



Profit and Loss (Cape Poetry)

Leontia Flynn

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Celebrated as an unusually original poet - nervy, refreshing, deceptively simple - Leontia Flynn has quickly developed into a writer of assured technical complexity and a startling acuity of perception. In her third collection, Flynn examines and dismantles a fugitive life. The first sequence moves through a series of rooms, reflecting on aspects of the author's personal and family history. Using the idea of the haunted house or the house with a sealed-off room, and Gothic tropes of madness, doubles, revenants and religious brooding, the poems consider ideas of inheritance and legacy.

The second section comprises a magnificent long poem written in the months leading up to the banking crisis and presidential election of October 2008. Taking as its occasion a flat-clearing, it assumes a more public voice (inspired partly by Auden's 'Letter to Lord Byron'), and reflects on aspects of the rapid social and technological change of the last decade. An extraordinarily moving reflection on mutability and mortality prompted by the spring-cleaning of a life's detritus, 'Letter to Friends' evolves from a private reliquary to a public obsequy.

Its collapse back into private griefs, including the poet's father's decline into Alzheimer's disease, is pursued in the third section of the book. Here the theme of a tallying of private and public balance sheets, of different kinds of profit and loss, widens to include poems of motherhood and marriage, the possibilities of hope and repair.

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