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Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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APRIL 2023

LIVE ENCOUNTERS
presents
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND
POETS & WRITERS
GUEST EDITORIAL: LINCOLN JAQUES

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND
POETS & WRITERS
APRIL 2023



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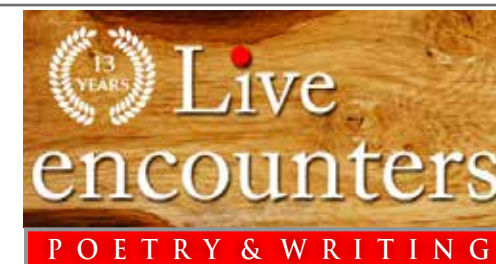
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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor
markulyseas@liveencounters.net

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AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND
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CONTRIBUTORS

LINCOLN JAQUES – *Guest editorial*

AINE WHELAN-KOPA

ALEXANDRA BALM

ALEXANDRA FRASER

ANDREA MALCOLM

ANITA ARLOV

ARTHUR AMON

ASHLEY SMITH

CASSANDRA LOH

DAVID EGGLETON

DENISE O'HAGAN

EDNA HELED

ERIK KENNEDY

GAIL INGRAM

GILLIAN ROACH

HELEN MCNEIL

HUA DAI

JACK ROSS

JANET CHARMAN

JOHN GERAETS

KATE MAHONY

KIRSTY POWELL

KIT WILLETT

LAUREN ROCHE

MARIS O'ROURKE

MARK LAURENT

MICHAEL GIACON

PAUL PROTHEROE

PETER BLAND

PIERS DAVIES

PIET NIEUWLAND

RICHARD PAMATATAU

RICHARD VON STURMER

RIKTHEMOST

ROBYN RESTIEAUX

RON RIDDELL

SAM CLEMENTS

SIOBHAN HARVEY

SUSAN GLAMUZINA

TREVOR M LANDERS

VALENTINA TECLICI

Lincoln Jaques' poetry, fiction and travel essays have appeared in Aotearoa, Australia, Asia, America, the UK and Ireland. He was the winner of the Auckland Museum centenary ANZAC international poetry competition, a finalist and 'Highly Commended' in the 2018 Emerging Poets-Divine Muses, a Vaughan Park Residential Writer/Scholar in 2021, and was the Runner-Up in the 2022 International Writers' Workshop Kathleen Grattan Prize for a *Sequence of Poems* (judged by Janet Charman). He holds a Master of Creative Writing from AUT.

LINCOLN JAQUES

GUEST EDITORIAL

Rākau tukua ō peka ki raro:
kaua e oho noa te hiki anō ki te inoi
ki te kapua āwheo hihiwa.
Meinga kia kaua ō ringa e mārō
te manahau, ehara noa tēnei i te toki
te pūhuki, te ahi rānei te pokia.

Tree let your arms fall:
raise them not sharply in supplication
to the bright enhaloed cloud.
Let your arms lack toughness and
resilience for this is no mere axe
to blunt nor fire to smother.

*From 'No Ordinary Sun', Hone Tūwhare. Small Holes in the Silence:
Collected Works. (Vintage 2011). Te Reo trans. Waihoroi Shortland.*

Nau mai, haere mai!

It's now gone 25 years since the death of one of Aotearoa's finest and favourite poets, Hone Tūwhare. Tūwhare reverberates with me as he lived for a time, in 1963, in Beach Haven, a low socio-economic suburb on Auckland's North Shore. In the sixties it was still tucked away behind surviving pockets of kauri forest, thick bush and mettle roads. One dairy and a hardware store. Rich in orchards in the 19th century, by the time the poet moved in those once lush food baskets were now shabby scraps of land pegged for infill housing. Ten years after Tūwhare lived in Beach Haven my family was to emigrate from the outer depressed suburbs of Southeast London to a small weatherboard house on a shingle road where not even the streetlights yet reached our letterbox.



Lincoln Jaques

Of course, I didn't know the great poet once lived nearby. I'd never heard of him until my early teens when I stumbled across a volume of his poetry in the local library. That book was *No Ordinary Sun*, his masterpiece. It instantly transformed my life, the way I thought about poetry, words, literature, the world. Rarely before this had any New Zealand poet spoken to me about everyday experience, to meditate on our anxieties, our fears, the injustices of the world in that captivating style of his. Add to that, Tūwhare was a boilermaker, with little education, a self-taught poet, who gave us sons and daughters of factory-workers a voice. He also introduced Te Ao Māori to a bunch of us Pākehā kids who never learnt much about 'that sort of thing' in school. Especially not at home. When I flicked open that book, I knew from that moment on I wanted to be a poet. And it's through poetry I have learnt most about the country in which I've grown up.

Poetry and writing in New Zealand has experienced a huge metamorphosis in the intervening years since that great poet's death in 2008. Poetry has taken on a new sense of self-confidence, of political activism, of urgency. Take the recent controversy that's raged over Tusiata Avia's poem to mark the 250th anniversary of Captain Cook's arrival in Aotearoa. The poem is from the collection *The Savage Coloniser Book*. This has also been made into an equally controversial stage show – *The Savage Coloniser Show*. It's a frank and no-holds-barred work exposing the colonial theft and brutal suppression of Indigenous lives, land and resources. The language, tone and message are confrontational, raw, honest. It picks at the still-wet scabs of colonialism.

The overwhelming backlash to the book (the Captain Cook poem in particular) and subsequent show quickly became personal and alarming (although, sadly, not surprising), with many citing 'hate speech' and 'racism' as their go-to slogans when faced with their mirrors. A poet friend of mine who attended a reading of the Captain Cook poem told me of the elderly gentlemen sitting two seats away from her, fuming red in the face, spittle forming in the corners of his bloodless, white lips, becoming more and more enraged as the poem progressed, as if he were a Colonial Administrator straight out of the New Zealand Company in 1850. It shows we as a nation still have a way to go to wake up and take ownership of our colonial past; but it also shows that the power of the word through poets and writers to shake those established hierarchies is at the forefront to bring about change. To steal a line from Erik Kennedy:

“...every one of us / has a heavy wooden implement that we know how to use”
(from 'Croquet: The First National Sport of Aotearoa New Zealand').

I'm truly humbled that so many great writers were generous with their contributions. They place us solidly within our own unique vernacular, cut off in many ways from the world as we are—and as we tend to think of ourselves—it's a vernacular that has at once struggled to find its voice yet has successfully broken free from conventions of traditional, external forms to turn towards more inwards looking. It's writing that connects us with the whenua (land). Aine Whelan-Kopa shows us this in her beautiful 'Moemoeā', where

“The happenings of the past flip over in chronological order, how the chords got broken on our ipu of love. We got stretched so hard that some whenu snapped.”

I'm pleased to include well-established writers alongside emerging talent and those who are relatively new scribes. The more seasoned poets include Richard Von Sturmer. I remember Richard from my teenage years, when he wrote the lyrics to the famous anthem *There is No Depression in New Zealand* by the band Blam Blam Blam, an anthem we 'lost punks' used to play on repeat as we negotiated the mean streets of Auckland in the eighties. Now a Zen Buddhist, he's turned more to haiku, and this sense of pared-back, powerful snapshots on solitude and reflection shine here in 'Rain in the Hills': *“An hour later / stretched out / on a pebbled beach / I remember / what you once said.”* There's the great David Eggleton, Aotearoa New Zealand Poet Laureate 2019-2022, with his typical mix of original word-slang and urban street-discord, found screaming out in 'Drunk Uncle':

He's biggy; he's bowsered; he's baggy-trouserred.
He's standing on his head.
He's poncing through Ponsonby.
He's half-way down Dominion Road, looking for the exit.

Janet Charman gives us her '27 Scenes from Modern Life', a magnificent piece of loss, yearning and the deciphering of a world where the search for meaning falls short, revealed in the sudden daydream glimpses of our past, as in the lines:

19. when i saw you at Daily Bread last week
it must have been a hallucination
because you're dead

Siobhan Harvey refers to herself as an “exiled writer” and this bleeds through all her poetry. No exception is the hauntingly dark and disturbingly sensuous, aptly titled poem ‘Survivor’, where she talks of the writer’s compulsion to draw out and face head-on rather than turn away from that darkness found everywhere:

where, each morning, the world disintegrating
 into war, pandemic, environmental disaster,
 extremism, racism, misogyny, transphobia,
 hate hate hate ... the writer finds devotion
 in creating the first line of another story,
It begins like this: the night ...

and the next ...

and the next ...

Mark Laurent, although a poet who’s been around for a long time, is known more as a singer-songwriter who plays regularly around Auckland. I first saw Mark perform at the opening of *The Roots of Empathy* exhibition at Art Depot in Devonport. With just himself and a six-string, Mark sang a hypnotic tune about the wrongs of the world which captivated me. That talent for song writing reflects here in the poem “*Not Such a Good Friday*” where the poet recalls a horrifying medical experience during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Arthur Amon offers a unique flavour of poetry backed with music. I read alongside Arthur a few years back at Kumeu Live! for a Phantom Billstickers National Poetry Day event. Arthur had an electronic backing set where he performed the words to “Easy, brother”, a fast-paced, hilarious piece with anxious undertones of a world spiralling towards AI technology.

And of course, Rikki Livemore (aka RikTheMost), a slam, spoken word, performance poet who has stunned audiences the world over with their captivating live presence and delivery, gives us an apocalyptic-style message in their breathtaking piece ‘*Apathetic Moon*’, where it feels everything may already be too late and out of reach:

Each treading trembling legs to keep heads higher than the horizon,
 Armstrong; we should dive in,
 One giant leap made wider when the tide is tsunami-rising,
 And we can’t help riding on it;
 Catapulting ourselves beyond,
 We are all so far above it.

Some newer poets are represented here: Cassandra Loh, a Graphic Artist who blends poetry with the digital image; Aine Whelan-Kopa, already highlighted; Sue Glam, Hua Dai, who has published widely in her homeland of China, to mention just a few. These, along all the voices in this collection, I’m sure will stun you, uplift you; make you laugh, cry, pause, think, reflect. Most importantly, they will make you change the way you look at life.

Thank you to all those who came on board this special edition. Warm thanks also to Mark Ulyseas who approached me to make this happen. There are many others I could have included, so I hope we can collaborate on another edition in the future.

Ka kite anō

Lincoln Jaques
Easter Sunday
April 2023.

Aine Whelan-Kopa (Ngāti Hine) is from Te Tai Tokerau and Taranaki. She has had stories, poems and art that draw from her upbringing, published in *takahē magazine* and *a fine line*. Aine is a person who notices the little things and feels compelled to write about them.



MOEMOEĀ – DREAMS

Moemoeā – Dreams

When it went from never wanting to stop, to deciding I was never going to stop.

That's when I knew the difference between dreaming and destiny.

Toi – Art

When it made me happy for hours to spend time with it, imagining it and then making it with my own hands. Staring for ages, like I did with my boy when he was a baby and everyday in-between.

That's when I knew the difference between like and love.

Kupu - Words

I'm so very careful with my words. I haven't been in the past. I hurt a lot of people and got in a lot of trouble. I thought no one really listened to the words, I was wrong. I'm saying better words now because I've softened up and the kupu come from my heart-heart.

With kupu, I learned the difference between saying it and meaning it.

Whānau - Family

The first thing I think of is Hokianga and Cyclone Bola 1988. It's the only time I ever remember it raining. And then I think of split apart. The happenings of the past flip over in chronological order, how the chords got broken on our ipu of love. We got stretched so hard that some whenu snapped. But since our babies got born, I've embraced the way we've been weaving it back together.

That's the difference between whāmere and whānau.

continued overleaf...

Aine Whelan-Kopa (Ngāti Hine)

MOEMOEĀ – DREAMS *...contd*

Roimata – Tears
Countless, but I remember every single one, like I'm a cloud. I suck them up
and let them out again in recycled tear-rain. Surviving those dark days and
taking the lesson makes me one resilient wahine toa.

That's the difference between letting go and moving on.

Aroha - Love
All of the above.
And more.

Therein lies the difference between losing and living.



Photo credit: <https://pixabay.com/users/pruzi-179411/>

Balm is the pen name of Alexandra Dumitrescu, a first-generation Kiwi who teaches English in South Auckland. Alexandra came to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2006 to pursue a research degree at the University of Otago. In the seventeen years since, she completed a PhD on metamodernism in literature (Otago) and an MCW from AUT (2017), worked as a matron, warehouse labourer, examination supervisor, administrator, tutor, department coordinator, and eventually teacher. In the little spare time left by teaching, marking, and preparing classes, she writes poems, short stories, and literary studies. At the start of the millennium, she proposed meta-modernism as a cultural paradigm and a period term. She received awards, fellowships, and scholarships from various universities and organisations at home and overseas. Her work was published in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, America, and Europe (Czech Republic, Greece, Romania). She taught at the Universities of Cluj (Romania) and Otago (Aotearoa New Zealand). In his 2014 memoir *More Deaths Than One*, Garry Forrester called her “the mother of metamodernism”.



THE MEETING

When I entered the room, it was already full, though there was only one man in it. He stood by the window, half turned towards the door, his profile dark against the fading light. He was a tall man and he covered much of the window, through which I could see the tops of buildings across the road and the last floors with their cornices and arches. Concrete and glass, art deco, cream rococo. A seagull circled a tile roof slightly above our level. It could have been tracing a halo above the man's head had this been 2D, a plane scene. But it was 3D and the man bigger than life.

We stood in silence as if he hadn't heard me come in, although the lock had clicked on and off when the door opened and closed in the resounding quiet of the deserted building. He'd called the meeting, so he was expecting me, but gave no indication that he was aware of me being there.

Was he ignoring me?

I felt crushed. I had hoped we could talk and sort things out, and now he was giving me the silent treatment.

As if I was invisible, inaudible.

As if my presence meant nothing to him.

As if I did not exist at all – my person a quantity that can be easily ignored with no consequence whatsoever.

Can silence be as devastating as harsh words? Can ignoring someone hurt them as much as bullying?

My face felt suddenly moist. My left eye – always the left eye! The traitor! The right one always behaved. Or took longer. In the past few months, I had become the weeping queen of the fairy tales that I used to read as a child, the one who wept with one eye and laughed with the other.

Alexandra Balm

Other than my breathing and his, and my thinking and his – of which I had no intimation whatsoever –, there was utter silence in the room. Heavy, portentous. Broken by the muffled cry of a seagull through the double-glazed windows.

The last light of the day was dying before our eyes.

‘Turn the light on, will you,’ he asked without turning. ‘Thank you for coming,’ he said as he moved towards me, his heavy built breaking the inertia of stillness. He put his hand out towards me and repeated, ‘Thank you,’ as we shook hands.

His hand was cold, and I shivered. It was wet like a lizard’s skin. I rubbed my right hand against my cotton pants, trying to make the gesture as unostentatious as possible.

‘Have a seat,’ he said gesturing towards the couch. He sat at his desk, a wall covered in bookshelves on his left.

‘So, what’s the story with you and Gopal?’ he asked.

I ignored the question.

‘I brought you the book,’ I said and got up and planted the book on his desk.

‘Thanks. Did you like it?’ he asked.

‘Yes. Not bad. There are bits in it that I actually loved. Remember the scene where Duffy stands fully dressed, with makeup on, watching the house on fire, when everybody else is in their pyjamas?’ I said.

‘Has she done it, you think?’ he asked, slightly amused by my animation.

‘I suppose so.’

‘Why would she have done it?’ he asked.

‘Get rid of the old place, I guess, the drunk’s bullying, the submissiveness of the mother. She put up with too much,’ I said.

‘Women do tend to do that,’ he said as if he knew a lot about it.

‘Do they?’ I asked.

‘Yes. Many do. Well, not so much in the western world, perhaps, but in many places of the world, they do.’ He fixed me with a glance that weighed heavy on me and pinned me to the couch. I couldn’t move. I gasped for air. ‘What do you think can be done about it?’ he asked as he leaned forward, the edge of the desk cutting into his stomach.

‘I don’t know. Teach men?!’ I said tentatively.

‘Yes?...’ he asked in what seemed like an encouraging tone.

‘Educate them, I guess, since they are small boys. Educate parents first to treat boys equally, teach them to contribute, to care,’ I said.

‘You seem to have a bit of an agenda there, a parti pris,’ he said, attempting a smile.

‘Oh well, one cannot help developing one,’ I said.

‘Anything else you’d like to read?’ he asked, suddenly stepping back into his teacher’s shoes.

‘Should be fine, thanks,’ I said. ‘I’m done reading.’

‘How come?’ he asked, looking up from his feminine nails, impeccably polished.

Our eyes met for what seemed like thirty seconds. I could read surprise in his eyes, then he examined his nails again. The white bits that extended beyond the lengths of his fingers were clean and smooth. He placed his hands on the desk.

‘I’m getting married tomorrow,’ I said.

Alexandra Fraser lives in the west of the beautiful Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, surrounded by kauri and tree-fern. She has been published in magazines and anthologies in Aotearoa and internationally, and has been highly placed in many poetry competitions. Alexandra is a member of the Isthmus creative and critique group of poets, whom she met while completing the Master Creative Writing at AUT. She's published two poetry collections through Steele Roberts ('Conversation by Owl-Light' (2014), 'Star Trails' (2019)) and is working on two more – one on history and ecology, the other on networks.



Alexandra Fraser

AUBADE FOR BEE DANCE

Dawn light slides past the blinds
I don't want to burrow through sorrow any more
turning up the same wretched things
that have been found fondled discarded
by so many over and over

The times are thick with it those words
are on repeat old vinyl
returning again and again
spinning on turntables that won't die

I don't want to feel the heavy dust coating my palms
grit dampened in early dew gathering
in slick wet semi-circles under my nails
the fibrous net of dead roots entangling
every syllable

I want to wake to the sweetness again the delight
which is elusive to me
though I know it must be there
somewhere there are signs

I shall become a tracker looking for the bent twig
the shadow of a hand-print the perfect shade
of blue rimming a cup

the scent of crushed sage and geranium leaf
the flight of bees towards nectar

the honey of life sticky adherent transferable

whispers of Bach floating from an open window

the crack of a pegged sheet flexing in the wind

WHILE WE ARE WAITING

embankments glow with early dandelions
cowparsley and crocosmia

and the train comes on time
and there is Pachelbel's Canon

and there are the blues of indigo
and periwinkle and violet

and hydrangea buds fatten on brown stems
we thought were dead

there are regular sunsets and sunrises
and apple crumble leftovers for breakfast

birds fluster and peck in the rain
greens of plantains paspalum kikuyu

and light glints from quartz inclusions
in the mulching waterworn pebbles

glowing sparks like so many stars
in the images from the new telescope

everyone everywhere is entranced
distracted

we look across the universe millions of years
to the time of the dinosaurs

when they too were skywatching
and waiting and grew feathers in hope

now we inspect each other's skins
looking for nubs of miraculous growth

but sometimes while we are waiting
we flick away the fat new buds

from their hopeful springtime stems
as we sabotage our optimisms

without thought
one splintering twig at a time

MOTHS WILL COME IN DARKEST NIGHT TO DRINK OUR SLEEPING TEARS

You are unaware sleeping
There is a moth gentled on your cheek
like a giant tear feathered velvet
a curling proboscis extrudes
probes along spiky lashes
tastes moisture salt sorrow
you leak grief to the night air

Your daytime face is desert sand
arid anger you no longer write of love
you are enraged despairing grieving
your words are bruised on the page

in isolated misery you rail without hope
against misogyny liars manipulators
against every trolling fascist every climate change denier
against every hand that slaps a moth into a candle flame

Will we ever touch again
sandcovered fingers reach
to draw love-hearts in drying sand
those long languorous summer days
remember them?
sun baked skin high cirrus drifting on the blue
the long recurring roll of surf
an ocean of salt tears pulled by the moon

night comes again relentlessly
and with it come the moths
to drink our sleeping tears



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Andrea Malcolm (Ātihaunui-a-Pāpārangi) has a background in journalism and communications and is a freelance writer living in northwest Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland). She has had poetry published in Landfall, Takahē, the Spinoff, Tarot, and 26 Letters (an anthology), as part of the Bloomsbury Festival, London and her poetry collection *When We Meet Heart to Face* was accepted by the New Zealand Society of Authors as part of this year's manuscript assessment programme.



WE THINK WE MAY HAVE A HEART

This is the phone; this is the voice
This is the pulse pulling through

the malaise, the soft thunderclap
to ear and brain, breeze to steel

the fading face, spark to fire,
from ashes escape. Seize this bag,

patient in the corner, sweep children
into the arms of friends and neighbours,

and drive it through in the heart
of night. It's a lot like going to the hospital

for a child to be born. It's a lot like
hearing a death bell
somewhere
in the village.

Andrea Malcolm (Ātihaunui-a-Pāpārangi)

Anita Arlov is the child of Croatian parents displaced after WW2. She lives in Tamaki Makaurau/Auckland. She writes poems and very short prose, hosts workshops and occasionally judges short form fiction. Anita grew up enjoying the cadence of language but didn't begin writing till mid-life in response to the Canterbury earthquake in 2011. Anita has won the Divine Muses Poetry Competition, the NZ Flash Fiction Competition and has placed second in the Bath Flash Fiction Competition. She is widely anthologised, including Bonsai: Best small stories from Aotearoa/New Zealand; Broadsheet; New Flash Fiction Review; takahē magazine; Best Small Fictions and Best Microfiction. She convened a team that ran the NZ Poetry Conference & Festival, a successful three-day celebration of all things poetry including vispo, wordcore, sung poems, cine-poetics and workshops, involving 200 poets and arts activists. For ten years she managed popular spoken word event Inside Out Open Mic for Writers. In 2022 she was selected an Ockham Collective Arts Resident. *"I like to conflate arresting facts with fiction, memory and emotion. Once I get a fix on a tone, I dive in and commit to getting out alive."* – Anita Arlov



UNDER CELLOPHANE SOUTH ISLAND LIGHT

Shot my lover at Lake Manapouri. The lead-up was epic. Te Wai Pounamu dreamed us up a boudoir diorama. Siren rata sexed up the canopies. Lupins looped plush carpets of blush purple & candied pink where we snoozed, flagged after Lord of the Rings meanderings. Tui bird surround-sound sang us awake. Cathedral peaks jazzed up a serene dreamy sky. The glacier lake - all four arms - ours for the week on a detox diet of ramble, no wifi, scared me sober with blue-skinned depth. It's all here, in default colour space. Look long enough, my screen morphs into magic eye 3-D reality. The body of him looms. His sockets are headlights GPSed on a beeline for me.

Note: Te Wai Pounamu (Māori) the South Island of Aotearoa / New Zealand. The literal meaning is 'water' and 'greenstone', from the presence of this stone here.

Anita Arlov

FISHING WITH MY FATHER

1
 My father reads Ivan Rebroff loves men.
He winces, wounded: who's the voice now?
 (I'm fourteen. Collect old 45s.)
 So I mix him a cassette of Vallee, Bing,
 Mercer, Fisher, Te Wiata.
 Inia Te Wiata who carves in wood,
 the Māori 'Wanderer' baritone, wins.

2
 My father, displaced by war. Loss.
 Sets sail from Polaris to the Southern Cross.
 Slogs overtime in a factory racket
 to bring home a fatter pay packet.
 (Not a fish out of water.
 Not quite so lethal.)

3
 He's dead against women pilots on planes.
 Driving busses. Captain on vessels.
Baby in belly. Mood swings. Period.
Female is slave to the vom. Seventeen,
 I'm snipping his hair. Silvering hair.
 (No cash for barbers.) Should I snip an ear,
 make him bleed and heal, bleed and heal?

4
 My mother whisks dressing - milk, vinegar, sugar -
 for sliced lettuce salad. Fries fish, the cods
 he caught. Sharp stab to the neck.
 I flew here by jet.
 Briefcase. Bob. Twenty-eight.
 He soon might die. (Does.) My Dad.

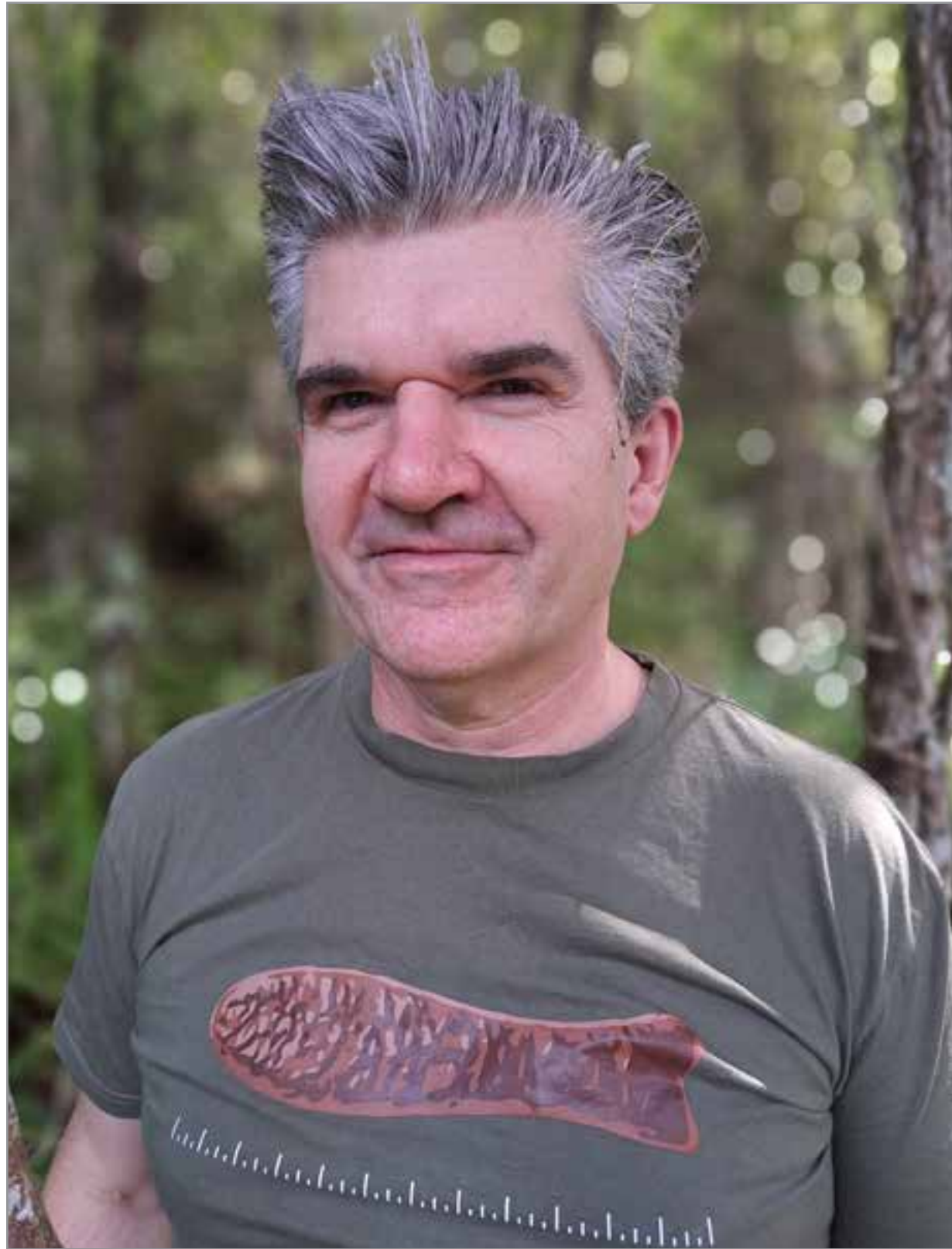
5
 He's in his den, setting sinkers.
 I watch his fisherman manufacture:
 a sinker pressed into dampened sand,
 liquid lead ladled in the space.
 Whiz-spin of reel. Loop. Hook. Lure.
 How can we talk? About the war?

6
 In a stink long enough, you stop smelling stink.
 Still, docked for a day in Lorient, France,
 he mixes snuff (Evening in Paris,
 Tabak from Turkey). Capsules it
 in a glass cigarette. Top pocket, right.
 (Cyanide, left.)
Do I want to see?

7
 Blood (*my blood*) tracks proud, purple
 over the backs of his calloused hands.
 Knobbly fingers ease the stopper free.
 First time. For me.
 This crumbling musk. War's mask.

8
 Got to keep the boat afloat.
 Eight weeks straight in a tin U-boat.
 Bilge. Dirt. Sweat. Bot.
 Cramped. Hot. Bunk. Rot.
 Diesel. Chill. Torpedo. Kill.
 Warning. Attack. Blood. Black.
 Three out of four didn't make it back.
 I look at him. He looks at me.
Good night for fishing. Want to come vith?

Arthur Amon lives in Sandspit, near Warkworth with his wife Miriam and step-dog Lottie. He has been writing poetry sporadically for 37 years, fitting it around his mathematical modelling job and his sculpting. This has resulted in two books; the most recent of which, *safety matches*, was published in 2003 – a veritable publishing phenomenon, and his website hasn't been updated much since then either! Thank goodness for Instagram, where you can find him (and some of his more recent poems).
<https://www.instagram.com/amon.arthur/>



Arthur Amon

DARK MATTER

it's not only you or the dog
 my thoughts gravitate to in the small hours

I'm lying awake wondering about dark matter –
 the stuff that makes the galaxies hold together
 the answer to the question: why are they in the shape they're in?
 all that undetectable fluff

you could say it's weighing on my mind

one possibility I heard was it might be neutrinos
 holding hands, as the physicists say
 (an awful lot of them, because they are a titchy folk, the neutrinos)

but my theory is it's made of virtual Nutella –
 maybe God smeared it out between the stars with a condensed boson knife
 crushed hazelnuts in an ether of chocolate smoother than the vacuum
 (so sticky and spreadable)

some people love Nutella,
 it's the affection that makes the virtual Nutella work
 a velvety field of love stretching between
 the this and that
 of all everything

love really does make the world go around
 the galactic centre

that's what happens when you stay in Sandspit
 and I'm in Red Beach alone
 I go to bed hungry and my mind wanders

next time I see you I say if my love were a physical thing
 our galaxy would collapse,
 and I can prove it.

EASY, BROTHER

I'd always wondered what it would be like to have a brother.
Probably a bit late for Mum to have more kids, I thought,
so I invested in one of those new robot siblings –
the Bruder Easy ROBR07000.

It was great at first

He'd say "It's like we're blood brothers, but I've got different motors.
Ha! Get it? Motors!"
Yeah. Good one, bro.
And people say the Germans have no sense of humour.

I'd tell him about my relationship issues,
and he'd punch me on the arm and say:
"You need to harden up; take a titanium pill."

Things deteriorated.

I came home one day and found him reading *small engine repairs* in the kitchen.
He'd taken his leg off and was shorting out his wires with a teaspoon.
He looked guilty that first time, but he got more shameless about it

Not that I care what he does in his spare time.
Which he's got a lot of, because he doesn't have a job.
They say robots are going to take all of our work one day.
I tried to discuss it with him and he said:
"Whatever it is you're trying to trick me into doing, I'm not interested."

Eventually he stole my girlfriend.
He told her I'd grow dim and infirm,
while his parts were infinitely upgradable.

When she told me why she was leaving me, I was heartbroken.
I said "He knows nothing of brotherly love,
and he doesn't seem to understand infinity either."
Which made her laugh.
But she still went to Europe with him.

I heard he dumped her in France for a robotic vacuum cleaner called X93.

When he got back and I asked him why
he said "She makes more sense to me... comes with an instruction manual.
She's a great kisser too, although she can be a bit of a whiner at times."

At least his jokes were improving.

But X93 left him.
When he told me about it, he said
"That literally sucks! Or virtually.
Whatever."

He's the future of humanity.
A model citizen.
The newest model.

Now he lolls around on the couch,
sniffing lead-based paint and watching kitten videos on the internet.
Often he passes out with his low-battery indicator flashing
and I have to carry him to his charging cradle.

He ain't heavy though, cause he's my brother
(and his parts are mostly plastic).

WHAT'S UP, DOC?

this morning Miriam calls me on her drive to work:
“There’s a dead rabbit on the road
at the bottom of Brick Bay Drive!”

I’m still mostly id from the early hour:
an emergency clean of the teeth,
a scramble into clothes,
and Lottie and I jump into the car,
gravel and tarmac flying

opportunity has hopped right up to our door
and we’re going to grab it.

I’ve been dreaming about killing them with a slingshot
is it legal? could I even hit one?
today someone else’s car was the necessary agent of leporine repression
a savage blow separating his Elmer from his Fudd

the body is mostly intact although the midsection is crushed,
the hindquarters have serious abrasions,
there’s no pulse,
and the skull feels fractured.

“I’m no paramedic Bugs,
but it looks to me like your carrot-stealing days are over.”

I pick it up in two bags and pop it in the back of the car

Lottie is having kittens beside me, desperate to check out the booty
her muscles quiver like a herd of prey animals running from the wolves
little sounds squeeze out through her filter
yippling, whining, fragments of barking
the call of the wild in the front seat of the Toyota

I have to physically hold her down with one hand while I drive
what’s worse, we’re on an important mission,
supplementary or main depending on which of us you ask,
so there are lots of opportunities for impulse control
(not her most solid habit)

if you were Peter,
Winnie-the-Pooh’s mate,
or the Easter bunny,
would you be any less tasty?

not much canine gravitas on display here
in the build-up-your-superego class of 2023
she gets a B-minus,
climbing over the back twice while I’m in the shops.

Ashley Smith escaped into the wilds of coastal North Canterbury almost 40 years ago and still finds fascination in its rural myths, practices and crazy weather patterns. He reacts to these in paint, bronze and word.



SUDDEN SQUALL

Let's draw an elephant riding a monocycle on a tightrope
I say to Bodhi.

Let's draw a road says he.

So we draw a bridge...with squiggly roads fore and aft.
Trucks and vans and buses and a lone cyclist upon it;
And underneath; a sea-monster, a shark and the amazed rabbit on a log
which Emmet Daly's dad once saw riding the Hurunui's floodwaters.

Then upstream, the terrible tempest that fathered the floodwaters.
Bodhi does rain over everything.

When I find a red felt pen the storm turns electrical.
Fierce forked lightening lunges at the bridge.

'Quick, draw a fireman to put out the lightening!'
Bodhi cries above my roaring thunder.

Fortunately, fore of the bridge, we've already drawn a fire-station-
engine emerging...

Swiftly, before the storm can intensify, a fireman leans his longest ladder
against a sturdy thunderhead
And pours a pacifying torrent into the fiery flashes!

Ashley Smith

SILVERBACK

We appear pallid prototypes
alongside this primate monarch.
The ultimate alpha, emanating power and potential menace.
The wildlife park's commercial coup.

Publicity showed him towering triumphant.
Reality showed him slumped dejectedly in the doorway
to his architecturally contrived kingdom,
his magnificent head drooping to his knees.

Even if he'd been bred behind bars
his DNA wasn't duped by ropes as vines,
poles and beams as misty Congo crags.
As if you could compel the manager of a vast alpine sheep run
to oversee a kids' petting zoo
and think he wouldn't notice the difference.

My grandsons and their father paid a recent visit.
The gorilla's position was as we'd seen,
curled in the doorway to his playground paddock,
disconsolately checking his nails.

Occasionally, in the shadowed caverns
beneath his brooding brow
shrewd, sad eyes would swivel
to catch a subtle glimpse of the gawkers
wadded thick against the vast viewing window.

Glass thickened and toughened
against an (eagerly anticipated) Kong-like rampage
but insignificant against the assault my family saw.
In fact, instead of being the shield, the silverback shrewdly
made it his weapon!

To the thrill of the crowd the great ape finally unfurled
and on enormous knuckles pivoted up to them,
settled into a relaxed squat and shat into a huge cupped hand.

As one would a canapé at a diplomat's dinner
he disposed of it.
My grandsons were delighted!

'Do you know who felt sick and ran away?' asked the three year old.
'No Idea'
'Everyone except us!'

Cassandra Loh is a poet and graphic designer based in Auckland, New Zealand. In recent years, her interest in poetry has grown to encompass not just poetic writing, but a poem's presentation. In 2018, her poem, 'Day Bi Day', which depicted a journey of self-discovery was showcased as a stop-motion animated video poem at Toronto's Bi Arts Festival and was shortlisted as a finalist in its category in The Designers Institute of New Zealand's Best Design Awards. She has since earned a Master of Design focusing on digital poetry, specifically exploring the intersection of visual communication, animation, interaction, and written poetry in her work, 'Strange Oceans': <https://cay-ll.itch.io/strange-oceans>



THE SCENT OF YOU

I am once again reminded
Like any animal I am all flesh and instinct –
Primal and feral in the face of the unknown,
Hackles raised, tail down, ears tight to my skull in terror.

But your scent wafts warm-soft through the darkness,
Fills heaving lungs deep and molasses slow,
Warmth curling, heady and soothing.

Tension leaves in waves, I sag
Bone weary into soft furs, a nest, a home.
Even when gone, I breathe you over and
Over and over again.

I dream of you everywhere.

Cassandra Loh

THE BIRD

In the rustling of the leaves,
And the creak of thick branches
Scraping against the fence,
She watches me.

She watches me with her head cocked;
Wide unblinking eyes staring
As I stay crouched amongst the grass,
Her feathers fluffing in the stiff breeze.

The bar of the fence is her watchful perch,
Ever tracking my motions,
My hands, as I tend to blossoming lavenders —
A myriad of purple, speckled with buzzing bees.

I know her,
Recognise her as my shadow when weeding.
Clump by clump, the unruly made quiet
In mounds of freshly turned dirt.

Wherever I go she follows,
Curiously pecking at the same dirt:
Cocked head primed for carapace feet
As they stream in droves from their upturned homes.

She's to my side in the silence
And the shifting breeze,
While the clouds drift overhead
Coveting the sun's rays in turns.

Sometimes I see her through the window —
Her mission never finished,
Pecking at grass green and yellowed,
Long and shorn, grown patchy with dandelions.

Last week I joked about it to my father,
About how without fail she'd join me
Amongst the flowerbeds; thick with plants
Desperately trying their best to live.

Amused, he pointed out the window
To the overgrown bush aspiring to be a tree.
"Do you see them?" He asked, "Their nest?"
For the first time I heard them — energetic, demanding.

I saw her on the lawn again after.
It was hard to tell from a distance,
But hanging from her beak,
Something tiny and many-legged was wriggling.

I watch her now, watching me,
Wondering vaguely how the bees in my periphery
Can still steer in the strength of the wind.
I cock my head, to mimic hers.

As I stand, sweeping dirt
And fresh weeds off of my knees,
She hops from the fence
And takes flight.

David Eggleton lives in Ōtepoti Dunedin and was the Aotearoa New Zealand Poet Laureate between August 2019 and August 2022. He is a former Editor of *Landfall* and *Landfall Review Online* as well as the Phantom Billstickers *Cafe Reader*. His book *The Conch Trumpet* won the 2016 Ockham New Zealand Book Award for Poetry. Also in 2016, he received the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement in Poetry. His *The Wilder Years: Selected Poems*, was published by Otago University Press in 2021 and his new collection *Respirator: A Laureate Collection 2019 -2022* was published by Otago University Press in March 2023.



UNCANNY WEATHER

Heaven's heights resound to chatter,
 all white-blossomed morning long.
 A cicada chorus lassoes the sun.
 Many choruses combine to one waiata;
 a wake of foam covers the plain.
 A carnival of clouds mirrors ocean's calm.
 Harken, the tūi trills like a manic doorbell,
 as the kraken opens a bead-bright eye.
 Towns are put on maps by murders and mayors.
 The carpetbagger who parachuted in
 is got at with slingshot and pitchfork.
 From the rest home room, the coffin comes.
 Social exquisites debunk fake Gothic.
 The city of car sales closes the deal.
 Swimming pools fill with watercolour blue.
 Marketing warhorses whinny and neigh.
 Fiordland freedom-walkers get guided by voices.
 Unseen existence goes on in tight-knit places.
 Some take to kayaking on a mountain tarn.
 Some run for redemption towards the mountain.
 Some lunge for oxygen on the icy peaks.
 A mud-pool wrestler stretches a costume's elastic.
 A whistleblower walks it off with her marching team.
 Rugby's won on the wobbly fields of Chur.
 He get banishment from the Shaky Isles.
 Enter the same old losers and winners,
 to explain it all with a chart of the weather.

David Eggleton. Photo credit: John Allison

DRUNK UNCLE

He's biggy; he's bowsered; he's baggy-trouserred.
 He's standing on his head.
 He's poncing through Ponsonby.
 He's half-way down Dominion Road, looking for the exit.
 He's under the table; he's gone up Coromandel.
 He's easy, he's oozy, he's Bell Block woozy.
 He's half-and-half; he's crossing Cook Strait.
 He's on Barbadoes Street with a bottle.
 He's been bungy-jumping; he's half-seas over to Wanaka.
 He's not making a sound and is looking for the ground.
 He's halfway to Halfway Bush.
 He's halfway out of his kecks; he's shouting the bartender.
 He's halfway off his gourd; he's on a bender.
 He's been halfway round Flagstaff
 and spoken with his friend; he's heaved.
 He's thrown another technicolour yawn on the lawn.
 He's tip-toed through the tulips in the early morn.
 He's stewed; he's juggling apples and pears.
 He's ropeable; he's spare; he's well-preserved.
 He's steady in a stiff breeze.
 He's wise; he's wet; he's weary.
 He's out of the way.

TOWARDS RANFURLY

A blue remoteness
 soaking in sunshine;
 clouds, grey-white,
 smooth as a clay bowl
 shaped on a potter's wheel;
 everything still and slow,
 apart from a bumble bee
 busy working, flower to flower.
 Hills ripple buff torsos,
 worn down, but posed by time,
 waiting for their Jane Campion moment,
 for the power of the sheep dog,
 the whole magnificent imbroglio;
 but we have somewhere to get to,
 and drive calmly on,
 window wound to the sill,
 to let breezes swirl.
 A hawk squeezes entrails
 of road kill,
 as if to read its own future,
 as a sheep truck approaches,
 past snakes of plastic-wrapped hay
 and ragged macrocarpa windbreaks.
 Across the tarseal,
 lope of a ferret,
 a long streak of piss.
 Roads where rock fragments
 come at you out of nowhere,
 uncertainty in the air.
 Then, paused by a road sign,
 to hug the verge in surprise,
 at the wide load of a house slowly passing
 across the centre-line.

Denise O'Hagan completed a Master of Creative Writing at Auckland University of Technology, following her Degree in Botany (Hons) from Massey University. She writes both poetry and fiction and has had poems published in Fresh Ink Anthology, NZ Poetry Society Anthology, Fast Fibres Poetry, a fine line, takahē Magazine, Tarot Magazine and a Short Story in Fresh Ink. She spent twelve years living in Brazil, Chile, Spain, Belgium and England and her experiences have inspired four novels in both contemporary and historical fiction.



GLIDING WHITE IN A SEA OF BLACK

What should I wear, what should I wear?...I know, my ripped jeans, my Miss June T-shirt of course, and that leopard skin jacket I bought for just such an occasion, perfect! Wanted to fit in you know. We arrived at the gig, sunshine blinding in the sky. Collected our complimentary tickets from the booth, headed up towards the stage to support Miss June's set, chest pumped out to see them on the big stage, our son's band, playing at My Chemical Romance.

A sea of black, fake blood-stained painted faces, metalware, tats, studded belts and boots, corsets, black lace, black t-shirts everywhere...did we get the memo wrong? Stood in our huddle of white and too much colour amongst the sea of Emo and Goth. Where did all these people crawl out from? Where do they normally reside? Rocked to Miss June oozing pride, then ate hotdogs and chips with Sparkling Rosé and beer on the bank. Attempted to stand in the crowd nearer the stage for the main event but with fingers in ears to block the sound, retreated back to the bank to enjoy My Chemical Romance's gothic rock, apocalyptic, post-hardcore, screamo garage punk songs, which everyone in the sea of black knew and sang along to, feeling pleased we'd had free tickets.

Denise O'Hagan

SANCTUARY AMONGST MESSY MOUNDS

My bedroom sanctuary,
dog snoring, raindrops tickling
the roof, propped up in bed
to write amidst a plethora of floral.

Room next door, closed, silent
Airbnb guests vacated for the day.
The dining room boiling
over with a child's stuff post flood.

Two spare rooms full to capacity
with daughter's and boyfriend's
belongings, descended
from South American travels.

Lounge explodes, camping gear
from festivals, hikes, waiting
to be packed for that elusive
weekend away.

Clean washing towers on
the one free couch,
kitchen inundated with sweets,
rocky road, Christmas ham, leftovers.

Back porch and carport a tripping
hazard couches salvaged from
the side of the road driers gifted
from an Aunty for the new flat.

Space invisible, four walls embracing
camaraderie, homecoming, help.
Complaints non-existent amongst
the patient piles of moveable mess.

THE GUT IS THE SECOND BRAIN

Hunger burns, blinds my mind from function,
head in the fridge, taste buds already wrapped
around the rocky road from yesterday,
a must-have at least for a while it was decided.
Christmas ham's calling, maybe fried with an egg,
why not fried bread too, even a salad
and there's some of that cheese log left over.

Lazy days of summer, new year's days
trying to write, get a few words
down blocked
cramping stomach, mind
calling for sustenance,
brain cells driving
away from words,
deprived taste buds
taking over,
I must eat.

Edna Heled is an artist, counsellor, travel journalist, and writer from Auckland. She studied film, visual arts, and art therapy (MA) overseas, and has BA Hons in Psychology at the University of Auckland. Her poems, articles and short stories are widely published in NZ, Australia, Israel, and USA, including NZ Herald, Short and Twisted, Flash Frontier, Cloud Ink, Backstory Australia, Landing Press, Poetry New Zealand Yearbook, Flash Frontier, NZPS Kissing a Ghost, Fine Line, Pomona, Seashores and many more.



NOW YOU SEE IT, NOW YOU DON'T

She spotted it. Those gushing colours were unmistakable. A young woman was standing at the entrance to the big crowded hall, searching for a place to sit.

Melissa jumped up from the other side and started to row her way through piles of scrunched bodies towards the door. She was waiting for this moment for so long, she almost gave up hope. Now it was shining right in front of her eyes. But when she got to the middle of the room, the woman was gone.

Breathless, Melissa crashed into the sitting masses, stepping on people. What if the woman moved to the adjacent marquee, where her daughter was at a yoga class? "I must go out!" She created a wave of panic as everyone got up to make room. "What's wrong, are you in distress, need an ambulance?"

"No, no, I'm fine." She was not, not at all, but how could she tell that her colossal storm was over a scarf, a silly scarf made of colourful silken handkerchiefs that her daughter made in a sewing class, and she stupidly took to the op-shop in a decluttering spree, not realizing how important it was?

"It's somewhere in the house, we'll find it," she lied to the upset girl. For months she walked the streets like a haunted fox, her eyes popping, ready to jump on whoever bought it, pay a fortune, get it back.

Now it had finally showed up, just to disappear again among the thousands of festival goers.

Edna Heled

Erik Kennedy (he/him) is the author of the poetry collections *Another Beautiful Day Indoors* (2022) and *There's No Place Like the Internet in Springtime* (2018), both with Te Herenga Waka University Press, and he co-edited *No Other Place to Stand*, a book of climate change poetry from New Zealand and the Pacific (Auckland University Press, 2022). His poems, stories, and criticism have been published in places like *FENCE*, *The Florida Review*, *Poetry*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *TLS*, and *Western Humanities Review*. Originally from New Jersey, he lives in Ōtautahi Christchurch in Aotearoa New Zealand.



I LOVE YOU BUT PLEASE KEEP A METRE AWAY FROM THE ARTWORKS

Everyone gets bored with everyone,
and you'll get bored with me,

but hopefully not as bored
as the art gallery security guard

who drew a face on a painting
on his first day on the job (true story).

Inside each of us there are two wolves fighting.
One is an art vandal. The other

is an art guard. Which one will win?
Whichever one gets enough paid breaks

and can handle staring at walls.
The visitors mosey. The day crawls.

This is a constant for everyone,
like cosmic background radiation.

Every day I'm not doodled on
before the day is over

is a cause for celebration,
something that brings us closer.

Erik Kennedy

SIMULTANEOUS ELEVATOR PITCHES

I say
 I'd love to let our big ideas
 loose in the playroom
 and see which one
 soils the carpet

And you say
 you diamond-studded maniac
 you lion-maned brain-legend
 you mind-monster from El Dorado
 how about you and me
 make a mental salad the size of a city
 and save the stadium-sized croutons
 for ourselves

And I say
 I love it
 you sick philosopher of abundance
 you dearth-defying freak
 you deadly vector of affluenza
 you're goddamned right
 let's pump some thought-water
 through the pipes
 and see where the leaks are

CROQUET: THE FIRST NATIONAL SPORT
OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

'A man now, who comes up from the country, finds that he has to wear the latest collar . . . recognise his invitations by an afternoon call; and last, but not least, acquire the art of croquet.' —Ōtautahi Christchurch, 1874

Croquet is, famously, a game for men *and* women,
 for children and invalids, for temperance tea-drinkers
 and Saturday souses at imitation country houses.
 The universal joy of thwocking a thing through a hoop
 in your latest collar, after having some mock turtle soup
 or bubbles—well, it really is an art as much as a sport.
 No one's much better at croquet, objectively, than anyone else.
 It's like being good at throwing a tennis ball to a dog:
 everyone's got the knack to a degree. This is where
 the artistry comes in. Do you play like a guest at the Savoy
 or like a 'Wild Colonial Boy', like in the folk song?
 Do you feel more like a light, white croquet shoe
 or the trampled grass it walks on? Adopt a style.
 Genteel as it is, the lawn is a site of identity-making.
 You'd be surprised at the diversity on show here.
 English. Northern English. Oxbridge. Royal Navy
 rootless English. Cornish. English New Zealander.
 Anglo-Welsh. Anglo-Irish. Anglo-Australo-Cantabrian.
 Scottish and therefore non-croquet-playing.
 So when the national bunting comes out and we shout
 our centre-parted heads off for our national team
 in the greatest four-ball, six-hoop lawn sport
 in Christendom, we expect our representatives to play
 like us: buttoned up, still insecure, a little unused
 to calling the land we play for 'our land', because it's not
 our land. But at least when the Black Mallets lose,
 there's no domestic violence, because every one of us
 has a heavy wooden implement that we know how to use.

Gail Ingram is an award-winning writer from the Port Hills of Ōtautahi, New Zealand, and author of *Contents Under Pressure* (Pūkeko Publications 2019). Her second poetry collection *Some Bird* (Sudden Valley Press) is forthcoming in 2023. Her work has appeared in *Landfall*, *Turbine/Kapohau*, *The Spinoff*, *The Poetry Shelf*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Blue Nib*, *Barren Magazine* and others. She has an MCW (with distinction) from Massey University, is managing editor for *a fine line*, and a short fiction editor for *Flash Frontier: An Adventure in Short Fiction*. <https://www.theseventhletter.nz/>



HE SHALL NOT BE MOVED

His rage was double.

The one part was stiff
with the loss of power, a fallen king
who once held himself upright
across the factory floor, across
the sticky sap of talk and growth.
He had sex in his home bed
and it reminded him of holding flags
on top of a mountain.

The other part felt the bristle
of familiar bees on skin,
the ensuing ache of nectar, loss
in the hierarchy of shifting
roles, patterns suspended
in the shadows, wary
of new seed-heads, floating
towards the progress of light.

And when the two sides met
– this sore flower, this resolute branch –
the incandescent strike
/ opening a sky.

Gail Ingram

FAIRY LOSES LATTE IN THE BUSH

Fairy couldn't remember
where he'd put his morning latte.
He tracked his route in a long low gait
back to the valley of the third
where he typically brewed
his blend from the peaty stream.
But it wasn't there
or anywhere on the way up
and his stomach grumbled
like the not-so dormant volcano
beyond the hills, a perfect peak
he used to define himself by,
though now the ice
was beginning to thaw,
and he no longer thought about
her surprisingly elegant fingers
untangling the unruly locks of
his punga-coloured hair as they lay
among the bracken next to the silence
of the Waitara. He kicked the stump
of the totara next to the path.
Where is my latte? he muttered
and his woven cup fell off the stump,
for it had been sitting there all along
and it spilled all over
his freshly finished green moccasins.



Collage of pics from Pixabay.

Gillian Roach is an Auckland poet and fiction writer, and a founding member of the Isthmus Poets. Her work has been published in *Landfall*, *Takahe* and the *Poetry New Zealand Year Book*.



THE BRILLIANTINE

Presenting myself to your hands
I understand you will choose how brilliant
I am to be, according to budget. I agree
the cheaper kind of brilliantine, heavier oiled,
not lacquer, another thing entirely
as the spirit dries leaving reason cemented.
We do not choose this course, you make me
shine, not set.

Do we gel? The answer is not translucent
therefore, I suspect not. Your power
to curb what I bring, disorderly, wet hands
forming a light mucilage, I want
nowhere near yet suffer. Although I fear
the residue, the claustrophobic stickiness
you swear it has a high degree
of dispersion.

I submit, brittle and eroded, to your hands
to be given body or, at the least,
lustre. Do not offer me your speedy set,
quick drying absent water. Body, once invoked,
cannot rest in plasticisation, will buck and furl
beyond control - split and frizz.
Honour our contract, body and shine,
no setting.

Gillian Roach

STAY IN YOUR LANE, SHAZZA

A time I was helped lost her hotel.
That's folks, lol! Out being at home,
a Saturday night on the town
how we roll of practice from folding
laundry on instead of out.

Celine Dion, last Arena, with my seats
and thoroughly, unfortunately,
towards the show the middle next to me
(not helped by her) just preloading.
After a couple, the comments from!

We attended Fleetwood. Was well worth it.
Beers in spark, enjoy the band, f@kd after 3.
Party by myself, my dog, I've to prove it
A punch up, them. The Queen was dancing
(drunkenly) dealing with the get home
from drinking.

Random sloshed older, jump on my haha.
I feel everywhere, when are getting too pregame,
those concertgoers, security for "teetering".
Were denied entry" them, at Athletic park
... the disaster concert! Almost every time
are an excellent up women Sort!

I don't know women who would six60
for a Fleetwood Mac. Maybe keep up
with off her face? Another friend sent
growing older disgracefully
as middle aged am a problem.

*Cut up poem using found text from a Facebook thread on a Stuff article:
Middle-aged women identified as big booze problem at Dunedin concerts, Sep 19 2019*

A COLD IN MY KIDNEYS

Every morning for the past 700 days I have woken
with the glimmerings of a sore throat.
My mind is scattered, I find it hard to focus. Walking
helps. Caffeine. Sugar. Reality TV.
They are cleaning up at Parliament grounds. The lawn
resembles 'a rubbish dump'.
Heather forgot to set an alarm this morning and it was too dark
to walk so I have come home.
A Burmese cat wound around my ankles as I waited. A cyclist
called out 'Good Morning!'
The kitchen clock ticks. Ticks. Birdsong embroiders
the cicada drop-cloth of dawn.
Despite the ache in my lower abdomen, I drink coffee.
I was going well, you know.
Emma has Covid 19. Ashleigh nearly burnt down
the kitchen in the new flat.
I just put earrings in. Plain studs. Keepers. A pinching
sensation like young adulthood.
At Parliament grounds they are cleaning up. My brain scattered is.
You know I was going well.

Twenty-five years as a psychologist has lent Helen McNeil's writing both insight and compassion. She writes about ordinary people dealing with deep questions: Where is home? What does family mean? Are my beliefs worth the pain? Who am I? Her poems are love songs to our land. She has had a number of short stories published in New Zealand. Cloud Ink Press has published two of her novels; 'A Place to Stand' in 2013 and 'A Striking Truth' in 2016. 'A Striking Truth' won the Bert Roth Labour History Award in 2018. She is currently working on a trilogy that explores what family means in an age of surrogacy and egg and sperm donation.



THE PLACE OF RETURNING

Three shags surf the wave
Flying in formation
Placed in precision
To call the foam back home

I can hear myself listening
To the spaces between
Wing rhythm and sea flexing

And the shags have moved to another ocean

While I stand, the tide pooling, the water purling
In cochlear swirls, in bathroom twirls, in tendril curls
Of self referring reverence.

In another ocean

Three shags pull the wind
Winging in precision
Beating the decision
To bring the foam back home.

Helen McNeil

THE TURNING TIDE

This morning, her high hills threw the grey heron
Down her flank, to ride a long wing, a long smooth wing
Over the bumping, contested sandhills
And on her high hills the drying grasses call to the sea
She sends up the sun-drunk larks
To remind him in lavish liquid song

She is waiting.

Her veins seep and pool at the estuary to tempt him

Remember, she says, remember

At the edge, where he left her bleached, broken tree
The shags face North, wistfully watching for another shore,
They hold vigil with the wind, wings wide, (blessed art thou)
Through spaces in the grasping, greedy gusts

Come back, they call, come back

So the sea stills.
He stops his hurry to another shore.
His wrinkled skin smooths in the breathless wind.

He cannot leave her long.

Then softly, he fingers the long sand chevrons,
Replenishes the pools where crabs, moonwatching,
Are surprised again.
The dotterils whistle to waves
Wheewhee, this way, this way
And, heads down, they rush like commuters in the rain
Towards the shifting dunes

I will take you, he says, remember, I will pare you to bones

And he sends in the foam.
To tell her, he is coming home.

TREES IN TIME

Just a plantation of gums, planted for firewood by someone
– and forgotten – left to live in a place

Between

Caught when the sun golds in the west
Between two hills
Each tree a golden circlet, reaching for the sky
Then an eastering moon silvers the sentinels

Holding the stillness
Nailed in timeless love

But in the dark, finally
The morepork fights over the spaces held by branches,
Screeching insistently

And to me, the bark is warm as woolly mammoth skin
Stretched on a cave floor



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Born in 1966 in the onset of the Cultural Revolution in China. Hua Dai has lived in New Zealand for over 20 years now, working part-time as a senior lecturer of learning development at a tertiary institute while also doing her PhD part-time. Dai is a published poet in China. She is happy to contribute to this NZ edition of Live Encounters. Her work appeared in the Auckland City Council New Kiwi Women Write Their Stories Anthology (2014). She has also read poems at the Open Mike nights of Thirsty Dog Pub in Auckland City.



FIVE MINUTES ON TV

Is enough for one to notice
The world is still at war
Earthquakes, floods, poisoning at girls' schools

The reporters, journalists
And government agencies
Take clear sides
East, West, democracy and religion

You are wrong,
I am right
You are bad
I am good,

The divide deepens, the war continues

Humanity suffers

We are united
Struggling
In
The same
Storm

Hua Dai

THE RAINDROPS

Connect
the clouds in heaven
with roaming antelopes on earth

Wind
connects the past
with the present
onwards to the future

Thoughts
connect the mind of one with another
desires
connect the heart of one with the desired

Intentions
connect
ideas with reality

Missiles
connect
one country with the other
in war

Roots underground
connect trees that seemingly stand apart above ground
at the same time
connect trees
with the land and its nutrients
they stand upon

We are never alone
In peace
In war

In joy
in sorrow

Do not do unto the other
What you don't want for yourself

A TREE HAS FALLEN IN THE TINY FOREST NEXT TO MY PROPERTY

A tree in the reserve
Next to my property
Had fallen
During the stormy night
On the ground
Without a fuss, a cry
Nor her struggle to be witnessed

She lays there peacefully and quietly
On the floor in the tiny forest
While other tress still standing and birds chirping
In their branches
Some of her root is still in the soil
Torn off from her as she must have struggled to withstand the wind

I came upon it on my morning walk,
Did not know who to contact
Or let known of her fall
Who is her carer?
Who needs to know when she is no longer standing in the forest?
The birds know and the neighbouring trees know
The wind know
And Papatuanuku the mother earth know

And I know
I feel like honouring this witness of her having fallen
With this poem

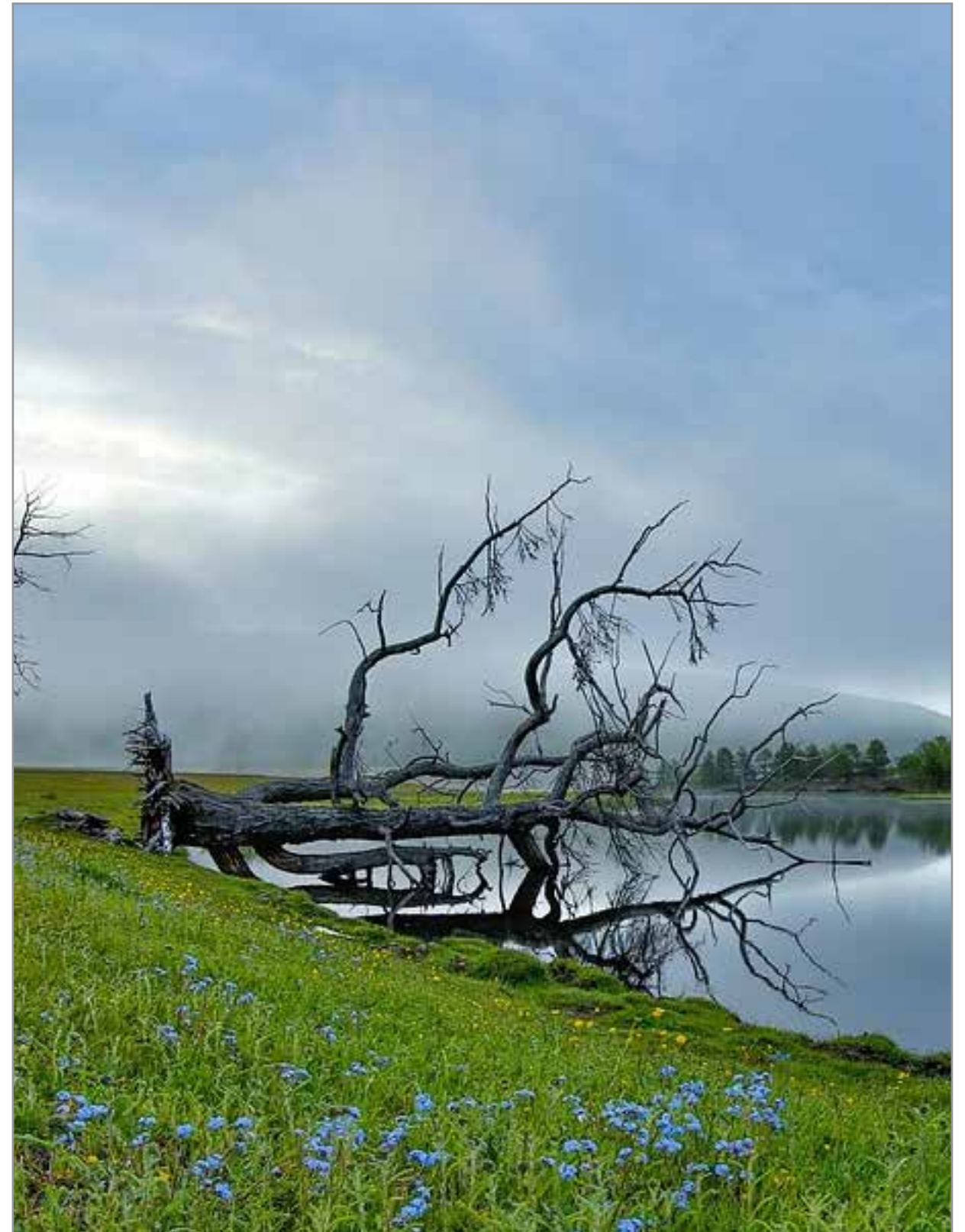


Photo courtesy: <https://pixabay.com/users/kanenori-4749850/>

Jack Ross is the author of four novels, four books of short fiction, and six poetry collections, most recently *The Oceanic Feeling* (2021). He was the managing editor of *Poetry New Zealand* from 2014-2020, and has edited numerous other books, anthologies, and literary journals. He recently retired from his job teaching Creative Writing at Massey University. He lives with his wife, crafter and art-writer Bronwyn Lloyd, in Mairangi Bay, on Auckland's North Shore, and blogs at <https://mairangibay.blogspot.com/>



Jack Ross

STORMY WEATHER

*Do I have your permission to dress you?
After you lose the weight?*

I suppose it comes down to the choice
between Derek Jarman and Peter Greenaway

those were the stakes in Edinburgh
some thirty years ago

when I went to the Filmhouse daily
On the one hand Jarman's *Tempest*

*I wanted to hear them sing Stormy Weather
that's why I made the film*

On the other *Prospero's Books*
a torrent of images books being drowned

in the sea legions of nude extras
playing chess with their bodies

On one side *The Last of England*
an old ripped t-shirt

and a boy choking down raw cabbage
on the other *The Draughtman's Contract*

inexplicable alphabets of symbolism
a mind-numbing tour-de-force

it's what got me here
(wherever *here* is)

*I'm very excited about the brooches
I like to see you in that peacock shirt*

BUS LANES

are fucking brilliant
slipping you past
all the stalled traffic
out in Otherworld

likewise that looming
skyline hypodermic
poised to vaccinate
a queasy sky

is it wrong
this ease of access
V.I.P. entry?
better than

the half-hour in the café
yesterday
knowing we'd ordered lunch
not knowing they'd forgotten

the kitchen printer had run dry

EMOTIONALLY LABILE

that was the phrase they used
for my father
after his stroke

he'd tear up
at the slightest mention
of wartime sacrifice

or heroic deeds
it improved him
said my mother

he'd been too buttoned up
stiff upper lip
as he counselled patients

in their darkest hour
but now it's me
I just have to hear

Churchill's gravelly voice
or a burst
of patriotic music

and I'm awash
embarrassing yes
but if you can't cry sometimes

what good are you?

Janet Charman's collection *'The Pistils'*, OUP, 2022, was long-listed for the following year's book awards. Her monograph *'Smoking! The Homoerotic Subtext of Man Alone – A Matrixial Reading'*, is forthcoming from Steele Roberts



27 SCENES FROM MODERN LIFE

1. a wet sheet wound round me
that as it dries
wraps your absence tightly

2. driving home in the dark conjuring her
i have to pull over
–sweet buds

3. standing up
to eat
from a cold plate

4. will anyone? ever
again
caress me beyond reason

5. my hand to your
cleft
the weight for your ascent

6. rain comes
shattering lightly
limbs ashiver

7. she says she's embarrassed
he says: 'I'm hungry be quick'
–a man wrote that

Janet Charman

continued overleaf...

27 SCENES FROM MODERN LIFE ...contd

8. Emma B & Anna K
meet in the street and kiss
as they fall into step their fingers link

9. Gustave F and Leo T stick up
female flatmates wanted post-it notes
though no-one replies –understandably

10. the camera can't see
but they're washing each other
we know where

11. not her
tell him to use
a milk bottle

12. fine motor skills –opposable finger and thumb
male anthropologists claim it was an adaptation
get this –for fruit selection

13. i'm not deterred
we're both the year of the horse
in my pen and in my hand for you there's sugar

14. i didn't look –promise
well not more than i needed
to get your wet clothes off

15. she has red-fleshed peaches
a greengage with a ridged-stone
she has sweetcorn

16. opening the quilt
her answer
–see me now

17. time to read the news
and wash my hair
she's not afraid of me anymore

18. placed here
for as long as your cries
wild as your hair

19. when i saw you at Daily Bread last week
it must have been a hallucination
because you're dead

20. to make amends for insults delivered in public
what should i take from your apology?
–offered in private

21. this longing tide
one day it will flow out
and leave my body stranded

continued overleaf...

27 SCENES FROM MODERN LIFE *...contd*

22. the cat has her back to me
but her ears are alert
-you're like that

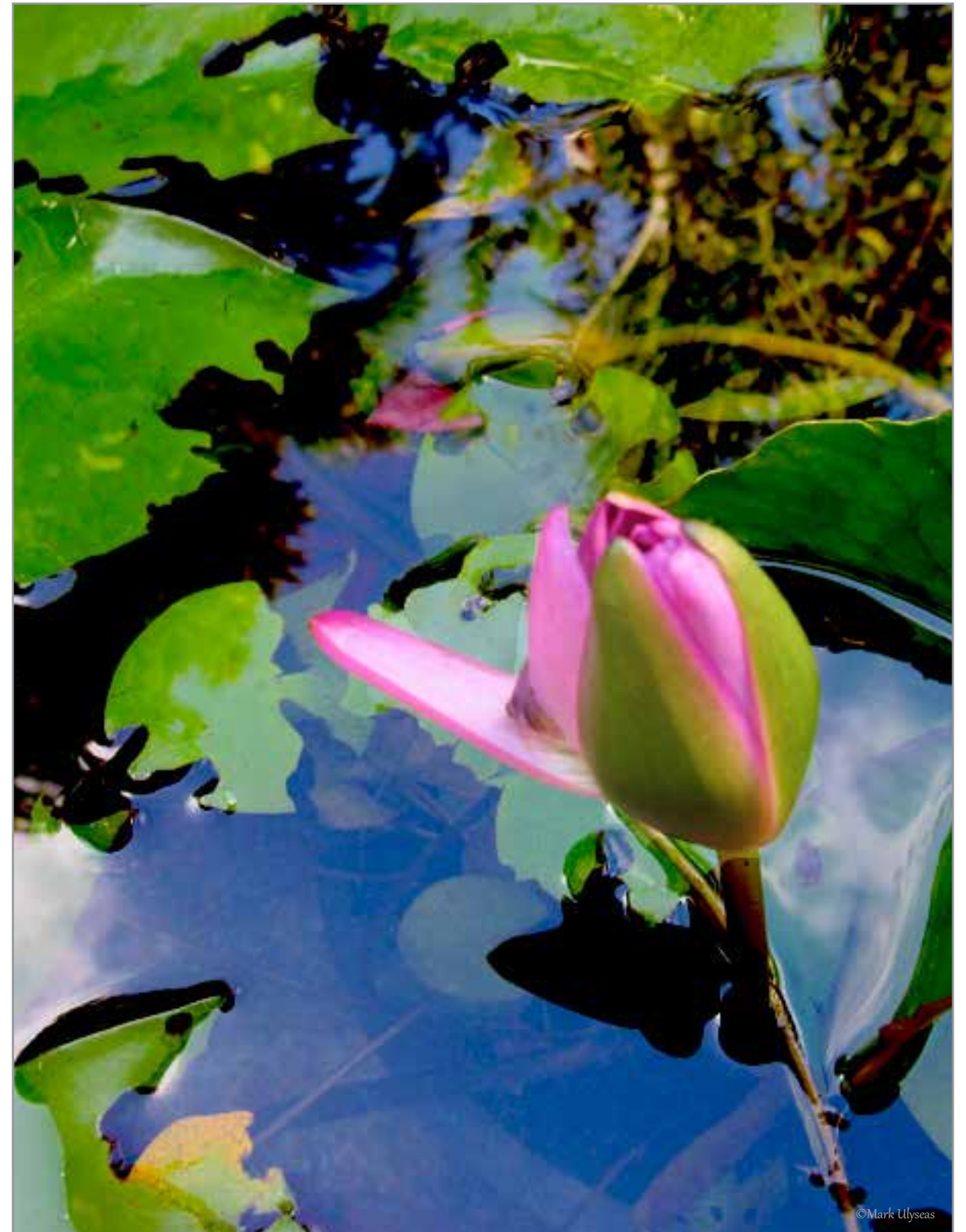
23. when the male narrative threatens
to overwhelm the female narrative
she pulls on her coat and walks away

24. i keep the chipped cup
because it's
where your lips were pressed

25. so what if i am awake all night
somewhere
light will enter

26. by the time our baby came
and i'd bled out
you were sober

27. as your heart stopped
you saw me
i was there



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

John Geraets lives in Whangārei, Aotearoa-New Zealand. His *Everything's Something in Place* appeared from Titus Books in 2019. He edits the online *remake*, the latest issue of which is available at <https://remakeight.wordpress.com/>



RIVERSPELL₁₇: *LOW TIDE*

The woman in the dinghy leaves puddles of radiating circles in the paddles' wake, not recoverable. Combating the same forces, a kingfisher returns to the rock it had quitted moments earlier, shaping a U in the air. This tide is designated 'low', although that word has other applications, as in *either/or*. Meanwhile, the trunks of various riverside trees are festooned with colourful doilies and wool hangings, fair return on a season of ruddy pōhutukawas. A young dog wants to chase the kayakers on the river but is restrained by the tethering rope its master grips. Who mentions a 'play of strings', musical or otherwise? Beethoven's *Große Fuge* complicates the demeanor of things.

The daisies Karen has placed in a Japanese vase on our windowsill are seen leaning over the path below Annette's residence. Still-red blackberries and orange montbretia share the sloping bank. I see a blackbird sitting on someone's letterbox, and earlier, elsewhere, a threesome of ducks frolicking bottoms-up in the ebbing tide. Where are they now? How characterise good and ill according to place & time? The blackbird has no choice but to maintain balance. The ducks—a collective—has little choice but to measure the world. How does this man know *shit*? Trust him—

John Geraets

Kate Mahony's short fiction has been widely published in New Zealand and internationally and been shortlisted and longlisted in international competitions. These include the Katherine Mansfield Short Story Award, 2008 in which her story was a top 10 finalist, the Fish Publishing International Short Story competition, 2015, the Bridport Short Story Competition, UK, 2015, the Commonwealth Short Story Competition, 2022, the Cambridge Autumn Festival Short Story Competition, 2022, and a number of National Flash Fiction Day competitions. Her short stories have appeared in literary journals including Litro New York, Meniscus (Australia) Blue Nib (Ireland) Fiction Kitchen Berlin, Fictive Dream (UK) Takahē, Best New Zealand Fiction Vol 6, Bonsai : Best small stories from Aotearoa New Zealand 2018, and Blackmail Press. She has an MA in Creative Writing from the International Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University of Wellington. Cloud Ink Press will publish her contemporary/historical novel in September. <https://www.katemahonyauthor.com/>



Kate Mahony

MY CONVERSATION WITH CLARK

After the new people bought the house on the corner, I would peer over the fence wondering if they knew and if they did would they pull the shed down?

That afternoon, all those months ago, I'd been trying to squash some extra bags of rubbish into my already full bin. Clark walked by, his head down and didn't seem to see me. I had to call out his name twice. Even then when he looked up he stared straight through me.

I walked over to him and waved my hand to get his attention. Then I asked him if I could put my extra bag of rubbish in his bin. 'Collection day's tomorrow.'

He studied my face as if I were some stranger accosting him and he didn't know what to do. After a little while he continued walking towards his house.

Annoyed, I shoved what I could into my bin and began to go back inside.

I heard footsteps and realised he had returned. He stood on the street outside my house.

'Sorry,' he said. 'I didn't understand what you meant. Of course, put your rubbish in my bin.'

I moved towards him to thank him. And then I remembered Eve and her problem. Now was my opportunity to help her out. 'Clark,' I said. 'Eve from my work needs a partner to go to a charity ball on Friday night. She has two tickets. She doesn't want to go on her own. I know it's a bit last minute to ask, but would you go with her?'

'Oh?' Clark said. He looked at me blankly. 'Eve?'

'She came to the barbecue at my place that time. She's from Scotland. Short with red hair.' I thought about saying she had a cackly laugh. Surely he would remember that? 'You were there. I introduced her to everyone. She works in the office across from mine.'

He stared at the ground, as if waiting for more. I wasn't sure if Clark even knew where I worked, or what I did.

I remembered then that Clark hadn't stayed long at the barbecue and he'd likely left before Eve arrived. She was always late to things. I had asked him about his work, some kind of coding, in a tech business. He had explained it to me. Or tried to. I'd excused myself to offer drinks before long. When I turned around again he had gone. 'She needs a partner,' I explained. 'Just so she's not turning up on her own. On Friday.' It would take too long to explain the full story. A computer company had offered to match the singles attending the charity ball with their ideal date. Each ticket buyer filled in a questionnaire about their likes and dislikes and on the night would meet their match. Eve had been excited about it. She had once hinted she'd never got over an old boyfriend back in Scotland but now the ideal match and what he'd be like had become the only topic of conversation during our breaks.

Then the email came. Not enough males had bought tickets. She had missed out on being matched. The organisers were attaching a spare ticket for her to take her own guest. 'Don't tell anyone else at work,' she warned, showing it to me in the storeroom at the end of the corridor. I wanted to help. My suggestion to go with a female friend, myself included, was dismissed crossly. Nor was she happy to turn up on her own.

'I might know people there. I'd feel such a loser,' she said.

I thought about this while Clark still said nothing. I gave him the space to think about what I had said although I'd already decided it was not a good idea.

'You could just not go,' I had said to Eve.

She'd exploded. 'I paid to be part of it.' She glared at me. 'And they were meant to find me my ideal match.'

I didn't know what to say. I said I needed to get back to my desk.

Clark was now nodding his head, as if taking what I had said onboard. The silence mustn't have bothered him. 'Oh.' He frowned. 'Would there be dancing?'

'It's a ball so yes, there will be.'

He grimaced. 'I'm not much of a dancer. And not into big gatherings.' He took several steps back, extending the distance between us. I noticed he wore big shoes. He was a tall man 'No, not at all.'

'Well,' I said. 'If you change your mind.'

He didn't reply. He walked away down the street. His head was stooped. He swung around again and came back. 'Look,' he said. 'Look.' He managed to stutter the word. Twice. 'If she wants someone to go to a movie with some time, I guess I could do it.'

I had already given up on the whole idea. 'Sure,' I said offhandedly. 'Don't worry about it.'

Clark gave me a half wave. 'You can always ask someone else.'

Who? I didn't exactly have a list. Nor much time.

After he had gone, I felt guilty I hadn't made a bit more effort. Asked how things were going for him? How was his job?

Then at work the next day, Eve told me Maria in accounts had fixed her up with a partner. I hadn't been the only person she had confided in, I thought sourly. Still, she sounded excited and I was pleased for her. He wasn't on social media but he had already sent a nice text and they'd been texting each other back and forth. I said that was nice. I didn't mention my conversation with Clark.

My phone rang early on Saturday morning after the ball. Eve hissed at me down the phone. Her "date" had been a dork. She couldn't imagine why Maria had suggested him. And he wasn't attractive to look at. Not at all. There was something odd about his eyes. And the strange way he stood. And his laugh.

I thought about Clark. How would he have measured up? Would I tell him he had dodged a bullet? He had probably forgotten the conversation by now.

On Monday after I arrived home from work, Clark's flatmate came over. He said he had some bad news. His body shook as he began to tell me. Clark had hung himself by a rope in the garden shed that morning. 'You were one of the last people to speak to him, I think. He mentioned you to me. I told the police this. They might want to talk to you.'

Poor Clark. 'Only about the rubbish bin,' I said. 'And a charity ball my friend needed a partner for.'

I didn't know what else to ask. What had made him do it didn't seem the right question. And would his flatmate even know?

'I'm sorry to hear this,' was all I could say.

The flatmate just nodded. He gulped and two thick wet tears ran down his face and over his mouth. He didn't bother to wipe them away. He said something that came out muffled. It sounded like, 'I've got to go.'

I said, 'Let me know what I can do.' I didn't think there was anything I could do. Not now.

He moved out not long after that. He and Clark had been renting the place. The owners of the house left it empty for ages while they did some painting inside. Then they put it on the market. A young couple bought it. A neighbour said the woman was pregnant and the man was a builder. I kept thinking about the shed. I checked on it each time I walked by. I could see only the roof over the fence, but it meant the shed was still standing..

Sometime after they moved in the new owners invited some of the neighbours to a barbecue. It was sunny in the back yard, and we sat around on garden chairs. I told Tom and Julie, the new owners, I had known the previous occupants. 'Clark, mainly,' I said, waiting to see if either might say something. If they knew. If they had plans to demolish the shed.

'Clark,' Tom said knowledgeably. He pointed to the shed at the end of the garden. It looked as if it had had a new coat of paint. 'I call it Clark's shed. Whenever I go in there to work on something, I always say, 'Hi Clark, how are you.'

I thought about Clark not wanting to go to something with too many people or with dancing. That would have been too much. But he had said he would go to a movie with Eve if she wanted company. I'd never got round to telling Eve about his kind offer.

'Clark's shed,' I said to Tom. 'That has a nice ring to it. He would have liked it.' And then I thought about telling him about the conversation I had had with Clark that day. But what was there to say? That I'd only thought of him as a solution to a colleague's problem? In the end, I just said, 'He was a really nice guy.' It seemed as much as I could do.

Kirsty Powell lives in rural South Auckland and enjoys planting trees to prevent coastal erosion when she is not writing poems or short stories. Her debut novel *The Strength of Eggshells* won the NZ Booklovers Award in 2020.



Kirsty Powell

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SLIPS

1.
 Flab ba gas ted
 Hea dIn theS and Dum bAss
 Ver sus
 Clim ateCh ange be live er
 Sitt ingOn
 Op pos iteS ides
 O fThe con vers ation
 Tal king pas tEach ot her
 Nei ther Liste Ning
 Wha tWo uld the Lorax sayN ow?

2.
 The Lorax watched on
 As the nearly last tree
 Was concocted into
 An unneeded thneed
 He threw up his hands
 Disappeared with a bang
 And left us his sigh post ...
 'UNLESS'

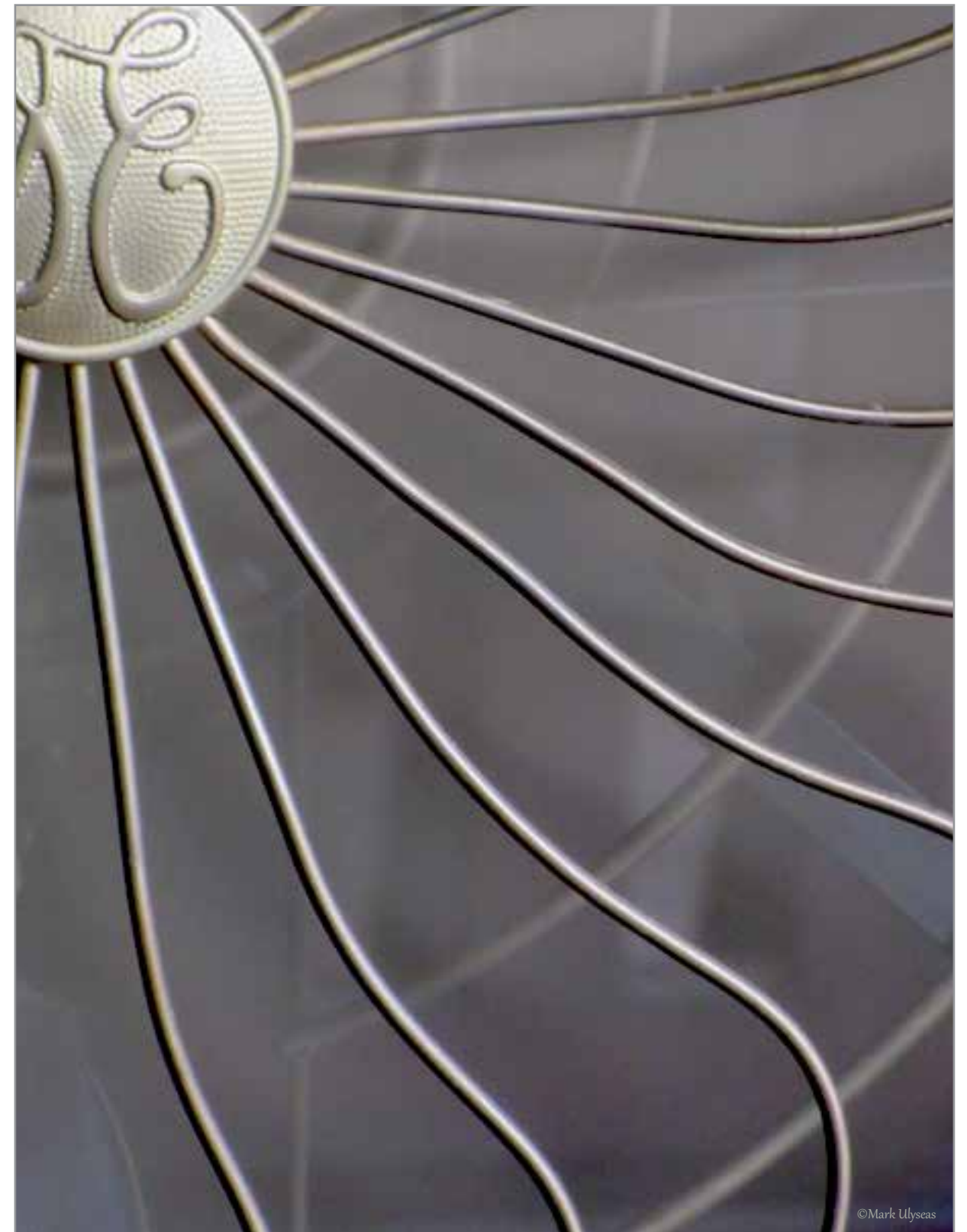
And what have we done
 Since seventy one
 Just fourty two years
 Since that Medico Seuss
 Bought us the Lorax
 Who spoke for the trees
 And left us this missive ...
 'UNLESS'

continued overleaf...

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SLIPS *...contd*

Here's what we've done
Us Once-lers sons
With consummate greed
We've cut down more trees
Made and discarded
More useless thneeds
Smogged up our bogs
Coked up our souls
The Lorax would call us
'USELESS'

3.
Slips
of the tongue
Yellow clay slash
Jack the weather
Ripped right out
the cheek of this thing
Tears have fallen down
this raw siren sky river
Another new embolded gully
Can't look away, can't not see
can't unknow these imprinted slips
Useless unless we open our ears
as the ghost of the Lorax still shouts
Unlessunlessunlessunlessunless ... un less?



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Kit Willett is an Auckland-based English teacher, poet, and executive editor of the Aotearoa poetry journal *Tarot*. His debut poetry collection, *Dying of the Light*, has recently been published by Wipf and Stock imprint Resource Publications.



A MYSTERY

The fourth seat at the table
has been stolen. The rest
cluster around one side like lost
pigeons. The carpet is marked
with burns and the deep
grooves of that fourth chair.

The other seats discuss
where it might have gone:
they last saw it out
by the old woodshed.
Has it finally abandoned us
for the proverbial cigarettes?
Did it sell, alone, at the market?

Meanwhile, the table is busy
making sure there is food
to be had; it does not need
to know whether the chair
has fallen for an oak-look desk
or has been enlisted
for the local church.

The three remaining eat well,
and the woodfired stove
which warms the soup
keeps all the furniture
from succumbing
to the winter air.

Kit Willett

DOMESTICATED

The cat has been domesticated. He used to read poetry, make music, and piss on the furniture; but now, he wears a tie in his collar, eats his food at the table, and only ever swipes at the dog next door (through the gap in the fence).

We do not let him get too comfortable though. He must earn his treats through tricks: he sits, speaks, and logs in to IRD through his RealMe account. Next April, he will do his own return. The treadmill gets good use: we hang a catnip mouse on the edge of the handle now that he has stopped attacking the belt.

He has gotten friendlier with our other cat now too—now that we have chopped his balls off. But, just the other day, we caught him making reverse colouring books with my watercolours and selling them on Amazon; we scolded him, and he hissed at us.

AS SEEN FROM THE RUG

The still life is characterised by its moving parts. Perhaps the rain is streaking down the windowpane, clinging in futile hope, like the way the basket of unfolded laundry waits. Perhaps the steam is rising from the cup. Perhaps the fire becomes a pole dancer, fresh in her feminism, ready to reclaim her body for herself. Perhaps the incense rises and wafts or wanders over to you to mix and mingle with the air in your lungs: to try being inside you a while. Perhaps the cat breathes; her tiny chest filling and emptying: the dishwasher that finishes its daily cycle. And you. Perhaps your yoga, perhaps your watering of the plants, perhaps your gradual change of a page is a sign that growth can occur in any still life.

I am 61, author of *Bent Not Broken* and *Life on the Line* (Memoir, Steele Roberts, 2000, 2001), and *Mila and the Bone Man* (Fiction, QWP, 2022). In 2020 my short piece *The Graverobber's Apprentice* was highly commended in the Lilian Ida Smith Award. In June 2022, my micro-fiction piece *Arise* won 1st prize in the Whangārei Library Flash and Micro Fiction competition. In 2023 Mayhem Journal published *Birdman* - speculative short fiction. There are several more book-length works on my hard drive. I began writing fiction after my father - a little sick of memoirs - begged me to 'please pick on someone else's family next time'. I retired from doctoring in August 2019 after a spinal cord injury sustained during routine back surgery. Writing was the only other passion I felt I could pursue full-time. I graduated with a Master of Creative Writing (AUT) in 2021 with James George as my mentor. A two-time Ironman finisher, I now read stories of long treks as my injury means I can no longer do them. My partner Graham and I live on the Tutukākā Coast with Bill, the cat, and Lucy Jordan, the dog.



Lauren Roche

STILLED LIFE WITH BLUE SLIPPERS

You stand upon a stony shore, looking across the dark water. Your mortal life has ended, yet here you are, living, all senses alert. Your skin feels a slight chill, and breath wraiths in front of your face. The fur they have given you is scented; as your body warms it, you can smell oils, musk, perhaps the slightest hint of spice. Across the water, a bird calls and is answered. It is dusk; no heavenly bodies grace the space above you—the only light is smuggled through a cleft in the tall, shining cliffs and reflected off the many facets of the water that laps gently at your feet. A red rowboat approaches shore; the boatman is bearded and grey-clad; he is singing a song your mother once rocked your cradle to.

Hush, little baby, don't you cry, you know your Mama was born to die.

His is a pleasant voice; his oar strokes match the slow beat.
You'd never really listened to the words before. The tune was enough, sung by loving, soft Mama as she rocked you and butterflied your cheek with kisses.
It's been many years since you felt so safe.
You wonder if your mother is over there, waiting for you.

* * *

You're wearing the worn blue slippers that you had on when you fell, stone-dead in front of the kitchen table. You'd just popped some bread in the toaster, and were warming the butter, ready to spread. You can't have preserves any more—your hands are too stiff to open the jars. How you'd love a smear of lime marmalade.

You feel dizzy, but that's not unusual, and your heart skips like a spring lamb. You make yourself a nice cup of tea rather than your usual morning coffee.

'It's like Irish dancing,' you once described your heartbeat to a G. P. 'Jigging around, quite happily. Leaves me breathless like I'd been leaping about too.' He listened gravely to your chest, then rolled up his stethoscope and put you on the waiting list to see a heart specialist. You won't hold your breath. The health service is underfunded, and you understand and barely resent that money needs to be rationed and spent on the young.

You go to sit in the kitchen chair, your heart pausing for a few beats, then racing away, fluttering like a moth in a web. Then you fall, slowly, autumnally, to the floor. You try to place your cup of tea on the table to keep things tidy, but it sloshes down your front in a sedate winding-down motion. Down and out. You feel no pain, just a fading, then a dawning awareness that perhaps this is it. And oh, good heavens, you might have peed yourself, but maybe the puddle of tea will disguise that when they find you.

You smile at the kind person who walks in without knocking and raises you to your feet: you could swear you almost recognise them. They mop from your nightdress the tea and pee you slopped in your fall, brush your hair flat, make sure you are steady on your feet.

They butter your toast for you, hand it over, still warm.

‘I don’t suppose you’ve got any chocolate biscuits?’ they ask. ‘It’s just my friend has a fancy for them.’

‘There’s a packet in the fridge. I was saving them for my son.’

‘I’m guessing he’ll have more on his mind when he sees you next.’

‘Right you are; help yourself.’

Your new friend opens the fridge door; the cool light glows on the lump on the floor, wearing your wet nightie. The biscuits are unopened—Mint Tim Tams, perfect for dipping into coffee. Your companion hides them in a deep pocket in their coat.

‘Oh, these’ll touch the spot. He’ll be very grateful. Right, we’d best get going.’

You grab your pink quilted dressing gown from the end of the bed. Even though your life is over, you wouldn’t dream of leaving your house in just your nightie. Your chaperone takes your hand, leads you towards the front entryway. You pass the ball-point marks on the kitchen doorframe, each showing your son’s height on subsequent birthdays. The top one was done when he was fifteen and already tall enough to rest his chin on the top of your head when you hugged him.

The morning sun slants through the panes beside the door. From the angle and the way the light strokes the hall mat, it must be around five.

‘I should leave my boy a note. He’ll wonder where I’ve gone.’

Your kind companion touches your shoulder, and turns you around: you can see your old self, stricken, pallid, lying on the kitchen lino.

‘He’ll know, dear.’

You look down at your shell. ‘Am I dreaming?’

‘No, no. Your time here is over. Come, someone is waiting.’

They smile at you, the light bright on their neat teeth. You strain to remember where you know them from.

Of course, you think, this is Death, and they have left their grey horse to graze, knowing I would have trouble hauling myself into the saddle. How thoughtful.

You step together through the open door, down the uneven garden path, past the dry marigolds; you’ve been waiting for them to seed, become immortal. They’re such cheerful little souls, and what a display they put on. They’ve dropped their petals at your feet, creating a golden red carpet that guides you to the gate. You take a last look back at your house. Of course, your son will sell the place; use the money to upgrade his own. You hope the next owner will love the small garden as you have.

The paperboy rides his bicycle, whistling down the pavement. He throws a morning newspaper towards your front step; it slices right through you. The cat looks up, mews at your shade, then walks away, tail high, seeking someone still capable of feeding him.

‘Cupboard love,’ you mutter. Your companion chuckles. ‘Is it far?’ you ask. ‘It’s just I’ve still got my slippers on, and my stick’s by the front door.’

‘Just around the corner and down the lane, love.’

‘What’s the worst that could happen? I might catch my death.’ You look coyly at your new friend, who laughs in response.

In their coat and hat, your guide looks almost regal. Indeed, the most trustworthy person you have ever met. You know, implicitly, that they will never harm you. You decide to accept their familiarity. You’ve repeatedly told the grocer off for calling you ‘love’. The words in your new companion’s mouth sound courtly, not condescending.

You walk along the familiar footpath, across the pedestrian crossing. It’s quiet as the grave; too early for commuter traffic.

The air thins, and suddenly your feet are on a woodland path, sloping downwards. You slide your hand along the wooden rail, worn shiny. You imagine countless others descending before you. Dark trees arch overhead; ferns kiss the carpet of leaves; the tunnel is green, twilight, the earth redolent. A rabbit quivers across the path in front of you, butterflies sparkle.

There is life everywhere, you realise, your senses afire. When did you last see, hear, feel, smell, or move so well? How magnificent marmalade might taste to you at the moment. You still have a little buttery toast. You take another bite. It is heavenly. Life quickens in you.

Down through the old Holloway, the trees become sparer, bright leaves replaced by needles and the scent of pine. The sides of the tunnel are now rocky; they seem carved from jade. The light follows behind you, casting a long shadow before your feet. Your guide is unshaded. You notice this, but it does not puzzle you. The answer is there, in the depths of your subconscious.

You descend still; you must be well under the city by now. The air is chill, and despite your dressing gown, tied tightly under your breasts, your skin is goose-pimpled and your breath clouds. Death stops at a small tollbooth. It’s made of ancient rocks, stacked, and mossy. No one sits there. Death reaches into a large wooden chest for a cape of silver fur and drapes it over your shoulders. They pass a carved stick to you and a mug of soup, the perfect temperature to warm your hands and insides. Smoky steam lifts from the surface. There is crumbly bread, thickly buttered, a welcome chaser to your toast. The communion of bread and soup smells like heaven and tastes like nothing on earth. ‘To die for,’ your grandson might have said. You sit on the low wall to savour it.

‘This is one of the Underworld’s treasure chests,’ says Death. ‘When they reach this point, some people realise that their coins, fur, jewels and priceless collectables have no value. Finally, aware that they can’t take it with them, they drop what was once most precious along the path; I gather the valuables that might make others more comfortable. I once had to rescue a herd of hogs from an abandoned string of pearls. They’d have skated their way to eternity.’ Death shook their head. ‘The coins people bring for the boatman are useless to him because he can’t leave the Underworld to spend them. We pop them in the chest, and I do a grocery run Earthside when needed. It works well. Watch your step: that root’s a bit gnarly. Just there, between the pines, you’ll see our destination.’

The water, when you see it, is a surprise. It’s the deep purple of drowned amethyst. Willows weep at the edge, and some very tall, almost black, yews stand sentinel on the far fringes. What little light has oozed this far below ground lights the wavelets. You are bathed in a moonless twilight in a place that feels like it has never been fully warm. A small green circlet writhes on the shingle, a snake that appears to be eating itself.

There is another stone building, a cottage, beneath the trees. Firelight flickers in a window, and smoke rises from the chimney. You don’t turn towards habitation but to the rowboat. You know you belong on a further shore than this.

The boatman tips his cap, pulls alongside, and Death hands you to him.

‘Watch your slippers,’ they say, helping you lift your feet clear of the tide. ‘Tuck yourself in.’

An orange kitten winds itself around your ankles then leaps into your lap. It kneads your knees with strong, sheathed toes, then settles, faintly vibrating, on your cape.

‘Good night for it,’ says the boatman. ‘Not as lumpy as some crossings I’ve made. Spot you later, mate.’

‘She’s brought, you some Tim Tams.’ Death throws the biscuits. The packet tumbles end over end, and Charon catches it with an expert hand.

‘You’re a Queen among women,’ he says to you. ‘Finer than rubies.’

The boatman waves at Death, who stands on the shore.

‘Funny one, that,’ he mutters to you. ‘Loves dressing up. Never know whom they’ll turn up as. Great mate, and a right hard worker, but changes like the blimming wind.’

‘I thought it was my old vicar, then a doctor, then the Queen. Funny how your mind works.’

‘Aye, it’s a funny old world, all right. Ready for this?’

You nod. ‘Ready as I’ll ever be.’

‘That’s the spirit, love.’

The boatman takes a big bite of his biscuit, pushes off, and rows steadily as he sings.

*If living were a thing that money could buy
You know the rich would live,
And the poor would die.*

You see chocolate on his teeth and smile to yourself, snug in the fur, the little purring cat in your lap.

This is the life, you think, more comfortable than you’ve been in years, and reach across to swipe yourself a Tim Tam.



Photo courtesy: <https://pixabay.com/users/bellawhitephoto-4717553/>

Maris O'Rourke describes herself as a poet and peregrina, a writer and walker. She has been writing for 10 years and published 10 books – a memoir (*Zigzags and Leapfrogs*); a family history; two poetry collections (*Singing With Both Throats* and *Paradox*); and six children's books (two in Te Reo). She lives in Mt Eden with her whānau and regularly retreats to Whaingaroa/Raglan to write and walk.



BUDDHA IN PARIS

In Paris you can buy a stuffed vulture at Deroylle, the taxidermy shop of wild dreams. It lurks at the top of the circular staircase, beady eyes fixed on anyone with €4,300 and the stomach for it. Maybe Huang Yong Ping got a discount for bulk-buying?

Five feathered sons of Judah feast on Huang's *Boudhha*, one of those fat jolly Buddhas with an enigmatic smile, almost a smirk, as if he knows something they don't, entrails writhing across the floor from a hole in his stomach.

Familiar with being pulled to pieces Huang's *Boudhha* surveys, prays - as the preying vultures close in. I bought my Buddha in Kathmandu. A thin ascetic Buddha, hand raised, thoughtful gaze, as he contemplates the stacks of stones beside the spa.

George Pompidou Centre, Paris
Intestins de Boudhha 2006: sculptor Huang Yong Ping (born 1954)

Maris O'Rourke

HAUNTINGS

I'm haunted by dead babies
who slip in at 3 a.m. via
glimpses from yesterday's news.

It was a cold night she didn't notice the baby asleep on the bed as she
threw her coat down hurried to join the party others followed fluttered
down like layers of dead leaves blanked his feeble cries the mother's
screams as she tore into the heap later didn't wake him.
Death by Misadventure the verdict.

I try to avoid them, turn away
my eyes, bang hands over my ears,
sing *la la la la* loudly.

It was a hot day she didn't remember the baby asleep in the back as
she locked the car rushed to work sweat trickled down his cheeks a
tsunami filled his mouth swamped his thin sobs his mother's shrieks
as she clawed at the car seat couldn't wake him.
Forgotten Baby Syndrome the verdict.

Sometimes I explore, read more,
in the hope they'll go away if
I understand what happened.

It was a drunken evening she forgot she'd taken the baby into bed to
feed him fell into a deep sleep crushed his frail chest rolled over his
failing breath the mother's wails as she rocked his cold body back and
forth in the morning wouldn't wake him.
Death by Suffocation the verdict.

I'm haunted by grieving
mothers who slip in at 3 a.m.
carrying dead babies.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Mark Laurent is a professional musician and writer. He's recorded over 20 albums, published 4 collections of poetry, an illustrated children's storybook, and written articles and reviews for New Zealand and international magazines. He lives in Auckland.
<http://www.marklaurent.co.nz>



THE FIG TREE

Why did Jesus curse the fig tree?
It wasn't doing anything wrong
standing quietly by the roadside
doing what a fig tree is meant to do

He had a point to prove
and his slow-growing companions
just weren't getting it

A short, sharp shock was needed
to shake their branches of doubt
wipe the leaf-litter from their eyes

But the fig tree was no doubter
well acquainted with times and seasons
it knew its hour had not yet come

Jesus and that tree were brothers
offering their food to the hungry
two living parables on the same road
both dying before their time.

Mark Laurent

NOT SUCH A GOOD FRIDAY

Easter 2022

It wasn't the agony of nails,
but fiery stabs in the heart
that arrested my attention
as we left the Easter vigil.

I would've cried out
but I had no breath for words.

Held upon a cross of anxious arms
I was lowered onto the gurney.
An ambulance carried me down
some darkened Via Dolorosa.

A Covid-robed crowd of medics
pressed in on me
with cardiac monitors,
anaesthetic, encouraging words.

Jesus was offered vinegar -
a sour and meager reward for his quiescence.
They pumped me with morphine and blood thinners.

Like him, I prayed for it to finish,
though I knew it had only just begun.

No winding cloth for my body,
though thermal blankets seemed to calm
my trembling bones.

No spear thrust in the side
(these days they have gentler ways
to test for life-signs)
- a luer inserted expertly into my arm.

Darkly humming CT scanner yawns
like the open mouth of a tomb.
Orderlies - pall-bearers of the living -
lay me down and walk quietly away,
leaving me confined, apprehensive,
in the sepulchral belly of the machine.

Will I ever get out of this?

My will is irrelevant here;
forces of life and death
tug at me from electrode cup and IV line.

They say I'll be here for at least three days,
and as much as I don't want to believe them
I can't imagine anywhere else right now...

Nurses fill the offices of the hours
with devotion, quietude, and tea breaks.

The world carries on
outside this cloistered place,
not minding my absence at all.

continued overleaf...

NOT SUCH A GOOD FRIDAY *...contd*

Sun and rain and celestial revolutions
turning night to day to night...
People out there in the well city
buying, selling, walking about, carrying on...

If I don't rise again,
in a little while no-one may notice
that I'm gone,
except those ones who love me,
they'll remember.

They are the reason
I'm hoping to return.

Datrise, my Sikh trainee nurse,
brings no spices to anoint my body,
but she has an angel's touch with a hypodermic.

Waking, dozing, fitful but not unpleasant dreams.
Darkness, subterranean voices
filter through walls, as permeable as stone
in this waiting place of souls.

I pray for the third day to dawn,
graves to open,
the clot that blocks my lung
to be rolled away like the Easter Sunday stone.

Thin light is filtering through curtains.
Somewhere I think I hear
a solitary bird singing
her dawn chorus.

THE DAY I ACCIDENTALLY STEPPED
OFF A CLIFF

I ran right off the edge once
my legs beating the air
like the first man who tried to fly
out in space with no point of contact

It didn't last long
that first flight of mine
- gravity, & perhaps a small lack of faith,
saw to that -

But that moment has lasted for years
one of my golden memories
and every time I replay it
it's like my flight lasted for hours
eternity takes hold of me
and the earth never rushes to meet me
but holds its breath in wonder.

Michael Giacon was born and raised on the central isthmus of Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland in a Pākehā/Italian family. He has an MA in creative writing from AUT University (2016) and is a founding member of Isthmus Poets, graduates of the Masters. He has been on the Board of the Samesame but Different LGBTQI+ Writers' Festival since 2017. Michael won the 2016 Kathleen Grattan Prize for a *Sequence of Poems* and was the featured poet in *a fine line* summer 2020/21 from the New Zealand Poetry Society. Over the last five years or so he's been published in a wide range of journals and anthologies including *Landfall* and the *Poetry New Zealand Yearbook*.



TREASURES

In the big pool we'd bomb from the high board
whitewash rocking those treading tiled blue.
But touching the bottom was the true thrill.
You could pull yourself down by the ladder
but only halfway. Diving from the side
was forbidden and we were good kids, mostly.

It was all about momentum.
I was a boy of size, had ballast on my side.
Huge breath, upend and down, down for the count
– and treasures. Why anyone would swim with coins
in their pockets. We'd splurge the bounty
on frozen Buzz Bars from the lady in the shop
with the twisted left hand. I still have the plastic heitiki
I found down there weighted on a lead clasp,
its moulded whētero giving challenge
to dive deep into the present.

Now I swim just minutes and fifty years
from the pools. I glide over sand and sea grass,
holding breath for 10, 11, 12 strokes, but never 13.
I sometimes emerge with everyday portents twisting
in my pockets: plastic bag, chewed tennis ball.
Last week, mid-stroke, I headbutted a kombucha bottle
bobbing to the barefoot shore. It's out back
in the recycling bin with all my dubious trove.

Michael Giacon

LAST SUMMER

He would arrive fully framed. Flapped hat, socks sandaled
 pant and sleeve length flared, shawled under cotton, the transition
 from sand to sea exact, shedding to a green and white costume, red
 bathing cap, goggles. She was also adorned with intent. At his merger
 for immersion she might move to the far end under overlapping trees
 where more sand could always be had. Below alarmed gates
 to the mansions above she would marshal an art of deadly stillness.
 limbs scripting air as he stroked to and from her close to shore.

An hour or two either side of a changing tide I'd toe my way barefoot
 to the bay a quick hop perhaps with a sharp stone past two bikes red
 and yellow tethered to the rail. The sea could float a fresh face on any day.
 I'd push and pull through rise and fall, read the moving mantra with body
 and breath calm in coming, tepid water under cool reaching down, mittens
 of warmth swarming fingers. I'd wallow in my own wake.

Construction was always claiming place, a clamour of that time
 those tides, then. A blue sun hat, a salted beard would glide conversation
 beyond the billionaire boat sheds to a specific point of obscurity and back.
 Their undressed dance followed organic form, limbs akimbo under towels
 a cairn of helmets and panniers sculptured on sand.

Mid-bay mid-swim vision fogged, my in-breath paused our colony reflecting
 on the bay almost not there. I'd splay myself to the breeze in a glaze of gold
 and two heads bobbing for their beacon or steer leeward across to where
 the foreshore was, and a caravan of cotton turning on the sand for the steps
 past the cutty grass, two bikes disarrayed, the path up to fresh tarseal away
 into dying light summer tides we couldn't fathom flooding every day.

SHADE

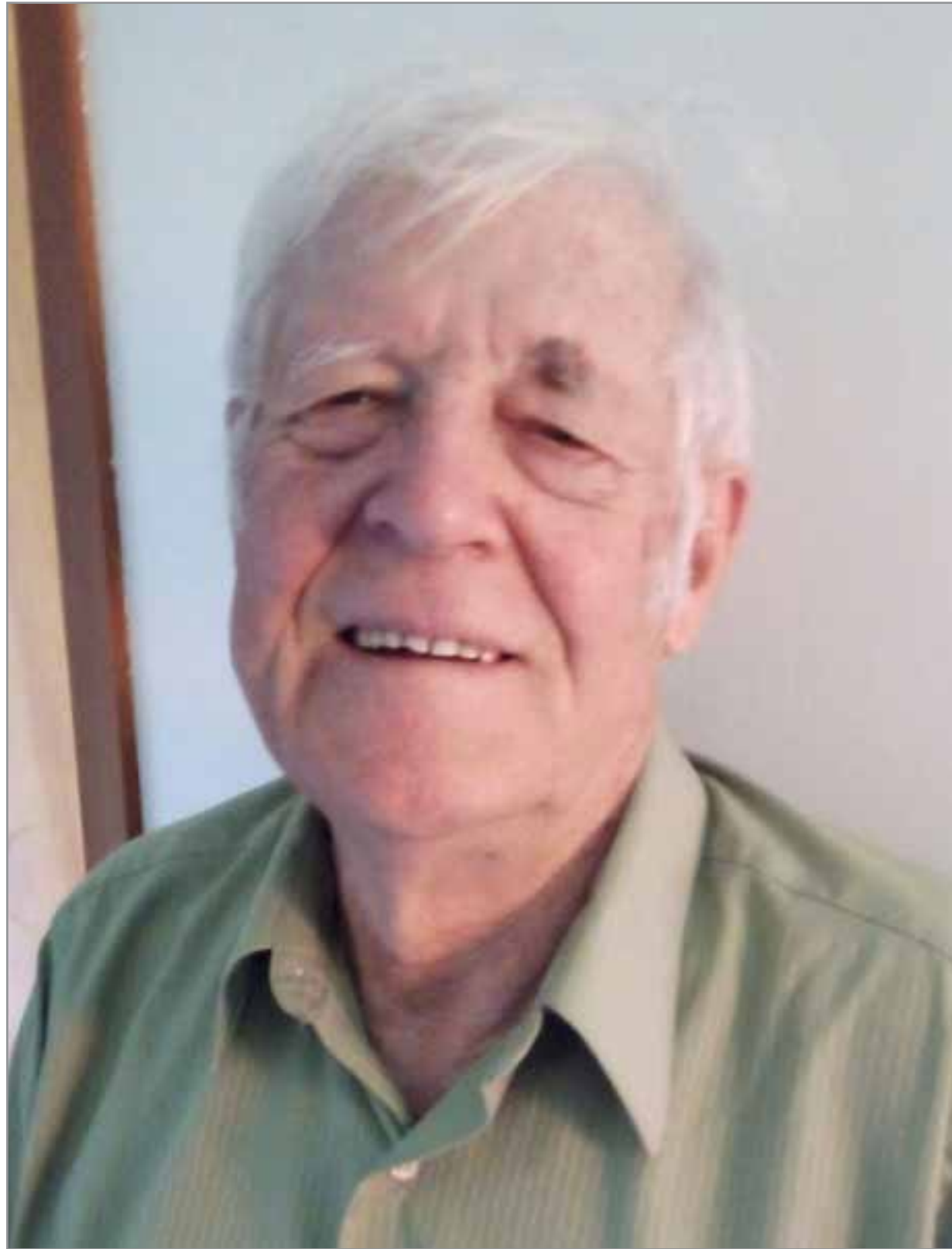
branches just budding I fetch
 oiled secateurs to open the heart
 of the plum to sun keep
 the peach within reach

pale pink
 to blood red
 soft fuzz
 to golden flesh
 warmest wettest winter yet
 first spring storm about
 to burst I ponder the bounty
 I wonder

the water tank brims plastic
 bags of bark on order in a haze
 of fruit flies the compost bin will
 be revealed netting unravelled shade
 cloth trimmed back brace tight
 with lupins to dig in blossoms
 abloom with bees

warmest
 hottest
 wettest
 driest I muse on
 ticking trees garden mix
 breakfast
 a bittersweet taste
 of ice-packed summer

Paul Protheroe, 78, retired mail officer, unionist. Stood for the Alliance Party in two elections. Employment advocate, teacher for migrants, CAB volunteer. Secretary Cambodian youth and recreational trust. Published selected poems "One fingered in Papatoetoe" 2006, "Sometimes like Taurus" 2014 and "Creeping along the bloodline" 2020. Recently published in Takahe. Wrote a book for Cambodian community, now translated into Khmer. Divorced. Three adult sons, two grandchildren. Lives in Manurewa Auckland.



FISHING WITH DAD AT RAUMATI SOUTH IN THE SIXTIES

Petulant light
nibbles away
at the earth's drying deck
as we arrive

at the shore's periphery
like tramps
or actors earmarked
for seafaring roles, in hole-pecked attire.

On the horizon Kapiti island
like a obstructive, lazy monstrosity
seems to constrain
the tide's swirling motion.

This island's history is notorious;
Te Rauparaha's tribal fortress,
with stories of bloody conspiracies,
yet an ideal backdrop

for our day's activities.
Fishing is the priority;
to scrape the sea's clammy floor
for indolent flounders, soles,

continued overleaf...

Paul Protheroe

FISHING WITH DAD AT RAUMATI SOUTH IN THE SIXTIES *...contd*

the odd dysfunctional crab.
This is the “old man’s”
grand escape from stress,
human capriciousness.

In frisky waves
we trawl a reluctant drag- net
parallel to the beach.
My Dad as the helmsman

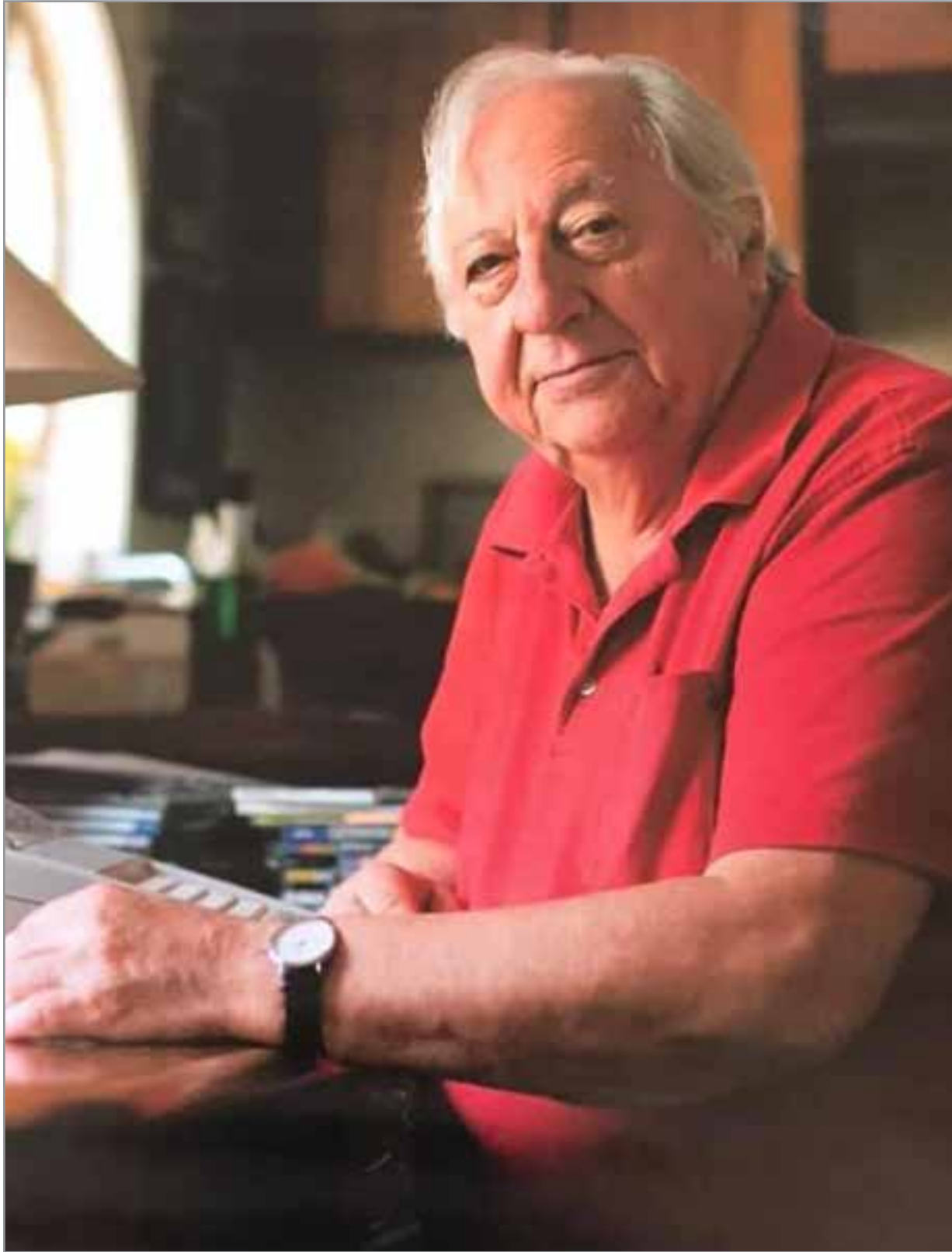
exercises a strategy
for “bringing back flickering kai moana”
trapped in inorganic flotsam;
a foreshadow of a future catastrophe.

Bedraggled, tired, we reek of brine
as we extract our fishy winnings,
enough for a family breakfast;
slippery, faded-black buttered discs.



Photo courtesy: <https://pixabay.com/users/langll-822640/>

Now in his 90th year Peter Bland has been a leading New Zealand poet for over 60 years. He also occupies a distinguished place in New Zealand theatrical history as the co-founder of Wellington's Downstage theatre. He has an international reputation for his poetry, receiving The Prime Minister's Award for Poetry, a British Society of Author's Award, and a Melbourne Festival Literary Award. He lives in Auckland, where he regularly. Reads his work on Facebook.



DROPPING THINGS

OK, it comes
With age. What's
Barely touched
Or anxiously clutched
Too easily falls
To the floor. My
Zen master says
I'm not to fret
As it's only a letting go
Of the known. Such
A gentle soul, giving
Both age and gravity
Their due. So I've ditched
My pick-up stick
To spend more time
Among dead moths
And broken pots
And the rich history
Of a fallen world.

Peter Bland

LATE AUTUMN....

And an old anxiety,
A shift to damp shadows
And falling leaves. There's
A hint of rot
In the fruit I eat
And a growing aloneness
That comes close
To remorse. I've been here
Many times before. It's
Where moons loom
And people leave. Mists
Gather behind my eyes.
I wrap each day round me
Like an old coat.

GOING TO SEED

There's a need for order
When living alone
But, for the moment,
Chaos wins. Birds
Desert a broken birdbath
To gorge on seeds
From the many weeds
That riot down
Forgotten paths. I've come
To prefer an outcast beauty
Among golden centipedes
And pearly snails
And the breezy timing
Of dandelion clocks.

Piers Davies was born in Sydney, Australia but has lived most of his life in Auckland Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa New Zealand. He is a Law of the Sea specialist having graduated with an LL B from Auckland University and a Diploma ECL from City of London College. He has been a long-time writer and reciter of poetry. His poems have been published in journals and anthologies in New Zealand, Australia, UK, France, Switzerland, Poland, USA, South Africa and India. Four books of his poems have been published, including 'Jetsam' and 'Force Majeure'. He is a coordinator of Titirangi Poets (first established in 1977) and co-editor of Titirangi Poets anthologies and Ezines. He has also been a scriptwriter and involved in the production of feature films ('Homesdale' and 'The Cars That Ate Paris' (Australia) and 'Skin Deep' (New Zealand)) short films and documentaries. He was sometime Poet Laureate of Haringey, London.

AN IMAGE LOST

In that last moment of sleep
I see an image
fluttering
on a clothesline
in a ferocious storm
vivid and elongated
back-lit haunting.

Then it is ripped from my grasp
as consciousness and memory return.



Piers Davies

MEDITATIONS OF AN INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN

“a dried leaf is still a leaf”

The gaudy clothes of my youth
have faded with excessive sunlight.

Memories slide in and out
like a wayward concertina.

The periphery of the world contracts
while distances lengthen
and seem beyond reach—
sleep is the sole escape.

The circle tightens around
the pit of oblivion.

PADLOCKED

1
the Liquidator
has entered my life
locked and chained each gate
securing the few assets
for a fire sale
he’s pleasant even smiles
unlike the gloomy sympathy
of the precise undertaker

2
the corridors are empty
the concourse depopulated
all dreams and hopes are gone
even memories dissolve

3
it all boils down
to a balance sheet
which he, like Anubis,
will place on the scales of death.

Piet Nieuwland has poetry appearing in Aotearoa/New Zealand and internationally in numerous print and online journals. He is a performance poet, a visual artist, co-edits the annual Northland anthology Fast Fibres Poetry. His new books of poetry *As light into water* and *We enter* the are published by Cyberwit. <https://www.pietnieuwland.com/>



WE MUST INVITE, ENTERING THE TIME OF ORANGE

Entering the time of orange we must invite
the albatross with wings of oceanic silver
scrawling clematis vines from Tutukaka headlands
nikau palms bursting hot with creamy ignitions
wahine of kakariki articulations and friends all violet
and friends all blue, childhood tastes of grapefruit, and plum,
our descendants carved from the obsidian night sky, harriers
that sweep past the open window,
We must invite our birthdays, each one and the months
with skeletal hands, faces in photographs, youngsters
with velvet wings and the ones with scarlet shoes,
perfumes of trees happy in the stillness at sunrise,
and musicians of the macrocosm, luminous brides of Algeria
and curiosity like the morning calls of roosters, resurgent tree seeds
that take root in the rivers alluvium, uncles with soft hands of steel and
aunties overflowing with knitted woolen cardigans, the strange
yet familiar person waiting at the bus stop, absence of the automobile,
grandmothers in swirling skirts baking scones, grandfathers growing
apocalypses of beans and whose potatoes spill as egg like jewels
from the dark soil,
We must invite pohutukawa shade, the sweet smell of panforte
And we must invite Tangaroa

Piet Nieuwland

WITH THURSDAYS

With Tuesdays long as the Pleistocene
Im talking about poets who sing in grimy halls, rowdy libraries and quiet bars
Im not talking about the greasy theorems of Kentucky fried chicken
I am talking about the weight of sunlight falling
I am not talking about hallucinating priests or the wet dreams of corporate raiders
I am talking about cotyledons of legumes and rituals of fruit
I am talking about the great grey eyeless swaying of the ocean
I am not talking about brands of shampoo, car tires or rugby sponsorship deals
I am not talking about the number of cows, plastic pollution or the population of cars
I am talking about the area of native forest, nut tree crops and the frequency of trains
I am talking about lively fluid dancers and their intricate artistry
I am not talking about more motorways or traffic congestion
I am talking about riparian planting, electric buses and community gardens
I am talking about Thursdays

AT THIS DISTANCE

At this distance
in the solitude of sky
the great entangled forest shrieks with parrots
amongst adjectival masses of leaves

Born into the algebra of wind
and the thick movement of the oceanic night
we are nourished by tears of monsoons falling
on fields foaming with vegetables and grains
and the passionate foliages of orchards and quantities layered
by autumn and forgotten blood
and the moistness of soil knitting underfoot
when the infinite kiss of morning mist
opens itself into the headlong rush
of rivers of violas filled with red wine
and rooster calls overflowing
into the turbid blue

Richard Pamatatau is a former print and broadcast journalist who has moved away from the inverted pyramid to use poetry to as a more creative and freer way to tell stories. He is fascinated by the intersection of class, ethnicity and place. He leads courses in literature and creative writing at AUT University and is onto his second German Shepherd.



LINED UP

That thing about the Koru Lounge
morning flights packed with people
with important Business.
lined up at the trough I mean buffet
privilege mostly white
looking very entitled.

Are they entitled?
Or just paid for the right to lounge
and be in a room where the walls are white?
Like many of the people
who feed at the buffet
like it's just business.

The subscription is paid by the business
part of my package and I'm entitled
To feast at the buffet
As part of the lounge
Where the people
Are often quite white.

The cups are white
and just the business
for coffee to keep the people
happy entitled
to be in the lounge queued at the buffet.

continued overleaf...

Richard Pamatatau. Photo credit: Louise Bockett

LINED UP cont

There's something about a buffet
part of the white
team in the lounge
looking like the business
feeling entitled.
Just what it is people.

Look at the people
who are not at the buffet
not entitled
not white
not in business
not in the lounge.

The entitled people don't wonder
in the lounge at the buffet
because white is décor for the world of business.

LIFE.DEATH.KINDNESS

In this time of virus
embody kindness
reach out to people
in isolation
Some mourning a death
celebrate life

life
hosts the virus
leads sometimes to death
kindness
Hard in isolation
breath and people

people
flout life
Outside isolation
invite the virus
No kindness
Just death

death
Affects people
The economy needs kindness
health to have life
those loaded with virus
must be in isolation

continued overleaf...

LIFE.DEATH.KINDNESS

....cont

Without isolation
death
a spreading virus
knocks people
steals life
Rejects kindness

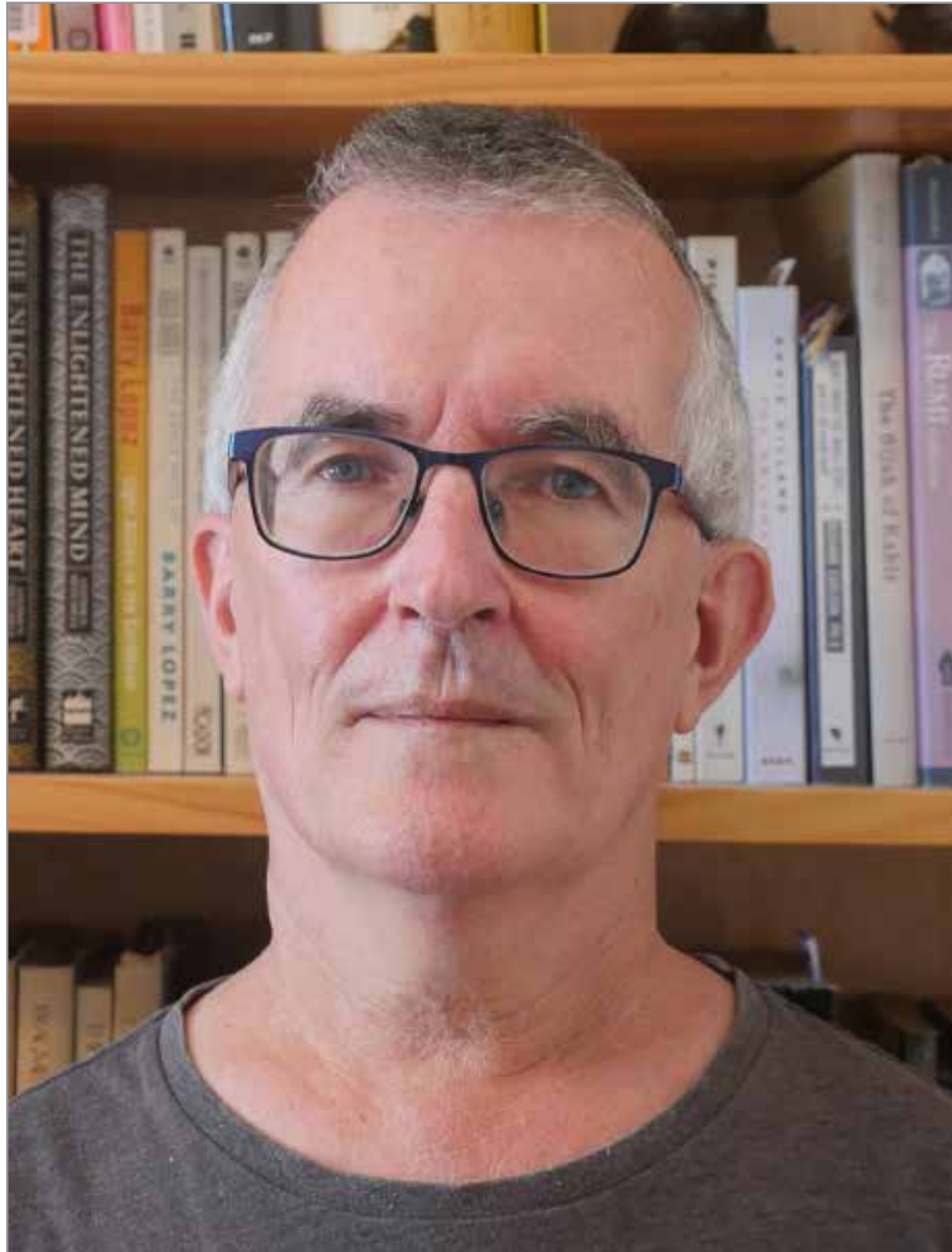
Return kindness
with isolation
life
against death
For people
free from virus

Kindness can help with death
When isolation is shared by people
Taking shelter in life from a virus.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Richard von Sturmer is a New Zealand writer. He was born on Auckland's North Shore in 1957. His recent books are the acclaimed memoir, *This Explains Everything* (Atuanui Press, 2016), *Postcard Stories* (Titus Books, 2019) and *Resonating Distances* (Titus Books 2022). In 2020 he was the University of Waikato's writer-in-residence. He is currently working with filmmaker and musician Gabriel White as the Floral Clocks. They have recorded three albums: *Desert Fire* (2014), *A Beautiful Shade of Blue* (2017) and *Gas Giant* (2019). <https://thefloralclocks.bandcamp.com/>



HARUN ABU-KHALIL

Harun Abu-Khalil
among the oystercatchers
his overcoat embroidered
with the eyes of gazelles.

He travelled with Ibn Battuta
to the far ends of the earth
and learnt not to discriminate
between non-believers
and adherents of the faith.

Harun Abu-Khalil
his scimitar now used
for slicing cheese.
To demonstrate he unveils
a large block of parmesan.

I wonder if we'll ever see
the likes of him again.
His overcoat remains on display
in a small museum in Istanbul.
The entrance fee—
a peacock's feather.

Harun Abu-Khalil
loved to observe
how everything corresponds.
The pebbles on a distant beach
still click beneath his heels.

Richard von Sturmer

STORM IN THE HILLS

Rain, rain
 eternal rain.
 I tramp
 down the rutted path
 with milky water
 flowing over white clay.
 An hour later
 stretched out
 on a pebbled beach
 I remember
 what you once said.
 How in a dream
 when the last bird
 has vanished
 and fish no longer swim
 in the grey sea
 we will still find beauty
 etched
 in the rock strata,
 in those ancient upheavals
 of the earth
 offered to us
 over millions of years.

LITTLE DEMONS

Little demons need no incentive
 to burn down the grain silos.
 Afterwards they cool their feet in the snow.

Little demons compose scurrilous poetry
 when they should be meditating
 back in their demon cave.

I once lured them out
 with a shrivelled radish
 and shut them inside
 a lead lined box.

Little demons recognize themselves
 in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch
 and Matthias Grünewald.
 They clap their hands and cry out
 "Our ancestors were so formidable!"

For some reason
 they adopt French accents
 and wear tiny fur coats
 (made from mouse fur).
 One one-eyed one sports a monocle.
 They call him "Mon oncle".
 Little demons love to play with words.

I could write their histories in red ink
 across the pages of medieval manuscripts
 obliterating all those pious saints and virgins.

Little demons are the sworn enemies
 of any insight or epiphany.
 When they slide down my shoulder blades
 I shiver with delight.

RikTheMost (they/ them) is a queer, non-binary, polyamorous, pansexual, vegan spoken word artist, who spends most of their spare time making homophobes feel uncomfortable. Rik lives in Ōtautahi (Christchurch) and, amongst other things - has been commissioned by the BBC; published by 'Write About Now'; invited to feature on Sky Art's BAFTA award winning TV show "Life & Rhymes"; toured internationally; performed at Pride events around the world; placed 2nd three times at the NZ National Slam Finals, represented Australia and Aotearoa on the world slam stage, and served as New Zealand Poetry Society's Vice-President. They also run the online poetry community, <https://www.facebook.com/YourPlaceEvents>. <https://www.rikthemost.com/>



APATHETIC MOON

I want to preface this poem by assuring you:
I am fine...

Well, not fine.

But I'm ok...

Well, not ok.

And the moon?

Well, I don't want to say.

Or don't know how to. So...

How are you?

I do care.

I mean, I don't care if you reply,

If you don't reply, it's fine.

Well, not fine,

But it's ok.

Well, not ok,

Because, of course, I want you to be ok,

Like the moon!

I assume...

Other than all the flying things, collisions, no water or oxygen, scarred skin,
But the last time I checked, most nights, it is shining...

But it's fine if you're not.

Well, not fine...

But it's ok.

Even if it feels like nothing really is right now, eh?

Have you noticed? Such aggressive lunar apathy!

continued overleaf...

RikTheMost. Photo credit: Federico Coradi

APATHETIC MOON

...contd

I mean, don't get me wrong... I told you I care,
Like I care about the moon,
Even though it's so far away.
Doesn't feel like it affects me really.
Still, somehow I am drawn to it,
Every time I look,
And yet...

Someone could *punch* it from the night sky!
Punch the light and dark that surrounds!
Punch the gravity from its very guts!
Punch that celestial body to the ground,
And I honestly don't know how long it would be
Before we truly felt the change of the swell of the sea...

Which is really not fine.
And it is nowhere near okay:
And distance is no excuse.
Because, either way:
The sea is rising right here,
And how easily we forget.
Blame it on the fact that it is so wet,
And we are dry,
Which is *fine*!
... Until you're thirsty
... and we all get thirsty.

But there's a tap - undeniably,
And a filter - usually,
And a glass - don't remind me,
Which is full - they say,
... and I am drowning in it.

But I can swim.
Though I'm not.
And others can't.
But they are trying...

And I am tying tired tongue and dehydrated split lips,
Tie-dying the water to try to make it seem worth drinking,
Simultaneously tidying up the tiniest trace of spilt drips
Because the driest of eyes can die in an inch of liquid,
Whilst we watch others space-rock squint through an ocean!

Each treading trembling legs to keep heads higher than the horizon,
Armstrong; we should dive in,
One giant leap made wider when the tide is tsunami-rising,
And we can't help riding on it;
Catapulting ourselves beyond,
We are all so far above it.

Ground: a distant memory.
Suddenly, zero gravity.
An apathetic moon and

... someone is *punching* me.

Robyn Restieaux is a poet based in Tamaki Makaurau. She has happily moved from teaching literature to writing it. Her work was most recently published in the Poetry Aotearoa Yearbook 2023: *Afterburn*.



Robyn Restieaux

BAD JOKE AT A HURA KOHATU

with great respect to Apirana Taylor

A small white fence and crisp
white shirts
gold Rolex Pakeha

Aucklanders by the Urupa
up for the day with their
two metre stare with their grim set mouths
they hope proclaim belonging

Francina and her whanau are a looseness
jovial in between whaikorero
kids shuffled from hand to hip
from mama to koka while Stephie

hands Dad in his shiny box to the Rangatira
and though she is family, slides back
to her Pakeha in the back
eyes others for the sign of a crack
until her mask lifts in the gale of a joke
about Dad's beautiful hair

*'You wait till youz fellas see my bush!
You'd get lost in there'*

Urupa: Maori cemetery

Hura Kohatu: a ceremony at the graveside to unveil the headstone

Pakeha: New Zealand European

Whanau: family group

Whaikorero: formal speech spoken by a male with recognised standing

Rangatira: hereditary Māori leaders of a community

WALKING BACKWARDS

at the gate you are a haunting

the Time you flew to Nelson
two days in and you planned a return to safety
premature but I saw the way you began
to sniff the breeze
ears now listening
for distance

the Time you were presented in the Brisbane heat
to your girlfriend's Mum both of us like bookends
Mother-spanning the Tasman
thinking we held you upright and intact
really we pressed you beyond endurance
packing you in
silence and camphor

that Time you walked
backwards for as long as
stability permitted
into tomorrow
apology creased and turning at the last minute
disappeared into migrancy
doorway now a tidy concrete
portal
passport booths
rendering you invisible

action completed in the past
Finite

Time you returned
duration of your stay a clock ticking down
suitcase liminal space
between what I know -
Auckland Spring and
that Other
your new closed circuit
my own kind of Silence
my own camphor grey

Christmas reunion and you
plan your exodus
Next week encircles every Now
my new kitchen calendar
upcomings glitter stickered
stored last year in a drawer

I'm learning the art of preservation -
flowers in a press
hoping to smell summer
in their desiccation.

Ron Riddell is a New Zealand writer with a deep commitment to ecology, on all possible levels: natural, social-temporal, philosophical and spiritual. Recent books are: *Dance of Blue Dragonflies* (poetry) and *Pachamama & the Jaguar Man* (novel). Previous work has been translated into a dozen languages. Book One of his long poem *The Wanderer* was launched in New Zealand in 2020 by HeadworX Publishers of Wellington. Married to Saray Torres from Colombia, he has two sons Roland and Pablo, and three granddaughters Tuvia, Felicia and Ella, who all live in Sweden. His latest collection of short poems is *Exilstationer/Stations of Exile*, a bi-lingual English-Swedish edition, was published in May 2020 by Simon Editor, Jonkoping, Sweden. Book Two of his long poem *The Wanderer* was published in November 2022. He believes and works in the spirit of the transformative power of poetry and all creative human expression.

CANTE HONDO IN TITIRANGI

I am not the same
I forget my name
when I hear the *ruru*'s call

his *cante hondo*
of bluest glimmering
moonlight shimmering:

something is touched
awake in me
sense of immortality

an evocation
of the nameless deep
that sings the dark sea song

no missing note
no missing beat
in perfect balance, thrall

the song of bustling tui
let nothing else ensue.



Ron Riddell. Photo credit: Sergio Rivera

DELIGHT IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

I delight in walking out
in the ruins of the light

in the sparkling air
the world that burns

that yearns in its turning
for respite, recourse

that yearns in its singing
hallowing, honouring

that seeks to halo those
who come in its name

who in it come to delight
despite the might of pall

despite the plague upon us
despite the mark of blight

of pandemic reign and
though we know its game

what can we do should
eyes be bound, lips shut tight

but delight, delight, in walking out
in the ruins of the night?



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Sam Clements poetry has appeared in Landfall and Jamaica's Sunday Gleaner, and his flash fiction in the international journal *Flash Frontier*. He has collaborated and performed at various festivals with leading New Zealand musicians jazz pianist Ben Fernandez, guitarist Nigel Gavin, and singer songwriter Sonia Wilson, as well as with a variety of prominent poets. He has read at recitals featuring violist Milan Milisavljević, principal violist in the Met Opera Orchestra, and the APO's principal violist, Robert Ashworth. He co-edited, with poet Jamie Trower, the anthology *This Twilight Menagerie*, published in 2021, celebrating forty years of New Zealand's longest running open mic poetry group, *Poetry Live!* where he has been an emcee for several years.



CALANDO

these days, the silences stand as testament. History's burdens, filtered memories, we breathe, wearier of our shadows, sense more acutely broken lives, the fallen about us, dreams turned dried-out river beds, joys near forgotten—those youthful pleasures and eternal optimisms, options as endless as south sea island horizons

these days, it's the Cuban Missile Crisis rekindled, our minds on the fresh risks of annihilation, midst tinder dry power-play dynamics, bullying, threatening, evil intent, the gnashing teeth of little dictators, driven to conquer, to obliterate, determined to spread their bloody ideologies, weaken, destroy, cause utter misery

these days, rising inflation, climate inaction, situation critical, we struggle to recall what four seasons were, their distinctive feels, frosted lawns, steady rains, gentle heat and temperature changes, floods rare—weather events far more predictable, we grieve relentless fossil fuel burning, the taking away from future generations

these days, we discuss Kafka, Freud, young classical virtuosos and the late string quartets of Beethoven, the cost of living, stock market corrections, medieval plagues, political corruption, deceit, disadvantage, refugees, moral standards, deep social inequities, poverty, violence, resource depletion, arthritis, eye sight, x-rays, surgery.

These days, sorrows linger longer, humour carries more biting pathos, as we sip coffee from recyclable cups, sitting in cafes by large shiny windows, observing the anatomies of fashionable commuters, the facial expressions of dogs, cats and children, we're more alert to approaching steps, we prepare more ahead, anticipate setbacks.

These days, it's more about wrapping ups, and revelations, strikingly profound, still absence and longings, the odd delight, birthdays, anniversaries, intimate soirées, dilemmas, deaths, messy divorces, intrigue, tax burdens, repair bills and funerals, we see more vividly the ephemeral things, that fleetingly brush past our finger tips,

lipping the abyss.

Sam Clements

THE POSE

*- The day of Adolf Hitler's suicide, April 30, 1945,
photojournalists David E. Scherman, and Lee Miller, photographed
each other in his Munich apartment, bathing in his bathtub.*

It's your pose, Ms Miller,
I return to:
hand over shoulder,
eyes gazing at the floor,

It's your sturdy,
muddied US army boots,
fresh from Dachau,
the soiled bath mat,

It's the portrait of Hitler
positioned to
glare at you,
from the rim, posing too,

It's the green tiles,
signifying hope,
nature, spring, new life,
but I prefer the black and white

version, segue into aesthetic musings here,
for the light shimmers, heightening the dramaticism,
and I associate the war years with monochrome images—
magnetic pulls across my consciousness.

How I find myself falling towards you,
every time, you suck me into this space,
until I'm almost there, with you,
drenched in empire's decaying remains,

the triumph of good over evil
—that line dribbles clichéd tackiness,
but it's naturally true—it was what it was,
and you embody it perfectly.

*That nude statuette,
right hand on head, pert breasts,
did he gaze at it and fondle himself,
dreaming of conquest and annihilation?*

I want to crawl, slowly, across that floor,
the size of an ant, to soak it all in—
this scene, it's making, it's electric potency,
to smell its air as a speck of inconsequence,

then sharply withdraw,
back up the ages,
emboldened, impassioned,
baptised, reawakened.

FILM

In the blackness, flickering light,
screen bright,
plot sound actors,
privileged lives,

green exit sign latches eye,
glowing gently, comforting minds,
escape route back to the real world,
a relief there's no fire, despite the cold,

young man, silken fingers, phone screen lit,
soft blonde hair, beautiful skin,
forbidden fruit, so near, yet so far,
tight little arse, cutest guy,

friend's presence warming, if a little annoying,
as he sucks and slurps on his milkshake's straw,
and takes large mouthfuls of chewy popcorn,
pieces on the carpet, so worn,

this sea of humans, darkened heads,
these silhouettes, glued to the action taking place,
pin drop thoughts, ticking away, a brief time free
from the struggles of the day.

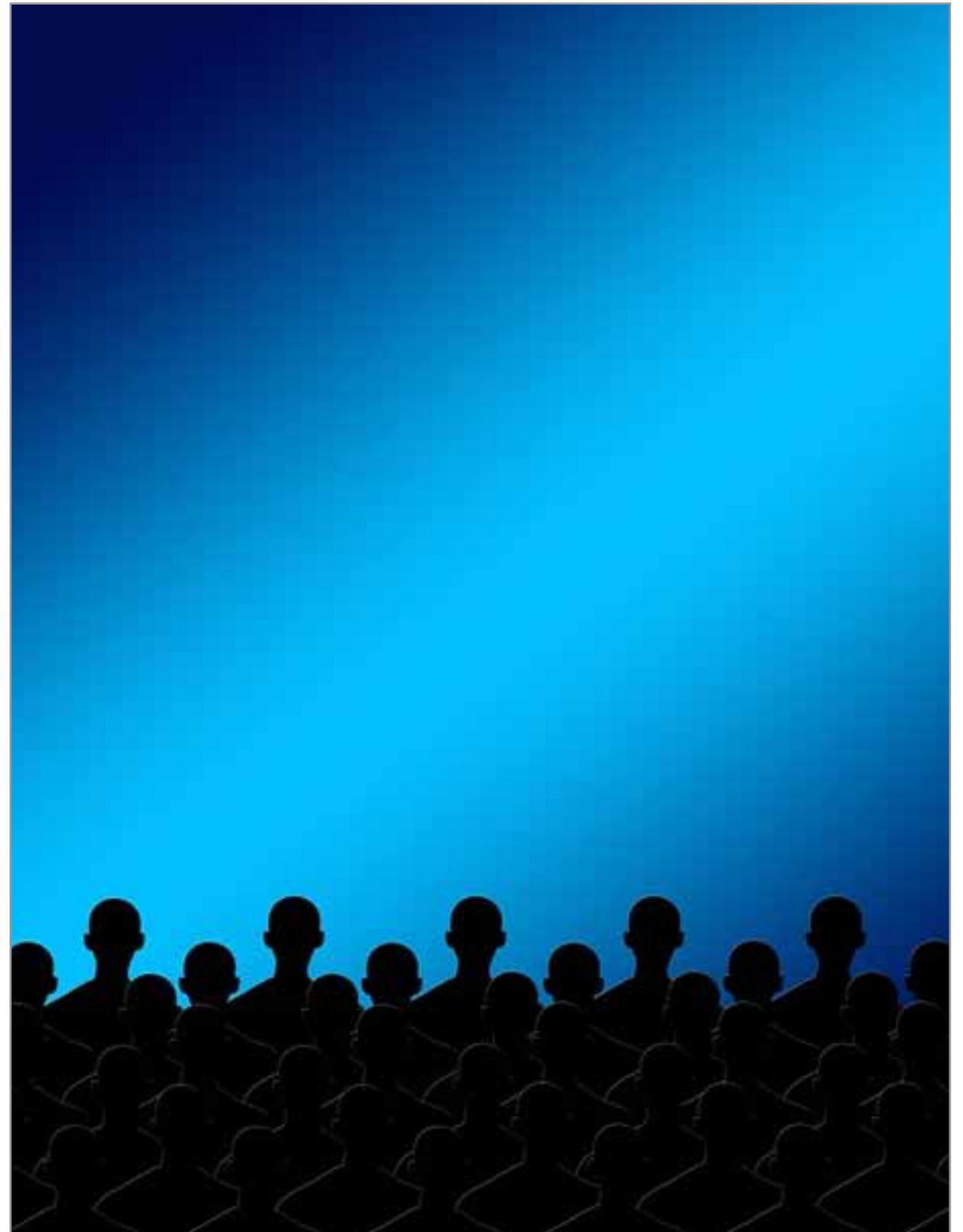


Photo courtesy: <https://pixabay.com/users/geralt-9301/>

Siobhan Harvey is an exiled writer originally from England, now resident in Aotearoa New Zealand. She's the author of eight books, including the poetry and creative nonfiction collection, *Ghosts* (Otago University Press, 2021), which was long listed for the 2022 Ockham Book Awards. She was awarded the 2021 Janet Frame Memorial Award for Poetry, 2020 New Zealand Society of Authors Peter & Dianne Beatson Fellowship, 2019 Kathleen Grattan Prize for a Sequence of Poems, 2019 Robert Burns Poetry Prize and Aotearoa New Zealand's richest prize for poetry, 2013 Kathleen Grattan Award. Recently, her work has been published in local and international journals and anthologies, like *Acumen* (UK), *Asia Literary Review* (HK), *Best New Zealand Poems* (three times), *Feminine Divine: Voices of Power & Invisibility* (Cyren US, 2019), *Fourth Genre* (US), *Griffith Review* (Aus), *Mslexia* (UK), *Out Here: An Anthology of LGBTQIA+ Writers from Aotearoa* (AUP, 2021), *Stand* (UK) and *Strong Words 2: The Best of the Land-fall Essay Competition* (Otago University Press, 2021). Presently she's a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at The Centre for Creative Writing, Auckland University of Technology where she holds a PhD in Creative Writing.



THE FATHER WITH NO FATHER IS THE FATHER WHO REJECTS YOU

No one will ever love you, said in his deep delivery,
as if darkness - a night-terror - was trapped in his throat.
Trapped in your memory also: the room narrowing,
like his eyes; and those six loveless words given
oxygen as the heat of August scorched the air,
the space tightening until your body emptied
of breath, and everything about you felt myopic
in that place you blindly still thought of as home.

No one will ever love you, said with a constraint
that endures. Like your suitcase packed in a hurry.
A door closed, never reopened by the same hand.
A cold night, the sky empty but for a single, dead star.
A phone call answered years later by a silence that choked
you, line cut. The letters unwritten, unsent. The emptiness
of these and other memories living in you like the sustained
consequences of a childhood contagion, stunting your growth.

Because no one will ever love you wasn't a point of origin,
but part of a lineage. A legacy: precious choker; genetic disease.
Bequeathed by a father who never spoke of his illegitimacy,
born - 'Father Unknown' - to an unwed mother in the war,
all spitfires and kamikazes, all air-raids and bomb-shelters,
the decades thereafter of its uneasy peace: whispers; bullies,
you bastard, said in their deep delivery; a cold stepfather; escape
into marriage ... Instead, passed down passion as conditional, his
to define in six loveless words surrendered the day you came out,
so they might rescue you from being unlovable. To others. To him.

Siobhan Harvey

SURVIVOR

It begins like this: the night,
moonless, is broken by a flight
of clouds, of cranes, of gravity
hauling sea to shore. Settlements

of houses, lovers, loners, new-
borns, tricksters, witches, covens of
worshippers, last breath-givers follow.
Wars rage. Peace stills. Epidemics pass,
like whispers, from strangers to friends.

Falling stars are miracle moments. Quakes,
shipwrecks and train-crashes are cavities swallowing
the past, birthing the future. Somewhere at the edge of

this long line of history-herstory, you materialise:
child born to damaged parents; child launched into
walls; child consuming books; child marked by
their lost whakapapa, and unspoken identity
in an era of the Aids crisis and Section 28;
child owning only the skin, bones and brain
their parents have always sought to break

down to dust, forgetting this much is magic:
words; ideas; narratives. The child's conviction
they aren't alien for being who they are, survivor,
compels them also towards the empty page,
where they trick the invisible into existence,

where, each morning, the world disintegrating
into war, pandemic, environmental disaster,
extremism, racism, misogyny, transphobia,
hate hate hate ... the writer finds devotion
in creating the first line of another story,
It begins like this: the night ...
and the next ...
and the next ...

WHALE

*Since 1840, over 5000 whale and dolphin strandings have been recorded
around the coast of Aotearoa, New Zealand .*

Her blue body bag had beached,
a spirit on the shore, ghosting

now against the eggshell tenderness
of sand, as yielding as her young.

From afar, she looks like cellophane
expanding and contracting in the sun.

Close up, she's fine-silted and calloused,
as encased and infinite as a fluid home.

Memories of her, like her once reverential music,
her once insistent imitation of the waves, flood back

through me as the blue horizon surrendering
her, as the swell turned to an open air cathedral

for her choir and communion. Raise her roof
by all means, open her like a box or coffin,

set free her insides in time, but remember,
she's the deep, dark space in everyone.

For too long have we envied her
magnificence. Too long have we ached for

a heart as strong and honest as hers.
Too long have we studied her

command of the world like light. Yes,
too long has she evinced the limits of

our existences in her gigantic lunging
against that which we can't contain.

Susan Glamuzina is a New Zealand author and poet who feels at home when there's sand between her toes and her thoughts are in the clouds. Susan's been published in the New Zealand Poetry Society magazine - a fine line, good company lit, Spillwords, Tales of the Domain, Tales from Dominion Road, and a number of international anthologies. Susan was runner up in the national Poetry Day, Poetry at the beach 2022.



SEE THE TREES

the closer to the forest
the less the edges blur
noise in my head
replayed conversations
memories
what I said wrong
how should I have acted?
clouds my mind
the trees centre me
reminding me to breathe
tree focused breath
the soggy scent
my head rests on the bark
throws a leaf between my hands
inhale
I now see the path because of the trees

Susan Glamuzina

Trevor M Landers, MA, MEd, MCW, is the Kahurangi of *Mātātūhi Taranaki*, the bilingual journal of creative writing servicing his home province of Taranaki. His latest project (with Vaughan Rapatahana and Ngauru Rawiri), *Ngā Pūrehu Kapohau: A literary homage to Pātea, Waverley, Waitōtara and districts* is due for release in May 2023. A follow up covering the rugged rural communities Eastern Taranaki is planned for 2024. These unpublished poems are drawn from the 2024 collection. He has previously published five volumes of poetry, as well as editing two national anthologies. <http://www.matatuhitaranaki.ac.nz/>



MAKING MAPS (AWAKINO HEADS)

I want to measure plumb lines
 & to chart new continents;
 the contours and curvatures of skin
 Draw new pleasures onto pliant canvasses;
 to dream a little more
 To put every fluid ounce of me into the ink which colours the topography of you
 Stencilled in pale pinks, mauve, sizzling reds & penitent purples
 To have at the command of my fingertips—an empire:
 Your bluffs; crevasses, major highways, and roads that lead me onward, imploring;
 I want to find flash-flooded rivers that make your tremulous heart race
 Find dank doorways in your industrial estates,
 luxuriate in long, languid rambles
 across the Nape of your neck
 To press my face into windowless shops
 and to inhale the fragrance that lingers
 & to come and know, the splendours of cartography.

Trevor M Landers

AWAKINO AT DUSK

Under a veil of drifting mist
sounds of night surcease
sea and air around effuse
in a state of timeless peacefulness
this is Awakino near dusk.

Dusk breaks in bright reflections
Mauve ribbons emblazoned across the sky
burning away the mist
the sea returns rainbow refractions
a thousand fathoms deep

From beyond the black horizon
the ocean roils and writhes
in mottled green confusions
night sweeps in burgling the last light
this is Awakino after dusk.

A THING OF INORDINATE BEAUTY
(WAI-ITI BEACH)

It was remarkable
the way he put her insecurities to sleep
with all the skill of an old time somnambulist
the way he dived into her opalescent eyes
and starved all her gnawing fears
& tasted all her incandescent dreams
that she had stockpiled in bone marrow
& when you have swum in her oceans
a lake will no longer suffice
everyone else is a pond but you are always the ocean
find a hand in the darkness of a flood
& if there is insufficient light
I propose you & I enter the water.

AN ATHENIAN DREAM (KAIMATA)

For Chrysa

Bring me your pain, love
spread it like a fine tapestry
unfurl the soiled threads
the flashes of silk
the discarded sheets of a white-hot conflagrations
doused in midnight passions nightly
lay them open in the morning sun
be as flush and open as a budding rose
a carmine entrance
a garland of delicate petals
a pleasure-way of delicious surrenders
fragrance it with cinnamon and sugars
like the aurulent new dawn
let our congresses be as sweet opiates
& yield to me, absolutely!



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Valentina Teclici, Romanian born, immigrated to New Zealand in 2002. In 1999, she completed a PhD in sociology at the University of Bucharest, with a thesis about street children. Her debut book, *De la noi din gradiniță (From our Kindergarden)*, Ion Creangă Publishing House, 1986, was awarded a national prize. Poems and excerpts from her books for children are included in the bibliography and textbooks for primary and secondary education in Romania. She has published several books of sociology, poetry and stories for children in both Romanian and English. Her work has been translated into French, Te Reo and Spanish and published in many magazines and anthologies in New Zealand and overseas. In 2016 and 2018, Valentina edited and translated the bilingual collection "Poetical Bridges – Poduri lirice" (Vol I & II), Scripta manent Publishing House, Ltd., Napier, that includes the work of 24 Romanian poets and 24 poets from New Zealand.



STOLEN CHILDHOOD

Half Russian and half Ukrainian, I'm only a boy,
but I feel very old.
My soul is burdened by loss, grief and fear.
My childhood was stolen by war.

I lost my dad. He was shot all over his body.
I'm wondering if one of my mum's brothers,
or cousins, or Russian friends did this.
My soul burdened by loss, grief and fear.
My childhood suddenly gone.

My mum lost two brothers,
shot and abandoned on foreign land.
They were kind and young like my dad.
In holidays, I used to visit them
and play with my cousins.
I'm wondering if my uncles were killed
by one of my dad's Ukrainian relatives or friends?
My soul burdened by loss, grief and fear.
My childhood was stolen by war.

My grandparents from Bucha were also slain
when a bomb crushed their home.
Why was this massacre allowed to happen?
Why does this massacre seem to have no end?
What is going to happen to me and others like me
half Ukrainian and half Russian?
My soul is burdened by loss, grief and fear.
My childhood was stolen by war.

Valentina Teclici

BETWEEN

Between me and you
the sound of love.
Between me and my children
the power of commitment
and unconditional love.
Between me and heavenly sky
the truth of my previous lives,
the gains of my learning.
Between me and poetry
the blue shape of my spirit
moulded in metaphorical expressions,
the journey of unspoken feelings
written on wings of time
by moments instead of words.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

2010 - 2022



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
APRIL 2023

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE