



a fine line

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NEW ZEALAND POETRY SOCIETY

**WINTER
2020**

ARTICLES

BY
JEANNINE HALL GAILEY
AND
XIAOLE ZHAN

STUDENT FEATURED POET

CADENCE CHUNG

REVIEWS

BY
P. HARRIS,
V. RAPATAHANA,
S. CARRUTHERS

POEMS

BY

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T. VELTMAN, M. WEBB-PULLMAN

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Cover Image: Heather Barnes

Cover Design: Emma Shi / Ivy Alvarez



From the Editor

Ivy Alvarez

I can feel winter's chill embrace from here as I write this, standing on the shores of autumn.

Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, son of poets Amiri and Amini Baraka, reads poetry during his press briefings to lift the spirits of his constituency during the pandemic. "I love to share poetry that is encouraging, inspiring, that gives people a sense of a new day, new opportunity of how to persevere."

Valete to NZPS member André Surridge (1951-2019). Tributes from fellow members speak of the ways his life and his haiku moved them. poetrysociety.org.nz/affiliates/haiku-nz/nz-haiku-showcase/andre-surridge/vale-andre-surridge-1951-2019

Thanks to *Read NZ* for featuring Editorial Assistant Emma Shi's piece about *a fine line*: www.read-nz.org/new-zealand-book-scene/nzbc-stories-details/a-fine-line-magazine-for-lovers-of-poetry

Know someone who would benefit from joining the Society? Why not treat them with a gift membership? Please email Administration Manager Katharine Allard, info@poetrysociety.org.nz

We appreciate contributions that enable us to support poets and promote poetry in New Zealand. As a registered charitable entity, donations over \$5 are tax-deductible. To organise a bequest to the Society, please get in touch at the same email address above. The Society's continued existence would not have been possible without the late Jill Chan's generous bequeathment, which arrived in the nick of time in early 2019. Read more about her here: poetrysociety.org.nz/jill-chan

The theme for the Spring edition is **Shoes**. Members, I look forward to reading up to four poems (40 lines max), due 10 July 2020 to editor@poetrysociety.org.nz

I am delighted to present **Cadence Chung**, our Featured Student Poet for the Winter edition, part of our initiative to spotlight promising NZ talent. She receives student memberships from both the NZPS and the NZ Society of Authors, and poetry books, thanks to the generosity of Unity Books Wellington and Arty Bees Wellington.

As part of the selection process, I sent Cadence Chung's poetry, along with a shortlist of other student poets' work, anonymised, to Emma Shi, our Editorial Assistant, who selected her work with much praise. Truly, a remarkable breadth of poems flowed in from all over Aotearoa, and I found the quality of poetry among our student poets to be astonishing, and the writing energising and thoughtful.

For this Winter edition, Jeannine Hall Gailey writes about promoting one's poetry despite illness and tyrannies of distance, with advice that feels especially relevant in our time of social distancing and preventive isolation. Xiaole Zhan shares her thoughts on being called to poetry, while Laurice Gilbert announces the winner of the Lauris Edmond Memorial Award. Revel in our Members' Poems, as they savour the pith and juice of life with poems on the theme of **Fruit**.

Thanks for reading. Kia kaha, kia ora. Stay strong, stay safe.

a fine line

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Quotations of the Season

Entering a good poem, a person feels,
hears, tastes, thinks, and sees in altered
ways.

— Jane Hirshfield

Poetry continues to be the conduit
between myth and daily life.

— Tusiata Avia

Feature Article

PR for Poets

How do I promote my books with a
chronic illness and a disability?

Jeannine Hall Gailey

I wrote this article several years after my book, *PR for Poets*, came out. I wanted to specifically address the needs of those who wished to promote their own poetry books, but had chronic illnesses or disabilities that prevented public readings or travel.

In the age of coronavirus, many of us have become aware of the risks of crowds and travel. So I hope that these tips are still helpful. I would add that right now Zoom readings, uploading poetry videos on Instagram and YouTube, and generally taking advantage of virtual appearances, are a great idea if you are looking to promote a book.

Good luck and stay safe!

*

My new book from Two Sylvias Press, *PR for Poets*, is a guide for beginning to mid-career poets on how to build an audience and promote their books. Think of it as a guide to getting read!

People have specifically asked me how I, as a poet with a disability and a chronic illness (I have MS, among other things), manage to promote my own books.

It's a great question because not every writer is able to hop on a bus and couchsurf across the country to promote their book. Not everyone is able to work in academia and have that built-in support system, either. I think trying to promote a book with MS is probably similar to how those with limited time or money, or those who are unable to travel because they are tied to day jobs and families, still manage to promote their work. I do what I can, when I can, and with what I've got available.

Promoting your book in your pajamas

I wrote an article for *Poet's Market* a few years ago about how to promote your book in your pajamas, and I wrote about that because I'd been forced to do it. In some of the years my books came out, I was in a wheelchair or in the hospital, sick. It was tough to rah-rah through a book launch party or even be on social media, as much as I felt like I should. But the upside of that was discovering that even if I could not muster a small tour of readings, or even if I did not have the energy for a big launch, there were things I *could* do to make a bigger difference to book sales.

Postcards, emails, and swag

The number one way that I sell books, believe it or not, is by sending out postcards announcing the book, its information, and how to buy it. The postcard generally has the book's cover art (with permission from the publisher and artist, of course) on one side, and ordering information on the other. There is also space for a personal note, even if the personal note is sometimes just 'Hope you are well!' I send these postcards to everyone on my holiday card list, and to writer friends that I've corresponded with.

I follow this up with an email announcing the book's launch, ordering information, a graphic of the book cover, maybe space for a blurb, and a little personal information at the beginning. This email can also have a longer greeting and personal update than the postcard affords. This goes out to a wider list because I don't necessarily have everyone's snail mail address, but I have a lot of friends who have emailed me to say that they want to know when my books come out. I have met these people from workshops, previous readings, school, teaching, conferences, and just random luck.

I produce bookmarks, magnets, and other 'swag' that I can give to friends and family to help promote the book. People love the weirdest stuff. A pen or a bookmark can help take your book out past your own set of readers, and into a wider space.

Social media, author websites, and Skype

This is important for all authors, really. Social media and website presences become even more important for those who can't get out into 'meatspace' (or in online parlance, IRL: 'In Real Life') as easily as others, because of either accessibility issues or an illness that limits how often we can travel.

I maintain an updated blog on my website, as well as an active presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. I don't track exactly how many books I sell through my website and social media, but it's not zero. Additionally, I've gotten invitations to Skype into classes and conferences through social media, as well as interview and anthology opportunities.

Being interactive... includes being generous

Being interactive — not just when you're promoting a book, but as part of your life — includes being generous, promoting other people's work, retweeting art and poetry news on Twitter, and offering your expertise to others.

A website that is clear and easy to find is also very important. It should include links to your books and your social media, a bio, maybe a CV and an author photo, and a way to contact you.

I want to encourage others to try Skype and to get involved in podcasts. These are ways that those with disabilities and illnesses *can* virtually get out and about into the world. In this world, you can talk about subjects that you're enthusiastic about, provide information on these subjects of expertise, and do readings.

It's not limited to just those platforms either. Celebrate whatever you're best at. Whether it's communicating visually, auditorily, or through performance, you can find what fits you. I had a friend who did a launch reading through Facebook Live! So ask around, try out some new tools, and find out what suits you. Have at least one practice run before going through with your chosen platform.

*

I hope this has been helpful to readers who are wondering how to promote their work, and who are worried about the obstacles they may encounter. For further information, please check out my book, *PR for Poets*.

• *PR for Poets* by Jeannine Hall Gailey is available from Two Sylvias Press. A version of this article first appeared in Trish Hopkinson's blog, www.trishhopkinson.com

About Our Contributors

Antoinette Baker of Christchurch has written poems for years, mainly shared with family and friends. She's come out in middle age to share her musings, be they thankful or otherwise.

Stella Peg Carruthers is a Wellington-based writer. A published poet, she is working on her debut novel that explores the power of literature to change lives.

Cadence Chung is a student at Wellington High School, of Chinese New Zealander heritage. Her heritage, as well as her love for reading, are the main inspirations for her writing.

Alexandra Fraser, an Auckland poet, has been published in many New Zealand and overseas magazines and anthologies. Her second poetry collection *Star Trails* was launched last year (Aotearoa: Steele Roberts, 2019).

Alexandra Hamilton recently organised her bookshelves by colour. A librarian in Auckland until 2018, she currently lives in the South Waikato with her husband and daughter.

Jeannine Hall Gailey served as the second Poet Laureate of Redmond, Washington. She's the author of five books of poetry, including her most recent, *Field Guide to the End of the World* (Moon City Press) and *PR for Poets* (Two Sylvias Press).

Paula Harris won the 2018 Janet B. McCabe Poetry Prize and the 2017 Lilian Ida Smith Award. She writes and sleeps in a lot, because that's what depression makes you do. www.paulaharris.co.nz

Lincoln Jaques holds a Master of Creative Writing. His poetry and fiction has appeared in *The Blue Nib*, *a fine line*, *Mayhem*, *Fast Fibres*, *Poetry NZ Yearbook*, *Shot Glass Journal*, and *Fresh Ink*.

Brett Reid is a New Zealander currently living in Drogheda, in Ireland's ancient east. His work has appeared in *a fine line* and *takahē*.

Belinda Tait lives in Palmerston North with her husband and pets. Words are her people, she says, since she has always felt *eminently* at ease with them; their customs and their ways.

Vaughan Rapatahana commutes between Hong Kong, Philippines, and Aotearoa New Zealand. He is widely published across several genre in both te reo Māori and English, with work translated into Bahasa Malaysia, Italian, French, and Mandarin.

Trish Veltman lives in Kāpiti and writes poetry, fiction and a blog: www.verveview.com. Some of her poems have been published in magazines, including in *a fine line* and *Mayhem*.

Mercedes Webb-Pullman: IIML Victoria MA in Creative Writing 2011. Born in Kaitaia, she now lives in Hawkes Bay.

Xiaole Zhan is still figuring out how poetry works and coming to terms with this being a perpetual state. Currently studying a Bachelor of Music, alongside Creative Writing courses in Melbourne.

Featured Student Poet

Cadence Chung

Encore

We are still here; we still live down Jesse and Haining Street, our eyes tired from late nights and early mornings and bitter anger we cannot be rid of; we remain singing a silent song to express the opposite of feeling, with no vocabulary left we resort to hiding in objects, in city lights, in the moon, in fireworks and star-filled nights; we are attracted to bright things like magpies, ripping the glimmer from streetlights and swallowing it whole; we float around kitchens and watch the mothers cook for their children who convince themselves that they no longer hold any ties to us, who throw away their great-grandmother's paintings and jade jewellery because they deem it sentimental trash; we lie on Leper Island's exposed rock, imagining what it would be like to die; the closest we get to Death is seeing him sometimes when we stare into a dying man's eyes, ready for him to join us in this floating mass of dissatisfaction; our bones will forever remain in a place that is not our home; we are nameless nothingness to the world, men who speak in either whispers or gibberish; even now our thoughts sound like the noise a shell makes when you hold it up to your ear, shshshshshsh, but not like a mother hushing a child, no, this sound is like static or rain or someone whistling in the next room, on standby while we wait for eternity, a meaningless conglomeration of spirits all trying to reach the next life and failing to ever make the step; we remain in the coils of a snake, a creature so often made out to be evil when it is simply following its nature; we hide in old opium bottles and become vaguely amused when we are mistaken for demons, but we only laugh to pretend this anarchy brings us any kind of amusement; now that we have all of time to live, we find that we were never truly living after all.

- *Previously published in Starling (Issue 8).*

Agent 888

They all lie like fallen grapes; stewing there in the grass
the tangy sweetness of haw flakes in their mouths;
tiny fingers tearing into those firecracker packets

There they are: The Li Spies
self-proclaimed 'Chinese James Bonds';

Running through the house in flashes of garish colour
barring themselves in a forgotten bedroom
(Knock eight times. Password? Eight double-eight).

Stocking the fruit shop; big smiles just as much on display
as the stacks and stacks of *Chinese gooseberries*-
their sign so resolutely hand-lettered.

"I'm not having the *gwai loh* claim them as their own," their father says;
wiry, smiling, framed by glasses; looking at the stock market
"Are we rich yet?" they all ask; the reply never comes.

The Li Spies, they exist on *maa faa* and eat *dau saa* straight;
"What's *that* in your lunchbox?" the kids in class ask, faces screwed up;
The Li spies lose their Bond bravado - they eat in a group, lunchbox lids up

"We're the Li spies," they say. "The best in the world." -
they don't need any new members on the team
Eight double-eight. Don't be lax, la. This base is secure; this room full of abandoned calligraphy

These Li Spies, forever running from explosions *in* explosions of pastel
they bite into life like an overripe fruit; on the damp grass
at the crowded house on Chelsea Street - looking in the clouds for signs of James Bond

- *Previously published in Starling (Issue 8).*

These bodies do not hold us

Tomorrow will rise
a sun-up dream of forgotten promises,
burgeoning over a sky
of lust (?)

We will press *together*
slippery with mucus, thick with the smell
of life (and death), warm body against warm body,
hand against skin against blood, reaching-

And O! We are sanguine, aria of liquid,
flowing down flowing through time, through hands-
Reeking. (Come closer so I can taste the *human* on your tongue)
let me ask; what is more divine than disgrace?

We will stay rigid
with truth, in slumber, eyes hiding from the ever-seeing light of day
(who judges not by smell but by sinew, pulling each heartstring in a tautening of gristle)
Yet we still hold each other, enter each inhale...
...and exhale, to disappear without ever knowing how *close* our thoughts were
to being divine

And if today gets too much, then we will retreat
into the spaces between breaths, entering
only for a fraction of a second (an upbeat to the bar), then slipping back
into empty quavers. We think the most divine things
when we are dirtiest, anyway.

The dream-catcher

Tonight I have murdered a dreamer I saw her
sleeping beneath the vulgar moon his
pockmarks so putrid his mouth open wide
and I took a smooth knife so perfect

And cut into that lilac sponge so idle
dreaming and dreaming - for what? I didn't care so first
I dug out her dreams of love pink with perfume
and so idyllic they floated off like ash

Then I took out the wedge of her inhibitions
so fat it took two hands to slay for it fought back
and dreams never want to die when I catch them that's why
I always kill them when they are alone

And lastly I cut out her daydreams the pasty puff
brittle like dead skin a scab to be discarded and when
it was stabbed it crumbled for it was never real
and steely resolve can cut through anything

Then I walked away for there was no need to creep
when I had done nothing wrong and she will wake
tomorrow and find her head empty of dreams and full of only
worries and will think she has finally grown up.

• We are pleased to present the work of Cadence Chung, our 2020 Featured Student Poet, who receives student memberships from both the NZPS and the NZ Society of Authors, and poetry books, thanks to the generosity of Unity Books Wellington and Arty Bees Wellington.

Lauris Edmond Memorial Award for Poetry

Laurice Gilbert

Dunedin poet Emma Neale is the 2020 recipient of the Lauris Edmond Memorial Award for Poetry, a prize given biennially in recognition of a distinguished contribution to New Zealand poetry.

On receiving the award, Emma says: “I’m incredulous, happy and stunned in my tracks, as if someone has thrown a surprise party – the way friends did when I was nine, and they waited to jump out at me until I was standing near the host’s swimming pool.

“All the other nine-year-olds were hoping I’d fall into the water with shock. I didn’t.

“So here I am, dry, a bit disoriented and also delighted again, and remembering that Lauris Edmond was the first poet I ever heard give a public reading.

“When I was 16, I caught the bus alone to a Book Council lunchtime lecture during school holidays in Wellington, and went to hear her talk about her writing career.

“I have a feeling I’d sneaked out of the house to do it – as if my interest in poetry and my aspirations to write it were somehow going to get me into trouble, and my parents and friends shouldn’t know.

“I sat and listened on the edge of my seat, as the poems and the talk opened a portal that meant I could glimpse the green and shifting light of hidden things.

“The portal was still a long way off, but I was convinced that poetry and literature were going to carry me into an understanding of intimacy, identity, time, ethics, deeper metaphysical questions.

“I still think of Lauris Edmond as a kind of poet laureate of family relationships; her work was immensely important to me as the work of a local woman poet I could not only read on the page but also hear in person.

“I am just sorry that I can’t thank her face-to-face for what her work has meant to me, and I’m enormously grateful to the Friends [of the Lauris Edmond Memorial Award] for reading my own poetry and giving me this generous award. I’ve pinched myself sore. I actually feel like leaping into a pool.”

Established in 2002, the Award is named after New Zealand writer Lauris Edmond, who published many volumes of poetry, a novel, a number of plays and an autobiography. Her *Selected Poems* (1984) won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize.

In the meantime, the Lauris Edmond Memorial Trust and Verb Wellington encourage everyone to eat cake and read three never-before-published Emma Neale poems online at verbwellington.nz

Feature Article

Letter to a Young(er) Poet *Xiaole Zhan*

Dear You,

I confess; I have no authority to be giving you advice on poetry or being a poet. I'm not sure what any of that means myself. Instead, I'd like to share with you some of the things I've learnt from and about this thing called poetry in my own journey at this point in time so that, perhaps, you may stumble towards your own discoveries.

I – *on rubato*

There's rhythm in everything. Our lives, fundamentally, are underpinned by skeletal percussion. The incessant turn of days; sunrise to sunset, summer to autumn, life to death; has something to do with it. The repetitive units of sound language itself is made of has something to do with it. I suspect our heartbeats have something to do with it, too. When there is a *catch* in our metronomic expanse of time, when certain moments are perceived as impossibly slow or immeasurably fast, when the heart skips a beat, that's when things tend to become interesting.

Consider the word *rubato*. There is the collision of its Italian translation, *robbed*, and its musical definition, *the temporary disregarding of strict tempo to allow an expressive quickening or slackening*, inseparable from the image of *robbed* time. There are many other colliding images, too. Consider the word *dactyl*. There is the collision of its Greek translation, *finger*, and its English definition, *one 'long' syllable followed by two 'short' syllables*, inseparable from the corresponding image of the one long and two short bones of a finger.

I suspect our heartbeats
have something to
do with it

'Only when one perception plunders another... only when things that in reality are mutually exclusive become plausible in a sentence can the sentence hold its own against reality,' says Herta Müller in her speech *The Space Between Languages*. Andrew Wyeth on painting *Christina's World*: 'I built the ground... thinking of her. And then when I put it, it was right... that pink like faded lobster shells that you find on the shore there.' What a collision. What a usurpation. Christina's pale pink dress 'like faded lobster shells'. And another collision in the title of

Seamus Heaney's poem "In a Loaning" — a *loaning* being a path between two fields as well as a cryptic reminder of our living on borrowed time.

Christina's dress like *faded lobster shells*, Heaney's loaning of *copper-fired leaves*... in these images, there is a sense of preservation against extinction that is the consequence of capturing precise collisions of images which dazzle time into standing still. There is a stardust quality of something near-eternity; a collision like a distant neutron star merger casting messages of light fossilised in the night sky even after the merger ceases to exist. This is the magic of the poet — the ability to capture fleeting eternities robbed through collision from our expanse of borrowed time.

And in order to witness these moments of *rubato*, one must live keenly and actively. Like the singer who cannot practice for too many hours a day or else the voice will be strained, the lifestyle of writing demands the space to live. Isn't that wonderful? Having the space to live deeply and sensitively is not a requirement for many occupations, yet it is built by necessity into the life of the writer. It is necessary to spend time doing nothing but listening and being susceptible to those catches in the metronomic rhythms of life in order to create fine work. In a way, this is life itself.

It's not necessary to write like a 'writer.' Write like someone who has been paying attention for a long time. Write like someone who notices moments in each day of robbed time. *Live* and write. That's all.

II – on uncertainty

Not too long ago, I learnt how to let a certain poem sit with me without needing to understand it. This poem I read over many times, understanding none of the first few stanzas, but for some strange reason feeling that maybe they understood me.

As a poet, and simply as a person in this world, you will be faced with many, many moments of not understanding. You will be faced with a poem you think is finished and be struck with uncertainty. You will be faced with the uncomfortable clarity of your own self and be struck with doubt. You will be faced with

the brilliance and brutality of life and be struck with incomprehension again, and again, and again.

something that dawns upon
you in ecstatic and
unpredictable intervals

'To know is to possess, & any fact is possessed by everyone who knows it, whereas those who feel the truth are possessed, not possessors,' writes e.e. cummings. I have found it overwhelmingly useful to allow myself to be 'possessed' rather than always seek to 'possess'. I think a certain degree of writing has to do with becoming comfortable with the unknown, to be possessed by it, and to begin writing despite not knowing the answers. In fact,

many begin writing precisely because of not knowing the answers. 'What matters is to live everything. *Live* the questions for now. Perhaps then you will gradually, without noticing it, live your way into the answer...' writes Rainer Maria Rilke in *Letters to a Young Poet*.

As for the immense and inevitable self-doubt that is the fate of doing poetry, these words by Martha Graham to Agnes DeMille I have found useful: 'There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and it will be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is nor how valuable nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open. You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep yourself open and aware to the urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open.'

And one more thing I'd like to say on uncertainty — you don't *always* have to be a 'poet'. You don't need to expect yourself to be supernaturally articulate every time you pick up a pen. A large part of writing is being struck by your own mundanity and stupidity. Often, it may feel like this 'poet-ness' is not even a part of you, is instead something that dawns upon you in ecstatic and unpredictable intervals. It is not your business to predict when this happens. It is not your business to wait for this to happen. It is your business to 'keep the channel open' for when it does happen.

III – on generosity

I remember feeling, after having my poem *muscle-memory* published last year in the Winter edition of *a fine line*, a familiar sense of uneasiness that stems from the absolute emotional transparency that poetry demands.

I remember reading these words from the feature article by Kiri Piahana-Wong directly above my poem: 'Our key work as poets is to render ourselves as nakedly vulnerable as we can possibly bear, and walk around

with our heart and skeleton exposed on the page. No-one else will do that job. Discomfort is a sign that things are going well.'

At the heart of all poetry, I think, is an overwhelming generosity. We place the human heart upon a page, our own heart, perhaps, and freely and selflessly give it away. We walk with our heart exposed upon the page so that other hearts can begin to heal.

As people who are so devastatingly occupied with giving so much of ourselves, it is easy to forget that there are those who read our poetry and receive. I think of this image first introduced to me by Ivy Alvarez during my NZSA Youth Mentorship Programme: writers and readers form a perfect circle of giving and receiving which then generates again the impetus to give. It's not always an easy way of living, but I think of all the poems that have carried me through when nothing else possibly could, and come to believe that it is a worthy way of living.

We see this way of living stretch inevitably ahead of us, a path which is equal parts beautiful and terrifying, and we know that we are brave enough to take it, to bear the weight of living with sensitivity and vulnerability a little closer to the knife edge of wonder and brutality. We know that we are brave enough to bear it but, often, that doesn't make things any easier.

Remember too, then, the private and solitary joy of living through writing. There is a great and overwhelming love in me for the moments of beauty which dazzle time into standing still. There is ecstatic joy in capturing these moments through language. I hold it in the solitary palm of my own hand. It is mine. It is yours, too. Keep it.

Sincerely,

Xiaole Zhan

Online Poetry Events List

Charlotte Steel, Social Media for NZPS

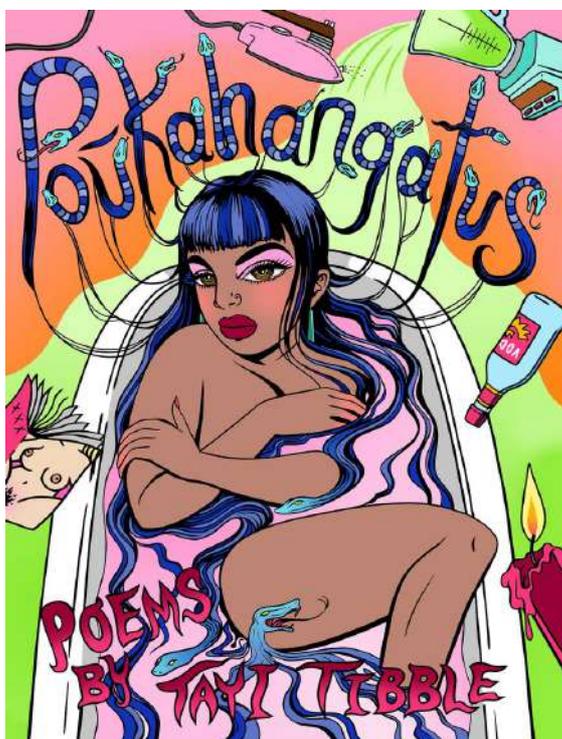
The NZPS currently maintains a list of many of the digital poetry events happening in Aotearoa and around the world. Although we are all maintaining physical distance, we can come together in cyber space to celebrate poets and poetry! You can find the list on our website: poetrysociety.org.nz/2020/03/29/online-poetry-events

Reviews

Poūkahangatus - Tayi Tibble

(Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2018).
ISBN 9781776561926. RRP \$20. 80pp.

Reviewed by Stella Carruthers



there is a hunger
that speaks of a
consuming desire

Medusa-like, a young woman stares fixedly from the cover of Tayi Tibble’s debut poetry collection. She does not quite meet your eyes. Her hair is purple-black and seething. Pink eyeshadow plasters her lids. Her fringe is blunt and short. She has her arms wrapped around her breasts in a gesture of apparent modesty. However, this gesture only seems to accentuate her voluptuous femininity.

In Tibble’s work, she celebrates the feminine voice and its contemporary concerns. The book is dedicated to her mum, and it also feels like Tibble could have written this collection for her own future daughters.

As the name *Poūkahangatus* suggests, the collection is a melting pot of pop culture references and historical associations. Playing with the name of Native American Disney princess Pocahontas, Tibble has made her own composite title for a woman who, as she writes in her collection’s title poem, is ‘floating between worlds’ (“*Poūkahangatus*”). This woman is floating between the traditional and the contemporary, between indigenous culture and the Western world, colonised and coloniser. Reality and a hoped-for-future, the remembered past and recorded memory.

Her position, as a young indigenous woman in Aotearoa New Zealand in the early 21st century, is one that is both singular and stained by a certain collective experience. Tibble’s voice rings true about issues of race, sex, and childhood. While these themes are expressed through her own personal stories, it also always feels like there is a bigger tale being told. Tibble is a strong voice adding to this wider national narrative, and she is putting her own stamp on history.

Tibble’s collection is not without its sexual politics. Written in the era of #MeToo, there is an interesting theme of sexual predation. For instance, in the poem “*Pania*”, which references the oceanic goddess, Tibble writes that ‘he ran his tongue over her bruised knees and she was

immediately overwhelmed by the intimacy'. Later in the book, there is a hunger that speaks of a consuming desire: 'She learns to eat off the land. / He is a dinner plate in denim jeans' ("Black Velvet Mini"). However, it was unclear to me whether women were the ones being hunted, or the ones doing the hunting. Might they even be doing both? And what does that mean for the future of feminism and concerns around gender equity?

As a book that asks questions about the feminine experience, the poems in *Poūkahangatus* muse on issues of appearance and, by association, self-image.

The book also shows a heightened awareness of trends and stereotypes. Consider Tibble's words in the poem "Red-blooded Males": 'I'm a modern city woman. / I practise mindfulness'. It's a clear tongue-in-cheek moment that plays with the trope of the urban hipster.

However, this playfulness felt more than a little careless and self-conscious to me at times. There was a slightly irritating colloquialism and a flippant feel to some words. Take these lines in the poem "Scabbing": 'I fantasise about being his housewife. / I imagine the interviews in *Woman's Weekly*.' Or when Tibble asks in the title poem "Poūkahangatus", 'Don't you wish your girlfriend was hot like me and Nicole Scherzinger?' To me, these statements seemed to reinforce feminine stereotypes of superficiality.

I wonder if this focus on the self and its many iterations is a certain millennial way of living in the world. Where we must laugh our way to hell (or over the train lines to Porirua) and back, because taking ourselves seriously means looking at things we'd rather ignore. I also wonder whether being self-conscious is something a young female indigenous poet needs. That is, she must be conscious of the self, because society only allows her to take up a certain amount of space.

Despite my hesitations around voice, I do believe Tibble has made a place for herself in the New Zealand literary community. And she has made use of this space to make a place for people who are often not given the chance to speak, such as Māori, kids, and women. For example, she writes from the perspective of children in "Tangi in the King Country", stating that 'They had a cry because everyone else was having a cry'. In "Ode to Johnsonville's Cindy Crawford", Tibble comments that she 'grew up reading *Fashion Quarterly* and the Bible'. Here, Tibble is in her element, combining popular and emotional references with a wry commentary on contemporary life.

Writing as a Māori woman, Tibble references a range of cultural concepts throughout the text. Sometimes they comment directly on cultural values. She also reveals her definition of family, which encompasses those bound by blood, iwi, passions, desires, and dreams. It also doesn't seem to matter whether people are dead or alive, or even imagined. 'She's not my real nan / but I have always wished she was,' writes Tibble in "Our Nan Lets Us Smoke Inside". Sometimes cultural motifs are also used as original imagery, such as when Tibble writes of someone who 'rolls her eyes / like a tiny haka' ("Assimilation").

Despite the light-hearted references to pop culture, Tibble's collection handles contemporary imagery in a sensitive way to speak of difficult truths. For example, in her poem "Takeaways", Tibble comments that

the only time they ever got

happy meals / was when it was the hardest to be / __.

These lines show Tibble's adept use of seemingly superficial references to hint at darker themes and wider issues. In this way, she is also able to connect through the minutiae of daily life at a very personal level.

Tibble's *Poūkahangatus* is a book of pretty poetic problems and a search for their meanings. I see her as someone who has successfully negotiated the bending boundary between the beautiful and the banal, the damn tough and a range of essential truths, as well as personal narratives and a wider cultural commentary. *Poūkahangatus* feels a little bit like a road map through some of the problems that we as individuals, communities, and as a nation, face. I think we should be grateful that this map has been made in such a manner that it is also so beautiful.

Moth Hour - Anne Kennedy

(Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2019).
ISBN 9781869408947. RRP \$25. 101pp.

To the Occupant - Emma Neale

(Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2019). ISBN
9781988531687. RRP \$27.95. 100pp.

Conventional Weapons - Tracey Slaughter

(Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2019)
ISBN 9781776562206. RRP \$25. 95pp.

Reviewed by Vaughan Rapatahana

Three interesting poetry collections by three New Zealand women poets, all who have English as their first language. Three different Aotearoa New Zealand university presses. Not a lot more in common after these initial similarities.



Anne Kennedy's collection is more specifically focused, regarding its genesis and gestation. So, it is perhaps of less 'general coverage' regarding topoi. It is the poet's lifelong coming to terms with the tragic death of her brother Philip in

1973: whānau demise being something no one ever overcomes, as I well know. As such, coming to terms with such an unexpected loss is intensely personal and the poet ceaselessly searches for some sort of explication. Kennedy notes, 'When Philip died, we didn't know what to do. I think that's why I have written these poems.'

Based on a series of 33 transformations and variations à la Beethoven via Anton Diabelli, the collection wends through grief, anger, and confusion, nonsequentially scivening the semiotics of loss and social injustice. There are some marvellous images here:

a plastic letterbox

like a Venus flytrap

eats a letter from the courts

("#4")

At the polytech the deceitful executives feed books...

In Santa hats they chortle at the teachers

their fat salaries spilled down their shirtfronts

("#20")

In the foyer I see my classmates unexpectedly

like running into them in a lesbian bar,

fancy meeting you here.

("#28")

The materialists with no materials have been trained like bears to dance
in their unbearable bedrooms,
(“#30”)

A thought is a Trojan horse in the head
(“TheThe” – a nine page exegesis.)

Yet, for this reviewer, the final prose section *Pattern/Chaos: An Afterword*, is the most cogent, and ironically is not poetry, given that this does not matter.

Philip’s own poem, here titled “The Theme” from around 1970, highlights *jars* — a word repeated throughout, along with *moth* and *airholes in the lid* — and is the fount of the collection. I reproduce it in full.

Come catch me little child
and put me in a jar.

Place inside:

some leaves (for me to eat)
The Book of Tea (for me to read)
some paper,
any paper
and a pen (for me to write)

Screw on the top,
little child,
and put six airholes in the lid,
then leave me on your windowsill.

Just one more thing,
little child,
look through your sunset hair
into my world
before I die
and collect your imaginary mind
(“The Theme”)

Finally, there is a distinct counterculture musical ambience interpolating this collection. Bob Dylan is lauded in #21, while one poem, #24, riffs on *Wild Thing*. The several references to this ‘imaginary mind’ — the state that the sibling Kennedys believe, across 50 years, ‘suggests we will find some solution if only we keep searching in the places we can’t see’ — is reminiscent of Jim Morrison’s raging, ‘Break on through to the other side.’

Yet, sadly it seems, ‘To make the silk, the moth must die’ (“*TheThe*”).

Emma Neale often likes lots and lots of words. Loves hyphenated words too, not always so smoothly, as for example the platoon reporting for duty during “*Still*”. Namely, ‘ember-gleam, city-crammed, fierce-frantic, greed-eats-need’. Perhaps also, there are just too many words and loooooong lines in some places, like this line from “*Minor Goddess*”:

she kindles song-crop and wing-flicker: waxeyes, darting daubs of green and pewter;

There is a prolix density at times and certainly a propensity of diverse themes, from the voices of children through to acute observations of social iniquities.

However, the poet does write far briefer pieces, detours into taut fontology excursions via typographical tutū (pp. 47-50), as well as promotes prose poetry. She is the most experimental of the three writers under review and is unafraid to delve into discursive formats, such as in “*Tone Poem*” and “*Blindsided*”.

Neale gifts us some excellent imagery, of course, because she is a gifted writer. Some examples.

...her smile a tern’s quick tilt in the
sky’s vast room

(“*A Room that Held the Sea*”)

We’re behind a man whose skin is pale as lunch paper
and whose jersey droops from his shoulders
as if it’s still being knitted
from the needles of his bones.

(“*Cut Price*”)

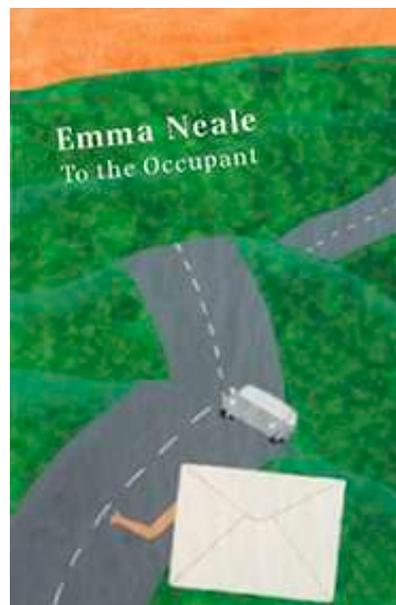
near a gutter glum with rubbish

(“*Blue Rubato*”)

...an anxiety of rats, a fret of rats

(“*Letter from Hamelin*”)

Except in the lexically less elaborate as well as the more frankly forthright poems, such as the aforementioned “*Cut Price*”, “*Warning*”, “*The Local Pool*”, “*My Aunt’s Story*”, “*Withdrawn*”, the fine “*Mere-Mare*” and the excellent “*Affidavit*”, there is some distance between the poet and the page, unlike



Kennedy, and most definitely unlike our next poet under review. Indeed, as Janet Hughes stresses in a recent critique, “Despite her technical inventiveness, Neale is hard to place; she absorbs but avoids being defined by trends, and seems to shoot for reach and variety rather than the cutting edge” (Pukapuka Aotearoa, August 2019). Koinā te kōrero (Yes, indeed.)

Ultimately, I wonder just how consciously ironic Neale is in her penultimate piece in this panoply of 64 poems, here reproduced in full:

Due to circumstances
we should have foreseen
the exquisite poems
we had hoped for
have not been composed.
We regret to say
until further notice
this space remains closed.
(“Economy of Style”)

Tracey Slaughter certainly lives up to her name: there is some killer verse here — dark, brutal, Plathian; the latter aspect perhaps best exemplified in the lengthy and ironically obese 18-page “it was the 70s when me and karen carpenter hung out”. ‘Only’ 19 poetic/prose pained paens here, but WOW, they’ll get you well past Go, yet without a reader ever scoring a Get Out of Jail Free pass.

Like she is on a narcotic upper/downer half of the time, this poet is not afraid to draw viscerally on the backstreet, the gutter, the underside, the downside of her own sexual and sensual experiences. Exploring this book is like lying in the beer swill of a suburban public bar, long after the heavy metal covers band has packed up and left, and only rank skank and vomit traces remain. Tropes well beyond the kitchen sink and down through the waste disposal unit of a formica-and-vinyl motel kitchenette strewn with plastic flowers, proliferate. Abortion, adultery, anorexia nervosa, pervade these pages in a never arrhythmic arching and aching historical outreach back into school days and schoolgirl play, through to an array of modern day affrays. Hypnagogic at times (see “nursery”), and machine-gun page-block at others (see “she is currently living”), the ever-lowercase collection is as far from its title as it could ever be.



Some snapshots:

we slept
that summer on a mattress
somebody’s water
had broken on.
(“31 reasons not to hear a heartbeat”)

Brick room with skin diptych. I could catalogue everything squalid. Chintzy pelt of the superking. The cheesy pallor of formica coffee tables. Diaspora of insects round the bulb like core samples. Drapes avocado as an old bruise...

Fuck me hard, then call your wife.

Slaughter is a vital Kiwi poet and her trench warfare of ruptured verse and ravaged/ravaging women (see especially “the mine wife”) is important.

You just oughta
read Tracey Slaughter.

Finally, Victoria University Press is also to be congratulated in recently publishing their expanding tranche of women writers who call a spade a spade and then go about disinterring Aotearoa New Zealand toikupu or poetry. Wāhine toa ināianeī. Ka nui te pai.

• *Anne Kennedy’s Moth Hour was on the shortlist for the Mary and Peter Biggs Award for Poetry in the 2020 Ockham New Zealand Book Awards*

Pasture and Flock - Anna Jackson

(Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2018).
ISBN 9781869408794. RRP \$35. 148pp.

Reviewed by Paula Harris

On Saturday, I sat at Cook Street Takeaways waiting for my order (one crumbed fish, one scoop of chips), reading

I am quite unhinged
and will probably spend the rest of the day
staring out this window.
 (“Thank for you having me, briefly, in your
chamber”)

and I stared out the window for a while, at the cars going around the roundabout, contemplating how I’m quite unhinged.

Yesterday, I sat waiting for my osteopath and read

We spent our childhoods upright. We rose asleep.

We rose silent, when our breaths were taken.

We sat on the mat, and were told to sit up.

(“Afraid of falls?”)

and I tried to sit up properly. I thought about rising asleep.

I’ve been carrying Anna Jackson’s *Pasture and Flock* around for months now. My excuse, mainly to myself, is that I need to write this review. I need to keep trying to finish or re-read the book, so that I can

she's superb at
creating characters and
making them the truth
within... that poem

start writing the review. Lately though, I've realised that *Pasture and Flock* has become a bit of a safety blanket for me.

This book is *comforting*.

Which isn't to say boring, since people can confuse comforting with bland. But it feels like it wraps itself around you and holds you. I mean, isn't that one helluva good thing for a book to do?

My first big encounter with Anna's poetry was when I was meant to write a review of *I, Clodia, and Other Portraits* (sorry, I never wrote it because the book swamped me; here's my review: the first part is confusing as hell, but part two is a special kind of magic). It was only when I met Anna — she was the lecturer for a 100 level paper on reading and writing poetry that I did at Victoria University of Wellington, and her support for my writing was the final turning point in re-finding my voice — that *I, Clodia* made sense. Well, no, the poems still didn't. I don't know the intricacies of ancient Roman society and I'd never heard of Catullus, so the Clodia poems are definitely way over my head. But Anna's deep, thoughtful intellect for poems and people across time made me go, ohhhhh, yeah, I don't get the poems but I get why Anna wrote them.

The Clodia poems in *Pasture and Flock* continue to not be my thing. But that's okay, I turned the page and moved past them. Instead, I let myself get caught up in the thing that Anna does so brilliantly — writing about people, about life, about a son recording his own cooking show in the kitchen. She's superb at creating characters and making them the truth within the world of that poem. The images she creates are delicious.

I remember my surprise eight years ago
when I looked under the downy fluff of a boy's sweet talk
and saw the scale of fraud beneath.
("I am reacquainted with the furry fish of fraud")

How is Anna Jackson not a national treasure?

I'll admit, the book is a slow entry for me, and the series "My friendship with Mayakovsky" didn't grab my attention. But the affection for the people she writes into her poems is a thing to hold in gentle wonder, such as this entire poem about her children:

Johnny says,

Elvira's hair

is clear

as God

and glass.

("After the nit shampoo")

The photographer poems from *I, Clodia* are here and are still brilliant. And I'm sorry Clodia, maybe if you were a pretty photographer who washes her pink knit top in vervain soap, maybe then I'd understand you, Clodia.

And this is from my favourite poem in *Pasture and Flock*, which includes the fabulous line 'You index achievements, I index my dreams':

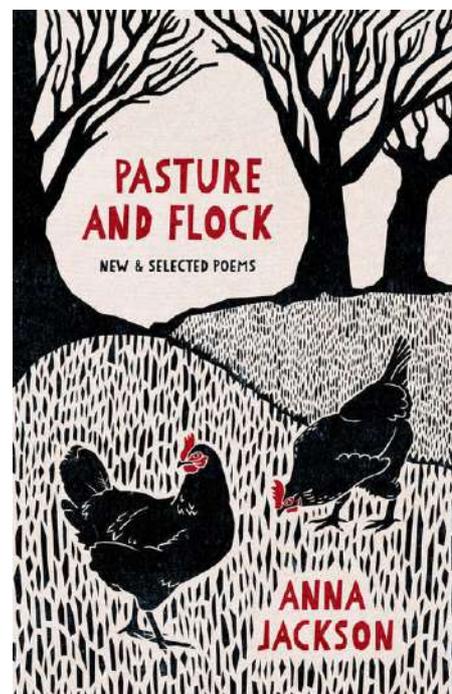
But perhaps it is our appearances
in others' indexes that count.

Well, I am in your index,
and you are in mine.
("Indexing")

Three days ago, I was in a waiting room (so much waiting in this life!) and read:

I think if you asked God if he would rather have
twenty-twenty vision of fireworks or be blind
with five children clambering over him, five children
clamouring for him to light the fireworks
he wouldn't be able to see, the answer would be
time works different up here
("God and us")

and I sighed at the idea of time working differently for God, even though I'm pantheist and don't believe in God. Then I got out my notebook and quickly wrote a poem in which I go out on a date with God after meeting them on Tinder. And my poem is hugely different to Anna's, but mine wouldn't have existed if I hadn't sat there contemplating God and vision and fireworks, in a tiny waiting room, sitting on white French country furniture, and reading Anna's poems.



To review books for *a fine line*,
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Members' Poems

To my lover

Of tomatoes
From my
Garden
Haphazard
You slice
Your morning
Slithers
And place
Perfect rounds
Of red
On your hot
Buttery
Whole toast
Licking a sigh
You're sad
"They're nearly done"
If everyone
Was you
We'd only eat
In summer.

— *Antoinette Baker*

The voice of the tui

The tui are in the persimmon tree
you tell me your voice shatters
through the phone line

an uncertain edge the kakariki
you stutter then say green parrots
flock to the guavas

I feel you circling to the core of it
your anxiety a protective skin
can you say the words you need to

or will they fuzz on your tongue
with the astringency
of an unripe persimmon

I am eating Queensland pineapple
Salt it you told me once
trust me and do it

the flavour is enhanced
salt counter-acts bitterness
I wish I could offer you salt but

I don't think it will do the trick
do you
Your voice is a disrupted dance

through the air between us
undecided wave or particle
trust me I say
all will be well

look to the tui
the ripening persimmons
golden before they fall

— *Alexandra Fraser*

The Feijoa Tree Shares Thoughts on Immortality

All morning we slice feijoas
in half, scoop the insides out
with a teaspoon, the delicate piles
of flesh set out on white saucers.

You may pity the feijoas
you may get the image in your
mind of those poor feijoas
that don't deserve such treatment.

But it is an act of love
for the fruit will be baked
into loaves, into cakes
into preserves for Sunday roasts.

after the earthquakes

after the floods

after the shootings

after the pandemic

We will gather to eat
one last time, full of love.
Silence at first, until someone
speaks, reminding us that one day
we won't be here; only the feijoa
tree outside our window
may still be growing fruit
to remember us and what happened.

— *Lincoln Jaques*

Women are Like Fruit

He likes bananas sleepy
taste of bruised peach
peels oranges with his teeth

She prefers root vegetables
how they grow in the dark

the excuse of onions

His teeth are white and strong
bite through apple skin
crunch to the core

Her mouth spits seeds
sour brown pips

she sweeps them up
strings a necklace

When her necklace is full
she will leave.

— *Trish Veltman*

- *A different version of this poem appears in The Blue Room Anthology (UK, 1999).*

High summer son

His high summer blight grew bulbous
Oozing through sweet hanging drupes
That shrank and casually yellowed him
Like the fall of overripe pocked stummers
Waiting on our mother's kitchen table
Ready for her angry vigour on wood
She sliced hard to get it over with
Missing the tiny wet slips of pips
Before she heaped white sugar to boil.

— *Antoinette Baker*

Astringent Old Cow

Obediently
I crossed my arms and legs
and sat up straight
while this teacher told me
what a bad girl I was.
I was a thief, she branded, a disgrace,
and let me tell you
I was really, really scared
and *manifestly* alone in that classroom,
with but this old cow
astringencing away at me,
while my playmates trilled
freely outside in the yard.
The sun kissed and promised
at the windows,
and this woman, she *rifed* at me,
actually lit me a swift, stinging
slap on the knee,
and then she took my apple;
the green, juicy orb I'd been nipping at
when she came stomping up
and wrested me away –
bitch stuffed it up to her face
and she *meaned* down on it,
just like there was sport
in stealing a little kid's lunch.

— *Belinda Tait*

for Tracey

grass crunched underfoot this morning
heavy frost had steel-sheeted the day
the half-remembered sound
skittering through memories' outskirts

not the shifting squeak of new powder snow
like walking in dry sand

not the puff of powdery dust
from under ponies' hooves
riding back from the river late afternoon
after a bareback swim at the junction

it came from the apples

a tree leant over the road
we turned under its shade

we were still there Tracey
two women on horseback in the heat
crunching summer's golden apples
in the gathering dusk
when I remembered us

— *Mercedes Webb-Pullman*

Wiggins peaches

I helped you pick the windfalls
From the gnarled tree in the drive
Pale creamy baubles of fur
Like your firm extended belly

Any sensitive touch or prod
Would bruise. Delicate you said.
Only dad climbed the ladder
He joked and you almost smiled

When the sweet harvest was in
Expectant you closed your eyes
And he chose three good ones
For you to peel with grubby nails

I held up my mound of peach
Up to my small amazed mouth
The rest I felt slick its juice
Right down my freckled arms.

— *Antoinette Baker*

Fire engine red track floor pump, bicycle
tube, yellow puncture repair kit, a pile
of folded newspapers cold off the press,
the last six of just-past winter's briquettes,

coal bucket containing not coal but ash
from callouses dried and split, a tightly
planted stand of scoop/grabber/poker/brush/
their cottage-sized handles gathering dust.

Domestic, 'til expressed as art by those
part-time orchardists Caravaggio
and Cézanne. They were both just here, you know,
rearranging the scene, though not without

upset (colourful language was involved)
about what was more suitable, a bowl
or a bask-et. *It's indisputable!*
yelled Cézanne. *A bowl!* for a cloud-fed land

where the good turf gets stacked like brown bullion,
and well capitalised Tech Companies
dig in so they may rise to pick apples
and cherries in the 3rd Millennium.

Brett Reid (b. 1958)

Still Life with Ireland, 2020

Water (implied) and Colour on Paper

Diana, afternoon

You choose fuchsia first
then navy, tangerine, umber,
pointing solemnly;
I parrot-sing the names. Then we pull

spuds blinking from the bag, brush
off the soil, carve
the wet moons into zigs and stars.

I press and peel carefully, like a kiss.
You are bolder, the paper dances
and blurs in your hands, you stamp
fierce and wild with colour.

Later, your daddy and I try to look
with your eyes: that one
might be tulips, propped on the sill. *Where have you ever seen a blue that deep?*
we wonder. And over there, curling in the sun, the juiciest orange, pips and all.

Away in the dark, you sleep
Bath-damp and
with paint in your hair.

— *Alexandra Hamilton*

Diana, night

You call out to me - ma ma! ma ma! -
and I'm awake already, moving
through doors to reach you
tearful and glowing like a mushroom.
We put our cheeks together.
I understand.
It is lonely to hear the dark noises,
the thump of windfall fruit
and the morepork calling deep as water.
Some of your mysteries I
think I have the answers to,
at least the ones I know about.
Others are sleeping in the
corners of the room, but
they will wait until morning.

— *Alexandra Hamilton*

Small preservations

I'm glad I made jam when
plums were rich and tree-fallen

glad I made apple chutney
with wormy windfalls
and the last tomatoes
green on a dying vine

glad I saved pretty glass jars
for an occasion of need

In my isolation I am eating toast
and cheese and chutney sandwiches
like my mother used to love

I use the scented candles
my grandmother's china
the last of the wine

on the shelves bright jars
preserving the essence
of the time before

— *Alexandra Fraser*

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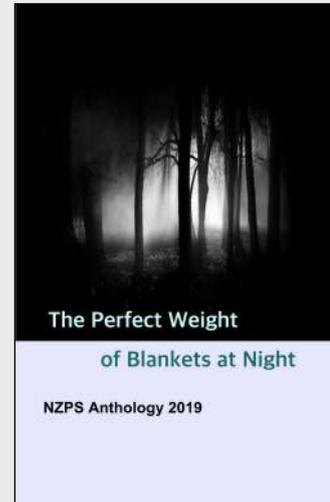
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