



a fine line

TE RŌPŪ TOIKUPU O AOTEAROA / New Zealand Poetry Society

Rama / Light

Spring 2024

Featured Poet **Dominic/Hoey**
Featured Article **Diane McCarthy**
Cover Art **Sheila Brown**

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New Zealand Poetry Society
PO Box 5283
Wellington 6140
info@poetrysociety.org.nz
www.poetrysociety.org.nz

Patrons

Dame Fiona Kidman
President
Robert Sullivan

FACEBOOK NewZealandPoetrySociety

INSTAGRAM @NZPoetrySociety

TWITTER @NZPS

TIKTOK @nzps_tok

a fine line staff

Managing Editor: Gail Ingram
Editorial Assistant: Sophia Wilson
Reviews Editor: Sarah Scott
Proofreader: Summer Wick-Featonby

Quotation of the season

'So the darkness shall be the light,
and the stillness the dancing.'

– T.S. Eliot

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GAIL INGRAM



Waxing gibbous – Oshadha Perera

Gail Ingram

Wow, poets, you shone marama on our spring edition with the quality of your toikupu. Honestly, almost 50% of the remaining subs might have been included and this edition would still shine. Thank you, especially to those I didn't select. Please keep sending your wonderful kupu because on another day, they would have been chosen. I chose poems that shone on me in a particular moment with their 'bright spring eyes' (**Lyndsey Knight**). Poems of emotional complexity and clout. Poems about the striped light on a stone (**J E Blaikie**), the eyes of a helicopter (**Sherryl Clark**) and haiku that ache with 'flickering life' (**Joseph Howse**) and sing of 'flipping shells' (**Gareth Nurden**). If you're not a haiku/senryu fan, read this selection and be convinced – how a wolf can hold a moon in its mouth (**Debbie Strange**).

We are also delighted to bring you our featured poet **Dominic Hoey**. Dominic does important work, shedding light on the underbelly of Aotearoa, 'bullshit jobs' and 'rotting decks' and 'the midnight of the universe' because 'real life doesn't have a pretty soundtrack'. Dominic teaches poetry to 'people who hated school' and has also brought us prize-winning books as founder and editor of Dead Bird Books. Ka pai, Dominic.

Diane McCarthy is our featured article writer. As a grandmother and poet, she is well-qualified to give us both a close reading of "For A Five-Year-Old" by the late, great **Fleur Adcock**, alongside an outline of some resources for children's poetry in Aotearoa.

Our reviews editor **Sarah Scott** brings us two exceptional reviews. **Linda Collins** discusses **Majella Cullinane's** 'image-rich and poignant' third collection *Meantime*. **Stella Peg Carruthers** considers the way **Tessa Kennan, romesh dissanayake** and **Sadie Lawrence** use place and space in their works featured in *AUP New Poets 10*.

Once again, we are very lucky with our art contributors. Our beautiful cover art by **Sheila Brown** from Ōtautahi is a light-filled delight. If you know of any artists who would like to contribute, please send them our way.

In NZPS news, our 2024 anthology is on its way into the world. It will be launching around the motu from Ōtepoti Dunedin, Ōtautahi Christchurch, Tāmaki-makaurau, Ōtaki and Keri Keri. Keep an eye on social media and don't miss this beautiful collection, *paint me*, edited by **Margaret Moores**. You can order it [here](#).

Our summer edition, will be themed 'mountain/maunga'. We would like poems about mountains of work, joy, suffering and ice. It will be my last issue as editor and so I will be featuring some of my favourite pieces from my four years of joy, editing your poems. Please send up to four themed poems (40 lines max) and/or up to four haiku, plus themed artwork by 20 November 2024 to Gail Ingram [via Submittable on our webpage](#).

Shine on.

Dominic Hoey



Tunnel – Oshadha Perera

6 Months Back in Shitsville

i've almost died 2 times
since i moved back
the details aren't important
buses, inattention, lack of coordination
and both times i thought of u
your face in the oncoming headlights
your reflection in the bus windscreen

i did dmt in LA
the room melted
everything made sense for 10-15 minutes
floating in the midnight of the universe

they reckon that's the chemical
that's released when u die
and if the bus was going 5 khs faster
or i hadn't swerved my car when i did
maybe i'd be floating next to u
in all that nothingness

Seagulls

when we was young
we used to talk about going overseas
on the rotting deck out front of our flat
drinking and watching the sun clock off for the day
we did a lot of drinking on decks back then
most of them in need of repair
and i mean obviously
we'd both been across the Tasman
but Australia's the learning disabled New Zealand
and the horizon was a locked door
graffitied with stories of places
from books and television
yeah we made plans to escape
repeating them
like a depressing theme song
but getting out
felt like trying to grab hold of the night
so we drank
perched on the rotten pieces of wood
seabirds who'd slept through migration
dreaming of the sun

Bombay beach

there's no water in Bombay Beach
no waves to wash the dead fish from the shore
in the 80s the Salton Sea
retreated back into the earth
leaving a film of dried tears
coating the horizon

I watched a doco about that place
apocalyptic and beautiful
but real life don't have a pretty soundtrack
just them thoughts
washing around ya skull

still
there's magic in a broke down dream
so instead of spending our last day in California by the pool
we drove an hour
to the seaside resort that'd lost the sea
listening to an audiobook about Manson
and his own ghost town
a few miles away

in the middle of the Sonoran Desert
we passed an old man on a bike
pedalling into nowhere
you slowed
concerned
and I could always read your mind

Bombay Beach smelt like a bonfire of old socks
a welcome sign
grew beside a dead palm tree
we bought water from an empty shop
and stared at the bar
stared at the TVs covered in graffiti
stared at the abandoned houses

a man drove past on a golf cart
with rust decal
he looked like life had run out of secrets for him
and I felt like one of them tourists
who travels to a disaster zone
taking selfies with the dead

on the way home the man on the bike
had vanished
you searched the sand for him
your worry got so loud
i couldn't hear the story about the cult
who cut up the movie star
all them years back

and every so often
for the rest of our life together
I'd hear you thinking about that old man on the bike
who disappeared into the empty sea

bullshit jobs

some people can't work a job
they just can't
it makes them crazy like caged tigers
or killer whales that eat their trainers
i wonder if there's something wrong with those people
or something wrong with everybody else

little things

You never know
Who gives good head and who can spell *bourgeois*
Who can talk shit with the dead
Who's heart keeps time with strangers
Who can make really nice pasta
Who hears the melody in numbers
Who dreams of the past and who has memorized the future
Who knows the shortcut to "don't put your head under lake"
Who can talk dirty like a gold toothed christ
Who knits jumpers for stray dogs
Who can throw a ball so high it comes down singed
Who can change a flat tire without questioning their entire existence
Who can make money with glue, scissors and a couple of good ideas
Who is famous on their street
Who fights like Bruce Lee with a hangover
Who gives advice that'll fix the broken windows
Who understands the life cycle of the tides
Who sleeps whenever they close their eyes
Who falls in love like drowning
You never know

Diane McCarthy



Bus Stop – Oshadha Perera

Poetry and Children

I. A poem about a child

Fleur Adcock (1934-1924) typically used domestic subject matter as she reflected on her family and friends over her long and illustrious career. One of the outstanding features of Adcock's writing is her voice which speaks to us directly. Intimacy with her children and directness are found within her poetry. We can see this in "For a Five-Year-Old", a classic Fleur Adcock poem. Other poets such as Lauris Edmond and Peter Bland have a similar engagement. So, although it's not a unique poem, it allowed me for the first time to see poetry as a way to communicate personal experience.

For a Five-Year-Old

A snail is climbing up the window-sill
into your room, after a night of rain.
You call me in to see, and I explain
that it would be unkind to leave it there:
it might crawl to the floor; we must take care
that no one squashes it. You understand,
and carry it outside, with careful hand,
to eat a daffodil.

I see, then, that a kind of faith prevails:
your gentleness is moulded still by words
from me, who have trapped mice and shot wild birds,
from me, who drowned your kittens, who betrayed
your closest relatives, and who purveyed
the harshest kind of truth to many another.
But that is how things are: I am your mother,
and we are kind to snails.

*(Poems 1960-2000, Bloodaxe Books, 2000)*¹

I first encountered this poem as a sixth form student doing University Entrance English with Judith Manchester in the last year that Waiwhetu Girls High School was open. Manchester knew Fleur as a friend and opened us up to seeing a poet as a mother and as a person. Suddenly poetry was about communicating life experiences; a vast field to explore. "For a Five-Year-Old" showed me too that irony can dwell alongside maternal love. It helped me recognise that honesty carries with it an impact on the reader.

The triggering incident for "For a Five-Year-Old" occurred when Adcock's younger son Andrew was five. She transforms her encouragement of him to care for a snail into a reflection on her way of acting towards and speaking to others. She admits her own cruelty, even though the snail is spared. However, she does not spare the 'hardest kind of truth' even

¹ [Bloodaxebooks.com/news?articleid=1455](https://www.bloodaxebooks.com/news?articleid=1455) Fleur Adcock reads "For a Five-Year-Old" in June 2007, as part of the DVD anthology *In Person – 30 Poets*, filmed by Pamela Robertson-Dearee; edited by Neil Astley (Bloodaxe Books 2008)

if speaking with a child. We see this ‘harsh truth’ in other poems too, such as “Advice to a Discarded Lover” where she tells the lover “In you, I see maggots close to the surface”.

The poem is a modern sonnet with a rhyming pattern of a, b, b, c, c, e, e, a, in two octave stanzas. Read the poem aloud to hear how this pattern shapes and strengthens her reflection. Rain/explain; there/care; understand/hand; window-sill/daffodil provide links and rhythm that underpins the flow of conversational language. While the convention of iambic pentameter is not strictly observed, it is the significance of the statements to the child that govern the flow.

Another convention of a sonnet is the volta or turn, where the mood changes. The first verse retells the encounter with the snail, and how the mother and child respond by protecting it by removing it from the windowsill, to put it back into the garden. The second verse reflects on ways that the poet has been destructive towards animals and people. This irony is in turn reflected upon, as “we are kind to snails” even though the snail itself is destructive, “to eat a daffodil”.

This poem is a powerful way of encouraging us to consider the ways we want our children to behave with compassion, keeping in mind how harsh our own behaviour can be towards others.

II. Poetry for children

While “For a Five-Year Old” speaks to the adult, this poem also makes me consider poetry itself and the benefits it may have for young people – ‘your gentleness is moulded still from words / from me’. There is growing recognition that early engagement with poetry is a positive and useful way to develop language in the lives of babies, toddlers and young children. It is a way that the sounds and rhythms of language can immerse the minds of our young.

Karen Coats, who researches effects of literature on children’s development, suggests that recognising the cognitive value of poetry for the young enables them to retain “the rhythms and pleasures of the body in language” and be aware of their physical and emotional relationships. Further, Coats suggests that poetry enables children to manage their sensory environment, through promoting self-regulation and expressiveness. As many poems and songs for children use actions and body movements as part of telling the stories, language and poetry build understanding and enjoyment.

Poetry for children is showcased by poet Paula Green in her blog, Poetry Box. Green encourages children to write poetry which is published on her site. Using starters and themes, young poets are rewarded and teachers assisted with resources and a publishing platform for their poetry. Green researches and promotes new and established children’s poets. 2024’s August blog posting recognises Grant Snider from Wichita, Kansas. His *Comic Poetry* (Chronical Books 2024) visualises kupu, exploring ways poetry bubbles into being. Paula Green has edited five notably entertaining collections of poetry for and by children. These include; *Flamingo Bendaligo: Poems from the Zoo*, (Auckland University Press, 2006), *Macaroni Moon* (Random House, 2008), *The Letterbox Cat and Other Poems* (Scholastic), *A Treasury of NZ Poems for Children* (Penguin Random House, 2017) illustrated by Jenny Cooper, featuring dearly regarded poets such as Joy Cowley, Margaret Mahy, Jenny Bornholdt and Denis Glover, and children’s poems, and *Groovy Fish and other Poems* (Cuba Press, 2019). Green actively encourages young poets. Her titles were suggested by tamariki

on school visits. Her poems and illustrations are backed by a helpful teacher guide to awhi kaiako and matua alike.

Such anthologies are not often published here in Aotearoa New Zealand, which makes Mary McCallum's Cuba Press special. *The Uppish Hen* (2023), edited by Juanita Deely and illustrated by Dine, fulfilled Robin Hyde's late son Derek's (Derry) dream of publishing his mother's hand-written anthology of poetry for him as a child. Poets such as Peter Bland collaborated with their children to illustrate their poetry books. Bland's books include *The night kite* (Mallinson Rendel 2004), and *When Gulls Fly High*, (Puffin 2011). *A Treasury of NZ Poems for Children* (Penguin Random House 2017) was edited by Paula Green, and inventively illustrated by Jenny Cooper.

The latest poetry anthology for children released in June 2024 by Cuba Press is *Wizardry to Wētā Verse*, a heartfelt project by Elena De Roo and Juliet De Roo. As founder of XYZ, a network for children's poets, Elena De Roo has encouraged children's poetry to be written, recognised and published. Her poems can also be heard on Poetry Box.

Another source of poetry for children is picture books. Some of my favourites are from writers like Joy Cowley, Lynley Dodd and Margaret Mahy with their characteristic bold kupu that rhyme and excite children as the stories jump from the page. Characters like Hairy Maclary have become worldwide classics. International best sellers such as *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (Walker Books, 2024, 35th Anniversary Edition) by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury now in its 35th year, are in soft cover and board books for sharing with enthusiastic babies and toddlers, and as animated films on Youtube. Still in print, they are just as entertaining and fresh, delighting new generations of children and grandchildren. Other classics can be gleaned through secondhand book shops from online catalogues for a reasonable price.

Children's sections in public libraries are another rich source of children's poetry, as are some worthwhile children's magazines, such as Write On (Write On School for Young Writers) and Toitoti (NZ Educational Series), with poems written for kids by kids.

As I was preparing for this article, my granddaughter picked up our copy of *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*. Stella held up the board book pages to Harry her brother, so he could see the pictures. So engrossed were they both, that when Stella recited the challenges by heart, "We can't go over it. We can't go under it. Oh no! We'll have to go through it!" with all the 'Swishy, swashy, squelch squerch, and Hoooo woooo' sounds, Harry squealed with delight. In the delight though, Rosen and Oxenbury, like Adcock, were not afraid to encompass a harsher truth. Bear looked sad as he walked back along the beach alone.



Road to Heaven - Sandeep Kumar Mishra

Lyndsey Knight

streetlight

under the streetlight's wing
children play catching moths.
held under the stars
they have fixed themselves
somewhere between earth
and sky, an aerial ballet.
voices high, they wipe noses
on sleeves and shadows
from the corners of their
bright spring eyes

violet steps

we sit
on the kindergarten steps
julie and i
our small backs
against the orange door

the steps are violet not purple
she tells me
the door is burnt orange not orange

we play
patter-cake with our hands
she has flowers in her lap
she holds the yellow up
and squints

you can see through the petals she says
it is a lie the sky is always blue

wash day

i have spun and hung
my lover out to dry,

the line sags and flags
with his heavy form

his appeal was always
surreal to me.

i run my fingers
through his lifeless hair

slap his butt and thighs
with almost-loving care

i double peg his feet
rotate the line

avoid the icy-flicker
of his blue eyed stare.

Mariam Rietveld

Rama Aesthetic

Naturally, the first light of Fajr, the hum of early prayers, a flickering lantern, hands raised in du'a. Equally true: the fields of date palms swaying under the sun's gaze. Even here, in this desert soil, fruits grow rich. Children's laughter as they play in the courtyard, long shadows, bright eyes, sandals left in front of the masjid door, an Adhan echoed from a nearby minaret, a whisper of wind, and the rustling of palms in the garden. Outside in the evening, the moon as a crescent, its light like a taut silver thread against the sky, the scent of oud combined with the coolness of night air. I greet the elder who is sitting by the well serenely, his eyes smiling. What neither of us knows is that he will return to Allah by the next Ramadan, his body beneath the earth and his soul in the mercy of the Almighty. And another prayer will be whispered at his grave: Quranic verses, rose petals, faded memories, offerings of dates. But today, Surah Yasin's recitation flows upon the streets, while white jasmine has flowered in the courtyard where believers once congregated, and twilight hugs us, leaving us lapped up in serenity.

Light's Mercy

I love the story of the lost traveller who sees
A guiding star just before the tempest,
And the ship rides out the tranquil sea
Unscathed by the angry tide. Or the one
Where the lost child in darkened woods
Finds the lantern left by unseen hands,
And follows it home. I'm at an age
Where if darkness falls, let there be
A glimmer of hope within the dark. No endless night,
No dark shadows that gobble up the light,
no hidden terrors lurking behind each door.
Having heard of Yunus in the belly of the whale,
of the mercy accorded to the repenting hearts,
having seen communities rise from the ashes
of despair, I have come to cherish the light
at the end of the tunnel, however dim
slow-won. It's now. And the world teems with trials.
You think I want despair?

Ariana Tikao

Immersed in the night

like tears I burst a boundary
waikahu flood

rhythms tidal frosty pink
liquid trickling down oesophagus

hot towels soothe my stony back
foundations rock as Rūaimoko turns

I feel giant waves approach and dive
beneath Wainuiātea salty ancestor

weight now pushing on perineum
a burning a ripping

a guttural cry – as generations of women
escape my throat

one last swoop and she slips
into te ao mārama

this girl – at times
she was
my mother

Nola Borrell

breakthrough

She mourns the loss of that long sand beach, a child's delight and tourist mecca, economy builder for Te Maru. But before the colonists, a gravel beach. Nature a commodity, Māori fishing grounds ignored.

Why didn't I learn this at my primary school not far away? Māori dress, Māori housing, Māori weapons, year after year. 'Boring, boring'.

But now the little blue penguins – kororā – are back. The beach is planted with natives.

clouded sky
light shines through
the patch of blue

J E Blaikie

Go

Sunlight in stripes from the fence next door
plays on a stone, a ball broken off
from a mudstone cliff and carried home,

its accretion of hard matter suggesting
a fossil. To crack it open, to reveal
its heart, I cannot do. It's beginning

to rust from ironsand. It's going to fall
open in time – it's only been a million
years. My questions of you risk fracture,

my single life, 10,000 settled years,
sunlight playing on the fence
Ready steady

Lisa Stanley

the gift

(for M)

I

I know nil of before but of your birth i know this –
the baby bird you cradled and placed lovingly

into a nest you made. I want to tell you the pāpā will come
for him. That one day a second voice will come

back when you cry deep into a cave. Like nature
in Chernobyl. Your cupped hands are an upside down

umbrella. We are sunshowers under falling
leaves. It was a day just like this when you were two

and I held you while you held your helium balloon. I
told you to hold on tight but you let go.

II

—What adventures it must be having! The stories it has
to tell. How wide were the eyes that made it out in the distance

as it disappeared from yours? Whose voices now light
up or slow down as it traverses their skies? As you walk to me

today from across the street after school we warm
each other as summer sun in winter. North westerlies

wave your hair into my clouds. Constellations home in your eyes.
I want to tell you about your pāpā but you already know.

sober

strange how these hands belong to me *as if yesterday*
away on a life exchange program, returned this morning

to butter my toast, the richer. *i remember them now*
i want to return them to stories disappearing

like collagen surfacing like bones, live them
differently this time. this time live them

without added sugar direct from vine, green
grapes, red berries – even the bitter kind

best eaten sooner. i know now they must have full sun.
protagonists, the hope of pruning.

Lee Fraser

Chronic Fatigue Is a Sloppy Thief

Chronic fatigue, you lazy fizzle
this dawdling dying of sparkle, strewn about with
unschedulable stints of standard brightness
is getting tired, you slacker of an illness.

I married a man who shone.
You stole him from under my lips
under my finally reclined, glowing soul
his sculpted-cheekbone smile
now as rare as a good night's sleep

fireplace newsprint that burned so perfectly
you can read it, if you don't touch it.
Do I puff away the ash: dandelion's foggy head?
If I cannot wish, I'll blow it up
explode the hope and mope with wet-grass socks
that rub, though no-one can tell.
Sunny yellow, turned to fluff and nonsense
keep your squished wish; I'm getting the lawnmower.

We rattle round translucently, coordinating
who's out which evening
restocking of matches, firewood, torch batteries
where to get glow-in-the-dark PJs for the next kid's birthday
while our overcast souls plod out months, decades
remembering sometimes how we used to glint, fascinated
by facets of each other under canopy or candlelight.

I miss him and he is still here.

So I tell him again where the light bulbs live
whether that gets line-dried
that I can't eat black beans
about the kids' disco this weekend
another nap, pill, episode, glazed look, one-way smile
coital coughing fit, breathless intermission
daylight / date night robbery

And I don't tell him again about
the shiniest part of today, of my teens
or the month we had married before the lights went out,
my daydreams for our children, or
how at thirteen I wanted to be a SCUBA diver.
Now I live underwater, trying not to stargaze the surface.
Perhaps my gills are coming along
but I miss the sun.

Sherryl Clark

Beat of the Dark

The helicopters fly over every night
thick blades beating the air
to syrup, dark shapes against
a white moon. Their thumping

shakes the house, rattles glasses
in the cabinet and the mirror
on the bathroom wall shimmers
in time with the relentless rotors.

We know they are watching us,
their black sightless eyes
scanning our streets, our backyards –
we don't know what they're looking for

but it's only a matter of time
before one lands on the lawn
touching down as delicately
as a dragonfly, hovering

while its invisible steel wings
rip the curtains from our windows
and the huge eyes zero in
on our puny, lightless lives.

Robert Rinehart

Sweet tears

Once, at twelve, Mother,
whom never was *Mother*—
little more than a wisp
of girlhood herself—frail toughie,
breath of scented air, hugged
me to her breast & said, *Now,
be brave. Tell the truth, that's
all. Just the truth.* Times bent
in tragedy, coarse & flawed.

I fronted up

the big fat man, red faced & fat,
wheezing & sneezing. I was sure
he'd pop, his effort at pleasance
the act, standing there in his black
robes, a fat crow. He asked me, *How
would you like to live
with your father? Or your
mother? If you had the decision
to choose, who would you stay
with?* (Who would you pick?)
Light gulled my heart. Light
chipped my boyhood, refracting as
beams do on a prism. Slight
waves caught me, pulled my sight
from mother or father, to me.
Sometimes I heard robins plucking
worms from the earth, stretching
their glued bodies, my ears
were so pure. Daffodils, paper
orange lips dwarfs inside yellow, call
me out from Sunday School
papier mâché.

Living

Christs pat the air, dabbling
this way & that. His words
& gestures melt like soft
pastel lozenges. Sweet warmth.
This, our Sunday-school cherubic
lady up front speaks to me,
holding a pouty flower, lips
gauche, perfect as a bell
of trombone, *this
one is a 'Narcissus'.*

Linda Albertson

After dark

A stone-washed sky
unbeaten by time
draws me out of the window.

Denim jeans shrink
on a drenching-hot wire
propped up by bleached poles,
the dry-diveted ground will lose its grip.

Small knots in a tie-dyed linen shirt
grip the ink into concentrated hues.
Then, patches of un-dark. The surface
has fisted and punched out colour

to stagger joyfully into swirls –
like sneaking out a window
after dark.

Michelle Elvy

Tussock

We move through windy Central
stark landscape either side, still
yet in motion. My mother says
it's like nowhere I've been.

We keep climbing through basalt,
stony and shallow, and when
I sneeze it's as if it echoes across
this wide terrain, dry and golden,

remembering everything.
When I was little we drove our
family car through a tumble
of landscapes, five kids a jumble

arms and legs crisscrossed, weaving,
ten of each, our histories tangling
though at the time we did not know
this was the point.

I tell my mother my friend
says I have tussock hair, breezy
in its own particular way
which makes me laugh.

The word tussock, I read, might
come from Middle High German *zūse*,
meaning lock of hair, or maybe
Scottish Gaelic *dosag*, little tuft.

I say, my hair's turning
grey, might be silver tussock.
My mother looks it up:
Poa cita, Ngāi Tahu taonga.

It's coastal, she reads, likes salt,
– like you. She smiles and says
the word again, *tussock*.
I hear it slip over her teeth,

the hard *ck* in her throat. She looks
across the land, says one should be
so lucky to have hair as beautiful
as this.

Jackson

For Coral

When we sat on the stage steps
you with your camera
me with my silence
and leaned on each other
I played with your irresistible hair
and I thought
people will think we are lovers
But I didn't edit my actions
Being true to oneself, even in the light, is more important
than anything people might think

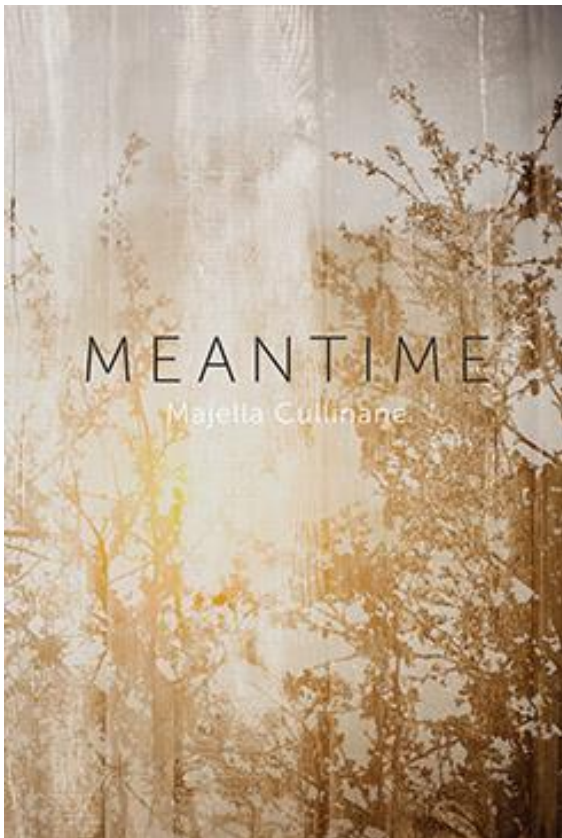
First published on the author's website writerjackson.com

Linda Collins

Meantime – Majella Cullinane

(Dunedin: OUP 2024)

ISBN 9781990048807. RRP \$30.00. 82pp.



There are deep-seated expectations around death. The dying person never alone. Family and close friends attending. Physical contact, a hand held, a body embraced a last time. Death formally marked with a gathering. Some sort of return to mother earth, burial or ashes.

Majella Cullinane’s poignant, image-rich third collection, *Meantime*, explores maternal loss, grief, and dislocation amid a world in disruption due to Covid, when expectations and rites of passage we take for granted were forsaken.

The title, ‘Meantime’, captures this in-between time, in which Cullinane grieves for a person who is alive, but disappearing.

A mother in Ireland has dementia, grows frail and incoherent. Her daughter is on the other side of the world, in Aotearoa New Zealand. Communicating by phone becomes hopeless; yet her daughter can’t travel there amid Covid restrictions.

There is a double dislocation, with the daughter in a far-off country and the mother’s dementia rendering her increasingly absent and unreachable, which Cullinane describes as:

the long goodbye –
this disease that each day snatches parts of you

and scatters them about, until you can’t find them,
until you don’t remember losing them.
 (“The long goodbye”)

The title, *Meantime*, captures this in-between time, in which Cullinane grieves for a person who is alive, but disappearing.

This creates a state of suspension, made more difficult by the alienation of trying to communicate without being there in person.

I press the receiver to my ear and listen
to my heart's hollow pulse. Nothing to distil

the distance between you and me.
("The number you have dialled")

Another poet who writes of the geographical and emotional distancing of a loved one with dementia is Liz Breslin.

... home, is the wallpaper

to the halting, screened
conversation that peters, pixelstutters, you call out
my name but you're gone and the white screen asks
how do you rate the quality of your call?
("Skype")

They are quite different poets – Cullinane, with her lilting cadence; Breslin, anger spiced with alliterative playfulness – but both bear important witness to the peculiar frustration of death viewed at a distance.

A funeral conducted over zoom in another country goes against the natural order of being there in person. Cullinane is a disembodied watcher as if she, too, is no longer earth-bound. This disembodiment robs the ceremony of its rite of passage. Grievors cannot move forward. 'I have no image of you being lowered into the ground' ("Virtual funeral").

In this curious zoom *Meantime* of being/not being, it is difficult to believe anyone is really dead – or even, really alive. Those who remain enter a new half-life, that of grief, and disbelief in that grief, once they log off.

² Beckett, Samuel, *Not I*, a play first performed in New York in 1972 involving a mouth between black curtains.

We, who would place our fingers into the wound,
feel the space of all that is lost to us
and still not believe.

("All that is lost to us")

*It's as if the bereaved are the undead,
dragged through the zoom screen into
the contemporary equivalent of the Styx.*

And how can you accept the loss, if you have not seen it for yourself? It's as if the bereaved are the undead, dragged through the zoom screen into the contemporary equivalent of the Styx.

Roles reversed: I am Persephone
searching for Demeter.
("Lost")

Yet, amid the profound subject matter, Cullinane lightens the sadness by interweaving images and voices that are inventive and beautiful. Sometimes the 'I' persona is the mother speaking, and she comes alive in a frenetic *Not I*² monologue:

Migrants are camping in the garden. The police
are here again.

The other night a baby was born. I held him in my
arms.
("This is not my room")

Continuing the conversation from Cullinane's stunning second book, *Whisper of a Crow's Wing*³, there are plenty of birds, with things with

³ Cullinane, Majella, *Whisper of a Crow's Wing*, Otago University Press, 2018.

feathers⁴ and other creatures acting as messengers between the earthly and spiritual worlds. ‘I’ll bring you the thrill / of blackbird song’ (“When I get back”).

And this colour-burnished image of a fox:

Last night I dreamed of a fox,
its coppery face,
its honey topaz eyes.
 (“Ghosts”)

This fluidity is set up by the collection’s title, *Meantime*, which has an ambiguity to it. Not just a period between two events – here, life and death – it can also be an adverbial substitute for ‘while’; or convey a sense of an average or mean – such as Greenwich Mean Time, which alludes to the different time zones of mother and child. There’s also another sense, from Germanic roots, as a mean time, a time of harshness, and Cullinane captures the pain of her loss. ‘My tongue burns. / If I were to walk through autumn’s cool air / I would find no relief.’

(“Meantime”).

Underpinning this is longing for another ritual denied by Covid, that of a farewell holding of the mother who once cradled you. It is universal. Kiri Piahana-Wong⁵ writes:

My sons and the husbands of
my daughters came and gathered
up my body and carried me down,
one last time across the long black
stretch of bay.
I was laid to rest in the ground, in
te urupā.

⁴ This refers to Max Porter’s *Grief is the Thing with Feathers* (which of course references Emily Dickinson) involving a metafictional crow.

(“Hinerangi”)

Each carries the other through the texture of a garment interwoven with love and memory, an act in which the grieving person moves from stasis to re-enter the world.

This need for the consolation of contact is also powerfully expressed by Selina Tusitala Marsh:⁶

The girl rises and takes her mother’s shuddering
body to hers
she cradles her
they rise and fall
like the ocean off the coast of Savai’i
emerald green
deep and fishless.
 (“Blackbird”)

Cullinane’s narrator desperately lacks the physicality of this closure. Finally visiting Ireland, she goes into her mother’s room – ‘it still smells of you’ – and puts on ‘your pastel pink pyjamas. DREAMING OF THE WEEKEND / is splayed across the front’ (“In your room”).

She notes that they are ill-fitting, ‘not my sort’. Yet clothes are a thread of connection, and an acceptance of loss, or an accommodation to it, emerges. The narrator looks to the future, to life back ‘home’ in New Zealand:

⁵ Piahana-Wong, Kiri, *Tidelines*, Anahera Press, Whanganui, 2024.

⁶ Marsh, Selina Tusitala, *Dark Sparring*, Auckland University Press, 2013.

I take one of your favourite coats, purple with four
large buttons
and a wide collar ...
I'll take you to places you've never been.
No-one need know I'm carrying my mother on my
back.
("Carried away")

The narrator reinvents the ritual of carrying her mother's body for a new time, after *Meantime*. Each carries the other through the texture of a garment interwoven with love and memory, an act in which the grieving person moves from stasis to re-enter the world. Cullinane adds another dimension to this through her poetry collection – as well as an artistic homage, the book is a physical entity in its own right. At one point the narrator asks her mother, 'Still, you'd have me write a few words about you – /something to say you were here?' ("Something to say"⁷)

Together, poet and reader hold her mother in their hands. She was here, and is here.

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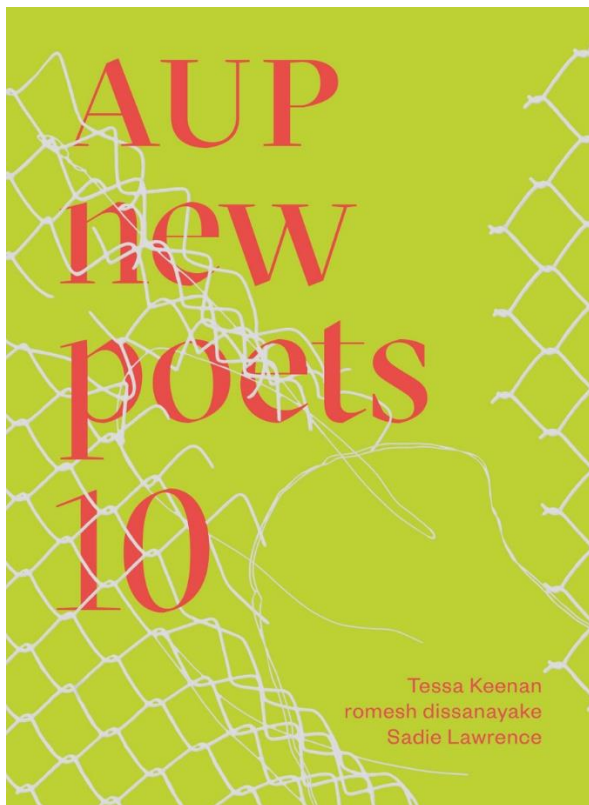
⁷ Riley, Denise. *Say Something Back*, Picador, 2015. The title of Cullinane's poem,

'Something to say', echoes this seminal collection on grief and motherhood.

Stella Peg Carruthers

AUP new poets 10 – Tessa Keenan, romesh dissanayake and Sadie Lawrence

(Auckland University Press, 2024)
ISBN: 9781776711239. RRP \$ 29.99.
85pp.



Where are you? Where does the poet *want* you to be? And, significantly, where do you end up? These are questions asked and only sometimes answered in the work of the three writers in *AUP new poets 10*, where considerations of place and space resound. Like previous collections in the series from Auckland University Press, this 10th edition introduces three new up-and-coming poets, providing readers with a glimpse into the current, emerging poetic talent in Aotearoa.

Within the framing of three chapbook length collections, the poetry of Tessa Keenan, romesh

These poems create glances into different kinds of places and spaces - some we might want to occupy, others we definitely don't...

dissanayake and Sadie Lawrence reverberates with longing – with the poets trying to make sense of themselves through language. These poems create glances into different kinds of places and spaces – some we might want to occupy, others we definitely don't – but all are presented as tangible options through explorations of what literature can do.

Keenan is the first featured poet in the volume. Her place-making, her world, is set in the context of wider whanau, planet earth and spectacularly the cosmos. In her poem “Celesta”, Keenan lyrically states ‘it’s just you and me and the stars pretending to be / Venus.’ Here, human actors are placed in direct association with celestial bodies. That the stars are given the false agency of a game of make pretend not only personifies them – it makes us think of the larger patterns given to human lives.

Meaning-making is also very present in dissanayake’s work as he negotiates cultural differences. He often uses the language of food and the senses to ground the reader in a particular space, where definitions of self and culture are presented as permeable. In the poem “Natasha

says we shouldn't heat our curries too high in the microwave", dissanayake writes 'let that garlic sizzle, sis/ let that fenugreek stew with green mangoes/ let that turmeric leave stains like graffiti.' He uses several senses including smell and sound as well as sight, to capture these foods, pulling the reader deeply into the poem in a carnal sense. Writing from the senses can be difficult, but dissanayake employs poetic techniques such as sibilance – the garlic sizzles, the fenugreek stews, the turmeric leaves stain. Reading the poem aloud these 's' sounds create a lovely, almost flavourful feel in the mouth, through the poetic device mirroring the subject matter.

This way of writing from the body is also used and further developed by Lawrence. In her poem "being a creature", she writes 'I envy pets/ with not the vocabulary to know/ what they are.' Her pet in this poem is unknowable to itself whereas Lawrence's human actor within the poem is heavily self-conscious as a human girl. The idea of awareness, of consciousness, is one explored by all three poets, and handled deftly by Lawrence, in her poems centred around a late teenage coming of age.

It is not only coming of age that the AUP poets explore in this volume. The concept of home; in place, space and self, is a recurring theme that readers of all stages and ages can identify with. Keenan writes in her poem "A world of perpetual longing", that 'there has to be space, something to stand on and something to/ reach for.' In dissanayake's *Walnuts* he writes, 'I expect to set free all these identities living within me.' Both these writers situate the poetic actor in a metaphoric space of selfhood. Whether it is a gesture towards spatial awareness, as created by Keenan, or a reference to identity creation in dissanayake's work, these two poets place their poetry in a context of selfhood where the poetic 'I' is permeable. Keenan for instance, uses a

clever left hand margin device in "Celesta" to place the reader in a different kind of literary space.

The poetic 'I' in the work of these three poets centres on a struggle for identity. If this struggle is a theme that can be difficult to articulate formally, one poetic area that is certainly not a struggle is how all three poets handle the figurative properties of their poetry.

The theme of identity creation is clearly supported by both language techniques and form in this volume. However, I did hesitate with this notion of sense-making as applied to the formal properties of some of the poems. For myself as a reader, in dissanayake's poem "B.A.D.D.I.E.S", the separation of the first letters of each line such as 'B oldly going where no sea slug has gone before' jolted me out of the poem and took away some of its potential power. The feeling of emptiness these formal choices made may have been intentional, there is after all a literal space, a gap made in the text in the "B.A.D.D.I.E.S" example. I may not like this technique, but I can appreciate the possible reasoning for inclusion within the text. However, I felt it obscured some of the beautifully rendered imagery and strong themes within dissanayake's work.

The poetic 'I' in the work of these three poets centres on a struggle for identity. If this struggle is a theme that can be difficult to articulate formally, one poetic area that is certainly not a struggle is how all three poets handle the figurative properties of their poetry. I particularly note the finesse with which they use image-rich language to create a beautiful lyricism. Keenan writes in the poem "Postcard", 'I wait for your postcard. It flies over bodies of

water.’ This simple image ends the poem beautifully and renders a sense of scaled spatial awareness to a gesture of simple human communication. Meanwhile dissanayke uses image-rich language to speak of ethnicity and an attempt to belong. He writes that ‘I’ve secretly tried bleaching my name too’ in the poem “Eating a peach in the sun I wonder”. The gesture of bleaching serves as a lovely allusion to a white dominant paradigm. Lawrence makes strong use of figurative language with great success, for instance in “All teenagers are Tapestries” – a poem which talks about the event of an injury but also the wider theme of identity and belonging. ‘We’d all be tapestries, sewn up with the fibres/ of one another’ writes Lawrence, evoking a kind of hurt that is healed by helping each other and a bond that goes beyond that of the body.

Like dissanayake, Lawrence mentions food within an image-rich framework to great effect. In the poem “Pet Name” she writes of a ‘seismic shift down my apple core centre.’ Meanwhile in “Aphantasia”, the ‘egg yolk of the night’ shifts space beyond the edges of the body into the wider world. In these two poems food is not an item to be consumed but a piece of evocative imagery used to great effect.

Where dissanayake and Lawrence use food motifs in their lyrically rich poetry, Keenan writes directly of the emotional element of human experience. In the poem “Mātou”, she writes of how ‘the weight of trying to remember/ often gets you lost.’ In “Permission to Hate”, she reflects on how she is ‘holey and hating everything.’ I found the directness of her language refreshing, giving me space to feel things without the intellectual gymnastics of pulling apart a metaphor.

Whether writing about identity, listing foods, or examining the nature of friendships, the three poets featured in *AUP new poets 10* show the

Overall, the poems in this volume are formally strong in their use of line breaks, punctuation and creative uses of stanza sets. The ways they position the poetic self also had me looking at both place and poetry in a fresh way.

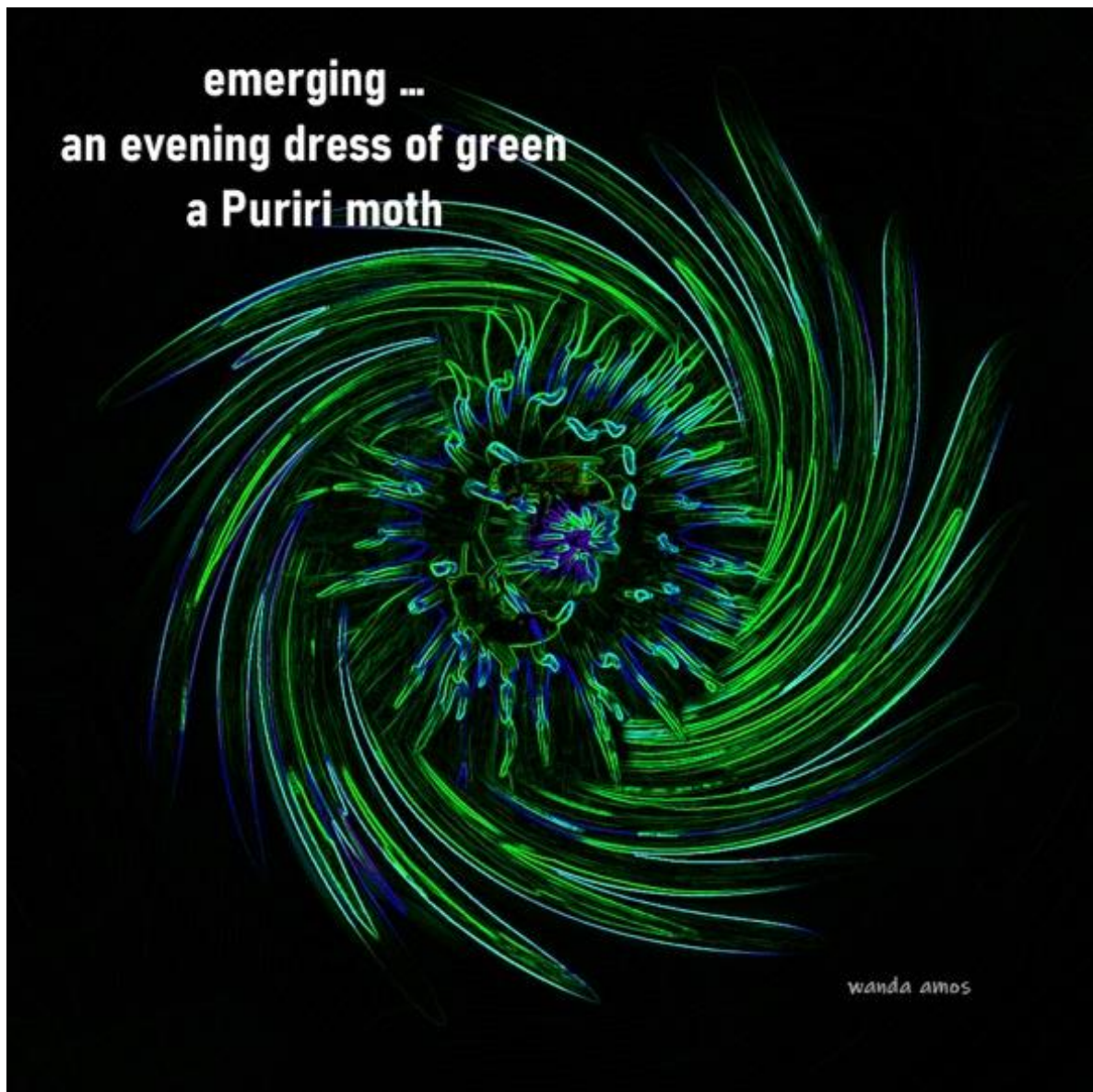
dynamic facets of current Aotearoa New Zealand poetry. Their poems are rendered finely and yet feel robust. Overall, the poems in this volume are formally strong in their use of line breaks, punctuation and creative uses of stanza sets. The ways they position the poetic self also had me looking at both place and poetry in a fresh way.

It might be Keenan speaking of her time on a Marae, dissanayake reflecting on work in a restaurant kitchen or Lawrences’ youthful flat conversations on doorsteps and in shared living rooms. Such ordinary locations are made to seem extraordinary through their mention in the poetic medium where readers are encouraged to think differently about the shapes of their own lives. These *new poets* write of a cultural moment where people and poets are trying to find steady ground to stand on in the context of a world in crisis.

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*.



Moth – Wanda Amos

Julie Bates

moon
a mountain
the silence in-between

Judit Hollos

migrant journey
a shed meteor plume
glitters on the sea

Gareth Nurden

afternoon sun
the voices of many birds
in one garden

Peter Free

wind chimes
spoon by spoon sunlight
fills our bowl

Kanjini Devi

wheelchair-bound
the drift of smiles
as sunbeams shift

(Published in *Haiku Dialogue*, 1st Sept 2022)

Kanjini Devi

nīkau blossoms in moonlight his sweet whispers

Julie Adamson

lightly turning pages
one by one –
oblivious

Gareth Nurden

end of spring
beaching waves
flipping seashells

Joseph Howse

life left flickering
in cabinets row on row
50 cents to play

Joseph Howse

vacant dawn
puddles and dewdrops
of vodka rosé

Judit Hollos

unfulfilled wishes
twilight ablaze / with
cries of seagulls

Joseph Howse

decades pass
each molly cat in lamplight
reminds me of sleep

Heather Lurie

forgetting everything beneath the snow its sparkle

Debbie Strange

rocky ledge
a wolf with the moon
in its mouth

3rd Place, 2015 Irish Haiku Society International Competition

Jenny Fraser

the molten flow
in age old lava
their buried roar

Nola Borrell

ancient rimu
the photographer
on her knees

Kit Willit

moss flourishes
between the cracks of concrete –
urban kintsugi

Jenny Pyatt

storm debris
bright tennis ball
in the driftwood

Nola Borrell

lightspell
the piwakawaka whirls
in circles

Julie Adamson

light fingers
caress the keys –
moonlight sonata

Debbie Strange

star-nosed mole
we search for light
in dark places

Shortlisted for Best-of-Issue Award, *Presence*, Number 65, 2019



Lamp – Rata Ingram

Julie Adamson lives in Wellington by the sea, always changing and inspiring her. She has been published in *Kokako*, *Island Writer* (Canada) NZPS Anthology 2020 and *a fine line*.

Originally from Ōtautahi Christchurch, **Linda Albertson** has lived in Australia on the lands of the Djiringanj people for the last 27 years. In 2023 she won the Booranga Writers Poetry Prize.

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 Websites: wandas wanderings on Facebook and Instagram.

Julie Bates has been previously published in *Kokako*, *seashells* and *Richmond news*.

J E Blaikie works as an editor in Wellington.

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 nonfiction, short fiction and reviews. She is currently studying for a Master of Writing degree at Canterbury University.

Sherryl Clark writes poetry and fiction, both for adults and young readers. She lives in Whangarei and works part-time as an editor.

Linda Collins is the author of a memoir, *Loss Adjustment*, and a poetry collection, *Sign Language for the Death of Reason*. Her poetry has appeared in *bath magg*, *Mslxia*, *Cordite*, and is forthcoming in *Lighthouse*. She has MAs in Creative Writing from IIML and the University of East Anglia.

Kanjini Devi is a published poet based in the Far North of Aotearoa.

Michelle Elvy is an editor and writer in Ōtepoti Dunedin. Her books include *the everrumble* and *the other side of better*, and her anthology work includes, most recently, *A Kind of Shelter: Whakaruru-taha* (Massey University Press, 2023).

Born in the Waikato, **Jenny Fraser**, nature lover, musician, artist and poet, now lives in Mt Maunganui. Her haiku, senryu, tanka, haiga and haibun are published in New Zealand and International Journals.

Lee Fraser lives in Ōtautahi. Her full-time jobs have included field linguist and parent. In 2024 she has been published in *Catalyst*, *the Fib Review*, *Fuego*, *London Grip*, *Micro Madness*, *Ōtautahi is Flash*, *Poetry d'Amour Anthology*, and *Quick Brown Dog*.

Peter Free is a Maths teacher from Wellington. Born in Nigeria, Peter has spent many years travelling and working in Asia. He writes haiku to relax.

Dominic Hoey is a writer based in Tāmaki. When he's not losing money on his various vanity projects, he's teaching writing to people who hated school.

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

Judit Hollos is an emerging playwright, poet and essayist. Some of her short stories and poems have appeared in literary magazines and anthologies. She is the author of two chapbook collections of Japanese-style poetry and short prose.

Joseph Howse (Canada) is a writer, computer scientist, and orchardist. His debut novel, *The Girl in the Water*, is available at libraries and booksellers. nummist.com/stories

Lyndsey Knight lives in Auckland with a special interest in creating hybrid works combining printmaking collage and poetry. Her short stories and poetry have been published both in NZ and abroad.

Heather Lurie grew up in America, and has lived in New Zealand for 18 years. She has always loved haiku, and relatively recently discovered she loves writing haiku as well.

Diane McCarthy is a writer who lives in Te Aro Wellington. She and Chris enjoy being hands-on grandparents to their two mokopuna, aged four and 10 months.

Sandeep Kumar Mishra is an artist, an author, a teacher and an editor. His work has been shortlisted for numerous international awards.

Born in Wales, United Kingdom, **Gareth Nurden** has been writing poetry since he was a teenager and now spends his time writing haiku and has been published in several haiku journals worldwide.

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

Jenny Pyatt is a retired teacher who lives by the sea in Hawkes Bay. She spends her leisure time pursuing her interests of photography and writing.

Mariam Rietveld is an enthusiastic 15-year-old student in Dunedin. She has 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.

Robert Rinehart (he/him) earned an MA in creative writing from California State University, Sacramento. He's coached swimming, and was an academic in tertiary institutions for 24 years, now retired. Work's appeared in *Chelsea*, *Mayhem*, and others.

Lisa Stanley lives and writes in Tāmaki Makaurau.

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/>.

Ariana Tikao (Kāi Tahu) is an artist of the sound and word variety based in Ōtautahi. She is a New Zealand Arts Laureate and has an MA in Creative Writing from the IIML. www.arianatikao.com

Kit Willet is a bisexual poet, English teacher, and executive editor of the Aotearoa poetry journal *Tarot*. His debut poetry collection, *Dying of the Light*, was published by Wipf and Stock imprint Resource Publications in 2022.