



Omnesia (alternative text)

W.N. Herbert

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Omnesia' is Bill Herbert's melding of omniscience and amnesia, the modern condition of thinking we can know everything about our world but, in actuality, retaining dangerously little. This doubly impressive new collection -published in twin editions, the alternative text and the remix -approaches and evades such flawed totality. For the past seven years Herbert has wandered from the Turkic west of China to the barrios of Venezuela; from Tomsk, the 'Athens of Siberia', to the heat of Hargeisa, capital of Somaliland, an unacknowledged country. These are travels to translate and, in more than one sense, to be translated; brief encounters with poets and poetics outside the Eurocentric norm; looking-glass meetings, omnesiac pilgrimage. Along the fracture lines between east and west in the Balkans, Greece, and in Jerusalem, across the cultural gaps that mark the north and south of the British Isles, Herbert teases out, through tensions between lyric and satire, English and Scots, formalism and experiment, what it is we hope to mean by home, integrity, or authenticity. Herbert's Omnesia is riven by the anxiety of incompleteness: it is two variations desiring to be one theme; doppelgängers haunted by the idea of a whole neither can embody or know. Which one are you reading? Poetry Book Society Recommendation. 'The very form of Omnesia is innovative and intimately related to his creative concerns. The "book" comes as two distinct books, dubbed the Alternative Text and the Remix...The two books aren't halves of one whole. The real poem might be stranded in the limbo between them, ever out of reach (in some ways this aligns Herbert more with a poet like John Burnside). There is no "definitive" or "original" version. That seems to me to be an attitude and ideology worth taking forward into the 21st-century Scotland.' - Stuart Kelly, The Scotsman.

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