

a fine line

TE RŌPŪ TOIKUPU O AOTEAROA New Zealand Poetry Society

SUMMER
2023



purse / pāhi

FEATURED POET • Sam Duckor-Jones

FEATURED ARTICLE • Joanna Preston

COVER ART • Jan FitzGerald

a fine line

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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

FACEBOOK NewZealandPoetrySociety

INSTAGRAM @NZPoetrySociety

TWITTER @NZPS

TIKTOK @nzps_tok

a fine line staff

Managing Editor: Gail Ingram
Editorial Assistant: Erica Stretton
Proofreader: Marina Lathouraki

Quotation of the season

“the troubles of life as we find
them are mainly traceable to the
heart or the purse”

— Charlotte Perkins Gilman

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Cover Art Jan FitzGerald “Pūkeko Pāhi”

Contributing Art John Allison, Oshadha Perera, Michael Giacon



GAIL INGRAM

‘The dreaded “Purse” theme’, one of our Te Rōpū Toikupu members wrote. Difficult indeed I concur, but, of course, not as fraught for the many who are navigating the tightening of purse strings in this cost-of-living crisis. Yet poets still rise – in hard times, perhaps, even more – our pen, our words, our salvation. We pick up that turn of phrase dropped on the pavement, turn it over, nod.

Our guest poet **Sam Duckor-Jones** drops the overheard language of our people, and it is gold to us, a collector’s item. Check out, too, our contributors’ responses to “pāhi”– **Michael Giacon**, a manbag speaks; **Robyn Restieaux**, a government purse closes; **Robert Rinehart**, a fishing net is the mouth of a purse catching less; **John Allison**, pursed lips cannot contain some things; and so many more precious pennies to be saved in this bumper bag of an edition.



Wood and Bamboo Purse – a fine line

Like **Joanna Preston**, Aotearoa’s current poetry Book Award winner, arguing the merit of poetry classes in our featured article. Or, for a rainy summer’s day, **Anuja Mitra** and **Vaughan Rapatahana**’s book reviews. Or, be delighted by the haiku of our experienced members alongside new contributors.

Poet artists once again embrace and enhance our pages. Thank you once again to our cover artist **Jan FitzGerald**, whose work also graced the cover of our ‘Animal’ edition last year. How fortunate we are to have these talented people in our midst. I encourage you to visit their websites and support their work.

In NZPS news, we are very sad to say goodbye to **RiktheMost**, our VP of many years. They have been an invaluable member of our committee, supporting our whanau of performance poets and queer writers, and we will miss them heaps.

And speaking of our whanau of poets, our latest NZPS anthology, *alarm & longing*, is out! Edited by **Tim Jones** and launched in Pōneke in December, don’t miss this wonderful collection of Aotearoa’s finest writing by adult and youth, poetry and haiku. Watch for news of a potential Zoom launch coming, and visit our [website](https://www.poetrysociety.org.nz) to order.

Next issue, the autumn edition, will be themed “History/Tāhuhu Kōrero”. Please send up to four poems (40 lines max), up to four haiku, and your artwork by 10 March 2023 to Gail Ingram, editor@poetrysociety.org.nz.

Kā mihinui, poets, may your heart and your purse be safe.

SAM DUCKOR-JONES

Purse

Geoff Cochrane died the other day. Geoff was a great gatherer. I imagine his pockets were always filled with bits of poems found while out walking. I think Grace Paley and maybe Jane Austen were the same. Desks strewn with ticket stub jottings... I think this kind of thing is an important way into prepping for a poem. Eavesdropping, noticing, recording. So in honour of Geoff, here are a suite of constructions gathered from various train journeys, bus trips, airports, meetings and barstools. Open my purse and you will indeed find crumpled scraps of paper there...

heckler

had a crash / been in hospital
all i got is panadol / you can have the panadol
how does \$10 sound for the panadol / had heroin had LSD as well

no don't do drugs / no you can do drugs
as long as your dealer is your doctor / where you from
they're from there mate / they're right there

mate / i'm just pleased to be out of the house
you got a tent / luxury
you got a cardboard box / luxury

grover was a groover who should have lived longer / i'm just an industrial animal
i tell my mates i don't care what it sounds like to them / sounds good to me
i've played here / i've played Karamea

i've played somewhere else / don't make fun of an old geezer
we forget / gotta keep some things for some things some things for other things
i'd like to play a ballad / it's called

well its just a ballad i like / don't confuse me
i'm getting denigrated / all i got is panadol
been in hospital / had a crash



Gloria – Sam Duckor-Jones

drifter

Anyone know where Rotorua is?
I slept in a bush last night
I walked from Raetihi

Smoke?
Does anyone smoke?
This chargers fucken

I'm gonna take this fucken
charger & shove it up the fucken
Some people make me do some beautiful shit

judge

I can see what you're doing there
Good boy
Yes

I can see what you're doing there
Bad boy terrible
Terrible

witness

a kilometre away was the Clarence River
and above that mountains of two thousand feet
and the noise of the boulders splashing into the river

and the dust
the dust was something you'd never
you'd never imagine to see

and the willow trees
and the poplar trees that surrounded the old hut
eighty feet high and cracking like stock whips

It was a noise I'd never heard before
and I've heard a lot of noises
and seen chimneys come down but this was exceptional

so
you can imagine

artist

It was morning
It was cruise ship season
We worked hard to make it look deserted

I'm a failed musician
I'm an engineer by trade
I went to a six week photography course in 2010

Now I'm photographing weddings
I find it nauseating
I love that light is your thing

I call it New York meets Casablanca
I feel like I'm cheating on my husband
Just ignore them

Its like fly fishing
Give them nothing
We are so professional

It has a silent shutter
Is it really silent?
So silent

It's a game changer
It's a sinking ship
& then they all started having children which is fair enough

customer

It's hunting season / can I have a duck
Well it's hunting season / you can have one duck
I'll take it I'll take it / I'll take the one duck

Hold on mate / don't ducks mate for life?
What's that? / eh?
Do ducks mate for life mate / is what I'm saying

Some ducks paradise ducks / yup for example
Well look what you've done mate / aw the poor girl
I'll come back for his wife sometime / cheers for the duck

The Mother Speaks To Her Chairs

The mother was born in a large city in 1956.
The father was born in a small town in 1957.
They met each other in a third place in 1979.

They got married in the large city in 1980.
They moved together to the small town in 1981.
Their first child was born there in 1982.

Their second child was born there in 1984.
Their third child was born there in 1986.
The mother's uncle died in 1988. He left her six good chairs.

Over a period there are approximately
3 cats, 6 mice, 4 rats, 9 fish, 4 birds & 1 dog
By 2003 the mother & father have split up

By 2004 all the animals have died
By 2005 all the children have moved out
& the mother has the six chairs recovered.

It was expensive, but, she argues, it has been such a long time.
& the first child gets a pet. He phones the mother to tell her.
He says how he talks with the pet & how nice it feels.

The mother says well I talk to my chairs so I understand yeah I get it.
I say, hello chairs, I love you chairs, you are so beautiful, chairs.
& the eldest child says, good Ma thats good, well talk to you soon.

Ok bye hon, she says.
And they hang up.

Frederick by Leo Lionni: the gist retold

Everyone is prepping for winter. Everyone is filling bags with oranges & cheese & frozen peas. Everyone is checking for leaks & chopping wood & stocking the bar. Everyone except Geoff, who sits by a babbling brook, daydreaming. With their arms full of blankets & pillows everyone calls out to Geoff to help with the goddam prep. Geoff says softly *I am* & he wanders off into meadows & feels long grass tickle his shins. Unpacking bootloads of batteries & panadol, everyone calls out to Geoff that a little help would be appreciated just saying. To which Geoff thinks quietly to himself *I am helping* & he looks up then to watch small birds move slowly 'cross pinkening skies. Well, winter comes & everyone hunkers down & for a while it's all pretty good. There's enough beer & beans & most board games haven't devolved into feuds. Then the 2minute noodles run out & everyone goes apeshit & Geoff senses his moment. He stands on a chair & taps a wine glass with a teaspoon. Everyone turns towards him with a communal snarl WHAT?! & Geoff begins to describe the sound of babbling brooks, the feel of grass in a meadow & the colours of a sky at dusk & a sort of wistfulness descends & folks rest their heads on their neighbours shoulders as they listen & some are gently weeping with smiles on their faces. Geoff! they all cry – you're a poet!

JOANNA PRESTON

Some Arguments in Favour of Creative Writing Classes

First, the disclaimer:

I am part of the racket. Not only do I have a Creative Writing degree, I also teach Creative Writing. Most of my income in the last decade has come from teaching. So what I have to say comes from a position of some partiality. But it also comes from the position of having experienced it both as a student and as a teacher.

1. Legitimacy, and the myth that Real Talent Will Find a Way

Let's start with the reflexive discomfort about the idea of offering a writing degree at university level. University is *meant* to be where we study things for the love of it. We don't mind if people want to study music or philosophy. We don't insist that visual art 'can't be taught'. And we don't expect every member of the class to become celebrated artists or working historians. Why *not* creative writing?

'Hard truth: becoming a writer requires you to be a bit of a bastard.'

Doing a formal CW degree legitimises the time spent. It makes it a 'real subject', to be taken seriously by other people. It isn't just a hobby, like knitting or stamp collecting. Okay, I know the response to that – a real writer *doesn't need* anyone else to give them legitimacy. The truth is that this attitude, like the 'anyone with real drive, real talent, will find a way to make it happen' argument, is dismissive rubbish. Yes, it may be



Red Purse in Watercolour – Rata Ingram

true in some cases. But if you want to examine it for yourself, I'm willing to bet the people making these statements are almost never the ones in charge of looking after a family.

Some of you will be rolling your eyes now, but this is much less a feminist rant than an observation: every class I've ever been part of, women, usually middle-aged women, are by far the biggest proportion. I suspect a lot of people who sneer at writing classes, or who genuinely feel they are a bad thing, don't appreciate how damn difficult it is to take a chunk of your life and invest it in writing. *Sorry darling, could you cook dinner tonight? I'm trying to finish this stanza.* Women especially are brought up with the expectation that they owe their families their undivided attention. Hard truth: becoming a writer requires you to be a bit of a bastard. *Especially* if you're trying to do it on your own. Too many people are made to feel ashamed of wanting to pursue writing.

A creative writing degree gives some legitimacy to those aspirations. You're paying actual money, to an actual academic institution, and doing actual study. Just *getting in* should mean that you've demonstrated enough ability to convince someone else that this isn't a waste of time. It is much easier to say *sorry, I have to finish this piece for uni – can you get the kids' breakfast?* than it is to say *sorry, I have to finish this sonnet.*

'It's always easier to do your homework than nebulously write something. I hear from students again and again that they've signed up for one of my classes to put aside time to write.'

And there's also the fact that you are much more likely to put in the work if you have someone else setting deadlines or laying out a course of study. It's always easier to do your homework than nebulously *write something*. I hear from students again and again that they've signed up for one of my classes to put aside time to write. Signing up, paying money, and having to turn up to a particular place at regular times, *especially* with the imprimatur of academic study, can be incredibly liberating.

2. *Cooking Classes, Skill Camps and Exclusivity*

'Let us suppose that everyone in the world wakes up today and tries to write a poem.'

(Dean Young, *The Art of Recklessness*)

When I first read this, I had a mild panic attack. Frankly, if you ever judge a poetry competition or edit a magazine you'll conclude that everybody is *already* trying – unsuccessfully – to write poems. I suspect most creative writing teachers know all too well that sinking feeling of being confronted with someone who is eager as hell but who couldn't write a decent shopping list. And it's getting worse: the rise of e-books means that the

crappiest writers on the planet can upload their ramblings to an e-publisher and become 'authors' without ever having anyone suggesting that their literacy skills need a bit of work. It's depressing. I, too, wish to haul the wagons into a circle and start housing arrows in deserving posteriors.

But that's something that creative writing classes can address. While it might be simpler if the only people in creative writing classes were naturally talented, it just ain't gonna happen. There aren't *enough* of them out there. But that's ok. Because it isn't only about them. Since when have we restricted study to the brilliant? What's wrong with teaching *everybody* who wants to learn what a sonnet is, how it works, and how to appreciate a good one? Even if they never manage to write a decent poem, the hands-on practice means that they'll be better readers. Maybe they'll continue to dabble. Get published in magazines that cater to beginners. There is no harm to poetry from that.

'What's wrong with teaching everybody who wants to learn what a sonnet is, how it works, and how to appreciate a good one?'

An example: rugby union, our national religion. A huge number of people invest large amounts of time, energy, and emotion, following the fortunes of their teams. Every weekend thousands of people all over this country are playing rugby, at every possible level. Coaching clinics give people of all levels a chance to learn new skills, and maybe meet some of their idols. People who have no talent whatsoever – as well as those precious ones who do – pay money, turn up, take part. All of this goes on, and the game survives. *Because* of this. It's grass-roots support – the vast number of people who play, casually or seriously. Which makes rugby *theirs*. They understand and appreciate the skills that go into the work of the top gals and guys. The general population is rugby literate and invested in the game. So it thrives.

I want to live in a society that is poetry-literate. Which isn't frightened by the idea of poetry, or fears that reading poetry equates to being forced to dissect a poem for an exam, or that a poetry reading means hours of tedious dribble. A country where people know the difference between good writing and bad, and care about the distinction. *That's* the best defense against the rising tide of bad writing. More people knowing the difference, and believing that it's relevant to their lives. Creative writing courses train those people.

3. Finally, some shorter points

What about dishonesty? Courses that dangle the promise of becoming a published writer when they can't possibly think everyone who signs up either will be or should be? Yep, this one is a problem. Realistically, courses probably need to either:

- a. only take people whose work is already publishable (or close to); or
- b. stop suggesting that publication is a likely (or even desirable) outcome.

But another reason for signing up to a creative writing course is the networking aspect. It is a great way of getting to meet writers whose work you admire. (Presumably you wouldn't be going to their course if you thought their work was rubbish ...) Plus, writing is a lonely occupation. Meeting other writers in a supportive setting can be a godsend.

'I want to live in a society that is poetry-literate. Which isn't frightened by the idea of poetry ...'

And the third reason is one that critics tend to gloss over: time. Good creative writing courses save time. They teach you skills that definitely and demonstrably *can* be taught – the fundamental, nuts-and-bolts donkey-work of good writing. Some of it you'll know already, some you'll need to be reminded of. Some of it you may have had a

vague feeling about, but never been able to formulate before. But some of it will be new. And where a creative writing class beats self-instruction, every time, is that you have a real person in front of you, who you can ask questions of. I know critics say that workshopping is poem-by-committee (it isn't if you have a spine), and that all those competing voices drown out individual thought. In a good class, it's quite the opposite – you get fascinating discussions that tease out aspects of whatever it is you're looking at that no teacher could ever timetable, and no writing instruction manual could even think of. Those discussions are what make *any* sort of learning a worthwhile experience. You'll walk away from the course with a real grounding in the fundamentals of your genre, with connections to other writers. You'll save yourself *so* much time. Which you'll need if you're going to reach your potential. Whatever that may be.

'In a good class, it's quite the opposite – you get fascinating discussions that tease out aspects of whatever it is you're looking at that no teacher could ever timetable ...'

I'll leave the summary to Stephen Fry (from 'The Ode Less Travelled'):

"I believe poetry is a primal impulse with us all ... Do you give up the Sunday kick-around because you'll never be Thierry Henry? Of course not. That would be pathologically vain. We don't stop talking about how the world might be better just because we'll never be Prime Minister. We are all politicians. We are all artists. ... Talent is inborn, but technique is learned. I write ... as a way of speaking to myself. But most of all *for pleasure.*"

MICHAEL GIACON

V.I.P.

I'm my favourite purse. In fact, I'm a man-purse and as such have black *piel bovina* skin in an *imitation coco* print at once discreet but reptilian, and a bold buckled sturdy shoulder strap so yes, I'm a man-purse shoulder bag, a hipster; I hang to the left. My front flap is my strongest feature: a second strap passes through a riveted loop to be pierced on the tongue of its own bronzed buckle. Unseen, a magnetic clasp holds all together.

My carrier-man Man and I met some wallet-ed years ago in Club ZARA on Orchard Road, Singapore in *Accessories*, an exclusive V.I.P. room. We've been going almost everywhere together mostly ever since although of late things have been somewhat sequestered. As forward-thinking urbanites we share a belief in public transport. This inevitably involves a breathless dash from home to the end of our leafy street around the corner to a shelter where we wait in wait while one of us contemplates time personified.

Under the Code of Contents my flap is pursed but I can reveal essentials: a tightly wound water bottle; hurricane-resistant umbrella (a bent rib of which is a tale for another day); N***A SPF50+ Sunscreen for Mature Skin; our mobile device in a smart purse-like cover. A recent addition has been a reclosable plastic – I know! – bag with a medicinal selection including antiseptic wipes, hand sanitiser and hurricane-resistant masks. And then there is the Book, a spellbound journal attended by a talking pencil. My lips are zipped.

A final thought on ripened skin. More occasionally than preferred I take a therapeutic break at *Spa Réparation*. Loose treads snipped, seams uplifted, lining tucked. The clientele is a mix of bags and purses, deluxe totes and recovering shoes, some sadly single. I do like the Home Treatment Crema Ricca although it's been a long time since I was given a good rubbing, Man.



Man-purse shoulder bag - Michael Giacon

ROBYN RESTIEAUX

The things we can't say

Purse (v): *(with reference to the lips) pucker or contract, typically to express disapproval or irritation*

This is indelible: your silent rocking,
a pink sweater taking shape,
steely smile on your knitting needles

and your eyes on me
the thought behind that narrowed moment
the neverthere antagonism

held between your little teeth
barely visible behind your little
purse of a mouth
its tight, polite hum in minor key –

silence leaves an impress;
lesions behind the eyes and a birthmark like
purple
ink on a quiet sheet of paper.

This is your poem.

Empty

Purse (n): *the money possessed by or available to a person or country*

In our line at the Bank
we are flat, yellow feet, highly strung
prayer beads, each hopeful
1 metre, polite and discreet.

Behind me a girl preparing
for combat catches my eye
then twitches away with a sigh
that is shame contained

her eyeliner black flicks
uneven ticks on a pro forma
and she whispers 'aid'
like she's calling for water.

Triage nurse draws the curtains
plugs the girl in
flatline smiling and
I imagine her lying prone

endoscoped victim
financial hardship raising
lumps in her liver
heart a bag of worms.

They'll eye her and tap on ergonomic
keyboards, inspect sources of salvation
and finding she has Kiwi Saver,
signal for suction.

There's a back door for people
like her, newly invisible,
pale hands clutching
an empty purse, skin
diaphanous.

An earlier version previously published in Tarot

OSHADHA PERERA

At the Bus Stop

A bus with yellow doors and red decals
saying 'city route' will stop for me,
but I'll have to say 'sorry' with cute round eyes
because I'm busy looking around,
at the supermarket with its green roof
and the full-to-the-brim parking lots,
the run-down crafts store with the friendly owner
who has knitting sets and painted purses,
the shop in the corner that sells lawnmowers
even in snowing winters,
the two bookshops that are up before the sun,
the city I'll be calling home.

First published by Poems on the Move 2022, Guernsey Literary Festival

SUSAN GLAMUZINA

Flax purse

Earth
Seed
Water
Sprout
Stretch
Rain
Grow
Pod
Bird
Flex
Flower
Bee
Harvest
Dry
Dye
Soften
Weave
Purse

CLARE HAVELL-SHUFFLEBOTHAM

True Romance

If my heart were a purse
you would steal it
Tell me I shouldn't leave myself
out where a common thief
does play

And once opened you might pat my knee
meaning let me fill that up for you
Even though I was sure I at least had
enough for a cab ride home and
my favourite lipstick

A true romance doesn't carry
practical things like condoms or
those little sachets of lube that
are impossible to open
or even room keys

We are young and wild and giddy
Possibly a little drunk
and it may be summer but
come morning I am really going
to need that purse

BEE TRUDGEON

Purse

My dead nana's purse
is the size of a secret
and easily accommodates a hip flask of tequila

Utilitarian
but stylish
Like its owner - unforgiving as a brick

Stern black leather
with a saucy red lining
and a ferociously tight clasp

Symbol of Saturday nights
and being sold out – stuffed with sweets
for cousins who lived closer

"She said you never visit"
one of them told me
as if we had some control over our childhoods

Homeward bound through Taihape
I leave it in a rubbish bin
on the side of State Highway 1.

CLAUDIA MISTAR

The people I carry

When I dare traverse
this dystopia by myself:
the streets,
the train station,
the office cubicle,
across which
pigs call like a cat,
pigs howl like a wolf,
and pigs bark like a dog,
I carry a trusted male figure –
a brother, a father, a cousin, a friend
in my purse.

We are in different worlds:
I am walking across a zoo
but they're at an exhibition.
Not all galleries say, "please do not touch the art"
but I think it's a given.

I carry my brother
in the jolts of my taser;
I carry my father
in the blade of my swiss knife;
I carry my cousin
in the particles of my chili spray;
I carry my friend
in the defensive keychain which I bought
when the cages of policies seemed flimsy
and the zookeepers would say
"they're just being friendly;
it just means that they like you;
they're harmless, you see?"

I wonder if my future daughter will clutch her iPurse
the way I strangle my *Strandbags*
the way my mum bruised her divisoria *Coach*
the way my grandma debilitated her "*Louis Vuitton*" from her brother overseas

because nature surrenders
when nurture thrives.
Animals can be trained,
so what have we
been teaching them?

'Divisoria' is a Tagalog word which cannot be directly translated. It metonymically refers to a street market, from the commercial centre named 'Divisoria'.

DESNA WALLACE

Used to be

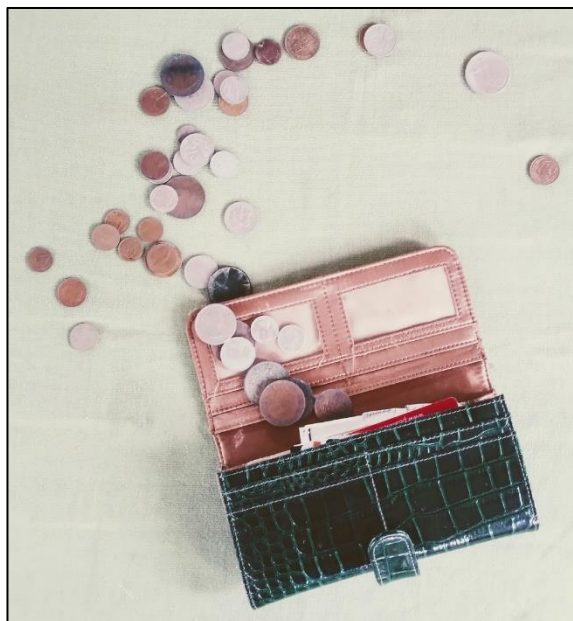
It's tiny
fits in the palm of my hand
edges frayed, loose threads
once used to be shiny and blue
used to hold treasure
to barter, trade
make purchases
now, in the third drawer down
it lies among pens, rubber bands
loose batteries, detritus of
all things kitchen
 a purse
with a memory
of gold and silver coins
given way now to plastic cards
plastic chips.
 I open the clasp
let the moths of the past and dark
emptiness fly out
and I think
how things have changed so much.
How once life used to be easier
with a few coins in my purse.

CHERRY HILL

Inside the purse we found

My grand-mother's
tiny notebook and pen
a list of groceries
glasses with thick lens
a tiny piece of sticking plaster
two aspirins in a packet
several bank-cards
most of them expired
a wallet with photos
cash, coins and a tiny
solar-powered torch
several tissues
some barley sugar sweets
a driver's licence
a sympathy card
a reminder to buy birthday gifts
photocopies of two poems.
Inside the purse we found

my grand-mother.



Old Money – a fine line

DEVON WEBB

All my various issues

I am dancing a waltz
with my substance addiction issues
I am stuck in an ADD loop
of deeply ingrained repeating patterns
I am fighting against the rain
to feel like doing something today
I am a mess of toothache
& empty beer bottles & lost sleep
I am sick
sometimes it feels like I've been sick for
as long as I can remember
I collect obscure eating disorders
& physical eccentricities
like properties in monopoly
I fight to get better be better but
some days it all weighs down on me
like all my various issues are colliding
like my endometriosis IBS & addictive personality
are hosting a dinner party in my tummy
& I don't get a choice about being invited
imagine if my body could feel normal for like one single day
imagine if my brain could actually concentrate
on my knees begging the overloaded mental health system for a
diagnosis so I don't have to self-medicate... unsustainably
sinking piss so I've got energy smoking weed so I can sleep
one day I'm gonna hack this puzzle
& then they'll see what I can be.

A butterfly in a jar

I am like a butterfly in a jar
you can interpret this in multiple ways:
the jar is my bedroom, & I am the butterfly
or the jar is my solitude, & not to be cliché but
the butterfly is my heart
just THWACKING ITSELF! AGAINST THE GLASS! with the innocent eagerness of
people who don't learn from their past mistakes cos they don't actually believe them to be mistakes
you see it is my utter conviction that
having a heart like a butterfly is never a mistake

I sit here... visualising
like it is actually very easy to navigate dreams when you're awake, funny that
I guess everything is easy when you're awake &
you can make whatever little vision comes to mind
& play it all out like an opera or when
Kerouac taped all the pieces of paper together so he could just keep writing

But I am not Kerouac I am a butterfly! I am not a butterfly I am a metaphor!
I am not a metaphor I am a poet!
or some combination of the above

I am sitting here half-manic!
I am clutching at my pearls!
The muse won't let me go!
the muse is this big alien hand that is
holding the jar with me, the butterfly in it
& SHAKING! WITH VIVACITY!! I AM A BIT! SCARED! but also the muse loves the butterfly

& I love the muse even if it
intimidates me sometimes
even if I sit on all my poetry like oooh that's a bit much for the world!

Ahahahahahahaha I can't stop I just
keep fluttering erratically & my wings go thwackthwackthwack by which I mean my heart of
course & then the
muse opens the jar & wow
the world is so big.

ROBERT RINEHART

seining

blasted by bagatelles grinding,
their ordinariness of a morning
as common as warming your
hands with a cuppa, my deck
hand a last check on nets.

three-day trip,
half out two days netting,
dropping then clenching
purse strings like mouths.
we only knew a vague
direction, modern sea
hunting grounds fished
almost out. then back
another half day, once
home, hearing the news
of earth's demise. one
crew said it was a
Schrödinger's Dilemma,
clamouring for life,
reducing its chance.



Little Kete – a fine line

JOHN ALLISON

out/fit

my wife taught me to care about
hats bags shoes

‘if you get these right
nothing else matters and you
can get away with anything’

since she’s died I’ve followed
her advice, in this as in many things

so hats and caps, my beret
my manbag and messenger bag
canvas satchell backpack rucksack
and all these shoes shoes shoes
more than I will ever wear

but I’ve never found a purse a pāhi
bag or kete that can hold my grief

I carry it so clumsily still
and it spills so readily

pursed lips are not enough

MICHELLE LEVY

Safekeeping

Filled with remnants of time,
things that once seemed so important,
now just rattling around;
their familiarity to fingers feeling their way
in the dark, long gone.

Old tickets, tired pens,
notes from loves long lost;
all reminders that yes,
yes, you were here.

And when you unexpectedly trip,
and it all cascades out across the floor,
as much as you might wish for that orderly existence,
it's a messy life you see.

And as you are promising
to do better, and to be better,
and to even do away with the old,
you are at the very same time scooping it all back up;
for safekeeping,
returning every single thing
to those torn linings
and hidden pockets of life.

ANUJA MITRA

Naming the Beasts – Elizabeth Morton

(Otago: Otago University Press, 2022)
ISBN 9781990048388. RRP \$25.00. 96pp.



Naming the Beasts reads like a series of dispatches from the brink of collapse; a view of the apocalypse as witnessed by the creatures who know it best. These inventive poems explore what it is to navigate this

troubled time bomb of a world, as Morton leads us through landscapes both urban and wild, both familiar and strange, both desolate and cluttered with life, so that we may examine the skins we live in and the slippery things we truly are.

‘These inventive poems explore what it is to navigate this troubled time bomb of a world’

“Feral” opens the collection, introducing Morton’s signature rich metaphors and her pattern of blending the everyday with the extraordinary. Who is this poem’s speaker who describes their domestic routine – person or animal, and wherein lies the difference? They position themselves and their companion humbly in the scheme of the universe (“We are a small sound, you and me”), and yet the poem

thrums with the possibility of other lives (“You could have been a warrior, / before you were this cotton heartbeat — this hush of sparrows.”)

Morton darts fluidly between images, leaping from the milk truck in the cul-de-sac to distant star systems. This habit can be occasionally overwhelming to a reader confronted by so many ideas that it becomes hard to engage with any uniting theme. But in the vast majority I found a striking line (or handful of lines) to anchor myself, and rereading to let the visuals really sink in also clarified some of these leaps. “Feral” is one of these, traversing different settings and emotions but acting as a cohesive curtain-up to a book that leaves us hungering, like beasts, for more.

“Old doggo barks the world”, one of my favourites for its creative premise and noirish atmosphere, follows the titular dog as he noses through a city and the lives of its inhabitants. As in many of these poems, the ordinary collides with the cosmic, with old doggo framed as an almost mythological figure:

... If he were a real dog, /
he would upturn the mattresses, stir people from
the delta waves of sleep, /
open midnight refrigerators and drag out chickens
and cantaloupe. /
He would trot in and out of avenues, barking the
headlines of other galaxies, /
woof woofing the trajectories of asteroids as they
slip the membrane of earth’s old eyeball.

(“Old doggo barks the world”)

Morton acknowledges that these pieces hold their mysteries close. “My torch forces itself

into a future / cryptic and dark like these poems”, she writes in “Stalker”; an unnerving, surprising poem which evokes ideas of predator and prey, of watching and being watched. Watching, of course, is nothing new for the menagerie of creatures that occupy a world impacted by climate change and ecological destruction. Environmental damage, capitalism and settler colonialism are central concerns of *Naming the Beasts*, yet these are not preachy or instructive poems. Whether addressing these issues explicitly or less explicitly, Morton’s writing seizes attention for its sharp observations about the uncertain future of this place we call home. “Breaking News” and “Fire” come to mind. In “Birdlife in a broken century”, the speaker asks to be forgiven for their part in environmental decline, while being aware of their sins in comparison with the more powerful players in society:

... If I had a dollar
for every time I strike a match, I’d be a rich man.
As it happens, everyone I know is a pyromaniac.

(“Birdlife in a broken century”)

“Rabbits” continues this theme of culpability, most obviously in terms of our interactions with the animal kingdom. The poem is an account of an evening spent rabbit shooting while discussing “the backlog of grievances / conceded by people without ancestors”. The effects of colonisation haunt this poem, as it does several others in the book. Where the speaker and their companions first appeared nonchalant about killing, deep down they can’t “stomach [their] own conquests”; unable to reap the benefits of their “deception”.

Those big ideas may be the most ripe for analysis in a review, but *Naming the Beasts* also features memorable explorations of more intimate subject matter – from faith to memory to the practice of poetry-writing itself. “The gospel” drops God and Noah into the age of social media, while “Nostalgia is a thing of the past” is a tale of youthful disillusionment with an opening reminiscent of an epic poem (“O brother, this is an ugly way to unlearn hope.”) Both showcase Morton’s skillful rhythm which, combined with her distinct poetic voice, must make her work suited to live performance.

‘Naming the Beasts does not shy away from interrogating guilt, responsibility and power, but ultimately its message is not unhelpful.’

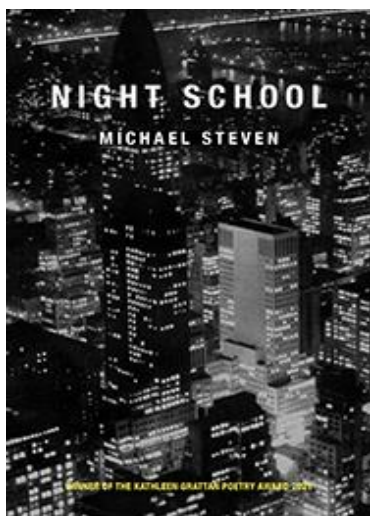
Running through all of these poems is the question of what we are and how we came to be here, however we define ‘here’. *Naming the Beasts* does not shy away from interrogating guilt, responsibility and power, but ultimately its message is not unhelpful. I return to “Dream-deer attends the collapse”, one of the final poems in the collection, and how it boils down to a simple truth; a quiet recognition of resilience: “... I am a single point where my grandparents, / and their grandparents, made a knot in the earth and held.”

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

VAUGHAN RAPATAHANA

Night School – Michael Steven

(Otago: Otago University Press, 2022)
ISBN 9781990048340. RRP \$25.00. 84pp.



This is the third collection by Michael Steven and the third I have had the privilege to review. It is also the darkest, an assembly of thirty-two paens to pain, both psychic and physical.

Indeed, the title – *Night School* - and the dark cover and matt black internal header pages are aphotic co-dependants in this stygian alliance.

Steven's dependence in this collection is narcotic. I adumbrated the wide range of chemical substances both Steven and his array of crapulous antiheroes imbibe, and the list was extensive, as such substances suffuse each and every page.

'...this is no panoply of hegemonic masculinity; this is an array of damaged males, eviscerated, voiceless.'

'meth, bodybuilding supplements, weed, cigarettes' imbue the very first poem and set the tone for the following recital of pharmaceutical

ingestion, intergenerational angst, and early demise. Almost always men too. But this is no panoply of hegemonic masculinity; this is an array of damaged males, eviscerated, voiceless.

'Reading through the book is like being stuck in an apothecary's shop with the lights turned off and all the curtains closed. *Night School* is Steven's songs of experience'

Reading through the book is like being stuck in an apothecary's shop with the lights turned off and all the curtains closed. *Night School* is Steven's songs of experience, a New Zealand concoction of Bukowski, Hubert Selby Junior, Hunter S. Thompson addling in a jar with James K Baxter sedimentary at the bottom, and Ronald Hugh Morrieson raising it to his lips. Let's take one poem as an example:

Strains: Acapulco Gold

Origin stories in the weed game are dubious. If you research beneath the surface, you will find they are often conflation – marketing campaigns made to sell crosses. Of this strain, every Dutch and Spanish seedbank will claim to have the master cut. Proto-coke smuggler Zachary Swan rated it his all-time favourite smoke. Arthur Lee wrote his best songs under its influence. For two renegade poets named Ulises Lima and Arturo Belano, it was bread and butter. I had a line on it back in 2012: poeming my way through a trance lasting six months. It kept Bob Dylan in Acapulco, goin' on the run.

Steven seemingly would like to transcend this realm of nicotine-stained fingers hypodermically clutching proletariat-prison garb. However, he cannot ever cut a lawn-mowing swathe through polite bourgeoisie suburbs, as he admits himself:

‘Most would blindly follow an inherited model: careers, mortgages, the trappings of respectability. That wasn’t for me, I could never roll like that.’

(“Winter Conditions”)

He searches instead:

‘What I sought was a kind of psychic repatriation, Some way of harmonising with the ineffable.’

Yet:

‘Nihilism was chic in the decade we came up in.’

(“Winter Conditions”)

And that final line is the heartbeat of this book, an ECG readout pulsing every page, where the few fleeting spasms of sex and surf are insufficient panacea.

**‘an A-grade poet, adept at granting
us a koha of a brilliant line, a
perfect phrase inside his caliginous
crusade’**

Accordingly, Steven rates himself as ‘an E-grade, middle-aged / poet with no money or job,’ (“Strains: Slurricane”).

The blatant lie here being the fact that Steven is an A-grade poet, adept at granting us a koha of a brilliant line, a perfect phrase inside his caliginous crusade. For another craving is his existential impetus to craft fine verse.

Here are a few examples:

‘Smoke eats the sea,’

(“Dropped Pin: Alappuzha, South India”)

‘...‘back to my bedsitter
and hungry poem in my typewriter
waiting impatiently to be fed the next line,’

(“Dropped Pin: Addington, Christchurch”)

‘or the Darwinian jungle of a prison remand
yard,’

(“The Secret History of Nike Air Max”)

The overall irony being that this slaughterhouse of streetlife, this abattoir of addiction will likely not be read by the scabrous characters populating the pages. Which is a pity, because Michael Steven is an immense talent, here sculpting their lives.

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

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*.

BARBARA STRANG

carousel screeches—
the small green suitcase
reappears

emergency bag
those facemasks I packed
without a thought



Full size output by John Allison

JULIE ADAMSON

a discarded purse
hangs by the door –
online shopping

OSHADHA PERERA

broken window ...
she looks at me
with pursed lips

moving house ...
I slip her photo
into my purse

MARGARET BEVERLAND

marmalade sandwich
the 70-year secret
out of the bag

SUE COURTNEY

buddha . . .
the way he purses his lips
to enlightenment

pearlescent moon . . .
the evening purse
my mother left me
far too soon

DEBBIE STRANGE

fireflies the synchronicity of it all

1st Place, 2021 Irish Haiku Society International Competition

stepping stones
a damselfly invites us
to change course

The Heron's Nest 22.4, 2020

HEATHER LURIE

I carry a purse
for the first time . . .
going to the opera

JENNY FRASER

second dip in the spring surf
suddenly
ageless

sand tussock all the ways of the wind

FRANCISKA SOARES

Mum's purse
cluttered with things
for emergencies

NOLA BORRELL

casino exit her hair flashes gold

Kokako 2, 2004

old ledger a cockroach crumbles

ANNE CURRAN

visiting hours –
he skateboards in
a lover's rose

store exit –
the beggar's dog
lifts its paw

VALENTINA TECLICI

baby kangaroo, safe asset
in his mummy's
fur purse

JENNY PYATT

Melbourne cup
I wear the hat
and dream the purse

CLAUDIA MISTAR

I'm clutching my purse
hem above knee, tights too tight –
should I run, not walk?

she perspires
purses her lips in pursuit
of a purse haiku

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

John Allison has had six collections of poetry published; another is in the works. His poem “Father's Axe, Grandfather's Machete” was selected for *Ōrongahau* | *Best New Zealand Poems 2020*.

Margaret Beverland is co-editor of *Kokako*, a journal of haiku, tanka and haibun. In 2019 with Sandra Simpson, she edited *Number Eight Wire*, the fourth NZ anthology of haiku.



Speed Life by Oshadha Perera

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

Sue Courtney lives by the estuary in Ōrewa where much of her inspiration comes. She co-organised Haiku Down Under (via Zoom) in 2022 and was the catalyst for the session, 'A Showcase of Haiku from Aotearoa presented in English and Te Reo Māori', with te reo translations by Vaughan Rapatahana.

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

Sam Duckor-Jones – artist, poet – was glumly grown in Wellington and today thrives in Greymouth.

Jan FitzGerald is a NZ poet and artist, publication overseas including *The London Magazine*, and *Acumen's* guest poet. Shortlisted twice in Bridport Poetry Prize. Four poetry books published.

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.

Michael Giacon is from Auckland Tāmaki Makaurau. He has been compiling a sequence called *Playing Favourites* and *V.I.P.* is #9.

Susan Glamuzina is an emerging poet who feels at home with sand between her toes or the earth under her fingernails.

Clare Havell-Shufflebotham is a writer, artist and curator living in Kāpiti. Her upcoming poetry collection *Splendid Bush* will be released early 2023.

Cherry Hill is a retired teacher of Japanese and Chinese languages. She farms sheep and deer on her farm on the edge of Lake Ellesmere/Te Waihora.

Michelle Levy (Waikato, Ngāti Mahuta), researcher, writer, poet, and artist living in Whāingaroa / Raglan.

Heather Lurie grew up in America and has lived in New Zealand for 16 years. She has always loved haiku, and relatively recently discovered she loves writing haiku as well.

Claudia Mistar is a student from Sancta Maria College who enjoys poetry.

Oshadha Perera is a student from Southland Boys' High School. He enjoys reading and writing poems.

Joanna Preston is a poet, editor and creative writing tutor. Her second collection, *tumble* (OUP, 2021) won the Mary & Peter Biggs Award at the 2022 Ockham New Zealand Book Awards.

Jenny Pyatt is a published author of 44 photocopiable teaching resources for schools. She writes poetry for pleasure, and her haiku and haibun have appeared in a number of publications.

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.

Robyn Restieaux is a poet based in Tamaki Makaurau. She has taught English Literature for years but is now happily immersed in all things poetic. Her work was recently published in *Tarot* and in the upcoming *Poetry New Zealand Yearbook 2023*.

Robert Rinehart grew up in Northern California and moved to Raglan in 2008. His work has appeared in *Chelsea*, *Mayhem*, *Sky Island Journal*, *Negative Capability*, and others.

Franciska Soares is a hearing-impaired teacher living the good life in Queenstown. The unsurpassable beauty of this part of the planet has inspired her to go back to writing, her first love.

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

Debbie Strange is a chronically ill short-form poet, haiga artist and photographer whose creative passions connect her more closely to the world and to herself. Please visit her archive: debbiemstrange.blogspot.com

Valentina Teclici lives in Napier. She has published several books in both Romanian and English. Her work has also been translated into French, Te Reo and Spanish.

Bee Trudgeon (she/her) is the Porirua Children's Librarian Kaitiaki Pukapuka Tamariki. She lives in Cannons Creek, Porirua, and on the Patreon page of her alter ego Grace Beaster.

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

Devon Webb is a full-time writer based in Pōneke. She has been published locally and internationally, is the two-time Wellington Slam Champion, and is currently working on her debut novel.