



Bold, Valentina (1993) *Under Cover* by Ed Colin Nicholson and Jane Ogden Smith. Lines Review . pp. 63-64. ISSN 1952-1998

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Deposited on: 17 February 2014

the stone sleeping-bag has plenty of room,
and time enough and love of life to go round.
Our names for it are foolishnesses
for a neglected kind of gruesome death
upon which, by several tosses and turns
of fate, we all depend.
—Welcome, Riding Hood and friends,
grandma dear is waiting.

DUNCAN GLEN

UNDER COVER

Edited by Colin Nicholson and Jane Ogden Smith. Mainstream, £6.99.

Under Cover commemorates the 25th anniversary of Shelter's campaign: "to ensure that policies adopted reflect the aspiration that decent housing at an affordable price in the right place is the right of all those in the community." Here, in association with the Post Office, fifty-one Scottish writers explore homelessness in poetry and prose (some previously unpublished).

Within desolate landscapes, nocturnal scenes dominate. In Janet Paisley's "Homeless," for instance, a woman is presented alone in a city, surrounded by garbage and the noise of trucks. The opening section is starkly lyrical:

spaces in black
 nightfaces
the pale ghost
 of dawnmist
as the chillfist
 of daybreaks
 on bone

There is a sense of barren continuity; like the town, its people never change: "every mind / a closed sign . . . / and the ground / is always hard." So too Duncan Glen's "The Hert of the City" describes urban experiences, visiting Glasgow on a cold night at Central Station. The homeless assemble at the Hielantman's Umbrella, traditional meeting place for exiles:

I see them at aince. Three girls and a wee fella
wi a bleedin heid. He's shakin wi laughter
and the bluid's splatterin on the shop windae.

They experience solidarity on a basic level: "They're no hungry / and there's plenty wine left." Similarly in William McIlvanney's tale "Mick's Day" the pub is "unofficial social work department." Homelessness is not trivialised though: "Mick's situation is like a prison sentence without any crime committed. It is an indeterminate sentence."

On the other side of this urban equation is the depopulated countryside of Norman MacCaig's "A Man in Assynt." Although the Man hopes that like the tide, "that sad withdrawal of people, may, too, / reverse itself," prospects are grim. George Mackay Brown's "A Poem for Shelter" contrasts the "wanderers . . . the breakers of icicles" with those living within an ideal rural (Christian) community: "The true inheritors of the earth are the people / Who desire to live in simple houses / Not too close together but enough for neighbourliness."

Homeless people are shown in isolation while "under cover." Sheena Blackhall's "Hinna Gotta . . ." is non-judgmental as a ballad, incantational like a children's chant:

Hinna gotta bairnie
Hinna gotta lass
Hinna gotta hope 'n Hell o
Gettin any brass.

The youth wants "Ony kindo cubbyhole / A place tae coorie doon," ironically echoing Alexander Anderson's "Cuddle doon." In Anderson's nineteenth century idyll Mither whispers "till my heart fills up, / 'O bairnies, cuddle doon'." In "Hinna Gotta . . ." family breaks down: "Mam disna wint me, / It's fecht, fecht, fecht."

Personal disengagement from the vulnerable is a recurrent theme of *Under Cover*. Dilys Rose's story "Friendly Voices" is a comic treatment of a bleak encounter between doctor and scheme dweller: the woman in authority is terrified when the patient tries to break through social barriers with a hug. Paralleling crises from Ireland to Africa, Sorley Maclean's "The Great Famine" implies historical recurrences in shared culpability: "'N ann as an aineolas rag, / No as a' pheacadh mhór"; "Is it from stubborn ignorance / or from the great sin." As Douglas Dunn states in "Bedfordshire": "Oppositional snores won't correct what is wrong." Shelter is necessary now as in 1977 (*The Big Issue* magazine currently corroborates this message) and *Under Cover* is a call for concerted action to remedy the scandal of homelessness.

VALENTINA BOLD