

Glen Phillips: *Alpi & Prati, Winged Seed Songs, Tides and Groundwater, Three in The Campagna*, with Rose van Son, and Rita Tognini, International Center for Landscape and Language Press, 2014.

It is often observed the romantic poets are nature lovers or even nature worshippers, but when this judgment goes no further it is mistaken. The romantics loved the relationship between the mind and nature, nature as it is inhabited and transformed by the imagination, as the situation of the mind in its existence. This is the same way that poet Glen Phillips seems to feel about the worlds of nature and culture through which he relentlessly journeys. Stunned into still, calm observation by grandeur and beauty, he finds the landscapes of fields and mountains come to life through the infusion of human drama.

Throughout these volumes both experience and setting are rendered in their details, and these details, these carefully observed moments, are fired in the small verbal kilns of his poems:

The fallen leaves were deep.  
You circled, shuffling, waiting  
for the one bench that caught the low sun.  
But there in the town fountain's  
chill pool the great carp  
swam like slow lanterns  
and saw you as another fallen leaf.

Phillips is at his best when he focuses on compact images or incidents as he does in this, the second of his *Poesie Brevi*, a poem about the fountain in Radda. He also excels in *Winged Seed Songs* when he crafts his poems according to structures suggested by musical compositions. But his poems are many and varied, turning from simple observation to the archiving of a particular journey, to mediation on our relationship to history, to the consideration of a personal love or loss, to the character of humanity. The poems in these collections also range over much of Phillips' adult life and continually return to examine his prodigious experience while traveling the world.

Phillips' ability to see the human particulars from the perspective of place, and from various different perspectives within place, provides depth and context for the intimate personal stories that are the subjects of many of these poems. As with all of the best poetry, these poems speak most to us when

the interplay of human drama and physical setting achieves a complexity and depth that reveal the elements of the poet's life as doorways of our own stories. In these poems we find that evening draws us in with the scent of almond blossoms, the shadows of distant mountains, and the challenge and possibility of a distant town.

At their best these poems move beyond the archiving of travel into an exploration of the mental and emotional interior's counterpart to physical place. Some of Philips' poems try to do little more than bear witness to changes in life experience as marked by passing through a field, descending from the hills, watching pigeons swoop down from the eaves, and this is often completely sufficient. And sometimes he meditates on how we can possibly bear our sorrows and losses or how we can best celebrate love and the ways we manage to find each other.

The personal intimacy that frames many of these poems finds its expression in the tenderness of stone. Yes, that's right, the stony paths of an ancient hilltop town can lead us on as gently as rain.

Glen Phillip's poems remind us that we move through our lives the way we move through landscape, path by path, encounter by encounter, and it is best if we observe carefully so we can live fully in the present even as we assemble the mind's museum of memories.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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D. S. Butterworth teaches literature and creative writing at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. Algonquin Books published his creative non-fiction book, *Waiting for Rain: A Farmer's Story*. His poetry

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and fiction have appeared in magazines and Lost Horse Press published his book of poems, *The Radium Watch Dial Painters*, a finalist for the Washington State Book Awards, in 2008. His second book of poems, *The Clouds of Lucca*, was published in September 2014.