

[home \(/\)](#) [about \(/about/\)](#) [books \(/books/\)](#) [authors \(/authors/\)](#)
[news & awards \(/news/\)](#) [blog \(/blog/\)](#)

Judith Crispin, 'The Myrrh-Bearers' in Cordite

[reviews \(https://puncherandwattmann.com/reviews\)](https://puncherandwattmann.com/reviews) / [Babel Fish](https://puncherandwattmann.com/books/book/babel-fish) by Jillian Pattinson
(<https://puncherandwattmann.com/books/book/babel-fish>)

Review Short: Judith Crispin's *The Myrrh-Bearers* and Jillian Pattinson's *Babel Fish*: Ivy Ireland

...A similar loss is at the core of Judith Crispin's new book, *The Myrrh-Bearers*. These poems, ostensibly love poems hidden inside elegies, tell stories of deep longing, carrying a sense of vertiginous presence coupled with the inevitable grief of disconnection from that presence. Crispin's task here seems to be to reconcile grief with understanding in an effort to resurrect – if momentarily – those loved and lost. 'If we'd praised more, if we'd believed/ till tongues of flame descended to our heads' laments the poet in 'Woodstock', a hauntingly beautiful dirge. Yet in the very same poem we are firmly reminded, 'Unsummonable are the dead.' Still, the dead, it could be argued, own this entire collection, singing out through the text, reminding the reader that they continue in and through the act of being captured. This notion of trapping essence in an art form is clearly explored in the beautiful elegy, 'Light Picture.' In this poem, a photograph is seen to play the role of the psychopomp, a guardian on the threshold, perhaps releasing the dead into the ether, perhaps bringing them home to us. The photograph, like this collection of poems, 'straddles two universes: in one you are alive/ and in the other, you are not.'

Weaving through the pages of the aptly named 'Myrrh-Bearers' we find a dark, woody spirituality (there I go using that troublesome word again) coupled with a penchant for ancient wisdom, a sense of Gnostic questing that wouldn't be out of place in a midnight meeting of the Golden Dawn. 'The answer is always like that,' Crispin remarks, 'kabbalah, peyote, the tarot – no matter how we ask,/ the answer comes only in images/ we already know.' These familiar images, archetypes, if you will, seep forth from the sheer precision of *arrangement* at work here, whether we are reeling through the deep darks of northern hemisphere winters or bathing in the harsh heat of Australian summer. The wonderful rhythms (Crispin holds a PhD in composition) and acute lineation of these poems create a meticulous vessel for the uncovering of these images. The voice is mythic, haunted by wolves, by wormwood, by a sense of being on the edge of sleep, not quite awake, liminal. We are drawn in, constantly in until we, too, are left with a deep sense of the immense within the minuscule, the sheer weight of moments and the burden of expressing such.

Crispin grapples with the burden of true expression again and again throughout these poems. 'I want to tell you something/ about love or forgetting,' laments the poet in the final love poem, 'but all my tongues are scattered/ and dazzling.' It is this scattering, this dance with light and dark, love and death, the combustion of the inevitable collision of all these seemingly irreconcilable opposites, that becomes the true achievement of the collection. What we are left with, in the end, is best summed up with a line from the poem, 'Like Honey is the River,' 'And every particle contains the whole god divided/ in fractions – the pleroma descending.'

— Ivy Ireland

[Read the full review in Cordite \(http://cordite.org.au/reviews/ireland-crispin-pattinson/\)](http://cordite.org.au/reviews/ireland-crispin-pattinson/)

Reviews

[Index of reviews \(/reviews\)](/reviews)

Samples

[Index of samples \(/samples\)](/samples)

Launches & articles

[Index \(/launch-speeches\)](/launch-speeches)

[Privacy & legal \(/legal\)](/legal) [Contact Us \(/contact\)](/contact) [LOGIN \(https://puncherandwattmann.com/site/member_login\)](https://puncherandwattmann.com/site/member_login)
to the top ↑