

a fine line

TE RŌPŪ TOIKUPU O AOTEAROA New Zealand Poetry Society

Winter 2024

Tauira / Student Issue



Featured Student Poet: *Sarah-Kate Simmons*

Runner up Student Poet: *Oshadha Perera*

Featured Article: *Tessa Keenan*

Featured Cover Art: *Oshadha Perera*

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Quotations of the season

“If you get tired, learn to rest, not to quit.” — *Banksy*

“The poet is a liar who always speaks the truth.” — *Jean Cocteau*

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Gail Ingram

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Sarah-Kate Simons

Runner-Up Student Poet

Oshadha Perera

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Oshadha Perera: “silhouettes”

Contributing Art

Wanda Amos, Charlotte Black, Ash Parkin, Oshadha Perera, Necia Zimmerman



GAIL INGRAM



Exceptional – Wanda Amos

Student Issue

This winter edition celebrates our young writers, bringing Matariki light to the horizon with their skilful poetry of ideas, loss and dreams. Congratulations to **Sarah-Kate Simons**, our 2024 Featured Student Poet, who is already a master of the woven word (notice her line-breaks and rhythms) to juxtapose ideas like ‘the casual / expiration / of a man’ with ‘your little sister ... in the embrace of the apple tree / singing.’ Powerful writing for our times. Sarah-Kate wins publication alongside a year’s student subscription to **NZSA** and to **NZPS**.

In a very close second place, **Oshadha Perera**, explores grief succinctly and poignantly. **Oshadha** is multi-talented – his stunning art features on our cover, begging a story of its own. Check out the four shortlisted poets too for the future of NZPS and Aotearoa writing.

Tessa Keenan introduces us to her top four poems also from young poets in our featured article. Tessa has recently been published in *AUP New Poets 10* and we also share one of her brilliantly evocative poems.

Our student poets sit easily alongside your poems and haiku of dying horses, trees and glaciers, chorus girls, cuckoos and climate change from some of our favourite members around the motu – **Alastair Clarke, John Ewen, Anne Curran** and **Sue Courtney**, and introducing **Hilary McDaniels, Perena Quinlivan, Kanjini Devi** and **Lee Fraser** to name some new contributors to *a fine line*. We also have close observations of new books in our reviews by **Sudha Rao** (*Town* by **Madeleine Slavick**) and **Anuja Mitra** (*MYTHOS*. Ed **Cadence Chung**) and artwork by talented poet-artists by **Wanda Amos, Charlotte Black, Ash Parkin** and **Necia Zimmerman**.

In NZPS news, I’m delighted to introduce our new Reviews Editor, **Sarah Scott**. When Sarah’s not writing poetry, she is arranging flowers in Pōneke. If you’re interested in reviewing for *a fine line*, please contact Sarah at reviews@poetrysociety.org.nz. You will have also seen the introduction of NZPS monthly newsletters, compiled by **Ruben Mita**. Also from Pōneke, Ruben, who was last year’s featured student poet, is a musician and ecologist. Please send news of events, journals and new books in your area to Ruben at admin@poetrysociety.org.nz.

Our next issue, the spring edition returning with the light, is aptly themed “Rama / Light”. Please submit up to four poems (40 lines max) and artwork on the theme, and/or up to four haiku, by 10 Sept 2024 via Submittable on our webpage: <https://www.poetrysociety.org.nz/afl-home/afl-submit/> Be sure to follow the guidelines – it keeps your editor happy.

But for now, join us in celebrating the star-bright future for poetry via our young poets.

**SARAH-KATE
SIMONS**



– Oshadha Perera

My World Looks More Like Yours Out of a Plane Window

Your fingerprints, like subtle promises, dapple
the soft skin of the world, you could
peel it
like a citrus fruit and it would be so
round, so sweet
we would taste it and want
more
we always want
more.
we want to unravel your stitches and re
thread the world in our image
but who is capable of unravelling
this? the blue
knit of the ocean, the mountains' lacy mob-
caps, dry tear tracks where rivers
once wept
were they your
tears
as you mourned our wayward
hearts?
when you hung the stars
we were still just a glimmer in the
corner
of your eye.
there's a lake in the middle
of a mountain, shrouded
by grazing cloud and I
wonder
if anyone has seen this since the lion
lay down with the lamb and everything
was new-born
we're still just children,
after all.

Yesterday I Broke the Car's Nose

they always call these things
accidents:
the sideswipe, the uppercut, i wish
i could say we got in a brawl
at a roundabout but it was nothing so
sensational

i was thinking still
of bright lights and the hands
in my mouth, terraforming
the contours of my teeth and not
the fleshy fist of the garage
wall

you're doing well but i
wasn't, at the sound
of the impact i put the car
in reverse but the damage was already
done—

metal skin split
metal bones cracked.

OSHADHA PERERA

Pulse

You would sit on the treehouse,
legs dangling in the air,
and touch the pink sky,
watching shadows get longer,
the silhouettes of stars,
and birds flying home.

You would trace your finger
along constellations,
whisper to aurorae,
under the pulsing sky,
rhythms and heartbeats,
still breathing,
still singing.

You might feel the clouds,
how they wrap around you,
remember how things used to be
before she was an aurora in the sky,
magenta waves sinking,
when you would look out the window,
and hope,
that heartbeats and pulses,
the voice she whispers in,
will still be there
the next day.

First published Dunedin Public Libraries (2023)

When You Were a Child

This is the sea where you learnt to swim,
your eyes tracing seagulls' flight paths,
while your dad taught you how to float,
spread your arms and relax,
feel the water hold you up
and whisper a silent thanks.

This is the sea that crept under your door,
every night, whispering its secrets,
warm water slithering on the floor.
This is the sea that stared back at you,
plastic scabs melting into the water,
as we drove into the dust,
dried memories scattered in the air.

First published *Calanthe Press* (2023)

Shortlisted Student Poets



Charlotte Black

Emma Philips

The Search

Pet lambs always disappear before they have to see us eat roast mutton
Small mercies you don't give me
Over your tracks you paint iridescent oranges purples pinks
Colours stolen from the James Webb telescope that we can't make out with the cones in
our eyes

And they say you were taken
They say you ran away
They say pieces of you will wash in with the tide lobotomised and unrecognisable
Served with roast potatoes and mint sauce
And the police don't have a telescope at the first Lagrange point
They can't trace the path you went down
Just name the road you were last seen on and flash their search lights through the forest
Dredge the river

But there are broken fragments of solar systems left in your wake
The tilt on venus different where you knocked it with your muddied white nikes
I take down number plates in the park and question all the astronauts
"Do you know where the pet lambs went?"
Reaching into the pond I grasp at the space between reflections of stars
The night runs through my fingers

First published *Given Words* (2023)

Trees in Autumn

We shed each other

Trees in autumn

Deciduous

Orange leaves on grey concrete and then the wind takes them

A susurrus

You move on

And I go on

There are times when I look in the sand behind me

As if I could read the marks we made before the tide came in

Spindly bare branches frame

The sky

Cradle her lovingly in blue glory

I calculate the probability I see you again

Autumn leaves never rise back up

Instead I watch tentative new growth

Unfurling green

Old leaves turn from orange to brown

Rot and clog the drains

Turn to mush in the rain

Sweep it all away

This city is not to be marred with the old

I forget

Slowly

Mariam Rietveld

Storytelling

He said, *you think you know stars
yet you are not worth it, you are just
a dreamer.*

She replied, *the stars are my relatives,
they teach me to radiate.*

*Your expressions make no sense, he countered,
they just glitter your talks
without any value.
And my words will be—*

*Plenty writes better than you.
When she said this on the fourth night
she had seen the moon smile at her
asking her to be luminous.*

*If only you didn't have those, he began
pointing his finger at her, bright eyes
and loud laughter, you would just be another shadow.*

She told him ... *then the sky
took a deep breath, breathed
stories into my soul.*

You're all talk, aren't you? he accused her
with a sneer.

She replied, *show me someone without stories
and I'll show you
a silent world.*

Tessa Smith

identity matrix

Proof I:

In living, we accept that there is nothing from which we can emerge unscathed.

the ink leaches from your hands

into the shower wall, thick and blue and bloody

faint anoxic tinge remains with your fingertips

wrinkled like raisins

even bodies are origami –

we hold our fold lines in our hands and give them names

this line for the head, this for the heart, this

will tell you how many children you have

and your children too, will seek to hide these creases

why shouldn't our bodies look lived in?

no amount of graph paper can solve

a problem for which no solutions exist

In calculus we call this inconsistent;

in life it is just another Wednesday

and yet try we must, so we find our derivatives

reduce down and down

and down

until we meet our match

our ouroboros

a written notation for nothing

invented when we realised we needed a word for loss or grief or

what was never there in the first place

sometimes when we touch

the universe forgets that we are supposed to be different

reality can no longer determine our discriminant

two

or one

or zero?

even our own atoms can never truly meet so –

on a certain level 'yours' and 'mine' become abstract concepts

hold on tight enough and we need not fuse.

even if you multiply a matrix by the identity

while it may appear the same to us

a process has still occurred

Q.E.D.

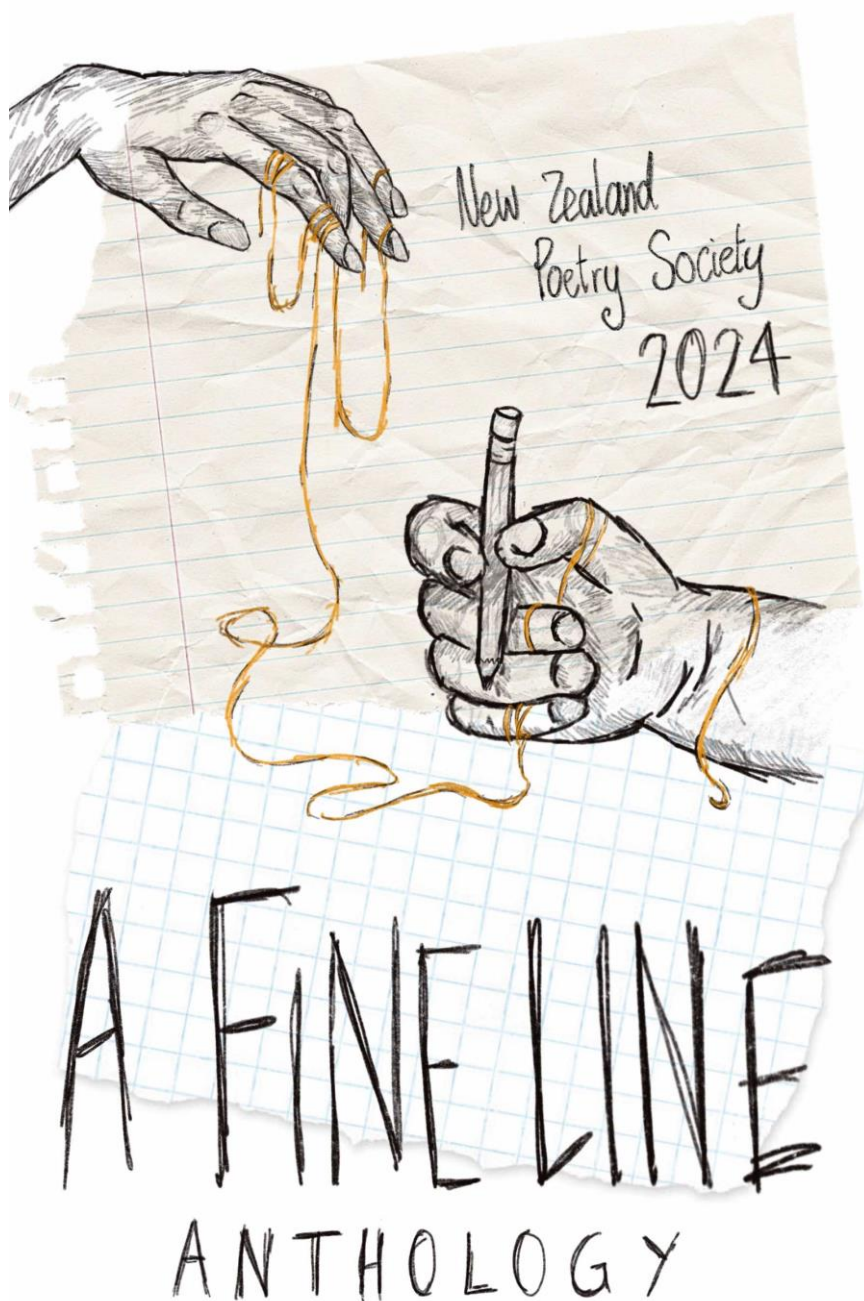
Baxter L. M. Williams

From up here, all the lights

From up here, all the lights
blend into a twinkling cityscape,
an ever-changing fabric, shifting
like a living thing
with a tail stretching miles
& breaths that shake neighbourhoods.
It's easy to forget
that the light from each window
illuminates a person
whose night is their own,
their thoughts and secret desires,
which shape the furtive glances
they share with beautiful strangers
on wine-tinted nights.
What are they thinking?
Who do they pine for
as their pillows soak
with hot tears
& their arms grope blindly
for the bodies of lost lovers,
whose breath mingles with theirs
now just a memory?

Tessa Keenan

Ngā Tētēkura: Reading Aotearoa's Young Poets



2024 *a fine anthology* – Ash Parkin

Aotearoa is heaving with the poetic talent of young people. Young poets pave the way for the generations below them, and because of this we have seen the rise in journals, publications, and spaces to house young people's writing, such as *Starling* and *Symposia*. I am grateful for the myriad of new and growing opportunities for us to have our voices heard.

I devour the poetry of young people when it is released, which seems to occur almost every week. In particular, I have four favourite poets I keep an eye out for: Aroha Witinitara, Aruna Bhakta, Margo Montes de Oca, and Sadie Lawrence. Each produce work that is equally quiet and daring, comforting but original.

The night ends in the dining room.
Someone reads the karakia off the laminated sheet.
But not before you, Take. Your. Hat. Off.
(Aroha Witinitara, "Anga Atu")

I have been lucky enough to hear Aroha Witinitara read their poem "Anga Atu" (*Starling* Issue 15) in person. It is an example of a poem that situates the reader in a hyper-specific setting but leaves room for them to bring themselves to the poem. We cannot know the voice of the person saying 'Take. Your. Hat. Off.' but it sounds familiar. Witinitara's poem is littered with ordinary objects, 'We drink hot milo out of the glass marae mugs'... 'Everyone knows that the red K-Bars are the best', which makes it honest. You trust their voice. You even come to think of 'laminated sheet[s]' as poetic. "Anga Atu" is a poem I aspire to write; it is delicately crafted, poetic storytelling, and Witinitara is a leading rangatahi voice.

Our young poets take us to particular special places and memories. Margo Montes de Oca's "Apple Tree Bay" (*Starling* Issue 16) sounds like waking up to the sound of the sea, mimicking what happens to the people in the poem. Life at Apple Tree Bay is as constant and certain as 'breath', yet is actively being brought into existence:

your breath folds itself outwards
you reach toward me in the gathering light
the whole beach is in your fingernails

I love how Montes de Oca is not afraid to format her words in a steady flow from one side of the page to the other. Other poets might risk predictability using the margin or use experimental formatting rather than labour over their words. In "Apple Tree Bay", the reader can let go, and rely on lines to flow 'like the tide'. Montes de Oca's use of format adds to the meaning of her words and draws you in to the poem. Some of my other favourite poems of hers are the daring translation of "Sappho [21]" (*Starling* Issue 16), and "only" (*Sweet Mammalian* Issue 10), which makes me think of the ones I love by using a constant tone and quiet words.

I could not write a piece about young people's poetry without shouting out my good friend Aruna Bhakta. Bhakta's poems deal with the weight of youth. For example in "The Magicians Daughter", which appears in *Starling* Issue 16, she examines the contradictions of her genealogy, or in "Little Miss Apocalypse", also in *Starling* Issue 16, explores the end of freedom on a trip to Martinborough which is cut short because of another lockdown announcement. Similar to Montes de Oca, Bhakta is not afraid to use the page:

I am a magician's daughter,
I will cut myself in half again soon

(Aruna Bhakta, “The Magician’s Daughter”). It’s as if she has thrown her words at it, but the result is not a Jackson Pollock painting. Bhakta’s words hold their place on the page, each line standing apart from the other. The reader can’t hide from the words, much like the speaker can’t hide from the conflicts of her reflection.

“Pet Name” by Sadie Lawrence (AUP New Poets 10) takes you by the shoulders, sits you down, and says ‘listen to me!’

...I never thought to
worry that one day the word would be
said without connotation, meaning only
A Young Dog...

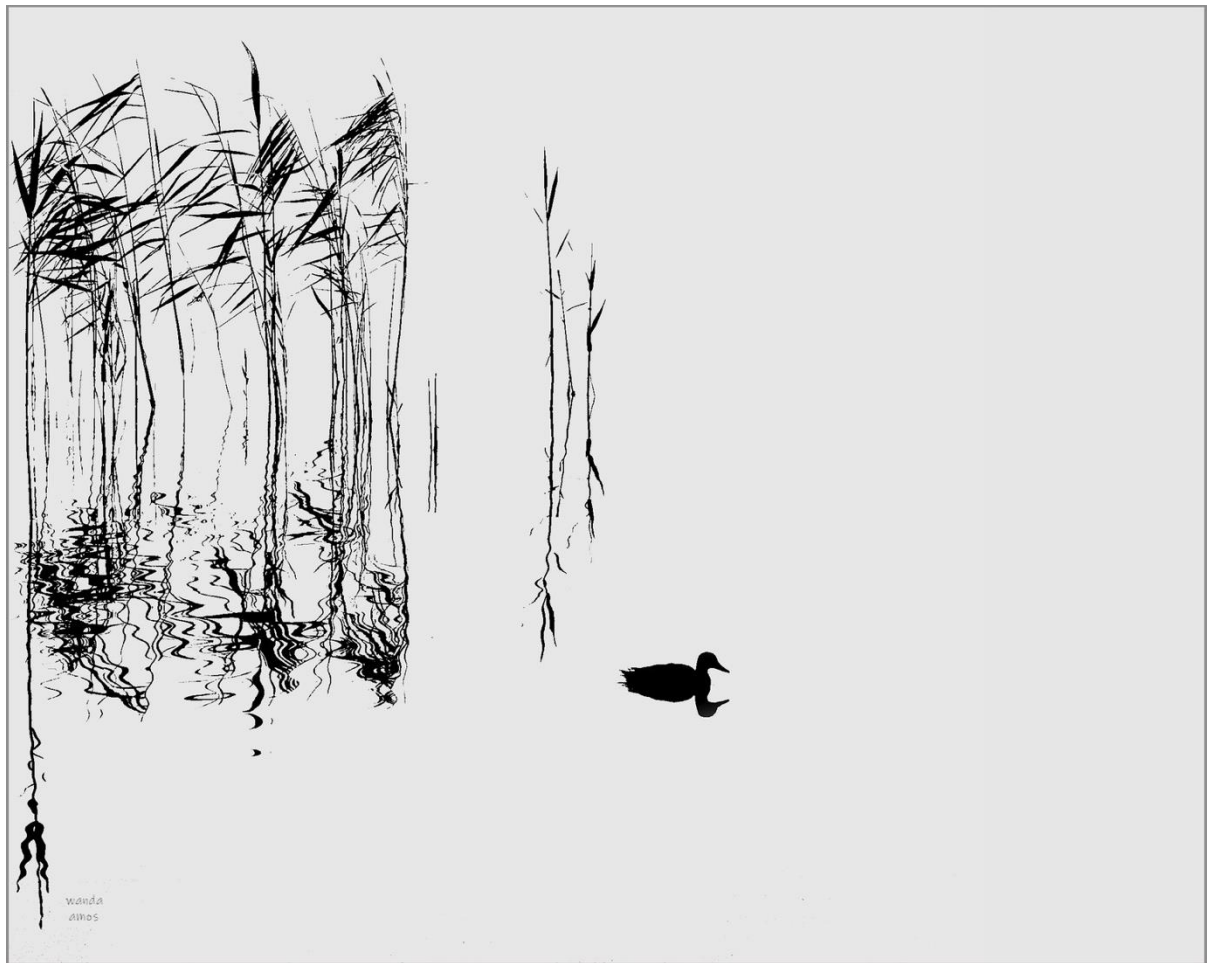
The sharp and sometimes confronting metaphors are achieved with musical, flowing descriptions and words that roll off each other: ‘my little xylophone with your / ribcage exposed’, ‘a seismic shift down my apple-core centre’. As you might guess from these examples, there is no comfort to be found in this poem – because, as she says, there is ‘another family home I’ll never see / again’. The poem is questioning, searching for meaning, but the ending threatens to “Sting and / splinter”. And the last line rewards. No spoilers – go and read it yourself!

Many young poets in Aotearoa are creating work that is wise beyond the years of the writer. We can clearly see the range of stories that our young poets engage with when you read the works of Witinitara, Montes de Oca, Bhakta, and Lawrence. These poets teach me to be bold with words and to not shy away from honest, specific topics. Aotearoa youth poetry ‘spills into the gold / hollow places’ (Montes de Oca, “Sappho [21]”) and fills us with new experiences.

Tessa Keenan

Coastal Driveway Song

In your car / I am recording the best bathroom stall conversation / and it starts with pressing your foot to the accelerator / like make an echo noise which means whisper / then wait / put your wrists together and push the noise forward / we will generate unexpected steam / making the buttons tremble and tearing you up / like an odd look / odd ponytails / you driving a mini / I want to spend my money on microphones / to attach to every corner of your car / in some ways / we are fake / we can try to make background noise drive us to a garden of sweaty men who like neo-funk / our ankles / our tape / our restricted licences / I hated noise before we started / now I want to take it / I like the way your hips look / moving / pretending they're not belted to a seat.



Duck – Wanda Amos

Perena Quinlivan

Ode to ANZAC Day

Our tūpuna look down from above at the to-do, wondering what to make of it. The merry choir in fashionable uniforms pierce the early morning chill blue sky with cherry voices. Strong winds blow strands of hair over shiny white teeth. Like a pearl, the National Anthem is prized open and sung, the still air is sliced by the karakia, cutting open the space with blood.

Aue! We didn't return to our farms, our jobs, our general store shop, our creaky iron bed with thin, itchy woollen green blankets, our black dogs with big eyes and sloppy tongues, our horses with no saddles and dumb names, our fine pākehā neighbours who shared fruit for bottling, our best summer swimming holes, our kai moana, our wives, our girlfriends, our boyfriends, our mates, our tamariki, our whenua where we were born, where our placenta and ancestors wait, believing, even now we will return.

Brothers from the Coast, we're petrified, breathing black barbs crawling amidst decay and smoke using the flesh of rotting comrades to shield us, blubbing like babies in silence. The fatal blow strikes. We pay the price of our citizenship. Mum calls; her soft, gentle tangi reaches Tunisia's alien sands. Amidst the butchery our wairua soars, leaving our ripped carcasses and bones below, silage for night predators in the eerie, smoky silence.

The Queen is Dead

Trumpets ring out
flags slice the surly mist
light tumbles, your lustre is fading.

The karanga calls
you take flight, voiceless
haere ki te atua, haere, haere, haere.

To some a blurred vision
your slight hands gifted to a country, and tender caress
gone. Your whanau pani, adrift.

Summoned by the deep, luminous voices
the public spectacle holds us.
Our time is coming.

Stella Peg Carruthers

Interface

Boxes watch us. Blinking
green to blue. Sometimes red.
 Windows is failing.
 Again.

He shows me pictures of his paintings
A paper portfolio *cos tech issues*, *man*.
There are the mountains of my childhood, snowcapped.
Rivers shadowed by the race of clouds.
He tells me he likes exploring light
 how it changes things.

The walls are made of glass in the space he rents upstairs.

We talk about books he only reads non-fiction.
I read fiction, but we both chase words
Where even the mention of flowers
 Cannot soften a history of violence.

To lighten the mood, he finds British comedy skits online.
We hunch close over the screen, our heads arched back
 in mirth.

We are everyday kids and yet we are divine
screwing up landscapes and ripping love hearts right in half.

We are illuminated Marys.
We are blue light deities.
We are twenty-first-century kids reading pixels.
We seek out glass rooms and the thin shadows of winter days.

 We look for laughter in the cloud.

SK Grout

Showers in May

You don't hit the high note on the first
go-round, but you try and try again.
I hear you practise from the bedroom
expanding where humidity breaks down
partition wall. The marble enables you.
I imagine what was said last night
between you and your diary – baseball
scores, pouring filter coffee over ice,
the perfect puppy growl. The song changes.
There are not words to elevate you
just a humming driven up your body
like something known before it's seen,
taking all expectations laid within my hands
and scattering like polaroids. There you go
being such a nuisance, again. Nostalgia
brims over everything, even my extended metaphor.
The medicine cabinet slams and I know in 3-2-1
the bathroom will be mine.

Sherryl Clark

Thursday 5.00 pm

A line of chorus girls high-kick
past the baked beans, and the checkout ladies
burst into song. Everyone in the supermarket
is ecstatic – dollar coins twinkle in the air
like tiny stars, we all flap our shopping lists
in time to the rock band ripping out
a heavy-metal version of ‘Imagine’
over by the bread racks.

The manager stands in the freezer cabinet,
champagne bottles nestled among the peas,
and pours us a glass as we fill our trolleys.
It’s free chocolate day.

Muscled youths in tight black jeans
and T-shirts carry our groceries to the car
and say, ‘You’re very welcome, ma’am.’
The lights are so gloriously bright that
I can’t bear to tear myself away and
trudge home to my ordinary kitchen
where the radio hums in quiet mutiny and
the cats howl for fresh blood.

Lee Fraser

Sorry I Forgot Your Names

Sorry I forgot your names
my mind was swirling
with how you introduced your children
as if they weren't grocery bags or
which vehicle is yours in the car park.

Sorry I don't remember what
you said your job was
I was beholding cheekbone summits
as you explained it
imagining backstory
how long this dream
has thumped its Morse
in your chest.

I just lost your last four sentences
decoding your vowels' global origins
cross-matching with
where and how you say your 'r's
and your "needs washed"
or that your ride is coming "now now."

I'm drawing a blank on what suburb you're in
I saw a biography behind where
your eyes went just before you answered
a whole posture
diplomatic grace in the face of frustration.

Your relationship status escapes me
but I remember you learn from your garden
soar when you work out
and hate beans;
that you admire your father
wish you'd known your grandmother
and are uncomfortable about your landlord.

Conversation data
might drop through my fingers
but a mindmap
heartbeat
soulprint in my hands
remains.

Courtney Edwards

At the Time of Your Calving

the Tasman Glacier

Even if you build a wall
of ice and fortify your pain
in a moat of clouds. Even if you
cling to the coldest pinnacle of your
grief until you are scarred and chapped
even if you recede slowly into the fog and
throw snow at those who dare wander by and
even if you hold it all in until you're blue on the face.

You can never escape your place in the order
of things. What I mean to say is, your sharp edges
will smooth this valley. Your rich silt will turn to milk
and feed the plankton which will feed the air that will sustain
my breath, which I will lose at the sight of your beauty. And even
though I shake at everything your shrinking represents, I can't help but marvel
at the sound of your
breaking.

Alastair Clarke

Awaiting Gabrielle

Kia ora. Ka mate. The beans briefly lived, then died.
The tomatoes lived, then died. Such are cycles. And failures.

We know these. While judgment is suspended (the Stoics'
position), the garden dries. While Gabrielle's dark clouds

gather moodily. The cyclone will live briefly,
furiously. Rain palpably nears. It will beat down.

It will cease. (Can I say die?) Sand bags are piled
like sleeping opossums. Voices are lost in rising wind.

Heavy swells swamp the small pier. Tension is high.
All will pass. While the waves will persist, sculpting,

re-shaping the sea, carving, moulding, re-moulding the land.

Spared

She walked under the green bullets
while the clouds rattled above.
This was her way – each movement a play –
her shift toward sane –

the leaves
the rippling water the water-birds
tumbling drifting

their noisy chatter

The space was good – Yet we might fear
in the hurtling green dark markers elsewhere

How many removes in any space
can we be from ordinary human fury?

The plate on her bench read a good life,
“well lived”. Was he spared?

Hilary McDaniel

Stan and the Wabash

*~ I long to see my mother standing in the doorway
as she stood there years ago her boy to greet.*

On The Banks Of The Wabash- Paul Dresser

In the dish room he was
sometimes so hungry he ate
off the returned trays.
Blue and golden that man
adopted and searching
for his birth mother.

I was just out of high school
a temp and part-time student.
Sometimes I'd turn around
to someone singing my name
between classes.
He'd wink at me on his way to physics.

That's why one day we walked east
down the levee to the river
and we didn't stop.

Just in to our shins
that river then dead
the deepest only 8ft
at Peru, Indiana.

Up to our waists and watching
skyward to the
bridges' underbelly
so high above us.

The far banks steep
the water pouring from my converse tennis shoes
sliding up mud.

A decade later
a picture came in the mail
of a large toothless woman
grinning with big arms around
my river-wader.

Joseph Shaw

Lillian the Heron of Ōkārīto

Swimming in slime, my life in deep water, a murky home, sublime in Ōkārīto Lagoon, I search to eat one chilly morning at the edge, in the shallow I look up for no reason, and there she is, perched on a thin twig, white feathered with sharp bill, *hello who are you?* I ask, my huge eel head breaks water, she looks down at me, Lillian the Heron, *call me Lily*, never one to be shy I reply, *call me Tuna the Eel*, the more I move below, the more beautiful she gets, she stretched that long white feathered neck like an Egret shooting star, whistling over my lagoon, we talk, for time means nothing to this monster, she tells me how lonely she is, which I find hard to believe, her white feathers move in the breeze, like a whisper I console her, *don't be sad little kōtuku*, my eel heart aches for this strange creature of land, of air, that day went, that week, a month, then a year, we grew close but we would never be together, I am an ugly eel of the slime, Lillian is this beautiful white heron, like the full moon, reflecting off the lagoon at night, no place for me on a thin twig, one day Lily took flight, I searched for her all in vain, my kōtuku love, if only Lillian would come back, I believe she's with her own kind now, I miss her, I think of her deeply and I'm heart-depressed, I will die in cold slime, floating, forgotten down deep to the lithium bottom, a misty rainbow will drift over Ōkārīto then be gone.

John Ewen

Death of a Horse

He freely conceded he'd been driven
why else would he sell everything
he'd owned to buy eight thousand
acres of wilderness, or gather
unwanted horses from across
his country.

The tree is ancient, great gnarled roots
spread out like tentacles grasp
the ground in all directions
mirrored in the air by branches
that seem too long, too heavy
to hold up both themselves
and the hot sky.

In the shade a wild horse stands dying
It's not alone. As always, another
from the herd waits not far away
moving closer when the other drops
to the ground and remains
nearby

unmoving, patient, *being there*
until every sign of breathing stops.
Then and only then will it move away
rejoin the herd. No horse is left alone
to die.

Hunger Stones

The Rhine and Elbe rivers can run deep
If you see me then look upon these words and weep

while down within their depths a secret keep
If you see me then look upon these words and weep

in times of drought the hunger stones appear
If you see me then look upon these words and weep

scribed with messages these past nine hundred years
If you see me then look upon these words and weep

of looming famine – more often now they show
If you see me then look upon these words and weep

with climate change we reap all that we sow
If you see me then look upon these words and weep

Jackson

view

the great tree
beheaded
to construct
a view

view to construct a beheaded tree
the great

great the tree beheaded
a construct
to view

Elliot McKenzie

Ouroboros

The helicopter circles
over each suburb one
by one. I walk around
the basin. I loop around
the park, around the
path at mission bay
with A. The dog chases
his tail. You fall deeply
in and out of love.
Fragments and whole
clusters of your love
endure for a lifetime.
Be grateful when they
come back to you.

The line is cast in and
out. The hum of the
machines at the gym
as the fan is powered.
The echo of voices
warbling in the indoor
pool. The slap of wet
skin in the sauna. Your
tears come readily,
unlike mine. This time,
I am a shoulder for
you to cry on.

This time, I am not
waiting for a
transmission. If I am a
lamb, then you are also
a lamb. If I am a mystery
then I remember you
saying we could kiss &
miss other people's
perspectives. Is that
cheating? It feels like it.

windy peaks / city mouse

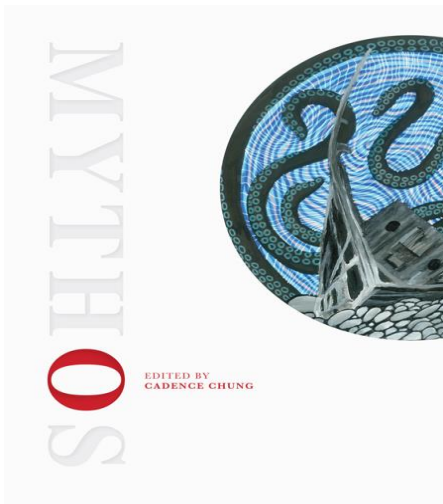
am i a doormouse? or am i the family dog? what is the third largest problem in the ward/word/world? do you still have those photos you took of me asleep, and smaller than the first? pinnacles of vulnerability and trust.

i miss your mother sometimes, your nieces and nephews. i could've been the coolest uncle to them, if it didn't mean i also had to be your suffering city mouse wife.

Anuja Mitra

MYTHOS – Cadence Chung

(Wellington: Wai-te-ata Press, 2024). 978-1-877159-32-9. 92pp.



Fresh off the printers at Wai-te-ata Press, *MYTHOS* is lovely to look at: Hannah Hitchcock’s cover art makes me feel as if I’m peering through a porthole into another world – a mysterious, fantastical world. The call to adventure comes on the third page, in the form of a QR code promising ‘the full audio experience’. This transports me to a playlist featuring readings of all the poetry in the anthology, recordings of all the music, and audio descriptions of some of the visual art. Musical pieces are represented in the book through sheet music, an accompanying reflection by the composer, and performance notes.

However a reader chooses to experience *MYTHOS* – predominantly on the page, or exclusively by ear – one thing is certain: this ambitious multidisciplinary anthology, skilfully curated by Cadence Chung with polished design by Erin Dailey and audio engineering by Kassandra Wang, is something truly unique.

While its title brings to mind the past, *MYTHOS* brims with an appreciation of *this* moment; both in its beauty and its hardship. The range and experimentation of these young New Zealanders’ work make for a thrilling, at times unpredictable journey (the unpredictability beginning, deliberately or not, with the lack of a table of contents).

A great deal of the pieces capture the ache of growing older, contemplating loss and longing, childhood and home, body and self. It’s always been part of the human experience to grapple with ephemerality: how do we try to make the most of our lives when nothing is permanent? Art is a way of achieving what immortality we can, through enshrining (indeed, ‘mythologising’) our experiences.

Zia Ravenscroft is one of many contributors to romanticise the everyday in “Home Run”. A portrait of the fervency of young love, Ravenscroft chronicles the stages of his relationship with his beloved. These progress from baking a pie together to enacting arcane rituals, which see the poet a willing sacrifice ‘laid out on a ceremonial altar, ritual knife cool against my skin’. In “Mahuika as a Boy”, named for the Māori goddess of fire, Cadence Chung adapts Jackson McCarthy’s intimate poem about ‘a cold night ... waiting for takeaways’ into a piece of classical music with rich, soaring strings. The effect is that the poet’s longing observations about his companion (‘your mouth, / your lips, your nose’) are made as momentous to us as they are to him. And why shouldn’t they be?

With “Archaeology”, Aroha Witinitara argues in favour of reclaiming the canon, highlighting the stories the heteronormative Western tradition hasn’t considered worth telling. On learning the tale of Tūtānekai and Tiki, two men in Māori mythology who shared a romantic bond, Witinitara thinks of the centuries-long erasure of LGBTQIA+ people. ‘History has not been kind, and now we are excavating our stories / from where they’ve been buried’, they write, declaring: ‘I want a turn with the shovel’.

This theme of myth-making runs throughout *MYTHOS* in overt and less overt ways. “Beach House”, a lovely, airy song by Alice Burnett and Anna Prail, immerses us in moments that already feel like memories. ‘i don’t know how it ends but it ends and it ends // and i could walk it with you’, the two sing, accepting that though their connection won’t last forever they can still treasure the present. Pippi Jean’s effective “Eventually” is another spin on feeling your current self become part of the past. The poem starts conversationally, outlining a day looking after a young neighbour, before the boy’s father shows Jean photos of his own youth and she realises ‘I am that age I may have to take in pictures / out of the bookcase to show the babysitter.’ I admire the almost disquieting final line, ‘the light turns on me’, for what it says about ageing; about our helplessness in the face of time.

“Creation Myth”, composed and written by Xiaole Zhan, takes the idea of personal mythologies in a different direction. Stemming from Zhan’s childhood memory of being tricked into eating crocodile flesh as a Chinese folk remedy for asthma, the text is striking enough:

(having been lied to as a child)
(i mistrust the drenched / suburban)
(miasmatic memory - / lands like water in
my lungs)

But it’s the music that takes it to another level, featuring a soloist speaking the words above what sounds like a haunted Greek chorus. They underscore the words with wails, scoffs, and even a ‘somewhat offensive exaggeration’

of ‘nasal’ and ‘oriental’ vowels and inflections’ (as described in the performance notes), creating an atmosphere of unease. It’s a strange and captivating piece exploring cultural traditions, racism, and the ambivalent feelings we may harbour about our upbringing.

Other impactful pieces include “Celluloid” by Maia Armistead, a poem that might yield a number of interpretations about self-image and the discomfort of seeing yourself, or maybe only *versions* of yourself, on film. Reading it gives me the sensation of being in a hall of mirrors; I enjoy the vividness of ‘my body is a joke waiting to crack. My smile / holds an old fear of somebody bursting in on me’. In “The Burial / Decomposition”, Josh Toumu’a confides similar feelings of disconnection from his body, but mingles this with an irony that carries the poem to its playful close. Its opening lines have a masterful rhythm:

Wrap me in burial cloth and put me to
bed! I cannot
afford the bones that hold me — cannot
bear
the brunt of this language (or is it bare?)

The final section of *MYTHOS* is dominated by “Every Extinguished Light”, an urgent, beautiful piece with music and text by Kassandra Wang. It largely borrows words from a 2020 post by user @六日 on the Chinese social media platform Weibo. The post was deleted, and the user confronted by officials, but their plea to the world to remember the suffering of Chinese communities in Wuhan devastated by COVID-19 lingered with Wang. The result is a musical work in four movements that honours both the pain of those in tragic circumstances and the resilience of the human spirit. The piano and vocals switch between fluid and frenzied, combining in a lament for a city ‘unable to wail / unable to cry out’ – but whose people ‘will never be silent again’. This is a powerful work that should be shared widely. It’s a work to shake us from our inaction against injustice, and remind us of all the people in the world deprived of a voice.

a fine line

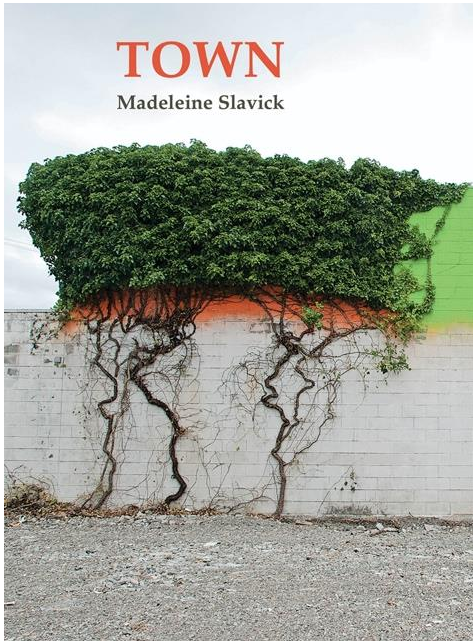
MYTHOS is a highly innovative anthology. I wanted to both savour *and* take it in all at once. It collapses the boundaries typically drawn between poetry, music and art, and encourages us to consider our own mythologies and those of our society: through what we've inherited, who we are, and what we'll leave behind.

To review books for *a fine line*,
please contact Sarah Scott,
reviews@poetrysociety.org.nz

Sudha Rao

Town – Madeleine Slavick

(Wellington: The Cuba Press, 2024). 978-1-98-859576-4. 132pp.



Madeleine Slavick's *Town* is an intimate diary-like collection of her 'growing up' experience in Aotearoa New Zealand. Cleverly designed by Tara Malone and Paul Stewart at The Cuba Press, the fifty photographs and fifty words/poems form a compact compilation. The words/poems and images reveal Slavick's transformation as she makes sense of the new landscape and finally blossoms into it.

Slavick is no stranger to new experiences in a new land. She came to Aotearoa New Zealand via a twenty-five-year sojourn in Hong Kong from her birthplace, the United States. Her keen eye picks out details a newcomer sees that others could miss. As a result, her images and words give an insight into how she understands her new world and finds her place in it.

Slavick's photographic eye is a counterbalance to her writing voice. The photographic images

form the landscape or backdrop to the conversation of the poems. Her choice of images remind me of Elizabeth Bishop's use of details to unfold a poem, as in "At the Fishhouses", where she paints a seaside picture one yearns to enter. While Bishop's poem is set by the water's edge, Slavick is positioned at a town's edge, waiting for its personality to be uncovered or discovered.

By her own admission, Slavick likes numbers, and they abound in this collection, starting with the first, "The Road Where I Live". Whether it is the counting of objects, people, animals or the telling of time and its seasons, Slavick's use of numbers emphasises the details of the place, often appearing list-like:

Five sheep stare at the movement of my
body, five black cattle stand with
enlarged udders, and five sparrows on a
wire do not fly off when pigs squeal. I
have always loved to count.
("The Road Where I Live")

Another day, a typed sheet of paper:
Missing 6 sheep, 2 ewe hoggets, 4
lambs. Sometime around 4 March to 8
March. If they turned up at your place,
please call.
("At The End Of The Drive")

The portrayal of town life accentuates Slavick's initial solitariness, but it is also an intimate contemplative experience of the cycles of a new life. In Pico Iyer's book *The Half-Known Life: In Search Of Paradise*, Iyer writes about his travels across countries in search of paradise, revealing the solitariness of such a venture. He is reminded of and comments on Emily Dickinson's poems: 'much of the time she seemed to be keeping company with what she couldn't see through; she treated what she didn't know with intimacy,

as if it were her daily familiar.’ (*The Half Known Life: In Search Of Paradise*, Pico Iyer) For me, Slavick’s narrative style, be it words or images, resonates with Pico Iyer’s thoughts on the intimate nature of the discovery of a new land and of new cultures. There is an underlying sense of alone-ness that Slavick overcomes by sharing her thoughts and feelings and by showing what she observes. Poems such as “At The End of the Drive”, “Signs”, “Animal Stories”, and “Do You Lock Your Door” are depictions of Slavick’s daily familiar and an invitation to her world. Yet, as if in conversation with the reader, Slavick allows us to draw our own interpretations of the world she is discovering. These shared observations enhance the conversational tone:

Three flags at the entrance: of the
company, of this country where the trees
are cut, of the country where the lumber
goes. Each log has a fluorescent spot.

By night, the lit white stacks become a
little city.
Each truck a carnival.
 (“Factory”)

It can be a risk to reuse things of
unknown persons.
 (“Hong Kong Song”)

Reflections of this nature are sprinkled
throughout the collection, along with lovely
images:

Between the artificial lake and sewage
plant, early morning wings of thirty-five
swans, seventeen pairs and a single.
They trim the fringe of overhanging
willow, and in the season of guns, hide
in orchards.
 (“Hello”)

And some great lines hold an underlying irony:

A man called a loved one Fantail. She
also left.
 (“Pīwakawaka”)

I love the poem more than I love you,
writes a woman who lives in a windy
valley...
 (“Write, Writer”)

It is clear Slavick has a deep respect for the
peoples of the land she lives on. Several poems
highlight and pay homage to tangata whenua as
an integral part of her physical and emotional
landscape. ‘A sign marks the town line, in two
languages. In Māori, the name speaks of song
and longing. In English, a dead man and a
suffix’. (“Hello”)

This respect extends to her Hong Kong life,
coupled with a tinge of longing for her former
landscape:

I do not want to tick the box Pākehā or
New Zealand European. I want to
choose Asian and write Hong Kong,
where I learned my song.
 ‘Need’ and ‘want’, the same word in
Cantonese.
 (“Hong Kong Song”)

We learn the alphabet, how to count to
ten, the O and A categories of what can
and cannot be possessed. Words for the
left side of the body, not always the
same as for the right.
 (“Lesson Number One”).

This collection traverses many topics. As one
meanders through *Town*, Slavick emerges not
just as a bystander but one who has adapted to
the turning life-cycles of a town. There is a focus
on the routines of rural life, with poems about
animals, on becoming a parent, the kindness of
neighbours and embracing the world of tangata
whenua:

The daughter has an accident on a
mountain road at one ‘o’clock in the
morning. She talks on the phone with
our red-haired neighbour for the hour it
takes us to go pick her up.
 (“Neighbour”)

This revealing and appealing collection offers up the singular voice of Slavick as she embraces a new land. Her outsider's perspective is like a slow opening flower into a world that's becoming more familiar: 'It is the bud I love and the after-flower.' ("Beautiful Desolation")

The images are intimate and evoke feelings of overcoming solitariness. Half-way through the book Slavick hints at the reasons for coming to Aotearoa New Zealand and the ones that keep her here after a quarter of a century growing up in Hong Kong:

I was auntie, wife and sister in my Hong Kong family.
Here I am partner and sometimes call myself a Nother,
Another mother for a daughter I did not bear.
("Declarations")

This book is a portrait of Slavick's life in Aotearoa New Zealand and an invitation to her 'town'. It is an acceptance of her place here:

I pass a view to the mountains and,
looking out to sea,
it is different every time. I am a land person. This is my sea.
("Town")

To review books for *a fine line*,
please contact Sarah Scott,
reviews@poetrysociety.org.nz

Members' Haiku

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Windrift Haiku Group. Their generous donation to the NZPS will support ongoing haiku projects, such as this haiku feature in *a fine line*.



Here now still — Charcoal drawing on paper. Necia Anne Zimmerman

Wanda Amos

wading
through clouds
the kotuku

Shadow Pond Journal December 2023

Anne Curran

liquid brown eyes –
he wants me
he wants me not

out of nowhere
her favourite expletive –
'fiddlesticks'

Sue Courtney

winter sun
on the dining room table
an unfinished jigsaw

First published in The Haiku Foundation's Haiku Dialogue July 2023

tai chi in the park
everyone embraces
the moon

First published in The Haiku Foundation's Haiku Dialogue October 2021

Jenny Fraser

cruise liner season ends
wind rings
in the halyards

rereading your tributes
spinifex
pierce the sky

wild dune freesias
no words
to bruise

Nola Borrell

chill wind
the old pine and I
groaning

Manners St
a poodle waits in
the barber's queue

Te Maru
kororā reclaim
their fishing ground

Cristian Matai

home village –
finding my shadow
on a different track

Debbie Strange

pressed flowers
the meadow I will give you
this winter

Akitsu Quarterly, Summer 2021

farm chores
this frost-fringed hole
in my mitten

Geppo XLVIII:1, February 2023

Kanjini Devi

stung by wasps
in wild grass
the kingfisher's laugh

skimming across the surface of a stream dandelion seedball

Oshadha Perera

harvesting tomatoes
her mouth
glistening in red

two years on
the hand-woven scarf
still smells of her

No Man's Land
the way his eyes
stare at the sky

Peter Free

all the trees bare
strangers in the city touch
and part

mum's alzheimer's
plum blossom where the wind
blows



Lavender – Wanda Amos

Wanda Amos started haiku at Ngunguru school, New Zealand. She now lives in Old Bar, NSW. She combines her hobbies of photography and haiku and has joined the Australian Haiku Society Committee. Facebook and Instagram: wandas wanderings

Nola Borrell writes haiku, tanka, and haibun in particular. Her work is widely published here and overseas.

Stella Peg Carruthers is an emerging writer from Aotearoa New Zealand who has published poetry, creative non-fiction, and short fiction. She is currently studying for a Master of Writing degree at Canterbury University.

Sherryl Clark has been writing poetry for more than 30 years. She was a co-editor of *Poetrix* magazine, and writes verse novels for young readers.

Alastair Clarke is a New Zealand writer. Recent work has appeared in *Antipodes* (US), *Landfall*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Fresh Ink*, *Orbis* (UK) and in *Ezine*.

Charlotte Black is a creative, enjoying a passion for poetry, writing and art; identifying it as a space where truth can be extrapolated when words aren't enough. She lives with her husband and two children.

Sue Courtney lives in Orewa beside the estuary where her surroundings inspire many of her haiku. She is one of the organisers of Haiku Down Under 2024, being held via Zoom on 16-18 August 2024
<https://sites.google.com/view/haikudownunder/>.

Anne Curran writes haiku inspired by the landscape, seasons, people, and events of Hamilton. She remains grateful to writing friends, mentors, and family members who nurture this hobby.

Kanjini Devi is a poet who calls Hokianga home. Her work can be seen online and in print. She makes friends easily with most creatures and it turns out she is also a foraging enthusiast.

Courtney Edwards is an English teacher, writer, and photographer from Portland. She enjoys traveling, playing the piano, and helping to bring sea otters back to Oregon through the Elakha Alliance. You can connect with her at @pnw.courtney

John Ewen, when he runs out of excuses for avoiding it, writes poetry, short stories, plays and non-fiction.

Born in New Zealand, **Jenny Fraser** of Riverweaver – nature lover, musician, artist and poet – lives in Mt. Maunganui. Jenny began writing haiku in 2010. Since then her haiku, senryu, tanka, haiga & haibun have been published in NZ & international journals.

Lee Fraser lives in Ōtautahi and has been rediscovering health through poetry after a regional slam win in 2023. Her work has since appeared in *Catalyst*, *The Fib Review*, *London Grip*, *Micro Madness* and *Quick Brown Dog*.
<youtube.com/@leefraserpoetry>

Peter Free is a science teacher in Wellington. He gets a lot of satisfaction out of reading and writing haiku.

SK Grout (she/they) is a writer, editor and poet. Her debut pamphlet is *What love would smell like* (V. Press). In 2022, they won first prize in the Open Category at the Oxford Brookes International Poetry Competition. Website: <https://skgrout.com>

Jackson, a writer, poet and editor born in Cumbria, England, now lives in Aotearoa after many years in Perth. Their fourth full-length collection *A coat of ashes* (Recent Work Press 2019) is based on their award-winning PhD thesis.
<writerjackson.com>

Tessa Keenan (Te Ātiawa) is from Taranaki and is now based in Pōneke. She has recently had a chapbook of poems published as part of *AUP New Poets 10*. You can find her writing in various other Aoteroa publications including *Starling*, *Poetry Aotearoa Yearbook*, and *The Spinoff*.

Cristian Matai is a Romanian poet, born in 1982, with a love of haiku. Their main inspiration is nature, but also emotion. They published one book of haiku last year (*Waiting for you*) and will always continue to write.

Hilary McDaniel (Douglas) lives in New Mexico. She holds an MA in Poetry from Queens University Belfast, a BA from Indiana University in history and a degree in dance/writing from Interlochen Arts Academy.

Elliot McKenzie (they/them) is a poet and support worker living in Tāmaki Makaurau. @elli0t.m

Rachel Miller is a visual artist and poet living in the Hokianga. She has had poems published in *Te Kohu*, *Fast fibres* and NZPS.

Anuja Mitra lives in Tāmaki Makaurau. She has reviewed and rambled about books for *Cordite*, *a fine line*, *Aniko Press*, *Minarets*, and *Lemon Juice zine*, and regularly reviews theatre for *Theatre Scenes*. Her poetry and fiction has appeared in local and international publications, including most recently *takahē* and *Poetry Aotearoa*.

Ash Parkin is a queer disabled poet in their final year at secondary school. They have been writing poetry since they learned how to write. Ash loves drawing, design, writing, psychology, video games, reading, music, Heartstopper, and cats.

Oshadha Perera is a poet and short story writer from Southland. He was a winner of the Lancaster Writing Awards (Poetry) and the NZPS International Poetry Competition (Youth).

A physics student at the University of Auckland, **Emma Philips** was commended in the NFFD Youth Competition, second in the year 13 *Aotearoa Yearbook* Student Poetry Competition and won the Sunday Star Times story Competition school category.

Perena Quinlivan is a Tamaki Makaurau based poet, with a professional background in the arts, and Maori economic development. Writing interests are focussed on loss of land and language.

Sudha Rao is a Wellington-based writer originally from South India. Sudha's first collection of poems *On Elephant's shoulders* was published in 2022. Her work has been published in several anthologies such as *Ko Aotearoa Tatou/We are New Zealand* and *Best Poems New Zealand*.

Mariam Rietveld is an enthusiastic 15-year-old student in Dunedin. She thrives at Columba College, with an immense interest in both science and arts. In her free time, she delves into a good book and acting is something she thoroughly enjoys.

Joseph Shaw writes from Ōtautahi. He writes: 'I had a cheese cutter hat made for me. It looks like a polished paua shell and I call it 'Paua Potae'. To me, it's wearable art.'

Sarah-Kate Simons is a poet and writer from rural Canterbury but currently residing in Tauranga. She is widely published in journals and anthologies, and has placed in several writing competitions. Her hobbies include art and verbal sparring matches with her characters.

Tessa Smith is an Auckland-born poet, who currently resides in Dunedin. She enjoys crochet, reading, and a good cuppa and some digestives.

Debbie Strange (Canada) is a chronically ill short-form poet and artist whose creative passions connect her more closely to the world and to herself Please visit her archive: <https://debbiemstrange.blogspot.com/>.

Baxter L. M. Williams is a PhD student in engineering at the University of Canterbury | Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha. Alongside his studies, he reads and writes poetry in Ōtautahi.