



Crumple by Vivienne Plumb, Wellington: Seraph Press (2011). RRP \$25. Pb, pp80. ISBN: 9780473177171. Reviewed by Patricia Prime.

Vivienne Plumb has published six collections of poetry. She has also written and published plays, short fiction and a novel. In her new poetry collection, *Crumple*, Plumb takes us on a series of journeys from Poland, to China, through Italy and Australia and home to New Zealand.

The strength, energy and compassion of Plumb's poetry is impressive; and it is reader-friendly without ever being shallow. She brings a wealth of meticulous observation and personal experience to her writing, through which we recognize and better understand ourselves. She invites us to share her vision and to discover, with her, the "breaking news" which "makes us part our lips." ("crumple").

Plumb seems to enjoy taking huge leaps to link ideas in unpredictable ways: "Irek made *bigos* using cat meat / from the butcher's. He never told us / and we ate it all." ("In Two Minds"). Travel is clearly a passionate interest for the poet and fertile material for a number of poems, among them "A French Movie in Poland", a prose poem divided into four sections in which the poet sits "in the kitchen in Blich Street", with her leg in plaster. The lyrical poem, "Smiley Face", takes place on a train heading for "The Grand Parade":

The teenagers sitting
in front of me draw funny, smiley faces
on the train seat upholstery with
their felt tip pens, and snap photos of
each other doing naughty things.

*You're mean to me, and so I'll be
Mean back, they tell each other.*

As well as other fine lyrics, including the beautiful "The Geographica of Italia", there is her powerful poem "Dragon Head" in which the reader is taken to Shanxi:

and the toilet
is a slit in the ground
where we three Western women pause

the Chinese journalists
ask me
why should other countries worry
about pollution
that is in a country not their own

In "Dog End" the poet returns home:

Back at home and nothing has changed
except the Asian Bus-Stop Whore
is wearing a new blouse. I wonder
who gave her that? She still needs dentures.

The second section of the book contains short prose poems. In "the capital city", the poet probes "one of those ecstatic days when Wellington resembles a jewel on an open palm / the cars are luminous metal-backed bugs like caterpillars laboring up the incline of The Terrace before they tip themselves over the next rise..." These images of the New Zealand landscape through which the poet passes are significant. In "motels in taupo," for instance, she writes:

There was underfloor heating in the tiles in
the kitchen and the bathroom. Warm as
toast. When the warmth hit me I said to
Duggie, I said this'll do us. Spa baths. And all
sorts. The service. In the afternoon I went
shopping and bought two blouses in the
same style, a 14 in the white and a 16 in the
black.

Then, in the final section there are Plumb's enthralling longer poems; travellers' tales about Auckland, Rotorua, bus trips, and more. In the darker lyric, "The Cosmos", she writes about friends who suffer from accidents, ill-health and psychiatric problems:

She was in a motor accident and he
contracted swine flu and she was blind
with fluid on the brain and was allegedly
turned away from the hospital and told
she had psychiatric problems.

Plumb demonstrates an unerring sense of voice, not only in her travel poems in which she presents people and places, but in all her work where she subtly matches voice to mood and subject matter. Minute observation is a compelling drive in Plumb's work, as we see in "Forty-League Boots" where she writes:

My dusty boots are leaden feet
on the plaid picnic blanket
Above the city in shivering paspalum
and talking trees
the invisible ones are with us,
kissing our foreheads.

In this collection there are many fine poems to indulge in. They have memorable lines, compassion and empathy, indelible images, a quirky sense of humour, and a skill in encapsulating the mundane and the extraordinary.