

THEME: BIRDS

AUTUMN 2020

# a fine line

THE MAGAZINE OF  
THE NEW ZEALAND POETRY SOCIETY

## IN THIS EDITION

**ARTICLES** BY HELEN MCKINLAY AND RAEWYN ALEXANDER

**REVIEWS** BY J. ROBINSON, T. HAMILL, K.M. COOKE

**AUTUMN FEATURED POET** PIET NIEUWLAND

**POEMS** BY J. ALLISON, J. CLAY, M. CRESSWELL, A. FRASER,  
M. GIACON, K.V. MARTINS, A. NAHILL, T. VELTMAN,  
K. WRIGGLESWORTH

**SPECIAL FEATURE** THE MEETING GROUND

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in Jamaica and New Zealand*



# From the Editor

*Ivy Alvarez*

It's always lovely to receive praise, don't you find?

Belinda Tait writes, "Just dropping a line to say the new Summer edition is looking great! Also, I would just like to say thanks, for your ongoing support of my work. Exposure is very hard to get, especially at beginner level!" Trish Veltman adds, "Another excellent issue for the summer, Ivy."

On behalf of the NZPS Committee, I'd like to thank Jamie Trower for his energy and enthusiasm for NZ poetry during his recent voluntary service, and to welcome Charlotte Steel, who now runs our social media. Get in touch: [social@poetrysociety.org.nz](mailto:social@poetrysociety.org.nz)

We will be having our AGM online this year, on the 6th of June at 2pm via Zoom. More details soon forthcoming.

For a *fine line's* Winter edition, we continue the search for our next Featured Student Poet. The chosen poet's work will appear in the magazine, and receive a book token as payment for publication. More prizes announced on [facebook.com/NewZealandPoetrySociety](https://facebook.com/NewZealandPoetrySociety)

Students, please email with details of your place of study, and a selection of up to 4 poems (maximum 40 lines each), subject line "Featured Student Poet", to [editor@poetrysociety.org.nz](mailto:editor@poetrysociety.org.nz)

Deadline **10 April 2020**. Good luck!

For Members' Poems, our Winter theme is **Fruit**. Deadline for members: **30 April 2020**.

This Autumn edition takes flight with thought-provoking articles from Helen McKinlay and Raewyn Alexander, poems from our brilliant Members on the theme of **Birds**, plus a special focus on a unique collaboration between New Zealand and Jamaican poets, organised by Jamaican poet Ann-Margaret Lim and our very own NZPS President Shane Hollands, with poems that will make your imagination soar and flutter.

And for our Autumn Featured Poet, I am delighted to present **Piet Nieuwland**, whose poems make graceful and unexpected swerves, and gentle collisions in language.

Thanks for cosying up to this edition of a *fine line*.

# a fine line

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## *Quotations of the Season*

Poetry can break open locked chambers  
of possibility, restore numbed zones to  
feeling, recharge desire.

— Adrienne Rich

I think writing is at its best when it's  
dipped in two streams: the reality and the  
poetic.

— Ben Okri

## Feature Article

### Environmental Poetry: A Personal Journey

*Helen McKinlay*

To begin, I want to share with you the thoughts and ideas that led me to one of the most enriching times of my life. As my knowledge increases, I realise how important sound and rhythm are to the human psyche.

Some say we are pure vibration.

I have always had an interest in the *performance* of poetry. It's the sound of the rhythm and the rhythm of the sound that appeals, whether the poem rhymes or not. And the same applies to written prose. It needs a rise and fall. Like music, language needs its phrasing, its dramatic pauses, its cadences.

However, it was not until I helped edit my daughter's PhD thesis in mathematical physics that I really internalised how essential rhythm is in all forms of *written* communication; from textbooks to spoken verse, whether read aloud, or quietly to oneself. When we read, our bodies have an emotional response, which in turn has its own rhythm. We gasp, still, shiver, tense, cry, freeze, feel angry, and sometimes doze off.

The internalisation of these ideas about rhythm in written communication led me to a deeper consciousness — that rhythm is what *all* forms of art hold in common. It equates to movement in dance, sculpture, painting, film. *It is part of our environment.*

At this stage in my thinking, I was frustrated. In the past, apart from being read aloud or performed, poetry has stayed on the page. I wanted to move it on, hang it up, throw it in the air... Other people must have had the same idea because it began appearing on walls and buses and in doctors' surgeries, and I myself joined an international online poetry blog and took part in a movement to paste poems in downtown windows.

Eventually it was my passion for the natural environment of Aotearoa New Zealand that gave me the experience of melding myself and poetry with the rhythms and spirit of the land itself.

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## The experience of melding myself and poetry with the rhythms and spirit of the land

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Below is my story of what turned out to be the Rototai Environmental Arts Project, situated in Mohua, Golden Bay.

Three years ago, I had a strong urge to give my poem, “Low Tide at Rototai”, to the beach of that name. Rototai Beach and the adjoining Motupipi estuary is an area of ecological and archaeological significance, as well as an area of fragile beauty. I have been a visitor since the days when it was dominated by the adjoining rubbish dump and the smoke from the Golden Bay cement works. The dump and cement works are now closed. In recent

years, the council and groups of volunteers have worked hard on restoring the native plants in the beach reserve and in parts of the inlet. Despite this, the quality of the estuary and its birdlife is still at risk. This project was my gift of aroha to a land that has suffered much — a contribution to its guardianship.

At Rototai, low tide can reach beyond horizons. Looking out from there, one is in the centre of Golden Bay — encircled, from left to right, by the mountains of Abel Tasman National Park, the Pikikiruna Ranges, Rameka, and the Tākaka Hill, followed by the view up the Motupipi inlet to Mount Arthur, and the mountains of Kahurangi National Park, which stretch round into the West Coast. And always, behind lies the long curve of Onetahua and Farewell Spit, with Mount Taranaki looming in the background. Lastly, there are the mysteries of the ocean bed and the multitudes of birds who feed there: royal spoonbills, white faced herons, pied oyster catchers, pied stilts, banded dotterels, black shags, and the rare kōtuku.

My poem is a simple account of what I saw, heard, and felt when walking far out into a tide that disappears into the sky: ‘At Rototai I walk to where the tide’s edge chatters with the gulls...’ But the experience of gifting it involved me in the sounds and rhythms of Papatūānuku and her children. I felt the mana of this place so deeply that I began to see the beach in 3D.

After much thought, I chose a boulder as the poem’s frame. I searched for a boulder that people could touch and enjoy, one they could lean on as they stared out to the everchanging views of tide and inlet. One that would suit the landscape. One that would have a space to place my poem on, in letters big enough for those who had left their reading glasses at home. And one day, the perfect boulder was there in front of my eyes. A sculpture in its own right. After a lot more phone calls, permissions, and paperwork, the big day came. I can’t describe the excitement I felt when it arrived at Rototai. It was indeed a truckload of boulder. Minutes later, the digger — ‘one of the big boys’ — arrived, and the driver delicately put it exactly where I asked. It was a huge moment and I was lucky to share it with my daughter, Beth, and granddaughter, Thea, who had helped find it. Now it was just a matter of designing the poem to fit the plaque that would then fit the boulder, as well as waiting for the carvers and the weather, and organising a celebration.

Finally, on 13 July 2019, the boulder — an ancient and sculpted piece of *Papatūānuku* from the Jurassic period — and the poem — not quite so old — were finally unveiled before a large gathering of people. Members of the Manawhenua Ki Mohua performed a karanga and waiata, and it was time for my daughters, granddaughters, and myself to lift off the harakeke covering made by Sarah Hornibrooke. I gave a short talk and then all who were present joined in the singing of Mozart’s version of *Dona Nobis Pacem*, or *Grant Us Peace*. Flautist, Patrick Riddett, played *Her Mantle So Green* (an old Irish air) and there was a final karakia, before kaumātua John Ward Holmes asked people to walk up to the boulder, touch it, and read the poem. My greatest wish had been that this gathering of people would be like a large dose of aroha for this place, and I felt it was. There were a few teary eyes and a lot of emotion expressed before we all chatted over our cuppas under the warm winter sun. All in all, it was a gorgeous Rototai Day.

Now that the project is finished, it looks so simple. But it was a mission that challenged all of my senses, faculties, and beliefs. I had no idea how to find a boulder, how many hours of work it would entail, how many people I would talk to, how many listened, how many emails I would write, how many permissions I would need, how to approach the funding, and what an amazing experience it would be. Or, that the project would increase exponentially until it became more about the rhythms of life itself and the spiritual connections between people, arts, and the environment. An act of kaitiakitanga.



# About Our Contributors

**Raewyn Alexander** of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland is internationally published. She edits, writes, ghost-writes, designs books, creates art-work, runs workshops and more. [www.writerfind.com/ralexander.htm](http://www.writerfind.com/ralexander.htm) or Facebook and Google for more.

**John Allison**'s poems appear in literary journals in New Zealand and overseas. He was the featured poet in *Poetry NZ* 14. His fifth poetry collection is *A Place To Return To* (Cold Hub Press, 2019).

**Jenny Clay** has poetry published in New Zealand and overseas, online and in print; and most recently in *Fresh Ink* 2019. Her poems are often influenced by the environment.

**Kay McKenzie Cooke** (Kai Tahu, Kati Mamoe) lives in Dunedin. She has had three poetry books published by OUP, with her fourth collection to be published by The Cuba Press in 2020.

**Mary Cresswell**'s sixth collection, *Body Politic*, will be published by The Cuba Press in 2020. It is focussed on the environment. See also: <http://www.read-nz.org/writer/cresswell-mary>

**Alexandra Fraser** is an Auckland poet. She is published in both NZ and overseas magazines and anthologies. Her second poetry collection, *Star Trails* (Steele Roberts), was launched in November 2019.

**Michael Giacon** is a poet from Auckland. He is a member of the Isthmus Poets, and a judge for the 2020 Peter Wells Short Fiction Contest.

**Thomas Hamill** is an English Literature graduate (University of Warwick), now living in Tāmaki Makaurau. Inspired by nature in Aotearoa, he loves exploring this theme in his own writing.

**Shane Hollands** is known for his work with poetry music & theatre, establishing The Kerouac Effect. Shane is a poet for the Wordcore bands, Freaky Meat, and The Moebius Orchestra.

**Ann-Margaret Lim**'s second poetry collection, *Kingston Buttercup*, was nominated in the poetry category of the 2017 Bocas Prize (Trinidad & Tobago). Her first collection, *The Festival of Wild Orchid*, was nominated for the UK's *Guardian* First Book Prize.

**KV Martins**'s poetry and prose feature in a variety of print and online journals. By day, she writes for an online history encyclopaedia, and by night, she works on a novella set in WWII Italy.

**Helen McKinlay** is a widely published poet and bestselling children's author. She blogs at [gurglewords.wordpress.com](http://gurglewords.wordpress.com). Her new poetry collection, *People of the Water*, is now available (see online).

**Art Nahill** is a physician-poet living in Auckland. He's published in both the US and NZ, and is working on his third collection of poems.

**Piet Nieuwland** has poems and flash fiction in print and online journals published internationally. He is managing editor of *Fast Fibres Poetry*, and previously worked as a conservation strategist. [pietnieuwland.simplesite.com](http://pietnieuwland.simplesite.com)

**Joseph Robinson** is a librarian based in Wellington who likes off-white roses and silk shirts. He posts some of his musings on Instagram: [open\\_tabs\\_infinite](https://www.instagram.com/open_tabs_infinite).

**Trish Veltman** lives in Kapiti and writes poetry, fiction and a blog [www.verveview.com](http://www.verveview.com). Some of her poems have been published in magazines, including in *a fine line* and *Mayhem*.

**Karen Wrigglesworth** was inspired to write a few poems – after a lengthy hiatus – while visiting Dunedin's Botanic Garden. She wrote "The Avians" during a Robert Lord residency.

# Autumn Featured Poet

Piet Nieuwland

## BlurBlurBlur

We are in, as the tee shirt full frontal states, Tokyo, London, New York, Dargaville  
The Great Northern Wairoa bulges like a big fat eel, the incoming tidal wave swallows the  
overflowing breakfast menu of eggs free range, focaccia wholemeal, beans and sweet hot kumara  
A triple shot espresso saxophonist trills, tribbles, vibrates a spill out a resonant jazz jive that  
opens all walls  
The chalk board invites patrons to a little greedy indulgence, servings of rich chocolate orange  
berry cake with cream that mirrors a vivid red cow abstractly in celebration of kiwi roaming free  
though pastoral landscapes  
Sunday morning main street vibe is a liquor store open and a gaggle of swaggering locals out  
back, the garden courtyard filled with banana palms and boasts  
Buoyant putangitangi chicks hang ten on a Hokusai wave over Riporipo beach  
Rafts of ghost kauri logs snake the afternoon rollin' down the river, dodging the jingle bell rock  
and carols bleeding from the scorched wasted hills  
The clouds are intercontinental, in a slow motion parade to and from the horizon just over there  
to Bondi, or Manly and the beach babes here as sweet as any there, any on the Vie De Pacifique  
Perimeter anywhere

- *First published in GREED: 7 Deadly Sins, Vol. 3 (Adelaide: Pure Slush Books, 2018)*

## **An Indium Morning**

Between Te Whara and Paepae o Tū  
Pohutukawa elbows knotted  
With an asymptotic curve of fine holocene sands  
Taonga islands drifting through a sifting, shifting lens  
Where we landed,  
Cloud caverns of frontal activity loom  
A spring tide in spring pulls the dunes down  
Ice plants melt in the white sun  
In a season of fires  
A red kete, red tee shirt  
Ebony bikini, blushing cheeks  
Red billed gull quartet  
He korero,<sup>1</sup> plays the ivory surf  
The fertile ocean carved whakairo  
Into literatures of foam and air  
A pizzicato for children  
Ngaruaroha, her cello, violins  
Trembling like the toiling clouds  
Haere mai te kara  
Ka nuku nuku  
Ka neke neke

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<sup>1</sup> Steinway concert piano He korero purakau mo te awanui o te motu: story of a New Zealand river.

## **With unspoken questions**

With unspoken questions / on bioluminescent algae  
Viridescent infinities / emerald harmonics  
We embraced the swollen arch of dawn / its twisted silken chords  
Over archipelagos of white winged yachts / on a deep aquamarine gauze  
On course to hidden magic bays / dialects of landscapes  
Fecundities of spirit / fertile subversions  
Dancing tarantellas of coastal dunes  
Vivid cadenza in the diluvial light  
As when we love / these wounded black mountains  
As when we follow / the edge of tidal water / through salt flats  
From this hill / feeling an uneasy peace  
When the sun lifts / out of the ocean  
The houses / sown loosely / amongst totara groves  
All huddle and flex / in tentacles / of the hot wind

## **Remember the numbering of clouds**

Not in snow, nor ice but warm mists  
Her eyes incandescent stars

A handful of words  
Scribbled on ribbons of language woven

An unveiling of letters  
On drying cotton sheets

A new alphabet of signs  
Of fluid sounds

A miracle of hours unfolding  
Sweet ellipses, a solar circle

Actions of electrons reaching  
Beyond their orbit

# Feature Article

## How to Edit an Anthology in 90,000 Steps *Raewyn Alexander*

As I edited the New Zealand Poetry Society's (NZPS) 2019 anthology, *The Perfect Weight of Blankets at Night*, hundreds of poems, possibly thousands, eased or rollicked in.

Other verses winked, a few seemed shocking (blunt experiences, or highly emotional, and so on).

Trends included fragile eco-systems, love poems (perennially-favoured thank goodness), the delicate, flexible ways we connect, cultural themes, school-life, families... Poems were published due to their winning a prize or their fine qualities.

Kudos to NZPS people for expertise, focus, and kindness. Yearly, the NZPS publication springs from a highly-respected international writing competition: many schools, workers, parents, multifarious individuals, including an octogenarian, were involved this year. Via email, we discussed vital matters — like capital letter use (honestly!), format, style, related themes — and relayed comments. Excellence from Aotearoa New Zealand and the world, in this publication.

Editing's like a medical procedure, but on a body of work... I'd created books before. Choosing cover colours took days. Excited about "night" and "comfort", trying grey, greens, lilac, until satisfied. People do judge books by their covers and require ease of reading. My International Communication degree training and decades of writing and publishing supported me.

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### Careful organisation is an invaluable writerly habit to cultivate

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Finickity changing, huffing, haaah-ing, wondering... maybe like adapting a favourite recipe. We cater using ingredients at hand. Often a mess at first, nevertheless persisting, often alone. Analysing previous editors' efforts as a guide, plus astounding proofreading from Laurice Gilbert at NZPS, along with Katharine Allard and Shane Hollands, helped — excellent administration. NZPS offers this yearly international competition. Their professionally-managed publication appears later.

An editorial needs to welcome readers, a true contents list must appear, with work thoughtfully collected. NZPS's *The Perfect Weight of Blankets at Night* overall utilised naturalistic presentation. Some editors prefer logical approaches. I employed some mathematical order, also relying on intuitive, emotional directions. Humans use multiple intelligences. I employed logic, visual-spatial, linguistic, and naturalistic reasoning regarding design, with a sense of musicality. Gardner's *Theory of Multiple Intelligences* explains.

Received poems were filed, then rearranged into a poetic story. Careful organisation is an invaluable writerly habit to cultivate. Highly-placed poems suited the beginning (to a degree expected and possibly comforting); some then appeared grouped as sharing similar moods or themes (e.g. natural subjects).

Contrariwise, intriguing tensions, and looser narrative groups evolved, soothing poems next to active work, etc. Particular poems suited being kindly grouped, others provided rests, mood changes, segues... Each choice quite deliberate with a sense of freedom, vitality, with personal touches offering such effects.

Poetry has been vital in my life since birth. My extended family lived nearby, and loved quotes, recited verse, sang, invented rhymes, nicknames — everyone widely read and creative in conversation. Many offered me reading recommendations; then I enjoyed a great formal education.

Excellent awarded verse compelling on any page, too, like extraordinary furniture in a room, but much finery in one place seemed unbalanced. Gradually, I furnished pages in a more naturalistic, eclectic style. Testing, questioning each line, punctuation, and placement, respect improved quality.

This anthology is designed also as a gentle, intriguing antidote possibly to ultra-orderly, tricky, streamed information coming straight at you (some too crass), beamed from screens, online, or TV *et al.*

Surely many readers shall discuss our NZPS's anthology 2019. Questions welcome. Buber, the German philosopher, said true dialogue's how human being progress.

Our 2019 cover is dream-like, edgy. Aotearoa NZ's inventive culture with international touches: inspiring. Practising creative arts, by the way, creates superior problem-solvers, happier people, more empathetic, so truly helpful decisions appear. Writing and reading poetry improves all thinking — so vital.

From ancient times, artists developed, drew cave pictures, or on artefacts — messages of life. We imagine sounds became stories, verses, etc., helping us understand feelings, where to next... Arts' wondrous tradition — you and me, free to practise them.

Much art opens minds, softens hearts — some nourishing food for thought...

Reading papers, and file after file online, my fingers hurt, arms ached (wishing I'd learnt touch-typing), but joyous, so involved. Editing takes mega-gallons and gigantic gulps of time, too. Writers and editors need exercise. Some do physical work when not writing: we walk, cycle, visit a gym, do aqua-aerobics... A work-life balance also vital.

Proofreading, re-reading, reformatting: grateful for people's guidance, also their accepting apologies for any errors. Complete puzzles, too, were sorted by a group, occasionally. When so close to editing, everything can blur.

Luckily, extraordinary help with proofreading appeared (as mentioned), and reading work aloud to myself assisted (something I learnt in a poetry workshop long ago. I oddly forget who advised me to read work aloud, perhaps pñw donnelly with her snail-mailed workshops, or inimitable Catherine Mair in person, or unflappable Patricia Prime, maybe luminary Janet Charman, or genius editor Alistair Paterson, or in Gold Table Workshops with David Lyndon Brown, Dr Olywn Stewart *et al.*, or fellow Eye St Poet Dr Jack Ross, careful Jacqueline Crompton Ottaway, fantastic Alice Hooton, maybe insightful Leicester Kyle over at wonderful Lee Dowrick's, or Poetry Brats like Dr Rene Harrison, Peter Larson, Lynda Chanwai Earle, or Happy Tea House poets, at Blue Haven gatherings, Grey Lynn?) Many poets supportive. I recommend joining or creating poetry workshops — in the swim, your head up, helping others stay afloat, too.

Important to build healthy resilience, and helpful friends and family do matter — the outside world's where your writing's going.

A thrill, anyway, working with such fine writers re the anthology, with nice short notes appearing on occasion. One farmer escaping rain sent mention of lambing. From Ireland later, someone relayed goodwill in Gaelic... Another poet chatted with a Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland radio show host, emailing saying *The Perfect Weight of Blankets at Night* could appear on the chat show *Kick Arts*. Deeply appreciated.

Insightful arts connect us truly well. Do kindly enter NZPS's competition this year — polish your poetry and submit. A rewarding experience. See our dreamy book launch photos online, read and enjoy the book itself. Inspirational.

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Editing takes  
mega-gallons and  
gigantic gulps of time

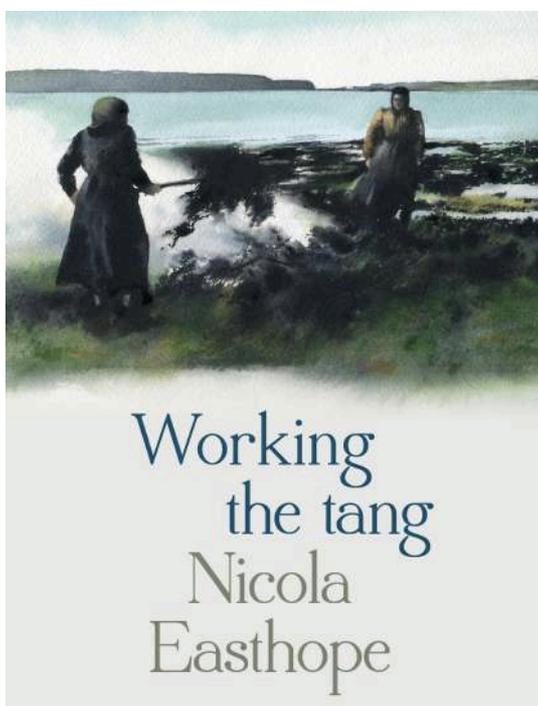
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# Reviews

## *Working the Tang - Nicola Easthope*

(Wellington: The Cuba Press, 2018).  
ISBN 9780995110724. RRP \$25. 87pp

*Reviewed by Joseph Robinson*



Easthope will put  
your extensive knowledge  
of New Zealand geography  
to shame

The endnotes of Nicola Easthope's recent volume reveal some aspects of Norse mythology to the uninitiated. Off the Orkney Islands, at the bottom of the Swelkie whirlpool, there is a witch who turns the great mill-wheels and keeps the planet salty.

Although Easthope might usually be found on the Kāpiti Coast, this appears to be a sly reference to her other dwelling. With all the salt and motion *Working the Tang* brings into the world, it is safe to say Easthope is that witch.

The volume's early poems are enmeshed with family histories and visions of a Pākehā ancestral home in the vicinity of the Orkney Islands. But this land is not the temperate twin of Hawaiki; it is cold, salty and bloody. But there is much mystery and song to be discovered there. Easthope's writing is distinctly Pākehā. She necessarily defines her identity in terms of a relationship with Māoritanga and Te Tiriti. Easthope does not shy away from the horrors and ongoing injustices that colonialism and eurocentrism has frequently wrought on Māori. These are not 'NZ/European' poems.

hoodie boy lights up in salute. He inhales,  
but his lungs empty out through his eyes.

The Wharemauku slips rain over  
a fish-pass conceived by school children  
("Morning")

Easthope will put your extensive knowledge of New Zealand geography to shame. Have you been to Ōkārito? What of Andaman, Pōrangahau, and Kiriwhakapapa? Ah, but have you been held up by the traffic controllers at Torea Street? I strongly suspect the author is the innovator behind the Dulux Colours of New Zealand paint range. The major clue is found in a bucket of Ōkārito NZ9H7 (a respectable, soft grey tone).

Some of the most striking poems seem to take

their leave off the page. Verbs vault and images rise. “Man at the Kerb” and “Boogie” demonstrate this best. ‘Shimmy’ might be the second most frequent word in the volume, coming in just after ‘salt’, of course. “Hot” is a delicious ditty full of affection, steam, and coffee.

In two standout poems, “Week’s End” and “What Shall We Write on the RAMS Form?”, Easthope masterfully probes the psyche of the teacher. If I were a member of the House of Medici, I’d commission an entire volume of her teaching observations. It’s a treat, reading the narrative voice as they radically empathise with the unique shortcomings of each student, and fret over the possibility of lunch-stealing weka.

I am 23. Children mystify, amuse, and terrify me. The concept of parenthood is filed away in my in-tray labelled ‘non-urgent matters you can just pretend don’t exist’. But a few of Easthope’s knowing tales can almost make a jaded millennial partial to the concept.

My son is such a deliberate tūi.

Flipping, falling out of his tree.

My son is Larsen C calving away.

(“Crouching Tiger”)

The image of diminishing glaciers in the last line fittingly calls to my mind the imminent threat of environmental collapse, and its discouraging influence on the concept of child-rearing. Anyway, if it’s not too late already, I’ll let the readers make up their own minds about whether they want to bring children into the Anthropocene.

Easthope condenses hundreds of years of ancestral history, and the identity that comes with it, into something tangible and salty. She conjures strong images from her personal experiences as a Pākehā living in Aotearoa, as a teacher, and as a parent. Reading this volume, I felt like I got to speak with Easthope personally as she shared poignant anecdotes of her life. And that is a treasure indeed.

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### *The Limits - Alice Miller*

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(Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2014).  
ISBN 9781869408060. RRP \$25. 51 pp.

*Reviewed by Thomas Hamill*

**It hints at the destructiveness  
of colonisation but is  
never preachy**

It’s funny when your pre-conceptions are torn up and something new and delightful appears in their place. For example, I recently ordered a seemingly bog-standard apple crumble in a restaurant in Auckland, only to find an oatly crumble in a neat pile, to the left of a steaming hot apple fruit compote. A perfect dusting of cinnamon neatly encircled the entire affair. This is known in foodie circles as a ‘deconstruction’. It was delicious. My approach to Alice Miller’s seemingly understated collection *The Limits* was similar. Early forays into Miller’s poems led me to believe I was heading into soft and whimsical poetry, filled with a gentle musicality. However, much like my deconstructed pudding, the more I looked at the sum parts, the more I was taken into something extraordinary and delicious.

Miller is an ex-pat New Zealander who lives in Germany. Miller was already established as a multi-award-winning writer when *The Limits*, her first full-length collection, was published in 2014. The fact that Miller now lives abroad is no surprise. *The Limits* is laced with an overtone of fascination with things beyond the shores of

Aotearoa. We are guided through poems that talk of ‘St George attacking forever a dragon’ in “Crowd”, to feeling encased in ‘humid ... wooden skin’ in a poem that speaks to Greek mythology in “Morning in Troy”. From ancient Britain to ancient Greece, all through the voice of a New Zealander. The threads of myth weave their way through the collection. Even poems that do not speak to mythology on the surface overtly reference something greater than humanity. It is as if we are the playthings of great gods, be they Rūamoko or Zeus. We see this juxtaposition best in “Apple”:

The night the earth’s crust cracked  
Under us, great  
Hands reaching

To brush the earth’s skin

There is a Homeric grandiosity in such seemingly simple syntax, and it is a device used extensively in the collection.

The collection is broken up into four sections. Three of these feel very personal: “Skin”, “Body”, and “Steps”. However, there is something misleading about this. The only downside to this collection is that the poems themselves avoid direct connection between poet and reader. Although there is romance, emotion, and intimacy in many of the poems, I never see myself or the direct voice of Miller in them. This is partly because there seems to be so much intellectual heft needed to fully appreciate some of the metaphor, almost like a series of in-jokes between two intellectuals that are designed to alienate the layperson. The prior knowledge needed to understand the complex relationships between composers Johannes Brahms, Clara Schumann, and Robert Schumann (entwined in a deeply challenging love triangle with Clara at the centre) in the poem “Album of Breath” is not for the fainthearted and means that the lines:

... do these snaps – one composer  
gone mad, in a river, one beauty doing  
  
as beauty always does; and one Brahms, a pianist  
whose hands stretched  
  
two octaves

could well be lost on many readers. Of course, many poetry readers appreciate all arts and I am surely doing them a disservice. But this isn’t an isolated incident, and many of the poems in the collection need prior knowledge to fully appreciate their meanings. Consequently, there is little for the casual reader.

Contrary to this, if ever a collection deserved a third or fourth reading with Google handy for any questions or clarifications, it is this one. “Ocean” is a beautiful poem that starts with an opening line that seeps of politicised anxiety. It hints at the destructiveness of colonisation but is never preachy: ‘We make a map to throw upon the world /to catch the unknown islands’. Tangata Whenua seem to have a role throughout the collection, if not directly, such as in “Ocean”, but Te Ao Māori seems to underpin much of the writing. Consequently, nature is treated with appropriate deference throughout. In “Wet”, ‘The lakes were incapable of being owned /they turned /wild.’ And in a reference to the importance of whakapapa, they ‘always remembered their mothers’. Here Miller hints at the faults of modernity, how it inexorably encroaches on nature and removes something of beauty with a mere ‘streetcorner’. The collection itself is prefaced with a quote from “Of Being Numerous” by George Oppen, which states:

They gathered in council  
And spoke, carrying objects.  
They were credulous,  
Their things shone in the forest.

I believe the ‘they’ refers to Māori and through this lens, the collection really sings. I was not surprised to discover that Miller worked at the Waitangi Tribunal.

*The Limits* is in many ways extraordinary. Miller voices magnificence and vulnerability, grandeur and minutiae, often all in the same poem. Time, place, and person are all very transient, and often push you as a reader to the limits of your perception. If you are up to the challenge and want to be swept up in some first-rate and delightful poetry, then grab a copy of Miller’s first collection, sit down with your deconstructed apple crumble, and simply enjoy.

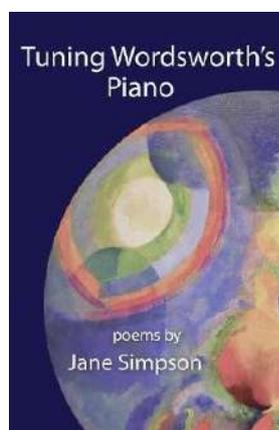
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## *Tuning Wordsworth’s Piano - Jane Simpson*

(Brisbane: Interactive Publications, 2019).  
ISBN 9781925231915. RRP \$29. 51 pp.

*Reviewed by Kay McKenzie Cooke*

Anyone who can discover  
the sacred in a  
bunch of silverbeet  
has my attention



I found the title of Jane Simpson’s poetry collection, *Tuning Wordsworth’s Piano*, rather intriguing. I wondered what the title was hinting at. I didn’t have to wait long to find out. The title poem is the first poem in the book and yields strong clues.

Unspoilt Nature is nature writ too small;  
nature at our feet;  
nodding daffodils saying ‘Yes’,  
green the obverse of grey paths  
in the Victorian Botanical Gardens  
where children cavort and disks wheel,  
Orphic artists paint concentric circles,  
create the sun – sing the music  
of the spheres.  
 (“Tuning Wordsworth’s piano”)

This poem sets the scene for this thoughtful poetry collection. All the poems that follow similarly expose the poet’s love of the sublime, the spiritual, as well as her love for humanity and nature. Small delights, such as plants in a garden and time spent among the trees, bring peace and a sense of wonder. An additional sensibility towards literature, art, and music — the finer things of life — infuses this collection. There is also a thread of reverence and compassion for the tender, vulnerable, and small.

Simpson asks of things that are still growing,

‘taken from your grove / can you thrive, alone, in the city?’ (“Rewarewa”).

There is also an admiration for how humble things, when observed closely, have the ability to highlight the universal — the macro contained in the micro.

Rain beads on brassicas,

the meniscus, taut

between white veins, is a jewel

that reflects the beloved,

would reflect the Milky way

were it not for the snap

of ice on opened leaves.

(“From a bed of stars”)

Like a gardener delving into fertile soil, Simpson’s metaphorical digging into the natural world often turns up personal insights. I think these small poems were the ones I enjoyed the most. Anyone who can discover the sacred in a bunch of silverbeet has my attention — ‘silverbeet are fluted / columns down a temple wall’ (“barocca pearl”).

Simpson’s mindfulness towards the elements and the environment is especially evident in the mid-section of the collection. Here, the poet describes her cycling tour of the Catlins. For me, this section holds the book together. Despite its vivid descriptions of buffeting wind and rain, I am tempted to describe it as the book’s quiet centrepiece. The focus is on Simpson as a (very grounded) pilgrim in search of, among other things, the late poet Hone Tuwhare’s crib (Northern readers, think bach).

Does she find the crib? Ah, well, since I enjoyed the subtle tension leading up to the answer to this question, I feel compelled not to spoil it for you.

The poet’s journey is impressively intrepid. And the heartwarming sequence of poems created because of this venture takes us along for the ride. Honest descriptions of the people she meets, of maps she follows, and the impact of the landscape as she forges ahead, pepper all the poems. I have a mental image of a hardy Simpson often halting her (surely) dogged progress, defying the battering of a strong easterly, to jot down lines inspired by this beautiful part of Aotearoa.

Campervans rush past to Slope Point

the minutes and seconds of extremity.

In front of me, ploughed hills are rolling r’s,

Rakiura stretches out, blue as a whale.

(“The map, CH13 Curio Bay”)

It is in the third section of this book where Simpson (now off her bike) really hits her stride. The poetry here is strong, and it also reveals a love of life and its finer aspects. But now, this love is tempered with personal disquiet and grief. This is where Simpson’s poetry speaks in more political ways. She insists

for more inclusion and equality in the church. One delightful poem about nuns at work is titled, “Feminine construct”. Through these poems, she shows a willingness to speak up as well as out.

I will see in their place Christa on the cross  
back in the Manhatten Anglican Cathedral, bare  
-breasted, sculpted in bronze;  
scandalous and true.  
(“This Good Friday”)

Did God not put the rainbow in the sky? In an ancient church  
the priest wraps hands, two sons are exchanging vows;  
what God has joined together let not man put asunder.  
(“Sonnenizio on a line by R.S. Thomas”)

*Tuning Wordsworth's Piano* is a book where observations are simple, singular, and tender. But at times, these observations can also appear opaque. Some of the poems, particularly in this third section, come across as enigmatic. This is actually not a bad thing in poetry, and Simpson's light hand still does offer accessibility.

They glisten like the key  
-hole slits either side and below  
my belly I see every morning  
in the shower -  
  
a sacrament of life, body  
and blood, my womb  
cauterised:  
(“Seeing Claire at Evensong”)

What carries this collection is the poet's obvious sensibility, salted with compassion, as well as a searing and unapologetic honesty. Simpson is personal and true to herself. Her insightful poems acknowledge a spiritual side that informs the everyday and the ordinary, with all its anomalies, tragedies, and all its small and large sorrows.

I believe a fitting conclusion to this review would be a line from one of the poems describing Simpson's cycle tour of the Catlins. This is where she had set out searching for the last home of one of Aotearoa's favourite poets. It perhaps sums up, more than anything, Simpson's compassion for the 'unmarked' as well as her reason for being.

The reason  
I'm here – a pilgrim  
to a poet's unmarked crib.  
(“With wing feathers trailing”)

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

# Members’ Poems

## slippery beauty

*from Fiona Pardington photographs*

cat’s eye

univalve mollusc

eye of Tangaroa

a string of beads

Neptune’s necklace

seaweed entangled woman

wrapped in bull kelp

moko on her chin

or draped in diaphanous fabric

fingerprints on neck

a harrier hawk from roadside

stuffed in a bag

then wings spread wide

held by pins

the way

it used to   soar

— *Jenny Clay*

## Promised

All summer  
we watched over

the wild bramble  
of blackberries

as though it were  
ours

as though we'd been  
promised

some aliquot  
of sweetness

bore witness  
to the flowering

then the slow setting  
of the fruit

But the relentless rain  
has come early

the rot  
has set in

and now the blackbirds  
squabble over a few

purpled nubs  
of ruin

— *Art Nahill*

### **birds with stone hearts**

perch in judgement / preening / cleaning carved wings / outstretched  
your arms reach / for bird dreams / tucked away in feathers golden  
as sunflowers & weeds / where seeds tossed failed to flower &  
black crow shadows flocked / to collect the crumbs of salted  
skin smoothed / by wounded wings / the cat walked away / and you  
have never moved / beyond the garden hedge.

— *KV Martins*

## Five Birds Make a Flock

The takahē rose quickly to fame  
rediscovered whence he first came.

Once named Notornis  
he's currently known as  
Porphyrio – but the face is the same.

\*

The kea can hop like a crab.  
She'll swoop and burgle and grab.  
She'll ravage your tent  
with joyous intent  
and leave you to pick up the tab.

\*

Lo the elusive kākāpō –  
its cost is high, it scuttles low  
Up in the air it cannot go  
all boom and bust is kākāpō

\*

When you think your life's gone kerplooy  
just spare a kind thought for the tūī  
who sings 'Mairzy Doats'  
out of both of its throats  
until listeners think they've gone screwy

\*

The weka goes stomping around  
but never quite gets off the ground.  
His beady red eyes  
give rise to surmise  
as he scuttles away with no sound.

— *Mary Cresswell*

## The Peacock Needs Glasses

*after Two Ladies at the Automat, Diane Arbus*

Thirty years, and the first words in her mouth are lies.  
Sugar-coated, so I can swallow them easy,  
like those pills for my blood pressure.  
But her pasted mouth never savoured an alphabet  
of sweet stuff. Honey. Milk chocolate. Plums.

What tickles her tongue is oniony and raw.  
She says You ain't changed a bit but who's she kidding,  
in that Woodbines drawl? I was there too,  
back when we were flapping, foxtrotting, flirting.

Peacocks should be on parade in the zoo,  
but she is sipping tea at my table, in some get-up  
lambs shouldn't wear, preening at herself in a spoon.

These days my mirror is a caged parrot, curtained  
with a black cloth of fake night, so it won't spawn  
wisecracks and cackles, making me blush.  
I don't need to see myself to know how I look.  
Not much of a looker, our Vic, Dad always said,  
but handsome is as handsome does.  
Whatever that means.

But I was never a girl who hugged walls  
waiting for dances they never got. Seventeen pairs  
of dance slippers I went through one summer.  
I was Markova,  
I was Fontayne,  
spinning, whirling, flying,  
in silk and sequins the colour of flowers,  
the colour of spring.

All the spinning I do now is yarns  
that make my grandchildren yawn and leave.  
They jive to the beat in their own feet,  
live like tomorrow is a day that only dawns for the old.

They don't want to wear the pearls and diamante  
I hoarded for my granddaughter.  
You think I want to wear scarves  
where fine gems used to shine?  
I was a swan once.

Haven't changed?  
All I can say is, it's time  
the peacock wore glasses.

— *Trish Veltman*

## Time travels

A night in the old room  
back under fraternal care  
ten and 25 now 65 and 80

I hear you slipper quiet  
through medicated night  
time travels by fresh wounds  
that will dissolve in tenderness

perhaps this new age floats  
loss and love, desire and disease  
on question marks, maybe it's only  
two tablets every four hours til dawn

undressing in slow motion  
beneath the icon from back when  
a daggered heart held by white roses  
the teddy bear slumped on the pillow

time later to decipher beauty benign  
fingers and toes stretched in warm sheets  
bright birds call light under the kitchen door  
our table laid a lifetime ago for this breakfast.

— *Michael Giacon*

## Notes on a Pigeon

Everything about it so utterly  
pigeon. Look, listen.

The abrupt  
clatter of wings, beating  
lemniscates across the creamy air  
between us;

& a sudden flurry  
of that tensile warmth alighting  
on my shoulder;

& the firm  
pink clasp of talons  
on the soft pink openness my hand  
has offered it;

& that  
particular alertness of the head,  
the iridescent sheen  
of feathers striking fire  
from light;

& I am  
in the pigeon's world, myself  
a world within this world  
reflected in the eye's black mirror.

— *John Allison*

## The Avians

The birds are closer here,  
More bold  
Riffling soft leaf moulds  
Just there! beyond the pane  
For grubs, and tidbits I leave out

A chiming bellbird doe-doe-dahs –  
A jambing hinge singing for grease –  
A foreign aural, awful sound.  
Rain gathers, gull shrieks drown  
The shhhhh! of Great King cars

Secluded in your chain-link cloister  
You rush straight down, puff russet wings  
Beg infant slop from mother  
Who – how I relate!  
– wishes you flown

Flown!

— *Karen Wrigglesworth*

## The albatross

In the early morning I beheld  
for the first time an albatross  
a bird of noble appearance

many of the passengers  
had their guns out firing it fell  
fluttering onto the water

unable to raise itself again  
I had the happiness of assisting  
in the skinning of it

its feet and legs were cut off  
I got one took the bones out  
so it seemed a fancy silk bag

Look at me the young lad cried  
unaffected by Coleridge ST  
look at me

running the foredeck flapping  
the monstrous albatross wings  
salvaged from the bird's corpse

strapped tight to his arms  
oh what a great bird am I  
he sang as the still-fresh blood

dripped to the deck  
in rivulets of warning

*T. Ferens (his journal) on board John Wickliffe, en route to NZ, 1848*

— *Alexandra Fraser*

## Longing

come back kakariki  
come back green swoop across the bay  
multiple cries in one voice  
green slice across the blue over the blue  
an exclamation mark of survival  
against the clouds

— *Alexandra Fraser*

# Special Feature

## The Meeting Ground

### A collaboration between poets in Jamaica and New Zealand

*Ann-Margaret Lim*

The Meeting Ground collaboration was initially the idea of Ian Wood, a diplomat from New Zealand. Aware of my love of literature, he arranged the fateful online meeting between myself and Shane Hollands, President of the New Zealand Poetry Society.

I was happy to have collaborated with Shane on our first Meeting Ground outing, which focused on Fathers' Day, and which *The Jamaica Gleaner* graciously published. Today, I am thrilled to the point of silence to share our Jamaica/New Zealand poetry collaboration on birds.

I received and read the poems with appreciative awe. We are both grateful for the poets who were game enough to contribute their work. As we read the offerings from Jamaica and New Zealand, we are even more convinced of the unifying force of the Arts in general, and literature in particular.

Works from New Zealand's Poet Laureate, David Eggleton, and Caribbean poet and critic, Eddie Baugh, are included in the collection of poems below. We hope these poems bring you illumination and joy, as they did for us.

As we say in Jamaica, 'Walk good, 'til we meet again. We all say nuff love.'

*Shane Hollands*  
*President, New Zealand Poetry Society*

The New Zealand Poetry Society supports and promotes poets and poetry in New Zealand. Established in 1973, we engage with individuals and communities across New Zealand, who share a sense of curiosity and excitement about poetry.

When I was approached by Ann-Margaret Lim to begin co-labs with Jamaican poets, I felt this was a brilliant opportunity. We have so much in common. Both of us are island post-colonial nations with a love of the beach life, sport, poetry, art and music with a preference towards reggae.

Our cultures are vibrant, unique and show great flair. This, our second co-lab, is based on our beautiful bird-life. Thank you so much for being a part of it. As we say in New Zealand, Aroha (love) and Kia Kaha (stay strong).

# About Our Contributors

## *Jamaican poets*

---

**Edward Baugh** is a poet and literary critic. His latest anthology won the 2014 Guyana Prize for Best Book of Caribbean Poetry.

**Delores Gauntlett** is the author of two poetry books. Among other accolades, she received the 2006 Daily News prize and the 1999 David Hough prize.

**Earl McKenzie** paints and writes prose, verse and philosophy. His work is included in *The Faber Book of Contemporary Caribbean Short Stories*.

**Dennis Scott** was a published poet and playwright, actor, dancer; editor and teacher, who starred in *The Cosby Show*.

## *New Zealand poets*

---

**Anita Arlov** runs Inside Out Open Mic for Writers. She was the head organiser of the 2017 New Zealand Poetry Conference & Festival.

**David Eggleton**: NZ's current Poet Laureate, editor of *Landfall*. Awards include PEN Best First Book of Poetry, the Robert Burns Fellowship and five-times Book Reviewer of the Year (Montana New Zealand Book Awards).

**Kate Kelly** used to dream about flying regularly. Instead of pursuing this, she studied MediArts and taught herself to drive, the closest equivalent available.

**Peter Le Baige** started writing around 1977 (BA, Chinese Language & Literature). Peter's work appears in the *We Society* poetry anthology (2015).

# Poems

## Woman, Bird

"What is that bird?" "A heron,"  
she replied before any of the others  
at the table had even heard my question.  
Her back had been turned to it. There  
was no sign she had seen it alight.  
She answered as if she had been  
wondering when I would ask.  
She was delicate, in a slightly  
awkward way guardedly watchful.  
She could take wing at a careless  
remark. She was a poet.  
I shall never see her again.

— *Edward Baugh (Jamaica)*

• *Previously published in Black Sand (Peepal Tree Press, 2013)*

## Jailbird at Momona Airport

He kārearea ahau...  
  
I come from the bay of hawks.  
Propellers roar my tragedy.  
I roar my own ecstasy.  
I'm exiled where I walk.  
I drool. I hang on my own talk.  
I'm between jails coiled in a shroud.  
Enter shackled at wrist and ankle.  
My feet are bare. I rankle.  
I'm off to where I'm sent.  
But my stare is proud.  
The howl of the mongrel.  
The fool's toothless scowl.  
My tinny shack paid back.  
Tinfoil, flame and the glass bowl.  
I drank. I trespassed. Now I rage.  
I don't utter sounds of doubt.  
My rhetoric is renegade.  
I return to thoughts of dak.  
I chew my cheek. I'm made.  
My toes claw the floor.  
I am silent as a waiting gun.  
I stare at the sun.

## Birds

Flock  
at sunset,  
message flung skywards,  
shreds  
into the dark  
alphabet.

— *David Eggleton (New Zealand)*

## A Song for My Father

Against the yam-vine stillness of the garden  
a nightingale stirred with my father:  
the lift and fall of the pickaxe, the heaving throat  
of the hidden bird, in unison  
pulsed with the subtleties of song.

This would become  
the memory of high grass  
brushing wet  
against his black waterboots, when

as to an altar he knelt  
to a sudden digging with bare hands  
till the head of yam surfaced  
like an offering from the earth.

The nightingale's song hovered over  
the awakened senses,  
then chirped in flight  
brushed past the dewy pimento leaves  
and, like a sweet wind-blown scent, was gone.

— *Delores Gauntlett (Jamaica)*

## Bird of Passage

The poet is speaking.  
The window reflects his face.  
A bird crawls out of the sun. Summoned.  
Its wings are like tar.  
That is because it is very hot.  
The poet sweats too.  
There is a beak at the back of his throat—  
the poem is difficult,  
his tongue bleeds.  
That is because the bird is not really  
dead. Yet.  
Clap a little.

— *Dennis Scott (Jamaica)*

• *Previously published in Uncle Time (University of Pittsburg Press, 1973)*

**you the gull**

just you  
and me  
you the gull  
padding along  
the shoreline  
in the wavelets  
up to your  
white buoy  
of breast  
padding on the  
sand and shell  
the wrinkle  
to and fro  
of sunlight  
below,  
the trill  
of shadow  
carried  
on  
just  
you me  
looking  
for something  
you the spotless  
one of us  
two.

— *Peter Le Baige (New Zealand)*

## Day off

My Sister and I

Have a speckled past

Like the egg of a tern

How I imagine the speckly anyway

Speck, speck, speckled.

We saw some today

On a walk that healed a part of my psyche

She helped me, in Te Reo, bless some important things

That can be worn.

At a magic spot from my childhood

Fresh water bubbles and flows from a quite close crater lake

Nearby, the sea flows and foams

Further on, the Terns

A hundred or so

Teeming in the air

Dive-bombing for food, then resting

Teem, teem, teeming

Speck, speck, speckled

Rangitoto overlooks us.

— *Kate Kelly (New Zealand)*

## Bird Singing

A bird stands on the electric wire  
and sings.

This is the story of our lives.

Perched on things that can kill us  
we sing our human songs.

Insulated by fragile culture  
we know a deadly current  
runs under our feet.

It is the artist's disease,  
The scientist's accident,  
the priest's deadly encounter  
with crime.

Standing on the terrors beneath us  
we sing  
knowing our only hope  
is the quality of our song.

— Earl McKenzie (*Jamaica*)

• *Previously published in The Almond Leaf (Peepal Tree Press, 2008)*

## Swallows on Dominion Rd

*for Graham Brazier 1952 - 2015*

My friend and neighbour phones me over. He's waiting outside, finger-shushing me. I follow him down the driveway alongside his second-hand bookshop. A small slim bird flits over us. No, two!

We stand, watching the birds. They swoop up, swoop low, swoop round about us. We watch one fly to a nest – a nest! – wedged on the bracket of the bevelled brick ledge directly above our heads. The other bird skims and re-skims the puddle that won't dry out 'til November. Their thin black tails fork like hair ribbons.

Ribbons used to come on card spools when I was a kid. A yard did two ribbons for my pigtails, for school. Forked edges wouldn't fray, but if you cut a straight edge, it left a stray thread you tugged until the ribbon unravelled rib by rib into a crimped silk thread fine as hair you wound 'round and 'round your finger 'til your trapped blood swelled dunkelbunt as tight, as hot, as long as you could stand it.

My neighbour lights up. You could sear a straight edge with a flame.

He points above us. We listen.

Chicks!

— *Anita Arlov (New Zealand)*

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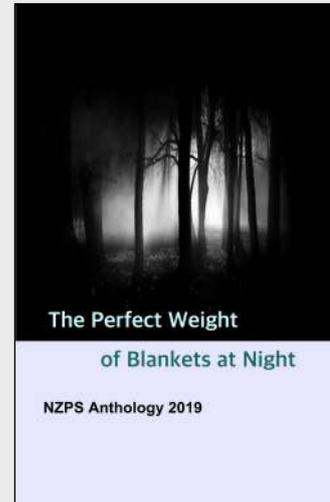
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