



***Ranging around the Zero* by Terry Locke. Wellington: Steele Roberts Aotearoa Ltd (2014). RRP: \$19.99. Pb, 70pp. ISBN: 9781926242599. Reviewed by Mary Cresswell.**

The poems in **Terry Locke's** new book, *Ranging around the Zero*, are restless ones:

they move back and forth like caged animals, ranging between stillness and activity in a world which doesn't seem to have settled for either as a default setting.

The first half of the book has poems with (for the most part) a sense of constant motion and dislocation. At the very beginning, "Synopsis" says "we are therein deluged/ with/ a universe of meaning". There is "The achievement of a hand axe" "transmitting/ the structure of a mind"; this is followed by "Walking the Heaphy Track", walking up hill as the body tilts and plods. There are poems about wind – about trees – about frogs. All of them involve motion (even the frogs' "...throats vibrate/ with the content of each occasion").

The poems move restlessly across the pages: there are wide gaps within lines and a lavish use of indents and sub-indent. "Rehashing old guilt" gives us a speaker floating in some watery world, slowing down only as

... we step gingerly  
over gunwales to a new craft in the bow  
a black stone at rest as we drift"

"Ranging" (at nine pages length) is the heart of the book, I think. In the poem, Locke acknowledges the ghost of Henry Adams – the nineteenth-century American intellectual who spent his life refining his sense of estrangement from a society into whose upper ranks he had been born. Here, the poet begins briskly:

it's the same irrespective  
am returned to the market  
opens  
it swings back  
& forth I go (i)

But the world gets wilder and more chaotic as the poem proceeds:

this is the night  
to make a new start  
Henry would have it  
we are adrift in  
the rain of it  
spent talking rabbiting on (iv)

Stanza (v) is an explosion of grief, represented by the Korean Airlines plane shot down by Russia in 1983, killing 269 people:

& the knowledge is contained  
of 269 magnolia blooms  
taking their fill of a grey dawn  
too purple for words

The poem then vacillates between sense and nonsense. The poet's need to make sense out of the world vibrates as urgently as did the bees sent into space in the Challenger spaceship (ix), but society itself is deluged by meaningless factoids:

the BLP has 273,803 members  
(cf 680,656 in 1969!)  
whereas  
da da da da da da da da dah!  
the Sun has 4,275,000 readers. (x)

And at the end, language also lets us down.

mark you  
how the client fronts up to  
their agency  
or tied to a tree, folded 'nd guillotined  
he fronts the darted Amazon of words  
frozen in their stench (xi)

Trying to walk the boundary between turmoil and stillness – or between feeling and ratiocination, perhaps – is as impossible for the poet as it was for Henry Adams. Perhaps, like Adams, he may need to turn his back on chosen bits of society. We don't know.

The final poems are less frenetic but are still swirling in activity:

What's left?  
we wonder  
maybe aftershock  
is our condition  
something we have always lived with.

# Reviews



Unshackled from reason  
rhyme picks its way  
dazed along Colombo Street –

...  
Is that where it begins  
the idea of god?  
The flickering of light  
on the wall of the cave?  
("Earthquakes and the idea of God")

We can wonder if our desire for order, our  
insistence on defining patterns, is no more useful  
than our deploring chaos. Maybe – perhaps – they all  
add up to zero.

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