

a fine line

TE RŌPŪ TOIKUPU O AOTEAROA New Zealand Poetry Society

Pāngarau me Pūtaiao
Science / Maths

Summer 2024

Guest Poet
Brent Cantwell

Featured Article
Janis Freegard

Cover Art
Rebekah Hall

$$\vec{F} = m\vec{a}$$

$$P = W/t$$

$$\cos(\alpha \pm \beta) \cos \frac{1}{2}(\alpha \mp \beta)$$
$$S = 4\pi r^2$$

$$P = m/V$$

$$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$$

$$f(x) = a_0 + \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \left(a_n \cos \frac{n\pi x}{L} + b_n \sin \frac{n\pi x}{L} \right)$$

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Quotation of the season

'Mathematics and poetry are
the two ways to drink the
beauty of truth' – Amit Ray

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GAIL INGRAM



Rebekah Hall – *Cones*

Pangarau me Pūtaiao / Science and Maths

The maths and science theme brought out the experimentation in you; these selections revel in glinting forms and sharp lines, and I admit I'm a sucker for this kind of beauty. As our cover artist **Rebekah Hall** delights in the lines of her stunning sculptures, we have **Annabel Wilson** juxtaposing the discourse of physics with signs on trucks and the ache of loss; **Loredana Podolska-Kint** plays with the Pilish form, where the number of letters of each word are based on Pi; there are poems of navigation and geometry (**Michelle Elvy, Jenny Longstaff**), and poems that rail against science while delighting in its language (**Margaret Beverland, Desna Wallace**). The haiku poets took up the challenge too, finding Tetris in overhead lockers (**Sharyn Barberel**) and Venn diagrams in relationships (**Sue Courtney**), and these are just a taster in store for you.

Our featured poet **Brent Cantwell** also captivates with the language and ideas of science and philosophy. His debut collection *tether* came out late last year, and the poetry is electric – ‘a billion stars / a billion light years away ... white-click *their* wings / sparkling’. He knows about angles, perspective, distance, and how to shift them with a line-break; a technically-assured and beautiful first collection.

Janis Freegard is a plant ecologist and a poet, and in our featured article, she tells us how she has used her study of science and maths to not only write individual poems but as an organising feature across three of her collections. I hope you'll be absorbed and engaged in her approach as I was.

Our reviews rocket us to the worlds of the following books: *Āria* by Jessica Hinerangi reviewed by **Vaughan Rapatahana**, and *Transposium* by Dani Yourukova reviewed by **Hebe Kearney**. And speaking of rockets, in NZPS news, our annual anthology *white-hot heart* launched country-wide, from Ōtautahi to Tāmaki Makaurau. It flew off the shelves at such a rapid rate, it sold out by the end of the year!

Next issue, the autumn edition, will be themed ‘rongonui me mata rorohiko *celebrity and screen*'. We are seeking poems about celebrities, paparazzi, unusual celebrities and fields, what's it like to be a celebrity (or not), the big-screen, screen-time and what is screened and by whom? Please send up to four themed poems (40 lines max) and/or up to four haiku, plus themed artwork by 10 March 2024 to Gail Ingram, editor@poetrysociety.org.nz.

But for now, want to find the beauty of truth in maths and poetry? Read on.

BRENT CANTWELL

a selection of poems from *tether* (Recent Work Press 2023)



relative train ride to Monte Carlo

it doesn't much pay to pay much attention
though sometimes carriage doors don't shut:
we see train-loads of people speeding past us speeding past

we see all of our directions
we see the violence of our closeness
we see sleepers at a thousand frames per second

and because we are certain of only one stop,
old men waiting in stations seem stationary,
the pitted skin of a granite crag

and even the mustard-past of an old chateau on a hill
seems precarious
because of distance and speed and the luck of ascension.

But unclosed doors open and everyone's heavy with badges:
Armani, Gucci, Chihuahua and cocaine, darling,
darlings of density taking *their* time, with such singularity

we are dragged along to event horizons
of white yachts and crystal flutes, Moët in platinum buckets,
leather gloves for him, iced manicures for her,

diamonds from Africa, blood of the earth,
cigarettes that don't kill you, cases of Dalmore 42,
future harvests, relative commerce, even light ...

it doesn't much pay to pay much attention.



Steve Cain – *violence of closeness*

dark-sky park

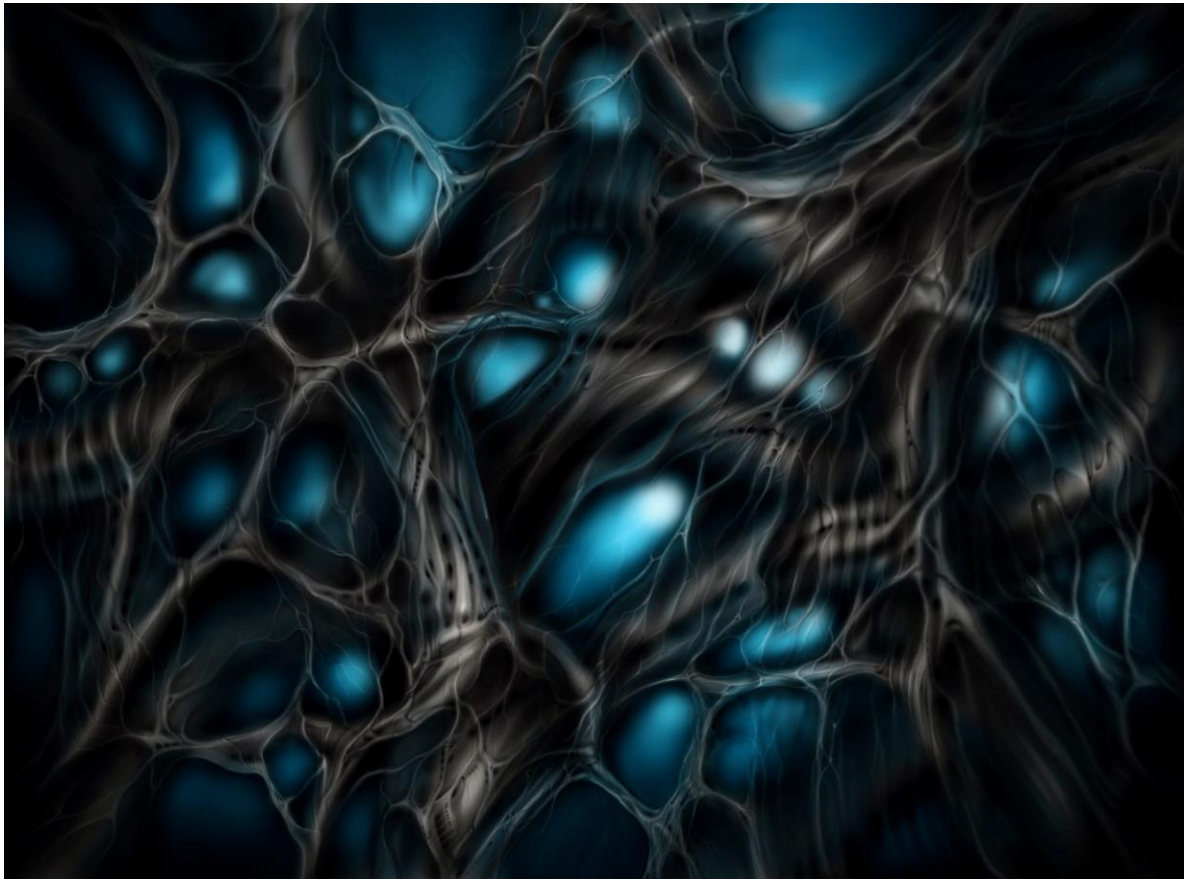
Campsite's paper-bark quiet.
Out there – the ghost gums.
My daughter – my first –
possums the way you do in a tent
when you're young and barely know where you are.

She finds a zip – realising.
She tears a wall telling me she can't sleep,
that the silence
and the cicadas out there
are shrieking white-wing wordless.

I hold her – of course –
in a single-splendid-movement-of-the-arm
and show her the April sky:
a black-noun canvas
white-silence knows where.

And when I pick my way from The Pot to Sirius,
a billion stars
a billion light years away
white-click *their* wings,
sparking the same blip-blip endlessness.

And *I* tear a wall in the scattered-gas what-cloud
of a no-
noise nebula – realising:
we're too inside to really look out;
in the single-splendid-movement-of-the-arm.



Steve Cain – *dark-sky park*

a boy in the toi-toi!

You play in the toi-toi
in a mood of mud,
a right angle
against a wrong green fence.
Your *siblings* show me skateboard knuckles,
grazed to the bone,
the intricacies of ripped skin
that *you* should—
everyone loves a scar!
but you sit there
adjacent to the complacency
of those other kids
with one of those little pink books –
a new one –
writing
downhill
in the wind
and the speed
of a deliberately injured
syntax
on the bone-white knuckles
of the moon,
an inconstant moon
that should—
but it doesn't matter anyway!
How I read you
will be the under-reed
of the toi toi now
and the should-green of growth –
as sharp as the flick
of a carpenter's tape –
will plume the blond after-shavings
of a freshly planed two by four.
I am only sorry
for how I read you
now you are writing *me*
watching
you – a boy –
play in the toi toi.



Steve Cain – *grazed to the bone*

outside

outside's assumed through a fly-wire
in –
we assume the mountain –
the coast far away –
knowing this semi-permeable membrane
strips the hills of its under-
hum,
the wind of the sea's salt –
it's my way of leaving
a rake out –
it's my way of clawing this,
this ragweed-midnight –
it's my way of reaching out at the strangled possum sounds –
the moon-striped driveways –
a brush turkey
on a tin-roof somewhere
clawing at the ragweed –
probably-chickens
perch in the dark
clenching quills, like me –
clawing at the ragweed like me –
assuming
as the fruit bats of Sagganto Park
way
down
there
assume
absence-in-darkness
when the squeak of late-night barbequed meats
and halloumi cheese on the teeth
is heard no-more
though they shriek still
and claw
at this ragweed-midnight –
like me

Voyager I, 14th Feb. 1990

(after *Pale Blue Dot* by *Voyager I* - Photo)

you are a butterfly in the
stomach of the plunge you
made it – astonishing –
out of the Cape to the pebbled
shore of some-other-sea
they said *you looked back*
one last time but it was
better than just looking back!
you transmitted pixels you
trapped the light in a grain of
sand you trapped the sea in
an old tin cup and us! un-
tethered-us on a planet
turning pale on a tide but you
don't recognise home you
don't see how distance
renders us dust on a slice of
light as soft as talcum powder
that we sit in the pale-blue
Cape-light of February in an
afternoon garden beneath a
pignut close enough to kiss –
a kiss lost in the bat-black
shadow of being alone
it is a connection only you
can capture six billion
kilometres deep we yearn
as you yearn from *our*
absolute edge distance blurs
our nerves steel-cold too
we are butterflies in the
stomach of the plunge –

JANIS FREEGARD

Trying to Make Sense of the World



Janis Freegard – *The Piano*

'Science describes accurately from outside, poetry describes accurately from inside.'

Ursula K. Le Guin

Science is all about seeking to understand the world we live in, through observation and by testing theories. Poetry is also a way of looking at the world and trying to make sense of what we observe and experience.

Like many of us, I grew up hearing the rhythms of poetry, and always had an interest in the natural world. When I was little, my grandfather would take me for walks around our neighbourhood (in South Shields, England) and teach me the names of trees, and my grandmother collected 'trees of Britain' cards for me from the tea packets: larch, alder, oak. Granddad read me Rupert Bear annuals over and over, Nanna taught me nursery rhymes, and my mother read me Longfellow's Hiawatha at bedtime. As soon as I could, I started writing my own poems.

When I went to university to study science, majoring in plant ecology, my interest in poetry continued. At second-hand book stalls, I'd buy an e e cummings collection alongside ecology textbooks. Eventually I started taking my writing seriously – sending work out to journals (and collecting many, many rejection letters) – until finally I had the opportunity for a first full-length collection.

Kingdom Animalia

I liked the idea of producing a poetry book that might appeal to people with an interest in science, as well as people with an interest in poetry. My first collection, *Kingdom Animalia: the Escapades of Linnaeus* (Auckland University Press, 2011) draws heavily on the biological sciences.

I wanted an organising principle for the book and chose a zoological classification system.

Modern taxonomy uses many groupings, so I decided on a simpler system: one devised by eighteenth-century Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus. I chose one of his early attempts, which divides all living creatures into six categories (mammals, birds, amphibians, fish, insects and worms). The categories are very different from what we use today (for example, Linnaeus included reptiles with amphibians, crabs with insects and jellyfish with worms), but they were revolutionary in their time.

Often called the Father of Modern Taxonomy, Linnaeus' work meant people all over the world could use a common descriptive language and a standard methodology for classifying living things. While there were many classification systems in use at the time, using different languages and different approaches, Linnaeus was the one who convinced scholars across Europe and beyond to adopt his two-word naming system – using names such as *Homo sapiens* or *Pinus radiata*.

Linnaeus used very poetic descriptions in his scientific papers, for example referring to the pistil (the female reproductive part of a flower) as a bride and the stamen (male part) as a bridegroom: "The flower's leaves ... serve as bridal beds which the creator has so gloriously arranged ... and perfumed with so many soft scents that the bridegroom with his bride might celebrate their nuptials with so much greater solemnity." Swedish author August Strindberg said: "Linnaeus was actually a poet who happened to become a naturalist".

Each section in *Kingdom Animalia* is introduced by a segment of a prose poem about Linnaeus. Sometimes these segments are largely factual, such as the list of Linnaeus' "apostles" who travelled the world collecting species to classify – including Daniel Solander who travelled to New Zealand with James Cook. Other times they are a mix of the factual and the absurd. For example, *The Escapades of Linnaeus: Part I* begins: "Carl Linnaeus was an enormous linden tree in the countryside of of Småland in southern Sweden". This refers to Linnaeus' father basing their family name on the linden tree. A line in

The Escapades of Linnaeus Part VI about swallows overwintering in lakes refers to a belief common at the time that swallows hibernated at the bottom of lakes during winter.

There are also a couple of poems in the book that draw directly on my days studying science: *On Old Olympus' Towering Top, A Finn and German Viewed A Hop*, refers to a mnemonic for remembering the cranial nerves of dogfish and *The Enlightenment* was inspired by a coastal ecology field trip to Auckland's Cheltenham Beach.

The Glass Rooster

With *The Glass Rooster* (Auckland University Press, 2015), I divided the book into eight different "echo-systems" or broad habitat types. These days the word 'ecosystem' is often used to mean any kind of system, but really it means an ecological system, such as a forest or a wetland. Each section in the book comprises four pairs of thematically 'echoing' poems, introduced by a triolet, an eight-line French form involving rhyme and repetition. In addition to the echoing pairs, there are poetic forms and themes that echo through the book, such as pantoums, shaped poems, list poems and poems inspired by artworks.

'Part of my motivation with the collection was to challenge misinformation. For example, people sometimes think there are only two genders or that gender is absolute, but this is not true in nature.'

"Mummy", for example, is a shaped or concrete poem arranged to resemble pyramids, and refers to a European tradition of cannibalism during the Renaissance, when Egyptian mummies were ingested for their supposed medicinal properties. In "Dimorphism" the first stanza is shaped like a vegetable sheep (a dense, cushiony plant that looks a bit like a sheep from a distance) and the second is shaped like a divaricating (spreading) shrub.

A prose poem sequence about a glass rooster also weaves its way through, with a glass rooster poem in each echo-system. This also echoes back to *Kingdom Animalia*, which includes a glass rooster poem.

Reading the Signs

Reading the Signs (The Cuba Press, 2020), my most recent poetry collection, is very much grounded in ecology. It's written as an extended prose poem sequence which tells a sort of fable involving a genderfluid, shapeshifting 'Interpreter', along with other characters such as Japanese poet Ema Saikō and a man in a safari suit.

The book explores a range of themes: climate change, gender fluidity in the animal kingdom, species extinction, loss and recovery. Some of the poems are very much an explanation of ecological science: my introductory scene-setting segment says:

Primary succession is when the land is colonised for the first time; secondary succession is when the original ecosystem is disrupted or disturbed – by a devastating storm, perhaps – and is colonised a second or subsequent time.

Now you are an ecologist. This is all you need to know.

I think as humans, we are hard-wired to 'read' our environment. Alongside science, I weave in other forms of trying to interpret what's happening in the world around us, such as tea-leaf reading. Scientists 'read signs' by interpreting data (such as glacial melt rates and species extinctions) and make projections about what might happen next. But it's also human nature to look for signs in a more general way.

Part of my motivation with the collection was to challenge misinformation. For example, people sometimes think there are only two genders or that gender is absolute, but this is not true in nature. Some species have multiple gender variants (such as ruffs, a type of sandpiper) and many species change gender (such as slipper

limpets and clownfish, which appear in the book).

Another strand running through the book is Norse mythology – reflecting my Norwegian ancestry through a great-great-grandfather. The themes of fire and ice and the ultimate destruction of the world (Ragnarök) seem pertinent to the times we live in. The Norse myth also ends on a hopeful note, with a new world emerging from the old.

But afterwards: a new world. The few surviving gods will gather. The two humans who hid in a tree, living on morning dew, will finally emerge. Líf and Lífthrasir: Life and The One Striving for Life, together repopulating the globe. This is where we come from: from water and wood.

Poetry and Maths

While I mostly write free verse, I sometimes use particular poetic forms – similar perhaps to a mathematical formula – some of which involve a syllable count or a words-per-line count. For example, “Anglerfish” in *Kingdom Animalia* has eight syllables per line and eight lines per stanza.

Other forms use the stresses of words to generate a particular metre or rhythm. “Berlin” in *Kingdom Animalia* is written in Sapphic stanzas – a four-line form with three lines each containing two trochees¹, a dactyl², then two more trochees and a fourth line comprising one dactyl then a trochee. I chose the form because I was writing about a former girlfriend. In “Arohata” (in the *Glass Rooster*), I used four-line stanzas of hendecasyllabic (eleven syllable) lines intended to resemble prison cells.

The trick with these sorts of constraints is to try to make them seem natural rather than forced. I’m always hoping that readers won’t notice the form.

¹ Trochee: a metrical foot consisting of one long or stressed syllable followed by one short or unstressed syllable eg **tiger**, **garden**

‘We need the languages of both science and poetry to save us from merely stockpiling endless ‘information’ that fails to inform our ignorance or our irresponsibility.’

It’s hard not to notice a triolet though. Pronounced try-oh-let, or tree-oh-lay or tree-oh-let, it’s a fun form usually with eight lines and a strict rhyme scheme of ABaAabAB (capital letters mean the whole line is repeated; small letters mean lines of the same letter rhyme). The repetition works best when the meaning changes slightly each time the line is used. This one introduces the “Forest” section of *The Glass Rooster* and refers to competition among plants:

Two new shoots in a rich litter.
Rot and moss and leaf and damp.
Which survives? The fitter.
Two new shoots in a rich litter
fighting it out – the battle’s bitter.
One’s the loser; one’s the champ.
Two new shoots. In a rich litter:
rot and moss and leaf and damp.

I will leave the last word to Ursula K. Le Guin who tells us: ‘Science explicates, poetry implicates. Both celebrate what they describe. We need the languages of both science and poetry to save us from merely stockpiling endless ‘information’ that fails to inform our ignorance or our irresponsibility.’

² Dactyl: a metrical foot that has one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables eg **elephant**, **happiness**



Jenny Longstaff – *Racing the Storm*

Annabel Wilson

What's the matter?

*Matter equals energy times
the speed of light squared.
Matter is made of hydrogen,
oxygen, carbon cobalt, molybdenum.*

“This is just the size of a pen,” they said.
“It will eliminate all matter.”
What’s the matter? What does
it matter? What are you, some
kind of martyr? Mater? Pater?

THE ONLY THING WE DON'T DELIVER
the sign on the back of the truck read
above the photo of a giant black & white
baby

Stuck in traffic, on the way there, she
turned her gaze to the sea. What *is*
the matter? Does it all stay intact:
perfect, whole, complete (*intactus* -
untouched). Is it see-through, like
jelly? It’s just matter. What is the

matter? Walking again and again
to an empty mailbox. Waking with
the feeling of empty arms. Waking
with an idea: this is just the size of
a pen. Actually, it’s just a pen. And
with it, I write

*Matter is energy times the speed of light
squared. Matter is energy dancing in form
and it goes on forever.*

$$m = \frac{E}{c^2}$$

64/46

Avstand, skillnad—
distance, difference:
My country code is +64
and yours, +46

I could only say *Hej Hej*
in your language before
that ebony-keyed night
when I listened to your singsong Swedish—

Outlandish, flirtatious words,
dark winter Nordic terms
like *vacker, utstrålning*

Husky hushed nothings
making me blush
unexpectedly, suddenly curious about
Öresund Bridge, *the gateway to Scandinavia*

Imagining you, match-racing yachts from Oslo
across black gnashing fjords—

Catching the gist of this *motpoler*,
this impossible, polar opposite
rapture—

Now I can't summon the gumption
to call you up. I get as far as +46
then stop. We're on contradicting
seasons and time zones and the distance
from Stockholm to Dunedin is
16998.61 kilometres, bearing Southeast.

Loredana Podolska-Kint

Echo

“Today, we are conducting a thorough interrogation of your heart.”

*In other words, we're squirting your chest with alien snot and prodding it with our lie detector.
we are using a miniature sonar to check for stray fishies.
we are staring into your contents like the airport inspector.
we've brought another TV screen in case you're bored of Hotel Transylvania 3.*

“We are subjecting you to this investigation to rule out a differential” (that we think unlikely)
In other words, there are no vegetations and we still don't know why your temp keeps spiking.

Could you lie flat?
Roll to your left?
Don't breathe so fast.
Hold your breath.

Change the antibiotics. Insert another IV. Try a different probe. Increase the frequency.
Of waves.
Of obs.
Of questions.
Of bloods.

“I think this child needs meropenem.”
Mother, you can wipe the zombie spittle from his sternum.

You tell every new face you feel better, though it isn't true.
For all our interrogations, we know so little about you.

(you can breathe now)

PI-ety

a 70-digit Polish poem

Did I once a digit reverence to beyond words,
And think humanity algebraic? Instead, apprehend
Why do our sciences push people to forget
More far-off miracles? And we pretend
Innocence, false exultation.

An unlikely question: does a scientist
Require a spirit? Certainly, our selection
Repressed the thought.

Here's a liberation,
Think: learning is rightfully venerated,
However, this universe's best word wasn't fashioned of
The numeration science collated;
I prefer love.

Brett Reid

Four Maths Teachers With Some Geography Near the End

One divided opinion,
two had a cross to bear,
three took nothing away
leaving what was there.
Four played Sudoku
as the years added up
for silencing a student
to conceal an affair.
Love's not a science,
nor seldom is it fair;
that teacher got life,
four walls, three square,
strange twins who would write,
plus ex-wife Clare,
who wasn't that clever,
or so he thought
'til she wrote him she lied –
the coast was never.
Hence he was caught.

Holly H. Bercusson

merch

I bought a pair of neuron earrings in sterling silver
I like my brain cells where I can feel them
I like to run my thumb along the back of them
press the stud point into my thumb till it pricks.

it was not a shock to discover my interest in the brain,
maybe a little unnatural,
assigned *right-brained* at birth
which might have been true for the wrong reasons
frontal alpha asymmetry could be a marker/symptom/cause of depression
though evidence is inconclusive
(van der Vinne et al., 2017).

I would tell you more
but I never finished my research
I was suffering from an elaborate form of brain death, surely,
as evidenced by the stack of half-highlighted papers
chained over with coffee rings,
greyed over with dust and making my eyes run
but I can't put them away.

did you know
coming back up Venlafaxine has a bitter taste
which hurts my feelings
I know it's not personal
but I also know it is
my source? it was revealed to me in a dream
bars on the pharmacy door
a wanted poster pasted with my candid face –

when my mind is undulled
by whatever pharmaceutical serendipity I may be granted
I will wear my neuron earrings
while I collate data and fumble through code
and thumb through my dusty pages

I will find a way through
the electrical ebb and flow,
stand in the shoal of my understanding
and cast my conclusions into the ocean.

Michelle Elvy

Navigation

I get a thrill each time I haul out the stiff paper,
folded twice over, from under the settee
and open it to place a tiny x on the spot
where we are, a charcoal speck
on an expanse of white.

Friends tell me of their kids' milestones
– first bus ride, first marks in school,
signs of achievement, signs
they are making progress. We know
these are steps to navigating life.

I am teaching my children
to find themselves, too.

They lean their small bodies
over the big square, rest elbows
on a continent while they search
the area where there is no land,
then take up a pencil and make a mark.

They locate Mexico, the Marquesas,
and point to all that space between.

I will teach them to walk
their way across the map
with a set of dividers and parallel rules.
We will look at the course together
and know where we are.

Earlier navigators make it possible
for us to plot our position. Maps charted
in the eighteenth century
guide us over oceans.
They had no GPS,

no radar, no electronic depth
sounders, no ham radio or email, no chronometer,
and sailed tens of thousands of miles –
our simple Marconi rig sails
these distances, wind and current

driving westward. We meet crafts of all kinds in places
with deep sea history; we learn as we go. We hear

of *Hōkūle‘a*, also known as Arcturus,
star of joy –
an old canoe design built of new materials, its master
navigator Pius Mau Piailug of Micronesia who in 1976
– I would have been 10 –
sailed *Hōkūle‘a* on a 2,300-mile voyage
along the ancient Polynesian route
connecting Hawai‘i and Tahiti. A noteworthy

moment in navigation history, the first
voyage in more than 600 years carried
out entirely without instruments. What a
thing: ancient knowledge used to
cross oceans,

memory and sinew from
times long before Europeans left their shores

What a thing, too: GPS and handheld
radios, even the distance we’ve come
from our dial phone on the wall
in our avocado kitchen, the one with the long
cord twisted round waists and thumb

while we walked down the hall and
talked to boyfriends, girlfriends,
grandparents five states away.
What a long long way we travel,
year by year, mile by sea mile

A miracle of time and space,
a connectedness

of technology and cosmos and
something more. What a thing
it is, bringing us to this –
this moment of
intersection.

I think of it all
while I pull
the chart, while I smooth
it flat, while my daughters
pencil an x

and say
We are here.

Margaret Beverland

Outside the Square

In matters mathematical
I think outside the square.
Theorems are mystical puzzles
& algebra . . .
 $a + b + c = xyz$
how can that be?
Letters of the alphabet have
nought to do with 1,2,3.

And the idea
that any point in space
can be specified
in relation to another
by combinations of numbers?
Absurd!

But I do love the names:
barycentric and areal coordinates,
trigonometric polynomials, &
hyperbolic functions.
Superb!

My favourite is trapezoid.
Should anyone wish to analyse me
and put me in a box,
make it a trapezoid.
There are no parallels –

& trapezoids kind of swing.

Jenny Longstaff

Geometry Drawn at Dawn

In the logic of sadness
I woke early that morning,
tumbled from a troubled dream
of massed angles; sharp elbows,
your isosceles knees in my back.

My compass scribed a circle;
a point drawn to the centre
of another world,
remembering tousled cherubs.
Furled feathers were beating
solitary spirals overhead
in a trajectory of arcs
and covenants, joining the dots.

A prism-split rainbow spilled colour
to stain my marked page
of parallel lines in a parallel universe.
Protracted pain, the ruler hard-edged,
my hand unsteady on the pen,
elements blotted and smudged.

Our days thus measured,
blurred yet undeterred,
I turned to see your angelic smile,
the curve of your lashes, lines of laughter,
the angle of your throat –
your hair feathered with silver strands,
the rhythm of our beating hearts slowing.

Johnny Martin

The Wave

Collapse of a wave
on shoreline divide
where all waves die

amongst roiling sonics
orchestral diffusion
rhythmic confusion

summersault
summer-salt
sun-assaults sand

black asphalt burns
barefoot-trots
across barren land

foaming frenzy
tumble-washed smooth
slumbering reigns

baiting the restless
resist and ride
ripples of a dying wave

~

Lydia Draper

Every poem I write is a swan song

(In May last year I found out that my brain had been growing a tumour, very carefully, for probably quite a long time. I was 33.)

"So what you're saying is that as far as tumours go, this one is kind?"

Dr Woon had sprung into the hospital room. He blinked two wild alive eyes.

"There is no such thing as a kind tumour. If we leave it, you will die."

Dying felt more natural than their needles but if life is kind which it sometimes is then maybe I will wake up with my son on my lap and see the faces of mum and Carl who drove through the night and maybe I'll do the chemo and radiation and add ten years give or take to my life and by then I'll be 44 and 'better placed' to die or maybe I'll feel defiant and go on living because we are all terminal, after all, the only difference is that I have the luxury of knowing so maybe I'll find a cure for cancer and the rising human plague, learn how to walk again *and* make the most of my time.

Ten years should be ample.

Or was it nine?



Annabel Wilson – Street art: Valdivia, Los Ríos, Chile

Alexandra Fraser

Collecting the invisible

Herschel space observatory 2009 – 2013

We cut the cord abandoned you
to wander alone the dark reaches

beyond all recall you won't
encounter our pale blue dot

for hundreds of years
perhaps we will have changed

be back to the stone age
unlikely we will use you again

you witnessed the radiance
of a thousand suns

born from a starburst galaxy
infra-red caught into mathematics

you brought the universe to us
a mystery of unseen light

connected by a thin umbilical
of captured data codes flowing

to astronomers' desks sliding
into equations pinned into graphs

we sent you to work at Lagrange 2
your back to the moon to the light

of the sun held colder than space
floating beyond us in far orbit

previously published in Alexandra's collection *Star Trails* (Steele Roberts 2019)

Desna Wallace

A fundamental formula for being a grandmother

Now that you are both here
I have not the energy
nor the time in my day
nor space in my life
to think about scientific things.
Such pursuits are piffle
and I wave them away.
In fact, I'd say physics
is of no consequence to me.
I'd rather fill up my time
with you, my grandsons,
for you are the substance of my life
my universe
and all that matters.

Lynda Scott Araya

Mycelium woman

We rolled our kilts, our eyes,
at Girls' High, black-robed teachers swooping,
telling us that we could be *anything*.
Yes girls! Really. Anything!
Stood tall on the shoulders of Emily Siedeberg,
first New Zealand woman to complete
a medical degree in the country.
For us, she had dodged clumped cadaver flesh,
the brown slimed insults of ignominious men
who thought they knew but who never knew,
the power of a woman, looking her up
and down, like a prize beast, the way my father did,
when I was in the bath, at my breasts, pubic hair,
like a soft downy mycelium, keeping secrets
hidden dark. He brushed his teeth slowly,
one hand at his crotch. Though
forty years later, and I can still conjure up
the sweetness of split-stemmed daisy chains
after a day outside revising chemical equations for summer exams,
bulbus amber bottles, their acrid tang,
the spurt of a scalpel through a bull's eye, a rat,
stomach still frozen, my Bunsen burner license,
the fluorescent flare of magnesium ribbon unspooled,
the biology teacher being asked to leave. Suddenly.
No explanation unless looser dresses counted.
Explosions. Implosions.

Most of all, I remember my Chemistry teacher
talking in euphemisms: a move
from my mother to my father's house
being a black pot, a burnt kettle
because sometimes, the numbers don't add up,
an equilibrium impossible to find,
even though the world still spins on its axis
and still your oyster girls.

Lola Elvy

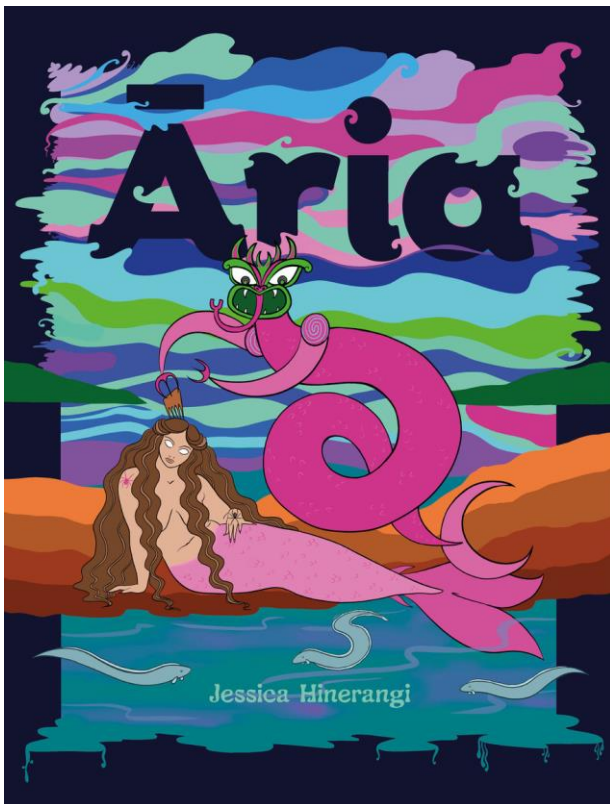
On this fine earth: Cabinetry

Fog clouds over the window
on a day like this. So thick I think
the birds must struggle to land.
Even the trees outside are blocked from view.
On a day like this
I could be at sea for all the world
around me. These days
my hands are clumsy things. The space
doesn't seem to fit me anymore: the room, the
table, the cupboard doors. I fumble
for the edges like I've forgotten
where my fingers end and the air begins. Entropy
can only increase. So it is written
in our very laws of physics that destruction
comes so much easier on this fine earth
than reparation, peace. Even balance
is held by opposing forces. Perhaps outer space itself
in all its silence does not know
rest. How we search
for what we cannot see. I am counting
the temperatures that reach below, above, beyond
our expectations for this season.
Floods and wind and rain and fire and smoke
a red red dawn from miles away. Someone else's sky. How we deal with
change when we are not equipped. Some people
are swifter to adapt. I hold on
to my routines: my coffee cup, my watch
my socks. These things I use to measure
the continuity of time
to know that this life
is not so different from the one five, ten
years ago if these things can
still exist. To separate the widening world
from the details that keep me grounded.
Still, my heart
beats a little slower, faster
than it used to. Still, my fingers reach, slip
on the wooden curves of cabinetry. I cannot fix
my socks. The watch runs out.
I drop my cup
sometimes.

VAUGHAN RAPATAHANA

Āria – Jessica Hinerangi

(Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2023)
ISBN 9781869409913. RRP \$29.95. 75pp.



Ānana! He pukapuka toikupu tuatahi tino kaha nā Jessica Hinerangi. Wow! What a powerful first book of poetry by Jessica Hinerangi.

In this collection, āria refers to a deep pool of water in between two land masses, and this is the direct connotation as to what is incorporated here. This title straight away intimates that there is a potential bifurcate vision swimming through these pages, and indeed there is.

Āria is also of course a solo voice in opera, but that is a later transliterated version of the English-Italian word aria, and is not the application referred to here. Or maybe it is.

‘... āria refers to a deep pool of water in between two land masses... This title intimates that there is a potential bifurcate vision swimming through these pages, and indeed there is.’

Hinerangi depicts themselves as caught between the two worlds of their heritage – te ao Pākehā rāua ko te ao Māori – and sometimes does find considerable difficulty at reconciling them. As revealed by the following quotes:

I am lodged into a space, two realms, like a cooking utensil between the oven and the fridge.
 (“Tangi Hotuhotu”)

I see me, Pākehā and Māori, looking for my place on the whānau tree.
 (“Dear Tūpuna 2”)

the muirs of Scotland merged
with the hills of Hokianga.
 (“Wewete”)

However, the poet is both forcefully aware and wary of the historical and contemporaneous breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi by Pākehā across Aotearoa, as so vividly depicted in the poem “Reading Ranginui Walker in rāhui”, where we encounter:

Uncles locked in white stone,
jailed for protest, Ngāpuhi rebels,
influenza epidemics, and the classroom
hidings from
men of God who gave us muzzle-loaded
guns while preaching love and light.

In such excerpts as those above and especially in the one following, Hinerangi emphatically

echoes Tusiata Avia and Alice Te Punga Somerville in their respective decimations of Captain James Cook. Indeed, if there was room in this review, I would include the entire piece titled *Spitting on the statue of Captain Cook*, such is its vituperative voice, where, after adumbrating the entrenched and ongoing ignorance of Pākehā attitudes towards Māori, it culminates with these lines:

I walk back to you
despite my stress, and going against what
tikanga I was raised by
(to not spit in public)
I release 381 years of fury, self-doubt and
resentment,
in one thick, silvery, wad.

Watch your step when you walk past
because it's still there,
clinging to the stone.

Accordingly, Hinerangi is an angry poet. Their riri pervades almost every page, as does the sheer mamae of being Māori. The two are symbiotic: anguish breeds anger, acrimony increases angst. Both precipitate a desire for utu, as exemplified by these excerpts:

planning the revolution
("Slumber party")

you are the utu
they didn't see coming.
("Utu")

Little do they know I'm
rising, rising, working
tirelessly at their game.
("Māori spy")

All these eddies of emotions are vicariously depicted across such lines as:

There is violence in me. There is rage.
There is shame, ("Dear Tūpuna 1")

I want to decolonise my body...
I want to decolonise my mouth...
I want to decolonise my wairua...
I want to decolonise my eyes...
I want to decolonise my skin...
("Wewete")

The self-doubt won't ever leave.
("Dear Tūpuna 3")

However, well before the end of this collection, Hinerangi, aka The Māori Mermaid, has made it clear that they have plunged into the deep pool that is the āria, inside the mighty awa o te ao Māori, and that they will remain there steadfastly swimming against any unleashed currents from te ao Pākehā attempting to drown them. The poet has a consistent dialogue with their tūpuna throughout the three subdivisions of this book, and this seeking and beseeching of tūpuna (a kupu I counted as recurring at least eleven times) is the springboard for their ultimate deep leap into this āria. As here:

be receptive to your tūpuna
be receptive to your tūpuna.
("Late night marae")

To emphasise once and for all that,

I know what I am.
I know who I am
I am Māori enough
("I whakapapa, therefore I am")

*'This collection becomes more than
the areal exploration of an āria;
it is an existential aria expressed
explosively by tēnei reo kōtike Māori
across the global stage.'*

Thus completely abnegating their earlier pathos, whereby:

Whiteness makes Māoriness feel so thin
and frail sometimes
("Dear Tūpuna 1")

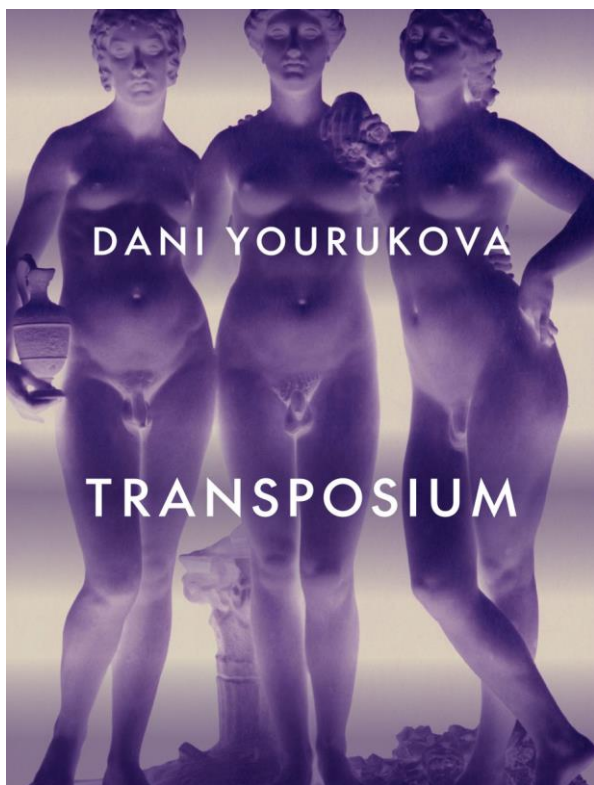
Hinerangi establishes themselves once and for all as a formidable new voice in Aotearoa New Zealand literature. This collection becomes more than the areal exploration of an āria; it is an existential aria expressed explosively by tēnei reo kōtike Māori across the global stage. The visceral image below marks once and for all the destination and destiny of this fine poet:

I want to become the root raised
from the wet dirt, broken
through the concrete path,
to trip everyone up,
the exposed truth of a tree
("Wewete")

HEBE KEARNEY

Transposium – Dani Yourukova

(Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2023)
ISBN 9781776711000. RRP \$29.99. 108pp.



Dani Yourukova's debut, *Transposium*, is a cool book. A smooth book. It has got it together. Using Ancient Greek philosophy and modern popular culture, it creates clever, subtle layers of meaning. I painted my nails before I sat down to write this review, so I am typing weird with flat fingers, trying not to smudge them. If *Transposium* were a nail polish job, it would have no smudges. It would have great nails.

Transposium takes its name from Plato's *Symposium*, which is often treated so seriously and revered as a crucial text on the philosophy of love. It is a text that presents itself as a record of

'Transposium really leans into the silliness of antiquity, while at the same time proving that classical texts can illuminate modern experiences, because they light up Yourukova's world.'

philosophical debates between Athenian men, featuring and centred around Socrates. What often goes unrecognised is that a 'symposium' was an ancient, glorified drinking party, and that Plato's *Symposium* is, in many places, genuinely funny. There is a playfulness in many Classical texts that too often gets overlooked or minimised. *Transposium* really leans into the silliness of antiquity, while at the same time proving that classical texts can illuminate modern experiences, because they light up Yourukova's world.

Like Yourukova, I studied Classics at University, and got very sick of people asking me, with various degrees of well-meaningness, what I was going to 'do' with my degree. Yourukova certainly does a lot with theirs! The collection is brimming with direct and indirect references to *Symposium*. Many pieces take their titles straight from the names of its key figures (e.g. "Phaedrus", "Agathon", "Alcibiades"), and these set the poems' scopes like *herms*¹ marking boundaries in text. These plentiful references, however, do not stop the collection from being modern in vernacular and focus. This is exemplified in "~~Socrates~~ Correct", when the question is raised: 'what is the probability that 'Diotima' is Socrates' deadname?'. Diotima was a female philosopher quoted by Socrates in *Symposium*, who it has long been speculated was fictional, and just a way for Socrates to express his own perspectives. Thus calling 'Diotima' a 'deadname' not only alludes to this debate, but casts Socrates as queer.² Which itself echoes another debate about Socrates – regarding his

¹ Stone boundary markers/milestones used in Ancient Greece, often with sculpted heads of the god Hermes and phalluses (of course, this is Greek antiquity we are talking about here...).

² The term 'deadname' is commonly used in the LGBTQ+ community, especially among transgender people, to refer to someone's former/given name once they have changed it.

own preferences – that has been raging since antiquity.

‘...there is not only humorous queer content – there is also a delicate hope revealed by some poems, an exciting and beautiful envisioning of queer futures.’

Transposium leans hard into humour and irony. The ancient history is transformed by modern styling; the first section, 'Transposium', is formatted like the personality tests that adorned the pages of early 2000s tweenage magazines, such as *Creem* and *Girlfriend*. The first poem (“*Symposium* (Adapted)”) presents a series of questions with options, and then has the classic: ‘If you answered mostly...X. Turn to page X’. You are then presented with which ancient figure you ‘are’. Seeing as you were wondering, I am Agathon,³ and upon reading the corresponding poem am told to ‘see how Eros makes a poet of us all’. This interactive structure encourages nonlinear readings of the collection, and changes the way the reader interacts with the text. Nostalgia and humour pervade the reading experience, but not in a way that prevents more candid, philosophical moments (e.g. the Eros line quoted previously) from also shining.

This technique is mirrored in the final section, ‘Alcibiades Chooses Their Own Adventure’ which is set up as a ‘choose your own adventure’ story. This, again, evokes nostalgia and joy, as Yourukova plays with and matures the format, providing options to choose from such as: ‘Absolutely do not fucking do that’ (p.73), and ‘Sexy dissociation’ (p.74). Most often you end up dead, eventually, and thus you are encouraged to go back, read the poems again, and choose a different fate. This creates an unsettling but deeply intriguing reading experience, and puts

me in mind of Bill Manhire’s iconic ‘The Brain of Katherine Mansfield’.⁴

The middle section of the book, ‘Dialectic’, employs a more traditional format, and instead of using an external quiz/story structure, seems to draw more from Yourukova’s own experiences. There are meditations on *Jurassic Park*, *Sims*, Goodreads, and queer friendships, alongside more classical references. I happen to be an avid *Sims* player, and was delighted by the description of the admittedly ridiculous experience of playing those games, interspersed with unsettling moments, such as: ‘our bodies grow in data’ (p.35), which echoes the fun/horror of simulation games as a concept. Occasionally tender moments, such as “Love poem for the snail in our toilet”, complement this and examine how it feels to ‘love small/and terrible/things’. However, this section feels to me less crafted than the others – perhaps a uniting structure would have made it more cohesive and enhanced the collection as a whole.

The strength of *Transposium* lies in its concepts, vibes, and single powerful lines. The verses themselves are not always stunning on their own, but in situ make something transcendental. Yourukova at times excels with simplicity; stating something everyone knows, but has not quite yet been put into words. In “Love poem for the mustard yellow jacket I lost on TradeMe”, Yourukova writes: ‘and you shouldn’t need another person to make you better even though we all need other people to make us better’. Granted – not a flowery or descriptive line of poetry, but one that rings true and smacks you in the heart and face with the truth. In the best way.

There is a lot about the book that will resonate with many, especially young nonbinary people. “Gender of the Day”, for example, has an off-kilter rhyme-scheme listing obscure things that give ~gender~, including: a piece of string, long-tailed bats, an orange peel, an earnest callout. But

³ An Athenian tragic playwright and figure in *Symposium*, who is renowned for his exceptional beauty and skill. All his works have been lost.

⁴ An online, choose your own adventure story that, if you choose one of the first (seemingly safer) options, you get

unexpectedly killed by an axe murderer. Among many other horrors/wonders. This text can be accessed here: <http://quarteracre.net/brain/index.html>.

a fine line

there is not only humorous queer content – there is also a delicate hope revealed by some poems, an exciting and beautiful envisioning of queer futures. This is exemplified in “Love poem for a future”, the last piece in the collection, which declares triumphantly: ‘and I, against all odds, am radiant’.

Not so radiant is my smudged nail polish. I got too excited; wrote too hard, but it was worth it for this collection. I can imagine many readers of many different backgrounds, experiences, and levels of knowledge about Ancient Greek philosophy not only enjoying it, but being broadened and enriched by it. Overall, yes, it is interactive and ironic – but it also has real moments of heart. It is a joy to hear them beat.

To review books for *a fine line*,
please contact Erica Stretton,
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*.



Claire Beynon - *Quiet Light* | Pastel on Paper

Sue Courtney

galaxy gazing . . .
my grandson goes on and on
about Graham's number

Venn diagram
the ins and outs of our
relationship

continental drift . . .
a slice of pavlova
slides across the plate

Sharyn Barberel

oh asparagus!
crunchy tasty spears of joy
for the first four weeks

overhead lockers
tetris of carry-on bags
and flattened donuts

Juliana Venning

circumference
divided by maths and minds
confuses me yet!

Cindy Zeiher

- I. the nautilus phorb –
 spiral in protection
 of a singular seed

- II. size is efficient
 roots lead branches
 to pattern clusters

- III. spheres don't tessellate
 but sit so near
 together in gaps

- IV. in the breadth and width
 of fibonacci sequence
 does the earth spiral?

Peter Free

oil spill . . .
a rainbow
wobbles

makeover
trying to squeeze the acorn
into a hat

Jenny Fraser

the old farm's rows
of tedded hay
 cirrus furrows

plumes of steam
over the lake . . .
a whiff of sulphur

Anne Curran

dandelion head –
spring sunshine clears away
the morning mist

Julie Adamson

the power of clouds
an accumulation
hides the sun

Barbara Strang

black and white film
her dream of becoming
an astronaut

Honourable Mention in the online Stars Contest 2023

the binoculars
shake in my hands
Jupiter's moons

Kokako 20

Julie Bates

orb of sky
no beginning
no end



Rebekah Hall – *Ferns*

Julie Adamson lives in Wellington by the sea, always changing and inspiring her. She has been published in *Kokako*, *Island Writer* (Canada) NZPS Anthology 2020 and *a fine line*.

Sharyn Barberel lives in Auckland and enjoys capturing moments in haiku as a side hustle to a corporate job.

Julie Bates has been previously published in *Kokako*, *seashells* and *Richmond news*.

Holly H. Bercusson was born and raised in Tāmaki Makaurau with a love of letters. Add to that a complicated childhood, a personality disorder, a dash of Jewish neuroticism and you pretty much have a poet.

Margaret Beverland is a kiwifruit orchardist and lives on the edge of the Tauranga Harbour near Katikati. She is chair and treasurer of the Katikati Haiku Pathway Focus Group, and for 12 years has been co-editor of *Kokako* haiku journal.

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

Steve Cain is a digital artist and painter from Temuka, South Canterbury. He currently lives in Albury, Australia and spends his time painting and growing very hot chillies. His work can be viewed and purchased on Instagram @crusadeartist.

Brent Cantwell is a New Zealand writer from Timaru, South Canterbury, who lives with his family in the hinterland of Queensland, Australia. He teaches high school English and has been writing for pleasure for 25 years. He has recently published in *takahē*, *Westerly*, *Meniscus* and *Poetry New Zealand*. His first collection of poetry *tether* was published by Recent Work Press in October 2023.

Sue Courtney who is one of the organisers of Haiku Down Under 2024, lives beside the estuary in Orewa where every September she eagerly awaits the return of the local godwits on their direct flight from Alaska and every March wishes them godspeed on their journey north again. These incredible birds are often a muse for her haiku and poetry.

Anne Curran writes haiku inspired by the landscape, seasons, people, and events of Hamilton. She remains grateful to writing friends, mentors, and family members who nurture this hobby.

After working in Mozambique for a marine conservation charity, **Lydia Draper** has returned to Waipū with a resolve to flow aroha towards te taiao. She is co-founder of Waipū Waters, a community initiative working to restore the mana of the wai.

Lola Elvy writes music, poetry, and other forms of creative fiction and nonfiction. She founded and edits the online youth journal *fingers comma toes*, and she is a central committee member and organiser for New Zealand National Flash Fiction Day.

Michelle Elvy is an editor and writer in Ōtepoti Dunedin. Her books include *the everrumble* and *the other side of better*, and her anthology work includes, most recently, *A Kind of Shelter: Whakaruru-taha* (Massey University Press, 2023).

Alexandra Fraser is an Auckland poet who has been published for years in magazines and anthologies both in New Zealand and overseas.

Born in the Waikato, **Jenny Fraser**, nature lover, musician, artist and poet, now lives in Mt Maunganui. Her haiku, senryu, tanka, haiga and haibun are published in New Zealand and International Journals.

Janis Freegard the author of several poetry collections, most recently *Reading the Signs* (The Cuba Press), and a novel, *The Year of Falling* (Mākaro Press). She was born in the United Kingdom and lives in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington. <http://janisfreegard.com>

Rebekah Hall from The Kauri Tree Studio, Picton, is a full-time ceramic artist creating unique hand-built sculptures inspired by the beauty of the little things that often go unnoticed.

Hebe Kearney is a poet and librarian who lives in Tāmaki Makaurau. Their work has appeared in publications including: Mantissa Poetry Review, Mayhem, Overcom, Rat World, samfiftyfour, Starling, Symposia, takahē, Tarot, and Poetry Aotearoa Yearbooks. You can find them at @he__be on Instagram.

Jenny Longstaff is a Dunedin-based writer, graphic designer and artist, closely involved with the Otago Art Society. She has a passion for verbal and visual imagery.

Johnny Martin lives in Northland and likes sunset beach walks and sour grapes.

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.

Loredana Podolska-Kint is studying medicine and poetry is her cure for being a medical student. She has self-published two poetry books and can be found on Instagram [@loredana_poetry](#)

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.

Brett Reid lives in Tāmaki Makaurau. His poetry has appeared in *Landfall*, *takahé*, *a fine line*, and *Sentinel Literary Quarterly*. With much delight, Brett and his wife foster greyhounds.

Lynda Scott Araya is a writer and teacher living in Kurow, North Otago. She writes poetry, short fiction and creative non-fiction, and has written a yet-to-be published poetic memoir.

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

Juliana Venning is an established author, artist, poet, with poetry (in collections), short stories (self illustrated), also art reviews, published in NZ, Australia, Belgium, Canada and Japan. Observation is her passion.

Desna Wallace has had poems published in journals for both children and adults. She is a writer, blogger, reviewer, tutor, and librarian, who loves playing with words.

Writer and teacher **Annabel Wilson** lives in Ōhinehou Lyttelton. Her poetry has been published and performed in Aotearoa and overseas. She recently completed a PhD in Creative Writing through Massey University, investigating hybrid forms of writing.

Cindy Zeiher teaches modernist and postmodernist theories in the Human Services program at the University of Canterbury, Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha. Her poetry can be found in *Aotearoa Poetry 2024*, *Pacific Dynamics* and in the forthcoming issue of *TAROT*. Cindy also plays the cello and is currently working on a series of tone-poems.