

At the edge of technological breakdown

Peter Abbs considers the warning words of poet Lynne Wycherley

Lynne Wycherley's recent volume *The Testimony of the Trees* marks a new stage in the development of her work. A lyrical gift confronts apocalypse. Her poetry now engages directly with the threat of uncontrolled technological 'advance'. Following the path of William Blake, she stands in fiery opposition to the "mind-forged manacles" of technological civilisation. Again and again, the poems expose the pathologies of our digital culture – not its light, but its increasingly sinister shadow: the way it is dramatically changing both our natural habitat and the quality of our inherited consciousness. As without, so within. The testimony of trees points to a whole world in peril, a peril that has been documented again and again by scientific research. In one poem an irradiated maple speaks: *Pedestrians trade blizzards. / I shrink; they grow. / 'Bas-de-page' / I wait for the axe. / I was a word made beauty. / Now I am nil, winter's nail. / Know me.* Lynne Wycherley's stance has changed her style of writing. It is more engaged, more confrontational, both more political and more metaphysical.

Reading *The Testimony of the Trees*, I was reminded of another apocalyptic moment in the making of art when, during the first world war, the painter Franz Marc suddenly stopped celebrating the harmonious, almost Platonic beauty of primordial Nature. Instead, he depicted the pitiless way in which animal life was being annihilated by the massive energies of an unprecedented industrial and chemical warfare.

Marc's last works no longer celebrated the harmony of the natural order, but foretold its imminent destruction. On the back of one of his last paintings, entitled 'The Fate of the Animals', the painter scrawled "*Und alles Sein ist flammend Leid*" ('And all being is burning agony'). His paintings were no longer affirmations: they had become warnings and prophecies: urgent siren calls. The same is true of the defiant poems gathered here. R



The Sentry by Andrew McIntosh www.mackie-art.com

THE STRANGERS

"What we are doing to the forests ... is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves"

– Mahatma Gandhi

Bleak, aloof,
they needled among us.
Grey lightning-streaks through the living.

Phone-masts, cell-towers, WiMAX.
Verticals, a cold-edged gleam.

Marching steel-steel-steel

Cadres on rooftops,
microwaves pulsing through stucco,
bone: nano-hailstones.

The strangers. Ghosts to feed
the screen-addicted ghosts.

Marching steel

We are hallowmas-in-summer,
rust-tinged leaves

*strange, someone says, there's been
no drought, hands mid-text,
eyes in data-fix*

while daylight dips half-seen
trailing saris, Indian dyes

in gloriam Dei.