

Glyn Pursglove review of *Larksong Static* in *Acumen* 100

Larksong Static: Selected Poems 2005-2021 (The Hedgehog Poetry Press, 5 Coppack House Churchill Avenue, Clevedon, BS21 6QW; £10.99) includes poems from Malone's three previous substantial volumes – *The Waitign Hillside* (Templar, 2011), *Cur* (Shoestring, 2015) and *The Unreturning* (Shoestring, 2019) as well as his four chapbooks published by Bluegate, The Black Light Engine Room, Poetry Salzburg and Hedgehog Poetry. Covering, as it does a span of 15 years, it is unsurprising that *Larksong Static* should present the reader with a wide range in terms of both subject and style. We meet Malone at an Iron Age hill fort in Wiltshire ('Barbury Castle'): "Let me reach towards its livewire/ its larksong static, earth your now/ in the harebells, ox eye, horseshoe vetch" and in several poems set near the White Horse of Uffington. There are family poems, such as 'Best Kite on the Hill' and 'Liverpool-Irish' as well as beautiful observations of domestic detail: "Late morning slinks its way into the attic flat;/ dances dust motes over gin-bottles and underwear" ('Waiting for the Green World Tour to come to Town'). I am particularly impressed by Malone's poems on artists and works of art, notably 'Mont Sainte Victoire'

Cézanne as Sisyphus: each day climbing
the steep sides of self, a mountain on his back

to lose the light, to not quite get right the it,
the it-of-it. Rolling back down him each night

towards the morning; a mountain on his back
each day climbing: Cézanne as Sisyphus.

This short poem says more than most books on Cézanne say in several chapters. Some other poems – such as 'Piazza: After Giacommetti' ("He'd make your head look like the blade of a knife") and 'Ghost of a Genius' – make me mentally place Malone in the category of poets who one wishes also wrote art criticism. Also in *Larksong Static*, naturally, is a substantial selection of texts from *The Unreturning*, Malone's book which reimagines the poetry of the Great War. Given that so many poets wrote so powerfully of their experiences in that war, it takes a brave latecomer to tackle this subject. In a review of *The Unreturning* (in *Poetry Ireland Review*) Siobhán Campbell captured one important dimension of the collection when she observed that 'Malone seems to imply that the battlefield has always been of our collective consciousness, or more to the point, our propensity to accept the 'given' story along received hierarchies of power'. It was, perhaps, inevitable that, in being reduced from its original 94 pages to less than 20 (if my counting is correct) and denuded of its notes, this abridgement of a remarkable and important collection makes a lesser impression. Even so, any reader of *Acumen* who hasn't yet 'discovered' Martin Malone is urged to get hold of a copy of *Larksong Static*.