008). ISBN: 978-0-9802501-5-2. R120.00 (incl. VAT)

A determined new wisdom

DAN WYLIE

Imagine the idea of a triptych goes back to the mediaeval religious art of the three-panelled depiction of Biblical scenes of the crucifixion and resurrection.

There is something of this division into three spiritual stages: trial, recognition and restoration, in Hogsback resident Norman Morrissey's new collection of poem, *Triptych*. Morrissey employs his own terms for this: disintegration, revival and blessing.

In this compact collection of over 140 tight, punchy, aphoristic poems, Morrissey extends the style of extreme brevity he

demonstrated in his earlier volume, *Dog Latin*.

With some exceptions, little of the slightly risqué, slightly sardonic humour of *Dog Latin* carries over into the new volume. *Triptych* is more serious stuff.

In short, the volume deals with Morrissey's own madness, a kind of manic depression, and its impact on his marriage and love-life. The first part, entitled 'Travels in Tartarus', focuses on the disintegration and loss of love as the poet feels himself subside into a washed-up, post-drunk, lonely late-to-middle-age.

The second part, 'Mosaic', shows evidence of a kind of ac-

ceptance, a returning to the world as well as towards the poet's capacity to survive his own traumas; the determined fashioning of a new wisdom.

In many ways this wisdom is not some kind of flash of illumination so much as a grim realisation that there is nothing else to do but grind on through life.

Finally, hints of redemption are seen through fully living the details and beauties of the present world, accumulating in a condition of blessedness – or at least as close to such a condition as one is likely to get in this life.

Through the triptych structure, Morrissey avoids sev-

eral traps. What in the first part might easily collapse into maudlin self-pity is saved by the poet's evident courage in dragging himself out of it, and the utter lack of resentment with his fate.

What in the last part might sounds like New-Age resort to vacuities about soul and spirit, is redeemed by the realisation of what the poet has been through.

All in all, this is an almost terrifyingly honest volume delineating all the tiny overlapping stages and moments (sometimes backwards but mostly forwards) towards a new, if forever tainted, self-restoration.