



The Corrosion Zone by
Barbara Strang.
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Reviewed by Patricia
Prime.

Barbara Strang is the author of *Duck Weather*, and is editor of Sudden Valley Press. *The Corrosion Zone* is her second collection of poetry. The book is about Strang's home in Christchurch, where she along with many others, experienced tragedy, devastation and loss of life caused by earthquakes in the region. As the title poem suggests, the book is about her experience and perception of what happened when she moved to her new home in the area:

Last summer I did not
go for a swim, last summer
I moved from my home.

Anyway it wasn't much
of a summer, it poured as I left,
The basement of the new house was awash.

The volume contains four sections: "On Godley Head", "Hearts", "Postures of Falling" and "Open Home". It moves from "the wreck / of this land, the skeleton" to the poet's reconciliation as she sees from a bus "the South Island as a shadowy mass bounded by sharp edged cliffs."

There is a variety of subject matter, of style and tone, ranging from nature to human nature, including poems about the loss of a brother, cooking, an elderly pet and housekeeping, among other themes. The poems about her brother's death are among the strongest in the book. One of my favourite poems is "Reading Andrew's Poems":

I read the words this morning
of one whose summer did not come.

His breath slowed
as he hung from a thread,
his life lying below.

Green tomatoes tinge to orange
in 'the fake summer
of an overheated room'.

There is incident and anecdote aplenty, and even her perception of domestic scenes offers a profound and personal take on the ordinariness of ritual, so that we

are invited to see the familiar in a distinctly new light, as in the poem "Things You Left":

You bought a large bag
of pickling onions by mistake –
they're starting to sprout.

I finished the rest of
the prunes on Saturday.

As well as being strikingly original, the images change the way we view the intimacy of the scene.

Strang often uses her skills as a haiku poet in her short pithy verses. An example might be the following verses from "Angel Falls":

Awake at three o'clock –
the night glow is soft,
a moth's wing.

The grey light grows
caressing me through
the lack of you.

The poet often uses nature as a vehicle to examine a more emotional, inner view of the world. There are recurring images of birds, clouds, the garden, flowers, mountains and the sea; yet beneath the surface is a deeper intimacy that connects with the reader. And you return again and again to the poems, opening yourself to their language and meaning. The passion and sincerity of the poems is evident.

The privacy of her experiences is thrown open and becomes public property through language. In the poem "Postures of Falling," for example, Strang undercuts the trauma of divorce through the objectivity of language:

Once you stood
before the family
and the lawyers –

our marriage was solid,
strong, you said,
soon the cracks appeared.

Here her experiences are dealt with, as in other poems, in a manner whereby the minutiae of the image is opened out to a more universal and satisfying understanding.

There is much to admire in Strang's poems, poems which are lyrically confident, varied and well-seasoned. Her controlled use of language and tone make this a lovely collection to read and return to. *The Corrosion Zone* gives a fresh and moving perspective on familiar motifs, and leaves a lasting impression.