

Ghost Methods, Síofra McSherry (Broken Sleep Books)

The ghost in the title of this slim pamphlet (37 pages including prelims and a foreword) is the shade of poet Sean Bonney, who was a friend and colleague of McSherry. Many of these poems write back to or are haunted by Bonney, and the best poem, or sequence of poems, in the book is 'A Series of Posthumous Discourses with Sean Bonney', which does exactly what it says.

Bonney's first pamphlet was a scrappy rebellious free verse affair, wrapped in a bright pink cover, entitled *Marijuana in the Breadbin*. After some further pamphlets from fugitive small presses Salt offered up *Pitch Blade Control*, and although the alt.publishing continued, *Letters Against the Firmament*, a surprising choice from Enitharmon Press, established Bonney as a revolutionary, considered and angry writer. This was reinforced by the online publication of a Selected Writing (*All This Burning*, Ill Will Editions) and the analogue volume *Our Death* from Commune Editions, which confirmed Bonney as a political writer for our time, seemingly as happy on the barricades as within the confines of a paperback book.

McSherry addresses Bonney in various ways and in various places. She adopts his shouty straightforwardness ('Bonney is fucking dead'), discusses his politics:

I was just sitting here thinking of you
and how from a certain perspective society is nothing but the interaction of
planes of power
although that's the kind of perspective that can kills us and in articular you

and welcomes even her privacy to be haunted:

I welcome your transparent introductions
you may peep and glimmer away

The four poems in 'A Series...' are unsettled, emotional and yet lucid reflections which move towards a calming acceptance of death and loss, tempered slightly by the idea of the author leaving their writing behind:

and I am here, I am here, I am still here
filling this page with lines that maybe someone somewhere will read
and know that even so you can hunker down if you want to
you can write and (same thing) survive

The rest of the poetry in this collection feels less engaged with Bonney, although he lurks as a presence throughout. 'Zonbi' plays with the idea of persistence and wished-for resurrection in its discussion of light:

Light requires no reason to go on,
so why should you? Get up from the ground

whilst 'Hamlet V:1' deconstructs and revises Shakespeare to focus on the fact that 'people can get used to anything, / perhaps even knowing that we'll die.' Other texts focus on memory, giving blood (a long poem awkwardly printed sideways), ideas of home and transience, whilst 'A Discourse' seems to be the poet talking to herself. There is also an autumnal confession that the narrator 'fell in love with Death', although at the end of the poem 'Death quietly drowns.'

If there's an echo of Anne Sexton in McSherry's report that 'Wide-eyed Death hovered helplessly by my side' and that 'Death has no heart', all the poems here evidence an ongoing engagement with both Death, personified *and* abstract, and Bonney himself. McSherry embraces and explores loss, grieving for 'the names, the many names / my mouth will never form again', and allows Bonney's words to 'fall on me in place of you'. There is something very moving and also resilient about facing up to absence, 'star[ing] up into endless night', whilst reasserting the persistence of poetry in the word.

Rupert Loydell

575 words