Rigorous Nostalgia

*Erato*, Deryn Rees-Jones (69pp, £9.99, Seren)

Deryn Rees-Jones' last book was written too soon after the death of her partner, and was full of raw emotion and hurt, which didn't make for good poetry, however understandable that rawness was. *Erato*, however, is all that that book could have been, and is a devastating return to form.

The core of the book is a number of prose poems, spinning out and away from grief but with absence as a centre. The texts focus in on the momentary, on remembered details, and move by association and emotion as much as time or narrative. In between are more individual poems, sometimes brief observational lyrics, including a sonnet sequence and a poem after Rimbaud.

'Imagine a landscape folded into a room' is the opening line of 'Cell', and this for me is the nub of these poems, memory, ideas and images folded up within the room, or self, of the poem. There is a surety and lightness of touch here, with the author re-presenting her memories but leaving us to make a choice of how to respond to them. The poems are certainly melancholic and moving, but this is because of my own associations and interpretations, not the heavy-handed declarations of grief published in Rees-Jones' last book.

Concentrated and erotic, or something

Unbeautiful

Or something

in the spaces between?

she writes in 'Fires' when discussing the work of Julia Kristeva, as the text moves from parental intervention and concern, to Virginia Woolf's lighthouse, and on through Freud and Elizabeth Bishop, through Kristeva to Dylan Thomas. Yet this is no academic treatise, this is the literary world the poet inhabits, it's as natural a progression and digression as bird watching and gardening are elsewhere. It also summarises how this poetry is working, leaving room in 'the spaces between' for the reader.

*Erato* finds its author balancing the fact she remains both lost and at home in the world, mixing the vivid and luminous present with the past. Her nostalgia is controlled and shaped, her eye alert to the foibles of memory and grief. This is a wonderful, lyrical collection, full of bright language and love.

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