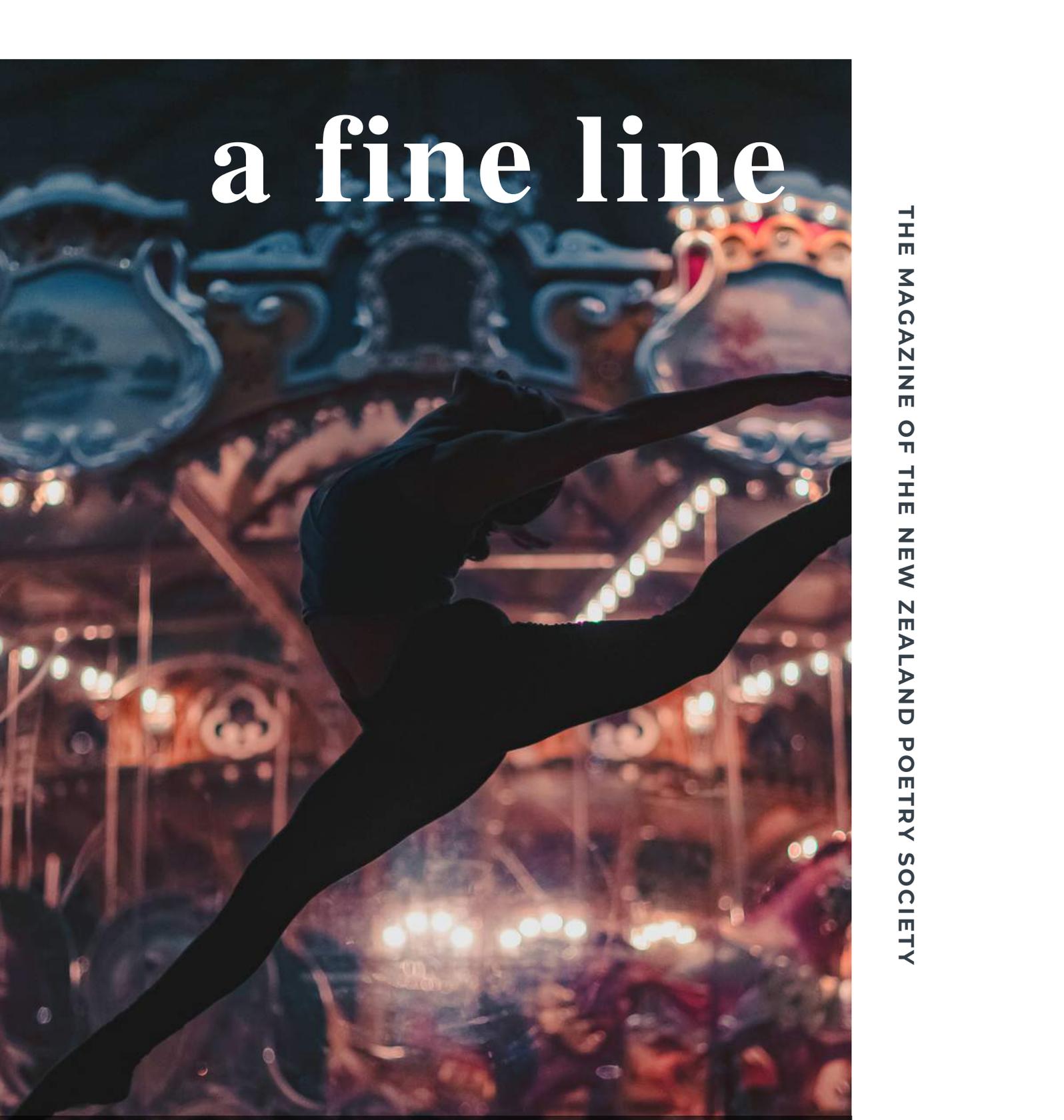


# a fine line



THE MAGAZINE OF THE NEW ZEALAND POETRY SOCIETY

**AUTUMN  
2021**

ARTICLE  
BY  
JANET WAINSCOTT

AUTUMN  
FEATURED POET  
**SOPHIA WILSON**

REVIEWS  
BY  
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T. PARAHA, J. PYATT, D. STRANGE, T. VELTMAN, S. WARDELL, S. WILSON

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Cover Image: Erick Zajac  
Cover Design: Emma Shi



# From the Editor

*Gail Ingram*

Welcome to the body issue, and it's in great shape. You'll find haiku and poems about doll bodies, anorexic and dead bodies, voices of mind-blowing gurus and those shedding their skins. You'll find poems and haiku by Anita Mortlock, Tru Paraha, Dorian David Leigh, Trish Veltman, Jenny Clay, and others. Our feature poet is Sophia Wilson, runner up in the 2020 Kathleen Grattan Prize. Enjoy her sensitive and imagistic exploration of consumption, sleep, and other bodily conditions. We have an insightful article from Janet Wainscott on how she brought poetry to the minds and pens of some rest-home residents. Our terrific assistant editor Emma Shi brings you the latest in poetry reviews. As for myself, I am a new body (in metaphor only) on NZPS's board, filling the big shoes and heart of Ivy Alvarez, editor for the past four years. She is already approaching her next adventures in the acting world with as much professionalism and vim as she gave *a fine line*. Thank you, Ivy, from *my* heart, for handing over this fine 'body' – and, as they say in theatre, break a leg.

From the committee, we have the announcement of the AGM for 16 June 7-9pm on Zoom. Watch this space for guest poet. All welcome. Please RSVP to [info@poetrysociety.org.nz](mailto:info@poetrysociety.org.nz). A reminder, also, that we are no longer able to accept cheques. And importantly, you have only until 31 May to polish and enter your poems into our celebrated annual competition. There are opportunities here for both poetry and haiku, adult and youth, so don't miss out.

The theme for the upcoming Winter edition is 'Animal'. Members, please send up to four poems (40 lines max) and up to four haiku by 10 June 2021 to Gail Ingram, [editor@poetrysociety.org.nz](mailto:editor@poetrysociety.org.nz). Thank you for reading and for your continued support of the NZPS.

# a fine line

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## *Quotation of the Season*

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Poetry is boned with ideas,  
nerved and blooded with  
emotions, all held together by the  
delicate, tough skin of words.

— Paul Engle

## Feature Article

### Ageing Poetically *Janet Wainscott*

We have all heard or read the advice about staving off the effects of ageing on our bodies and minds as long as possible — eat well, keep moving, keep in touch with other people, stimulate the mind. Creativity occasionally gets a mention, but it comes a poor second after Tai Chi and Sudoku and walking groups. I'm going to argue that poetry has a place in ageing well.

Some years ago, when my mother was still alive and living in a dementia-level rest home, I was at a meeting for residents' family members and another woman said her mother loved poetry, and she asked whether poetry could be included in the activities offered. I thought that it would be something that my poetry-loving mother would enjoy. Nothing happened, but later, after my mother's death, I decided to pursue the idea.

I was aware that reading, including poetry, is used in some rest homes and day-programmes for older people, but I wanted to go beyond reading, discussion and reminiscence. I looked to Gary Glazner's Alzheimer's Poetry Project in the US and John Killick's dementia poetry project, In the Pink, in England for inspiration and guidance. Both combined sharing poems, especially well-known poems, and then creating new poems.

Back in 2017, I started a pilot project with a Homeshare group (a day programme run by Presbyterian Support's Enliven service) and then worked with a day programme run by Hornby Day Care Trust.

The models I looked to are based on work with people with dementia. Some participants in the groups I worked with struggled

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## I set out to honour the meaning intended by the participants

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with memory loss, but many did not, and I concluded that this type of poetry project is effective for older people in general.

With each group I ran a series of sessions, each beginning with shared reading of selected poems on a similar theme, using a mix of well-known and not quite so well-known poems. I looked for poems with a strong beat or rhythm. Participants chimed in with the refrains or with verses they knew.

While there is nothing particularly novel about the idea of shared reading and enjoyment of poetry, the crucial next step in the model I used was the co-writing of new poems. After the reading, I asked open questions that related to the poems we read and were broad enough for people to respond however they liked. During the ensuing conversation, I took notes to capture the words of participants. If I were clever enough, I could have used a flipchart or whiteboard and put together a poem on the spot, but that approach did not work for me and I chose, instead, to compile poems from my notes after each session and bring the poem or poems back to the group next time.

When turning notes into poems, I worked with several constraints. First and foremost, I did not add or change words, although I did select and arrange the material. This might sound akin to a found poem, but it is not. There was no reframing the words to make new meaning; rather, I set out to honour the meaning intended by the participants. In an effort to make sure that the final result included something from everyone, I sometimes needed to include clichés or phrases that were awkward or did not quite fit. I had to suppress the urge to look for the best word or most felicitous phrase.

I used different ways of arranging material, sometimes piling detail on detail or example after example. Other times I used a short stanza for each participant to look at a topic from several different perspectives. Occasionally I managed to slip in a satisfying line break or a subtle internal rhyme. I listened for vivid imagery ('Cats purr like traction engines'). One of the advantages of working with a group, rather than individuals, was picking up on how participants responded to what others said. In a poem on different types of love, there was this exchange:

'Love conquers all.  
No, it doesn't.  
Well, it's meant to.'

In a discussion about favourite meals, everyone contributed examples from childhood, leading one person to say:

'Our mothers and grandmothers  
we accept the works of their hands.'

These words provided a beautiful refrain to tie together the other examples.

The poems produced were broad ranging, touching, insightful, and often witty. Because everyone has their own way of expressing themselves, the poems often give a real sense of the individuals. One of my favourites is this poem about cats. It may look simple, but to me there is humour and poignancy and a lot about the comfort of pets.

## Cats

A dog would die for you, but a cat  
just sticks its tail in the air  
and walks away.

They seem to know things  
and appear when they hear  
noises from the kitchen.

They regard humans as poor providers;  
that's why they bring in rats and mice.

A cat chooses you. Ours came from a paddock  
at the end of Woodville Street.

It has a long tail with different coloured circles —  
grey and red and brown.

You do go for looks with cats.

Ours is ginger. Very pretty.

Cats purr like traction engines.

They like to be patted; they're very relaxing  
and calm you. You pick them up  
and they snuggle up and gaze at you.

I dunno — I just love them.

Sharing the poems created with participants was a delight and the response was always enthusiasm tinged with disbelief that they had created a poem. Initially, I had to reiterate these are your words, your poems.

Use of poetry in the way I have described is not a replacement for reminiscence sessions in aged care or for helping people to create a narrative record of their life, but it can be a valuable addition and does have advantages. Poetry stimulates thoughts and associations and gives people a voice and allows them to speak about what is meaningful to them, whether it's about something that happened yesterday or seventy years ago. There are no right or wrong answers, no pressure to remember specific things, and imagination, creativity, opinions, reflections, and observations are as important as memory.

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Poetry... gives people a voice  
and allows them to speak  
about what is meaningful to  
them, whether it's about  
something that happened  
yesterday or seventy  
years ago.

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The most frequent feedback was along the lines of ‘It gets the mind moving.’ I feel that we underestimate the intellectual capacity of older people, including those with cognitive decline, and their appetite for meaningful and mentally stimulating activities. There were social benefits, too, as participants got to know each other better. ‘Everyone stops and listens,’ one person said. Another commented on the importance of good conversation as a part of ageing. In another group, participants were delighted to be able to talk about what interested them because they felt that no one else wanted to hear their stories or listen to them. The creation of poems using the words of participants is a powerful way of validating experience and feelings and giving a voice to older people.

Unfortunately, work commitments precluded me from continuing with this project. I was prompted to think about this again after reading Jeffrey Paparoa Holman’s essay in the latest *Poetry New Zealand Yearbook*. He writes about how he and other poets (Bernadette Hall and Jeni Curtis) take part in a reading group at a prison. He throws out a challenge: ‘So what can you do then? What is your gift, that can be a candle in somebody’s cell?’ To which I would add, what if that cell is not a prison cell, but an ageing body and mind?

## References

[www.alzpoetry.com](http://www.alzpoetry.com)

Glazner, G. (2014). *Dementia Arts: Celebrating Creativity in Elder Care*. Baltimore: Health Professions Press Inc.

Holman, J. P. (2021) That’s the revolution: Our prisons, ourselves *Poetry New Zealand Yearbook Issue 55*, 304311.

• *An earlier version of this article appeared in Corpus: conversations about medicine and life, March 2017*

# Featured Poet

## Sophia Wilson

### Wash

They force fed the whale-shaped mountain  
with aluminium nitrate and fuel oil,  
stuffed its belly, primed its flanks.

Their slick-shot meal exploded its innards,  
shattered cartilage, splintered the curve of its rib bones,  
shred its forest-clad skin.

Rubble stemmed the flow of a babbling stream sourced from  
deep under ancient blubber. The heart rock split and shuddered  
and dust spewed from its blowhole in ghostly shroud.

The land butchers are gone, shadows long,  
gone to whatever it is they do when the blowing up's done

but tonight the mountain will stretch moonward in grief song,  
imploping the sky to unpin itself,  
descend

and wash over it

like ocean.

- *Previously published in Shot Glass Journal Issue 33, 2021.*

## The In-between

to one side —  
thistles, toil,  
pasture, dung

to the other —  
a thorny sea,  
lengthening shadows

suspended  
atop weathered stile

— a seat —

where lichen wafts to and fro  
and the evening light is mellow

## Stuck

he's tried, but he just can't get there, can't get past this  
circling around the dregs, poring over the grit and  
shadows of residua, can't climb out and over  
the edge of his own cup, where he peruses  
coffee-stained walls day in, day out —  
can't quite get to the beam of  
light that slants,  
capacious and unasked, through his open window

## Consumption

Sometimes, the way someone feeds closes the heart down  
and narrows the throat to a stricture.

Sometimes, ingestion births hidden mouths that linger  
like spectres around the body's machinery.

Sometimes, fuelling a clamorous want  
is like appeasing famine with stimulants.

Sometimes, consumption draws the eyes to hollows  
and prompts nerves to waste their flesh moorings.

Sometimes, it is like the dry wind urging  
an inferno to leap the next fence,

or electricity short circuiting an intricate code,  
to spill frenetic, over skin and earth.

Sometimes, consumption is like yearning  
for cooling rain,

even as powerful hands — acquisitive, inflamed and stubborn —  
ramp up the temperature, running our river beds dry.

## Sleep

Sleep's fabric descends like a drunk paw,  
turns off our lights, offers mouth-to-mouth oblivion.

For a while we can pretend we're like stars —  
that we don't reside here anymore,

between impossible grindstones  
and the birth-death quandary;

we drift weightless as falling leaves over silver-scaled lakes,  
sprout fins and tresses, or transform to moon-mirrors

until consciousness drops its arsenal,  
hauls us to sharp wake —

child's cry, wild cat's yawl, angry door slam, thought's hook,  
or the midnight texting of a faraway drunk and

we are re-exposed under the ticking clock of rising temperature  
as an endangered species,

like stars,  
small blossoms  
and rest.

- *Previously published in Australian Poetry Anthology, July 2020,  
and in Hektoen International Journal, Hektoen Institute of  
Medicine, Chicago, October 2019*

# Members’ Poems

## **tiny bone**

herniated vertebra  
pierces me  
leads to this morning when

I crouch  
to gather  
a tiny bone into my palm

my thoughts  
are of resurrection  
sinew and muscle  
mending  
nerves espalier

bone becomes  
mouse’s thigh becomes  
mouse becomes  
scamper away

tiny bone  
I sing verbs to it like a desert woman  
until they are stuck  
in my throat with burning

— *Anita Mortlock*

## The Guru of YouTube

I'm real awake. Old-soul, intense.  
Under this lemon tree  
filming a missive for my tribe: the collective.  
Nature is my space  
child of mother-earth born  
in my feminine/masculine expression.  
We're diving deep! Big old deep Karma.

Let your mind open on the third wave.  
Expansive, man! I've found my primal purpose:  
it will blow your mind.  
I'm here to teach you with my good buzz.  
An enlightened seeker of the way,  
I push those dark feelings down.  
Don't feed shadows. (Click subscribe!)  
I'm be-ing and I'm looking at you, soul-sister.  
I bet I'm raising your vibration.  
I'm real open to your heart space and your  
pleasing profile pic.  
My eyes appraise your vintage tee.  
I'll call you goddess. Let's get on the same wave.  
So. Much. Love.  
for your short skirt  
and all them likes.  
Namaste.

— *Anita Mortlock*

## Summer Gothic

Something dragged it onto their lawn.

It has a stench and two crime scenes.

They keep colonial distances; curious, irreverent. They want to touch its insides  
or kill it again as a friend.

Flies blow-nibble at skin.

The compost bin emits a rot, and the trees have deserted — too deciduous for Spring.  
Can you taste it? they sigh, greens gone to seed.

— *Tru Paraha*

## Zodiac Man

Once upon a time,  
The soul lived in the liver  
And the heart was ruled by lions.  
A freckled face bore the grace of constellations.  
As above, so below,  
And all that.  
Not so! cried Science.  
We cut open the liver  
And we found only meat.  
Particle physics is the new occult,  
It's not a secret if you get a degree in it.  
We've consigned astrology to the pages of  
Cheap magazines.  
But I still believe  
In the liver,  
And my heart roars like a lion.

— *Dorian David Leigh*

## In my mother's mouth

My mother didn't always like my brightness.  
She cut my hair back against my will —  
a jagged fringe, a tailored coat,  
nails off if they grew too long.  
I painted my nails with a tiny brush from small  
red, green, glitter bottles —  
scent of acetone thinning

across all ten nails of my long fingers —  
a welcome chaos,  
each finger a sign of the mischief and nomads  
like threads through my personalities

that she never believed in. Oh, the quiet ones  
that matched her quietness, were good enough.  
She harboured hidden knives behind her palette  
of grace,  
soft cadences fell from her tricky mouth,  
watery eels  
like the Sirens that filled her and sucked me  
into whirlpools. On the worst days.

On the best days she loved me.  
Her whispers stretched like a scream across a  
silent table.  
I learned to keep my tongue lashed inside my  
mouth —  
in my troubled mouth — to build things in my  
minds  
like crooked walls with fatal flaws.  
All her disappointments carved over her face,  
her own cut-off nails dug deep.

*Stay back. Hold your tongue, wait.*  
*You are too much.*  
*Slice off some of your flesh.*  
*Share it around —*  
*all your broken exuberance.*

I got the holes, the fallout, the release.  
My siblings were the guests in her other life,  
her words and gifts abundant, mostly  
a pale affection flavoured with warmth.

This is not a memoir.  
This is colour and how it refuses to leave.  
Like a nuisance story in the corner,  
I am painting my body whole.

— Wanda Barker

## The Real Frida

The toy people doctor me.  
Thin capitalist minds scan my image,  
photoshop out the real curves and planes  
of my twisted body: add bits, subtract.

They pour plastic into moulds,  
a fantasy female made to rake in dollars.  
They drape it in flowers, in my shawls,  
and flowing skirts.

But what is this timid hand-folded pose?  
What is this red plastic simper?  
These cheekbones chiselled  
in perfect symmetry. My hair plucked  
and shaved from frowned-on places.  
Truth and pounds erased  
by bulimia-thin waist and ballerina neck,  
by my withered legs unfurled  
like leaves seeking light.  
Mexico air-brushed  
from my eyes and my skin.

This doll is a lie.

A tribute, they say.  
But this plastic creature is no legacy.  
Mattel mock us all with a pale mannequin,  
a distorted puppet to make little girls  
believe female bodies must mask  
their natural brushstrokes.

Look at me, the real Frida.  
Teach the little girls to be proud.  
Let them see every hair, every scar,  
every inch, every pound.  
Show them the black and the brown.

Tell them all  
Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo  
was nobody's plaything.

— *Trish Veltman*

## Yesterday, mustard and cress

*Mum, I'm growing my breasts now,*  
you announce at breakfast,  
as if sharing your weekend plans.  
Yesterday, mustard and cress, today...

breasts.

A word too certain, too full  
for these subtle curves you show me  
this softening around your nipples.

Yet here we are in Farmers, shopping for bras  
and you are certain  
because you are growing your breasts.

A fitting consultant brings bras, jargon,  
tape measure. You strip off layers,  
down to milky winter skin  
and lift your arms to be measured.

I know 3.4 kilos, 59 centimetres,  
ten fingers ten toes

Measure twice, fit once, the consultant says,  
under breast, band size, cup size.

Under breast, band size, cup size.  
She tells you 08 triple A.

You ask me what they feel like, full-grown.  
You forget they're there, I say,  
although that's only half true.

I remember when mine  
were sore and heavy with milk you didn't drink,  
and you lay sleeping against them.

— *Trish Veltman*

## weight\* 'restoration'

crossed arms without a chest is  
skin hanging on bone  
the elbow pinpoint,  
a knuckle head rising  
swinging passed the sharp hip  
of us as walking skeletons.

the pelvis is tilted  
we walk leaning  
down rosy clean streets  
thumbing curiously  
the sides of our rib cages, saying  
'how did that get there?  
and is it really?'

swaying like seaweed  
the anorexic stride  
is air slipping through air  
inside the widened thighs.

we are quantified  
at dawn in green gowns  
*HOSPITAL PROPERTY*  
temporarily.

the blue water pipes  
of our veins  
snake across dried skin  
and it is within  
that we tried to hide

but we are turning like the tide  
making ourselves  
softer by the bite  
and back into beings of flesh.

\*Disclaimer: the underweight body is only a *side effect* of anorexia, which is a mental illness. Only 6% of eating disorder sufferers are medically classed as 'underweight', and weight does not determine severity of illness.

— Hebe Kearney

## Shedding

The cracks in my skin  
dig bleeding craters.

The flakes  
form fish scales,  
bring me  
to my reptilian roots.

Snakes  
shed their skin,  
shrug  
and stretch  
until it peels right off.

They leave it  
lying in the  
earth  
for children  
to find and take to  
school for show  
and tell.

The snakes slide away  
still sheathed  
into the undergrowth.

My skin peels also,  
but it takes time  
for a new layer  
to grow.

I slide away raw,  
dirty and looking  
behind me.

— *Katrina Larsen*

## As I fall

As I fall I regret (briefly)  
my absence from  
wing construction classes  
but the view is fine a panorama  
of mountains (natural)  
skyscrapers (unnatural)  
lakes and rivers for drowning in  
people scattering running  
from my potential impact zone  
grab at twisted fluffs of cloud  
and wind-tossed leaves  
tether them tight into feathers  
include gull cries (harsh)  
and twitterings of a lark  
susurrations of small winds  
wanting to be the storm  
all these I twine with rainbows (faded)  
highlight with the bright buzz  
of insect flight the chaos of a butterfly  
gather strings from balloons (lost)  
and tie all these together  
with accents of quavers semibreves  
shimmering as they drift aloft  
songs from forgotten throats  
through cumulonimbus nightmares  
calls of hungry owls  
glittering collage  
falling for you

— *Alexandra Fraser*

# Reviews

## *Goddess Muscle - Karlo Mila*

(Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2020).  
ISBN 9781775504009. RRP \$35. 215pp.

*Reviewed by Tamara Tūlitua*



Reader, be warned —  
Moana time, island time  
is not in fact slower,  
but non-linear. Be ready to  
leap between ages,  
hop between heavens,  
language, and lives.

Karlo Mila’s *Goddess Muscle* is a rippling flex. Weighing in at 215 pages, and a decade long in the making, the answer is: yes, she did have to flex that hard.

I have a habit of reading dedications and acknowledgements first, before anything else. It’s similar to my need to know the year a film was made. It gives me a reference point. The dedication page here presented me exactly this: ‘For Papa Sean who gave me the language to describe another world’. Mila engages in multiple languages in various forms in the collection, and unlocks multiple worlds — from the physical to the cosmic, to the inner workings of beating, throbbing hearts.

I was surprised by the tender opening statement “Your People Will Gather Around You: Love After Love”. Immediately embracing, disarming warmth, comforting song. The piece names the reader and invites her, as if to say: you are here where you belong, in the grand embrace of a collective sighing ocean of dreams. Not just any ocean, but the expanse that is Te Moana Nui a Kiwa. The continent of Oceania where we hold myriad tongues, common gods, and divine humans. Where we sit with ancestors and babies and speak through stars, fleshy moons, and sands.

Yes, your people  
will hold fast within you.  
In the marrow of your bones,  
waiting to be known.  
Travelling with you  
along the soft breathing  
curves of an infinite circle  
that has no circumference,  
and whose centre  
is everywhere  
 (“Your People Will Gather Around You: Love  
After Love”)

If you are from these waters, you will see your image in this collection, and perhaps grow your confidence in naming these connections within you. If you hail from other watery continents, this is an invitation to move beyond brochure resorts, statistics, and stereotypes. Here are poems pulled from the belly of our mother. Reader, be warned — Moana time, island time is not in fact slower, but non-linear. Be ready to leap between ages, hop between heavens, language, and lives.

In the first section, Mila sits at the feet of elders past, our seers and prophets. The ones who gave language to our longing and yearning for home, breathed our stories on foreign pages. Tuwhare, Hau'ofa, Teaiwa, Viviani, Baxter, Wendt. Mila draws clever odes to their wit, vision, and daring. She is old mates with Hone:

You and I both know,  
the ones who break the rules  
get the chicks.  
("A Conversation with Hone Tuwhare")

but pulls away from Baxter, choosing to instead address him through Jacquie Sturm. Each ode moving in waves at times, irreverent, funny — then moving and delicious.

In other sections, Mila is the frigate bird offering her lens — crossing waters of time, land, heavens. 'There,' she says, 'see the fire of Hawai'i... See, there! The fin of Hina... Listen,' she urges, 'for the cry of taniwha... Chill with demigods. Sigh at Tūhoe boys. Walk in dark night with eyes shut wide open...'

The bird lands and shapeshifts to woman, wife, mother, lover, friend. Lost, lonely, forlorn, forgiven, found, wooed. There is unravelling and unbecoming. Poems pulsating with the muck, elation, despair, and exhilaration of love.

Then Mila takes her cue from literary elders, and lays out her vision of Tino Rangatira. Some poems are chastising, others visionary. For me, her strongest statement is the lathering of languages throughout; in the free flow of our tongues — naming our gods, emotions, and landmarks. One, two, three languages within one, two, three lines. With each reo, she opens a gateway for belonging. Tagata o le Moana were never singular, homogenised. We were and are myriad: carriers of time and place, bearing the markers of all corners of our whakapapa. The physicality of language grabs and pulls you in, shoves reason to the side, pushes heart to centre. Imagery pounding in your chest as if standing against a loud speaker.

Curdled green-blue  
head-bashing into white  
wrestling in every direction,  
deeply muscled waves  
rip tides, thick spit, swirling hips,  
saltwater saturated,  
spindrift sweat.  
("Odyssey in Black Sand")

Installations of  
Urbanesia:  
incisions,

bite-marks,  
we slash and cut,  
stitch and sew,  
bind and lash.  
("Bottled Ocean (for Jim Vivieaere)")

If you have wondered what it means to be connected to land, to be in tune — try these poems on, follow their directions. Take the prescription therein. Let the goddess muscle flex and flow, and tell me that stretch doesn't feel good.

### *The Lifers - Michael Steven*

(Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2020).  
ISBN 9781988592077. RRP \$27.50. 92pp.

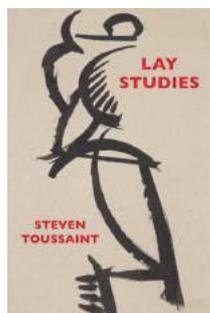
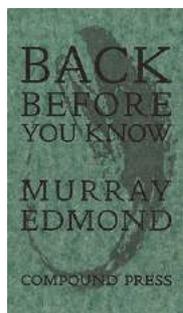
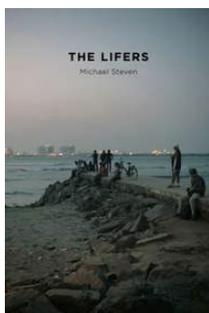
### *Back Before You Know - Murray Edmond*

(Auckland: Compound Press, 2019).  
ISBN 9780994112392. RRP \$20. 80pp.

### *Lay Studies - Steven Toussaint*

(Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2019).  
ISBN 9781776562404. RRP \$25. 105pp.

*Reviewed by Vaughan Rapatahana*



These are three interesting and rather diverse collections by three Pākehā male poets. Other than this similarity, the collections have substantial difference in common.

Michael Steven's second recent collection is essentially a continuation of depictions of bruising street life, except that this time there is more of an international tenor to the poems. New York; Singapore; Stratford, England; India are all in the mix, and in one sprawling poem, "Dropped Pin: Omitted Entries", several cities are all in the sample together.

Still, this time around, wherever the fix, drugs, death, and decadence spew through the lines, Steven tempers the downside with more positive paeans to his young son in poems like "Reading to My Son" and "Summer/Haszard Road".

He also reveals another, antipodal side. Steven is a mystic-in-the-making. His mighty poem about Baxter and beyond — "Yellow Plums" — transcends the vitriolic crime infestations of several of the surrounding pieces; after hunting the poet's grave in Hiruhārama, it offers up 'tiny benedictions'. By the time we detour to Tiruvannamalai and encounter a charas-whacked initiate epiphanising by a fire ("Strains: Shiva Shanty"), we are ready for "Dropped Pin: Woodhill Forest, Muriwai". Here, the poet encounters a calm 'ethereal' zone of transcendence away from street life and street strife. In Muriwai, he will,

wait for darkness  
hold fast for the hush  
that it is endless  
and beyond all things.

There is, then, redemption. Away from the early demise of some of his friends, as conveyed in poems such as "Dropped Pin: Three Lamps", "Ponsonby", and "At Eastern Southland", Steven conveys the koha that the escape of time progressing gives us, if we choose to listen. Just like Ron Jorgensen ostensibly managed as he vanished from Kaikoura ("The 8:50 Freighter from Picton") to perhaps reappear in Perth. By the time we reach the final poem in this slim volume, "Last Pastoral", there is the sense of solace, of sanctuary, of a settled soul,

A sleepy inlet reflects the scene back.

Sometimes the bay is also an amphitheatre.

The Lifers, after all, does not just connote the prisoners, as in “Strains: Big Bud” and in part seven of “Leviathan”, but also refers to individuals who grasp life and don’t let go. It is ironic, this title, given the number of dead men littering the body of this collection, that the poet is evolving into more life, not less.

Topoi aside, Steven always writes well. Concise, taut lines fuelled by right-on vocabulary and verbs that weren’t but are now, as well as verbs used in a new way. Such as,

I decode you to keep warm  
(“The Old Town”)

And,

Dubbed-out guitars, fried-food and glasses of craft beer  
drowsy the lunch customers.  
(“Late Pastoral”)

... my third friend deducted this year.  
(“Eastern Southland”)

While personification strafes the poems like hailstorms,  
Spires are climbing the sky.  
(“The Old Town”)

He does not play around with shape or font or concrete crafting, although Steven does gift us a couple of prose poems. He is a clever poet too, notwithstanding his litany of literary references, in the way he winds words around themselves, as here:

Those who work to stay high  
and stay high to keep working...  
(“Tower, 1996”)

He catches scenes so well. I reckon Steven has cameras for eyes.

A critic is quoted on the Otago University Press flyer accompanying the collection, as saying, ‘I have seen the future of Aotearoa New Zealand poetry. Michael Steven is slap bang in its nexus’.

I reckon the future is already here.

The two long balladry poems by Murray Edmond are characterised by the poet’s wry humour: indeed, the first poem “The Ballad of Jonas Bones” makes me laugh out loud with its dreadful yet delicious irony. It has an especially apposite title too, given the literal skulduggery on display throughout its 20-odd pages. Or should that be dugskullery? The dastardly colonial murderers unknowingly murder their own son, returned as he is replete with wealth from his American endeavours.

Edmond's singular take on poetry carries over to the physical book, as described by the director of Compound Press as, '... an idiosyncratic thing, made from largely recycled materials, the jacket in particular coming from repurposed filing cabinet folders. We would say this construction fits with the poems within'. This chapbook is indeed ludic entertainment rather than the stark roadkill scenarios forcefully painted by Steven.

Accordingly, there are sudden time juxtapositions and regularly irregular rhyme schemes in the first shorter waiata, featuring as it does the fickleness of fate and the grab of greed. The past is set in the King Country right on the aukati or line between that rohe (or region) and the more accessible Waikato, and this flicks forward three times during the poem to the site in the present day. The rhyme scheme is abab and rhyming couplet, and sometimes neither. Waiata? Yes, because the entire piece comes across as a minstrel's frolic, singing out — if you will — for performance on stage, which did occur in 1984 at the Mercury Theatre.

Edmond is having fun here, while winking with both eyes as he gifts us the requisite moral tenets intrinsic to the verse of the jongleur. The poet jabs you in the jugular with regular aphorisms such as,

There is always a line  
you must not step over,  
and it's always a line  
you want to step over.  
(“The Ballad of Jonas Bones”)

And,

Luck is the stick to measure a life.  
And luck is a bird and luck has got wings.  
(“The Ballad of Jonas Bones”)

The second loooooonger piece, titled “The Fancier Pigeon”, is also set in Aotearoa New Zealand, with interspersed jaunts to Australia; this time in the more immediate past. While the plot concerns further misdeeds about a golden ring — here between a set of young protagonists — I did have to read it more than once in an effort to decipher Edmond's intricacies of storyline. Essentially, there is a sort of distanced ménage-à-trois between genders, who themselves sometimes dress crosswise. A nasty man in a fez crops up here and there too, somewhat complicating the interrelationships.

Once more, nature in the form of birds and water beasts — eels in the earlier piece, fish in this one — sees cases of these creatures swallowing the treasure and later regurgitating it, here via evisceration. Once more, fate proves quite fantastic as a pigeon flies in and snatches up the ring, leaving a scrap of paper with the titular ‘Back Before You Know It’ scrawled across it. After all is said and done then,

There is symmetry  
and there is entropy  
and they go together  
(“The Fancier Pigeon”)

Edmond writes throughout this second, generally unrhyming tale, with his tongue very much in cheek too. He plays around with pigeons — the name of the café is ‘The Pigeon’. There is the fancier pigeon, and — of course — the pigeon fancier. Inevitably there is a stool pigeon.

Then we have lines such as,

Her mea culpa was her sine qua non

(“The Fancier Pigeon”)

Really!

When the troubadour-poet is not Latinising, he crafts other wonderful lines like,

The brown murk of the lake

spread round them like

a bourgeois bedspread

(“The Fancier Pigeon”)

And,

before too long

those galloping messengers of morn

had turned to tired old nags the hour the sun sat down

To pasture.

(“The Fancier Pigeon”)

Marvellous stuff.

Steven Toussaint writes on the back cover that Edmond’s work here, ‘joins the rich tradition of late modernist folk poetry,’ which is true. I would append the words ‘with a spectacular Kiwi patina everywhere’.

And it is to Toussaint I now turn.

If Steven is a serious dude, Toussaint is severe. An ascetic. Reading these tracts reminds me of the Good Friday procession outside our house in Pampanga (Philippines). Self-laceration, blood flowing copiously from men and boys flagellating themselves with barbed whips, and a stooped Christ figure struggling to maintain his hold on a mighty wooden crucifix. Intense.

This is heavy, dense, and sometimes impenetrable vocabulary layered on thick. Toussaint loves loooong words, the more arcane the better. It is almost as if he has a ledger next to him, replete with obscure, often religion-themed words — often nouns — which he slots into his ley lines and then rules a line through once he has included them. Can a reader decipher — at least on first reading, and then second — lines such as these?

The liturgy is aeviform

or boomerang of movements.

No moon of *Aufhebung*.  
Only emanation then return.  
(“Pickstock Improvisations”)

Unless the layman reader is au fait with Latin and the intricacies of theological doctrine, the answer has to be no, even despite Toussaint’s learned Notes at the rear of the book. In effect, this poet has created his own opaque language, stemming from his own deep religiosity. As Susan Whaley noted in her Bookseller’s review of *Lay Studies*, ‘If you are searching for the poems’ meanings, then it is not a light read’.

The poet is an articulate and intelligent scholar and has researched the technique of melopoeia —words ‘charged’ beyond their normal meaning with some musical property, which further directs their meaning, inducing emotional correlations by the sound and rhythm of the speech. And this Ezra Poundian effect is certainly achieved, although I will iterate that it is at the expense of ‘normal meaning’. Some examples of this overlaid effect are:

The new corn’s tassel like a crucifix  
pierce the vaulted manure.  
(“In Memoriam”)

And,

Let pagans stuff  
their young with slaughtered  
breakfasts.  
(“Hymn Before a Feast”)

And,

pornography  
flashes through transom.  
(“Oak Park”)

Notwithstanding the comments above, Toussaint does hit home runs with some of his imagery:

The wind is animal with cannabis.  
(“Jesus Green”)

And,

slowing  
theology down  
like a starved wind with

every concord conquered  
("Loriot")

Finally, there is not much reference to physical locales in Aotearoa New Zealand, given that the young poet is American born — a 1986 nascency he does refer to in the poem "Sts. Peter and Paul":

It could have been worse.  
I could have surfaced  
upside down

With this international tenor suffusing many of his poems, Toussaint resembles Steven. Other than this, however, the two men are almost complete polar opposites, existentially grounded in different metaphysics, given that Toussaint too, at times nears the numinous. As in the poem "Agnus Dei":

I believe in a God who can learn  
to work new spindles

Both are young men: Steven born in 1977. Accordingly, both are — to a degree — striving to find themselves via verse.

Murray Edmond already has.

I look forward to sighting all of these poets' next collections.

*Neon Daze - Amy Brown*

(Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2019).  
ISBN 978177652381. RRP \$25. 138pp.

*Reviewed by Emma Carter*

*Neon Daze* is a self-described ‘verse journal of the first four months of motherhood’. And it is exactly that. It is an extraordinary diary with daily entries that capture the elation, pains, and sheer terror of childbirth, as well as the early days of motherhood. And Amy Brown does this with nuance; she has it spot on. It’s not always a comfortable read as it doesn’t shy away from brutal realities, as shown through this description of an emergency caesarean:

And then, at last, under the stage lights  
you’re halved like any leggy assistant about to be sawn  
... The magician wears a plastic shield over  
his glasses – you know why.  
 (“13 August 2016”)

And just over a week later:

In the shower  
my hand doesn’t mean to brush what feels  
like meaty cross-stitch.  
 (“22 August 2016”)

Beginning with the birth of her son Robin, we follow Amy’s journey of discovery and disbelief:

This day begins early  
when seven kilos you’ll lose  
by its end starts to leak  
and your abdomen begins  
to speak in a voice that books  
and friends recommend you  
control as soon as you hear it.  
 (“13 August 2016”)

It goes on to capture, with heart-wrenching accuracy, the movements of a newborn the mother can’t take their eyes from, and the infant’s new world of wonder:

he senses the right  
place to anchor himself and drives  
forward with all the power

a minutes-old nick can possess,  
as if the nipple and aureole were prey  
about to escape  
("14 August 2016")

The collection moves on to the quickly dawning enormity of parenthood, and the slap-in-the-face sense of responsibility that is thrust upon the new mother. One might know it was coming, but one could have never understood the magnitude.

I lay him against my thighs and,  
eye to eye, we both recognise something awful – that I am his best  
chance  
("15 August 2016")

As a mother myself, with this period in recent enough memory, I can authoritatively say that Brown captures, with fragility and honesty, the experience of new motherhood. How this book would read to someone who is not a parent, I can no longer say. It might educate, or it might be meaningless. But I can't go back to that pre-motherhood world and imagine what it might be like to read this book without my experience.

I recognise the constant sleep deprivation:

Taste the twelve  
mornings in each  
twenty-four hours  
("21 August 2016")

Plus the tedium and desperation of trying to encourage a newborn to sleep:

A shush might be enough,  
if associated with his cot.  
Yet here I am lurching  
like the bus in *Speed* and  
whistling a breathy prayer  
that you will sleep. And then  
what? Will I sleep too?  
("31 August 2016")

And with poignancy, Brown captures the essence of being totally overwhelmed, being drained to the point of hopelessness and, finally, an inability to speak.

Why are you crying? he asks  
when we brush our teeth. I tell him I am  
tired. He says, You are allowed to be tired,  
but that is no reason to be upset. I say,  
You don't understand how this works.  
He says, Yes, but I don't know what  
you expect me to do. I say, Nothing.  
("5 September 2016")

There are countless examples of Brown's tender representation of this most extraordinary time in one's life. Although it portrays pains, fears, and hardship with crystalline honesty, it also captures the beauty and wonder of this new-forming relationship: the mother-child bond.

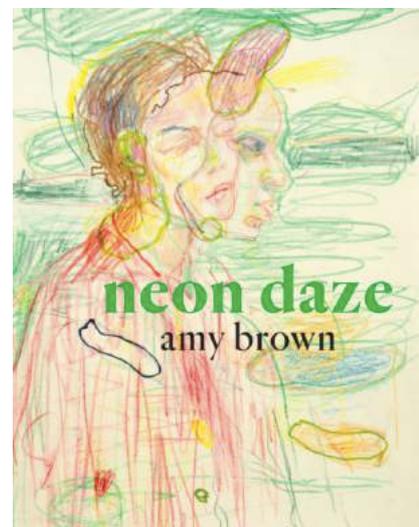
But, this brilliant symbiosis we possess

ensures that my front fills up with river  
stones if we go too long apart. Early  
this morning, 4.30, I woke

to find myself lying on a pile of pebbles  
leaking river water and debated with myself  
about whether to let you keep sleeping —  
whether you needed me as much as I  
needed you then. I swear I didn't make a sound,  
but a moment after I woke, you yelped...  
("4 November 2016")

However, one feature I found distracting were the footnotes throughout the collection. The footnotes provide, not just a platform for definitions of certain words, but a stage for additional stories and anecdotes. Although often witty and informative, one could never quite decide whether to read them at their first appearance in the poem, or to wait until the end of the day's entry. Either way, the footnotes took me away from the world of Robin and parenting, a world that I had to try and re-enter. They made too much noise. Perhaps, however, they represented the sleep-deprived mind, darting in and out of thoughts.

*Neon Daze* is an extraordinarily brave book for Brown to have written, on a deeply personal experience. Brown humbly says in her acknowledgements that '*Neon Daze* records one unremarkable experience of the commonest phenomenon'. That is true; it does



that. Brown goes on to say that ‘Millions of women have been through those months without feeling the need or right (or having the time or health) to make a noise about it’. To that, I would add — or the courage. Time and health are doubtless major factors, but sharing what is an intensely vulnerable time is valiant. So thank you to Brown for meeting the challenge. Although millions have experienced this, it is a rarely shared, oddly taboo subject, and it is refreshing to hear the similarities across experience. A must-read for Mums or Mums-to-be, and anyone interested in the enormous beauty of ‘the commonest phenomenon’.

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

# 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 haiku feature in *a fine line*.

---

garden circle reunion  
wilted flowers

deserted beach  
waiting for the jerk  
fishing

— *Jenny Pyatt*

---

cicada shell  
broken open  
by departure

stick insect  
outstretched by water  
surface tension

— *Jenny Clay*

beneath  
wild cluster

Sirius  
coronavirus

— *Tru Paraha*

---

weight of a knee  
thousand candles  
break the dark

— *Peter Free*

---

closure like a clip handbag  
dark inside  
girl's depression

— *Stella Carruthers*

---

the sea advances  
a grandparent's lungs drown  
in salty secretions

— *Sophia Wilson*

stars cluster  
constellation  
of light through maple

— *Susan Wardell*

---

colours of a summer sunset —  
sliced watermelon

— *Julie Adamson*

---

earthmovers  
mould new embankments —  
planting of natives

— *Anne Curran*

---

the sway  
of a hanging bridge  
cloud forest

— *Debbie Strange*

# 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*.

**Wanda Barker's** poems & flash fiction are published in recent issues of *NZ Flash, a fine line, Mayhem, Meniscus, and Landfall 240*. Also, a poem novella *All her dark pretty thoughts*, 2017, and writing a novel.

**Stella Peg Carruthers** is a writer and lifelong Wellingtonian. She works in a library and has a BA in Art History from Victoria University of Wellington.

**Emma Carter** worked the past two decades in the arts industry, whilst sporadically writing poetry. She's now a full-time Mum still sporadically writing poetry, with lofty ambitions of having time to write more.

**Jenny Clay's** poems have been published in online and print anthologies, including New Zealand Poetry Society, *Blackmail Press, Poetry NZ, 4th Floor, takahē, Shot Glass Journal, and Fresh Ink*.

**Anne Curran** is a Hamilton poet. She enjoys writing short Japanese verse forms. She remains grateful to all those editors, poets, family, and friends who have supported her along this journey.

**Alexandra Fraser** has been published in NZ and overseas. She has two poetry collections published, and was awarded Second Prize and Highly Commended in NZPS competition 2020.

**Peter Free** is a Maths teacher from Wellington. Born in Nigeria, Peter has spent many years travelling and working in Asia. He writes haiku to relax.

**Hebe Kearney** is a poet from Christchurch who now calls Auckland her home. Her work has also appeared in *The Three Lamps, Oscen, Starling, Forest and Bird, and the Poetry New Zealand Yearbook 2021*.

**Katrina Larsen** is a poet from Tauranga. She has previously been published in *takahē, Oscen, Poetry New Zealand Yearbook, and Blackmail Press*.

**Dorian David Leigh** is a lover of books, drinker of coffee, wearer of hats, collector of odd and interesting things. He resides in Papaioea, where he is studying history at Massey University.

**Anita Mortlock** lives on the beautiful Kāpiti Coast where her garden feels like an entire world. She teaches at Victoria University of Wellington.

**Tru Paraha** has published various writings and live artworks in Aotearoa and overseas. Recent poems are forthcoming in *AUP New Poets 8*.

Ex-teacher **Jenny Pyatt** is now retired by the sea in Hawkes Bay. She has had teaching resources published for schools and her poems have appeared in New Zealand magazines.

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

**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: [debbiemstrange.blogspot.com](http://debbiemstrange.blogspot.com)

**Tamara Tulutua** flows from Sāfa'ato'a, Matā'utu, Vailima, Tanugamanono, Sapapāli'i of Samoa. Aotearoa is her birthplace and current home. She writes from between the margins to explore boundless galaxies beyond cultural/ethnic li(n)es.

**Trish Veltman** has poems published in *a fine line*, *Mayhem*, *Tarot*, and (forthcoming) *Blackmail Press*. Her story "Shoelaces" won Page & Blackmore/NZSA's 2020 short story competition. She lives in Kāpiti.

**Janet Waincott** lives near Christchurch and writes poetry and essays. Her poetry has recently appeared in *takahē*, *Landfall*, *Catalyst*, and *Poetry NZ Yearbook*. Janet's website is [janetwaincott.com](http://janetwaincott.com)

**Susan Wardell** is from Dunedin, New Zealand, where she lectures in Social Anthropology, while raising two small humans in a garden overlooking the harbour. Her poetry has been published in a variety of journals throughout Australasia.

**Sophia Wilson** lives in Woodside near Ōtepoti, Dunedin. She has recent writing in *Blackmail Press*, *Landfall*, *Mayhem*, *Not Very Quiet*, *takahē*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Flash Frontier*, and *Best Microfiction 2021*.

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## Notice of Annual General Meeting

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The Annual General Meeting of The New Zealand Poetry Society Incorporated will be held virtually this year via Zoom on **June 16, 7-9pm.**

Meeting ID is **863 4380 8699**

Link is [https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86343808699?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86343808699?pwd=cEJNRTYvVlpjMGszc1MwWXZEM3hDZz09)  
[pwd=cEJNRTYvVlpjMGszc1MwWXZEM3hDZz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86343808699?pwd=cEJNRTYvVlpjMGszc1MwWXZEM3hDZz09)

Password is **548731**

### AGENDA

- 1) Apologies
- 2) Confirmation of the Minutes of the 2020 AGM  
*These are available on request from the Administrator, Kim Martins:  
[info@poetrysociety.org.nz](mailto:info@poetrysociety.org.nz)*
- 3) Matters arising from the 2020 AGM Minutes
- 4) President's Report
- 5) Financial Report
- 6) Proposed Budget for 2021-2022
- 7) Election of Officers –  
President  
Vice-President  
Treasurer  
Secretary  
Committee Members
- 8) General Business

The AGM will be followed by a reading from Guest Poet, to be announced.