

# a *fine* line

New Zealand Poetry Society Magazine  
Te Hunga Tito Ruri o Aotearoa

**Barren**



**Summer 2022**

**Featured Poet:** Joanna Preston

**Featured Articles:** Emma Barnes, Robyn Maree Pickens

**Cover Art:** Claire Beynon

**Reviews:** Chris Reed, Vaughan Rapatahana

Members' Poems • Haiku • Art • Reviews

# a fine line

The Magazine of the  
New Zealand Poetry Society  
Te Hunga Tito Ruri o Aotearoa

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

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**Managing Editor:** Gail Ingram  
**Editorial Assistant:** Lily Holloway

## *Quotation of the season*

from "Approaching the start of  
civil exams" by **Jim Chapson**

"all knowledge is futile and  
barren  
which does not open the love  
of your friends."

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### Cover Art

Claire Beynon "Walking with Arvo part ii"

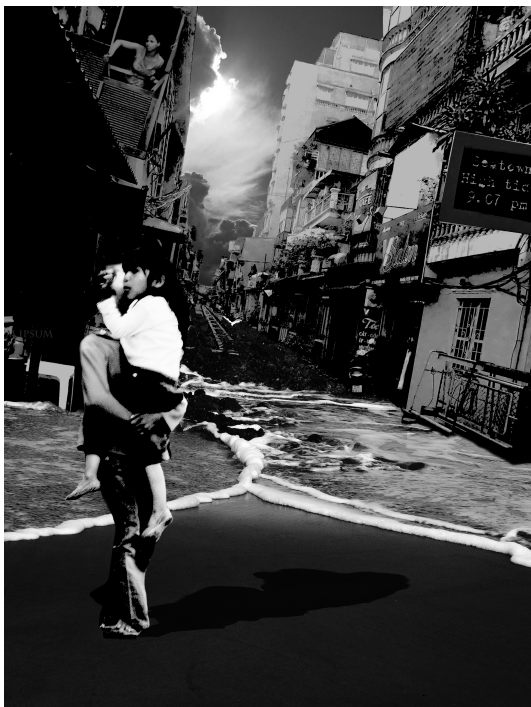
### Contributing Art

Claire Beynon, Edna Heled, Kirk Lafferty, Jenny Longstaff

*a fine line* affirms and upholds the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and acknowledges  
Māori as the tangata whenua and kaitiaki of Aotearoa.

# Editorial

## Gail Ingram



"seatown" by Kirk Lafferty

I was late to Leonard Cohen. Bernadette Hall introduced him me in my thirties as the kind of music to “lie down, turn up loud, and weep.” This summer issue, themed barren, is for weeping to. There are poems of despair, anger, emptiness, loss. I wept after reading **Emma Neale**’s “Night-call”, sighed through the grief of many others (see **Antoinette Baker**, **Karen Zelas**, **Sophia Wilson**) and wondered what I was thinking having ‘barren’ as a theme. But then I realised there’s something about this time of great unravelling where weeping and sighing could not be more apt. Isn’t weeping a washing, a cleaning of the spirit, a time to lie down and let go, an essential response that readies us to stand up again and fight for what we hold dear?

Setting us up with the unsettled brooding of ocean and sky in the beautiful cover art of **Claire Beynon**, this edition begins with the portentous “Chronicle of the year 793” by our guest poet **Joanna Preston**. Other poems from her glorious new book *tumble* (OUP 2021), longlisted for the 2022 NZ Book Awards, follow. **Emma Barnes** talks us through editing the new anthology *Out Here* (AUP 2021) and

how the state of queer poetry in Aotearoa is a lot less barren than it used to be (thanks to editors like them and Chris Tse). The haiku section is rich with wonderful writers from our community – **Sue Courtney**, **Sharyn Barberel**, **Anne Curran** and **Barbara Strang** and more. One of our long-contributing reviewers, **Vaughan Rapatahana** responds to *As light into water* by **Piet Nieuwland**, and **Chris Reed** reviews *Far-Flung* by **Rhian Gallagher**. 2021 winner of the Kathleen Grattan Prize for a sequence of poems, **Robyn Maree Pickens**, writes about he/r winning sequence *High Clouds*.

This summer – as the high clouds scud across the sky – I imagine you have beside you your fabulous copy of our 2021 NZPS anthology *Kissing a Ghost*, edited by the brilliant **Tim Jones** and designed by **Anne Harré**. It’s a balm to read – young writers alongside experienced poets, haiku alongside poetry. Big thanks to **Kim Martins** for the work behind the scenes, **RikTheMost** and **Shane Hollands** for hosting our successful online launch. Anthology orders can be placed online through Stripe at [bit.ly/3oMpP9a](https://bit.ly/3oMpP9a).

In other NZPS news, congratulations to our new editorial assistant **Lily Holloway** on their acceptance into the IIML programme this year. Also check out **RikTheMost**’s fortnightly “[Poetry Slam At Your Place](#)” for international spoken word poetry – all welcome. Later this year, keep an eye on the NZPS webpage – we’re planning a fresh new look and more resources.

The theme for the next issue is “eye” due March 10, 2022. Members, please send up to four poems (40 lines max), up to four haiku, and your eye-themed artwork by 10 March 2022 to Gail Ingram, [editor@poetrysociety.org.nz](mailto:editor@poetrysociety.org.nz).

But before you do, tap into your sorrow, lie down in the sun, and turn the page.

# Featured Poet

## Joanna Preston

### Chronicle of the year 793

This year, half gone, has worn heavy.  
A sickness plagued the cattle,  
and many were lost. A blight  
has afflicted the crops –  
the ears of grain grow sticky and dark  
and will not ripen.

What we have to share, we give,  
but so many are hungry.  
When the king left, Father Higbald  
stripped the hangings and plate  
from his room, sent the sacristan  
to sell what he could and buy bread  
for the weakest, for the children.

And still the portents come.  
Dragons in flight, great flashes  
of fire from a cloudless sky.  
The miller's son ran wild – tore  
at the skin of his chest and arms  
until it hung in bloodied ribbons.  
He saw visions. Demon faces  
leered from the walls  
he said. A day later he died.

Stranger still, at vespers three nights ago  
a great flock of birds blackened the sky.  
People cried out, or fled, or clung  
to the altar cloths.  
So many birds! Yet afterwards  
not one feather was found  
to name them.

And now again! Strange,  
how their wingbeats sound  
like oars.



"bereft" Jenny Longstaff

from *tumble* (OUP 2021)

## **The dollhouse**

Through the window, with its wimple of lace  
into a room where no clock ever strikes,  
g on the wall is mathematically straight,  
and the two armchairs face each other  
slant, like lawyers.

Further in, and a girl  
in frilled socks, her hair in neat plaits  
is dressing her dolls before breakfast.  
Here is the mother: here is her apron.  
Here is the father: here are his trousers,  
painted on. Here is his shirt, freshly pressed.  
Here is his briefcase, his necktie, his car keys.  
Here are the mother's blood-red stilettos.  
Here is the mother's short skirt.

And here  
is the kitchen table, the three chairs,  
three plates. Here are the three spoons  
that catch the light, and the two adults  
who will not catch each other's eyes, no matter  
how their daughter contorts them.

## **Burning**

Late afternoon, and I'm burning tree-stumps. This one, deep  
in the cattle-camp of scribbly gums, sticking out a metre, with  
a sharp point like the one that bled the broodmare dry. I build  
the twig-pile around the base, burn the wood-witch at the  
stake. Bullgrass and bark-pith tucked under. The match flares  
like a curse, like a hole ripped open into another world. Friend  
and enemy, servant perpetually on the point of rebellion.  
Blessings laid at the foot of the mountain. I lean close, give it  
my breath.

sunset  
the last glimmer  
goes out

from *tumble* (OUP 2021)

## **Lares and penates**

God of the river, its laughing mouth,  
god of secrets singing rain to the roof,  
god of the paddocks, god of the track  
leading safely through the boggy creek,  
god of the lilly pilly, god of the silver net  
strung between gateposts, catching the stars.

Every outcrop, every ridge, every stand  
of trees – guardians of the border  
woven between earth and sky –  
so many threads, our stories, braided  
and tasselled or tucked  
neatly into the backing –  
the mountain  
with great-grandfather's name,  
the three silky oaks, heeled-in overnight  
that grew into one – god  
of the spendthrift  
Christmas beetles, their jewels  
scattered underfoot by morning.

The sun on the far ridge, flooding my veins.  
The shifting course of the river in spate,  
swelling the tone of my voice.  
How could you live, rootless, unclaimed?  
How can you stand, so far  
from the bones of the mountain?

How else, when the child disappeared –  
paddocks and solemn cattle, snakes  
and long grass waving, waving,  
the ripples spread wider, the barn,  
the car shed, the sullen pond,  
the underworld beneath the house,  
the boar with his mouth full of razors,  
the hooved, the toothed, the tusked –  
did they find me unharmed, a mile from home  
asleep on the hillside,  
the kelpie bitch standing guard at my head,  
unless cradled and claimed by something  
that knows us all?

from *tumble* (OUP 2021)

## Spelunking

Halfway in through her ex’s window, just  
at the point where she’d committed  
most of her weight to the ball  
of her outstretched foot – toes  
wedged behind the tap, heel pressing  
back against the wall – that  
was when she remembered he’d said  
he’d be getting a dog.

Strange, the thoughts that run  
through the mind at a time like this.

Like all the hours she’d spent  
at this sink in daylight, and never noticed  
the tap growing loose in its socket  
like a milk-tooth,  
                                moisture oozing  
across the bench like the tide across mudflats,  
wicking, she noticed, up her stocking,  
her foot cold, and going numb.

She’d forgotten just how dark  
this kitchen was at night. Almost  
as dark as the cave they’d climbed into,  
years ago, a darkness their headlamps  
could barely push aside.

There too, ever-present, the sound  
of seeping water, centuries accreting  
into draperies of breathing rock  
– their sculptor called away,  
bare moments before the stone  
could show its face, free a curve  
of naked shoulder.

The headlights of a passing car  
splashed light across the kitchen,

sent her shadow leaping for the door  
and the handle that, she noticed now,  
was turning.

first published *Poetry New Zealand Yearbook* (2017)

## **Catching up with Harry**

I'd like to think the spider  
talks to the fly he's wrapping –  
asks about her day, the weather,  
whether she had something  
planned this weekend – the last  
apologetically, as he tucks and turns  
the parcel he has made her into,  
neat and orderly.

Last time I spoke to Harry,  
he was wrapping a couple  
of steaks, tying the string  
into delicate butchers' knots  
and planning his daughter's wedding.  
She and I were as close as crossed fingers  
once. Time sheds its fine meal  
over everything.

The last time I saw Harry  
was the calendar behind the shop counter,  
one hand smoothing his apron, smiling,  
buttocks bared towards the camera.  
Still apple-cheeked as ever, but his hair  
mere cobweb draped across his scalp.  
October never made me smile before.

Beyond the window's plastic grass  
the sky wore town colours, white on blue.  
Two clouds, poised like marionettes  
or the little girls on traffic signs,  
skipping hand in hand, silently, forever.



# Featured Article

## Emma Barnes

Co-Editor of *Out Here* (AUP 2021)

### The State of It Out Here: On Editing an Anthology that Celebrates Queer Writing in Aotearoa



"birds" by Edna Heled

Through the process of assembling and creating *Out Here: An Anthology of Takatāpui and LGBTQIA+ Writers from Aotearoa* (AUP 2021) my co-editor Chris Tse and I both really wanted to demonstrate that queer writers have been 'out here' for a long time and contributing to the writing world in Aotearoa for a long time. We wanted to undo the glossing over, the wilful ignorance and shame that often surrounds queer writers. We wanted to show we are here in our multiplicity, in our complexity and in our beauty. We write across genres and styles. We're experimental and familiar. We're funny, we're sad, we're desirable. So often we're considered tragedies, we're one figure in a crowd rather than an entire crowd of voices, or we're seen as damaged and troubled. We wanted this book to be a cacophony of sound, a wild circus of words that could lead people in and out of themselves, all in 368 pages.

"Of course you don't recognise me;  
you grow into something you cannot yet  
comprehend—

I am a version of you from the future.  
I can prove it."

(*"I am a version of you from the future"*)

— Jackson Nieuwland, *Out Here* (AUP 2021)

Over and over again, as we put the book together many people mentioned to us that they weren't queer enough or that their writing wasn't queer enough or that they were sure they didn't belong. It is still a big step to reveal queerness. It's often a revelation that can come at very fraught moments. It's something you have to say over and over. It can leave one open to rejection or violence. Often it's a conversation never started. It can be a

strange thing to congregate around shared sexual desire, similar difference or shared understandings of gender. Yet queer people and spaces have been some of the most nourishing in my life: the lesbians in their 60s and 70s who shared their lives with me when I was in my late teens; the butch I fell in love with when I lived in Japan who took me to Sapporo Pride and to queer snack bars, and found me a home there even though I'd gone to Japan determined to act straight. There are many layers, disadvantages and complexities to queer life. Yet here we are. Continuing.

"We'll all be very very brave  
because being a person requires great bravery,  
and we won't have to wear signs around our  
necks saying I am a Person.  
We'll become immune to all tropes, and win  
every prize.

If we find a gun under the floorboards in the  
first act,  
we will bring world peace by the fourth act.  
If we open our lockets to show the platoon a  
photograph of our loved one,  
We'll be guaranteed to survive until the end  
credits."

(*"New transgender blockbusters"*)

— Oscar Upperton, *Out Here* (AUP 2021)

Just before Covid became something real to me I was in Sydney for Mardi Gras. I went to a couple of parties that were like nothing I'd ever experienced before. A dance party of well over 1000 people, all queer, all in various states of dress and undress. All genders, all bodies, all welcome. Dancing. Having deep and intense conversations. A casual kind of intimacy I've only ever really experienced in queer spaces. I was coming out of a

hard few years and wasn't in a place to get involved. I politely declined most advances and took in as much as I could, glorying in all these beautiful queer people. It was particularly special for me to see so many joyous fat people. I returned home mere weeks before lockdown, full of hope and full of over 1000 pages of the submissions we received. Full of the possibility of a larger, queerer community than I'd known before in Aotearoa.

At times Chris and I felt like we were in a process of discovery. We sought out queer elders, we found peers we'd never known were queer and then a huge number of writers our age and younger out there, out here. We decided to open submissions right from the start of the process because we knew our connections alone wouldn't be good enough. Even then I'm still hearing stories of people we didn't reach, or people who felt they weren't queer enough or worried their writing wasn't queer enough, or people who had heard about it well after we'd finalised the selections and headed to print.

“Girls just wanna have fun girls just wanna  
be fatal eyeliner like slits in their skin  
lipstick like bloodstains nails like claws

Girls just wanna escape but there is no escape  
when the past rattles from all directions in time  
so they find escape in their own bodies

until they no longer sit in their own skin  
but watch themselves laugh (until laughter  
sounds like a language) high above”

(“Girls just wanna have fun”)

— Cadence Chung, *Out Here* (AUP 2021)

The state of queer writing in Aotearoa is alive and well, particularly poetry, though of course I'm biased because I write poetry. Soon *eel magazine* is going to release its first edition – a new queer magazine and run by shania pablo, Nathan Joe and Lily Holloway. Lily tweeted recently about feedback they received during the pitching process that suggested there wouldn't be a market for their queer poetry magazine in New Zealand. They received 104 submissions and funding to build their vision. *Starling*, a lit journal for young New Zealand writers, continues to publish many queer voices. Its 12th edition had an editorial committee

that included Sinead Overbye who features in *Out Here*. Sinead also has another project on the go – this time with Jordan Hamel, editor of *Stasis* – a lockdown project from 2020 that resurfaced in the most recent lockdown. It offers an array of many queer pieces and voices, though not exclusively. Both *Starling* and *Stasis* release poems or writing through Instagram, a format I'm coming to love more and more. It's like an ice-cream tasting where you're delivered a mouthful of something delicious on the regular and you can go find a whole tub if that's what you'd like to do. It has exposed me to writers and writing I may not have found any other way.

Writers featured in *Out Here* have released books this year [2021], or written and performed operas. They've helped to start Taonga Pūoro festivals and have spoken at festivals throughout Aotearoa and featured in EnQueer, the Sydney Queer Writers' Festival inaugural run. I was lucky to be at The New Zealand Young Writers Festival in Ōtepoti in October. It felt to me like a queer festival. So many events had queer panellists or writers. At the slam held during the festival, it felt like most of the poets performing were queer. It was a welcoming and beautiful space of conversation and connection over a weekend in Ōtepoti.

Together Chris and I have only scratched the surface of queer writing in Aotearoa. We were able to publish a small selection of writers who either submitted or who we sought out. There's a lot more out there for you to find. We're out here. We're all over the place. You just have to pay attention. You just have to be able to see.

“I've always liked Venn diagrams.  
The cocoon they make for those of us who walk  
in two worlds.  
The shape of the waka, the porotiti,  
the leaf of the karaka tree  
grown from the seed my ancient held in his  
palms  
as he prayed his way across the ocean.  
His warmth germinating the plants  
that feed the landscape he prayed for.”

(“Both”)

— Ruby Solly, *Out Here* (AUP 2021)

# Members' Poems

## Emma Neale

### Night-call

When the day he died  
turned its face away  
and became our night

sleep was severed like a cord  
we wandered a circuit of streets  
wintered in a dark so deep

we felt spun in a wave of ice;  
tar-black footpath and inkwell sky  
tumbled and swung in a chill swoop.

Unknit night, unstrung sun, noon-star moon,  
what measure, what world, what news was this  
where the heart could slit

like a full new sack of crystal grain  
caught on a metal hook  
and when from the witch-claw reach

of our landlord's front yard tree  
that in six years had never borne  
a single green-winged leaf,

a solitary bird could suddenly sing and sing  
a star-beaded embroidery in triplets rising?  
Melody so Mozartian, sweet-fibred,



*"These are our days" by Claire Beynon*

it capsized the senses,  
wrote bioluminescence in audio,  
a sung italics of wrongness, confusion,

the wrench and lean  
of an omen delivered so late  
it was no longer truly an omen.

Death to breath,  
night to day, song to sob,  
half-orphan or daughter

the scarring disquiet  
of that night lark's weird beauty  
is the sparkle of glass  
still lipped by a wound.

## Mary Cresswell

### Takahē

*Until 1948, the takahē was considered extinct.*

Extinct, you were everywhere  
in unmapped hills,  
free as the moa  
beyond the next ridge.

Snow-tussock shredded  
significant droppings  
proved you had hidden  
deep in the bush.

Now you're a poster bird,  
glaring through townships  
labelled and tracked  
whenever you move.

You loom like the misery  
of small-town life.

## Antoinette Baker

### Anniversary

the November loam  
is friable fecund  
it seasons the mother hands  
and shiny brow  
like sprinkled crumbs  
from a tiny messy mouth

barren three years now

the chatelaine rattles  
there's no need to knock

tender the plot  
of pinks bursting on  
nearly Show Week's  
budding breeze

soon there'll be  
that damnable foehn  
across the plains  
across the day  
of the mangled wreck  
of her daughter's life

white she was

Solomon's seal  
reaches to her  
its thread  
of many bells  
falls over the edge

wanting to be lifted

there's the smell  
of unpeeling

earth altars ready

a young woman  
settles again  
her mother's crook

## Karen Zelas

### Re-generation

there is little sad as  
a barren hillside its korowai  
systematically felled

from shoulders rounded in grief nothing  
but yellow clay and odd limbs  
strewn like matchsticks by dogs of war

I had an aunt who was said to be 'barren'  
the spaces  
in her life  
unfillable by her husband's thoughtfulness  
or homeless dogs there is

no generosity in disappointment no  
satiation in a smile no poetry  
in words whispered to a wounded womb

the hillside will be replanted  
in regimented rows before it can slip away  
under the wash of tears

before it can be reclaimed by forest – dust  
pollen seeds fern the koru-curl  
of your fist around my finger a silent eulogy

## Michael Fitzsimons

### A day in lock-down

A little boy stands in the garden,  
concrete palms open to the birds and the rain.

Remember you and the boy that afternoon,  
not doing a lot, weeding,  
turning compost,  
shaping an olive tree into a perfect orb,  
lighting a quiet fire

and remember how you sat  
with a glass of wine at the end of the day  
and watched the 6 o'clock show,  
a flamingo news reader  
with her slick animations  
of sky-rocketing death.

What if the cure is worse than the illness, said  
the reporter.  
The illness *is* death, said the governor.  
What can be worse than death?

What about pouring some detergent down your  
throat,  
said the president. Let's look at that.  
It could be interesting.

Remember that night,  
your view from the white carpet at the top of the  
stairs,  
the little boy luminous,  
above him the moon.

### Woodshed

Unquiet self,  
ungrateful self,  
come with me  
across the lawn  
to the woodshed  
with the leaking roof  
and blunt axe.

## Sophia Wilson

### Waning

At the year eleven formal a boy asks  
*What happened to you?*

I am moving my skeleton like Cyndi Lauper:

*girls just wanna have fun*

[seven: Waxing – sun-browned, barefoot,  
ravenous

nine: I swim in the dam,

I look for yabbies

ten: I knit, I roller skate, I collect stamps

twelve: I breed ducks, I sit in branches and read

thirteen: I put my Walkman on. I run.

fourteen: I weigh thirty-eight kilograms

fifteen: I circle my body like a scavenger

sixteen: I shrug,]

*Nothing.*

### Unthinkable

We handled with care small, charred animals,  
imagined what would happen  
if all the trees disappeared for good.

unthinkable

slowly drowning while intubated,  
one human pinning another to tar seal,  
sadistically sealing breath,

the real, bleak, airless deal going down.

unthinkable

plundering forests in wake of inferno,  
rare remnant erasure, native wipe-out,  
the take-down of trees, animals, people.

my children, in tears, ask, why? how?  
i tell them, i don't know.

it's complicated

it's

first published *Mayhem* 2020

## Alexandra Fraser

### Not one of us

each day skin changes  
crinkles shrinks

she wonders about ecdysis  
re-growth of damaged self

those remnants of exterior  
exuviae fallen to wind-drift

and what bright-winged creature  
might yet emerge

or at the end a slight breeze  
a flurry of dust?

the eyes of strangers drift past her  
each day less visible

she walks into the dark  
out of place  
out of time

### Small transmogrifications

A shoot lifting above the earth  
leaves hoping for sun  
the stem drooping  
with the weight of a terminal bud  
an eyeball dripping blood  
which pools and soaks to buried roots  
the nourishment of death

The eye has retained its vision  
can see through a rust-coloured film  
an arid expanse of soil  
rock decayed to dust  
and in the distance vultures  
searching for prey  
swivelling their eyes of violets and plums  
they hear only the slither of worms  
hungry for the flower's blood

## harold cou tts

### barrenness

you scoop me out  
in sterile expedition  
like a well you would empty so others cannot  
quench  
thirst is a flame you are fanning  
i am but an exterior left in your ruinings  
like a beacon you hold aloft & unlit  
more for the showing than the function  
like the special ceramic plates  
or balls on a dildo  
be my heartbreaker  
my destroyer, my everything  
turn me into cement and build a house from my  
body  
then burn me down and claim insurance  
treat me like a pasture gone to the goats  
and pull me back by your teeth  
until the roots in my earth don't know where to  
grow to

## Katie Millington

### X

A spider on my ceiling,  
an unsympathetic witness to my lonely life,  
stares down, mocks me for  
being in bed at this hour of the morning,  
meanwhile she's climbed  
Everest.

She tells me we look  
like sisters though I'm old  
enough to be her mother,  
rolls her eyes at the mention of botox,  
makes it known she plans on  
growing old gracefully.

I thank her for her insight  
into why I sign my emails with an X –  
according to her, it's a mark  
of the previous generation, back when  
a woman needed to be meek in business  
in order to survive.

Now let's be clear,  
the four walls she's scurried up overnight –  
I paid for them myself and,  
given she's on the payroll,  
I (technically) also paid  
for those shiny climbing boots.

She'll make her move any minute now,  
she eats my kind,  
she sucks out experience,  
she squeezes her eight tiny feet into my size  
nine stilettos,  
unzips my skin and wears me  
as a coat.



## Dorian David Leigh

### Tell Me a Story

Today a child was born  
Who will never know the smell of rain.  
She will never see the ground covered  
In silver beads of water  
Or taste the freshness of a single droplet caught  
Upon her tongue.  
Her grandmother will tell her stories  
Of a time when water danced from the sky.  
She will ask what clouds are,  
And her father will compare them  
To the smoke of the mechanical firebird  
Whose feathers they wring for water.

## Roland Oliver

### In Memory of Denis Greville

I don't know how it is  
yet still I see you swimming  
                                    at Titirangi Beach  
going far out, as you usually did  
beyond safe reach  
                                    drifting toward the channel  
  
with easy stroke, your fair arms  
lifting clear of the gold-green swell  
the almost tropical summer scene  
your arms arcing high  
                                    into blue  
pink-bonneted skies  
                                    the bright-billowing sails  
  
saluting the crowns of kauri and rimu  
whose emissaries dart  
                                    from branch to branch...  
  
I don't know how it is  
that you're still swimming  
                                    and the weather's spanking  
effulgent, sparkling...  
  
– already it's getting late, dark, cold  
everyone's heading home for bed –  
  
yet you're still out there calling  
*Come on out, come on in!*

# Iona Winter

## Protest

### *a found poem*

*for Reuben*

1. To fight *exhaustion*: avoid *sitting down*.  
But isn't *sleep deprivation* considered *torture*?

I felt like I had died, was *just so tired*,  
with a *desperate longing* all *clammed up*,  
so I *scrubbed the table raw*, *expressionless*.

It's *hard to think* – please God *let me sleep*.

2. *Nose to the ground* I yelled, offering myself up,  
'This woman doesn't *matter*.'

But why I am so frightened?  
Because *human kindness* belies my defiance;  
that kind of *assistance* is not *limitless*.

And I cannot distance myself, from the *pain* of  
remembrance

3. Tell me friend, is *fire and brimstone* the answer?  
We can fight with *great bitterness*, but *our ancient*  
*fidelities* have failed us.

*No loyalty in their hearts* when women and men are *ruined*  
by *mass indifference*, and *prejudices* are illustrated  
to the *point of obstinacy*.

It's *a tragedy* – with a *lunatic edge* to it.

4. Privileges *suspended at whim*. Basic rights taken  
in an attempt to cleanse, *break* and *weaken*.

And it's difficult to *imagine*, yet *striking in its intensity*.  
For you, son, I will protest *for the rest of my life*.  
Strength is the *basis* of our *survival* now,

and I've got nothing left to lose.

Italicised words borrowed from:  
*Only the rivers run free. Northern Ireland: The Women's War*  
by Eileen Fairweather, Roisin McDonough and Melanie McFadyean

## Edna Heled

### **Adama, Admati\***

*Are you going home?* – you whisper to me  
as the class is about to wind down  
and I am like – 'yes', then I am like - 'no'  
then I am like – 'Why must you ask me this now?'  
and I am like – 'pain', then I am like – 'wrong!'  
then I am – 'the lawn by the driveway has grown  
and the walls are all bare and the rooms are all torn  
and there's nothing left of what I once loved to own

but you've never known, cause I've never told'  
*Yes, sure! Going home. Need a lift?* – I respond

\*Adama, Admati (Hebrew): earth, my earth. Also – land, my land/homeland.

### **Noho Māmā – Environmental Chant**

Abundance all around us  
noho māmā  
live lightly

Let's rewrite the story of the princess and the pea  
cause the pea is not the worry, cause the pea is what we need

we can chuck the pile of mattresses, give up the silky quilt  
bid farewell to blinding eagerness, go back to treasure seed

so much beauty in the humble, we can wave goodbye to greed  
in our hands are all the remedies – let's follow them with deed

we don't want our country barren, cause we want our land to feed  
our fields can thrive and flourish – let's uproot the glutton weed

let's collect, let's grow, let's gather, so the soil will heal and breed  
talk together, plant together, pave the way to better creed

Abundance all around us  
noho māmā  
live lightly

# Featured Article

## Robyn Maree Pickens

Winner of Kathleen Grattan Prize for a Sequence of Poems

### About *High clouds*

Many of the poems that were included in the final sequence of *High clouds* were written over the first few months of 2021. I had set aside these summer months as I wanted to be out with the rest of nature. My PhD, which I submitted on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January this year, critically and creatively advances the concept of reparative ecopoetics, so I wanted time outside to explore subjectivity and (the rest of) nature. In brief, reparative ecopoetics, as the term suggests, reads and writes for glimpses of repair, remediation, and regeneration of especially the earth and nonhuman beings in poetry and artworks. I developed the use of “kin” to discuss “nature” and employ “ki” and “kin” as singular and plural pronouns respectively for the earth and nonhuman beings. For example, instead of saying, “It (a tree) is beautiful,” I would say, “Ki is beautiful.” My usage of these terms originates with the work of Potawatomi botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer and theorist Donna Haraway.

So a year ago now I spent a lot of time out the back of my place, which opens onto the town belt (in Ōtepoti Dunedin) with huge trees and native birds. I thought a lot about and had phenomenological experiences with kin, such as the porosity of self and what constitutes a self, interconnectedness, love, lovers, and the role of language in all of this. One example regarding subjectivity inverts western hierarchical ideas about humans and plants: “A thousand-year-old tree breathes us and out between.” Another few lines from a different poem are full of wonder for the interactions that preceded humans: “When the large meteor struck / magnolia trees were pollinated by beetles / This was before bees.” The poem, “Too



*"Oil & Water do not mix" by Claire Beynon*

hot for ciphers” included here, experiments with the themes outlined above by eliding the spaces between words in several instances, and plays with language, such as near homonyms: “trajectories leaped further / trajectories leopard father.”

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***In brief, reparative ecopoetics, as the term suggests, reads and writes for glimpses of repair, remediation, and regeneration of especially the earth and nonhuman beings in poetry and artworks.***

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In many respects, I felt that my experiments with languages, syntax and typography would be understood by the judge of the Kathleen Grattan Prize for a Sequence of Poems, Vana Manasiadis, and I gave myself permission to push these aspects further. I subsequently expanded on this trajectory and it became a separate manuscript that was a finalist of the OUP Kathleen Grattan Award (also in 2021). I had often thought about a more multilingual style of poetry, as I have a smattering of different languages, and am interested to see if I will continue this mode in the future. Being placed in both competitions gave me a sense of validation for which I am very grateful.

What next? Well, I hope to publish a collection based on these two manuscripts as they share many thematic and formal similarities. I will see how the two work together and develop the synergies further. I imagine the two together will create a foundation to which I can add and play with.

## Robyn Maree Pickens

### Too hot for ciphers

The eyelid rolls from one palmandintothestomataoftheleaf

Birds still fly intosmallholesinthewall—  
fathom a release of crown tension

trajectories leaped further  
trajectories leopard father

wings flame blaze flare up

this vulnerability  
this summer skin  
this theyfriend  
this warmest small

# Review

## Chris Reed

### *Far-Flung - Rhian Gallagher*

(Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2020).  
ISBN 9781869409111. RRP \$24.99. 96pp.



Rhian Gallagher's latest collection *Far-Flung* demonstrates a maturing voice. After her 2011 offering, *Shift*, she was awarded the 2018 Robert Burns Fellowship Grant, and *Far-Flung* is the resulting piece. Her artistic journey is a triumph. As a child she struggled to read but

recognised the importance of oral language. Growing up a Roman Catholic, prayer was an important part of a dedicated Christian's lifestyle and she recognised the importance granted to those words. For her now, words carry deep connotations and develop the speaker as a storyteller, especially in contrast to our modern age where data is favoured. Gallagher has never taken words for granted and every word carries meaning.

Her collection *Far-Flung* captures the importance of words to her: the meanings, the images they evoke and the stories they tell. The collection is split into two major sections: *The Speed of God*, and *Seacliff Epistles*. The former contains, largely, poetry of Gallagher's relationship with the land and history; the latter is a series of poems that bring forth some of the stories of people entangled in the devastating history of the now defunct Seacliffe Institute (termed Mental Asylum in its time) just outside of the city of Dunedin.

Poems throughout *The Speed of God* present New Zealand in all its rural and parochial glory. Small town feelings and activities are observed with an almost celebratory tone. "Country Hall" creates that connection within a community that we

all have as part of our collective memory. The anticipation and the atmosphere of these local events are captured in the first stanza:

Bring-a-plate occasions, flagon beer,  
rites of passage: final year  
school concert, a twenty-first, the wedding  
dance  
("Country Hall")

Later in this section, Gallagher gives prominence to the quintessential component of most New Zealand poetry: the relationship between people and the land, the flora and the fauna. This celebration of all that is rich and powerful within our natural world is presented with an articulate and poetic voice, deeply crafted to bring out the imagery of the landscape.

In "Tears, Trees, Birds & Grass," she mixes the sublime with the philosophical:

I wonder if a bird ever wakes up in the  
morning  
sick with the business of singing.  
Do the birds cry? I have never seen them  
cry.  
Maybe they do it when I'm not looking.  
("Tears, Trees, Birds & Grass")

Gallagher is adept in the soundscapes and melodious use of language to extrapolate meaning. The almost syncopated use of consonants and the elongation of the vowel sounds in "While the Light Lasts" alone is magnificent:

To reach the small town  
while the light lasts  
before the freeze  
sets black ice on the road  
or a stag, driven down  
from its high place  
("While the Light Lasts")

The latter section, *Seacliff Epistles*, is a curated collection of beautiful poetic explorations reminiscent of fine wine varietals – each containing its distinct and unique flavour profile. Flexing her literary muscle here, Gallagher refers to the grouping of poems as a ‘lyrical documentary’ and deftly employs narrative structures and letters from the mental institute *Seacliff Epistles* itself, north of Dunedin. Of note is the imagined story of Agnes, an immigrant from Ireland who ‘carried / the shame of [pregnancy]’ (“My Career”) in being banished to New Zealand. While Agnes’s story is fiction, it is most certainly based on an amalgam of personas of those who found themselves rejected by their families after falling pregnant out of wedlock. A significant proportion of these women found themselves in Seacliff, the ‘lunatic asylum’ that Gallagher refers to as ‘a strange land in a strange land’. It was a sprawling monolith of a mental institution administering horrific procedures on patients in an attempt to calibrate them back to stability was built – somewhat tellingly and certainly ironically – on unstable ground.

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***This celebration of all that is rich and powerful within our natural world is presented with an articulate and poetic voice, deeply crafted to bring out the imagery of the landscape.***

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There is something quite eerily disconcerting about Seacliff. A haunted aura still surrounds the buildings, even though the grand turrets and Edwardian styled structure no longer remain after a terrible fire in the 1940s, which began a slow descent into its final destruction in 1992.

The poem “What You Knew About Water” describes the gruelling hardship and the bitterness of the institution:

Water came down from above, you knew,  
 came down on the head of a child  
 you were that child in a shift  
 (“What You Knew About Water”)

Without a doubt, there are some challenging moments in the collection. Our response to mental illness and destitution for many immigrants is widely whispered, anecdotally, albeit not strongly documented. Gallagher closely examines the lives of our immigrant population from the Dunedin area and the troubles and challenges they faced.

I’m the clothes that poverty wears  
 I come with an easy hand  
 play host to your unrest  
 branding your face with wretchedness  
 (“Riddle”)

One of the final poems in the collection is “The Asylum Songbirds” and is also amongst the finest as Gallagher arrests the reader with such vivid observations of life in the asylum. The perceived pain that comes from this imprisonment manifested on the page:

Brought to heel, stripped, your belongings  
 locked away – mastering the scripts  
 what you ought and ought not to say – welcome  
 to the ‘forcing house of change’  
 (“The Asylum Songbirds”)

Gallagher’s poetry is controlled, challenging and lyrical. Her attention to detail is impressive and her presentation of those so affected beautifully commemorates their lives and their struggles. Within the two sections of the collection Gallagher almost diametrically presents the beauty of the country alongside the deeply troubling past of New Zealand’s response to mental illness.

*Far Flung* is a rich and often powerful collection of poems. The poignancy of the words and the mastery over the form is a remarkable thing to indulge in. Highly recommended.

# Review

## Vaughan Rapatahana

### *As light into water - Piet Nieuwland*

(Allahabad: Cyberwit.net, 2021). ISBN 9388319508. 80pp.



This is Piet Nieuwland's first collection of poems, and there are a lot of them. Sixty in all, mainly one-page affairs, generally not in stanza, although there is one call-and-response poem with italicised responses, as well as a couple of prose poems and the lengthier "In the interval".

I think it may be difficult to read through the collection in one sitting and the poet may not expect a reader to do so, but rather make sequential treks into the luxuriant poetic foliage throughout. Why do I state this? Because the poet is unrelenting in his depictions of our environment and more especially the nuances of Nature. He employs masses of descriptive adjectival phrases and plenteous images of flora and some fauna, which – cumulatively – could well overpower the intrepid reader. Indeed, he often personifies these variegated aspects of the natural world of Aotearoa New Zealand in his quest to confirm the interrelated *living-ness* involved.

The sheer mass of imagery crams the mind; this is a veritable mighty mantra of proto-mysticism ('I am the ocean and the ocean is me' from "Behind pillars of black rock") and – again – there is a possibility one could get well lost in the dense forest of imagery, as is the case in the titular piece, "As light into water".

Added to this facet, Nieuwland also likes arcane words and words *per se*. 'mycorrhizal', 'epiphytic',

'tredecillions' are examples of this leafy wordplay – and we are up to page eleven only. He has an affinity for alliteration too, with a dash of internal rhyme here and there. An example of his lush verbal undergrowth follows:

Stellar scintillation riddles the sky  
 Iridescent butterfly wings gyroid in vermillion shades  
 Mirror trevally schools frantic in feldspar blue harbour shallows  
 A karoro murmutation spills from the valley  
 Quark families dance in the ferny fractal fields  
 A neutrino flock passes through my left eye  
 ("Amour mirror").

Is this perhaps over-fertilised, given the poet's distinct epistemological vista?

There is very little self-reference in these poems, although there is frequent use of the second-person possessive 'your' followed by a listing of tinana parts, such as eyes, mind, mouth, voice, face, back, hair, heart, plait, 'transparent cheeks', 'black lashes' and 'vermillion lips' (he likes the word vermillion). He inculcates a feminine muse here, as 'her' also frequents the pages, as does 'we/our' at lesser intervals. The word 'Her' also refers to Nature as a fecund presence in poems like "Watching the sky speak" and "La Lauzeta".

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***He employs masses of descriptive adjectival phrases and plenteous images of flora and some fauna, which – cumulatively – could well overpower the intrepid reader.***

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However, there is a reason behind the profuse visual layering throughout the book. Nieuwland is a gifted artist and I imagine everything around him is viewed as a potential canvas: he sees in colours. The fact he lives close to Nature in Tai Tokerau – Northern place names abound like magic mushrooms across these pages – means he is close



enough to travel small distances to witness Her munificent magnificence. This aspect is mirrored consistently throughout his verse (he likes the word 'mirror(s)' too). His is an ekphrastic ability to paint poems, to imbibe on trees, plants, flowers, manu, kararehe, as 'we bask in the simple physicality of sensations upon the skin' ("Kia tupato").

Accordingly, he is an aficionado of kaupapa Māori, especially our kotahitanga with the natural world, and our requirement to be kaitiaki of it. This is obvious in "Tauaroa walk", where there is 'the same green language on our lips'. It is a key theme here, as opposed to contumelious social critique and political overbite. He often incorporates kupu Māori (even if – in places – he misses the macronisation involved, as with mōteatea, pōhutukawa, kōrero, tūi).

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***His is an ekphrastic ability to paint poems, to imbibe on trees, plants, flowers, manu, kararehe, as 'we bask in the simple physicality of sensations upon the skin' ("Kia tupato")***

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Furthermore, he propagates some great lines here and there. Such as, 'overlooking a graveyard of hills' ("In sight of hazes blown"), 'what happens there in that river of eyes' ("A photosynthetic metaphor"), 'a sun of bees breaks open the day' ("Sciptio continua") and 'in tribes of reflections, the present is motionless in a pornography of pain and post-colonial resistance' ("A cutting wind from all compass points").

In summation, I like Nieuwland best when he is not overreaching lexically, when he does include some self-reference, when he keeps his craft simple yet effective. As in this fine poem, "Without name or history", here in its entirety:

These are small things that surround me with happiness  
 the blessed endless black earth at my back and Sunday  
 with a blue sky tangling our veins  
 my eyes bathing in the sadness of wind  
 the pulse of ebony night that leaves my name  
 in the amniotic fluid of the evening sea  
 in tidal current of immense desire  
 your eyes moist with infinite patience  
 that leaves imprints  
 like small bony feet in the sand

Now, this is a wonderful poem. I am looking forward to his next collection.

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



## Members' Haiku

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

*"be my friend"* by Kirk Lafferty

### Sharyn Barberel

heavenly tango  
Venus and the moon  
dance around each other

beyond the lagoon  
a passing whale  
journeys to south seas

---

### Steve Cutler

Kōtukutuku      lays purple stars on the track      out of the long dark

---

### Jenny Longstaff

arrangement of birds  
long distance arpeggio  
humming through wires

---

### Roland Oliver

red leaf in spring  
on the woodland path  
a discarded mask

Maureen Sudlow

the summer drone of chainsaws

blackbird song  
becoming harder  
to hear

---

Barbara Strang

briars sidle  
across the rocky slope  
Dad's weekend whiskers

kids back in school  
the cloud  
like a question mark

---

Nora Borrell

lockdown  
our rubbish bins  
spaced out

lone mallard  
the pond damned  
with duckweed

---

Anne Curran

a rainbow arches  
over the shimmering lake –  
good-bye kiss

tallest branch  
on the kowhai –  
tui song

Sue Courtney

barren landscape  
her fourth IVF  
fruitless

parched earth  
the mandarin tree  
also dies

pink ribbon  
a part of her  
no longer there



*"searching for sustenance" by Jenny Longstaff*

---

Jenny Macaulay

barnacles  
high-density housing in  
coastal apartments

spot-lit kangaroo  
a dazzling performance  
in the final act

---

Gillian Candler

Beaufort wind scale six  
trees bow  
but don't surrender

Sandra Simpson

a fresh-dug potato  
from each pocket –  
the tremor in his hands

still no rain –  
a magpie lands on the fence  
and quardles

---

Debbie Strange

peace talks  
the hiss of magma  
hitting water

beach closure  
sand skips over  
the dunes

the swans  
we hoped we'd become . . .  
crook-necked gourds

---

Peter Free

scent of roses different on dad's casket

rainbows  
caught in a spider's web  
words i couldn't say

## Our Contributors

**Antoinette Baker** of Ōtautahi has written many poems and enjoys letting them take off with her stories.

**Sharyn Barberel**, a part time dabbler in haiku and writing as a creative outlet alongside a corporate job. She loves the challenge of capturing moments into such a short format.

**Emma Barnes** (Ngāti Pākehā, they/them) lives and writes in Pōneke/Wellington. They released their first book in March of this year *I Am In Bed With You* (AUP 2021).

**Claire Beynon** is a Dunedin-based artist and writer. In addition to her solo practice, she works collaboratively on a diverse range of interdisciplinary projects in NZ and abroad. [www.clairebeynon.com](http://www.clairebeynon.com)

**Nola Borrell** writes haiku, tanka and haibun in particular. Her work is widely published here and overseas.

**Gillian Candler** is a nature writer, tramper and citizen scientist.

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

**harold coutts** (they/them) is a poet living in te whanganui-a-tara. they have previously been published in literary journals such as *Starling*, *Poetry New Zealand Yearbook*, *Best New Zealand Poems*, and *Stasis*.

**Mary Cresswell** is from Los Angeles, lives on the Kapiti Coast, and perpetually laments the decline of light verse. Her poems are in journals in NZ, the US, Australia, Canada and the UK. Also see: [www.read-nz.org/writer/cresswell-mary/](http://www.read-nz.org/writer/cresswell-mary/)

**Anne Curran** lives in Hamilton. She enjoys writing haiku and tanka verses as any dreaming time allows. She remains grateful to those companions who continue to encourage her along this path.

**Steve Cutler** lives in the landscape and seascape of Otago. He is interested in working science and poetry together and values and loves its power for sharing of the daily wonderments of life.

**Michael Fitzsimons** is a professional writer and editor who lives in Seatoun. He has published two volumes of poetry. His latest collection, *Michael I thought you were dead*, was published in 2019 by Cuba Press.

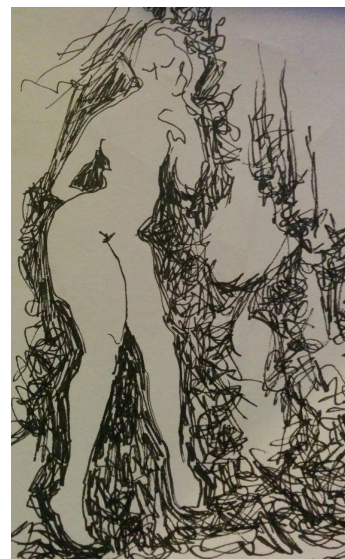
**Alexandra Fraser** has been published here and there for years. She is sporadically working on a third poetry collection, and has bought an A-frame house – it has no flat walls for bookshelves – a challenge.

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

**Edna Heled**, an artist, art therapist, counsellor, writer and travel journalist from Auckland. Published in *Flash Frontier*, *Fresh Ink*, *Going West*, *Poetry NZ YearBook 2021*, *The Twilight Menagere*, *NZPS anthology*, and more.

**Kirk Lafferty** creates his photographic works using a process of stacking multi-exposures allowing the creation of relationships between different images to grow through this organic process. The final image creates a narrative effect.

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



"barren 2" by Edna Heled

**Jenny Longstaff** is a long-term Dunedin resident with interests ranging from the environment, to tramping, history, and motorcycling. A keen observer, she enjoys exploring verbal and visual imagery.

**Jenny Macauley** is a New Zealand citizen currently living in a seaside village in Victoria having retired from a career in teaching. She now enjoys creative activities of her own.

Born in Sydney, **Katie Millington** graduated from the University of Wollongong with a Bachelor of Creative Arts degree (Writing). In love with poetry and married to film, Katie visited Auckland for a film shoot in 2012 and never left.

**Emma Neale** is a writer and editor based in Ōtepoti/Dunedin. She received the Lauris Edmond Memorial Award for a Distinguished Contribution to New Zealand Poetry in 2020. Her most recent publication is *The Pink Jumpsuit* (Quentin Wilson Publishing, 2021).

**Roland Oliver:** 'Poetry is an endeavour of self-discovery, / sometimes more, never less.'

**Robyn Maree Pickens** is a queer pākehā art writer and poet who lives in Ōtepoti Dunedin. [robymareepickens.com](http://robymareepickens.com) Instagram: [@handwritten\\_signs](https://www.instagram.com/handwritten_signs)

**Joanna Preston** is a poet, editor, ringmistress of *The Poetry Class* and chook-mama. To her delighted amazement, her second collection, *tumble*, has just been published by Otago University Press and longlisted for the New Zealand Book Awards 2022.

**Vaughan Rapatahana** (Te Ātiawa) commutes between Hong Kong, the Philippines and Aotearoa. His work, in te reo Māori and English, has been translated into Bahasa Malaysia, Italian, French, Mandarin, Romanian and Spanish.

**Chris Reed** is an Auckland-based teacher of English at Macleans College. He is also a musician, copywriter and an award-winning writer of short stories, novels and poetry.

**Sandra Simpson** is founding editor of [Haiku NewZ](http://HaikuNewZ), secretary of the Katikati Haiku Pathway committee, and South Pacific nominating editor for the annual Red Moon anthologies. Sandra blogs about haiku at [breath](http://breath).

**Barbara Strang** lives by the Estuary, Christchurch. She has written haiku for a while and has been published here and overseas. She leads the local haiku group Small White Teapot.

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

**Maureen Sudlow** loves the conciseness of haiku. She studied on-line with Alan Summers, and has published two poetry books containing haiku. She has taught haiku for beginners, and currently lives in Whanganui.

**Sophia Wilson** is based in Ōtepoti Dunedin. Her writing has appeared in journals and anthologies internationally and she has received a number of awards for poetry

**Iona Winter** (Waitaha/Kāti Māmoe/Kāi Tahu/Pākehā) lives in Koputai, Port Chalmers. She is author to three collections: *then the wind came*, *Te Hau Kāika*, *Gaps in the Light*.

**Karen Zelas** is a Christchurch poet. Her radio play, *Falling*, is being developed from her book – *The Trials of Minnie Dean: a verse biography*. Karen also runs Pūkeko Publications.