



The Same as Yes
by Joan Fleming.
Wellington: VUP
(2011). RRP: NZ\$28.
Pb, 79pp. ISBN:
9780864736987.
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The poems in *The Same as Yes* can be read as a study in dislocation: like the cover, they illustrate a world of not-quite-there,

where a different angle gives us a different face. Most of these prose poems are dialogues, two parts looking to connect but not succeeding.

In “Blue as the eyes of her mother,” most conversations are one-sided. On an aeroplane, parents talk over a child, Auntie talks to her niece or a woman talks to her sister, but most of the time a child or adolescent is talking to an inanimate object, with no apparent expectation of an answer.

But the objects of your world are without regard. They have no ears to listen to the struggle of human limbs; they can have none. I am like this, too. I can’t keep the rats out of the ceiling so that you can sleep better.

(“Old house saying please”)

In “He and she,” some sense of person-to-person connection emerges. But it is not easy – there is “sweet violence” and the need to distinguish ownership from belonging. We can’t control of the angle of sight; accidents happen, and our direction is changed. (“Small girl talking to the quail chick...,” “He helps she to breathe in...,” “Young man talking to his reflection...”). At the end, the poet looks forward to a relationship in which there is no need for talking:

Underneath the table, their bare feet find each other, yin, arch against arch, making a soft space where speech can grow, in the darkness

(“Husband and wife talk without talking at a difficult dinner party”)

“A mirror and the first face” says that there is no point talking to anything but inanimate objects. We might hope for an answer, but words – although they may bounce off their object – just don’t come back to us. The books are closed even though the bookcase which contains them wants to sing:

The books are all commuters pressed together on a crowded five o’clock train. Every commuter has a bird, trying to beat its wings, inside their chest. No one talks. No one talks about the furled flock of story harboured by the hard spine, the clamouring dusk chorus, suppressed inside the travelling body. Which hardbacks will open up, tonight? Releasing a piteousness of song, a murmur, an exaltation, a flight.

(“Bookcase full of closed books...”)

We see the disjoint and desolate – face-to-face connection has nearly disappeared: “I used to come from you, and you from me, but you probably don’t remember. It was in the beginning, before time got linear and the invention of the chainsaw.” (“Cloud talking to the top of a plantation pine”). Although we need connection, it might well come from outside, almost from outer space.

The collection draws its energy from this dislocation. As long as there is space between “yes” and what we take as “the same as yes”, there is room for the poet to move. Though the books on the shelf are closed, they are still there in front of us. “Even folded up, even shut in the dark of a closed book, you can never leave our ears” (“Young woman talking to a difficult poem...”). This is where connection will happen.