

BitterSweet Reviews... *i left my body behind*

It's difficult to describe *i left my body behind* — at once poetry collection, prose poem, memoir, and epistolary novel. Some pieces, particularly certain poems, would work in isolation; others require the full context of this collection.

The design is subtle, simple, yet elegant — tender changes in typeface or layout complement grander shifts in tone or voice. Throughout, form is in an elegant dialogue with content. While it would be unfair to judge a poetry collection entirely on its typography or typesetting, here it adds something,

Many poems play carefully with the space of the page. The collection as a whole makes for a beautiful printed object: blank pages and negative space create silences, moments of reflection. The writing is thoroughly visual despite an absence of imagery: the writing speaks at once to the eye, the mind, and the mind's eye.

A single line stranded in the corner of a double page spread — annotations added in a tiny font — amorphous blobs, like artificial inkblots, used as punctuation.

The tone is very personal, intimate — sometimes I felt like I was intruding on a personal thought, eavesdropping on a private conversation. It's honest without being overly sincere, authentic but never trite.

If I had to identify a single poem as my favourite, I would say 'i had planned to talk about sitting in public places', a piece that is frank and confessional, playing with mood and tense and tone.

As the title suggests, the work throughout is somatic, corporeal — rooted in feeling and sensation. Bodies upon bodies amongst bodies throughout bodies. As mächler writes in the title poem:

i left my body behind
so i could see myself
but i really need to be my selves.

This plural permeates the writing. Whatever you want to call it — self, ego, subject — is multiple. We are, each, legion.

And, yet, the writing comes from the singular, the subjective — all of the writing is from the selfsame 'I', from short poems to letters directed to a certain reader. It is thoroughly cohesive. There are fragments of a narrative; suggestions of characters or constant referents.

Very occasionally, something feels lost in translation — an oddly worded phrase or a word that feels out of place. This merely adds to the charm, though, the playfulness of the language. The reader is made aware of the peculiarities of language itself: the difference between *somebody* and *some body*, for instance, or *nobody* and *no body*.

The first letter ends with 'Best regards, mmm' — the last, 'with all my love, mmm'. Journeying with martian m. mächler, one is saturated with hope, with love. Pick this up and read, with care.

— Louis Shankar