

CILIPS COVID-19 Book Reviews – Sacrifice Zones

Reviewer name: David Kenvyn

Book title: Sacrifice Zones

Author name: Samuel Tongue

Genre: Poetry

Overall Rating: Excellent

Brief summary: For those of you who have not had the pleasure of doing so, I recommend that you get hold of a copy of Samuel Tongue's new collection of poetry, "Sacrifice Zones". At the moment, it has the huge advantage of fitting through your letter-box without any difficulty. What you will get is 36 thoughtful and thought-provoking poems. You will certainly be challenged to think about the world in ways that are different from your normality. That is something to be grateful for in these challenging times. Some of these poems have been published elsewhere, but it is a delight to find old friends amongst the new material. My favourite is Capel-y-Ffin. Samuel Tongue translates this into English as Chapel at the end. I would have preferred Chapel at the edge or Chapel at the border, because that is exactly where it is. The mountain ridge to the east of Capel-y-Ffin is the border between Wales and England. What he describes is the environs of the chapel built by the monks of Llanthony Priory, a little to the south in the Honddu Valley. The poem is an accurate description of the place that I remember, as you look up to the hills in the words of the psalm. There are other poems like this, such as "A View of the Small isles, with Electricity Pylons" which are equally evocative with its description of "an appendix of rock, a small shrug in the harbouring sound". Another favourite is "The International Whaling Commission Answers Back" with its Biblical questions about Leviathan and its answers based on what is allowed in hunting whales. There are also political poems, poems about the modernity of life and poems about relationships. I particularly liked "Some Data Points for Cambridge Analytica" but how could a librarian resist a poem that starts "I offer up information as an offering, every time I register online? It is a truth, as Jane Austen would say, universally acknowledged. Or there is Carhenge, offering "Twin exhausts are organ pipes, emptying". I have never thought of an exhaust pipe in such poetic language before, and this will stay with me. Or there is "Animal Trials: Statement from the Trial of the Weevils of St. Julien". Apparently, in 1587, the weevils of St. Julien were put on trial for ruining the vines and therefore the grapes for the wine. I have no idea if this is true, but why would Samuel Tongue make it up. He puts into the mouth of the weevil leading the defence a statement about our irrelevance as a species, in the greater scheme of things. Straight from Genesis, he takes the phrase "God created animals first – each creeping thing – and gave us every green herb for food". Each poem contains at least one thought of this kind. Each poem will make you think, which means that each poem is worth reading. And, let us be honest, you have nothing better to do at this time.

What you liked: Everything about this short poetry collection. It is extraordinary

Who should read this book?: Poetry lovers