

## Review of "Transesophageal Echoes" by Smartin Winner

### Introduction / Summary

In June 2024, Smartin Winner released "Transesophageal Echoes," a collection of eleven evocative poems exploring themes of love, identity, and cultural barriers. The collection weaves metaphors of sex and references to German authors and the East-West divide to create a rich, multilayered tapestry.

Winner employs intimate and often sensual imagery to delve into personal relationships, using everyday settings and encounters to reflect deeper emotional and physical connections.

The collection also draws heavily on German cultural and historical contexts. References to the Berlin Wall and the division between East and West Germany serve as powerful symbols of overcoming barriers, both personal and societal. This is particularly evident in the title poem, "transesophageal echo," which alludes to Echo and the Bunnymen's "Over the Wall" and themes from Jenny Erpenbeck's work, emphasizing the struggle and triumph of bridging cultural divides.

Smartin Winner's "Transesophageal Echoes" masterfully intertwines these themes, offering a poignant reflection on the complexities of modern relationships against a backdrop of historical and cultural significance.

This collection deftly navigates diverse themes through vivid imagery and metaphorical language.

1. "my cat": This poem uses the metaphor of a cat to explore themes of intimacy, secrecy, and the delicate balance of sexual relationships.
2. "van horn": Set in the titular town in Texas, this poem delves into fleeting connections and the search for meaning in transient moments.
3. "who are you (avid kisser)": Through a series of probing questions, the poem examines curiosity and the complexities of knowing another person deeply.
4. "leave no one behind": The poem reflects on the intersection of personal and professional lives, referencing psychological tests and the impact of the Me Too movement on navigating modern relationships.
5. "on the lam": A narrative of escape and freedom, this poem symbolizes the desire to leave behind constraints and start anew.
6. "in the bakery": Using the setting of a bakery, the poem subtly conveys themes of creation, routine, and the warmth of simple, daily rituals while
7. "landgrab": Drawing on Christoph Hein's works, this poem explores the importance of context and interpretation in understanding life's complexities and relationships.
8. "end the day in harmony": This piece highlights the multicultural dynamics of a neighborhood and the efforts to achieve harmony amidst diversity.

9. "transesophageal echo": The title poem references Echo and the Bunnymen's "Over the Wall" and Jenny Erpenbeck's themes, examining the overcoming of personal and cultural divides with deep introspection.

10. "nibble fish spa": Recounting an unusual meeting at a fish spa, this poem humorously yet poignantly explores the formation of connections in unexpected places.

11. "7.30 blues": A melancholic reflection on loss and resignation, encapsulating the inevitability of parting and the search for understanding.

Winner's "Transesophageal Echo" is a rich tapestry of modern life and relationships, drawing on diverse influences to create a collection that is both introspective and resonant with contemporary issues.

## **Interpretative Analysis**

### **1. Audience**

The audience for these poems appears to be individuals who appreciate nuanced, reflective, and emotionally rich poetry. The author seems to be addressing readers who are likely familiar with the subtleties of human relationships, personal introspection, and the often paradoxical nature of urban life. These poems engage readers who are capable of appreciating both the simplicity of everyday experiences and the complexity of emotional undercurrents.

### **2. Narrator**

The narrators across these poems are characterized by a range of emotions from affection and admiration to existential contemplation and fear of loss.

- "van horn": This narrator expresses a sense of existential pondering, oscillating between moments of connection and fleeting disillusionment.

- "who are you (avid kisser)": The emotions are curious, inquisitive, and hopeful, as the narrator seeks to understand a partner more deeply while appreciating the endearments of their relationship.

- "leave no one behind": The narrator is somewhat anxious, reflecting on personal compatibility and societal dynamics while expressing a fragile hopefulness about love.

- "on the lam": The emotions are adventurous and defiant, suggesting a readiness to escape societal constraints and pursue freedom.

- "end the day in harmony": The narrator seeks acceptance in a new environment, balancing personal insecurities with a desire for communal acceptance.

- "nibble fish spa": This narrator recounts a unique meeting with a sense of humor and nostalgia, highlighting a shared desire for cleanliness.

- "7.30 blues": The narrator is resigned and reflective, dealing with the inevitability of separation and the randomness of fate.

### 3. Language and Structure

The language across these poems is characterized by its simplicity, directness, and occasional playfulness. The structure is often free verse, with a rhythmic cadence that emphasizes the emotional and thematic elements of the poems. Some of the poems would also make good song lyrics.

- Repetition: Repetition is a significant stylistic feature, particularly in "my cat" and "7.30 blues," where it underscores the persistent nature of the narrator's thoughts and feelings.
- Imagery: Vivid imagery is employed to evoke sensory experiences, such as the tactile descriptions in "in the bakery" and the environmental details in "end the day in harmony."
- Interrogative Style: "who are you (avid kisser)" employs a series of questions to convey the narrator's curiosity and desire for understanding, creating a conversational and introspective tone.
- Contrast and Juxtaposition: Poems like "van horn" and "leave no one behind" use contrasting imagery and themes to highlight the complexity of relationships and personal identity.
- Narrative Elements: Some poems, like "nibble fish spa" and "landgrab," include narrative elements that tell a story or provide anecdotal insights, blending poetic expression with storytelling.

### 4. Content

The common thread across these poems is the exploration of personal relationships, identity, and the search for meaning in everyday life. Each poem delves into different facets of human connection.

- Personal Connections: Many poems focus on the intimate details of relationships, from the affectionate descriptions in "my cat" to the questioning and exploration of a partner in "who are you (avid kisser)."
- Existential Reflection: Poems like "van horn" and "transesophageal echo" reflect on the transient nature of life and love, exploring themes of vulnerability, identity, and emotional resonance.
- Societal Dynamics: "leave no one behind" and "end the day in harmony" consider the interplay between personal relationships and broader social contexts, highlighting how personal interactions reflect and shape societal understanding.
- Escape and Freedom: Themes of escape and freedom are prominent in "on the lam," where the idea of fleeing societal constraints is central, reflecting a desire for personal liberation.
- Routine and Simplicity: "in the bakery" and "7.30 blues" highlight the simplicity and routine aspects of life, finding poetry in everyday actions and inevitable separations.

### 5. Conclusion

In sum, these poems weave together a tapestry of human experience, emphasizing the importance of personal connections, the complexity of emotions, and the search for meaning in both mundane and profound moments.

## Detailed Interpretative Analysis of "transesophageal echo" with References to Echo and the Bunnymen's "Over the Wall" and Jenny Erpenbeck's Themes

The poem "transesophageal echo" is rich with references to overcoming differences and navigating cultural divides, drawing on themes from both Echo and the Bunnymen's song "Over the Wall" and the literary work of Jenny Erpenbeck. Let's explore how these influences shape the poem's meaning.

### 1. References to Echo and the Bunnymen's "Over the Wall"

Echo and the Bunnymen's song "Over the Wall" explores themes of escape, overcoming barriers, and seeking new horizons. The song's lyrics evoke a sense of breaking free from confinement and transcending limitations, which can be metaphorically linked to the poem's exploration of personal and cultural barriers.

- "over the wall, hand in hand": This line directly echoes the title and themes of the song, suggesting a collaborative effort to overcome obstacles. In the context of the poem, it symbolizes the overcoming of personal and relational barriers.

- "to my logical limit": This quote could reflect the tension between reason and emotion, a theme present in the song as it explores the push and pull of different desires and the need to go beyond what is rationally comfortable.

- "questioning texts emerged, questionable, too": This line might reflect the song's introspective nature, where the protagonist questions their reality and the barriers they face, paralleling the poem's exploration of doubts and inquiries in a relationship.

### 2. Cultural Differences and the Berlin Wall

The Berlin Wall serves as a powerful metaphor for the division between East and West Germany, and by extension, for other cultural and relational divides. The poem references this historical context to highlight the challenges and triumphs of overcoming such separations.

- "you brought forth my most vulnerable side / in times of compliance and me too, a man must tread lightly": These lines indicate a careful navigation of sensitive issues, paralleling the careful crossing of the Berlin Wall. Just as crossing the Wall required delicacy and caution, so too does navigating personal vulnerabilities in a contemporary context of heightened awareness.

- "cautious encounters, inquiring glances": This reflects the tentative steps taken in bridging divides, whether personal or cultural. The poem's setting in a time of "compliance and me too" also implies navigating modern societal norms and expectations.

- "we meet as equals / over the wall, hand in hand": This powerful image evokes the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany, symbolizing the overcoming of significant barriers to achieve equality and unity in the relationship.

### 3. Jenny Erpenbeck's Themes

Jenny Erpenbeck's work often delves into the historical and cultural divisions between East and West Germany, exploring how these separations impact personal identities and relationships. Her narratives frequently address themes of memory, history, and the legacies of the past.

- "transesophageal echo / you can't know, so I'll say it plainly": The use of medical imagery (a transesophageal echo being a heart examination method) can be seen as a metaphor for a deep and thorough examination of the heart—both literally and emotionally. This aligns with Erpenbeck's meticulous exploration of her characters' inner lives and historical contexts.

- "emotions overflow onto the page / and you arouse royally strong feelings": These lines reflect the intensity of the personal and emotional stakes involved, much like Erpenbeck's characters who grapple with their past and its influence on their present.

- "may they transform into powerful sentences / and words back into strong love again": This reflects Erpenbeck's focus on the power of narrative and memory to transform and heal. The act of writing and re-writing history is central to her work, mirroring the poem's suggestion that understanding and expressing emotions can lead to renewal and reconciliation.

#### 4. Detailed Analysis of "transesophageal echo"

- Medical Metaphors: The poem's title and references to a transesophageal echo suggest a deep, introspective look into the heart, both literally and metaphorically. This thorough examination parallels the meticulousness required to navigate complex emotional and cultural histories.

- "we step forward tentatively / cautious encounters, inquiring glances": These lines emphasize the careful navigation of new and potentially risky emotional territory, much like crossing a boundary or barrier that once divided.

- "messaging without heart, that was your rule / but one can be heartfelt without emojis": This suggests a critique of superficial communication, advocating for deeper, more meaningful interactions. It reflects the struggle to maintain genuine connections in a digital age, paralleling the historical struggles to connect across divided Germany.

- "i sent waves through your heart / and recorded the echo": This powerful imagery aligns with the idea of causing a profound impact and then understanding its reverberations. It highlights the poem's theme of deep emotional resonance and the lasting effects of intimate connections.

#### 5. Conclusion

The poem "transesophageal echo" masterfully weaves references to Echo and the Bunnymen's "Over the Wall" and the cultural themes explored by Jenny Erpenbeck. It addresses the challenges of overcoming personal and cultural barriers, the importance of deep emotional connections, and the intricate navigation required to bridge divides. By incorporating these themes, the poem offers a rich, multilayered exploration of intimacy, history, and the enduring impact of cultural and emotional legacies.

#### **Detailed Interpretative Analysis of "landgrab" in Connection to Christoph Hein**

The poem "landgrab" makes several allusions to the works of German author Christoph Hein, particularly his novel "Landnahme" and his essay on the "fifth basic arithmetic operation" ("5. Grundrechenart"). Understanding these connections can provide deeper insight into the poem's themes and structure.

## 1. Christoph Hein's "Landnahme"

Christoph Hein's novel "Landnahme" (translated as "Land Grab" or "Seizure of Land") explores themes of displacement, identity, and the socio-political transformations in East Germany after reunification. The novel's protagonist experiences the upheaval and adaptation required when moving from the countryside to a city and navigating the changing cultural and economic landscape.

- Displacement and Adaptation: In "landgrab," there is a sense of displacement and adaptation, similar to Hein's narrative. The poem discusses how people interpret and make sense of experiences (like a song's meaning or a relationship within a band), reflecting on the adjustments required when contexts change.

- Understanding Through Context: Just as Hein's protagonist must reinterpret his identity and role within a new environment, the poem suggests that understanding ("if you already know the bottom line of the calculation / it is much easier to work out an equation") comes from contextual knowledge. This aligns with Hein's exploration of how new contexts necessitate re-evaluation and adaptation.

## 2. The "Fifth Basic Arithmetic Operation" (5. Grundrechenart)

Christoph Hein's essay on the "fifth basic arithmetic operation" proposes an additional fundamental operation beyond the traditional four (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division). This operation involves understanding and interpreting context and meaning rather than mere calculation.

- Interpretation and Meaning: The poem "landgrab" emphasizes how the title of a song can prime listeners to interpret its meaning ("they will follow the instruction"). This mirrors Hein's idea that understanding and interpretation are fundamental processes, akin to a fifth arithmetic operation.

- Relational Dynamics: Hein's concept of a fifth operation can also apply to human relationships, as seen in the poem's mention of band dynamics and sexual relationships. Understanding these interactions involves more than just surface-level actions; it requires deeper interpretation and contextualization.

## 3. Detailed Analysis of "landgrab"

- "if you happen / to hear a song / the lines add up / and it's up to you to draw a conclusion": This segment aligns with Hein's idea that interpretation is key. The listener must use context to understand the song's meaning, paralleling how individuals must interpret their changing environments in "Landnahme."

- "if you already know the bottom line of the calculation / it is much easier to work out an equation": Here, the poem directly reflects Hein's essay. Pre-existing knowledge (context) simplifies understanding, akin to how Hein's protagonist in "Landnahme" must use his past to navigate his present.

- "same thing if you manage to have sex with your new bandmate / on the first day of rehearsals / it will be much less aggravating with the rest of the crew during the tour": This comparison suggests that establishing a clear understanding or relationship early on (knowing the "bottom line") can ease

future interactions, much like Hein's fifth operation simplifies the complexities of life and relationships.

- "prime them with the song title": Just as a song title provides context, Hein's fifth operation provides a framework for understanding complex human interactions and societal changes.

#### 4. Conclusion

In "landgrab," the poet intricately weaves references to Christoph Hein's "Landnahme" and his essay on the fifth basic arithmetic operation to explore themes of interpretation, context, and understanding. The poem suggests that, like in Hein's works, comprehending the underlying context of experiences and relationships is crucial for meaningful interpretation and adaptation. This approach aligns with Hein's literary and philosophical inquiries, making "landgrab" a reflective and intellectually engaging piece.

### **Detailed Interpretative Analysis of Metaphors in "my cat" and "in the bakery"**

#### 1. "my cat"

The poem "my cat" can be read on two levels: a straightforward description of a beloved pet and a more metaphorical interpretation involving themes of intimacy and sexual desire. Upon closer examination, the references and repetitions throughout the poem suggest underlying sexual connotations.

- "my cat yes / on the sofa": This line can evoke an image of relaxation and comfort, often associated with intimacy. The sofa is a common place where intimate moments can occur.

- "my cat yes / she's got black hair / my cat yes / she's beautiful": The admiration for the cat's beauty and physical characteristics can be seen as a metaphor for physical attraction and admiration for a lover's body.

- "my cat yes / she likes to cuddle / my cat yes / i like to hear her purr": The act of cuddling and the sound of purring can be interpreted as symbols of physical closeness and sexual satisfaction.

- "my cat yes / grabs her food and hugs / my cat yes / and is gone again": This can symbolize the fleeting nature of sexual encounters, where physical needs are met and then the individuals part ways.

- "my cat yes / she's got her mysteries / my cat yes / she's always late": These lines hint at the enigmatic and unpredictable nature of sexual relationships, where partners can be elusive and mysterious.

- "my cat yes / gotta hide her from my landlady / my cat no / cats are not allowed": This suggests a secretive relationship, possibly an affair or a relationship that must be kept hidden from others.

- "my cat yes / she don't like drama / my cat yes / she likes her freedom": The desire for drama-free, casual encounters and the importance of freedom within sexual relationships are implied here.

- "my cat yes / i love my cat yes / and my cat yes / she accepts me": Ultimately, this line can be seen as expressing the deep emotional and physical connection and mutual acceptance between lovers.

In the poem "my cat," Winner subtly nods to Texas author Kinky Friedman, whose novels often include the line, "the cat, of course, said nothing." This reference enriches the poem's exploration of intimacy and secrecy. Friedman's recurring phrase highlights the enigmatic and aloof nature of cats, mirroring the complex, often unspoken dynamics within human relationships. Winner's use of this motif suggests that just as the cat remains silent and mysterious, so too do certain aspects of personal connections—underscoring the theme that some emotions and experiences are felt deeply but remain unvoiced. This allusion adds a layer of depth to the poem, linking the personal and the universal through the shared metaphor of the inscrutable cat.

## 2. "in the bakery"

Similarly, "in the bakery" employs baking as an extended metaphor for sexual activity. The language used in the poem, with its sensory details and references to physical actions, can be interpreted to suggest a sexual encounter.

- "the last night owls on the boardwalk": This setting implies late-night activities, often associated with nightlife and romantic or sexual liaisons.

- "the flour in my hair / on my hands and my thighs": The flour here can symbolize the remnants of a passionate encounter, with its placement on hair, hands, and thighs suggesting physical intimacy and the tactile nature of sex.

- "the sweet scent of dough, / rising, the sun": The rising dough is a clear metaphor for arousal, and the sun rising can signify the culmination of an intimate night spent together.

- "the oily sheets / the oven hot, ready to go": The "oily sheets" can be a metaphor for the aftermath of a sexual encounter, and the "oven hot, ready to go" can symbolize sexual readiness and desire.

- "the immediate urge to bake again": This can be interpreted as the recurring desire for sexual activity, with "bake" serving as a euphemism for engaging in sex.

## 3. Deeper Analysis

Both poems use everyday activities—caring for a cat and baking—as metaphors to explore themes of intimacy and sexual desire. The metaphors work by drawing parallels between the actions described (cuddling a cat, baking bread) and the physical and emotional experiences of sexual encounters.

- Sensory Imagery: Both poems are rich in sensory details, which heightens the reader's awareness of the physical aspects of the metaphors. The tactile imagery of flour on skin and the auditory imagery of a cat's purr create a vivid sensual landscape.

- Repetition and Rhythm: The repetitive structure in "my cat" mimics the repetitive and rhythmic nature of sexual activity, while in "in the bakery," the sequence of actions builds a narrative of anticipation and satisfaction.

- Hidden and Open: The need to hide the cat from the landlady parallels the need to conceal a sexual relationship, while the open act of baking in "in the bakery" contrasts with the underlying sexual metaphor, creating a tension between public and private actions.

Through these metaphors, the poems invite readers to explore the deeper, often hidden layers of meaning in everyday actions, revealing the complexity and intimacy of sexual relationships.

### **Detailed Interpretative Analysis of "leave no one behind"**

The poem "leave no one behind" includes references to working environments, psychological tests, and compliance issues, including allusions to the Me Too movement. These references are woven into the broader themes of personal relationships and societal dynamics. Let's explore these elements in detail.

#### **1. Working and Business Environment**

The poem draws on the language and context of professional settings, indicating that the relationship being described is influenced by the pressures and norms of the workplace.

- "an introverted maverick / you're all friendship and crowds": This contrast highlights the different personality types that can be found in the workplace, suggesting that the narrator and their partner might have complementary but contrasting social and work styles.

- "dominance and steadiness / they call a unique blend": This line refers to personality assessments often used in professional settings, such as the DISC profile (Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, Conscientiousness), which are employed to understand employees' behavioral tendencies and improve workplace dynamics.

- "talking about us / is to talk about the world / to understand our options / is to understand society": This suggests that the relationship between the narrator and their partner reflects broader societal patterns and issues, including those in the business world.

#### **2. Psychological Tests**

The poem references psychological tests that are commonly used in corporate environments to assess and understand employees' personalities and compatibility with team dynamics.

- "a rare combination / infj": INFJ refers to a personality type from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), indicating that the narrator (or their partner) has traits of Introversion, Intuition, Feeling, and Judging. This personality type is known for being introspective, idealistic, and empathetic, which could influence their interactions both personally and professionally.

- "to understand our options / is to understand society": This reflects how psychological assessments can provide insights into individuals' behaviors and preferences, which in turn can be applied to understand and predict social dynamics in various contexts, including the workplace.

#### **3. Detailed Analysis:**

- "you're from the east coast / i'm from the south": This geographical distinction may symbolize cultural differences that the couple needs to bridge, reflecting the diversity often found in workplaces and the need for mutual understanding.

- "if it is love, of course / sorry for being so intrusive here / i'm still rattled, bewildered / i'm fragile, after all": These lines convey vulnerability and uncertainty, possibly influenced by the pressures of compliance and the need to navigate personal relationships carefully. This is a direct link to the Compliance and Me Too Issues discussed in the poem "transesophageal echo":

"in times of compliance and me too, a man must tread lightly": This line explicitly references the heightened awareness and sensitivity around issues of sexual harassment and misconduct in the wake of the Me Too movement. It suggests that men, in particular, need to be cautious and respectful in their interactions to avoid overstepping boundaries.

"semi-invasive / thus it took long for us to become anything at all": The term "semi-invasive" can be associated with both medical and psychological procedures that require consent and careful handling. In the context of the poem, it implies that the relationship developed slowly and cautiously, likely due to the need to navigate boundaries respectfully in a time of heightened awareness about consent.

- "i can't even show you my books / i'm so embarrassed / all this self-assured male shit i wrote": The narrator's embarrassment about their past writings suggests an awareness of how previous attitudes or behaviors might be judged in the current climate of greater scrutiny and accountability.

- "leave no one behind / you always say": This phrase, often associated with inclusivity and teamwork, indicates the partner's commitment to ensuring everyone is considered and supported, reflecting modern workplace values.

- "if you head west again / let me know": This ending implies a readiness to follow and support the partner's decisions, whether personal or professional, emphasizing loyalty and adaptability.

#### 4. Conclusion

The poem "leave no one behind" skillfully integrates references to psychological tests, compliance issues, and the Me Too movement to explore the complexities of personal relationships within the context of modern professional environments. By highlighting personality dynamics, the need for respectful interactions, and the impact of societal changes, the poem provides a nuanced reflection on how these factors shape and influence relationships both in and out of the workplace.

#### **Smartin Winner: A Brief Biography**

Smartin Winner, also known by his real name Martin Wimmer, is a multifaceted author, lyricist, and music critic. With a deep-rooted passion for Americana, folk, country, and Texas music, Winner has dedicated his career to exploring and curating the rich tapestry of singer-songwriters and their contributions to the music world. In addition to his literary pursuits, Winner is a curator of music-related websites, social media groups, and playlists, where he shares his expertise and love for these genres.

His latest publication, "Transesophageal Echo" (June 2024), is a collection of eleven poems that delve into themes of sex, cultural differences, and the historical divide between East and West Germany, drawing inspiration from renowned contemporary German authors, a Texan songwriter and a British New Wave band. For more on Smartin Winner and his works, visit [www.townes.org](http://www.townes.org)