



## 2025 NEW ZEALAND BUG OF THE YEAR POETRY COMPETITION



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## WINNING POEMS

# CONTENTS

## Open Section

<b>Winner:</b>	<i>Heather McQuillan</i> The mothman finds an exquisite specimen
<b>Runner Up:</b>	<i>Katie Marshall Whē</i>
<b>Highly Commended:</b>	<i>Sophie Bathurst</i> De Spiritu Sancto

## Student

<b>Winner Secondary School:</b>	<i>Eve Hughes</i> Ontomology
<b>Winner Primary School:</b>	<i>Linda Jeane Dos Santos</i> Snail's spaghetti
<b>Runner Up:</b>	<i>Sophia Le</i> The Shell of Hope
<b>Commended:</b>	<i>Fred Forde</i> Let's have fun finding velvet worms

## Haiku

<b>Haiku Open:</b>	<i>Peter Free</i> mānuka tea
<b>Haiku Runner up:</b>	<i>Peter Free</i> school car wash
<b>Haiku Highly Commended:</b>	<i>Randy Brooks</i> praying mantis
<b>Haiku Highly Commended:</b>	<i>Peter Free</i> hut snore fest
<b>Haiku Student:</b>	<i>Sophia Carlota Dos Santos</i> bugs are life

## Best Poem for each bug nominee

<b>Southern ant:</b>	<i>Heather McQuillan</i> Abundant ants
<b>NZ Dobson fly:</b>	<i>Erin Zampaglione</i> The Puene
<b>Exquisite Olearia Owllet:</b>	<i>Gregory Dally</i> Starlet, Rangiora
<b>Giraffe Weevil:</b>	<i>Heather McQuillan</i> All in the name of copulation
<b>Frosted Phoenix:</b>	<i>Philippa Werry</i> Sightings
<b>Gravel Maggot:</b>	<i>Heather McQuillan</i> Ghrael maghghot
<b>NZ Praying Mantis:</b>	<i>Heather McQuillan</i> Whē, what do you pray for?
<b>Yellow Mayfly:</b>	<i>Heather McQuillan</i> Piriwai: Sub Imago in Yellow
<b>Mānuka Chafer Beetle:</b>	<i>Heather McQuillan</i> Mānuka Chafer or Mānuka Beetle; get it right, please
<b>Long-tailed Stonefly:</b>	<i>Heather McQuillan</i> Last on the list
<b>NZ Giant Stick Insect:</b>	<i>Annelies Judson</i> Sticks and Stones
<b>Bat fly:</b>	<i>Heather McQuillan</i> Da da da ... Batfly!
<b>NZ velvet worm:</b>	<i>Kākahu Banks</i> Ngāokeoke
<b>Gherkin Slug:</b>	<i>Jackie McCullough</i> Gherkin Slug
<b>NZ Blue Blowfly:</b>	<i>Robinne Weiss</i> Rango pango
<b>Giant ground snail:</b>	<i>Heidi Allan</i> In a lab not too far away
<b>Trapdoor Spider:</b>	<i>Marisa Cappetta</i> Cantuaria johnsi studies for her PhD
<b>NZ mole cricket:</b>	<i>Heather McQuillan</i> Excavator
<b>Ngaio weevil:</b>	<i>Philippa Werry</i> Nightfull, Moonlight
<b>Mercury Island tusked wētā:</b>	<i>Wanda Amos</i> Wētā
<b>Giant springtail:</b>	<i>Heather McQuillan</i> Holocanthella spp. responds to an ad
<b>Love of bugs:</b>	<i>Harley Bell</i> I offer myself to the sandfly

## OPEN SECTION



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Heather McQuillan

## The mothman finds an exquisite specimen

The modest mothman, a paragon of perseverance  
and Kiwi can-do, rubs his thick moustache as he wanders  
the Southern scrubland armed with a net, a hankering heart  
and a can of Highlander condensed milk though  
that is correlation and supposition.  
His vigilant eye spies the moth.

Not just any fluttering speck of dust and dreams.  
The Olearea Owlet's wings shimmer like moonlit lichen –  
*termen not crenulate, obliquely rounded, bright-green, black suffusion* –  
amid the soon-to-vanish tree daisies.

The mothman moves swiftly, a swoop, a sweep,  
now, trembling in a gauzy prison, fragile and exquisite,  
a speckled scrap. He, the poet-naturalist, names it – *Meterana exquisita* –  
classifies, catalogues, collects it.

When night's wild breath expires  
it is replaced by the immortality of a pin through the thorax.  
But what is a single moth's life compared to an obituary  
and the legacy of seventy-seven specimens in Te Papa?

He paints the fragile wings spread as if mid-flight  
– *white-margined. Cilia green, barred with black* –  
proof of beauty, of Science,  
of the human habit of destroying the thing we love.  
The Exquisite Olearia Owlet, At Risk, Relict  
but please not as the mothman portrayed: exquisitely, forever still.

Katie Marshall

**Whē**

I was never afraid of you  
The matriarch  
With wide-set eyes  
And a gentle gait

Unlike the others  
Who wrenched screams from our throats  
You weaved between my hands  
Like sand  
And I let you

Perhaps you reminded me of  
Our power  
Even when trapped in a glad-wrapped lunchbox  
Pricked by pins so you could  
Breathe in the breeze

Let me hold you in my palm  
Your Highness  
I'll help you escape the plastic sheen  
I'll lift you up  
To the top of the tree  
So you can stretch towards the sun

Sophie Bathurst

## De Spiritu Sancto

The trapdoor spider hasn't been seen since she drew the silken curtain on her burrow. Like a forgotten neighbour, people shrug their shoulders when her name is mentioned. No one's even bothered to call the cops to arrange some sort of arachnid Interpol Alert. After all, she isn't really lost, is she?

In Japan, they'd call her hikikomori. In the US, she'd be enrolled in online group therapy for the socially anxious. Perhaps she would find all eight of her feet if she were to migrate to France, where there's a word – *se recroqueviller* – to describe an autumnal leaf or creature who turns in on themselves.

Entomologists say she's frightened of the world. More than a little parochial. But I'm not sure about that. There's many an illiterate man who can read the stars. I'm guessing the trapdoor spider is a type of hermit who can read the world.

Once I taught an English-language student who said, "We've all got some cobwebs in the cupboard". My first instinct was to correct his idiom, but then I began thinking about when the gossamer itself becomes the point of entry.

A hand-spun prayer song to the act of retreat.

## STUDENT



Wikipedia image © K. J. Walker

## SECONDARY WINNER

Eve Hughes

### **Ontomology**

say a leaf draws freshly away from its stem  
with a ring in the air days and nights lasting,  
absorbed through surrounding green like damp  
or danger, and say nearby something hatches  
in response or melodic counterpoint, spawned  
with a hunger without regard for newness and  
other life — then say the needling brews,  
spills over and the cerebral  
ganglia reach for what is theirs  
through the gleam upon the  
mandible —

let the spaces around the eaten lines be  
irregular, uncreated and rather explored by  
a young entity in its first time on earth, and  
let the stem spring up a little in accordance  
with the lifted weight — what  
is now the leaf? the frame left  
behind? who is to blame for  
this damage, or maybe this  
growing?



## PRIMARY WINNER

Linda Jeane Dos Santos

### **Snails' Spaghetti**

Personally, I like spaghetti but without the worms  
Powelliphanta snails, however, have unusual taste and revolting table manners

I'm known to get rowdy when I'm hungry at tea time, but Powelliphantas  
slurp and suffocate their prey with their 6000 teeth

When Mum calls me a Powelliphanta snail at the table,  
I remind her that I am perhaps meant to be nocturnal

But maybe I'm more like a Powelliphanta than I thought  
They are threatened species, and my Grandma says that I'm a rare wildchild

I will always enjoy slurping my spaghetti,  
but Powelliphantas can keep the worms.

Sophia Le

## **The Shell of Hope**

Curling and whirling  
And twisting and spiraling  
Intricate lines and glistening shine  
Scores an ancient history  
Of sadness and survival  
And delicate new hope  
Along the smooth shell

Saddled with centuries  
Of dread and joy  
Curled into one tight, neat, little spiral  
And placed on one snail's back  
These endurers so determined  
To live and thrive  
Inch along  
Till the end of time

But we can share this  
Mighty creature's burden  
And come together  
In our hundreds, thousands, millions

Now we have a chance to make amends  
We hold this snail's future in our hands  
So we'll help along  
This giant snail  
Then it's legacy may carry on

Fred Forde

**Let's have fun finding velvetworms**

He aha tēnei?  
He ngāokeoke!  
Velvetworm glue guns, they shoot sticky glue  
Onto the insect  
Capturing their prey  
To devour

Velvetworms are not a worm. Or velvet.  
They are quite soft AND bumpy.

You can find them in rotten logs, just like me one glorious day.

# HAIKU



iNaturalist.nz image © Noah

## OPEN WINNER

Peter Free

mānuka tea  
chafer beetle and i  
share a cup

## RUNNER-UP

Peter Free

school car wash  
an ant walks over  
a rainbow

## HIGHLY COMMENDED

Randy Brooks

praying mantis  
there is no such thing  
as upside down

Peter Free

hut snore fest ...  
i'd rather sleep with  
mole crickets



## STUDENT HAIKU WINNER

Sophia Carlota Dos Santos

bugs are life to Earth  
bugs are our environment  
we stand together

## BEST POEM FOR EACH NOMINEE



iNaturalist.nz image © Emily Roberts

SOUTHERN ANT  
*Chelaner antarcticus*

Heather McQuillan

**Abundant ants**

*Chelaner antarcticus*

You are abundant, ant.  
Not redundant, ant.  
I find you resplendent, ant, in orange or black  
You are a remnant, ant,  
of complex beings, ant.  
You are dependent, ant, upon your ant pack

Your smell is not pungent, ant,  
like the intruder ants.  
May you be ascendant, ant, despite your small size  
You are a defendant, ant  
with your sharp mandibles, ant.

PUENE/NEW ZEALAND DOBSONFLY  
*Archichauliodes diversus*

Erin Zampaglione

**The Puene**

Puene, puene, toes you'll bite,  
In the stony streams at night,  
Mighty hunter in the wai,  
Grows into the Dobsonfly.

Your jaws are naiads' greatest fears,  
You prowl and eat for many years,  
A conquerer: a Genghis Khan,  
But when you're grown, your hunger's gone.

Old and frail, bereft of fight,  
Still you rage at dying light,  
With your final, spiteful deed,  
Salt the earth with your strong seed.

Puene, puene, toes you'll bite,  
In the stony streams at night,  
Mighty hunter in the wai,  
Grows into the Dobsonfly.

ĀTAKA/EXQUISITE OLEARIA OWLET  
*Meterana exquisita*

Gregory Dally

**Starlet, Rangiora**

Exquisite in flight, Meterana's consuls  
flood the air. They're out to enrich  
your act of sitting near rātā, smiling.

The moon in ascent has evolved  
to a Utopian's figurine. Its corolla glazes  
your veins' effulgence, crimson.

Lunar light contorts from the moths  
to stab your eyes as if a star has fallen.  
You recall the opaqueness of sleep,

a time in which you gained experience  
just by dreaming. The null  
conjured moments of laughter,

rife in the lens of a Speight's ale,  
obscured as mist from a sigh  
you've let free this morning.

The insect armada shades you. On a thrall,  
it's conceivable that anything you picture  
has happened already in memories

now mislaid, uncertain. It's possible  
you'll choose to hibernate in your mind here.  
At home on rye grass, fêted through moths,

you'd picture an infinity  
to the luxuries a heart acquires  
and keeps under one final summer.

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# PEPEKE NGUTUROA/GIRAFFE WEEVIL

## *Lasiorrhynchus barbicornis*

Heather McQuillan

### **All in the name of copulation**

*from the perspective of a female giraffe weevil who just discovered Rhymezone*

Here I wait with quiet dedication  
guarding my nest at my new workstation  
while the males engage in confrontation.  
All in the name of copulation.

The big ones swagger in domination,  
swaying their necks in absurd gyration.  
They boast loud of their snout elongation.  
All this fuss to expand our population

They crash and clash in furious frustration  
A ridiculous display of male fixation  
I sit here pretending adulation  
all in the name of copulation.

The small blokes sneak in to avoid frustration  
coming from beneath with canny concentration.  
Their humility earns my admiration.  
I prefer their meeker means of procreation.

My vocation is peaceful ovulation  
(from this role there is no abdication)  
but alas, without mass castration  
it's fighting first, before insemination.

I'll endure it all for the duration,  
let my thoughts wander in dreamy contemplation  
and imagine myself taking a vacation  
once we're done with all this copulation.

FROSTED PHOENIX  
*Titanomis sisyrota*

Philippa Werry

**Sightings**

Wakapuaka, Nelson, February 1882

As twilight softly falls  
Miss Collins turns up the lamp  
in her drawing room,  
notices a large dark moth.  
Forty years later,  
a warm night  
with the windows thrown open,  
Mrs Hamilton, visiting friends  
at Rangataua on the Main Trunk Line,  
spies a similar moth  
in their drawing room,  
deftly traps it in a matchbox.  
Miss Collins, Mrs Hamilton,  
first names unknown,  
but forever linked to  
the elusive frosted phoenix.  
Eleven recorded sightings.  
Miss Collins, number four.  
Mrs Hamilton,  
number nine.

GRAVEL MAGGOT  
*Smeagol climoi*

Heather McQuillan

**Ghravel maghghot**

*Note: to be read in a Gollum voice as performed by the brilliant Andy Serkis*

we ecologically important, precious,  
ghormandising on ghravel slime  
consumingh gharbage.

we named for Ghollum's  
alter-egho-Smeaghol,  
precious

and we are pulmonate ghastrapod mollusk  
not a nasty maghghottses,  
gholl —ughm.

we loves our ghlossy hide like  
an eleghant chocolate/half-sucked lolly  
spat out

we are jawless wonderssss,  
we slide and slither with  
mucous ghlands, precious,  
gholl —ughm.

# WHĒ/NEW ZEALAND PRAYING MANTIS

## *Orthodera novaezealandiae*

Heather McQuillan

### **Whē, what do you pray for?**

When you assume that pose to indispose your prey  
do you pray for forgiveness?

for being an ambush predator?  
for your kin who practice post-coital cannibalism?  
for humans who spray pesticides  
when you would do the work for a feed?

do you pray for the survival  
of your young in their foamy nest?  
your cousins in decline?  
do you pray for your pale nymphs to find colour?

do you pray for more than one cyclopean ear  
to hear the echo of te whē, (whē whē) gone before?  
do you pray for understanding?  
do you pray for your basic needs?  
do you pray for food that lies still?  
do you pray for fewer eyes so you don't have to see  
all that damn concrete?  
do you pray to stand out among the leaves?

do you pray for salvation?  
for the impoverished and the suffering?  
the persecuted?  
those further down the food chain?

whē, who do you pray to?

PIRIWAI/YELLOW MAYFLY  
*Ameletopsis perscitus*

Heather McQuillan

**Piriwai: Sub Imago in Yellow**

Your wings, thin as sunlit silk,  
tremble in the air's sigh, piriwai,  
a saffron flick over forest green;  
a match strike, a fleeting breath

you do not feed  
you do not fight, piriwai,  
you rise and rise

Yet, before this ephemeral flight  
you were a sharp-jawed nymph, piriwai,  
propelled by the violence of need  
did you think you had all the time in the world?

that you were invincible until  
your frenzy dissolved  
into cellophane kowhai wings?  
in brief, a body specified for birth then death

you will not feed  
you will not fight, piriwai,  
you will rise and fall.



# MĀNUKA CHAFER BEETLE

*Pyronata festiva*

Heather McQuillan

## **Mānuka Chafer or Mānuka Beetle; get it right, please**

Yeah for real I'm a chafing!  
I am not a mānuka beetle beetle!

Here's a lesson first in etymology.  
My name has nowt to do with Old French *chauffer*  
to rub to burn – to rub the wrong way.  
Rather, Old English *ceafor*  
entomological definition – beetle,  
of the family Scarabaeidae  
defined by our shells and  
clubbed antennae lamellae.  
Lesson over.

But if I chafe, if I irritate,  
it is not my intent.  
You took our mānuka,  
replaced it with pasture.  
Where were we to go?

Our damage, like yours, can span wide  
but we are more than ruined crops.  
We are layered complexity,  
carapace shimmering, chiral-coated,  
green-gold and perfect,  
crafted for our mānuka home.  
When will you return it?

LONG-TAILED STONEFLY  
*Zelandoperla fenestrata*

Heather McQuillan

**Last on the list**

(i)

Of what possible interest is a long-tailed stone fly to a poet?

*Is your tail exponentially longer than the rest?*

*How could I romanticise your grey stone sheen?*

*Is your body unlike other flies? Your habits stranger?*

And such minimal information was provided.

Who nominated you? Were you a mere space filler?

(ii)

I read the word polymorph  
and am sent skittering along a flight of thoughts  
of colour varieties, shapes and forms  
like you, not all my thoughts take flight  
some settle on wet-dark pebbles, others flicker  
over fast-moving water  
some lift high with window wings  
to gaze on possibilities beyond  
*fenestarta*, fenestra,  
you open my eyes to possibilities  
beyond a name

# RŌ/NEW ZEALAND GIANT STICK INSECT

## *Argosarchus horridus*

Annelies Judson

### **Sticks and Stones**

It is inglorious, of course,  
to be compared to a stick,  
more so to be  
named after one.  
I am giant, yes,  
so one might think  
that a more impressive name  
would be appropriate.  
Even the scientists describe me  
as horridus,  
as if my mere existence  
fills them with dread.

I cannot say sticks and stones  
without some sense of irony.  
Yet I watch myself  
as if I am nameless.  
I consider myself graceful,  
dainty,  
glorious in my angularity.

BAT FLY  
*Mystacinobia zelandica*

Heather McQuillan

**Da da da da da da da da da da da da da da da da Batfly!**

Behold the batfly's cry.

*To the bat mobile!*

wingless, we cling to fur

to soar into the night.

Behold the batfly's gadgetry.

Abdomen bag and a grappling claw;

*No guano left untasted!*

yet like our chauffeur, we're as blind as a bat.

Behold the batfly's lair

a bustling metropolis

our guano-coated tree hollows

a harmony of symbiosis

and a bat-wavelength of our own to say

we are not your prey

yet your prey

becomes our food (batshit crazy?)

Behold the batfly – a true superhero.

We never give up,

no matter how dark things may be.

We are no parasite

no wings, no sight

yet we take flight.

# NGĀOKEOKE/NZ VELVET WORM

## *Peripatoides novaezealandiae*

### Kākahu Banks

#### **Ngāokeoke**

He waewae iti, he nui te ngākau.

He reka te kai, haere mai te kōrero.

*Peripatoides novaezealandiae* is a mouthful...

Karanga mai e ngāokeoke, he whanaunga tāwhito, he whanaunga ora.

Kia ora te ngāokeoke. He kauheke a te ngāhere.

#### **Ngāokeoke**

Little footsteps, a big heart.

Sweet is its food, it welcomes discussion.

*Peripatoides novaezealandiae* is a mouthful...

Call to me ngāokeoke, an old relative, a hardy relative.

Thank you to the Velvet Worm. The kaumātua (elder) of the forest.

PUTOKO ROPIROPI/GHERKIN SLUG  
*Athoracophorus papillatus*

Jackie McCullough

**Gherkin Slug**

I found you stuffed into a jar  
By jar, I mean trunk  
By you, I mean green glorious glabrous  
splendiferous you  
The lime of ecstasy-tainted fluorescent  
pen-licked dreams  
(My tongue is still viridescent, just at the  
tip. It glows at night like an emerald  
furnace)  
I licked you to see what you smelt like.  
I imagined you tasted like hope's freckles

Behold the gherkin  
It's majesty visible  
Unseen, unheard slug

RANGO PANGO/NEW ZEALAND BLUE BLOWFLY  
*Calliphora quadrimaculata*

Robinne Weiss

**Rango Pango**

Rango Pango, razzamatazz  
I take no shit, I don't like jazz.  
I find you dead, I'll eat your eye  
Yep, that's me, I'm pretty fly.

Biggest, baddest on the block  
You got some sheep? I'll eat your flock.  
And for dessert, road kill's nice  
Or rotting fish – I'll take a slice.

I know you think that I'm so vile,  
But sit and stew on this a while –  
If I weren't eating up the dead,  
You'd smell them everywhere instead.

POWELLIPHANTA/GIANT GROUND SNAIL  
*Powelliphanta augusta*

Heidi Allan

**In a Lab Not Too Far Away**

In a lab not too far away  
You might find a frigid room  
Working hard to save the day  
As native flowers fail to bloom

You might find a frigid room  
A home to giant snails  
As native flowers fail to bloom  
They stay in chilly jails

A home to giant snails  
A site for coal-mining skill  
They stay in chilly jails  
They try a different hill

A site for coal-mining skill  
No place for gastropods  
They try a different hill  
The result was ill at odds

No place for gastropods  
Searching for a better fate  
The result was ill at odds  
So the entomologists wait

Searching for a better fate  
Working hard to save the day  
So the entomologists wait  
In a lab not too far away



PŪNGĀWEREWERE/TRAPDOOR SPIDER  
*Cantuarina johnsi*

Marisa Cappetta

***Cantuarina johnsi* studies for her PhD**

Scholarly life is solitary. Sedentary.  
Bifurcated body grows cumbrous in  
the confines of my underground home.  
I spin eight legged essays in the silk

walls of my tunnel. Try to get  
some exercise. Re-line the burrow.  
Make a new hinge for the leaf door.  
A sound body ensures a flexible mind.

I research the movement of insect feet.  
Categorise by rhythm as they tread the  
earth above. I record vibrations  
in ascii binary. Weave reproductions of

insect footprints. Capture their voices  
in the threads of my web. Accumulate  
decades of data. Teach my children the  
difference between predator and prey.

Hapless research subjects stumble into  
my lab. I observe. I devour. Lit by the  
eyes of my countless broods of children.  
Venture out only to defend my thesis.

# HONI/NEW ZEALAND MOLE CRICKET

*Triamescaptor aotea*

Heather McQuillan

## **Excavator: Honi / New Zealand Mole Cricket**

the spade digs into your gallery  
excavating an excavator  
exposing you to the light

your exoskeleton brown as the damp earth  
exiled in this wild patch  
while all around is cultivated concrete

the gardener extracts you  
holds you in their palm, rare creature,  
examines your shovel-claws  
two movable and one fixed dactyl per foreleg

you are not expendable  
the gardener will replace you  
in your underground exedra

the spade will be forsaken  
plans for the garden upgrade will be forsaken

NGAIO WEEVIL  
*Anagotus stephenensis*

Philippa Werry

**Nightfall, moonlight**

Darkness creeps over Takapourewa,  
grasses stir in the wind  
and spiny tuatara lie in wait  
as the ngaio weevils  
set off on their nightly scramble  
up the trunks of the ngaio trees  
while high in the sky above  
Rona in the moon  
clutches her ngaio tree fast,  
keeping it safe  
from chomping weevil jaws.

# MERCURY ISLAND TUSKED WĒTĀ

*Motuweta isolata*

Wanda Amos

## Wētā

banished  
to the backyard bach  
a weta and i  
overcoming fear  
breathing slowly



iNaturalist.nz image © Simon Lamb

# GIANT SPRINGTAIL

*Holocanthella* spp.

Heather McQuillan

## **Holocanthella** spp. responds to an ad

*Feeling sluggish?*

*No spring in your tail?*

*No jump in your butt?*

*Springtail Solutions will get your bounce back with our nutrient-rich wood rot*

*Spring Back Guarantee!*

No, thanks

I embrace my bulk, my spring-less state.

I've been endowed with a weight

to keep me down during storms

and help me push through tough terrain.

Why should I wish to be bound?

A determined crawl beneath logs

rotting on the ground serves me fine.

I've found I can adapt

and astound my predators by bleeding on demand.

I have been crowned a giant of my kind.

What matters most isn't how high I leap,

for I am renowned for doing my bit for the ecosystem.

That makes me proud.

## Harley Bell

### **I offer myself to the sandfly**

Here come your wings, hungry on the wind.  
One of us wakes with heavy lungs, awakens others to sandfly questions.  
How long was I out of sunlight  
in a dream above the earth?  
    Long enough for a kiss  
to be torn into teeth.

There was a time when silver shadows sprouted with the moon.  
When insects sang beyond the glass. Now tender light stains  
our panes of sleep like a thief between us.

Sing back the darkness, sandfly.  
Sing the lover's rest – an ear cradled to shoulder and chest.

There was a time of gardens  
when dirt swallowed my mind.  
Trees gave everything to Winter  
while I cut flowers  
from their thorns. I kept water with roses  
to bathe my hours  
with books, with salt, with petals. I thought there was no good way  
to be wild without leaves. But sandfly, here come your wings,  
born to desire skin. Sandfly, ask for blood  
and I shall offer my heart.