

The Sum Of Its Parts

Florilegia, Annabel Dover (Moist Press)

There are two main protagonists in this brief, elusive novel: Anna Atkins, an early photographer, and a first person narrator who is the product of a troubled and troubling childhood. These two stories are juxtaposed and gradually form associative connections, but the book is also full of sidesteps and asides, historical facts and fictions, which often seem irrelevant or fanciful, but work to show the flitting mind of the narrator.

There are also 93 small photographs or images reproduced throughout the text, which are all carefully detailed at the end of the book. These seem to act as pauses in the story, perhaps as section breaks, but also provide a meta-commentary, another set of connections or disconnections to the main stories.

I say main stories, but really this book draws attention to and highlights the fact that we impose stories on our lives, make narratives where there are none. *Florilegia* is the sum of its parts, nothing more or less. In perfectly readable, yet sometimes bewildering, clarity it details the way encounters, memories, facts and stories inform and transform our lives, not to mention the lives of contemporary and historical women. How the mundane and ordinary accumulate and congeal into a life. One surrounded by others living very different lives.

There is also an element of fiction in the very facts that Dover has used as her starting point. In a brief 'Preface' the author notes that her research has shown that Anna Atkins' cyanotype prints actually depict composite flowers and plants, assembled from various species, rather than documenting botanical reality. Dover also mentions that the museums and Institutes which hold Atkins' self-published albums, have often re-ordered and edited them. Everything is unstable and open to change, nothing is what it seems.

Moist Books are a new press, who are issuing three books a year, *Florilegia* being one of their 2021 titles. If the writing they publish is all of this standard they are to be applauded, although I think they need to work on their typesetting and design.

Rupert Loydell