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Shadow Enough

Furthering his prodigious achievements in novellas of haunting originality, in luminous essays and as a master printer and publisher, Alan Loney's eleventh book of poetry, the chapbook *Day's eye*, is visually, formally, numerologically and thematically a superbly integrated performance. Miriam Morris's orchid-becoming-sunbird supplies the cover image, affirming the sun as dynamic, metamorphic painter of all things. This lends the cue initially to explore the sequence photo-tropically, as it were, receiving in turn the light, the heat, and the plunge into the depth of shadows cast, feeling the intensity of colour claimed back from shadow, probing the expense of shadow's assignment, before returning again and again to auscult the mythic and implicitly personal harmonics of the poem sequence, in the gaps, between the lines. These twenty-four pages, sounding the hours of the day, seem to have the emotional duration of years, for the dazzling intimations of bliss and the slow journey of grief that underscores them.

Speak —  
 But don't split off No from Yes.  
 Give your say this meaning too:  
 give it the shadow.

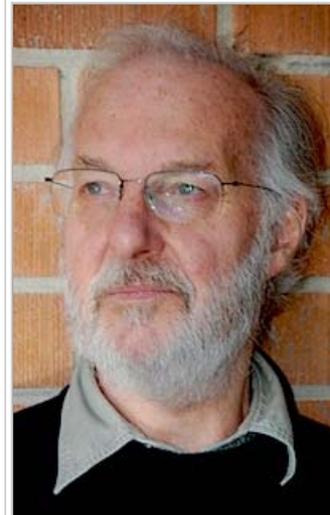
Give it shadow enough,  
 give it as much  
 as you see spread round you from  
 midnight to midday and midnight

That is Paul Celan [\[1\]](#) and Alan Loney rises to his bidding, to this, the hardest and most beautiful of tasks, to "speak" through the shadow assignment of "midnight to midday and midnight".

**BOOK REVIEW**



Alan Loney  
*Day's eye*  
 reviewed by  
 Marion May Campbell  
 24 pp. Edmonton: Rubicon Press.  
<http://www.rubiconpress.org/>  
 7.00 CAD 00 978-0-9809278  
 -4-9 paper



Alan Loney

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Before the first numbered page we traverse the space of prefiguration, passing through the saturated yellow of the end paper, its glow persisting through the title pages and the dedication to the painter Max Gimblett, which again is followed by a blank, as if the book were holding its breath, listening for its own possibility: liminality thus prolonged opens out the poem's holding space and its yielding space; like the Platonic *chora*, it's a space of virtual imprinting and erasure; a silent music which rehearses the inevitability of dis/appearance.

There is no rhetoric, no argument, no hierarchical layering; rather, Loney offers an obliquity in the choreography of fragments, of the "whole fragment [2]", a parabolic writing. As Benjamin's reading of the parable suggests, time here is complex, for it brings out a relation in writing of what *precedes and succeeds* it, the impossibility of *writing* witnessing. What would be written is forever *beside* the writing; it is *beside itself*. The writing provides the hollow in which, eyes wide open, vigilant, we dream some of its aspects, and come through these fields with their "care-ridden drift" [3] strangely, inexplicably, marked by the grief and by the wonder that inform the work.

Derrida's words about Blanchot — two of the philosophers of the limits of language whose work has been inspirational to Alan Loney — could be applied to the luminous evidence here: that "the testimonial act is poetic or it is not from the moment it must invent its language and form itself in an 'incommensurable performative'". [4] There is nothing that is the measure of this writing. Just as Loney asserts, "we are not measure/ of anything" [5]. He refuses the hubristic pretension of the commensurability of the human to anything, of being to object, of word to world. It is a refusal of currency, of the economy of exchange and in this *Day's eye* resonates with Anne Carson's *Economy of the Unlost*: in its apparent austerity of means and its extraordinarily rich harmonics, its quiet, most delicate achievement of polysemy, this work only knows the economy of the gift.

Here, as it seems to me to be the case in each new work of poetry, Loney derives a singular, as if inaugural poetics, never simply reprising the visual and auditory pulse of the previous work. But more than visual, more than auditory, pervading *Day's eye* is a truly synaesthetic imagination, of inter-sensory translation, in which ear sees and eye touches, in which touch tastes and tests text — "putting yr tongue/ to the text" [6] he writes — a euphoric displacement along the pathways of all the "text's voices".

"One is an artist at the cost of regarding that which all non-artists call 'form' as content, as the matter itself." As Nietzsche writes in *The Will*

*to Power*: the “matter” here is always the failure of the word, but these are the stakes of the poetic act: the failure of the word is where poetry begins. This is not a concept, this matter; this is primitive.

One could assert of the poet of *Day's eye* as Lévinas does of Celan: “the poem is situated (...) at this pre-syntactic and pre-logical level, (...) but also at a level that is pre-disclosing (pré-dévoilant/ pre-un-veiling) at that moment of pure touching, pure contact, grasping, squeezing (hands finding each other).” [7]

Here he presents the silent evidence of the trace of events and of their un-calm reciprocities — of luminosity and atrocity. There is no restorative comfort in the “alternation and the vis-à-vis”, as Mallarmé wrote of Wagner, of light and darkness, of print and page, of colour and its leeching away, of art and violence:

<i>And another thing</i>	a song
<i>Molto adagio</i>	another song
a sound	a ruin
another sound	another ruin
a place	a book
another place	another book
a work	a rape
another work	another rape [8]

This beauty of the “dry mind [... ] achieved” [9] here finds its motif in the “unblinking right eye” of Horus, as the sun, which persists when the left eye, the moon, is torn apart by devastating violence. When the unblinking mind “stare[s] out” [10] of the unspoken space in the poem, it calls forth the reader, answerless surely, but ready to offer hand or face... towards encounter. This is an insomniac vigilance, without subject, such as Deleuze regards as *the* ethical attitude, this unblinking mind, such as in the dream, the dreamer becoming anonymous, that “turncoat”, whose face is no man's. This is the *outside* reached when one sees what Orpheus sees, the endless retreat in the face of death, that *un-knowledge*: that writing can only approach what retreats. Like Pi for the Egyptians this approach is asymptotic; thus it bears a kind of impossible sacredness, a care, an endless delicacy, and most importantly, an unwaveringly patient attentiveness. It is not you who will speak; “let the disaster speak in you”, says Blanchot again [11], who in some ways could be called the spiritual patron of this sequence. This is the advance towards impersonality.

Here there are twenty-four numbered pages for the unblinking eye of day to roll sinusoidally along — just as the moon, rehearsing disappearance and reemergence, suffers its tearing apart, its fractional diminution 1/14 each day before its slow incremental recovery, fraction by fraction, “fragment by fragment” [12], right up to the last italicised

insinuation of *dedicatio* on page twenty-four, which returns us to the dedication and thus, in completing the circle, begins it again.

Horus, the falcon-headed god “who flew up at the beginning/ of time” [13], beyond where the gods have gone, being sun and moon, principle of seasonal return, is patron of the hours and hours of mourning; as far things are lit and close things shadowed, the *hours of Horus* [14], scatter his name anagrammatically, like the fragmented body, which even in grief, “*nourish[es]*” [15] the poet’s red deserts.

This writing wears its ethical stance most obliquely, but all the more potently for that: the stoical insistence is astounding — a refusal of any transcendental humanism, an extreme modesty.

we are not measure  
of anything hands  
or wind-sound-breath  
that takes your breath  
away the word proves  
all of us dunces up against  
a wall of unintelligible  
flowers or birds or this  
lode of trash & words [16]

“[S]orry someone else already has your name” [17] — the writer is imposter in the sense of stealing away from his own identity — “he tries to write as far from himself as he can” [18]. The poet turns, and watches what retreats, and even in residence, even in finding hearth and heart to call his own, he remains the stripped, naked, imposter, the migrant who is un-named, who is not permitted to speak in his own name, let alone anyone else’s. The mark of the poet is that he is “a stutterer / gone slow” [19].

As mentioned above, the poet is necessarily a “turncoat” [20]: turning his back on identity; always with that foot on the deck of the boat, of the sinking or exploded vessel — he turns his back on the audience like Mallamé’s conductor; he is a turncoat in that sense; he has to die *as personality* to them. This in order to await the quiet events, which might settle on the virtual line:

with sparrows  
and all else  
on the line spring blossom  
whitening the path  
turncoat [21]

“All else/on the line” opens the space of awe before the sheer infinity of this white potential. Here in the face of contingency and randomness, the poet gives us the exquisite placement of the “care-ridden drift” [22] of what is carried away from will, what deviates, but is ridden by care

and rides it. *Care, craft*. “POIESIS & self/pen-friends merely” [23]. The pen tip that connects self to process, to *what makes*, unmakes the self, away from secure wharfs of identity... The far-away writing tip of self that inscribes and throws out into process — makes of the self the “migrant” [24] who sends letters back, othering, to the shoreline of the familiar.

Squaring the circle is a godless resurrection... of the painting sun, of the poet's late painter son, of the beloved. But it is one which has the lucidity and courage only ever to fail, to be partial and peerlessly so, and in assuming its paucity, it is radiant. On this theme of resurrection of the return of blossom and bird along the line, throughout, it's hard not to be reminded of Ezra Pound's exquisite reduction of a long poem to the haiku:

In a Station of the Metro  
The apparition of these faces in the crowd  
Petals on a wet black bough [25]

In “A Song” [26] Loney conjures the magical singer who brings “empty rivers” to Swanston St: the “dry mind” is singing here of “summer rain”. From the first quatrain to the last the black singer is drawn from past to present; he moves from note to word, from street busker to mythic artist. He turns, as Horus does, from Osiris's death and the desertification of the upper kingdom, to conjure the ill of Seth away, and to fertilise — with dry tears — the desert of the bloody uncle's making. How to piece together the torn body of the father, and of the father in the son? Osiris is also of course Orpheus whose body is, as well, cruelly ripped apart. But the black singer also conjures Eurydice's retreat “you opened out your arms to him/ he vanished without a trace” [27].

“A Song” is composed of six quatrains, twenty-four lines within the twenty-four numbered pages of the book, so in this most formal poem, with its gorgeous fable, Loney conjures in a sense a *mise en abyme* or a nestled image of the *Day's eye's* journey.

In “all the limbs of the body” [28] the poem is bird and flying formation at once. In its sideways V-flight is the *mise en scène* of the paradox: in the stillness of waiting is flight; in the attentiveness, the passivity of the wait, of the watch, is flight. Here the poem as miraculous synecdoche, as single “wingflap”, opens out to the wonder of immensity. A “life as a single/ wingflap”: the book itself becomes the winged eye of day, twenty-four-times enfolded.

“[T]hat your death should *nourish* me is hard/to bear”. [29] If one survives the death of a beloved being and this death feeds one,

nourishing the poem, that is the hardest to say, to bear, to carry — and to carry on thereafter. But then we gather, two poems later, that one *has* and one *has not* survived: with the beloved's disappearance one is ghosted, utterly severed. No gravity will hold. There is no cure. There is no 'consanguineous' construing of the beloved lost one. And mad murderous humanity continues unabated, despite all those who with art and action would make a difference:

no color holds            black trees  
    fold on a white sky  
 writing            my feet are not  
    on the ground            leaning  
 on the light    is no help  
    not far away  
 humans are on a killing  
    spree            shrinking  
 from open skies with nothing  
    to say            all  
 disaffection loosed upon  
    the unforgivable  
 other

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Whether or not one can square the circle, it remains that musically the ratio of  $2^3 : 3^2$  makes the perfect tone... Nine Horus cubits is the diameter of the perfect circle; and eight Horus cubits the side of a square approaching its area.... In the extreme modesty of its squared circularity *Day's eye* dreams the reader into the endless approach of that perfection.

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how quick do you go from  
    eye-to-eye  
    to heart-to-heart and  
 mind's anthesis  
    as if the cortex could open  
    like a flower  
    and forgetting cease

your painting's bright band  
    across the dark  
    is grace to me

29

By way of not putting a full-stop to the wonder of this little book, I would like to let Loney's own words resonate here, answering, as they do, Celan's challenge to bring grace and bleakest loss uncompromisingly together: "[*Day's eye's*] bright band/across the dark" achieves "grace" indeed — through the exquisite attentiveness and measure with which it "gives shadow enough", from "midnight to midday and midnight".

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## Notes

[1] Celan, Paul. *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*. Trans. John Felstiner. New York & London, 2001, 77.

[2] See Loney, Alan *Fragmenta nova*. Melbourne: Five Islands Press, 2005,

"And so, in defense, I have come to celebrate the whole fragment." from Ann Lauterbach *The Night Sky: writings on the poetics of experience*. N.Y.: Viking 2005,3.

[3] *Day's eye*, 3.

[4] Derrida, Jacques cit. Peggy Kanuf 'Compostion Displacement', *MLN* 121 (2006): 889.

[5] *Day's eye*, 11.

[6] *Day's eye*, 15.

[7] Emmanuel Lévinas. Trans. Michael B. Smith. *Proper Names*. London: Athlone Press, 1996, 41.

[8] *Day's eye*, 19.

[9] *Day's eye*, 4.

[10] *Day's eye*, 1.

[11] Blanchot, Maurice. *The Writing of the Disaster*. . Ann Smock University of Nebraska Press, 1986, 4.

[12] *Day's eye*, 18.

[13] *Day's eye*, 8.

[14] *Day's eye*, 8.

[15] *Day's eye*, 8.

[16] *Day's eye*, 11.

[17] *Day's eye*, 2.

[18] *Day's eye*, 2.

[19] *Day's eye*, 16.

[20] *Day's eye*, 2.

[21] *Day's eye*, 2

[22] *Day's eye*, 3.

[23] *Day's eye*, 3.

[24] *Day's eye*, 2.

[25] Pound, Ezra. Eds Allison, Alexander W. et al. *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, Third Edition, New York & London, 1983 (1970), 963.

[26] *Day's eye*, 5–6.

[27] *Day's eye*, 5.

[28] *Day's eye*, 8.

[29] *Day's eye*, 8.

Marion May Campbell lives and works in Melbourne, Australia. Her most recent book *Fragments from a Paper Witch* (Salt Publishing) was short-listed in the innovation category of the Adelaide Festival Literary Awards 2010. She is working on a PhD on Intertextuality and Subversion at Victoria University.



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Enough™s Enough. Paris Shadows. Produced by Keith Varon & McKay Stevens. Enough™s Enough Lyrics. [Verse 1] I keep goin' down the same road (Road) Blackin' out in the same clothes (Same clothes) I wish that I could have some control But this feeling's all that I know I'm just livin' in the moment Doing things that I shouldn't I've been in the dark all alone 'Cause this feeling's all that I know. [Pre-Chorus] Help me stay 'Cause all I know is run away And I don't wanna be alone.