

Outside In

Not There – Here, Andrew Taylor (89pp, Shearsman)

Branches of a House, Agnieszka Studzińska (81pp, Shearsman)

Whether in England or France, or sometimes en route between the two, Andrew Taylor's poems accrue simple images and observations to assemble intriguing strings of thought and language. As he says in 'Above there are three helicopters', 'Let's not live in / fragments, there's // too much connectivity'.

So although his work is often imagistic and documentary, if not downright Creeley-esque in its construction (this is high praise, not a criticism), it becomes much more than the sum of its parts. It also references other writers and musicians such as Mark Hollis, Robert Sheppard, John James, Richard Skelton and David Rothenberg, and sometimes draws on other texts and writers for literal or thematic source material. Others may feel differently, but I felt a shared world emerging: these people are all part of my world too.

This isn't to suggest that Taylor works by empathy, nor does he try to persuade through ego or epiphany. He simply focusses the reader's attention on a number of events and specific language, giving us the space to contemplate 'these truths that cannot be categorised'. It's exhilarating, refreshing writing.

Agnieszka Studzińska's poems are denser, sometimes claustrophobic texts, that explore notions of body, self and place within the world. Opening poem 'Foundations' does exactly what the title says, offering a litany of individual possibilities for the book, including 'the voices of distance' and 'shapes in the margins'.

Then there are a cluster of dense prose poems, the first vigorously populated with slashes, others more lyrical and abstract, exploring the 'ghost language' of the past. Other poems return to lists of sentences, others spread themselves across the field of the page. There are also a number of intriguing essay-like poems, responding to authors such as Joseph Conrad: 'Port' gazes at the Thames estuary whilst engaging with contemporary refugees and social displacement.

Studzińska is aware that life itself, let alone any notion of home or belonging, is fragile and tentative. In 'This Could All Be' the first line reads 'Destroyed. Damaged. Obliterated.' but the author 'promise[s] to remember the small things.' And she does: in the second part of the book there is an exploration of the 'Branches of a House', conversations with herself and others, discursively unpicking emotions and longing, and a letter to a ghost.

Part 3's 'Winged Narratives', a six page poem in numerous short segments, is a more straightforward attempt to put things in order, to remember, and then move on: 'we listen and *remember forgetfully: again, the outside.*' This is a remarkably moving and accomplished book, personal without being maudlin, dense and thoughtful without being difficult or obtuse.

Rupert Loydell