

Sounds Between Trees, Peter Larkin (Guillemot Press)

Are the sounds between trees a kind of conversation? The wind? Or silence? Or is it an abstraction, even at times a personification, 'to save us from / what is formless'? Peter Larkin's new book, a beautifully produced volume by Guillemot, evidences an arboreal religiosity, 'a thud of spirit', rooted in a landscape of prayer and seeking.

The hundred small poems here (each two or three short lines) are small-scale devotions-come-observations, verbal snapshots of a world of verticals, '[t]rees above trees', shelter, storms and 'noises in rain'. Within the '[t]ree chaos', it seems that nature itself prays, perhaps to itself, in a self-contained cycle of erosion, displacement and ecology.

The final line asks 'is this how the wild calls?' I truly do not know; the words – pared back to a minimum – are more 'a stumble into the uncondition' that Larkin seeks, a hoped-for escape from human formlessness into a new world which celebrates and facilitates its own natural forms.

Words like 'abnegation,', 'abdication', 'grief' and 'penury' suggest a sense of loss and pain, but this book is also infused with hope. Phrases such as 'the cycle of increase' and 'towards wholeness' speak of a future, perhaps an overgrown world where humans have no place, or at the very least know their place:

Tree chaos amid
greyed-out (us) of harm,
a forest of counter-calms

These compressed, thoughtful and thought-provoking miniatures are evidence of a complex engagement with the world around us, disturbing and insightful moments of possibility and potential, a quiet forest of words, 'a place of return / racks of outlook at rest'.

Rupert Loydell