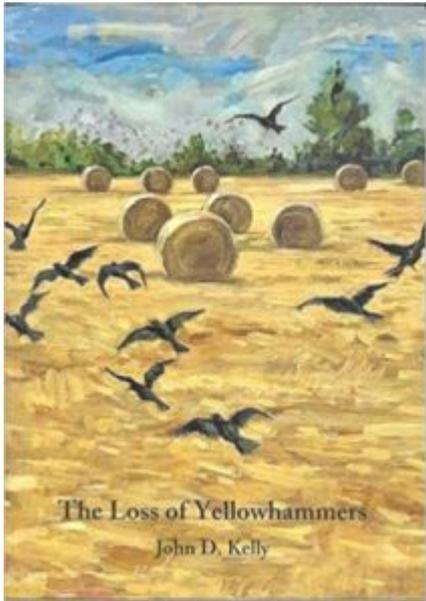


The Loss of Yellowhammers



In the lambent light of a shebeen, in the company of men of a certain vintage nursing tumblers of amber-coloured liquid as the fire in the hearth crackles with mischievous laughter, tales are told of soft-remembered times. It is here you will find this astonishing debut collection of John D Kelly's *The Loss of Yellowhammers*.

The narrator's voice throughout this anthology is both singular and unashamedly masculine, yet it is leavened with an unheralded gentleness and warmth of wit that welcomes readers of every gender.

The poems here entice and draw the reader into a world that is rich with colour and such a visceral vividness that at times, you find yourself forgetting to breathe. John's poetry moves at a healthy lick. The inherent rhymes and wordplays that are present in the spare text create a delicious tension that draws the reader's eye line-by-line.

The stories that unfurl in the poems are incredibly serious and intense. There is a specificity in the language that makes them distinct to the narrator's own experience, written through with the narrator's voice like a stick of seaside rock. It is this very specificity.

The joy of John's poetry, is in taking what is familiar and showing the reader another way of seeing it in a new and fresh light .Why you did not see these things before? In *A Soft Border* he describes a *fence-less, running-stitch of hyphens* and that makes you smile at the truth you always knew, but lacked the poet's way of saying it. In *Six Black-headed Gulls*, he describes a used condom as a *mermaid's purse*, taking the often banal and mundane and making them extraordinary with the deft use of allusion.

The expanse of the stories here revealed cover half a century – with little references (almost asides) that hearken back to much older periods. The language reflects this spectrum, using words like 'sheugh' for a ditch that

are redolent of yesterday, but also brings in the contemporary, with references to the 'euro'. A sense is given that the stories have been brining in the barrel for a generation, imbuing them with an umami richness and gaudy spectrum of flavours.

Even though the subjects may contain difficult realities, you are always conscious that John's steady hand will guide you. His is a gentle pen – an avuncular presence that will always be there to guide. And if, like this reader, you find your cheeks dew-speckled with soft tears, what is the harm in that?

This is a collection to be treasured, to be read and re-read again and again. We have waited a long time for this poet's voice to be with us and now it is here in this splendid debut anthology..

John Llewellyn James

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