*a fondness for the colour green*, Charlie Baylis (Broken Sleep)

It's hard to see how this collection is Charlie Baylis' debut. In fact page 4 of this book lists six other small press publications, including an earlier volume from Broken Sleep. Baylis has been ricocheting around the poetry world for some time now, writing barbed and witty reviews, submitting quirky and original poems here, there and everywhere, and sending email missives from around the world, whether at work or simply on holiday.

Baylis, &/or his narrator, is friendly from the word go. The first poem 'hi...' starts by declaring that 'now that we're friends i will tell you about the buttercup' and a whole host of other things, later insisting that 'confused or worse, let's stay friends. come, i want to show you'. And he does. Here is 'the beautiful jazz of the sea' and here are his future, somewhat utopian yet possibly achievable, plans:

 i want to plant these orange trees with those orange seeds
 i want to raise a palace of tender hearts, hearts that are ours
 but not ours.

Baylis is a kind of Peter Pan. The end of the poem tells parents not to ask, and declares 'we're dancing on the breeze the butterflies are born'. It's an upbeat, fantastical (if syntactically disrupted) ending, before the comical manifesto of 'charlie wave' which follows.

Here we get a ridiculous long list of things the poem or poet is ANTI, including 'the letters that comprise the opening line' (which is, of course, the opening line) and a single PRO: 'PRO charlie', obviously. Naturally, I'm pro Charlie too, although it appears from some of the love poems that not everyone is, not even himself at times. Whilst some lovers 'never waved goodbye', and there are questions to ask the mermaid, at other times – despite recalling the fact that 'when i was a boy i found it hard to breathe' – 'everything was beautiful', possibly as a result of trying 'not to take my sadness seriously'.

Baylis seems to be able to shed his miseries quickly and return to his happy place. His poem i.m. Sean Bonney, 'dystopia', has an upbeat ending, and although in 'madonna' the moment of waking and 'dreaming i've made it' quickly fades away to the reality of some kind of going home (as opposed to homecoming), by the end of the poem and the first section, 'everything is forgotten'.

Part ii, 'spilling pink champagne on your party dress', contains further romantic adventures, sometimes self-deprecating and jokey, other times regretful and knowing:

 you are no longer
 i am no longer
 who we want to be
 ('okinawa')

If section ii ends with the windblown question *'why are you running away from me?*' (italicised original), section iii is *self-*questioning: 'so you think you're in love with jennifer'. It's unclear if Jennifer is an imaginary friend or lover, Baylis' amalgamation of ex-lovers to produce perfection, or a character to hang some poems on. All or any of them seem plausible, although I err towards the first as Jenny arrives, 'ravaged with life', from trembling plasma; appears to be a kind of superhero whose 'star bright knickers eclipse the bright star'; and seems to know Juliette Binoche – who (allegedly) contributes a poem here, written topless. Somehow, within this emotional potpourri, Baylis bows to Raymond Carver's informed response to a poem ('he told me it wasn't worth the paper it was written on'), lusts and longs for Jennifer, loses her in another poem whilst 'raymond carver eyeballs a raspberry', and belligerently ends the whole affair after Jennifer has gone to Japan by insolently urging her to

 go polish your poetry prize
 does it keep you warm at night?

Possibly not, for even 'tinkerbell hates jenny the same way i do'.

Baylis, however, doesn't care. He advises other characters that 'you are lucky there is some oxygen left', notes that 'i'll be moving on / and you should go and love yourself', and admits, in a poem that begins 'excuse me, do you know who i am?' that

 i can't talk, my mouth is full of waffle
 i can write, mostly waffle
 i'm so sorry i didn't quite catch your name
 it sounded like charlie boredshitless

Elsewhere, in section v, 'a bunch of idiots talking don delillo', there are a cluster of poems that cleverly reference themselves, but also others poems throughout the book, in a suitably knowing manner, whilst the final section instructs us to 'fuck these motherfuckers'. In 'the new insincerity', reproduced in its entirety here, Baylis contrarily notes that

 there is not much in poetry that remains unsaid
 but that you should say it is not your responsibility

whilst later turning down the misspelt (and therefore presumably non-libellous) Neal Astley's offer of both 'a bloodaxe' and 'more eggs', and revealing – in 'phosphorescence' – that he (Baylis) is 'burning books. you do not / have any new ideas. i am your / idea. you are short on ideas.'

It's all very arch and knowing, all quite zany and entertaining, although it's unnerving to read the cynically romantic closing poem 'pink mink' which not only tells us that 'poetry is a bitch it takes me / round the park like a poodle on a chain of lace' but also that

 [...] this has all been terribly dull
 my friends are a bunch of cunts
 jesus doesn't want you for a sunbeam
 & i'm not that kind of girl

I'm not sure Baylis is really that kind of girl, or poet, either. At the moment there's some confusion and argument between the belligerent, assured and sometimes loud- or foul- mouthed poet, and the Byronesque lyricist who notes things 'flowering like poetry on the underside of the night'. It's not dull but there is a fear of being too 'poetic' on show: always the desire to pull the rug from under the reader, to undercut everything, to knock down what the poet has just built. Although Charlie Baylis has the swagger, as well as a great band, he is not the Jim Morrison of poetry, however hard he tries:

 your poetry is so pretty i want to lick your ear

 celebrate by pissing in leather trousers from a great height

 onto your wedding cake

 (from 'pink mink')

On the back cover Luke Kennard, wise as ever, quite rightly talks about 'moments of wounded humour and wonder, plenty of wonder, despite it all, because of it all.' It is this wonder I'd like to see more of, and less of the belligerence and self-deprecation. I want to be caught up in and allowed to enjoy or be challenged by the poetry, by Baylis's fantastical visions, his original analogies, his renewed language of love and despair. I want to be taken to Neverland, not dropped back down to reality from a great height because the poet can't be bothered to take his sadness or happiness more seriously. Baylis needs to 'break on through to the other side'. As Morrison sang on The Doors' 'Tightrope Ride':

 You better get your balance
 You have to feel the weight
 There are no more questions
 Or no answers today
 There are no reasons
 There are no more rhymes
 But if you can feel it, you can fly next time

Rupert Loydell