

# *a fine line*



TE RŌPŪ TOIKUPU O AOTEAROA  
NEW ZEALAND POETRY SOCIETY

*Student Issue*

*Winter 2025*

*Featured Student Poet*  
Eve Hughes

*Runner-up Student Poets*  
Oshadha Perera  
Isabella Fuller  
Isabelle Holmes

*Cover Art*  
ilona simpson

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## *Quotation of the season*

‘Education is an admirable thing,  
but it is well to remember from  
time to time that nothing that is  
worth knowing can be taught.’

– Oscar Wilde

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## *Cadence Chung*



Tēnā koutou,

Welcome to the Winter edition of *a fine line*. This is my second issue as Managing Editor, and I already feel so welcomed and supported by the wonderful NZPS team and members. It's also the student issue, which feels extra special for me. I was the featured student poet in the Winter 2020 edition of the magazine, which was when I was still in high school. It was such an exciting opportunity, and to now be able to impart that opportunity on others is even more exciting.

Our featured student poet is Eve Hughes from Cashmere High School, who absolutely wowed me with her finely tuned balance between craft, confession, and maximalism. The runner-ups for the featured slot are the talented Oshadha Perera, Isabella Fuller, and Isabelle Holmes (who is only ten years old!)

Even though the issue is unthemed, there are several strains that emerge in the selection of poems. The season makes itself seen in the icy atmosphere of Isabelle Holmes's "Winter", in Denise O'Hagan's icy tableaux "Eavesdropping", and in many of the haiku. Chris Palmer splashes us with the salty spray of a ship, and Maya Field's ducks swim through 'water never so clear before'. The middle section of poems take a reflective turn, with Ami Kindler, Baxter Kamana-Williams, and o(l[i]ve)(\*) (bly(th)) reflecting on poetry and language, before moving through to the visceral imagery of the final few poets.

We were introduced to forthcoming NZPS anthology editor Jackson McCarthy in the last issue, and we're now meeting Amelia Kirkness, who will be editing alongside Jackson. I interview Amelia about balancing university and writing, as well as her poetic inspirations and editing processes.

In our Reviews section, Vaughan Rapatahana reviews Tracy Slaughter's *the girls in the red house are singing*, and Hebe Kearney reviews Amy Marguerite's *over under fed*. Lastly, art by Ella Quarmby, Rachel Miller, and Kieran Trainor is smattered throughout the issue. Our cover artist is the wonderful ilona simpson, a Fine Arts student at Massey University.

Our next issue is the Spring edition, which has the theme of *chiaroscuro*. I'd love to read poems that play around with light and dark, art, composition, and contrasts.

I hope you enjoy cracking into the warmth of this issue in this cold winter. In these difficult times, it's so heartening to see the life and liveliness of the poets in this issue, from students, NZPS members, and more.

Ngā mihi,

Cadence.

## Featured Student Poet

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*Eve Hughes*



## As it were

i met j at his doorstep & saw  
through the rooms his mother and her  
baby boy, bright plastic things at their feet  
stepping around them i offered my hand  
& his eyes answered in silence with j's deep blue

we walked around & behind the old hospital,  
like something out of a memory brick-red  
& glowing slightly with lens flare  
up to a grass patch with sunlight all through it

j's gonna grow up, he's gonna grow his girlfriend  
a grapevine for her eighteenth birthday  
his brother's gonna start preschool by then  
carrying something of him, his eyes or maybe  
the way he walks, or his laugh

i had nothing to offer on that grass but my  
losses, my misinterpretations, & my lacks  
& when i went back today some had sprung anew  
but some had died – & i suppose that was  
the point of all this, burying our dead  
& gently holding on to everything regrowing

## Raw umber

to hell with  
the thousands of voices curving about our heads  
*you long-lashed children you'll see the end anew*  
*with each step out into the real reality* what if  
nothing fearsome yet that we can control  
will go uncontrolled, & what if everything else  
should be allowed to bend like weeds in the river  
we'll pay careful attendance to our duties  
of observation

it could be supposed  
that the thick smoke & suchlike will stain  
our golden crops dark & bleach our black soil light  
forevermore, yet see us washing & returning  
our dead to the earth, see our hands rinsed &  
dirtied in the natural cycle – a double exposure

the love club  
will scrub itself thin, obsessive & curling  
& after that affair has ended the rest of us will  
step out & take up space, tell the grasses & bugs  
to do the same – old promises of our youth fulfilled

## Not achieved

i wear shower-water like a halo, spit through the  
grille – you left quick  
as you came, flew from my hands  
my lady bird

eyes closed the cathedrals grow back again  
your blood tasted fine & sweet  
with life – summer wine  
trode against the oak, overfermented  
froth-white – a birth of venus

i don't ask the space around me where  
you are, don't measure my breath  
against yours – a metronome's pendulum  
stilled in its centre, still ticking



## Lyttelton tunnel, april 2025

*is it bright? does it smooth good bodylike? are you  
proud to be it?* my fingers lace & the gold pours  
over them in waves, first the forelight & then the  
heaving middle with its thickness & weight, laden

this place as a child was all washed with youth,  
dripping it onto the floor & through the tyre-treads  
winging between the cars – i pull my knees in, pull  
the lines of the tiles with my eyes, straight & narrow  
as the arrow flies

the things the light carries are good, are holy, need no  
brace for impact, no gasp like the water-cold  
smothering my skin – i receive, pores & palms open,  
warm & blurry softness like a shadow's edge

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## Runner-up Student Poets



*A brief history* – Rachel Miller

## *Oshadha Perera*

### **88 keys**

I will sit beside the piano,  
remember you saying  
88 keys and seven octaves,  
notes ringing out, as you went  
through nursery rhymes.  
Think of the times when  
I didn't walk into your bedroom  
every weekend,  
and open the curtains,  
watch the sunlight fall  
onto the gathering dust

*First published in Re-Draft 22: The Afterlife of an Ice Cream Wrapper (2023)*

## *Isabella Fuller*

### **Unfortunate Circumstances in my Dreams**

An army of confused mares trample downhill  
backwards. In my dreams, a revelation of lambs –  
too cold to leap. Packed together like  
cotton buds, they remain still in the slump,  
in a cobweb of merino fibres  
and tire skids, impaled by a reflective road sign.  
A dagger through my heart, going over  
one hundred kilometres an hour.  
Like a slater unfurling down my tongue,  
I swear never to return.

Itched by polyester and taunted by something raw,  
I'm distracted – haunted by the mare.  
Ridden to death while picturing freedom.  
Does a racehorse convince itself that to run  
is to be free, despite the unfortunate circumstances?



## *Isabelle Holmes*

### **Winter**

Slivers of ice  
slide down the window  
The air is sharp and harsh  
slashing against everything  
Icicles are like fingers  
tapping against the window  
The trees bow against the cold  
all warmth disappears  
Powdered snow is like flour  
tossed everywhere by a child  
Covering everything  
in ice's reach  
Footprints are like carvings  
embedded in the snow

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## Featured Article

*Cadence Chung interviews Amelia Kirkness*



*Amelia Kirkness will be editing this year's NZPS anthology alongside fellow young poet Jackson McCarthy. Our managing editor Cadence Chung interviewed Amelia about her processes and work.*

**What are your inspirations and processes when writing poetry?**

The internet and popular culture are consistently among the biggest inspirations for my poetry. I was extremely online from a very young age and spent my formative years practically marinating my brain in a soup of digital content. While this almost certainly had adverse effects on my development, I also benefited in many ways from the range of influences I've been exposed to. Early experiences in fandom spaces, where I created original characters and wrote fanfiction, are how I got into writing in the first place. As an adult, I really enjoy engaging with the nostalgia I have for those years through my poetry.

I am particularly interested in how, through the internet and media, we can imagine other worlds and create other selves. So a lot of my poems start from the idea of, 'What if I were [X]? What would my voice be as that version of myself? What life would I have?' and I just go from there, seeing how ridiculously far I can take the concept. There's definitely an element of self-parody at the root of a lot of it. I usually generate a ridiculous persona based on some seed of reality, an actual feeling or desire I have in real life. There's always a kernel of sincerity, as I never want to come off as completely irony-poisoned.

My processes are...pretty chaotic. I have a physical notebook that I bring with me to class or work, and I'll pull it out to jot down any ideas, fragments, or drafts I come up with during the day. An equal amount of the time, though, I'll end up frantically keysmashing a concept and a line into my notes app when I'm in a situation where pulling out the whole journal is too conspicuous. I've learned that I need to actually write stuff down in whatever form is available to me at the time.

From the notebook/notes app, I usually shift to typing on my computer for a real draft. Usually, the document will hang out, half-written, for some undetermined amount of time until I come back to it and realise I know how to finish it. Editing ensues, usually with the help of some lovely friends and fellow writers, and then I have a poem. The efficiency of this process could be improved.

**You study English Literature at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington, currently completing your Honours year. How do you find a balance between the academic and creative sides of your work?**

Unlike some people (cough, the editor of this journal, cough), I'm not really the type to write poems during lectures. The good thing about Honours, though, is that I only have 2-3 (long) workshops a week, meaning most of the rest of my time is spent hunched over my laptop on the sixth floor of the library or in my flat. Between those two settings, I've done some great work on some poems this year while procrastinating on my essays.

At this stage, although the level of effort I'm having to put in for my studies has increased, the flexibility I have with my time has increased as well. I remember really struggling to make space for writing alongside uni the last few years, but without jinxing it, I feel as though I've finally started to get a rhythm going. It shifts throughout the term depending on my other commitments, but I make it a goal to do some amount of non-university-related writing each day. If I hit a wall on the assignment I'm working on or find myself untenably fatigued by the article I'm reading, it's time for poetry. Then, when I find myself stuck on how to finish a line or reword an ending, I switch back.

And, of course, the wonderful thing about this degree is that even when I'm in class or spending hours on an essay, I'm studying literature. Some people would definitely hate it, but I'm the type of obsessive person who loves the fact that I get to engage with my passion from multiple angles. This year has been the most enjoyable for me so far, mainly because I've been able to focus in-depth on the aspects of English Lit that I enjoy the most. I find that my studies and my poetry complement each other really well.

**What is it like being both a bookseller and a poet? Does it have any unique challenges and/or benefits?**

After leaving my job at a chain store, which shall remain unnamed, in October of last year, I started working full-time at Unity Books over the summer. I'm back down to one day a week at Unity during the university year, and it's the best student job I've ever had. There's a whole category on the digital inventory for books that have been written by Unity staff and ex-staff, so I'm in good company as a writer there.

I'm not sure if I would say there are specific challenges to being a bookseller and a poet beyond the regular trials of any customer-facing job, but there are definitely benefits. Just the sheer access to so many books is fantastic, as well as getting to pick my coworkers' brains for recommendations. It's also been wonderful to get to be on the other side of the launch events I've been attending for years and see how everything comes together. As I mentioned before, I'm pretty obsessive with my interests, so it's honestly a total dream that my weekend job while I'm studying also happens to relate to books/poetry. Support independent bookshops!

**You are one of the founding editors of *Symposia* Magazine, a literary magazine that publishes emerging writers. How have you found the editing experience? Do you have any insights you'll take into your editorship of this year's NZPS anthology?**

The biggest thing that my involvement with *Symposia* has taught me is just how difficult the choices of an editor are.

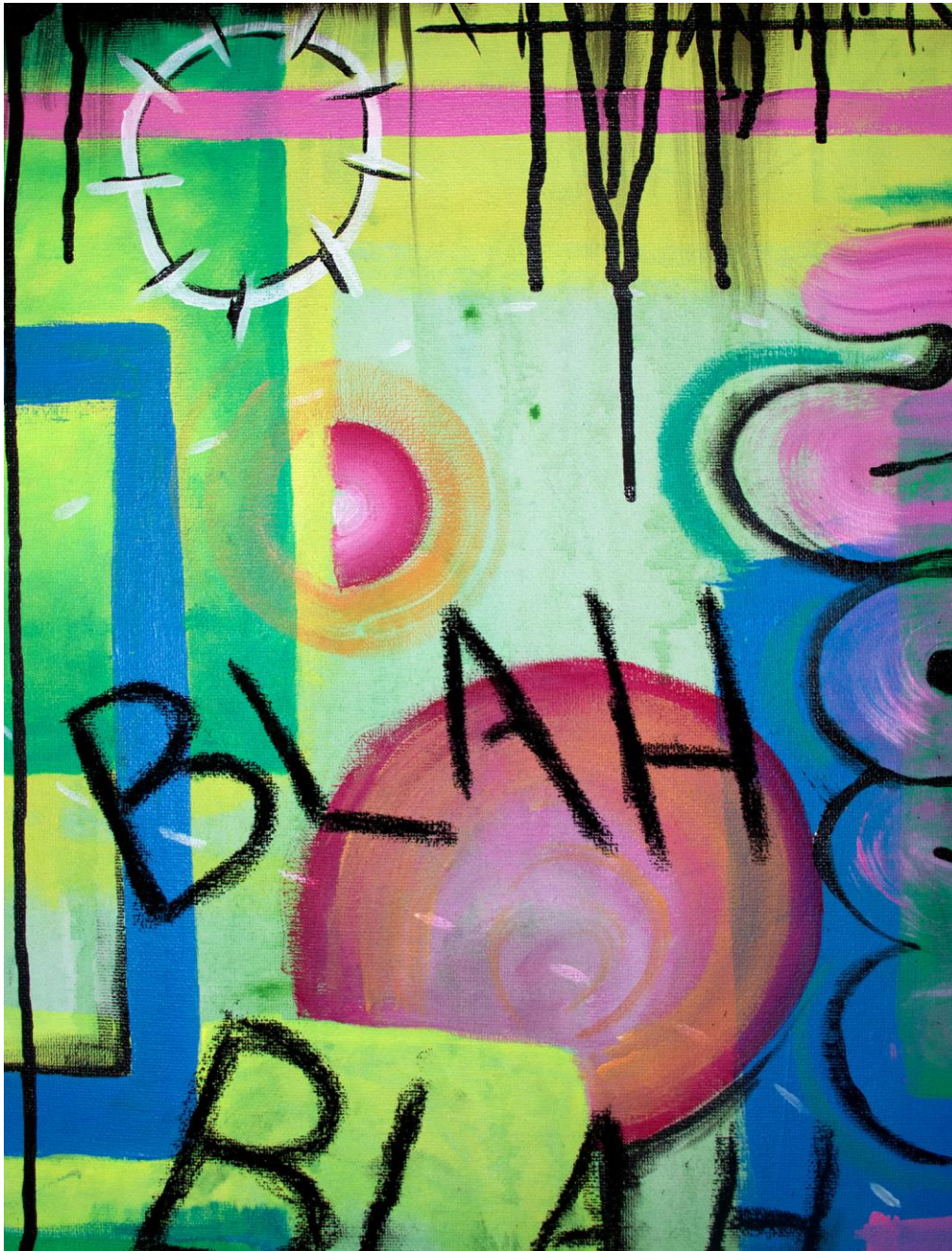
*Symposia* began in 2022 when I was in the first year of my bachelor's degree and had been submitting my poetry to journals for a few years. While I had some publications, I also had plenty of rejections, and in my mind, at that stage, a rejection meant that my writing sucked and that I should be embarrassed. Being on the other side of the process has taught me just how



marginal it can be between a piece that is selected and one that isn't. Especially when there are multiple editors in the process, the decision can be so incredibly close and so subjective.

When you get a rejection, there's usually no quantifiable information given on how close your piece was to getting chosen. You could have been the very next on the list that just narrowly missed out, or you could be at the bottom of the pile – the important thing is that there's no way to know, and therefore, no point in getting caught up in a spiral of shame and embarrassment as I used to when I was 18.

The experience of editing *Symposia* has been fantastic in so many ways. Working alongside the other editors, who all have their own tastes but whose opinions I respect so much, has been really fascinating. The discussions we have during the process prompt me to reflect really deeply on why I like the pieces I do and what actually works about them. Developing that kind of analytical eye over the past three issues has been really beneficial, and going into the process of editing the NZPS anthology alongside Jackson, I'm really grateful to have that previous editorial insight.



*Untitled* – ilona simpson

## *Rosana Vakatini*

### **In the Beginning**

I once lived in this street  
where a café now stands,  
near the gasworks.  
Some beginning.  
I have no memory but imagine  
a hiss and hum in the infant's ear,  
the factory siren punctuating dreams,  
bees in the gorse behind  
rain on thin glass,  
the mother's arms,  
and the father's kiss.  
Rounding the corner on the bus  
my mother would name it each time,  
this point of departure  
the end of the marriage.  
That first pin on the map.

## *Denise O'Hagan*

### **Eavesdropping**

That was the winter of the Fagin gloves,  
wedge heel boots and duffel coats  
and Friday nights in the Fox and Hound;

the city bulged amber through slumped glass,  
the pavements grew slick with rain, and  
cool gathered in the folds of damp umbrellas.

Looking back, we could have been a painting,  
a Rembrandt perhaps, or a Vermeer:  
the elements were there. See, the five of us huddled

at a table, leaning – not over dice, or a hand of cards –  
but towards one another, mid-sentence,  
firelight lacquering chins and knuckles, wetly;

oils take days to dry. And there he is, still twenty-one,  
slouched at the intersection of thirds,  
his dark face flushed, hands upturned in supplication,

perhaps, or anger – or had he just drunk too much beer?  
the face of the girl opposite is masked sheer  
by the fall of her hair and the pale ridge of her ear,

but her shoulders are stiff, hands holding each other:  
her whole body speaks. She can't see the waitress  
stepping out of the canvas, twisting back to look at her,

drinks tray tilting; the others are settling into their  
background for the night, the broad brushstrokes  
of their thoughts hardening. Only one is turned to us –

but enough. Let us go now, while there is still time  
lest we eavesdrop too long on our own past,  
and stir up ghosts to trail the rest of our lives.



## *Christopher Palmer*

### **A carnival of sorts**

A long breakfast leads to morning tea  
which interrupts lunch. A passer-by

sees a flying fish through the window;  
reason enough to remain at the buffet –

the best view on the ship.  
This is how 90,000 tonnes service 150.

Outside, time elongates  
distance marked by occasional spume.

The planet is 70% water; here it's 100%.  
This must be what it's like on Europa,

the ocean moon. No siren's call there  
just a slow-motion icy spray

with a side order of radiation.  
Anyway, bingo's on at 3pm

in the Pharoah Room.  
Earth may as well be flat.

It is for some of us.

## Ship to shore

Docking at the container port  
much of the cargo of designer labels

is disgorged onto the pier, stable underfoot at last  
ready for cultural exchange

enhancing mutual understanding.  
One hundred thousand photos

are taken of the mother ship  
in the first thirty minutes

locals included for a sense of scale.  
The cargo returns from the beach after six hours

ready for a tongue and pulse analysis in the spa room  
or the hairy chest competition on level two

while, between the seaweed and driftwood  
are Coca-Cola, Band Aid, San Miguel, Cadbury...



*Untitled*— Ella Quarmby

## *Maya Field*

### **On Ducks**

The charm with ducks is in their movements, I explain to you.  
Swimming in the water – water never so clear before –  
we watch their webbed feet push them through weeds and eels.

I liked pointing to them when they went upside down,  
when I was little. Something about ducks' bottoms made me laugh.  
The feathers and the webbed feet, wagging in the air.  
I didn't know what they were doing down there,  
but I would do handstands in the water to try and find out.

Perhaps it's more the feathers that I like best.  
the green heads, dark like pine needles,  
with a white band, a shirt peeking over  
a brown sweater. The mottling browns.  
Or that ever-rare blue that I once saw.

Isn't it awful that we also love them at that Chinese restaurant in Newtown?  
With the pancakes and Beijing sauce. When we ate too much and watched TV after.

Mainly, I think of ducks like I think of you –  
I just like looking at you



## *Ami Kindler*

### **I met her on the street selling putiputi**

I met her on the street selling putiputi.  
Under the table in an earthquake drill.  
Over a midnight meme. I met her in sorrow.  
In a comfortable silence. When she walked my dog.  
On zoom. I met her in a turmoil of grief. At a transit lounge.  
When she held my son. With a finger to my lips. In the dark.  
At a new mother's group where we swapped recipes for successful sleeps.  
I met her at a writing retreat. Listening to the sound of the tūī.  
On a walk through Bushy Park.  
Over a wine with a captivating view of the Te Henui valley.  
In the mirror. In the park flying a Pokemon kite.  
I met her when I asked for directions in the spices aisle.  
Admiring dahlias wearing a summery dress and flowery doc martins.  
On the edge of the Pacific ocean, teetering toes venturing in.  
I met her for lunch at Wild Pear café. On the brink of a break up.  
In a crowded room splattered with chatter.  
At the poetry open mic, chewing her fingers till they bled.

## *Baxter Kamana-Williams*

### **Bus**

a young man  
sits  
next to me  
he has red hair and  
a black coat and  
a book of poems  
                    he takes  
out of his bag

I sit beside him  
while he reads  
                    Bukowski  
until the bus stops  
to let him  
off

he walks the way  
we came  
                    as the bus  
pulls away and I  
take out my  
                    notebook  
to write this  
poem

*o(l[i]ve)(\*) (bly(~~th~~))*

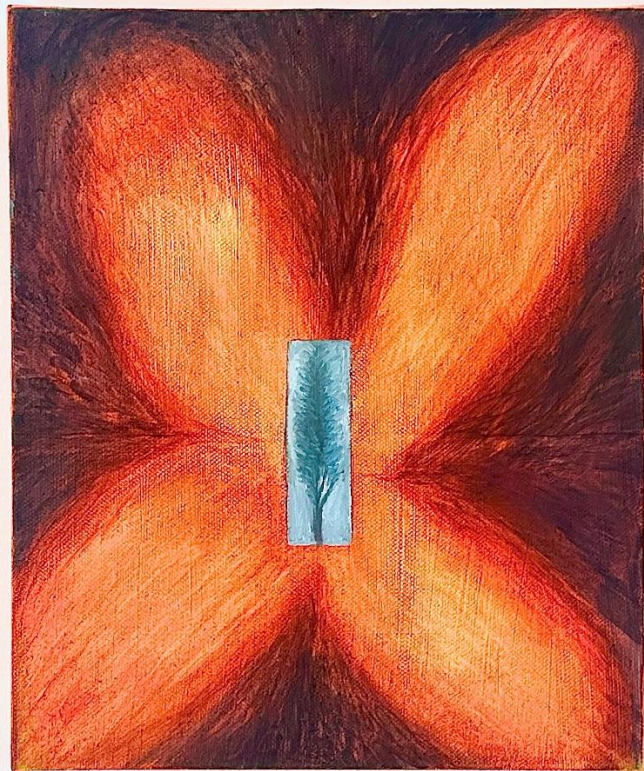
**thorn**

[i] wish these were hard shapes  
but all's so soft, & so liquid  
that (my) grasp leaves no imprint –

but don't call it clay: don't –  
(you don't call me): [i] don't ask  
you— [i] ask you which vase

reckons with its maker: [i] ask  
whether i'm to be—by (your) hand –  
handled or positioned as ornament –

as an ornament (fr)agile: [i] ask  
if—when dropped—[i] will crack &  
shatter, or melt into the floorboards  
    & find (its) linear imprints left in [me]



*he is an old memory* – Kieran Trainor

## *Freya Turnbull*

### **bite me**

when it drains out again you look in the bathroom mirror.  
sugar high in your retainer wire and run your tongue  
over it like a loose woman. woman cut loose as  
pink lily stamen swinging like a pendulum at the back  
of your throat, time is up. it flies from you, plump vulture,  
picked clean again. *complex case*, the white coats say,  
screaming your decline in every entrail.  
the wires burn out, but the whistling bones remain.  
write a love poem for this predator animal, stroke its  
wings in your memories. your russian roulette days.  
gutter summer. skin of your teeth. bone tired. cut loose.



## *Jonah Liu*

### **Between fire and silence**

fire spills  
from the pōhutukawa 's throat  
scarlet tongues licking the infinite blue  
a secret whispered between stars and earth  
an old song burning bright  
where memory and wildness collide  
beneath this blaze  
my feet trace the ghost of dances  
ancestors woven in salt and shadow  
singing rivers alive  
holding storms like fractured lullabies  
folded deep into the breath of time  
i am the question  
folded like a paper bird caught in wind  
a shadow shifting between steel towers  
and the untamed pulse of ocean breath  
searching for a place that is not place  
a belonging that sings beyond borders  
belonging is fire and silence both  
the fierce roar that breaks the sky open  
the quiet ache that folds into the soul  
the wild flame rising from roots and sky  
the courage to burn without being consumed  
to bloom where the earth remembers you  
here between fire and silence  
i find myself  
neither lost nor found  
but becoming always becoming  
a story woven from the ashes and the light  
a voice carried on the breath of wind  
a song that will never be finished  
only reborn

## *Bee Trudgeon*

### **Unlicensed**

I tore all night

through twisted

flannel sheets:

the driver, the driven,

the liquid-eyed deer

in your headlights,

reduced to spirits,

entering through the windscreen,

exiting through the tailpipe,

exhausted.

## *Robert Rinehart*

### **Ignace**

fiery one,  
buried since  
time moves so  
incrementally slowly  
upward flowing  
locking arms  
with s(c)is-brothers  
solid & encased  
millennia eons  
buried until  
edges torn ripped  
shorn by gut rumbles

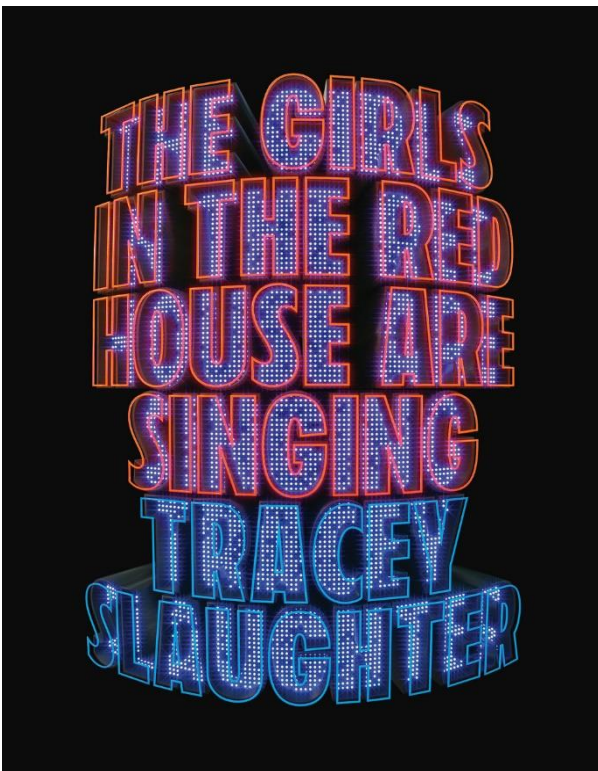
weakened alone  
cracks formed in ice  
in heat swollen  
mother moves below  
& cautions drops  
scatter like seeds  
edges worn wet  
& wind rain & sand  
cave-ins drop-offs  
arrogant bastards  
letters etched

I lay inside  
this museum  
barely wearing  
rough as time  
solid as fate

### Vaughan Rapatahana

*the girls in the red house are singing* – Tracey Slaughter

(Wellington: Te Herenga Waka University Press, 2024). ISBN: 9781776922116 RRP: \$30.00. 112 pp.



*Content warning: This review contains mentions of sexual assault, domestic violence, sexism, drug use, and suicide.*

WOW!!! This is a stand-out assembly of riveting runes which immediately seize you by your lapels, and compel you to continue, to consider, to cogitate. This collection makes me think of Jack Ross's statement in relation to an earlier Slaughter collection (*Conventional Weapons*): 'Buy this book. You won't regret it'. No wonder its first riveting segment, titled

*the girls in the red house is superior verse, fervidly saturated across four distinct yet symbiotic sections. Slaughter is never afraid to write about difficult issues other poets might shy away from addressing*

*The girls in the red house* is superior verse, fervidly saturated across four distinct yet symbiotic sections. Slaughter is never afraid to write about difficult issues other poets might shy away from addressing.

Rape is graphically depicted across "rape mosaics" #1, 2 and 3. For example:

'O small town

of delicacies. Why am I eighteen with  
thorns in my sacrum

an exoskeleton he gummed to the  
ground.'

("the rape mosaic #3: [skin fence]")

Domestic violence is portrayed in the lengthy "teeth", whereby Crystal, who 'might have been the shadow who cleaned the office carpet when I walked out at night', (who subsequently is tragically murdered) is graphically portrayed as a victim of this brutality – much to the despair of the poet, who works in the same building.

Adultery ('the wife's pain is as good as mine' from "bullet points: a descant for mistresses"), drug dependence after a near-fatal car accident ('In pain, in pain, in pain, in pain, in pain' (from "lifetime prescription (for the chronic)")) and

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*Hurt permeates these pages as though Tracey Slaughter were Sylvia Plath's Antipodean cousin...This is not a safe house at all, but a red house set of powerful lamentations, lashings, lacerations*

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consistent and recurrent suicidal inclinations ('I'm all fired up to taste you, O suicide', in "quicksilver drumroll suicide pretty please") intermingle with abject loneliness, decay and death. Hurt permeates these pages as though Tracey Slaughter were Sylvia Plath's Antipodean cousin. Confrontational Honesty are surely the latter's middle names, and there is no hiding behind omission. This is not a safe house at all, but a red house set of powerful lamentations, lashings, lacerations.

Throughout the collection, there are riveting cascades of brilliant imagery, generally in terse, concise phrases latticed with surprising juxtapositions and novel usage of words. For example: 'the celsius of death' in "aria" and 'The light in hotels is a tabernacle of collarbones' in "the light in hotels looks forward to welcoming you again soon".

There is also a liquorice allsorts of interesting words such as 'axons', 'alkalyds', 'gesso', 'diastole', 'artex', 'thanatos', 'iliac' and 'hypoxic'. Then there are repetitions of words/phrases within any given piece. For instance, in "this is not a tribute", 'nurse' is mentioned eight times, once internally rhyming with 'curse'. Throughout the entire suite, the colour 'red' is etched everywhere. Red swims to the surface four times in the first, titular poem, as does the clever phrase, '(A)luminium can swim' ("opioid sonatas").

More word echoes occur in "reprise", where 'scotia' and 'scoria' appear on adjacent lines, while – as further instance of the poet's ingenious inventory – the entire plot of "bullet

points: a descant for mistresses", is a slew of reconstructed proverbs, such as: 'a little mistress is a dangerous thing', illuminating the dark, pervasive penumbra of black humour running through these pages.

Brilliant similes also abound. Take the following as evidence:

'Nights I tried to close my eyes, but  
paint was on them like an assailant.'

("memento mori")

and

'... the room keys  
in their hands like talons'

("blessings upon them")

while this metaphoric image simply slays me:

'The phone is a place

where my voice makes the sounds of  
drought

before I dial your number.'

("psychopathology of the small hotel")

And I nearly died with delight when I  
encountered:

'... the unlucky cutlery

manholed in clubfooted drawers, in  
aluminium couplets...

A disputation of plastic

flowers nobody has ever dusted.'

("reprise")

The final section, "nudes, animals & ruins", with its recurrent emphasis on the excruciating solitude encountered during Covid, is not quite as necessary reading as the other sections to my mind, though it successfully permeates a sense



of profound sadness. For example: ‘I am black and blue with walking the same ring around & around my empty house’ (“nudes, animals & ruins”).

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*I admire her courage in setting out in such graphic detail her own personal involvements in the serious issues addressed throughout. This book could stand as an existential paen to women’s pain.*

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What is the significance of the title? What is the red house exactly? The poet acknowledges that the line ‘the girls in the red house sing’ comes from a poem by Mark Prisco. But this is not a clarification; more an obfuscation, as is the dedicatory line, ‘for all who write from the red house’. Could the Jimi Hendrix waiata<sup>1</sup> with the following evocative lines

‘There’s a red house over yonder  
That’s where my baby stays  
Lord, there’s a red house over yonder  
Lord, that’s where my baby stays’

convey significance (especially as he is mentioned on page 17)? Only the rouge-haired poet based in Kirikiriroa knows, I muse.

I admire her courage in setting out in such graphic detail her own personal involvements in the serious issues addressed throughout. This book could stand as an existential paen to women’s pain.

‘If tomorrow

there was a decree to erect a statue to  
any woman

beaten or raped or assaulted or  
murdered

on the land where they had fallen,  
industries would grind

to a halt. The system would be brought  
to its knees.’

(“teeth”)

I te mutunga, koinei ngā toikupu tino kōhure (in the end, this is distinctive/outstanding poetry).

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

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<sup>1</sup> “Red House”, *Are you Experienced*, Track Records, 1967.

## Hebe Kearney

### *over under fed – Amy Marguerite*

(Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2025). ISBN 9781776711642. RRP \$24.99.  
Pp. 80.



*Content warning: This review contains discussion of eating disorders.*

I first read *over under fed* in unusual circumstances. On Takapuna Beach, I reclined shivering on a towel marked ‘HOSPITAL PROPERTY’, deep in Marguerite’s reflections on illness, loss and loveliness. She writes in “when my body was *Animorphophallus titanum*”: ‘i wore thermals to the beach in december’. This was March, and I was freezing – the result of an unsanctioned swim – on weekend leave from the Eating Disorders Unit (EDU).

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*[Marguerite’s] experience of anorexia, while undeniably important to the collection, comes across as simply a star in the constellation of her life. It is no longer the sun she orbits around*

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At the time (and still now) I was so determined to claw my way out of this illness. Lying on that beach, I was struck by just how thoroughly Marguerite has done this – her experience of anorexia, while undeniably important to the collection, comes across as simply a star in the constellation of her life. It is no longer the sun she orbits around, and I cannot overstate how profound it is for those still spinning in its grip to have access to this perspective in poetic form.

Marguerite writes deftly not only of illness, but of the complexities of life on the other side of it. The collection is not short on references to things those who have encountered anorexia will be familiar with: treatment, liquorice tea, struggling with ‘normal’ coke, burnt diaries, Fortisip et al. However, these things are by no means the focus; instead, they are just one of the many echoes throughout the collection.

To have been desperately ill, in any sense, leaves a mark on the sufferer and their loved ones.

The body becomes different; you view it differently. The human body, all visceral and fickle, pervades these poems, from nails and blood to broken teeth, ulcers, plaque, insomnia, and vomiting. She reflects, ‘i’m angry / at my body for taking / so long to heal’ (“july poem”). Underlying this unflinching depiction of the body, is not only Marguerite’s own experience with illness, but her mother’s, who lives with MS. Though it is a very particular set of circumstances portrayed here, I’m sure it would

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*Some serious illnesses heal,  
some cannot, and most will  
leave their mark. Marguerite  
holds this truth, and balances  
its sorrow beautifully*

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resonate with most of us – that painful illness perforates life. Some serious illnesses heal, some cannot, and most will leave their mark. Marguerite holds this truth, and balances its sorrow beautifully.

Marguerite does this, in part, by constructing an ‘i’ that is not abrasive. The collection is in first person, yet this ‘i’ remains elusive at times. When we read ‘i dream of the day my eyes / are the seeds of a green bell pepper’ (“far too blue”), we understand the intent emotionally, though perhaps not in a way we can name. The same can be said for other lovely images in the book, such as spreading someone’s ugly skirt on toast and weeping, or ‘an immortal jellyfish / drafting its seventeenth will’ (“stalling”). This makes Marguerite’s ‘i’ feels soft and captivating, even when harsher lines arrive, such as ‘fuck active recovery / what actual fool promises / to jog on the spot’ (“shadowboxing a situationship”). By the end of the collection, the reader feels fond of and close to the poetic ‘i’, which is never oppositional, even when strong sentiment is expressed.

I think this effect is also aided by Marguerite’s deliberate, specific choices around style and formatting. The majority of poems are written with short lines, ranging up to approximately six words. Similarly, there are few capital letters, and even fewer commas. This gives the book a particular aesthetic with a dreamy feel. As a reader, you are immersed in the poetic ‘i’’s perspective and style, and despite the at times confronting subject matter, it feels like a safe place to be.

Another thing Marguerite balances well is loss and, *over under fed*’s key term, loveliness. In particular, the collection dwells on entering into closeness, as well as losing relationships with those you were once close to. In both, there is an emphasis on connections missed. In “shadowboxing a situationship” the word ‘aching’ is repeated, and in the poems on this topic, hands, limbs, and fingers make recurrent appearances – there is a sense that there is a connection missing that touch itself cannot restore. It puts me in mind of the Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds lyric ‘but there was a chord in you / I could not find to strike’.<sup>2</sup>

Conversely, the relationships Marguerite reflects on losing seem to have struck chords, but for various reasons, could not last. Marguerite thinks ‘about the friends / i wasn’t allowed to keep... i don’t / know if they are alive now i hope they are / doing gorgeous things’ (“discharge notes (iv)”). There is something almost unnameable about being ill alongside someone, then having no way of knowing if they are still here. Especially when you have lost people to that same illness, as Marguerite alludes to. I say ‘almost unnameable’, because although it remains unnamed in Marguerite’s writing, she manages to communicate the incorrigible feeling of it.

Another such feeling is remembering those who helped you to get better, even against your wishes. Marguerite considers writing to her former treatment team, ‘thinking i should / thank them for everything they did for me’ (“discharge notes (i)”). But how do you thank people who hurt you to save you? This is something many of us who contend with illness must wrestle with, and while Marguerite does not resolve this tension (who could?), she finds a way to make peace with it.

She does so by taking illness, loss, and tension, and wrapping it in loveliness. She creates a specific, safe, and confronting 80 pages, expertly crafted. In the final instance, she does this by listing an important 19 names, at the very end of

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<sup>2</sup> “Jesus of the Moon”, *Dig, Lazarus, Dig!!!*, Mute Records, 2008.

the book, perhaps fulfilling a sentiment expressed earlier that ‘i don’t think a body ever / forgets a lovely woman’ (“discharge notes (i)”). And as readers, we won’t forget this either.

To review books for *a fine line*,  
please contact Sarah Scott,  
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## 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*.



*untitled* – ilona simpson



## *Julie Bates*

paramour moon  
leaving through  
the back door

autumn deepens  
my mother's necklace  
I never wore

## *Richard Smith*

skeins of geese reform  
mirrored in meltwater lakes  
cold voices of change

## *Warwick Rope*

hihi  
a high-pitched flutter  
spreading the sun

## *Debbie Strange*

alpine camp  
meteors falling  
into our mouths

*Modern Haiku*, Volume 55.1, 2024

## *Kanjini Devi*

thin mist  
at the mouth of the harbour  
taniwha's tail

a broken boat  
in the cold mangrove  
tide out

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## Contributors

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**o(l[i]ve)(\*) (bly(†))** is an outer-disciplinary artist, based in Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Aotearoa(...) she plays the piano, writes poetry, paints, and ponders(...) (her) poetry has previously been published by *bad apple*, *Circular*, *Mote*, and *Sever Books*(...)

**Julie Bates** is from North Beach, Christchurch. She is a published poet and haiku writer locally and internationally. Her loves are her husband, walking along the beach, gardening, meditation, yoga, and most of all, solitude.

**Kanjini Devi** lives in the Hokianga. Her published poetry in various journals and anthologies can be seen online and in print. She is mildly known for her movie roles and music recordings.

**Maya Field** is a Wellington-based writer. She studies English Literature at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington. Her work has been featured in *The Spinoff* and *Salient Magazine*.

**Isabella Fuller** is currently studying her first year of Creative and Literary Communications at Te Herenga Waka. She is passionate about writing and filmmaking.

**Isabelle Holmes** is a 10-year-old poet and storyteller. She has been published multiple times in the New Zealand Poetry Society Anthologies, and *Write On* magazine, with her work also featured in *NZ Poetry Box* and the NZPS social media.

**Eve Hughes** is a poet from Ōtautahi Christchurch, currently in Year 12 at Cashmere High School. Her interests include philosophy, art history, religion, and lesbian studies.

**ilona simpson** is an artist/actress studying fine arts at Massey. She delves into themes of mental health, the world and identity via a visual representation of her mind seen as another dimension.

**Baxter Kamana-Williams** is a PhD student in engineering at Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha, researching sustainable energy systems. He also reads and writes poetry in Ōtautahi, and his work has appeared in *a fine line* and *Tarot*. @b\_xt\_r on instagram.

**Ami Kindler** is an emerging poet with publications in *a fine line* and *NZ Poetry Aotearoa Yearbook*. She lives in Taranaki, where she also teaches language part-time and enjoys spending time in Nature.

**Amelia Kirkness** is an Ōtautahi-born, Pōneke-based writer, student, and winged eyeliner aficionado. Her work has been featured in publications like *Starling*, *The Spinoff*, *bad apple*, *Overcommunicate*, and *Catalyst*. She has been a regional finalist at both the Wellington and Christchurch poetry slams and she is one of the founding editors of *Symposia* magazine. As part of her English Literature Honours degree, she is researching lesbian romance novels.

**Jonah Liu** is a Year 10 student at Wellington College. A clarinettist, writer, and lover of quiet moments, Jonah's poetry explores identity, memory, and the unnoticed beauty in everyday life.

**Rachel Miller** is a visual artist and poet living in South Hokianga. She has had poems and artworks published in *Te Kohu*, *Fast fibres* and *a fine line*.

**Denise O'Hagan** is a Sydney-based poet and editor of NZ background, born in Rome. Her poetry is published internationally, and her recent awards include the Monica Taylor Poetry Prize. <https://denise-ohagan.com/>

**Christopher Palmer** is a poet, visual artist and scientist (in that order) based in Canberra. He's been published worldwide, and his first collection of poems, *Afterlives*, was published by Ginninderra Press in 2016.

**Oshadha Perera** is a poet and short story writer from Southland. He is a winner of the Lancaster Writing Awards (Poetry), NZPS International Poetry Competition (Youth) and Southland Creative Arts Awards (Emerging Talent).

**Ella Quarmby** is an artist, writer, and student based in Wellington. Her poems are in *Mayhem*, *Bad Apple*, and *Poetry Aotearoa Yearbook*, but this is the first time she's published artwork!

**Robert Rinehart** lives in Whaingaroa | Raglan. His work has appeared in *Mayhem*, *Fleas on the Dog*, *tarot*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Queen's Review*, and others. [robert-rinehart.com](http://robert-rinehart.com)

**Warwick Rope** lives on the Hibiscus Coast in Auckland. He describes himself as a 'Field-walker, haiku guide, and quiet observer'. He writes haiku poetry about place, presence, and wonder.

**Richard Smith** is a teacher living in Porirua. Some of his recent poetry can be found in *Balloons* Literary Journal, *London Grip*, *Ekstasis*, the anthology *Now and Then* (Landing Press) and in the forthcoming issue of *Relief* Journal.

**Jessica Simpson**, known by her artist name Ilona, is in her final year of studying Fine Arts at Massey University. She is a multidisciplinary artist working across painting, photography, makeup artistry, modelling, acting, film, and printmaking. Her work is deeply rooted in exploring different perspectives, especially through characters and storytelling. She is passionate about bringing awareness to mental health and societal issues, using her art to start conversations and challenge perceptions.

**Debbie Strange** (Canada) is a chronically ill short-form poet and visual artist. Her daily creative practice connects her more closely to the world, to others, and to herself. Please visit her publication archive at: [debbiemstrange.blogspot.com/](http://debbiemstrange.blogspot.com/).

**Kieran Trainor** (they/them) is an artist and writer living and studying in Te Whanganui-a-Tara. Their work explores intersections of Queerness, ecology and decolonial practices. They can be found anywhere with flowing rivers.

**Bee Trudgeon** is a writer and children's librarian, previously published in *RipItUp*, *The Sapling*, *The Spinoff*, *Audioculture*, *NZ Poetry Box*, *NZ Poetry Shelf*, and *a fine line*. Read more on the Patreon page of her alter ego, Grace Beaster.

**Freya Turnbull** is a poet, student, and aspiring spectre based in Pōneke. Her work has been featured in a number of publications, most recently *Starling*, *Turbine* | *Kapohau*, *Overcom*, and others. She enjoys putting corpse paint on Barbie dolls.

**Rosana Vakatini** was born in Wellington, New Zealand, and lives in Perth, Western Australia. She has European and Pacific Islander heritage. She is inspired by the strong oral story telling traditions of her family and the need to explore her connection to time and place.