



# a fine line

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NEW ZEALAND POETRY SOCIETY

**SUMMER**  
**'20/'21**

## ARTICLES

BY  
RIA MASAE  
MADELEINE SLAVICK  
BRIDIE LONIE

SUMMER  
FEATURED POET  
**MICHAEL GIACON**

REVIEWS  
BY  
MAIA ARMISTEAD  
ANUJA MITRA

## POEMS

BY  
M. MACDONALD, J. DOBSON, S. WILSON, A. SUTTON, A. HAMILTON, J. GRAHAM GEORGE,  
V. RAPATAHANA, J. ADAMSON, D. O'HAGAN, A. BAKER, P. DAVIES, R.M. WAENGA, L. JAQUES,  
R. KEELER, A. CURRAN, B. STRANG, D. STRANGE, N. BORRELL, S. COURTNEY, M. REA

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Cover Image: Ian Dooley  
Cover Design: Emma Shi / Ivy Alvarez



## From the Editor

*Ivy Alvarez*

How hopeful is the promise of a New Year! Anything can happen. For the NZPS Committee, this means new people joining us. Please welcome **Kim Martins**, our new NZPS Administrator. The winner of several writing contests, her work appears in a number of publications, including the 2020 NZPS International Poetry Competition Haiku section.

We also welcome Committee volunteers **Gary Bradshaw**, our new Secretary, and **RikTheMost**, for Advocacy. Gary Bradshaw is a New Zealand expatriate based in Beijing, China, with several publications and a keen interest in NZ literature and poetry. RikTheMost is a vegan, queer, non-binary, polyamorous, spoken-word artist residing and working in NZ under the prestigious Exceptional Talent in the Arts visa.

Sophia Wilson writes, "Thank you for your magazine. It's been wonderful reading." Jenny Dobson shares sterling news about her poem, 'Shoes' (originally in the Spring edition): "Since this poem appeared in *a fine line*, I have been contacted by the writer of a NZ Women Graduates' newsletter as she would like to include it in her newsletter. So that was a bonus!" Such a delight to receive these bouquets.

The theme for the next edition is **The Body**. Please send up to four poems (40 lines max), up to eight (unthemed) haiku, and any lovely poetry news, sent by 10 March 2021 to [editor@poetrysociety.org.nz](mailto:editor@poetrysociety.org.nz)

It is with a heavy heart I must bid farewell to my editorship of *a fine line*. I am proud of my four-year contribution towards its current incarnation, with initiatives such as sourcing articles written by local, national and international writers; creating the student poet edition to encourage newer writers; the popular themed editions; and in this Summer edition, the new Windrift haiku section. However, I am confident I leave this venerable magazine in the capable hands of the incoming editor.

For this Summer 2020/2021 edition, read about poet Ria Masae's steady rise in the arena of slam poetry; the perseverance and belief in the power of poetry that made Madeleine Slavick's unique 20-language event for National Poetry Day possible; Bridie Lonie's insights into Iain Lonie's Collected Poems; and thoughtful reviews from Anuja Mitra and Maia Armistead.

It is with much pleasure I present to you our Members' Poems, which float on bubbles of wonder, in response to the theme of Balloon. This edition also signals the debut of our Windrift Haiku section. All these are a joy. Thank you to our members for embracing this new section with open arms.

I am delighted to present our Featured Poet for the Summer Edition, **Michael Giacon**, whose poems bestride delicacy and muscularity in surprising ways.

Many thanks, and sending you good wishes for a peaceful writing year ahead.

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

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### *Quotation of the Season*

Read the poems again last thing that night, then first thing in the morning. If you're still happy that they're as good as you can get them, send 'em off.

— Katrina Naomi

Compression and simplicity are very, very difficult.

— Ben Okri

## Feature Article

**because I burn and I rise:**  
An interview with Ria Masae

*Ivy Alvarez for a fine line*

***a fine line:* What definitive event started you down the path of slam poetry performance?**

My path in slam poetry performance began through an internship in 2015 with a sister-organisation to Youthline, called Action Education. The internship was part of our assessment in a class at the Manukau Institute of Technology, called Professional Practice, taught by artist Steve Lovett.

Action Education run Word The Front Line (WTFL), the only inter-college poetry slam in Aotearoa. During my internship, I observed how extremely passionate, supportive, and genuinely caring its amazing facilitators, Ramon Narayan and Dietrich Soakai were, (the latter has since passed the baton on to Ken Arkind) not just in teaching spoken word as an art form but also, importantly, in uplifting the rangatahi community.

The kaupapa of Action Education is to provide a safe space for rangatahi to share their truths through creative expression. With WTFL, this is through spoken word poetry, in the setting of a poetry slam/competition.

However, unlike other poetry slams that focus on championship, Action Education utilises spoken word and slam poetry to nurture the progressive journey of self-confidence and self-love of the individual voice, as well as empathy towards and the building of the collective.

As Ken and Ramon always tell the young poets, 'It's not about the points, it's about the poetry.' I've also realised it's not just about the

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## Have enough respect for your poetry to deliver it to an audience in the way it deserves to be delivered

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poetry, but also the connection between people that poetry creates.

Action Education's process includes holding workshops, open mic nights, and a weekend-long slam camp on a marae every year for participating college teams. Students gain a safe platform where their voices are valid, learn to enhance their craft of spoken word, and actively build bridges between their different worlds.

Since my involvement with WTFL, there hasn't been a single year where I haven't become teary-eyed from students' feedback, which often speaks

about finally finding a sense of belonging after feeling like outsiders in their own environments. I have watched students cross social barriers to become solid friends with those that they would never have engaged with in their everyday lives. Come to any WTFL event and you will observe an aroha and whānau vibe that is genuine (and loud) between students, regardless of the contest aspect.

I strongly believe Action Education's programme provides rangatahi with some vital tools to help them stand tall with dignity, strength, and compassion as individuals — and as a collective — in a world that is competitive and sometimes unfair. It's our responsibility as adults and nurturers to arm our future world game-changers with these types of essential tools.

Hence, through my internship with Action Education, and through my role as a regular team coach for WTFL, I am extremely lucky and grateful to have experienced and learnt these positive aspects of the spoken word and poetry slam scene. It enables me to have a healthy and enjoyable relationship with poetry slams, while growing mentally, spiritually, and emotionally during my own participation, despite its rivalrous nature.

### ***afl:* What's something you'd tell your younger self now that could've made performing slam poetry easier?**

- *Memorise, memorise, memorise!* Memorisation is one of my weaknesses. So learn how many days, weeks, or months it takes you to commit something to memory, and plan for that.
- *Believe in yourself and your craft.* Or, at least, have enough respect for your poetry to deliver it to an audience in the way it deserves to be delivered. I made the mistake of only memorising two poems in the first slam I ever entered, even though there were three rounds. I thought there was no way a newbie would make it to the final round. Nek minnit ...! Needless to say, I deservedly didn't earn a placing in the top three in that slam, lol.
- *Get to know other poets who are supportive.* It's a lot more enjoyable and less terrifying when you go into a slam with the comradeship of a community, rather than going alone. Also, you can learn so much from others.
- *Keep yourself safe!* It's easy to fall into the trap of sharing your most gut-wrenching, angsty, and sorrowful poems for the sake of competition, but it can have devastating effects on your wellbeing if you don't have the tools to hold yourself together personally after sharing your experience.

Ask yourself: Why do I want to share this poem? Am I in the right space of mind to share it? Must I share it now, or is it better to wait for another occasion? Do I have the knowledge and support to nurture my wellbeing, if I need it, after sharing?

One of the most important lessons I've learnt through slam poetry is to listen to my instincts and know when to say 'no' or 'not yet' to a poem.

- *Have goals other than winning, especially if you're new to poetry slams.* It's not something I'd tell my younger self, since I practised this from the beginning, but I think it's an important mindset to

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Overcoming my personal goals has been far more rewarding than getting placed over others in the competition

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emphasise for any slammer.

I've seen slammers come away heartbroken and bitter at slam results and it always saddens me. Focusing on personal goals takes the edge off the competitive side, while building your individual growth in areas that you need/want to.

My original — and ongoing — goal was overcoming stage fright, which I tackled in small steps, e.g. speaking into the microphone; getting through a poem without my legs shaking uncontrollably; just getting on the stage. In my experience, overcoming my personal goals has been far more rewarding than getting placed over others in the competition.

- *Believe that your spoken word poetry is valid in any poetry arena.* Yes, there are differences between styles, but don't fall into the false mindset of one poetry form being better than another, e.g. literary or academic poetry versus spoken word. Although I wrote poetry for the page before I embarked on my spoken word journey, both forms have equally allowed my poems to branch out into other creative disciplines, such as stage productions, a music track, a short film, and publication.

And thanks to writer, editor, and lecturer Anna Jackson, an academic who appreciates both spoken word and page poetry, a collection of my poetry is published alongside Claudia Jardine's and Rhys Feeney's collections in the recently released, *AUP New Poets 7*. It is one of my creative goals to bridge the gap between page poetry and spoken word.

### ***afl*: Why poetry?**

I wrote a poem that thoroughly answers this for me, and it was recently accepted for publication in the new poetry journal, *Tarot* (out December 2020).

### **poeting**

because my mother sang Samoan and English nursery rhymes and lullabies

because vibrant illustrations and dramatic stories in my cousins' children's biblical set

because Mrs Plank and her bag of poetry tricks at primary school

because Bess (dear Bess) and her Highway Man

because the pen is gentler than the sword

because the page doesn't judge, it just waits and listens

because paper absorbs grief and bitterness safely

because art speaks a thousand truths when the artist is cowering

because the interaction of words, imagery, and emotions

because compliments and ego

because I miss the laughs and stories of beloved bodies who have returned to spirit

because I'm nostalgic for the celestial womb

because I walk through the valley of the vā

because pain is sometimes necessary

because secrets aren't meant to be dangerous

because I'm no longer afraid

because they told me not to talk about it

because I stopped giving a fuck what they told me

because I hate you

because I used to hate me

because he said I'm nothing like my father  
because sometimes I don't have the capacity to voice my depression, trauma, and anxiety in a coherent sentence  
because of the heartfelt stories I receive in return  
because I occasionally weep for both the sorrow and grace of humankind  
because not enough people were writing about sexual abuse and mental health  
because what if that was me?  
because that was / is me  
because empathy in a world where too many people don't give a shit  
because how do you know they're not Jesus?  
because be like Jesus  
because hurt  
because healing  
because I burn and I rise  
because fist pump to the underdogs  
because I am breathing and this is living from seed to dust  
because my capacity to love overflows my 'Best Mum in the World' mug  
because I'm not a slut who asked for it after all  
because the scared little girl who was hiding in the dark since 1980 has finally stepped into the sunlight  
because fly little one, fly.

# About Our Contributors

**Julie Adamson** is a retired librarian and haiku writer, who lives in Wellington. Her writing appears in *island.writer magazine* (Vancouver Island, Canada), NZPS anthology 2020, and *Kokako*.

**Maia Armistead** is a Year 13 student from Hamilton. She loves music and books, and can probably be found listening to Joni Mitchell or obsessively reading in order to fulfil her 2020 challenge to finish 50 books.

**Antoinette Baker** is from Christchurch. She has written poems for many years for family and friends, but has only recently felt bold enough to share them.

**Nola Borrell's** haiku is published widely. Her publications include *waking echoes* (Korimako Press, 2013), and *this wide sky* (Puriri Press, 2012). Nola co-edited *the taste of nashi* (New Zealand Haiku, Windrift, 2008).

**Sue Courtney** lives in Orewa. She loves the depth, ambiguity and imagery of the haiku form. "So much can be said in so few words."

**Anne Curran** is a Hamilton haiku poet. She has been writing Japanese verse forms for about ten years now. She remains grateful to all mentors past and present.

**Piers Davies** is a maritime lawyer, long time poet, co-ordinator of Titirangi poets, writer of feature films, including *Skin Deep* and *The Cars That Ate Paris*, and sometime poet laureate of Haringey.

**Jenny Dobson** lives and writes in Central Hawkes Bay. The green balloon was presented to her following the 2009 Montana Poetry Day Live event in Napier.

**Jane Graham George** is the author of *LibraryLand* and *A Year on the Kapiti Line* (Red Dragonfly Press). Her poems have appeared in *Poetry Australia* and *Manifesto Aotearoa: 101 Political Poems*.

Auckland poet **Michael Giacon** has been published in journals including *Landfall*, *brief*, *a fine line*, and *Fast Fibres*. He is completing a poetry manuscript for publication.

**Alexandra Hamilton** was born and raised in Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. She has recently emigrated to Yarralin, a remote community in the Northern Territory of Australia, with her husband and young daughter.

**Lincoln Jaques'** poetry, fiction, and travel writing has appeared in New Zealand, Australia, the US, and Ireland. He was a finalist in the 2018 Emerging Poets.

**Robert Keeler:** Born St. Paul, grew up in jungles of Colombia. BS, MS, MBA, Poetry Certificate UW. Honorman Submarine School, Submarine Service qualified. Vietnam Service Medal, Honorable Discharge, Whiting Foundation Grant.

**Bridie Lonie** is currently head of the Dunedin School of Art at Otago Polytechnic. She recently completed a PhD on art and the Anthropocene.

**Mac MacDonald** and his poems pop up regularly around Dunedin, on radio, at gigs, open mics, and the Octagon Poetry Collective.

**Ria Masae** is a Kiwi-Samoan who is a librarian by day and a writer by spare time. She has a collection of poems alongside Claudia Jardine and Rhys Feeny in the recently-released, *AUP New Poets 7*.

**Anuja Mitra** lives in Auckland. Her writing has appeared in *Signals*, *Starling*, *Sweet Mammalian*, *The Three Lamps*, *Mayhem*, *Poetry NZ* and *Cordite*, and she is also co-founder of *Oscen* magazine.

**Denise O'Hagan** has an MCW. Her poetry has appeared in an NZ Poetry Society anthology, *Fast Fibres Poetry*, *Fresh Ink* anthology, and *The Blue Nib*. She writes contemporary and historical fiction.

**Vaughan Rapatahana** (Te Ātiawa) commutes between homes in Hong Kong, Philippines, and Aotearoa New Zealand. Widely published across several genres in both te reo Māori and English, his work has been translated into Bahasa Malaysia, Italian, French, Mandarin.

**Mackenzie Rea** lives in the Manawatu where she is learning that it's never too late to get lost in poetry. Her work is featured in the recently released *Versions* anthology.

**Madeleine Slavick** is a poet, editor, photographer, and arts organiser. Her books include *Fifty Stories Fifty Images*, *delicate access*, *Something Beautiful Might Happen*, and *Round: Poems and Photographs of Asia*.

**Barbara Strang** lives in Christchurch. Her haiku have appeared in New Zealand anthologies from 1998 onwards. She leads the Small White Teapot Group, Christchurch, and has published two poetry books.

**Debbie Strange** is an internationally-published short-form writer and haiga artist, whose creative passions connect her more closely to the world and to herself. Please visit her archive: [debbiemstrange.blogspot.com](http://debbiemstrange.blogspot.com)

**Ariana Sutton** is a New Zealand poet of Māori ancestry (Ngai Tahu, Kati Mamoe, Waitaha), who writes about the whenua, resistance, and the hidden antics of bats. Debuted in *Work n Tumble*. Winner of the 2020 Dan Davin Literary Award.

**R. M. Waenga** is a Māori and Pākehā Poet from Wellington. Her poems focus on mental health, feminism, whānau, and Kiwi/Māori Culture. She particularly enjoys writing poetry in the horror genre.

**Sophia Wilson**'s poems were recently published in Australasia and abroad. She was runner-up in the 2020 Kathleen Grattan Prize for a Sequence of Poems. She is based in Woodside, Otago.

# Featured Poet

## Michael Giacon

### fruit fly

8.38 am. Breakfast, 2<sup>nd</sup> procedure of the day. Hands translucent with care, chopping board scoured, spoon, bowl small paring/large serrated-edged knives fresh from bubble bath. Two vitamin C tabs, one garlic capsule, kitchen compost bin positioned. All surfaces organic/not soaked. A soundtrack of morning news as unrelenting as its content.

Frozen blueberries in first, banana skinned and quartered. Orange peeled, halved, segmented. Two pitted prunes. Kiwifruit pared, pineapple serrated and diced watermelon managed – the first cut the deepest – rind removed, seeds pipped. LSA sprinkled, homemade yoghurt dolloped, compost bin lidded (fruit fly swiped – missed) ingredients re-refrigerated.

9.04 am. Hands sanitised and dried, powder the powder-free gloves, slide in. Out to the sundeck with bowl and spoon, retrieve yesterday's paper from the airing rack. Find balance, right hand feeds, left turning pages of exhortation- be kind, be safe, behave. On the penultimate page a feature on *Sgt Pepper's*,  
I've read the news today, oh boy.

9.18 am. Paper into recycling bin, inside to the kitchen sink. Hot water, detergent, gloved hands. Bowl, knives, spoon. 3<sup>rd</sup> procedure of the day.

## Consequence

Could this be  
the bus ride of  
consequence?

The sky is **laced**  
with visible veins Turkish  
all it needs is a minaret and a call to prayer  
I'm wired with winter  
flirting with caffeine **shy to skyline**  
I look out as I look back  
the black and white of solitude  
flashes like film rising from a moment of wonder

haunting Sunday gold in May  
a signpost of a ghost **we're holding empty hands**  
on a path as old as a love song  
the moon wears the mask of its other half  
a mere slipper of its hidden self  
perhaps it likes it that way

colour without light between

**extreme** close your eyes

vision after sight **of desire**  
love and talking  
about it I really want to go up not down  
ropes are thrown and fall to be hauled  
comic like the clown but  
for a laugh as sweet as all of us  
made of stone yet  
dancing

## Framed

it's a dream      I can be  
here alone      subdued  
familiar      a film of dust  
over      clever crockery  
art not craft      paintings  
unframed      abstract grey  
on white      I still have that  
one they gave me      big  
red face      had it framed  
in the end      I can't see  
the one I gave them      the  
Edwardian      lithograph  
girdled in gilt      I have to  
wipe the table      put out  
the flutes and      silver trays  
clean the fridge      cream  
and butter      smelly  
cheese      bitter sweet  
chocolate      the blini in the  
plastic container      I am  
on my knees      contents  
laid over the bare floor  
I must clean up the spilt  
milk      put everything  
back in place before they  
get home      I've eaten  
the chocolate      it's okay  
I'm awake      a taste  
in my mouth      I'd better  
call Pat      she can't help it  
that's her      I should write  
this all out but      I'm not  
sure if I need to anymore

## Charged

her music enters the room  
restraining order slows  
sound in measured foot  
falls through fitful  
sleep, curtains drawn  
on muffled morn

I must hear more must  
know what they herald  
those lathered lyrics  
stamping shadow

plastic packed  
for the supermarket  
soundtrack charged  
with superstition

I draw back drapes early  
light circling sure licks  
camouflage from budding  
fingers, the reaching tree  
flushed through chill

# Feature Article

## Two Hours and Twenty Languages *Madeleine Slavick*

On National Poetry Day 2020, Wairarapa held a 20-language event, *Wairarapa Worlds*, to affirm the place of poetry in our lives, to recognise the many cultures present in Wairarapa over time, and to acknowledge Masterton as a refugee resettlement community — even though the pandemic has delayed the arrival of incoming families.

COVID-19 almost cancelled the event, too. There was indecision. Would we get a crowd during Level Two? Would the necessary precautions make it too unmanageable?

In the end, we persevered, with the COVID-19 app in place, a sign-in sheet at the entry, more than one bottle of hand sanitiser, and microphone-wiping being carried out between the 20 presentations.

We felt it was important to mark the Day, on the day.

### From Te Reo to Tagalog

Wairarapa kaumātua Mike Kawana opened the day with kōrero and later a waiata. Author and organiser Madeleine Slavick spoke of the kaupapa of the event. Masterton councillor Sandy Ryan gave a moving speech about experiences with refugees in Aotearoa, while archivist Gareth Winter spoke on Wairarapa's cultures, and played a recording of an interview with a Latvian swagman.

Gareth Winter also helped determine the languages to be presented, establishing a chronological sequence according to when the people and their language settled in Wairarapa. Te reo was first, obviously, then English, Scots, Irish, Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Danish, German, Polish, Hindi, Latvian, Dutch, Japanese, Samoan, Kiribati, Spanish, Afrikaans, Czech, and Tagalog.

There was poetry in Afrikaans, Danish, English, Greek, Japanese, Kiribati, Mandarin, Scots, Spanish, and Tagalog, Koran verses in Arabic, lyrics in Czech, Hindi, Latvian, Polish, and te reo. There were videos to represent Germany and Samoa, a discussion of a traditional Dutch reading device; and ditties that spoke of Ireland.

I could have listened for hours. *Wairarapa Worlds* lasted for two.

### The New Year

Joy Harjo has said, 'As I write, I create myself again and again.'

I arrived in Wairarapa eight years ago, just before National Poetry Day, so I have come to see the Day as the beginning of a New Year.

I have put together several National Poetry Day events now and, for 2020, I wanted the Day to be more global.

It took many phone calls and emails to find Wairarapa-based speakers of the 20 languages. Many people said they were once fluent, but no longer.

Who were the presenters? Published writers, artists, musicians, environmentalists, teachers, students, retired folk, and various workers, who all took a break to join the day.

Presenters said they felt very moved they were able to publicly speak in their mother tongue, saying it was a rare experience to do so.

I heard two languages for the first time in my life: Kiribati and Latvian.

### Lingering

A month later, there are several presentations that stay in my memory.

“Mittens” and “Lotus” by Vivienne Plumb — such a singular voice.

Halina Kania, who had been one of 733 Polish children raised in a refugee camp in Pahiatua in the 1940s, sharing a song from her childhood was another such memory. She sat beside me in the first row.

Steffen Kreft’s and William Connor’s Kiwi-German “Lifeswap” episode “Group Effort” made me laugh, and featured the voices of two women I admire: Hinemoana Baker and Jacinda Ardern.

Robin White, another person I cherish, spoke of the awhi needed to welcome newcomers into the community and recited a ‘tightly wrapped’ poem in Kiribati.

The two couples who performed: Catherine Cooper and Jonáš Koukl sang a Czech melody, and Rachel and Cristian Gómez recited Rachel’s “Love in the Time of Covid” in English and Spanish.

I remember powerful poems of social justice: one by Antjie Krog (read by Kiewiet van Deventer), one by Robert Burns (read by Janette Wallace Gedge), and another by José Rizal (introduced by Imelda Cruz Wood and read by Mar Manaligod).

I couldn’t find a local Greek speaker, so poet friend Konstandinos Mahoney kindly arranged for actor and educator Luke Prodromou to send an audio file from Greece. A local Hindi speaker had to cancel for family reasons, so poet friend Mani Rao sent audio and video files from India.

Mohammad Eriqat, an engineer from Jordan who has been in Wairarapa for six years, read verses from the Koran with a firm tenderness. He and his wife Mariam run the catering service Akel Saki, which provided great homemade treats, both sweet and savoury, over the intermission. As always, kai cements togetherness. The snack made with rosewater went fast.

### Creative Communities

I initiated this event, made possible thanks to a grant from Creative New Zealand/Masterton Creative Communities, with koha collected on the day going to Wairarapa Word, the monthly writers’ series I coordinate. I also acknowledge with thanks Mayors Lyn Patterson (Masterton) and Tracey Collis (Tararua) for their assistance, ArrowFM for recording the event, *Wairarapa Times-Age* for excellent coverage, the New Zealand Book Awards Trust for their enthusiastic support, and Aratoi, the region’s main museum, for providing the venue free of charge. I chose to hold the event in Aratoi’s Wesley Wing gallery, which had once been a church. It is an evocative atmosphere with good acoustics. And it was between shows, so the space was deliciously empty.

### Space

I have called poetry a space. We choose how to fill it.

I invited Boston painter Kerri McGill, an artist-in-residence with New Zealand Pacific Studio, to exhibit large scale landscape paintings for the day. I also invited floral designer Fionna Hill to create a foraged display. And mounted on one wall, a stencil made by Fab Lab Masterton read, Mā tātou ka ora ai tātou. Our togetherness keeps us well.

I closed the day with two beloved quotes.

‘Poetry is always an attempt to hold what we love a little longer.’ — Mark Doty

‘A poem is like a radio that can broadcast continuously for thousands of years.’ — Allen Ginsberg

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Presenters said they felt  
very moved they were able to  
publicly speak in their  
mother tongue

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I am pleased to say there is talk of Wairarapa Worlds becoming an annual event.

- **Wairarapa Word** is a monthly writers' series, established in 2012, that involves readings, workshops, and book launches. Supported by Almo's Books.

- For information:

Facebook ([www.facebook.com/WairarapaWord](http://www.facebook.com/WairarapaWord))

YouTube ([www.youtube.com/channel/UCp1UQLLFN0yMH\\_ii9skHZA](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCp1UQLLFN0yMH_ii9skHZA))

[events.waiword@gmail.com](mailto:events.waiword@gmail.com)

06 379 7103

# Feature Article

**Iain Lonie: Scholar and Poet**  
*Bridie Lonie*

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One of the loveliest things about this book is the way in which it represents the meeting of two very different poets

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Thanks to David Howard's imagination, commitment, and skill, I can hold in each hand my father's two major publications — almost equal in weight and page length, two sides of the same man, related but distinct. In 1981, Iain Lonie published the summation of his work as a medical historian, a commentary on some texts of Hippocrates that drew on contemporary theory. In the seven years between the commentary and his death in 1988, he returned to the poetry that had been his first love.

Iain died in 1988. In 2004, David Howard approached us with the proposal that he edit a *Collected Poems*. We drew up an informal contract and David worked for the next ten years, pausing at times. But in the process, he developed a keen understanding of Iain's mind. We and Ann Sommerville gave David access to Iain's correspondence and all the unpublished papers we could find.

The result, *A Place to Go On From: The Collected Poems of Iain Lonie*<sup>1</sup>, demonstrates the development of his poetic voice. Without David's contribution, Iain would only be seen as an occasional poet who produced five short volumes, and known, by 2003, only to a small audience.

David intersected Iain's own collections with sequences that show his prior and intervening development. This worked for two laureates, who subsequently commented on the editing. Bill Manhire wrote, 'This book is going to be essential', while Vincent O'Sullivan said, 'I can't imagine how we could overestimate just how much we owe to David Howard for his superb edition of Iain Lonie's *Collected Poems*'.<sup>2</sup>

In 1982, Iain lived in Newcastle upon Tyne. Here, his second wife Judith was a speech therapist and he, a house-husband and scholar. But Judith died suddenly, and he chose to return to New Zealand with his young son, Andrew.

Before the easy access of the Internet, it was hard to draw on the libraries he needed to continue his previous life. His attention turned back to poetry, both elegiac — as he felt and worked through his response to Judith's death — and exploratory — as he focused his craft. This second body of work took his full attention, now undiluted by academic distractions. From this, David brought a retrospective insight to Iain's life. Reviewers have suggested that this transformed Iain's place in the history of poetry here.

David was an extraordinarily kind and generous editor. At times, I had to decipher Iain's handwriting. I thought I had lost some drafts, not realising they were on recycled paper; David looked a little wry but said nothing about what would have been a significant loss.

When I found them, my partner Bruce and I scoured Iain's Greek dictionaries to find the faintly written figure of speech that both titled the poem and completed its thought.

David was also open to the unexpected. Harry Love, who knew nothing of the proposed book, rang one day to tell us that his son Damian Love had written on Iain. The text worked beautifully and David

included it. David's choice for the cover painting — *The Centurion's Servant* by Stanley Spencer — baffles some, but Spencer was a painter whom Iain loved.

In a collection published in 1969, Charles Brasch addressed *Born and Made* to the more youthful Iain, describing a writer subject to the poetic voice. David makes evident that the later attention to Iain's craft brought scholar and poet together into one.

Jack Ross wrote of the collection: "One of the loveliest things about this book is the way in which it represents the meeting of two very different poets — David Howard and Iain Lonie — somewhat alike in temperament, perhaps, in their concern for technical precision and tour-de-force, but very different people, who have been able to meet on these poetic grounds almost like Dante himself, walking with Virgil and Homer into the seven-walled castle of the great pagan poets at the beginning of the Inferno."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *A Place to Go On From: The Collected Poems of Iain Lonie*. Edited by David Howard (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2015). ISBN 9781927322017. RRP \$50. 390pp.

<sup>2</sup> Comments by Bill Manhire and Vincent O'Sullivan on the book's back cover.

<sup>3</sup> From *Poetry New Zealand Review's* blog (11 July 2017): [poetrynzreview.blogspot.com/2017/07/a-place-to-go-on-from-collected-poems.html](http://poetrynzreview.blogspot.com/2017/07/a-place-to-go-on-from-collected-poems.html)

# Reviews

## *Every Now and Then I Have Another Child - Diane Brown*

(Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2020).  
ISBN 9781988592404. RRP \$29.95. 164pp.

*Reviewed by Anuja Mitra*

Every now and then I have another child

DIANE BROWN



A surreal chapter of her life  
involving a mysterious baby,  
a persistent doppelgänger,  
a missing mother,  
and a mural come-to-life

Paired with the slightly uncanny doll on the cover, it was the title of Diane Brown's latest book that first intrigued me. What would lead a person to collect children without concern or ceremony? Is it loss of agency or deliberate whim?

As a person, Joanna Lodge is used to being abandoned by others. As a writer, she is accustomed to birthing and discarding characters. *Every Now and Then I Have Another Child* explores a surreal chapter of her life involving a mysterious baby, a persistent doppelgänger, a missing mother, and a mural come-to-life. It is the deft manner with which Brown interweaves these elements that makes the collection engrossing, guided as we are through a world both disconcerting and mundane; privy to Joanna's deepest thoughts while she starts to question her reality.

Advertised as an extended poetic narrative, I essentially read this book like a novel told in poetic vignettes. In my view, there are several potential pitfalls of poetic narratives and novels-in-verse: will the poet privilege craft over readability? Or will interesting language take a backseat to progressing the story? *Every Now and Then I Have Another Child* avoids these shortcomings, attesting to Brown's confidence with the form. Her style has an appealing simplicity that helps build an organic narrative without confusion between characters or events. The collection is shot through with disorienting imagery, beginning with an unrestful night ("In the Dark") and returning every now and again to the unease of living in the world today:

We've been here before, with adored despotic  
leaders, but they're

spreading now, rising like the sea levels. The dog  
hurtles towards

the black-backed gulls congregating at the curve  
of the shallows

where the currents converge. As the gulls rise in  
unison, I sense

something invisible, keeping in step.

("That's Enough from These Invaders")

These references are sprinkled in without making it feel like the collection is straining to be relevant. It is enough that these global issues haunt the edges

of Joanna's story, adding to its undercurrent of discomfort. They also deepen her disconnection from the world. Who among us doesn't feel a little detached from things this year, 'like you've slipped into another life, running / on a parallel track / one layer behind'? ("Finding Yourself on the Other Side").

Joanna's isolation from others intensifies when she interacts with her sons, referred to vaguely as her 'firstborn' and 'secondborn'. Poems like "Where the Heart Is" convey her desire to be involved in their lives, as well as the feeling of distance between them (likely caused by their suspicion that she might leave them the way her own mother left her). The anxieties of motherhood are often foregrounded:

Strange to feel as if I'm standing in the dock giving an account  
of a night I can't remember. The verdict would come down hard,  
as it always does if your offspring is doing the judging.  
Not when young and still in love with your mother smell,  
but later on  
  
when they develop a more discerning sense, a preference  
for their own perfume.  
("Mother Failure")

These kinds of observations are combined with lighter musings on contemporary living and working as a writer, and we might presume Brown is speaking here from experience. I enjoyed Joanna's heartless advice to a writing student who she thinks is being stalked figuratively by a character and not a real person ("The Woman Who Refuses to Leave"), as well as her general weariness with the status of celebrity author.

Something about the collection I found surprising, but which serves to further enliven and unify these poems, is its metafictional aspect. Joanna's doppelgänger is conscious of her intrusion into Joanna's plotline (the first poem from her perspective is titled "Inserting Myself into the Story"). Other characters speak directly to readers' expectations: 'The reader / might think it a step too far', remarks the Baby on a new development ("Manifesto"). Several characters also criticise and comment on others, mirroring our own activity as readers interpreting the text. The doppelgänger does this the most memorably, as Brown invests her with a distinct point of view that continually pushes up against Joanna's.

The parts I found most engaging were the clashes between Joanna and this enigmatic figure who claims to be her missing sister. What they want from each other is not always clear, but the insights we get from the way they position themselves in this odd relationship reveals much about their differences, in class and life experience. 'I don't think you have a clue about those of us who live / precariously,' accuses the doppelgänger, while Joanna attempts, embarrassingly, to prove her credentials as someone who cares for the less fortunate: 'I read the paper and cry in Ken Loach films. *I, Daniel Blake* / and *Sorry We Missed You*' ("A Visitor in the Garden").

While the concept of a writer too wrapped up in their fiction is far from new, Brown illustrates this in inventive ways. At one point, Joanna seems to transform a boy in a street mural into a living, breathing one, yet cannot find a place for him in her life ("A Home Not a Wall"). While the doppelgänger is 'a woman of action, no time for living / between pages' ("What Use Are Words"), Joanna is propelled by her narrativising impulse; her imagination sparked by particular individuals instead of abstract scenes ("A Visitor in the Garden"). The question, of course, is when knitting real people into your stories becomes exploitative. It is a question Brown leaves unanswered, but it is one that is ever relevant for any artist, with repercussions for both one's work and personal life.

Though *Every Now and Then I Have Another Child* is consistently interesting in both language and

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This book makes you  
pay attention to how you  
navigate the narrative  
of your own life

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ideas, there are a few places where Joanna’s ruminations felt slightly blunt or repetitive. At the dentist in “Witnesses”, she tells us

the news

the tooth has to go

is no surprise. I am used to losing

before listing the people and places she has lost. Joanna’s feelings of abandonment have already been effectively built up throughout the collection, making this matter-of-fact confirmation unnecessary. Such direct explanations of her state of mind perhaps work better when they come from another character’s mouth, like when the Baby addresses us in “Why Not Show My Face”: ‘You see what I’m saying? She doesn’t really / want me. She just wants an idealised version.’

Ultimately, however, these are nitpicks that did not impact my enjoyment of the book. Brown’s skill in constructing a narrative through 160 pages’ worth of poems, which feel both varied and intimately connected, is commendable in itself. The fact that *Every Now and Then I Have Another Child* is downright gripping proves her mastery. Incisive and strange, this book makes you pay attention to how you navigate the narrative of your own life.

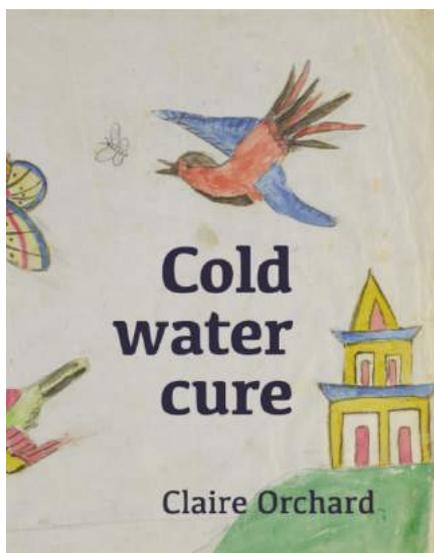
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### *Cold Water Cure - Claire Orchard*

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(Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2016).  
ISBN 9781776560578. RRP \$25. 112pp.

*Reviewed by Maia Armistead*



*Cold Water Cure*, Claire Orchard’s debut poetry collection is, on its face, a series of poems about Charles Darwin during his time working on *The Origin of Species*. Orchard takes inspiration from his notebooks and letters, viewing his life and character through the eyes of his wife and other figures from his personal history.

Orchard reaches far across history and culture for inspiration, and this eclectic myriad of voices rings loud throughout the book. From the opening found poem taken from an All Blacks interview post-game, to a piece of advice given from a father to a daughter, Orchard’s strength is her ability to link these dramatically different settings and tones together, and then string them into a cohesive story that remains emotionally taut.

In the middle section of *Cold Water Cure*, Orchard’s and Darwin’s words and worlds lie side by side, woven together seamlessly, as Orchard tells Darwin’s story through the lens of her own eyes nearly two centuries later. In the poem “In the library with Darwin’s red notebook”, Orchard endeavours to understand Darwin’s writing, and spends the rest of *Cold Water Cure* colouring the gaps of his character.

You underlined *gradual* with a firm stroke,  
Scored another word until it was unreadable. So we go  
On, you retreating as I advance over pebbles, beached somewhere  
You do not name, in the air a tang of distance and discovery

By paralleling the eclectic and sometimes sad life of Charles Darwin with her own experiences, Orchard manages to create something that transcends history or biography, weaving a thread of humanity between the somewhat inaccessible past, and the mundane reality of the present that we all understand. Her references don't feel contrived. Instead, they feel natural. Orchard achieves a story that is more than biographical and creates a world with details spanning past, present, and future.

Along with the references that permeate *Cold Water Cure*, Orchard dances between perspectives, making her poetry collection an adventure through the innermost thoughts of all kinds of people. She shifts through a range of viewpoints, from a five-year-old observing their own growth in terms of the shrinking gaps between words, to a collection of figures from Darwin's life. In "We're all five", Orchard captures the changeability of childhood:

Time was we didn't know the names for things but now we're  
Utterly absorbed by placing cubes in rows and counting them, with  
Variegating paintings of our favourite things, at least until we're thinking  
We'd like to go home soon.

Orchard writes her cast of characters in a grounded way that surpasses mere history. By capturing the internal monologues and deepest thoughts of her subjects, Orchard allows the reader to feel a wide scope of human emotion. In this way, *Cold Water Cure* is a story that celebrates the everyday. At times, it is also a story that shocks with its ability to extract strong emotion and nostalgia for the oft-forgotten moments of life.

Some of the most powerful poems in *Cold Water Cure* are the ones that document life's unexceptional moments, such as 'History', where Orchard listens to the radio and hears the voice of a boy she used to go to school with. Reality and memory blend together in many of Orchard's poems, and it's always interesting to read on and discover whose head you're going to get a glimpse into next.

*Cold Water Cure* has integrity beyond its status as a debut. It doesn't shy away from bluntness or open spaces, trusting the reader to keep up with a story that jumps between centuries, from head to head, past to present. I would recommend *Cold Water Cure* to any reader who enjoys poetry that finds beauty and meaning in the everyday aspects of life. Its portrayal of life and memory is consistently natural and visceral, and I leave *Cold Water Cure* feeling as though I had travelled a long way and heard many different stories throughout my journey.

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A world with details  
spanning past, present,  
and future

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To review books for *a fine line*,  
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[reviews@poetrysociety.org.nz](mailto:reviews@poetrysociety.org.nz)

# Members’ Poems

## Gift

*for Phyllis*

It was so unexpected  
so not a bottle of wine

it was a green balloon  
and a laugh and a smile

and a thank you so sincere  
the wooden church fair

rang with it!  
it was a green balloon

a thing made magnificent  
it was a peal of bells

a PhD, a Pulitzer prize  
it cost nothing or a fortune  
(you can choose)

It was a green balloon  
the very thing I wanted most

— *Jenny Dobson*

## Fish of Many Names

to evade predators a pufferfish inflates its stomach like a balloon  
with huge amounts of water and sometimes air

there is enough poison in one porcupine fish to kill 30 adult humans –  
no known antidote

zen monk Gennai Toshio rubs his hands  
with pleasure at the memory of his slightly numbed lips  
a meal of *fugu* at the New Otani

restaurant preparation of this Japanese delicacy  
is strictly controlled by law

only chefs who have qualified  
after three or more years of rigorous training  
are allowed to prepare the fish

domestic preparation occasionally leads to accidental death

fish of many names  
on Whareroa Beach  
I saw you washed up  
under the full moon  
your spines catching the light  
a crystalline miracle of symmetry

*did he smile his work to see?*  
little blowfish, did he who made the Lamb make thee?

— Jane Graham George



## Ghosts, Crocodylus Park

My daughter hooks her  
fingers through fence-links,  
curls bare toes round wire,  
searches the empty pen  
for Rama. She knows he's there,

he paced and glowered  
for seventeen years;  
old man tiger blazes,  
even cold and gone.

They put on a solemn send-off,  
he was marched in to bagpipes  
and saluted on his way -  
man or cat, they lie quiet and  
still under the flag  
just the same. But

he might have wished that  
his body was rolled  
up through the rye-grass to  
a great pyre set on the hillside;  
or that we'd knotted a bed  
of eucalypts, waded in waist-deep  
and floated him fragrant down the creek.

Maybe, even wilder:  
squint and you'll see  
a hot-air balloon, our hero dusty and  
slumped in the basket,  
sailing into the red sky  
through a flurry of cockatoos.  
Fanciful, but  
tigers are all born rakes,

and today my baby can't look away  
from old man blazing  
right here, beyond us.

*Corporal Quintus Rama  
Mascot, 5th Battalion  
Royal Australian Regiment*

— *Alexandra Hamilton*

### Smiley Face Balloon

There's an old time saloon out the back of Duntroon  
where they roll out a deal  
when the nor' wester  
blows enough garbage into town  
to whip up a storm.

You get a burger,  
you get a beer,  
you get a girl and a room,  
you get a swing and a miss from a drunken buffoon.  
You also get a smiley face balloon  
with your number on.  
What I don't get  
is how a smiley face balloon knows  
you're up to no good.

— *Mac MacDonald*

## Starling

Candy > coloured veneer  
lipstick - sweat  
smear— ring  
a kiss from the peach lit sky.

Violent - romantic  
silent  
smoke  
not high on  
the priority list.

Sat 4pm/She ballooned ^^  
burst it's secrets upon the  
throbbing city.

[Plummeting > ash  
coating the faces /

Gasp]. chest / lungs

A Starling

boardroom

Darting / the

table burdened

In files/  
obsolete.

Some would see the rainbow arc >

as a graceful tohu >

ballooned upon >>>>>>>

A fire lit sky

so those ones hovered  
and some thought — stagger  
Some just curled >  
Upon the circles  
of hope >  
Retracing } } } } } ]  
where the string's  
may have broke.

Everyone threw candy >>>>>>> Into the fire

their dusty faces {

upon the cave lit sky

— Ariana Sutton

## The Unbearable Lightness of Balloons

**1**

Salty faced,  
wind in his beard, my  
father brings home a lone,  
cork-lipped balloon found among  
driftwood and shells. Thrilled  
with the treasure, I rinse sand  
from its skin — BANG —  
loose cork,  
limp  
s  
h  
r  
e  
d

**4**

s  
On the  
evening news:  
myriad delicate  
pink balloons  
submerged

**5**

We connect  
through rubber skins;  
\* maintain safe barriers. hold  
\* hands. perform surgery. slice  
\* bread. caress — inevitably  
\* deflate — or just go  
\* out with a  
\* bang  
\*  
\* \*

**2**

My three-  
year-old daughter  
clutches her heart-shaped  
balloon. A sudden gust  
of wind — red,

racing to  
s  
k  
y  
\*  
\*

**6**

100 x  
unused rubber gloves  
diligently intended for shopping  
trolleys or petrol pump handles —  
inflated, bases knotted, released  
into brisk westerly — 100 x  
bloated, white hands  
floating across the  
valley, waving  
good-  
b  
y  
e  
\*  
\*  
\*

— *Sophia Wilson*

# Members’ Haiku

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Windrift Haiku Group. Their generous donation to the NZPS will support ongoing haiku projects, such as this new haiku feature in *a fine line*.

---

patchwork quilt  
in every square  
a memory

seasonal optimism  
winter slippers  
packed away

last page  
missing  
imagine

— *Julie Adamson*

---

Jonquils, pink blossoms  
black nose sniffs the warm wind  
of quarterly change

— *Denise O'Hagan*

I planted a fern  
It is silver underneath  
Stars hover above

They said things would change  
A man took a first small step  
Whitey on the moon

— *Antoinette Baker*

---

A shortage of rain  
causes the algae to bloom  
a viscous yellow.

Forty days of drought  
and desperate wasps patrol  
the last two puddles.

— *Piers Davies*

---

Stretching of latex  
Mouth wrapped around the pink rim  
Balloon or blowjob?

— *RM Waenga*

The boats come and go  
chattering voices echo  
across the water

— *Lincoln Jaques*

---

### **Crows on a Wire**

Four crows on a wire,  
properly separated,  
all wearing black masks.

— *Robert Keeler*

---

Sky fades  
Watercolours stain  
My chipped teacup

— *Mackenzie Rea*

---

waiting in icy rain —  
across the river  
a downpour of sunshine

— *Sophia Wilson*

Day 20  
the newbie cyclist's  
wide grin

social distancing  
a kingfisher takes  
the high wire

old buddy a newcomer introduces us

smartphones  
a newspaper rustles  
the silence

— *Nola Borrell*

---

last trip to Mum's  
dipping in and out  
of the fog

lockdown  
the campground tap drips  
cobwebs

— *Sue Courtney*

ammonites  
the differing whorls  
of our fingerprints

flying squirrel for an instant moonless

— *Debbie Strange*

---

body art  
on toned legs -  
he pedals out front

a magnolia glows button-hole bloom

— *Anne Curran*

---

chance flakes of snow  
the plum blossom's  
hint of pink

he's still making jokes ...  
the cumulus cloud  
puffs higher

— *Barbara Strang*

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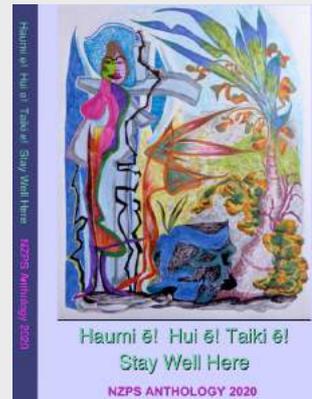
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