

a fine line



THE MAGAZINE OF THE NEW ZEALAND POETRY SOCIETY

ARTICLES

BY
CHLOE HONUM
AND
NATHAN JOE

SPRING FEATURED POET

ANDREA EWING

REVIEWS

BY
T. GRGEC,
T. HAMILL,
N. EASTHOPE

POEMS

BY

A. BAKER, J. DOBSON, J. EWEN, S. HOWARD, K. O'GORMAN,
B. TAIT, T. VELTMAN

**SPRING
2020**

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Cover Image: Mohammad Metri
Cover Design: Emma Shi / Ivy Alvarez



From the Editor

Ivy Alvarez

Many huzzahs for the encouraging words we've received here at the magazine! Jenny Dobson writes, "Thanks for Winter *a fine line* — lots to enjoy and think about!". Trish Veltman adds, "Really enjoyed the latest issue again."

Abashed thanks for understanding and sincere apologies to Laurice Gilbert for misattributing the Winter 2020 article on the Lauris Edmond Awards.

At the recent NZ Poetry Society AGM, members approved a membership fee increase, starting 2021. Fees have not increased for well over 15 years, and these do much to sustain the Society so it can carry on its work. Know someone who'd appreciate a gift membership? Organise a surprise and send an email to info@poetrysociety.org.nz

The theme for the upcoming Summer edition is **Balloon**. Members, please send up to four poems (40 lines max) by 10 October 2020 to Ivy Alvarez, editor@poetrysociety.org.nz

If you write haiku, a bighearted donation from the Windrift Haiku group means we can now publish (and pay for) a small selection of haiku from our Members. Send up to eight, unthemed, haiku to the same address above.

From reflections by Chloe Honum on her Grimshaw Sargeson residency, and Nathan Joe on lockdown and performance poetry, to beautifully articulate reviews by Tim Grgec, Thomas Hamill, and Nicola Easthope, we believe this Spring edition is one to admire. And our Members' Poems on shoes new and polished, weathered and storied, promise to take you where you need to go.

For our Featured Poet for the Spring edition, I am delighted to present Andrea Ewing, whose poems reveal devastatingly casual epiphanies in the quiet moments of one's life.

Thanks for reading and for your continued support of the NZPS.

a fine line

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Quotation of the Season

To understand poetry as an art is to understand it is the same as every art, every discipline. It is work ... beautiful work you can go to in times of stress and loss.

— Kim Addonizio

Feature Article

A Seam Inside History: Notes on a Grimshaw Sargeson Residency

Chloe Honum

I first saw the Frank Sargeson Centre on a misty autumn morning. Martin Cole, the Secretary of the Sargeson Trust, had picked me up from the airport at dawn. He guided me up the wooden stairs that lead to the apartment.

From the landing, I looked up at the Sky Tower glinting against the pale sky, and was overcome with wonder that poetry was what had brought me from Waco, Texas, where I live and work, back home to Auckland, where I grew up, to write for the next four months as a Grimshaw Sargeson Fellow.

The preceding weeks had been full of planning and preparation — finishing the semester at the university where I teach, arranging for the care of my dog, checking items off packing lists. And now I was stepping inside, carrying my suitcase into a place where Kiwi writers have held residencies since 1987.

In my writing life, which has included its share of uncertainty, I have held tight to these rare, dreamlike moments. A key turning, a door being opened.

The Sargeson Centre is located at the top of a two-storey brick building almost completely covered in Virginia creeper. Built in 1883, it originally served as stables for mansions on Princes Street in central Auckland; it could house six or more horses, along with carriages and food. Sitting on the eastern edge of Albert Park, among the majestic trees, painted cannons, and immaculately kept flower beds, the building has a mysterious air. People liked to take pictures against its leafy walls, and often glanced up curiously at the loft windows. At night, as the nocturnal rhythms of the park came alive,

It felt like being in a kind of secret watchtower

undoubtedly fuelled and inspired me. I had only to look as far as the bookshelf in the living room, which held dozens of framed photographs of writers, who had previously lived and written in the Sargeson Centre, to feel connected to a kind of river of New Zealand literature that has its own energy and momentum. I came to lean on that energy to keep me moving, to not linger too long in the satisfaction of completing a poem, as I've known myself to do, but instead plunge forward into the next blank page.

Auckland is the city of my youth, the place where both my parents were born and raised, and where my mother died when I was seventeen. During my days in the loft, I thought a lot about time, generational shifts, and New Zealand history, especially aspects that seem obscured or diluted, stigmatised or hushed. I thought frequently about Janet Frame, who held the fellowship in 1987, the year it was created. In the bookshelf, I found a hardcover copy of *An Angel at My Table* with an inscription inside thanking the Sargeson Trust and Centre for "A productive enjoyable stay..." Running my fingers over the blue ink, I felt as though I was touching a seam inside history.

Like Frank Sargeson, her mentor, Frame was a writer who illuminated her country in a full and unflinching way. Standing at the window, watching rain fall through the leaves, I imagined the many writers who had stood in that same spot, a pen in their hand perhaps, the pages of a manuscript fanned out on the desk behind them.

I also found myself longing to reach back in time and talk with my grandmother, who was born in Auckland in 1924, the same year as Frame, and with my mother, born in 1950, who loved reading, and books. I wanted to talk with them about the societal conditions of their times, about all that they navigated and fought against and hoped for. And I imagined their reactions to my telling them about where I was living — the way my grandmother would clasp her hands together and make a little *ah!* sound when something delighted her.

In the past, I have held residencies in remote places — on a mountain in Northern California, in the woods of New Hampshire. At the Sargeson Centre, there was something very special about being granted space and solitude while also being in the middle of a thrumming city. I structured my days by writing in the loft in the morning, then heading out to one of the many nearby coffee shops in the afternoon. Walking from place to place, I'd sometimes stop and work for a while on a bench in Albert Park, balancing my laptop on my knees, looking out at the birds and trees, and people lying in the soft grass.

I grew a somewhat embarrassing affection for the two-storey Starbucks on the corner of Queen and Victoria Streets. It could be crowded and sweaty, especially when it was raining out and everyone was coming in flustered and dripping. But I loved to put in my headphones, sink into one of the armchairs, and focus on a poem amid all the bustle.

I also loved the quiet of the University of Auckland library, the students' furrowed brows and hushed, serious voices. I had subject matters to research, forms in mind, but a poem is always, in my experience, shaped by things well beyond the poet's intent — the time of day, what the weather is doing, scraps of overheard conversation, a familiar image illuminated in a new way.

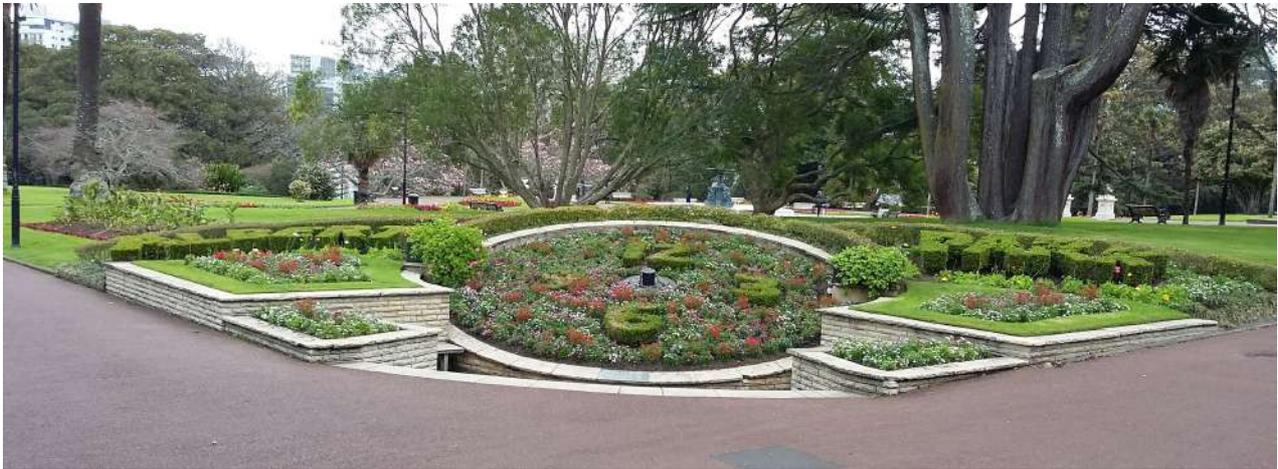
In Albert Park, there's a clock made of flowers, with shrubs sculpted into the shape of a 12, 3, 6, and 9. I liked to pause in front of it and look at its design. When I arrived, it was ringed by cheery yellow flowers. A

it felt like being in a kind of secret watchtower.

Sometimes poets will bristle at the idea of inspiration, preferring to talk about the hard work and persistence that is indeed foundational to writing. I'm a slow writer and almost always work on a single poem at a time. Writing for hours every day, as autumn deepened into winter, was certainly a test of perseverance. And yet the loft and its surroundings — the whole gift of the fellowship —

I felt a renewed
determination
to finish as many more
poems as I could

month or so later, the flowers were pulled out and the clock's face was bare dirt. It stayed like that for a while, then was planted with small white buds, like polka dots. By then it was almost August. I knew I'd be gone before seeing the clock change again, and I felt a renewed determination to finish as many more poems as I could.



Especially in these last few months as Covid-19 has shaken the globe, I have been reflecting on my time in the Sargeson Centre with immense gratitude. My homesickness has taken on a new intensity. I keep thinking about an afternoon that I spent writing at Shaky Isles, on the University of Auckland campus. I had a deadline the following morning for an essay I was working on, and I was struggling with how to end it, rummaging my mind for the right image, the right words. I sipped my mocha. I watched a sparrow hop around on the table beside me. I took deep breaths, deleted try after try. When the sentences I needed finally arrived on the page, I nearly wept with relief. They still needed to be tinkered with, but the essence was there. I kept working as dusk fell, then walked back through the park. The flowers glowed at that hour. The lampposts snapped on in unison, always a certain one flickering and buzzing. Back at the loft, I took off my backpack and coat. Then I put the kettle on and sat for a while looking at the photographs of the writers, taken over three decades, all part of the legacy of Frank Sargeson and his mentorship, their many books lining the shelves below.

About Our Contributors

Antoinette Baker is a mostly Christchurch girl who writes poems for family, friends and herself. She has come out to share her middle-age musings of thankfulness and some other things.

Jenny Dobson has written and performed poetry for over thirty years. She recently had a poem about laundry highly commended in the NZ Poetry Society's International Poetry Competition.

Nicola Easthope lives on the Kāpiti Coast. She is a teacher, and poet: 'Leaving my arms free to fly around you' (Steele Roberts) and 'Working the tang' (The Cuba Press).

John Ewen's poetry, short stories, plays and nonfiction have appeared in NZ literary magazines and anthologies, the UK online literary magazine *Five Dials*, and broadcast by Radio NZ.

Andrea Ewing is a criminal lawyer by day, and a writer the rest of the time. Her stories and poems appear in *takahē*, *Flash Frontiers*, and *Headland*. In 2004, she won the Katherine Mansfield Award for a novice short story. She lives in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland.

Tim Grgec is a Master's graduate of English Literature and Creative Writing from Victoria University of Wellington. He was the 2018 recipient of the Biggs Family Prize in Poetry.

Thomas Hamill is an English Literature graduate of the University of Warwick in the UK, now living in Tāmaki Makaurau. He is inspired by nature in Aotearoa and loves exploring this theme in his own writing.

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

Chloe Honum is the author of *The Tulip-Flame* and *Then Winter*. She was a 2019 Grimshaw Sargeson Fellow. Raised in Auckland, she currently lives in Texas and teaches at Baylor University.

Susan Howard lives in Matakana. She writes about what affects her and what she feels is important on the world stage. She has been published in New Zealand and overseas.

Nathan Joe is a Chinese-Kiwi playwright and performance poet. He placed third in the 2019 National Poetry Slam, and is currently the 2020 Ursula Bethell Writer-in-Residence.

Kate O'Gorman is a Drama/English teacher originally from Wales but now residing in Himatangi. She is enjoying a resurgence in her creative writing.

"Words are my people," says **Belinda Tait**, "since I have always felt so eminently easy among them; their customs and their ways!"

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*.

Featured Poet

Andrea Ewing

Oystercatcher

Mostly they totter in pairs, little
tux-clad fellows;
but today a lone bird
is facing the sea,
her shoulders stiff
against the offshore gale.
She takes no brisk steps,
she is utterly still:
just watches the onslaught
of foam-strewn waves heaving in,
the dark tide on the rise.

I watch her
to see what she will do.

And I remember
how that day, my mother stood
like this: black-wrapped, back turned
to the land's betrayals –
its cancers and wars, the cost of it all.
Lake Hāwea beyond
was wind-muddled and cold:

a few short steps
and she would plumb its green depths,
as if to comb them
for everything she'd lost.
We watched – we five – clot-throated,
knowing now no voice
could ever call her home.

What's astounding is
these moments pass. Emptied hearts
drum on, more reliably
than we'd like; and
from fragile equipoise
something shifts, minutely;
we bear up, resist;
we go on.

The oystercatcher, too
turns her bright-eyed head;
trots along the rocks
in search of tidbits, company,
the solace of inane routine. All the same,
you could see
it was a close-run thing.

Life after death
(for Ray)

Most days I wear my atheism
jauntily; like a schoolgirl flaunting legs
in breach of dress code, because
why on earth not?

Today, though, is different –
driving up Pukaki
with you resting at my feet, the charred ruins
of a temple.
Mum's staring out the window,
her fingers playing Chopin
on her forearm.

It's our first time scattering.
We stand around, unschooled in ritual,
unsure how to start.
Your favourite peak presides, tooth-white;
a slate sky presses down;
a wax-eye chirrs, now and again;
the ancient forest keeps its distance.

I think: *This is all there is.*
Birds, ash, a few neurons
sparking. Then you are not really here;
not free of your white hospice bed,
not glad to be coming home.
You lie still in my hands

as I once squirmed in yours;
but metal-boxed, plastic-bagged,
a typed sticker for your name.

Most days atheism
costs me nothing: it's like not getting
insurance,
a sort of adolescent confidence.

But today – as we strew you forth
in chalky handfuls, to rest
nowhere in particular –
today materialism hurts. I want more
than this sad mulching
of anonymous moraine; I want
myth, some solemn incantation
to stay your rising soul. I want
to tell my daughter:
sometimes in the hills I glimpse
his shadow, blue on snow, moving closer
to the summit. And I want
to *believe it.*

We hurl you free of that awful box, in silent
turns.

You eddy, coat the hebes, rise in clouds;
and I try to recall
about how atoms are reborn,
fly from Caesar's failing lips
to flock in some startling new form. But today
it's not enough.

Melbourne

We're driving past
squat houses, their red roofs
cheerily facing the lengthening
cirrus clouds
when you ask me, casually,
if I want to come to Melbourne with you
next April. You're watching the road,
inscrutable.

April
is further away than Melbourne:
accessible
only to the brave, only by some leap
over perilous waters, a quest
for lights shimmering with distance.

I look at the stubbled fields. They flow by
as if we're caught in a current of asphalt,
bearing us north. You clear your throat
as the silence thickens like fog.

We are pattern-seeking animals: taught to trust
in the inexorable logic of sunrise, the rhythmic placement
of fence-posts, the patient triumph
of gravity. April is a leaky boat, cracked ice:
it can't be relied on.

I'm stuttering a sentence
far too thin to hold all this
when you touch my hand, nod skywards
and say, Look -
a hawk.

And there he is:
drifting square-winged, unexpected, the fringe of his shadow
lapping the sun-streaked sky;
a dark thought in a blue eye.

Company

The window's shedding pale squares of
morning
and they come to rest on you;
the sheets give off our sleeplessness
and sweat.

We're still joined at every joint –
fingers cross-hatched, knees neatly stacked,
the sole of my foot
kissing your calf. My hair shivers
with each of your breaths, like something
struggling
again and again
to get back up.
From above this might look like
togetherness. In all this warm proximity –
curled close as scallop-shells –
there's no space for lack or loss,
no room for loneliness.

I think
about the bookshelf. How when he left
it looked so empty. How the ghosts
of his textbooks and dictionaries

perched on; how I filled the space
with vases, cookbooks, unread tomes –
anything to hand, anything
that wouldn't up and blow away.

Easier, though, not to draw
comparisons;
not to pry, open cupboards, risk
finding them bare.
Instead
I stare at the wall, let the sea of your breath
lap steadily at my ear,
hear the tuis' squabbles
lancing the dawn hush.

The light creeps on
across the covers, hours yet
from your eyelids. All your curtains
stay drawn. Still some time together, then
before you go.

• *Previously published in The Unnecessary
Invention of Punctuation (NZPS anthology, 2018)*

President's Report

Presented at the 2020 NZPS AGM

Kia Ora, greetings, and welcome, New Zealand Poetry Society and guests.

2020 has brought us all new challenges and opportunities. We have become much more isolated and connected in new ways.

Membership of the society continues to increase, with 65 new members being welcomed into our community during 2019-20, and with many more welcomed back. Student membership has continued to grow strongly, and it is wonderful to read the offerings from our student poets.

We had a lively and slightly chaotic launch for the 2019 anthology, *The perfect weight of blankets at night*, edited by the dedicated and diligent Raewyn Alexander. The judges from our 2019 International Competition — Kiri Piahana-Wong, Miriam Barr, Gregory Piko, and Anne Curran — were generous with their time and thoughts. I would like to thank them and congratulate them for their fine work.

Early on in the year, the Society was honoured to receive a generous bequest from poet Jill Chan, which has assured the ongoing financial stability of the Society. We are also appreciative of donated funds from the Windrift Haiku Group when they wound up, and will be featuring more haiku in the future.

Ivy Alvarez and Emma Shi continue to work hard on a *fine line* magazine, and we say a big thank you to the writers and poets who have filled the pages with interesting and well-crafted content. A big thank you to our patrons Fiona Kidman and Vincent O'Sullivan for their continued support.

Over the past year, we saw a few changes to the Committee. Our new social media officer, Charlotte Steel, came on board. She is already doing an impressive job, especially during COVID-19 measures that required changes to events, as we migrated into isolation and emerged as online communities.

Poets have made the most of our change of circumstance, and made opportunities out of challenges. Poets have also joined creative practitioners in providing calm and chaos as needed.

Our guest poet Rik The Most is one of these active innovators to emerge from the crisis, with his *Poetry at Your Place* events, which have a very strong following. We look forward to hearing him later.

We would love to know how we can continue to support, grow, and promote our expanding community of poets. We have plans in place to expand our support of emerging young poets, our established and experienced writers, performers, and whakapapa.

As always, we are very interested to hear from all of you. We would love to discover new ways to benefit you all, since this is your Society, poets of New Zealand.

Sincerely,
Shane Hollands

Feature Article

Word Made Flesh
Nathan Joe

We often imagine a lonely soul marooned, stranded

When it comes to poetry, my background is in spoken word, so the emphasis is on performing poetry rather than writing specifically for print. Without getting into a huge debate over the semantic differentiation between the two — for that is a truly tired debate — I'm interested in the way that spoken word is intrinsically tied to the live experience.

I'm a playwright, first and foremost, which means that I have a predilection for real bodies in live spaces. The more theatrical the better. Spoken word

(or performance poetry) is a reminder that the poet isn't just a writer, but a living, breathing, human being. The source of these words are flesh, not paper or ink.

Yes, when we consider the image of the poet, we often imagine a lonely soul marooned, stranded, and fallen through the cracks of society. Very much alone. Very much solitary. And yet... this has never been my experience of the poets I know in real life. Introverted perhaps, but always social creatures deep down, longing for meaningful connection and discussion, often community-minded, and deeply generous.

It is through this generosity that I found a platform for my voice. A few open mics and a few slam events later, I'm supposedly a poet myself. The process of becoming a poet wasn't about jumping a specific set of hurdles; it was about being given permission to find my voice.

The poet's voice is one of the most essential components in writing — the thing that distinguishes them from anyone else. For the performance poet, this is doubly the case, the voice manifesting itself both figuratively and literally.

It might sound somewhat self-important, but the act of performing a poem live has become a deeply political act for me. There is no more efficient way I can personally reclaim space in such a short pocket of time. It is all about me.

If that risks narcissism, it's because I've been invisible for so much of my life. To be openly queer in my work and unabashedly Asian is still a relatively new concept to me. To take up space, and centre a narrative around my own experiences, even if it might be no more than three minutes at a time, feels revolutionary. I am the most punk rock version of myself up on that stage. Or as punk rock as I'm ever going to get anyway. It's like years of silence and introversion, of being forced to play one role, are finally given release. Pure catharsis. In a way, the performance poet is the perfect representation of art and artist as one whole thing, impossible to separate. And all the better for it.

So, to be in lockdown was to be separated from that essential, tangible human quality. To return to a quieter, more demure demeanour. I am many selves. Performance poetry serves one. The more reserved habits of reading and writing serve another. But the need for release did not disappear or go unnoticed. Poets all around acknowledged this, as a surge of live-streamed events cropped up. While far from the ideal format to experience performance poetry, it was an important antidote for an uncertain time. And I was thankful for it, when I eventually did grow hungry for the intimacy of a live poet's words.

The two I managed to catch were the double bill of Erik Kennedy and Chris Tse for *Poetry Live* — two poets who also blur the line between print and performance poetry, due to the sheer excellence of their reading. Good poetry resists easy categorisation.

To be in lockdown was also to be reminded that the process of writing poetry is about inspiration as much as creation. Writing isn't simply the act of putting pen to paper, but everything that comes before that as well. While I understand that lockdown wasn't necessarily a holiday for most people, it was a forced period of introspection for many, including myself. We were

forced to let go of some of the values we had convinced ourselves had become so important, forced to take stock and reconsider the things that were most immediately important to us.

No, not quite a luxurious writer's residency and certainly not without its stresses, but ultimately it proved to be an enriching experience. How often are we given the opportunity to find stillness? Yes, the pressure to produce content was there (it always is) but, ultimately, idleness was king. To be against productivity ironically resulted in what felt like the best use of my time. Any writing that resulted, then, was purely accidental — not the strained labour of content creation.

And what a joy to finally read the books that had been sitting on my shelf for far too long. My muse was not something I chased; she came to me unexpectedly. She was between the unassuming pages of books I felt like reading, rather than the ones I felt I had to read. She walked alongside me on many of my long walks to nowhere. And sometimes she didn't come at all — which was genuinely okay. Unlike the pace of the normal world, there was far less pressure to shine, though many still did. I learnt to hold everything lightly, to be kinder to myself.

Looking back, I consider the many ways I unconsciously practised Sonia Renee Taylor's notion of radical self-love. Not perfectly or consistently, but when I needed to. By reminding myself that my self-worth isn't all tied up with my need to perform. To be able to claim space off-stage is just as important. She speaks of the body's needs, its losses and mournings. That to love oneself in a manner that sits outside the status quo is an immensely radical act all in itself. No surprise that she, too, is a performance poet. Our bodies and our words are so woven together. Yes, to give yourself permission to be idle. To eat and sleep and read. That is what my body craved. It's these things that kept me connected to my craft as much as writing itself.

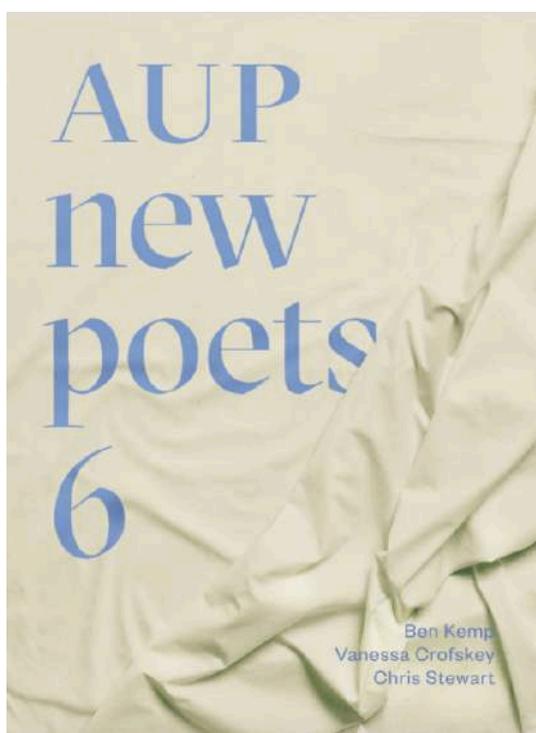
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Reviews

AUP New Poets 6 - Ben Kemp, Vanessa Crofsky, and Chris Stewart

(Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2020).
ISBN 9781869409098. RRP \$29.99. 114pp.

Reviewed by Tim Grgec



Each go rummaging through
various experiences
in search of a
recognisable self

AUP New Poets 6 is the second revival of the *AUP New Poets* series under the editorship of Anna Jackson. And what a revival it has been, bringing back to life a medium in which emerging writers can showcase a substantial body of work in book form, before going on to publish their own collections. Jackson herself was an original new poet in the 1999 *AUP New Poets 1*. Now, over twenty years later as editor, she advances the tradition she herself helped pioneer, allowing three emerging poets to announce themselves on the national stage.

Jackson's selection displays the diverse range of voices in contemporary New Zealand poetry. From Ben Kemp's quiet meditations on life in Japan and Aotearoa, to Vanessa Crofsky's whirlwind political poetry about living as a twenty-something Hokkien Chinese New Zealander, to Chris Stewart's sleep deprived review of fatherhood. While each poet is distinctly independent of one another, the three share complex explorations of identity. All three ask the question about what we inherit as individuals, interrogating both the parts of ourselves that are predetermined, and the parts that are more malleable. Each go rummaging through various experiences in search of a recognisable self.

Ben Kemp opens the collection with *The Monks Who Tend the Garden with Tiny Scissors*. Having spent ten years in Japan, Kemp's work 'explores the nexus between Japanese and Māori/Polynesian culture,' a nexus that sees Māori gods wandering the narrow streets of Gōtoku-ji and a Japanese Kami-sama receiving his own kind of moko. There is a profound sense of quietness to his writing. The introspective space within Kemp's own head serves as a refuge from the overwhelming bustle of metropolitan life. In "Juni-Gastu", the opening poem, Kemp becomes the street level observer, meandering through the 'arteries of Tokyo... / with ears open...' listening and looking for details to help him comprehend his place in the world. Avoiding the monotony of routine, small observations are enlarged by the speaker's long, winding sentences:

Walking to work,
the peddlers in steaming noodle carts have faces like nourished hide...

if you get close,
their foreheads are old photos,
with grandfathers, mothers,
brothers & uncles, resting over their brow.

Kemp's words wander across the page like his speaker does the streets, slowly and languidly, taking in every detail.

His Japan is at its most delicate in the poem "Green Tea". For Kemp, the individual tea leaf carries with it a culture and voice of 'millions'. His speaker is captivated by the 'quintessence of the tea flower' and the subtle transformation 'from *chawan* to lip'. Kemp's interest in film is apparent here, favouring close-up snapshots of particular details to allow space for a wider contemplation. Like the poem's unnamed warrior, the perspectives from within the tea house allow the speaker to observe the 'view of his inner self'. It is a contemplation that stretches far beyond what's directly in front of him. The drink of Japan's Buddhist monks and samurai, each cup of green tea is full of history, holding within it a centuries-long legacy 'swaddled in steam'.

With fierce velocity, the collection jumps to Vanessa Crofsky's *Shopping List of Small Violences*. Crofsky's section strikingly presents itself in a different font to Kemp and Stewart. We feel the struggle of a narrator maintaining friendships and lovers, moving between cities and flats, alienated by the boredom of work, all with a compulsive skin-picking that borders on self-harm. Crofsky's work exhibits a remarkable variance in form, redefining the expectations of how a poem should look and behave. With a degree in visual art, Crofsky's work appears as Excel spreadsheets, online recipe reviews, emoji-filled text messages, Post-it notes, and fold-out visual art pieces.

The most striking, though, is a reconstituted New Zealand Customs Passenger Arrival Card. Through a clever use of erasure, Crofsky reconstructs a banal requisite of international travel into a poem that challenges the xenophobic attitudes of a purportedly open-minded Aotearoa. With humiliating scrutiny, Customs officers 'take their / time inspecting luggage. Sniffing bags. Frowning,' challenging the identity of Crofsky's speaker upon arrival. The process informs us of the disproportionate psychological burden placed on Asian New Zealanders entering their own country. Her poem ends with a crushing revelation: 'The last time I arrived back in New Zealand, / SECURITY JOKED / if our suitcase had ANY DOG,' revealing a casual perniciousness still, regrettably, alive and well in New Zealand.

We then move to Chris Stewart's sleep-deprived haze, one all new parents can empathise with. It would be reductive, however, to categorise Stewart's poetry as simply a reflection on fatherhood. In *Gravity*, Stewart explores how his new role as a father informs his place as a son. He confronts his own mortality, the mortality of his parents, and the inheritances we adopt and will inevitably leave behind. In "everyone wants to know how heavy they are," Stewart's speaker explains the magnetic forces that bond a parent to their child. As his children grow, so too does the weight of his love. More remarkable though than 'knowing the kilograms,' of your baby, his speaker muses, is the inexorable force 'with which you are pulled' towards it.

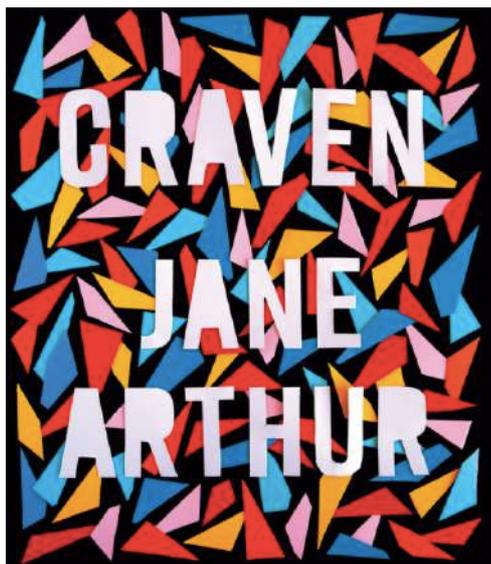
It is with this newfound magnetism — the fear of losing one's child — that Stewart confronts the mortality of his own parents. "the chef", for example, asks the question: how much are we products of our

parents, and how much are we products of their absence? In the kitchen, seemingly trivial details like blowing on a hot wooden spoon serve as sharp reminders of a mother's passing. Memories of the speaker's mother come flooding back in Proustian clarity when he recreates her stew: 'peeling carrots he hears / the winter voice of his mother's recipe,' remembering 'the red taste of it'. It is an elegy for someone lost, yet his mother's cooking is a tradition that will continue through him. Stewart reminds us how the dead continue to shape our lives, a pleasant comfort in grief, warming his heart and belly.

Craven - Jane Arthur

(Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2019).
ISBN 9781776562879. RRP \$25. 80pp.

Reviewed by Thomas Hamill



Everyday inconsequential reflections are captured and paused upon, giving a sprinkling of deep meaning

I'm not good at Christmas. At age 13, I was an avid reader, and was once given a very fancy bookmark. At the touch of a button, this bookmark would magically illuminate the page in a deep crimson red for 'under-the-covers' reading, so as not to disturb my stepbrother sleeping in the same room. The thing is, I was grateful, but I think the expression 'tell your face' was perhaps appropriate and I was rightly chastised. Since then, I have never really been able to judge what is and isn't appropriate in the gift-receiving stakes. Do you jump for joy at a knitted scarf? Do you sob uncontrollably when you receive a picture of your dead hamster Snuffles? Do you give a polite nod and nothing else for a Farmer's gift voucher? I just don't know. As I read Jane Arthur's extraordinary debut *Craven*, I am repeatedly reminded of my deep-rooted anxieties such as this one. Crucially, as I delve deeper through the poems, I am being empowered to overcome them.

Craven is Arthur's debut collection. Although you wouldn't know it — her delicate and accomplished style has the feeling of someone who has been around poetry and literature for years, and I wasn't surprised to read that she has been in the book industry for a long time. *Craven* is a collection that holds a varying mix of mid-length and short poems. *Craven* is also split into three sections, although the purpose of these sections is a little lost on me. Overall, there is a calm assuredness in the style of writing throughout the book. I feel like I am in conversation with Arthur discussing the peaks and troughs of life over a glass of red wine at the kitchen table, and that we are both showcasing our feelings without knowing it. "Oh, Great" is one such poem where a colloquial moment belies meaningfulness:

I was trying to decide
whether it's better the oceans are rising
than if they were drying up –
I mean emotionally, not scientifically – and
I couldn't decide which was better
or worse, an abundance or absence,
to drown or to die of thirst.

Cleverly, Arthur omits a question mark, inferring that this poem is a musing rather than a grand statement that requires an answer. Despite the potential seriousness of the topic, together reader and writer are invited to consider the situation gently, and to not cave under the topic's weight. Similarly, in a short poem later in the collection, we read about "A Sharp Large Knife" that likes 'chopping onions', which then leads to pondering the fact that 'it's ok, they're already dead / though I am weeping, too'. Everyday inconsequential reflections are captured and paused upon, giving a sprinkling of deep meaning.

This is not to say that there aren't moments of real heft in Arthur's writing. Among the conversational poems, some pieces have a weight that cuts through and stands out. The poem "Reach" explores male dominance and the imbalance of power in a relationship. The man 'would take everything I handed him' while the woman would 'laugh ... afraid of having that much power.' It is a challenging topic that is treated with measure and poise. Further to this, and in what is something of a showstopper, "The Real Reason Why Hollywood Won't Cast Jane Arthur Anymore" explores the haze of new parenthood, as well as the feeling of being newly trapped in a world that you can't control, with a life that you now have to guide through it. The structure of the poem sums up this challenge. Neat passages are justified left, while lines of seemingly broken text sprawl at random across the page. The dichotomy of finding order in the chaos of modernity is laid bare for all to see.

But, for me, the real strength of *Craven* is in its conversationalist tones. "The Sum of Your Life" is a delightful encapsulation of this. It is a short eight-stanza poem that gives a snapshot of fleeting thoughts, which you could have at any moment on any given day:

The discomfort
of mishearing a stranger
over and over.

An epiphany
followed by the realisation
it's the same one you had at sixteen.

Like so much of the collection, this poem really is full of vulnerable charm; Arthur leaves so much of herself in the simplicity of her words. "Situation" demonstrates this further. The voice in the poem states that 'I've been preoccupied with what others think again', and that 'nights are not long enough' for all these musings. Then follows a series of questions that many of us silently think at some stage but never have the courage to ask out loud. Not just for Arthur, but for all of us, so often these 'questions come up at inconvenient times.' The poem ends on a final rhetorical note that neatly encapsulates the mood of much of *Craven*:

Maybe healthy emotional behaviour wasn't modelled to us as children.

So we bite. We draw blood. We take things that aren't ours. I don't know.

Nothing is too challenging in the language and syntax of this neat statement. However, behind these simple words, there is deep introspection and meaning. Questions are constantly raised and left for the reader to answer; it is therapeutic. As such, I realise that the more I read, the more I am thinking back to my own anxieties and using the poems as a catharsis for my own neurosis; I'm imbuing my experiences through Arthur's words. "Messing Up the Scales" is one such example. It is a narrative poem that describes arriving at a piano lesson, and feeling the intense embarrassment of putting some of yourself out there in performance:

...Your face reddens

like your fingernails when you realise

the children outside

can hear you, too.

Reading this, and realising how much it can be applied to my own adult life, gave me a real sense of relief. Someone else has had these experiences, and they are okay! They are maddening, at the time traumatising, but these experiences are part of existence and have been shared by many before. *Craven* is a collection that has something for everyone, and explores life's highs and lows in simple and reassuring words. It is a pleasure to delve into the collection, as it offers hope, charm, support and, most importantly, empowerment, to anyone who reads it: 'I can get up in the mornings / I do things' ("Idiots"). Simply, Jane Arthur has delivered a wonderful debut collection full of vulnerability and charm. The fact that I'm using it as some kind of self-help book to get over my Christmas unwrapping traumas is neither here nor there, and as poetry, it is wonderful. But for the record, now that I've read *Craven* and feel better about life and my own quirks, when I receive my next fancy bookmark, I'll feel emboldened to react with a polite smile and a hearty thanks.

The Yield - Sue Wootton

(Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2017). ISBN
9780947522483. RRP \$25. 84pp.

Reviewed by Nicola Easthope

She makes the essential
extra, and the ordinary
effervesce

Some words dwell in the bone, as yet
unassembled. Like the word you want...
("Lingua incognita")

As a high school teacher and part-time poet, who dwells mostly in the classroom and the junior deans' office, these two lines are an affirming and yearning encapsulation of my life during term time. In her fifth collection, *The Yield*, Sue Wootton reaches in, plucks the word you wish for (like a heritage rose stem, like a vintage cello string) and holds it out in invitation — here, feel this with your whole body. Suddenly, you're alert, all senses popping, whether poet or reader, listener or observer, or poised in each and all of these roles.

In *The Yield*, Wootton is a skilled orchardist, rhythmic conductor, and the chief writer of a muscular Deep South settler-tongue — all in service of ideas and experiences that thrill and heal.

The Yield was a finalist in the 2018 Ockham New Zealand Book Awards Poetry Award, and it's no wonder. This is an enviable harvest of many award-winning and runner-up poems: "Wild", "Ice diver", "Smeuse", "Luthier", "Calling", "Daffodils", and "Admission". Instead of being divided into sections, the collection is made up of 58 poems that flow together; you'll be swept up in its fluid movement from one fruitful poem to the next. But there is an intentional arrangement, beginning with the vivid "Wild", an urgent love song for the nurture of nature, and ending with "The yield", a wonder song to the little askew apple tree that could.

The speaker in "Wild" personifies what could be a desperately old tree, or an urgently compromised ecosystem, demanding to be regarded:

Measure my wild. Down to my last leaf,
my furled, my dessicated. This deciduousness,
this bloom...

What will survive me, O my cockroaches, O my lice?

There is no place for the reader to be an impotent bystander — protect and conserve, or get out of the way: '...Examine my yearn, and treat it with trees.' I feel as if I've been employed as an assistant nurse in A&E, and that my patient is acutely conscious of their mortality. My own tame and wild aches are delineated here, too — it's like I'm in consultation with a holistic GP who issues me with a green prescription: 'Mineral deficiency: socks off. Soil. Dark / rot, eye-less wriggle, while the roots seek, seek.' Reading and re-reading this poem feels as good as doing what this doctor orders, and nudges me, barefooted, to the nearest native bush.

Wootton's varied characters include clouds, children, ice divers and icebergs, sealion and salmon, mammoths and wasps. The poet's themes are equally ranging: the rough intimacy of hospital care, the difficult solitude of prayer, as well as what humans do to hedgerows and the small animals that traffic through them ("Smeuse"). The sanctuary of an empty church is illuminated: the speaker could be someone of an organised faith or an atheist open to the mysteries. Whoever they are, they're glad to be alone, dazzled into the worship of everyday things, even the dust motes that are cast in the lightshaft of a stained glass window ("The needle work, the polishing"). A priest in a coffee shop, an ice diver as monk, atheist-leaning children in awe at the bounty of nature's seeds, stoppered human emotion in a jar — these poems are grounded and full of body, yet accessibly open and attendant to the metaphysical that neither religion nor agnosticism can wholly satisfy.

Throughout this collection, Wootton is queen of the quotidian; she makes the essential extra, and the ordinary effervesce. "The crop" is a taut string tied back and forwards between the earthly and the otherworldly; it traces a kind of matrilineal abundance through work, birth, and art:

...and she,
unforeseeable by She, who stands now in the beds,
stripping the glut for jelly. The fruit mounds in the colander



like a placenta. Scarlet juice stains all her fingers.

She prints the wall...

Further evidence of Wootton's pliancy of language and succulent grace can be found in "Wintersight", followed by "Matariki in the Chinese Garden". Both are comforting poems to read during this cold Covid-liminal July in Aotearoa, when we '...Can't see by bright what shores us up / or orbits us, what shapes the edges of the known and needed world.' I love the wry humour within these poems, too: '*Forgiveness*: such a pretty word, for such a bitch'. ("Forgiveness"). This is both assured and reassuring.

Wootton is a master of the sound device. She writes with taut control of assonance and alliteration, monosyllabics and line breaks. In "Mammatus", the chiming consonants and echoing vowels make unusual clouds visceral, metaphorical breast tissue made firm:

This canopy
might burn and wheel, might split,
might vomit flapping cawing smuts, might spew
its pent and rotted milk to pit our pretty town

I feel confident in saying that William Shakespeare would have admired Sue Wootton!

In Wootton's ultimate poem, we are gathered into all that has come before, and reminded that in order to keep our home in this world, we must sow, tend, harvest, and yield. We must give in and give way, open up and let go:

...Criss-crossed
constantly by stars and worms, so bonded
to this place and bending to it, as ice
melts in its season, streams away...
("The yield")

Wootton's writing casts the spells and seasons of living. Her poems are chants and enchantments, incantations to strengthen the weave between human will and the wildness we depend on. She creates with the dexterity of an athlete, a musician, and a food gatherer in all weathers. Her poems are simultaneously spacious and substantive, voluptuous and sensorily ripped. This book is ink-jet, juicy-fruit, harvest-moon bathed and flavoured. It compels me to write my way through the school holidays, and work to make my craft better than before. Pick *The Yield* off the bookshop shelf, bite in, and savour.

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

Members’ Poems

London Rhythm and Blues

She was expecting them;
even so, unpacked,
they wooed her like old friends,
black work, party spikes,
moths of memory
squinting at the sunlight of
opportunity.

They’d flown in from
half a world away
their souls forever stitched
in leather lasts and
life lived hard, a whiff
of river, and cobblestones
from forgotten streets.

The Vivienne Westwood’s
sidled closer,
whispered their past,
and dared her
to stretch out her foot.

— *Susan Howard*

The Worshipful Company of Pattenmakers ¹
(And Countdown calls a period what it is)

Here to our honourable lodge we come
And at the meeting we decide
A motto is the go. Latin if you please
We do fundamentally support
All fragile feet and others if they pay
For the interregnum of the outdoors
Getting from A to B. Click click take care the ankle
Then with manners we slip into something more comfy
Enter indoors and work on our motto
Recipiunt Foeminae Sustentacula Nobis:
Women Receive Support From Us
We call it what it is. Period.

— *Antoinette Baker*

¹ 'Pattenmakers' is not a spelling mistake. Pattens were elevated metal or wooden overshoes worn to protect feet from mud and bog in streets and wet marshy fields. There are various references in literature to these contraptions from the 17th century but they are thought to have originated in medieval times. Pattens became redundant with the arrival of better drainage and smooth walking surfaces such as pavements. Pattens were for outside use and etiquette demanded they be removed before entering indoors. And yes, there was a Worshipful Company of Pattenmakers that adopted the motto in this poem!

Blue heels

There are moments when
Stopped in your tracks
You say – wow, look at that
Not after. A pair of new
Blue shoes stop the show
With raised brocade pattern
Perhaps the *fleur de lis*
A brush of satin 'n suede
But that's the backstory
Just behind the electric hue
Up front the shape of purr
The curvy purr propped up
Stalked to strut at all cost
Looking for a place to go.

— *Antoinette Baker*

Scarpe Italiene

On a display stand at the opshop
they were the tops, men's footwear
at its very best. She said she had
to buy them: Italian shoes, a byword
for quality, like suits from Savile Row
or French perfume or German engineering.
Their unmarked soles
had never brushed the ground
and we agreed they'd graced
the feet of a *padrone* when laid out
to view, then whipped off. He went unshod
into cremation. They almost fitted me.
Like Cinderella's mean stepsisters
I stabbed and jabbed those shoes
with feet so slightly oversize.
It was so close, had I fewer toes...
And so I missed my chance
of footshod elegance.
She took them back as a donation.
I could not fill a dead man's shoes.

— *John Ewen*

Every Time I Blink

I didn't see you'd grown so tall
until tonight, when I wear my heels
for your farewell dinner at Mario's
and you still come up to my chin.

The clock plays tricks.
It has galloped to this night,
squeezed all your years
into the space of minutes.

You're gloved in that dress I bought myself
in last year's Monsoon sale,
and squirrelled away in the wardrobe
for the perfect occasion.

It looks better on you.
I don't remember when wearing my clothes
stopped being a game you played
on wet Sundays
clopping around in my shoes
six sizes too big.

Barefoot, you stand at the mirror,

gelling and sculpting,
and when you turn to tell me
how gorgeous I look, your eyes
don't need to lift to mine.
I see a hundred faces I have known,
a kaleidoscope of yous,
six months old - two years -
twelve - seventeen.

Every time I blink,
the kaleidoscope turns, the pattern shifts,
and I glimpse another facet of you.

You slide your feet into shoes
I haven't seen before
and your arm into mine
Come on, you say,
I'm ready.

And I blink

— *Trish Veltman*

Sole - Less

Mum shot me spear – eyes across the table
and she warned me I had too much to say for myself.
My fingers picked at the tablecloth
and I stared at the cylindrical sauce bottle
chimney – ing up behind the salt `n` pepper twins,
and the butter lumping sunnily,
and I leaded there, sullen, listening to Mum say
I`d gotten `too big for my boots`.
What a curious phrase, I spectated,
and I resented her resoundly, gray – ly,
as the weighting sky
outside the big picture window.
I bit down on my fork harder than I needed to
- a toothy retort; its taste of condiments and steelshine.
I wanted to slap her and tell her
this wasn`t about footwear at all
but how sole – less I felt,
how the hard ground we lived struck into my Heal, over and over,
defeating it rugged and bloody.
I wanted her to ask,
maybe try, beyond her own arse – sightedness
and mother it out of me; the thing that I couldn`t articulate.

— *Belinda Tait*

In My Shoes

She is tottering on my chipped high heels again.

The click clack clatter of swamped tiny feet
echoing on the floorboards.

Silence.

She surveys the perilous journey,
an assault course of toddler's treasure;
Lego, remote control cars and plastic beads.
I hold my breath.

She sashays through the danger with
sure footed stealth grounded on two pins,
like a model gliding across her carpet catwalk.
I exhale.

She is playing mum in the caricature kitchen,
a mimic of a soul inside insole
within the last vestige of an old life and
I hope.

She will choose her own hobnailed satin mules and
never wear mine.

— *Kate O'Gorman*

New Shoes

I want to tell my 22 years
grown daughter to be careful

on the stairs, to tread carefully
across the stage and mind the

hem of her gown doesn't catch
but just in time I realize that a

gracious young woman with a
Science Degree can probably

manage new shoes

— *Jenny Dobson*

Ship - Shape

The evening is a busy bay, and shoes make ships of themselves. Nautical – shaped,
intriguing through the

LampLit like Lighthouse Throw.

Spy the vessel – forms ferrying their limb - y cargoes:

A woman's heel sits high, aft, as she goes.

A practical, barge – ish work shoe makes determined craftways, crewing home.

Doldrum used – ness sinks over it like a fat ash cloud.

At the walls, the streetsides, shadows crowd like relatives all shouldered together while
the band plays, pipes skirling. And, you might imagine that the cluttered dims are waving
their loved ones away, while the ships dis – part.

You very well might, if it strikes you how a sneaker neats through the air, sportish as
a yacht cutting water.

— *Belinda Tait*

Superstition

There's a miner dead they say just the one thank the Lord
Thank him for us will ye? His shoes on the table top
Black once just hanging in shined with spit and buff
For the journey ahead to look your best my love
Proud I am to be they say what can I do with that?
Through the nets I see grim the same as when you left
This morning. Peck and off. The shoes I can sort
But I've nothing for the poorly of your face and maim
It won't wash off. No matter I am proud to be known I say
While the grey sets more and I draw down again.
Tie the laces once they're on eh they'll soon be here to see
And say and sip and murmur that the sole of the left's lopsided
A slight roll in from the right. Did he limp? We never noticed.
Shoes are never meant to be on the table.

— *Antoinette Baker*

Six Months in Århus

This time last year, you wore thin blades
screwed to the sole of white leather boots
and wobbled close to the snow-clad skirts
of a frozen lake. Your tongue still spilled
English words

skates ice cold

The lake remained solid for weeks - long after
you coaxed your borrowed skates into
swooping
curves and spirals, to explore further from
shore,
and your tongue learned new shapes

skojte frossen koldt

Today I hear you talking on the phone,
Danish flowing like summer streams.
Er den vejr godt til skojte?
Is the weather good for skating?
The answer is yes. I can tell, because you say
We don't get the right sort of cold here.
I hear that whistle in your chest
from the wrong sort of cold.

Last year, it was silent. I miss that,
and the way every day you tumbled
in the door, tongue tripping out new words:
Mum, I can say '*Jeg kan skojte*',
and, Mum, I know '*koldt and sne*'.
I miss sleeping with my curtains open,
icicles teething outside my window.

I suggest we drive to the ice rink in the city
though I know it's not the same. At the rink,
you can't see marsh-grass trapped like flies
in amber, can't gaze through the icewindow
at fish still swimming below. You can't roll
on your back when you fall and trace
aeroplane
journeys in white stripes across icebergblue
skies.

You don't feel it move beneath your feet,
don't hear the icesongs chime.

It was hot summer when we left.
Back home, we skated on thin ice,
trying to force our feet into old shoes
too small to fit.

— *Trish Veltman*

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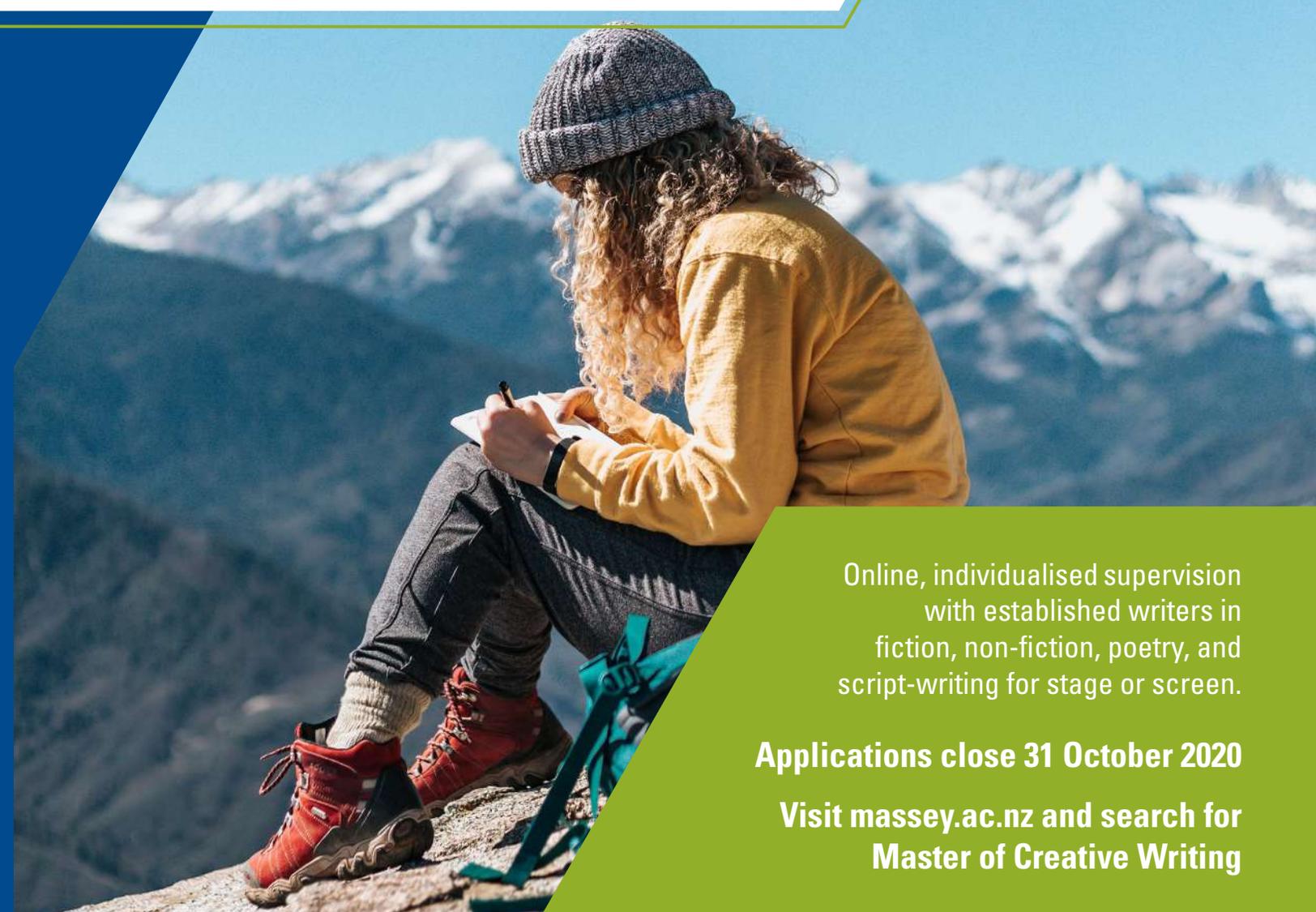
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