

a fine line

TE RŌPŪ TOIKUPU O AOTEAROA New Zealand Poetry Society Magazine

bloom / pua
SPRING
2022



FEATURED POET • Serie Barford
FEATURED ARTICLE • Victor Billot
COVER ART • Rebecca Smallridge

a fine line

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

ISSN 1177-6544 (print)
ISSN 1178-3931 (digital)

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

Patrons

Dame Fiona Kidman
Vincent O'Sullivan

President

Shane Hollands

Vice President

RikTheMost

FACEBOOK NewZealandPoetrySociety

INSTAGRAM @NZPoetrySociety

TWITTER @NZPS

TIKTOK @nzps_tok

a fine line staff

Managing Editor: Gail Ingram

Editorial Assistant: Erica Stretton

Proofreader: Summer

Wick-Featonby

Quotation of the season

Ahakoia he iti he pounamu
Although it is small it is a treasure

Whakataukū / Maori proverb

Contents: Spring 2022

Editorial

Gail Ingram

Featured Poet

Serie Barford

Featured Article

Victor Billot – “The Ode and I”

Members' Poems

Sarah Scott, Hebe Kearney, Ami Kindler, Jan FitzGerald, Janet Newman, Nola Borrell, Jenny Longstaff, Katrina Larsen, Jenny Dobson, Ila Selwyn, Jeni Curtis, John Ewen

Reviews

S J Mannion reviews *Super Model Minority* by Chris Tse

Hebe Kearney reviews *Meat Lovers* by Rebecca Hawkes

Haiku

Nola Borrell, Sharyn Barberel, Mackenzie Rea, Julie Adamson, Barbara Strang, Maria Adams, Jenny Pyatt, Sue Courtney, John C. Ross, Anne Curran, Donna Coleman-Smith

Contributors

Cover Art Rebecca Smallridge – “Kaihua & Stigmella Kaimanua”

Contributing Art Jenny Longstaff, Jan FitzGerald, Maria Adams



GAIL INGRAM

Ahakoā he iti he pounamu (Although it is small, it is a treasure). *a fine line* is a small journal, only 32 pages long, dedicated to the small and often under-the-radar form of poetry. The blooms of our native flowers often go without notice too, so tiny, some no more than a few millimetres wide. But as **Rebecca Smallridge**, our cover artist, shows – how delicate, how intricate, how connected these treasures, how great a part they play in the ecosystem, aesthetic joy and the wellbeing of us all!

In this issue, we celebrate our pounamu and guest poet **Serie Barford** with a selection of light-filled poems of grief from *Sleeping with Stones*, shortlisted for the Ockhams this year. In our feature article, **Victor Billot** explains how he came to be writing satiric odes for *Newsroom*, a series of hilarious poems to keep us sane in a world of crisis, and we are lucky enough to publish one.

Two haiku mark the anniversary (**Jenny Pyatt**) and passing (**John C. Ross**) of the Queen. We have baby blooms (**Sarah Scott**), queer blossoming (**Hebe Kearney**), pressurized bodies (**Janet Newman**) and somersaults (**Ami Kindler**) going riotous across our pages. **S J Mannion** reviews our newly appointed Poet Laureate **Chris Tse**'s most recent book *Super Model Minority*. **Hebe Kearney** reviews rising star **Rebecca Hawke**'s *Meat Lovers*. While our poet artists, **Jenny Longstaff**, **Maria Adams** and **Jan Fitzgerald**, sprinkle gold pollen on our kupu.

Many of our members are springing up everywhere. Youth poets **Sarah-Kate Simons** and **Elizabeth Ayrey** were star performers at a combined NZPS, National Poetry Day, *takahē* and Canterbury Poets Collective event in Ōtautahi with **RikTheMost** as the fabulous MC. Sarah-Kate also won the adult section of *Given Words*! She features alongside many of our other commended members, **Anita Arlov**, **Piet Nieuwland**, **Kim Martins**, **Jenna Heller**, **Victor Billot** and **Gillian Roach**. Congratulations, all! And congratulations, too, to members with new books out this year, **Denise O'Hagan** and **Jan FitzGerald**, and every member putting themselves out there, we love to share your poesies so don't forget to tag us at NZ Poetry Society @NZPS.

In other news at NZPS, a few small and brilliant changes. You might notice we've updated our te reo name to Te Rōpū Toikupu o Aotearoa. Thank you to the wonderful **Vaughan Rapatahana** for suggesting this more fitting version. From the summer issue, we will also be paying you, our contributors, by internet banking, all the better to feed you with.

Thank you as ever for your wonderful toikupu and support of *a fine line*. Next issue, the Summer edition has the theme of "Purse/Pāhi". What do you keep in your purse? What do you use your purse for? Please send up to four poems (40 lines max), up to four haiku and your artwork by 19 November 2022 (note the earlier date) to editor@poetrysociety.org.nz.

But now, stop a while, smell the tiny rosebuds within, and bloom.



Spring Serenade – Jenny Longstaff

SERIE BARFORD

A selection of poems from *Sleeping with Stones* (Anahera Press 2021)

The third day

it's the morning of the third day
since I heard you went over the edge

autumn dapples my bewilderment

I arrived at work
was briefed on deadlines
ran away

filled your whisky and wine bottles
with brilliant long-stemmed roses

conjured your smile
pinned it to my pillow

a black dog led you into mountains
past escarpments marked by petroglyphs

I hope ancient birdmen sang a threnody

accompanied your lonely swan dive



Mycorrhizal network by Rebecca Smallridge

Water songs

pigeons flock to our fale at sunrise

I scatter birdseed
scoop water from bowls

tilt my palms so it trickles
tinkles
splashes
sings to thirsty birds

pigeons are suction drinkers
draw moisture into hollow bones

I pour coffee for one
lurch through days
hunker in your chair at night

Masina rises full and luscious
sings recalcitrant tides into kings

I pour nightcaps

wonder which song lured you over the falls
if there were sirens in your head

fale – house
Masina - Moon

The dark side of the moon

grief is a fist of whirling mussel shells
slicing
scraping
shredding what remains

a white pigeon heard you'd flown the coop
took me gently under his wing

Filemu Filemu Filemu I crooned
offered water
seeds
leftovers

he ate everything except cooked carrots

was a peaceful presence in my dismantled world

one morning Filemu was gone
waning Masina rested instead
on the guano-splattered roof

I ached to patch her incomplete beauty

I am fully present Masina chided. *Heal yourself
instead of tinkering with my perfection.*

I closed my eyes

saw the dark side of the moon

white feathers falling like rain

Masina - Moon

Filemu - peace, quiet, stillness. Also a reference to Black Saturday in 1929 when independence leader Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III, dressed in white, called out 'Filemu, filemu, peace, peace', but was fatally shot by New Zealand police.

Geometries of light

when I was small I watched clouds
morph into phantasmagorical creatures

flit crazily over houses
piss on unsuspecting hills

dislodged sticky beads from paspalum
flicked them at thieving ants

pressed thumbs against reclining lids
until retinas exploded into phosphenes

blue stars
kaleidoscopes
fireworks

banished the bogeyman

I wish you'd played this game darl
activated geometries of light

welded the frayed end of your tether



Symbiosis # 3 by Rebecca Smallridge

VICTOR BILLOT

The Ode and I

I had an interest in satirical writing going back to high school. Later I wrote a lot of opinion pieces, both as part of my job, and also for my own interest. I wrote occasional articles for the *Otago Daily Times* over several years, and these evolved into satire. It wasn't a conscious decision. The danger is that reality is becoming more surreal and outflanking the satire, constantly levelling up. So much of contemporary public life is ludicrous, breathtaking, giddy with conceit, dominated by larger-than-life self-promoters. In another area, managed, official communication is ripe for a take down.

'So much of contemporary public life is ludicrous, breathtaking, giddy with conceit, dominated by larger-than-life self-promoters.'

In the last ten years, after a long spell, I came back to poetry as my main form. In my twenties I went down the music track. I had been writing a lot but had dropped the thread on poetry. Counter-intuitively I started writing poetry again when I was suffering from depression, when I occasionally had a bit of energy. The depression faded away but the poems are still coming. Some of this was satirical or political poetry, influenced by a range of poets and writers and musicians. You have to be careful with political poetry. It has to find a way not to be a lecture or sermon. The use of colloquial language as a tool is something that I picked up



Lakeside Lupins by Jenny Longstaff

from David Eggleton. You have comedians like Stewart Lee, who are far more than comedians. They take an idea and push it to its limits, beyond its limits, and the inherent strangeness of reality is brought into focus. I found Sleaford Mods amazing, just when you give up on music something comes along and gives you a zap. Some of the writers for *the Guardian* like John Crace and Marina Hyde can be brilliantly savage, and they need to be. Social critics like Mark Fisher are a source of some of the structure of thought beneath it all. Obviously Steve Braunias is one of the few writers in the satire zone in New Zealand, although he is my editor at *Newsroom* so there is a conflict of interest there right away. No doubt someone will point it out. So, I'm omnivorous, but I wouldn't say I'm that up on the latest cultural sensations.

How the odes in *Newsroom* started – I wrote a poem about a cartoon that appeared in the *Otago Daily Times*. The cartoon made a jokey

reference to the Samoan measles epidemic – a situation where children were dying. Whether it showed a racist tinge, callousness or was a

‘There are also a lot of people who loathe the odes and loathe me as a result and leave raging comments on Facebook. They see me as a left-wing smart arse, which is probably fair.’

blunder is hard to say, but the cartoonist seemed to think it was fine. I’m not a great fan of cancellation as I think things have to be challenged out in the open, hence I wrote a poem in response to the cartoon and sent it into *Newsroom* on the spur of the moment. I just thought it might have something. Steve Braunias picked it up and then asked if I would like to do a regular weekly poem. Who could turn down this offer?

After a slightly wobbly start the poem evolved into an “ode” somehow and started to take on this antique, vintage voice. The odes take a current event and create an outlandish story populated by caricatures, stretched metaphors, call backs, and characters and settings that come and go and make guest appearances. The odes have turned out to be an enormous success as far as readership goes. There are also a lot of people who loathe the odes and loathe me as a result and leave raging comments on Facebook. They see me as a left wing smart arse, which is probably fair. The height of this madness was when the Taxpayers Union attacked me as *Newsroom* were getting some money from the Government fund for media during the pandemic and the T.U. accused me of sucking on the teat of the nanny state and being an operative for Cindy. The effect of their campaign was to give the odes a huge publicity

boost, so in a way I suppose I should be grateful to them.

The odes I do for *Newsroom* have usually been about an individual. That has been the feedback I’ve got about what works. Interestingly some of the people featured in the odes have taken it in good spirits and one of them even wrote an ode back at me, which I thought was great. The other side of it is if you have an ode written about you, you have made it in terms of being a person of note. So it is a kind of back-handed compliment in that sense. I try not to be too personal and I tend to avoid really terrible things but it is not always possible. I’m not very forgiving of the hypocrisy of the powerful, and people who represent that world. The point is not to necessarily pour acid on the individual, but the wider issue. Is it legitimate to turn these issues into a joke, albeit one with a point? I honestly don’t know.

‘Is it legitimate to turn these issues into a joke, albeit one with a point? I honestly don’t know.’

I have not read the satirists of antiquity. In fact until recently I struggled with any non-modern poetry with a few exceptions, and didn’t do very well at all studying English at University. I was very young and not at all disciplined and didn’t make the most of it and have been trying to catch up ever since. Having said that, I have read widely, if in a very unstructured way. The punk thing is an influence. It’s become a cliché now. There was an idea that you could do something, just start doing it, and set yourself up in opposition to what you “should” be doing. The flip side was I tended to avoid putting in structured work.

I've heard some ridiculous claims – that my ode is “bullying” or part of the “Mainstream Media agenda.” It is just people who can't handle their worldview being challenged. The problem is political illiteracy. People who call the Government “communist.” As a socialist I have spent most of my life advocating minority positions and copping flak, so I don't have this sensitivity. I've lost it.

One thing I have picked up on is the rapid growth of a kind of toxic ecosystem of the “conspiracy right” as I think of it. It started with vaccines and the UN agenda cranks, and now even worse these neo-Fascists are openly operating in this media landscape. The irony isn't lost on me, because I'm a long term critic of “mainstream media” and its ideological role, but now I often end up defending journalists.

'The irony isn't lost on me, because I'm a long-term critic of "mainstream media" and its ideological role, but now I often end up defending journalists.'

Politically, my views are obvious. I was in the New Labour Party then the Alliance. These days I'm in the Socialist Society. I think politics in this country is an absolute shit show. I devote my political energy into work for unions. I am frustrated with what passes for “left wing” these days, which often seems to be policing a form of middle-class manners. My frank view is the multiple crises facing humanity are too big and we are heading towards a very bad end. There is a small chance we might change direction and salvage something so you have to keep on keeping on.

No doubt there are poets and writers who wince in horror at the odes. They are often a pastiche. There is often a biblical theme, often mock Shakespearean. Tolkien is a great source with an extra ironic subtext in New Zealand. I have borrowed from Joseph Conrad and Game of Thrones. I don't worry about it. The odes aren't intended to be a permanent statement of art. They are a cartoon in words – although of course the best cartoonists create a kind of art.

'I have borrowed from Joseph Conrad and Game of Thrones. I don't worry about it. The odes aren't intended to be a permanent statement of art.'

I regard the odes with mixed feelings. I'm glad they have hit some kind of nerve but I worry it has overwhelmed my other poetry. I see a clear demarcation between my satirical “odes” and the rest of my poetry. I have no idea how long the odes will last for. I don't think it is something that I could keep up with for years. But the odes have been an interesting experience even if sometimes I have the uneasy feeling they have chosen me as a vehicle rather than the other way around.

VICTOR BILLOT

The Trials of Elvis Tokoroa

Lo, Elvis was a shepherd of Men. From the forests
of Tokoroa he came, a humble servant, to the Great City.
He preacheth against the Pink Nonbinary Unicorns
and their pronouns and Kombucha and sinful ways.
And God looked favourably on his good servant Elvis:
and sent signs and messages, such as mobile EFT POS terminals
and pimped out Harley Davidsons, and sweet holidays in Greece.
So Pastor Elvis prospered as did his wise wife Hannah,
who standeth behind his throne and counsel him
in a very direct firm manner on fairly much everything.
Lo, and Reverend Elvis walked amongst the fallen
and his congregation said yea, we long for burnings and smittings
and other opportunities to express our love for sinners.
But then a plague came to the land, to punish all those
who refuseth to paywave their tithes for the Harleys.
And High Priest Elvis saith, I shall not be locked down,
nor partake in your sorcery or public health measures
for these are the ways of Satan: for few can attend
at the Temple and contribute their meagre kopecks.
So it was the Archimandrite Elvis led the Israelites
out of Egypt unto the Auckland Domain super spreader event,
where he denounc'd Empress Cindy and the Philistines
and the Sodomites and those without direct debits.
And the Pharisees sent their guardsmen to arrest Bishop Elvis
and he will duly appear at the District Court.
But the judgments of the Pharisees and the scribes
are straws in the wind to Messiah Elvis;
for one as Holy as this answers to no worldly laws,
his law is that of the Almighty, and when the Almighty speaks
it is with the beep and whirr of a mobile EFT POS terminal.

SARAH SCOTT

Arcadia Road

Let us live just south of Autoville
where the cockscomb spark above your bug-bitten
knees
Let us want to go a different speed
when the newborn azaleas speak in whole
sentences
& anthers surface on the face of the deciduous
where leaf buds creak open like a difficult
cupboard
Let the dark just give you shade
like a girl in the office on her first day
Let us be flushed and overwhelmed
when we open the nearest dusty window
to an olive-dry landscape with a neon-lit grotto
just beyond blue like the painted mountains
Let us go down that dirt drive
where silence flickers like a sign.



Red Rose by Maria Adams

Blossom

When I hear Bjork's first beats
or a bird branch across my path
I think of you reading aloud
while I swam in the clear water
with your daughters, sunshine-blossoms
over-winging the busy city
like a kimono made of scrap fabrics.

When I look at his sleeping face
it's clear as a new page.
I think of sunshine-scrap
branching, my son's
body as a bird or the first city
beats of him
I heard blossom in the busy water.

Poems written in response to Karl Maughan's exhibition *Arcadia* (Milford Galleries Dunedin, 2013)

HEBE KEARNEY

blossoming

i love you stupidly among the blossoms.
you have big hands and your breasts grow
slowly;
you are blooming like the cherries.

you show me your estrogen patches
with a wide smile like a proud child.
i am giddy with the joy of your becoming.

grinning under our masks
we are stupid happy with the pink tree
branches waving in thin blue air.

we stride without a care
unapologetic and queer!

your friendship
is the essence of love to me:
sweet, warm,
and perfectly petal-shaped.

spring in auckland

and spring isn't a rebirth here
a release of potential stored
in sleeping nature,
world wrought anew
in blossom heads and shy flowers,
as the breeze blows a mixed, refreshing chill –
no.

here, spring drags itself damply
across the few months allotted it;
begins an overexcited rush
in mid-august, the month of thieves
(for each year it creeps into the vaults of our
minds
and steals our hopes like gold).

here, this zealous start is soon smothered,
dampened, torn by rain
so blossoms fall waterlogged,
squelch heavy onto concrete
drowning in a way
that could be mistaken for modesty.

here, it's never a breeze.
it's a gale, a strong wind warning
on the 6pm news,
blowing us all away.

here, spring hauls itself
bitterly through the rainstorms
heralding the arrival
of ever more troubling summers.

AMI KINDLER

Full Bloom

bare tiptoes on the picnic table
nightdress billowing
arms flung skyward
she is a tree in bloom
in the middle of summer
at full moon – mad

melodious notes float from her mouth
like petals in a sea of lunatics
she doesn't know them, sees only faces

angry bees in their heads
yet they listen gaping
seascapes in their minds

she is a light in the dark
and then she's not

she takes refuge in the cupboard
with the empty coat hangers
hides from nurses
from white pills that wrap a
hungry mist around her heart
from herself

she laughs like the gull-banshees
circling her window
its metal bars lend
weight to errant thoughts

she tries to read the paper
normalise the day
flicks through pages
of other people's lives

she spends the night
in front of the mirror
looking past her reflection

The 100th Somersault

With outstretched arms
Her fingers are butterfly wings
Curling into the buoyant blue.
She rises like steam
Off the Earth in winter.
Darts upwards,
Drapes an arm around a cloud
Mimics nearby fantails
With a noiseless tumble.

Her cotton dress is
A fevered kite, plummeting.
Limitations scatter from her pockets
like seeds.

She defies gravity
At the bottom turn.
Frolics with frontiers
Until each sultry somersault
Is a window of joy.

After the rush of a 100 twirls
Dozens of hungry eyes
Watch her
From the tiny meadow below.

Poised, she floats down
Stands tall but humble,
Earth invigorating
beneath her feet.

JAN FITZGERALD

After winter

it feels like hearing the voice of God
seeing the freesias finally push through.
First a crack in the soil
then a slim green finger,
climbing the air like Nature's take
on the Creation of Adam.

Daffodils too, have shot up overnight
like skyrockets on slender sticks,
exploding in showers of brilliance.

Even I feel a looseness in the hips
that dares me to twirl in the courtyard
as if all the spores of spring
have burst across some interface,
among clench and grip and shiver,
like a fizzing Jackson Pollock
putting paid to ice in the marrow
and that bastard wind
throat-singing in the chimney.

There is a drumming in the soil,
a rhythm in the air.
This day, this moment –
when one bird's song brings forth
an orchestra
and one new leaf a garden.



Freesias by Jan FitzGerald

JANET NEWMAN

Specialised knowledge

The Repco assistant
pushed the rubber blade
into the wiper arm with one hand,
her other holding the umbrella,
water sheeting off blue nylon
while I marvelled

at how she knew
the Triton wiper fits my Toyota Fielder,
even though the ten-inch housing
is out of stock, the eight-inch
should not – *will not* – affect the operation,
she told me who does not know
how to insert the rubber,
hasn't a clue how to unclip the blade
but watches

as I watched
the saturation divers on TV last night
repairing oil pipelines in the sea
so far beneath the surface
their bodies become pressurized,
living for weeks in a capsule
no bigger than my bathroom

where each morning
I wipe steam off the mirror,
my arm much like the window wiper
without which I could not see
to drive and now, repaired, can see
some way along the road ahead
and drive

still not grasping
exactly how the wiper works
or the car for that matter
or the divers
or who contrived work so deep
by which I mean extreme –
blinking out the blur, focusing
on what little I can make sense of.

one two

waitotara

walking to school or riding the mail truck bare feet
surfing the running board wind in his hair in his ears
right arm crooked over the wound window
left stretched into air floating flying
he was lighter than air lighter even than light

kiwitea

she wanted to keep him safe
on the ground one child buried
from falling
off a horse hid the air force calling
he went with a pack two new boots

bombardier

pressed to the ground fingers in his ears
twelve pounders pounding ear drums slid
another shell in the sleeve they counted
one two three all threes are anti-tank gunners

cassino

apex of light on silver wings over desert sand
steel-capped boot on shovelhead Tobruk
headlights on the slow road to Cairo Jerry overhead
in Tripoli they were shaving women's heads Cassino
roots of old vines oak barrels vintages drunk
from cellars drunk from purple death pressed
into slit trenches drone of engines sky black
with planes shadows drawing near
they were dug in for three days cheering
until the black bellies opened friendly fire
they said he could read the numbers
seven eight lay them straight lighter than air
he was lighter even than light

NOLA BORRELL

leafing

“Are you a grownup?” asks a passing party tiger, all of five years old. “Definitely”, the old woman says. “I’ve been a grownup for a long time ... But right now, I’m a postie”, and she drops a letter in a nearby postbox.

Later, she thinks of better replies. “Sometimes” or “only when necessary” and “when I want to be”. Questions too. “What sort of tiger are you? Bouncy like Tigger? Or the hungry type?”

old pūriri
the buds bursting
with leaves

JENNY LONGSTAFF

Pecking at Seeds

My dreams perched on thorns,
sure-footed as a song's refrain
flitting through memory.

Lingering on the forefront of a frown,
furrowed thoughts carried seeds
to scatter before the wind.

Now the harvest awaits.
It's my time. It's my turn.
It's mine, and I'm ready.

Freedom's flight will find me
under bloom-light's silver sickle,
reaping what I'm owed.

KATRINA LARSEN

Impatient

They walked and I
trailed behind, scuffing
feet and tearing leaves into
confetti blown on the breeze.

Azaleas one would say.
Agapanthus the other replied.
Pansies. Rhododendrons. Lilies.
Marigolds. Rabbits' Ears. Lavender.
Geranium. Begonia. Hydrangea. Daisy.

Side by side, pausing to touch the petals,
they spoke a common language
on that first day, as the suitcase in
the hallway waited to be unpacked.
Around the lawn they pottered,
making cuttings and pulling weeds.
Dirt under their fingernails.
A slow stroll, an even pace,
before dinner and old
resentments resurfaced.

Dandelion I call, as his small hand
reaches into the long grass.
Scottish thistle. Those?
I don't remember
their names.

JENNY DOBSON

Blossom

There is a time –
One soft, sensuous evening in spring
when the air is all touch and tenderness
when there is no sound, no words, just
breathing, just the rise and fall of leaves

When 10,000 white winged butterflies
burst from plump buds, and wait
paused at the edge of a moment

For the coming morning holds them
morning when curtains are opened
and someone looks and someone sees
the Cherry Tree Covered in Blossom!

Every other morning after
there will be petals lost, petals loosened
petals played out on the phrasing of the wind
petals rocking down towards water or grass or earth

And the natural tone of the voice re-sounds
the critical angle is reached, boys and girls
come of age in an awkward, precarious flush
bees hum, tiny birds delve and flit
it's all so glorious, so sparkling, so fleeting

The first quarter chimes
the young god and goddess take their place
the night sky explodes with fire and
white, white drifts

ILA SELWYN

after Peter, two pantoums

i.

i'm a frayed silk scarf flapping in the wind
wispy wisteria dresses the lawn in mauve
clouds morph into Dr Seuss shapes
grief beds down beside love

wispy wisteria dresses the lawn in mauve
home is Peter rolling over on my notepad
grief beds down beside love
a walk in the woods blows worries away

home is Peter rolling over on my notepad
wilful weeds wind round, clutter my thoughts
a walk in the woods blows worries away
formal dancing brings freedom and joy

wilful weeds wind round, clutter my thoughts
clouds morph into Dr Seuss shapes
formal dancing brings freedom and joy
i'm a frayed silk scarf flapping in the wind

ii.

a blocked dam without a release valve
stars shiver, my window shakes
cloud carpets the far valley
mist weaves its fingers up to my door

stars shiver, my window shakes
his flowers have gone to seed
mist weaves its fingers up to my door
weeds tangle around my heart

his flowers have gone to seed
wilted, parched by the sun
weeds tangle around my heart
wait in vain for my rain to come

wilted, parched by the sun
cloud carpets the far valley
wait in vain for my rain to come
a blocked dam without a release valve

JENI CURTIS

it is time to plant bulbs

it is time to plant bulbs
to anticipate an expanse
of gold ribboning
the end of the garden daffodils woven
amongst the green like eyelet lace

it is time to plant bulbs
to anticipate the pink-
frilled petals of the hyacinth's
tiered ranks pushing skywards
in heady gusts of heavy scent

it is time to plant bulbs
to anticipate the yellow throats
of crocus clustered under trees
corolla of purple and white
a delicate carpet

it is time to plant bulbs
to anticipate the end
of summer the fall of autumn
leaves the rain-drenched sog under foot
bare branches in a monochrome world

the abundance of summer
rots and decays the coloured
panoply of autumn fades passes
while pale fingers of toadstools advertise
the way all flesh goes – it is time to plant bulbs

JOHN EWEN

Spring Ritual

Once when I was seven I saw
crocus flowers poking through snow
defying that dreary whiteness.
What made them bloom?
Later I read of prehistoric seeds
sown in these modern times
somehow bursting into shoots
and I was hooked.

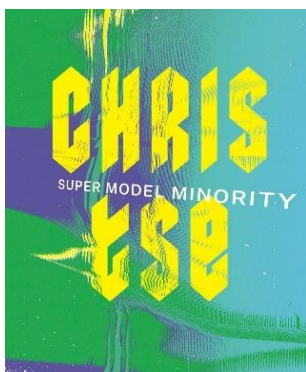
In a crevice of my palm are specks
mere dust containing life
asleep until set free in soil
while in my pocket
jostle other seeds
still waiting for their chance.
They seem as good as dead
but when I sow them they will live
give birth and bloom before they die.

They, the earth – we too
are matter from the cosmos
some long-dead distant fire.
How do they know it's time
now is the season
now is their moment?
I kneel, I plunge
my hands down into stardust
repeat an endless miracle.

S J MANNION

SuperModel Minority – Chris Tse

(Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2022)
ISBN 9781869409616. RRP \$24.99. 104pp.



Super Model Minority is Chris Tse's third collection and it is a bold and bracing read. There is something beyond brisk about the pacing, a singing rhythm of honesty, clarity and purpose that gives it almost muscular energy.

'We would all benefit from a surprise key change
in the middle /
of every traumatic experience.'

(*Super Model Minority*, "Karaoke for the end of the world")

There is a revelatory quality present here too, and a heightened sense of the collaborative that illuminates the relationship between writer and reader. A recognition that through the act of writing, the writer both discovers and uncovers himself, much as the reader does. This is a writer familiar with both the process of knowing and the knowing process. And he is eloquent with it:

'The more I write, the more I grieve
for something I'm not even sure /
belongs to me.'

("Utopia? BIG MOOD")

This only happens in the very best work.

This trilogy with its tiara-like title piece (who doesn't love a trilogy? or a tiara?!) travels. It has motion, passing through stations (*Super Model Minority*, *Vexillology*, *Poetry to make boys cry*) and stages until it reaches a kind of climax. Indeed, the ultimate climax. The end of the world, even.

'If you want the comfort of being remembered, I
will tell you: after /
The End is the memory of your being passed
down the line like an heirloom.'

(*Poetry to make boys cry*, "Funeral arrangements for the
end of the world.")

Yes, we have been through the fire and yes, we
are forged anew. And we are not only awakened
but amused which adds to the effect.

'There is no turning back once you've played the
'bukkake' card.'

(*Poetry to make boys cry*, "What's fun until it gets weird?")

Or:

'strapped to a torture rack because no one trusts
a gaysian /
with a kiwi accent and a creative writing degree.'

(*Super Model Minority*. "Mike & / Karl & / Duncan & /
Martin")

Or, in the same piece:

'... a livestream of me starving to death while
trying /
to save for a house.'

I laughed, nay, cackled more than once,
sometimes out loud. Tse might say I LOL'ed.
But not me, I would never say that.

**'It is broadly graphic but with
a look of the brush stroke and
a sophisticated spectrum. You
could say the same for the
poetry.'**

The book is nicely made too, deliberately raw,
with a slightly unfinished feel to it. The colour
palette is modern and 'artsy'. Arvid Boecker or
Joanne Freeman's contemporary abstracts
sprung to mind. Bright yellow, white, green,
purple and a splash of duck drake blue –
something you could hang on your wall. Were
it enlarged, I would. It is broadly graphic but
with a look of the brush stroke and a
sophisticated spectrum. You could say the same
for the poetry.

'All I want is a pattern /
I can relate to – something like symmetry
without the call for order.'

(Vexillology. "Violet-Spirit")

I had not read this poet's work before, but I
filled in that gap after reading this particular
book but before writing this particular review,
so my thinking is now tinged by what went
before, and my appreciation edified. It is a great
pleasure to read a body of work by such an
accomplished, rising-star-now-recently-
crowned Poet Laureate! Quite the constellation.

'I've eaten my own heart only to find I'm allergic
to melodrama and yet I'd /
do it all again just for the exposure.'

*(Poetry to make boys cry. "Spoiler alerts for the end of the
world.")*

I suppose this kind of instant or immediate
expertise, or the appearance of it, is happening
more and more now, as almost all of our
emerging artists, in almost all genres, are so
very well educated. While it largely remains to
be seen if this will improve 'output' or merely
increase it, it is safe to say that in Chris Tse's
case, the erudition is both obvious and
obviously earned. With lines like this, who
could say otherwise:

'-that satisfaction can come from pain suggests
sometimes /
what is meant to be shut out deserves our
consideration.'

(Vexillology. "(Yellow-Sunlight)")

And:

'... but sometimes I can't bear to be in a room
surrounded / by people I know and love.
And so is love – too bright to look in the eye, /
too bright to ignore.'

*(Poetry to make boys cry. "Love theme for the end of the
world.")*

So thank you Mr Tse, your skill with the word
and the wānanga burns bright. Long may it
light your way, and ours.

To review books for *a fine line*,
please contact Erica Stretton,
reviews@poetrysociety.org.nz

HEBE KEARNEY

Meat Lovers – Rebecca Hawkes

(Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2022)
ISBN 9781869409630. RRP \$24.99. 92pp.



Meat Lovers is a captivating collection of poetry that is overflowing with ripe detail. Hawkes draws skillfully on her experiences of growing up on a sheep and beef farm in Canterbury to take her readers to uncomfortable places, and force them to

confront visceral horrors, while maintaining a seamless aesthetic.

The first half of the collection, “Flesh”, confronts simple horrors in particular. A pork nipple, being cooked, watches like an eye (“The Flexitarian”). A farm girl falls into a hole and ends up ‘ankle deep in a bursting purple corpse’ (“Flesh tones”). Lamb tails sit warm inside a sack (“Flesh tones”). A sheep refuses to die (“Is it cruelty”). But alongside these scenes are images of another kind: wisteria, willows, gorse, marzipan, honeydew. Milk mixed with blood is described as ‘the safe lurid pink of strawberry milk’ (“Dairy queen”). The visceral walks in lockstep with the strangely beautiful. Reading, you are at once entranced and repulsed, and can’t help but gobble down more words.

The second half of the book, “Lovers”, is overflowing, too, but with decadence rather than visera. These poems are somehow less personal but more intimate. They contain glimpses of experiences with love and sexuality, while still including imagery informed by the farm and flesh focus of the first half. They invite a lover to ‘lick it in the way you will my wounds’ (“Mince & cheese”). The standout for me in the second half is “Werewolf in the girl’s dormitory”, evoking the pain and confusion of having to repress your queerness, which then feels like ‘the unguessed danger inside you’ (“Werewolf in the girls’ dormitory”). The second half of the book feels like it takes place later than the first; temporally in Hawkes’s life, but also in terms of feeling. If “Meat” feels like a clear summer’s day, “Lovers” feels like a velvet evening.

‘The visceral walks in lockstep with the strangely beautiful.’

The book’s artwork (by Hawkes herself) matches the content perfectly. I found myself revisiting the cover image as I progressed through the collection. With each poem I read, my appreciation of the artwork deepened, and as my appreciation of the artwork deepened, so did my understanding of the poems. I was continually noticing new details in the artwork, such as the pavlova from “Barbecue mirage”, the salt lamp from “The salt lamp I got you for your birthday” or the axolotl from “Pink fairy armadillo”. The inclusion of these aspects, all matching in pink tones, contribute to the strong themes and moods of the poems, which washed over my mind as I read. This interplay between poetry and visual art makes *Meat Lovers* not just

a great collection, but a whole aesthetic and sensory experience.

‘The poem constitutes a moral dilemma, and also illustrates how being forced to make adult decisions as a child can leave scars.’

At its best, this is an experience that absolutely floors you; Hawkes’s writing has the ability to get you right in the guts and twist. “Is it cruelty”, from the first half of the collection, exemplifies this most to me. It details an attempted mercy killing of an injured sheep by two children, which is made especially harrowing by the poem’s technical construction. It chillingly employs rhetorical questions and repetition to build the sense of horror the children feel as the killing does not go to plan. Each verse continues from the title (‘Is it cruelty...’), revealing the details of the situation by asking, for example: ‘... if the sheep has a broken leg?’; ‘... if there is nobody else around’ (“Is it cruelty”). The questioning reaches a climax with the repeated question: ‘If the stone hits the skull with a sick quiet thud / that is barely a crack?’ (“Is it cruelty”) and each time you read it, the line feels like a blow, until it is revealed ‘the bone in the sheep’s brow / is crushed but not caved in’ (“Is it cruelty”). The pain and guilt felt by the children is palpable in the repeated questions, which beg the reader for reassurance: ‘Can they walk away from it?’ (“Is it cruelty”). The poem constitutes a moral dilemma, and also illustrates how being forced to make adult decisions as a child can leave scars. “Is it cruelty” is Hawkes’s writing at its absolute best; painful, poignant, powerful.

‘There is much more I could say, but even more that I could not. This is because, like all good poetry, there is something you can’t quite put your finger on about *Meat Lovers*.’

Meat Lovers is a skillful, enticing, and confronting collection. Its two sections, though distinct, resonate with each other, and are united by an aesthetic epitomised in the collection’s visceral/ beautiful cover art. There is much more I could say, but even more that I could not. This is because, like all good poetry, there is something you can’t quite put your finger on about *Meat Lovers*. Something unknowable, but definitely delectable.

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*.

NOLA BORRELL

Half Moon Bay
the whale ropes grow
ferns



SHARYN BARBEREL

tail aloft
my sweet little feline friend!
feathers in his claws

MACKENZIE REA

winter sun
a burst of daffodils
too soon

Jenny Longstaff - Blooming Beauties

JULIE ADAMSON

spring fragrance
lost in a landslide

bluebells
in a wood
my first cuckoo

wattle day
a celebratory
sneeze

BARBARA STRANG

not speaking
the cherry on the fence line
in full bloom

First published in *Kokako* 30

they're no longer
cutting the grass –
wildflowers

First published in *The Perfect Weight of Blankets at Night*. NZPS

MARIA ADAMS

gold buds on new shoots
small sculptures
against light

JENNY PYATT

fifty year anniversary
the Golden Queen Peach
blossoms

SUE COURTNEY

tulip season . . .
row after row of
selfie-takers

first rose
the snap
as it's taken

JOHN C. ROSS

Elizabeth dead
'long live' . . .
changes

ANNE CURRAN

blue windmills
painted on porcelain cups –
stories from home

homeless man –
a stray dog
licks his face

DONNA COLEMAN-SMITH

xmas at Karitane
the spoonbills and godwits
feed together



Forest orchid by Rebecca Smallridge

On completing studies in Psychology and Business, **Maria Adams** established a career in Corporate H.R. Presently she lives in Tauranga, and operates a property business whilst caring for her two boys.

Julie Adamson lives in Wellington overlooking the sea. Nature in all its forms and life in these strange times inspires her haiku. Her work has appeared in *Kokako*, NZPS Anthology 2020 and *Island Writer Magazine* (Canada.)

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

Serie Barford collaborated with filmmaker Anna Marbrook for the 2021 *Going West Different Out Loud* series. Her poetry collection, *Sleeping With Stones*, was shortlisted for the 2022 Ockham Book Awards.



Rose Blush by Maria Adams

Victor Billot is a Dunedin writer. His poetry collection *The Sets* was published by Otago University Press in 2021. He writes a weekly satirical ode on current affairs for *Newsroom* website. His website is victorbillot.com

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

Donna Coleman-Smith is a Northlander living in rural Otago, who belongs to a remote journaling group who enjoy writing as an antidote for busy lives.

Sue Courtney lives by the estuary in Orewa. She takes inspiration for her haiku from the world around her.

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.

Jeni Curtis, an Ōtautahi/Christchurch writer, was featured poet in *a fine line*, Summer 2019, and runner up in the CPC John O'Connor poetry competition 2022. Her poem, "talking of goldfish," set to music by Janet Jennings features in *21x21* by Jenny Wollerman.

Jenny Dobson lives in Waipawa, Central Hawkes Bay and has written and performed poetry for over thirty years. Her laundry poem was included in the NZ Poetry Society's 2020 Anthology.

John Ewen's poetry, short stories, non-fiction and plays have been published in NZ magazines and anthologies, the UK online literary magazine *Five Dials* and broadcast by Radio NZ.

Jan FitzGerald is a long-established NZ poet with four poetry books published. A guest poet in *Acumen (UK)*, she has also been shortlisted twice in the Bridport Poetry Prize.

Hebe Kearney (they/them) is a poet who lives in Tāmaki Makaurau. Their work has appeared in publications including *Starling, Mayhem, Tarot, takahē*, and the Poetry New Zealand Yearbook.

Ami Kindler is an emerging poet. As well as poetry, she enjoys writing fiction. In her spare time she loves walking and spending time with her husband and son.

Katrina Larsen is a Tauranga based poet and teacher. She has previously been published in *Poetry New Zealand, tahakē*, and *Blackmail Press*.

S.J. Mannion is an Irish writer, reader, cook, teacher and dreamer, living in the Land of the Long White Cloud – Aotearoa. In between she ukuleles.

Janet Newman lives in Horowhenua. She won the New Zealand Poetry Society International Poetry Competition in 2015. Her first poetry collection is *Unseasoned Campaigner* (Otago University Press, 2021).

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.

A retired teacher living by the beach in Hawkes Bay, **Jenny Pyatt** has had 35 teaching resources published and writes poetry for pleasure. Photography is her other passion.

Mackenzie Rea lives in the Manawatu. Her poetry has appeared in the NZPS Anthology (2020-21), *Dementia Haiku, a fine line* (Summer 2021) and *Versions* (2020-21).

John C. Ross I'm a long-retired English Literature academic (ex-Massey), living in Palmerston North, but originally from Wellington, and a member of the windrift.haiku group.

Sarah Scott's poems have appeared in *Landfall, Turbine |Kapohau* and on *NZ Poetry Shelf*. She recently curated the Poetry Lightbox Series in Te Whanganui-a-Tara where she lives with her partner and two sons.

Ila Selwyn has written three poetry collections, *two sisters, dancing with dragons* and *slipping between*. Her next book will be a collection of poetry, short stories and drawings.

Rebecca Smallridge is a full-time visual artist based in Ōtautahi. Her work is inspired by Aotearoa's natural environment and driven by our stewardship towards nature.

Barbara Strang lives near the Estuary, Christchurch. Her haiku have appeared in anthologies and periodicals here and overseas, from 1998 on. She leads the Small White Teapot Haiku Group.