

## WILLIAM BEDFORD

Cheryl Moskowitz, *The Girl is Smiling* (Circle Time Press, 2012), ISBN 978-0-9564082-1-1, 70 pp, £7 (pb)

“I am an experiment that cannot be undertaken” Cheryl Moskowitz tells us in ‘Scientific Autobiography’, and there is something of the scientist’s objectivity which gives the poems of *The Girl is Smiling* their quiet power. Occasionally, the effect is dreamlike. ‘A Walk in the Park’ has police officers clustering “together as if this is the safe thing to do”, handing out witness appeals which in their bluntness seem to sum up a whole life: “*He was wearing a dark green blazer with a blue fleece underneath*” and “*Balding grey hair and a chequered flat cap.*” Similarly, ‘He Disappeared into Complete Silence 1947’ starts with the fairy-tale “Once there was a girl and she loved a man” only to treat the lovers as if they are specimens, given that “new research has come/to show that love is not all it is cracked up to be”.

But scientific objectivity disguises great emotion in Moskowitz’s poems. ‘Beginnings’ sees reincarnation in the moment of birth, “Your infant body curled tight inside mine. / Rivers rising upwards, becoming rain.” Maternal love holds a mother “in the tangle of its strings” in the lovely ‘Alice’, just as the “blind sweep and swerve of bats” comes too close “but not quite far enough / away to want to keep in touch” in the Oedipal ‘About Mothers, by Daughters’. Love is the real theme of *The Girl is Smiling*, whether of the young or the old, beautifully captured in ‘I Left My Heart’ with its “salmon death silver pink / a new beginning” and its playful ringing of lines from the song ‘You must remember this’. But some of the most powerful poems deal with the indignities of growing old. As Virginia Woolf said, “when our memories go, we go”, and the marvellous ‘Leaving’ shows this agony of leaving as a parent and child play an agonising game of remembering. At the end of the game, all they are left with is fragments, but the fragments make a poem, as a leaf “falls from trees when wind blows” and “autumn starts / leaving.” Moskowitz recognises “that every kiss is also a sting”, as in ‘Maternal Encounters and Thoughts Arising’, but still “wants you to remember seeing her just like this, / with her eyes open” as in the final affirmative poem in the collection, ‘Snapshot’.