

ALICE  
OSWALD



Falling Awake

CAPE POETRY

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## **Falling Awake** Alice Oswald

Alice Oswald's poems are always vivid and distinct, alert and deeply, *physically*, engaged in the natural world. Mutability – a sense that all matter is unstable in the face of mortality – is at the heart of this new collection and each poem is involved in that drama: the held tension that is embodied life, and life's losing struggle with the gravity of nature.

Working as before with an ear to the oral tradition, these poems attend to the organic shapes and sounds and momentum of the language as it's spoken as well as how it's thought: fresh, fluid and propulsive, but also fragmentary, repetitive. These are poems that are written to be read aloud.

Orpheus and Tithonus appear at the beginning and end of this book, alive in an English landscape, stuck in the clockwork of their own speech, and the Hours – goddesses of the seasons and the natural apportioning of Time – are the presiding figures. The persistent conditions are flux and falling, and the lines are in constant motion: approaching, from daring new angles, our experience of being human, and coalescing into poems of simple, stunning beauty.

## **Falling Awake Details**

Date : Published July 7th 2016 by Cape Poetry

ISBN : 9781910702437

Author : Alice Oswald

Format : Paperback 83 pages

Genre : Poetry, Environment, Nature

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## From Reader Review Falling Awake for online ebook

### Julie says

7.0/10

It may be I was distracted when I read this but I found the collection ... unexciting... overall. (But, if so easily distracted, then, it could be argued the poet wasn't speaking to me in the first place.)

Still, she has some strong imagery in *Swan*, which is probably the best poem in here.

*A rotted swan  
is hurrying away from the plane-crash mess of her wings  
one here  
one there  
getting panicky up out of her clothes and mid-splash  
looking down again at what a horrible plastic  
mould of herself split-second  
climbing out of her own cockpit ...*

(Excerpt only)

Her poems on nature, and her shorter poems generally, have a certain lift and bite to them that give me an insight into a vital, vibrant spirit, but I found her faltering as she wrote her way through the myth of Tithonus. After a very promising start:

*It is said the dawn fell in love with Tithonus  
and asked Zeus to make him immortal, but forgot  
to ask that he should not grow old. Unable to die,  
he grew older and older until at last the dawn  
locked him in a room where he still sits babbling  
to himself and waiting night after night for her appearance.*

the poem dwindle<sup>s</sup> rather pointlessly until it just fades completely.

Not enough blood on the apple for me.

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### Simon says

If I knew poetry better, or was more of a poetry buff, I would probably have given this four or five stars. As I am not and still learning it gets three which is high for me in this arena of literature. Alice writes beautifully about nature and the smaller miracles of life be it animal, human or mythical. For that I liked it very much. Sometimes I just didn't get the poems on the levels I felt I should. But that's me and not Alice.

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## **Kirsty says**

Alice Oswald's *Falling Awake* has one of the most beautiful blurbs which I have ever read; even had I not been familiar with her poetry or output beforehand, it would definitely have enticed me to pick this particular tome up. I very much enjoyed *Dart* when I read it a couple of years ago, and have been eager to read more of Oswald's ever since. The imagery which she creates throughout *Falling Awake* is nothing short of beautiful, and her use of mythology is strong and fitting. The themes of nature and mutability tie the whole together wonderfully. Oswald's repetitions are splendidly handled, and there is not a single poem here which falls short of being meaningful or memorable. *Falling Awake* is a fluid poetry collection, which I would heartily recommend to any fans of poetry.

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## **Eric Anderson says**

every time I read a book of poetry I wonder why I don't read more poetry. I was prompted to read this collection after it won the poetry category of the Costa Book Awards and I'm so glad I picked it up. The title "Falling Awake" feels apt as Alice Oswald has a dizzying way of turning the world upside down, making it fresh and inverting expectation with her stunningly beautiful acrobatic language. Many of the poems in this collection focus on nature whether that includes animals, insects, the weather, the setting/rising sun or the transformation of the seasons. A few draw in references to figures from Greek mythology such as Orpheus and Tithonus. Their inclusion melds with the tone of the other poems giving a striking perspective on time's movement and how we perceive the world as it flows around us.

Read my full review of *Falling Awake* by Alice Oswald on LonesomeReader

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## **Esther says**

Raved about in England, one of the finest contemporary poets etc. So I picked up this collection whilst on my Brit travels last summer. Left me a bit cold to be honest. Plenty to admire in the craft, but nothing really clicked with me. I kept re-reading poems again and again, before admitting this was obviously just not my bag.

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## **Lauren says**

Oswald is back on fine form again!

*Falling Awake*, Alice Oswald's latest poetry collection is simply beautiful. She is an incredibly rare sort and has an ear for the musical in the everyday. I don't think I can really compare her with anyone else because she has a unique style of writing, of fitting different sounds together, of creating some of the most incredible imagery I have ever imagined, she is truly one of a kind.

Having said that however, *Falling Awake* isn't my favourite poetry collection by her; my favourite is either *Woods*, etc. or *The Thing in the Gap Stone-Stile*. Here, she literally sets my mind ablaze with her poetic word play.

If you want to delve in to a different sort of poetry where there is magic, wonder and musicality in nature and the everyday, then look no further than Alice Oswald. She will take you by the hand and introduce you to new wonders of the world.

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### **David Schaafsma says**

Flies

Alice Oswald

This is the day the ?ies fall awake mid-sentence  
and lie stunned on the windowsill shaking with speeches  
only it isn't speech it is trembling sections of puzzlement which  
break off suddenly as if the questioner had been shot

this is one of those wordy days  
when they drop from their winter quarters in the curtains and sizzle as they fall  
feeling like old cigarette butts called back to life  
blown from the surface of some charred world

and somehow their wings which are little more than ?akes of dead skin  
have carried them to this blackened disembodied question

what dirt shall we visit today?  
what dirt shall we re-visit?

they lift their faces to the past and walk about a bit  
trying out their broken thought-machines  
coming back with their used-up words

there is such a horrible trapped buzzing wherever we ?y  
it's going to be impossible to think clearly now until next winter  
what should we  
what dirt should we

This book is about nature and observation and language. Accessible, oral-based. My friend Jenn showed me these two lines from the very beginning of the very first poem, “A Short Story of Falling:”

It is the story of the falling rain  
To turn into a leaf and fall again.

and I was hooked. Oswald is a classicist and likes music, too. There's one long poem, “Tithonus: 46 Minutes in the Life of the Dawn”. A performance piece, with music. Sad. But I like best the pieces about dew, foxes, falling night. I needed it because I just read Bill McKibben's sad book Eaarth about our fast-declining natural world. This is my first experience with her poetry. I'll read more.

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## **Philip Dodd says**

Falling Awake by Alice Oswald. So this is modern poetry, I thought, while reading it. This is what it is, now. I liked the book, enjoyed reading it. Though fresh, new, it did at times remind me of poems I had read before, mainly Four Quartets by T.S. Eliot, Wodwo by Ted Hughes. Every poet is influenced by those who have gone before, right back to the works of Homer, The Iliad and The Odyssey. Alice Oswald has found her voice, her own style, which is good. She lives in Devon, her biographical note tells us. That did not surprise me, as her poems are rooted in life in the English countryside, the village, hedges, lanes, fields, woods, ponds and rivers. Her roots are rural not urban. I liked the eerie feel of her poem, Village, which reminds us that life in a country village is not entirely wholesome and pleasant, the deeper you go the darker it can become. I was curious, I wanted to know why her book and her previous books had won literary awards, and had won praise from literary critics, and what a living poet writes like, now. I was glad that I bought the book. That it was Shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize and the Costa Poetry Award 2016 impressed me. I wanted to know why it had received such praise and prizes. Learn from the masters. That is my motto. Alice Oswald has mastered her art, I think. None of the masters, old and new, learned the craft of writing poetry from academic tutors, but only from each other, from reading those works that took to their liking. Falling Awake by Alice Oswald is a good book to read by anyone interested in finely written poetry.

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## **Ken says**

Favorites: "A Short Story of Falling," "Flies," "Looking Down." Oswald hits my sweet spot in that she has an affinity for nature poems. Here's an example:

### **Flies (Alice Oswald)**

This is the day the ?ies fall awake mid-sentence  
and lie stunned on the windowsill shaking with speeches  
only it isn't speech it is trembling sections of puzzlement which  
break off suddenly as if the questioner had been shot

this is one of those wordy days  
when they drop from their winter quarters in the curtains and sizzle as they fall  
feeling like old cigarette butts called back to life  
blown from the surface of some charred world

and somehow their wings which are little more than ?akes of dead skin  
have carried them to this blackened disembodied question

what dirt shall we visit today?  
what dirt shall we re-visit?

they lift their faces to the past and walk about a bit  
trying out their broken thought-machines  
coming back with their used-up words

there is such a horrible trapped buzzing wherever we ?y

it's going to be impossible to think clearly now until next winter  
what should we  
what dirt should we

Very cool, especially that cigarette butt-like sizzle being called back to life. We've all seen those mysterious flies do the Lazarus thing by the window.

The downside is that I didn't enjoy as much Oswald's longer poems, especially one that took up half of this book, "Tithonus." It's never a good thing when your least favorite poem in a collection takes up half the book. But still. When there's some you really like, you just go back and reread those. That's how poetry collections give of themselves. Unlike with fiction, multiple readings (right after you read it) hold up like *Billy the Kid*.

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### **Rebecca says**

Two great ones: "A Short Story of Falling" and "A Rushed Account of the Dew" ("I want to work out what it's like to descend / out of the dawn's mind // and find a leaf and fasten the known to the unknown / with a liquid cufflink"). One more good one: "Two Voices." The rest? Opaque, forgettable, repetitive. And oh the pretentiousness of "Tithonus" (envisioned as a 46-minute performance)!

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### **Trish says**

I have a new favorite poet and and I can't stop thinking about her work. But you have to hear her speak the work to get the full impact so therefore on my blog I have attached a video of Oswald reading the first poem in this 2016 collection, called "A Short Story on Falling."

I have learned that this appears to be Oswald's ninth book of poetry, and that her second book, *Dart*, won the T.S. Eliot Prize in 2002. According to her wiki, Oswald "is a British poet from Reading, Berkshire. Her work won the T. S. Eliot Prize in 2002 and the Griffin Poetry Prize in 2017. In September 2017, she was named as BBC Radio 4's second Poet-in-Residence." It is absurd to fall in love with language again, but here I am, helpless in her hands.

Her visualizations are unforgettable. In "You Must Never Sleep Under a Magnolia," we learn of "shriek-mouthed blooms" and the first flowering like a glimpse of flesh. And what of

Old scrap-iron foxgloves  
rusty rods of the broken woods

what a faded knocked-out stiffness  
as if you'd sprung from the horse-hair  
of a whole Victorian sofa buried in the mud down there...  
--from *Evening Poem*

Or what about "Tithonus: 46 Minutes in the Life of the Dawn" whose characterization of Tithonus reminds us of another babbling old man:

It is said the dawn fell in love with Tithonus  
and asked Zeus to make him immortal, but forgot  
to ask that he should not grow old. Unable to die,  
he grew older and older until at last the dawn  
locked him in a room where he still sits babbling  
to himself and waiting night after night for her appearance.

As it happens, just when I discovered this unbeatable voice, I learn that she and another newly discovered favorite author, Kei Miller, will be speaking together, in a month, at the same venue in England, as part of the Bath Spa Poetry Series:

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It is enough to bring the dead to life. ?? If I were a rich man ??

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### **Del says**

i tend to be a little dense when it comes to modern poetry, having only studied ancient poetry and a little bit of french poetry.  
but this collection made me think that modern poetry might just be the thing for me.  
i was already charmed after the first poem, and it only got better from there. it read like greek lyrical poetry, and reminded me of my favourite poets.  
not only will i be rereading this one, but i'm going to be reading as much oswald as i can.

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### **Dannii Elle says**

I received this in exchange for an honest review from NetGalley. Thank you to the author, Alice Oswald, and the publisher, Vintage Digital, for this opportunity.

This collection of 24 poems are deeply rooted to the natural world and linked by the subject of mutability – a sense that all matter is unstable in the face of mortality.

Whilst I did enjoy this collection, I don't think I engaged with it in the correct way. I read through each poem and, whilst appreciating them, they didn't exactly move me. I found certain stanzas or sections particularly beautiful but, overall, I was left feeling a little blasé about the collection.

Orality has always been a part of the lyric poetry tradition, going back to pre-literate times, and this collection was expressly created in keeping with the oral tradition of the classical world. Perhaps my enjoyment of this waned in my not doing so, in which case, I only have myself to blame. Reading this to myself I could decipher the lilting quality of tone and pace that would lend itself extraordinarily well to being read aloud. I don't really think, however, having done so would have vastly improved my experience of this.

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**Brett Dupré says**

A masterpiece.

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**Nick Spencer says**

although not unable to  
turn a decent phrase someone

should tell alice oswald that  
there  
is  
more  
to  
writing  
good  
poetry  
than pissing about with the space  
bar and refusing

to use punctuation or the

caps  
key

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