

a fine line

TE RŌPŪ TOIKUPU O AOTEAROA
NEW ZEALAND POETRY SOCIETY

Spring 2025
Chiaroscuro

Featured Poet

Joshua Toumu'a

Featured Article

Rebecca Hawkes

Cover Art

Kieran Trainor

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The Magazine of the
Te Rōpū Toikupu O Aotearoa
New Zealand Poetry Society

ISSN 1178-3931 (digital)

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Quotation of the season

'A candle...is nothing but a tongue of
light describing a refuge' – Rumi, A
Just Finishing Candle (One-Handed
Basket Weaving)

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Cadence Chung



Cadence at the latest Salon event, run by the NZPS and Symposia Magazine

Tēnā koutou,

Welcome to the third issue of *a fine line* this year. The theme, *chiaroscuro*, is one that I am quite familiar with in my singing practice. A sound that is overly bright and shrill has too much *chiaro*, while the opposite, a dull and woofy sound, has too much *oscuro*. A singer has to finely balance the two to create a warm, rounded sound. It's also more commonly known in regards to painting: the way an artist plays with light and shade to create a sense of volume.

Naturally, light crops up in various ways throughout the poems in this issue. Lyndsey Knight's conversation poem takes place beneath 'porch light'; khubz are cooked on a fire in Anna Hoek-Sims "Vers La Flamme Op. 72"; incense is lit in a smokey haze in Sara Qasem's "Bayna'al ard w'al Samaa"; Sam Reichman's daylight is 'fizzing out beyond the sliding glass door'. Michael Giacon's light is a 'siren', while Whaitiri Tua-Warbrick's moon is 'comely'. Many of the poets, being concerned with composition, take on a rapid-fire, run-on diction, such as Amelia Kirkness, Sofia Drew, Zia Ravenscroft, and Colleen Doucette. And in Felix August's opening poem, light emanates from an object familiar to all poets: a sentence.

Joshua Toumu'a is our featured poet, with his pseudo-Baroque set of seasonal poems taking up much of his slot. These broad-spanning poems traverse through landscapes of colonialism, otherness, religion, love, and anger; they were first performed at Kia Mau festival, accompanied by a live string quartet. Fittingly, our featured article comes from poet and painter Rebecca Hawkes, who shares insights into her recently-completed studies at the University of Michigan. Recent releases by Fiona Kidman and Nina Mingya Powles are reviewed by Diane McCarthy and Anuja Mitra respectively.

Our gorgeous haiku reflect upon birds, stars, youth, and history; stars are 'taking their reflections with them'. The inner art is by Mariela Durnhofer Rubolino and Rachel Miller, while the cover art is by Kieran Trainor. I've always admired Kieran's work for the way it so evocatively depicts light – seeing it in real life, I'm always shocked that there isn't some sort of hidden lamp or screen behind the paintings.

We are living in a chaotic time, and it is so important to keep engaging with art, beauty, and community. I hope you are all taking care of yourselves, and that spring is treating you well.

Noho ora mai rā,
Cadence.

Featured Poet

Joshua Toumu'a



Summer Death

“It’s a beautiful country,” she said
hands dipping in, out of the tepid
water, flat across her chest.
“A beautiful country, it’s become.”
Her eyes carry a wistful glaze
as her hands butterfly,
treading waist-deep water with her palms;
facing down, facing up.
Hair dripping, she shakes her head; a tau’olunga.
“It’s a beautiful country, but...” her voice
trails out her mouth and down her chin
as if every utterance is
denser than the air around her.
She stirs her words into the water
they rush around her arms, her fingers, her skin.
There is something volcanic about her presence:
the water boils around her, and
her hair is peppered with ash,
each strand slowly turning white.
Behind her, the setting sun catches her silhouette, and she
is aflame in it; gold upon gold upon gold.
She swallows, looking back at the water, now
down to her thigh. The land is unrecognisable
now, her name lost to the decades.
“It’s a beautiful country.”

Autumn Famine

And it was a beautiful country indeed,
deeper than it was wide and
blindingly bright down to the bone.
And those bones were beautiful, although
they sat more like foundations than like a body.
You can only imagine what kind of fool built his house
upon these sands. The rain came down and
the sea rose to our thighs and we were told
it was biblical: A woman bathes Jesus' feet with
oil and wipes them clean with her hair.
Just like that, our minds were wiped clean of
transgressions: the storm drains cleared, and
the flooding migrated down and seawards.
Salvation came after many months
from the heavens like an olive branch.
We extended our hands outwards,
cupped for communion.
They placed in our palms
corned beef and powdered milk
and we looked upon them like patron saints;
They were patron saints indeed.

"Come! Take, eat;" they said, electric.
"For this is my body, given for you.
Do this to remember me."

Winter Conquest

I ate from their palm that evening:
there was no place set at their table.
The conversation that night felt underhanded, lowered
below the tablecloth like the kind gesture of a child
to their beloved family dog, although how am I to complain?
Life has become lavish, all belly rubs and wet food.
It was the first time I met your parents,
they were monolithic, both in stature and rigidity.
Still, this didn't excuse your mannerisms, like how you
introduced me as the "Samoan Boyfriend", as if I was
a single incorrect entry in an overcrowded kennel of boyfriends,
or how you kicked me under the table for trying to correct you.
Your parents were dog breeders by trade, and
the living room was rife with sleeping hounds.
When they asked of my career, they cooed at every word
although I doubt they would have responded differently
if I were, say, a soldier, a doctor, a drunk.
Conversation ebbed and flowed with the evening,
and after a few glasses of pinot noir they decided
I was not to be seated on the ivory furniture.
This was presented plainly, in a gentle manner, and chased
by a tight lipped smile the eyes did not follow.
They were funny like that: their language permitted
so much meaning, and they utilised it all.
This made them fascinating to me, in a macabre sense:
despite all their luxuries, they were austere folk
who held control of their belongings with equal austerity.
As the night concluded, the cheque book
was served to them with dessert.
They waved the paper just above my nose, and to me
it was a large, ivory flag flown above the mantelpiece.
I was asked what I could provide their child,
what I can provide them.
They held me close: tender, rumbling.
I ate from their palm that evening:
I have been good, how am I to complain?

War in Spring

Love, you must understand
when I took you into my palms, it was a crucifixion.
It felt like instinct to rely on you.
You'd run your fingers between mine;
slide your thumb through the hole and
hold me like a glove if I let you.
Love, you must come to understand
I am only a sometimes lover.
I have lived ten thousand lives
carried more names than I can remember,
and love, there is so much you have yet to understand.
I am ageless! I am hundreds of miles long
and tapping at your window for you to let me in!
Love, how can I explain to you
that crisis has not left my heart?
My body is a built-to-scale model
of every grieving, every oil lantern'd night
singing into the darkness.
I can see in your eyes something like religion
but you have never known faith! Not like I do!
No, you are looking for answers, or some
sagely figure to turn every tragedy into a parable
but love, every injustice has only left me angry!
And I am angry! I am angry this bitterness
has grown bitter and bitter still!
I have no gospel to preach, at least not to you.
Love, when you call me to bed I represent my country,
just as you unravel into your most fundamental
ingredients when you drift into sleep.
I see your salmon-pink arm reaching for the nightstand
and never more in my life have I felt so conquered!
Before you I am aged, tempered, unsexed.
Love, I've been told I only write of beginnings and ends.
Love, this is one of them.

The Anniversary

On the day of the anniversary,
my mother wakes from the bedroom floor.
She rises to her bed
and falls asleep again.

The blackbirds return to the yard
to scatter the oats,
The dogs swallow their barks
and the morning undoes herself into a dream.
I sprint backwards into my room,
fall asleep and forever forget.

In the late afternoon the day before,
the highways begin to unclog.
Car fenders straighten in their collisions.
The vehicles flatten and osculate
like forlorn lovers departing.

Back in the city, my mother
returns to the office in the dead of night.
She removes the feedback
from her students' essays,
unpublishes her thesis.
Rain leaps from the pavement
back into the sky and my mother
returns her lunch to the container.

The rice hardens, the stock cools,
the turmeric flows back into the shaker.
As she stands by the stovetop
I forget how to make pilaf.
I nod in understanding,
she tucks the saucepan
back into the cupboard.

On my birthday, only weeks before,
I hold her close and weep.
I take off my shoes, now never worn
and return them into the box.
My breath relights the candles
and she scoops the icing from the cake;
we disassemble it together.
I draw the batter from the oven still raw,
scoop flour into the bag.
She walks backwards into her room
to hide the present.

My mother takes the shoebox
and unwraps it carefully.
Her penmanship is undone,
the tape binds to the roll,
and she slides the box
back under her bed
forever.

Featured Article

Rebecca Hawkes



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Eclipsing the Eclipse



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Pocked with personification

the fossil virgin of the skies

waxes and wanes

- Mina Loy, from “Lunar Baedeker”

We had, it seems, loved the planet and loved our lives, but could no longer remember the way of them. We got the light wrong. In the sky was something that should not be there. In the black sky was a ring of light. It was a thin ring, an old, thin silver wedding band, an old, worn ring. It was an old wedding band in the sky, or a morsel of bone. There were stars. It was all over.

- Annie Dillard, from “Total Eclipse”

I’ve recently had the luxury of two years at poet school, an MFA saturated in the surreal somehow-not-satire of the USA. The apex of the dream came in the Spring. In April 2024 my class went on a field trip, driving two hours south from Michigan to Ohio to picnic under the path of totality of the solar eclipse.

Our teacher, Kelly Hoffer, had brought watercolour paper soaked in cyanotype solution and we tried to capture the developing eclipse’s sickle-shaped sunlight between our fingers. I scurried in the underbrush finding leaves with curlicued edges, dry seed-heads, elegant stems of thorns. I left their silhouettes in the turning light, then hid the paper in a dark envelope to let the prints develop.

Slowly, then suddenly: sunset in every direction. The air grew cold. A great heron tiptoeing in the river took off as confused vultures above circled back to their nests. We set down our sandwiches and shared around special paper glasses to look safely at the sun as it was eaten up.

There we were – humans, animals – watchers of the hungry moon. This was the great gift of the MFA. Sheer time to look

I held on to the intensity of the eclipse – those long moments under a new darkness, what remained of the sun impossibly small and far from us...

around, to see, alongside other watchers. If we think, like Sontag, of the writer as ‘professional observer’, it’s true there’s a lot of witness to bear these days. For many of us it was a relief to have something celestial to see that was so beyond the reach of earthly awfulness, and in doing so our eyes were also opened to the goings-on at ground level. Which of us saw the ribbon snake slithering by the picnic blanket? We watched it with curiosity rather than fright, as the world turned silver around us.

Annie Dillard described her total eclipse as a terrifying experience. In Ohio, none of us screamed. As the sky dimmed, Noor asked whether we should sing, but we couldn’t decide on a tune in the shadows. And then it was dark – a new kind of darkness that rushed through us, my hand warm in my lover’s as we looked at everything through changed light. There was no colour for a while, and then the afternoon was returned to us in backwards dusk. And after, I held on to the intensity of the eclipse – those long moments under a new darkness, what remained of the sun impossibly small and far from us, the after-noon now feeling like a kind of after-life with its too-bright blues and greens.

While I spent a lot of time in classes before and since that day, my metaphorical education was transformed by the eclipse. I’m not alone in being susceptible to such phenomena. Dillard says ‘Seeing a partial eclipse bears the same relation to seeing a total eclipse as kissing a man does to marrying him, or as flying in an airplane does to falling out of an airplane. Although

the one experience precedes the other, it in no way prepares you for it.’ And I think perhaps this is part of the relationship of poetry to prose – where prose remains connected to all kinds of agreed convention, and being able to read in that respect is a prerequisite to making sense of literary writing, poetry can spin you out into a transformed realm that defies what we expect of language – and so ourselves, and our worlds. How could I respond to the eclipse, except by writing poetry?

When you’re holding a hammer, everything looks like a nail. I was in love and at poet school and so everything felt like poetry, even the revelations of tumours growing in my chest. But I digress. Jane Hirshfield describes poetry as a way of ‘truing’ the world – but also altering it to let that truth be seen, a fabric-ation weaving many ways of apprehending truth (social, political, sensory, scientific, emotional, told in speech or older songs...). Poems, in their distillation of universe, make our apprehensions differently sensory – more saturated, or as starkly monochrome as moonlit snow.

So how can we *make* strangeness? How can we render in different light the known, to un-know it, and so see newly? Diane Seuss suspects that poetry’s shimmying duplicities also make its allure more entrancing. One of her most essential sonnets closes with ‘Does language eclipse feeling? Does it eclipse the eclipse?’ In studying, I’ve gone deep into this question of how poetry could *do* this work of eclipsing, of annihilating and recreating the world in a few breaths.

For me, in writing, the best feeling is when a poem rushes ahead like torchlight, showing me things I must have already known but never distilled so starkly. A poem can say something I didn’t know I could until after having said it. It’s what Hirshfield describes as ‘the difference between a poet’s seeing and *poetry’s* seeing’ – this freer language not bound to

my preconceptions, my everyday speech and sight, the humdrum taken-for-granted. One of the encouragements I received in my studies was to worry less about making sense of narrative situation in a poem, and think about what its other commitments could be – sonic, imagistic, linguistic, etc – that enable new kinds of meaning to be made.

...the eclipse challenges us to keep our eyes open, to not be lost in the awe of darkness or blinding light, but to try carefully to say what we see.

As a reader and editor, too, this is what I often hope to see in poetry. A poem given permission to see the world strangely, to dim the lights until the sun can become a far-flung wedding ring for real. Regardless of style or topic, what makes me crazy about a poem is the feeling of being *in* it. Lost in the sauce, one might’ve said a few meme-years ago. Being eclipsed by whatever is happening in there – scene, sense, sound. Getting secondhand the trance of the poet living something in the writing (which, when taking this note, my phone corrected to *wronging*, which also feels right in a way).

Poetry contains a capacity for weirdness that contains both light and dark, not black-and-white, all the way one or the other. This is not to say every poem of rage at violence needs a silver lining – the writing itself is already that, giving knife-shine form to fury. And not every love poem requires a corresponding song of despair (but if kissing were enough, why pick up the pen?). Instead, the eclipse challenges us to keep our eyes open, to not be lost in the awe of darkness or blinding light, but to try carefully to say what we see. To find the dark inside the dark, the light glinting off every blade of grass.

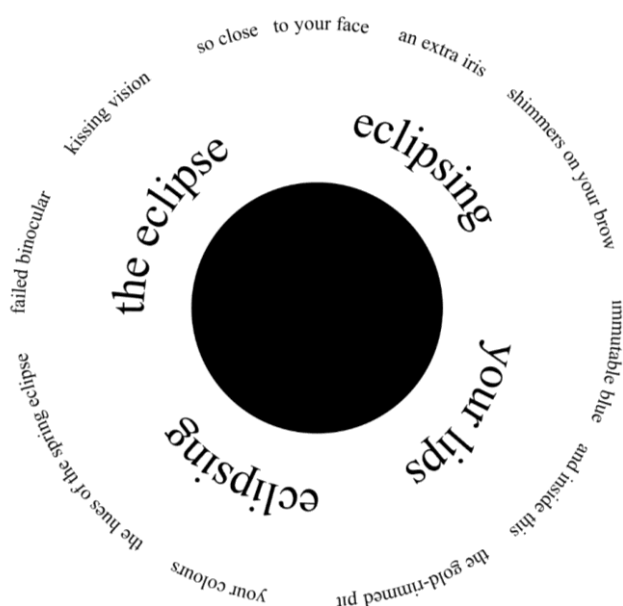
It's easy to feel powerless and silenced in the face of large, terrifying powers – be they natural or manmade. Shadows kept on creeping in after the eclipse. An ultrasound over my breast showed a dark oval rimmed in silver, as the biopsy needle searched in my flesh. There's oppression weighing on the prospect of future MFAs, as it's harder now to go where I went – my student visa was caught up in government shutdowns as the new administration took power, and suspicion only darkens over the speech of the educated, the young, the 'alien'. It's not easy on citizens either – the April of the eclipse, my friends camping on the university diag to protest atrocities done with weapons funded by our institution were stalked, threatened, and pepper sprayed by the campus' private police. Alas, poetry school isn't all kissing under eclipses.

So I've been looking to poets who wrote through their own tumultuous eras with deep commitment to, as Adrienne Rich puts it, 'diving into the wreck'. Lately I've been reading Mina Loy, a fascinating pre-feminist poet and provocateur who consorted with a constellation of avant-garde movements (Modernism, Futurism, Dada, Surrealism...) but was contained by

none, her writing spanning conflicts from sex to atom bombs. Teaching, too, reminded me of how powerful it is for my students to speak truly how they are seeing their world in its shifts of shadow. Sharing poetry with them was much like the purposeful gathering of my own MFA class under the eclipse. Wanting – choosing – to see the world strange and new, together.

What can poets do? Hold our own little moons against the sun to see what the world might be in different light, and in doing so reveal the actual day to ourselves again. The gift of poetics; of the eclipse. And still we carry those half lights within us, far beyond the field where we saw the sun and moon make dusk of afternoon. We carry them, wondering when they may become words, poems, action – though perhaps they never will, or will make themselves known only once we've become the people capable of writing them.

Or this is what I'm telling myself about the poems I haven't written yet about so many things I keep from these strange years, some of which are still developing in the dark – like a cyanotype of leaves that will be falling now, again, in another country.



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Poems



Vestige – Rachel Miller

Felix August

He was in the room, I took him to the sentence

after Gerald Murnane

We were, by coincidence
in the very room where
the sentence lived
quietly, third drawer
down, fourth cabinet
from the door –
one of the great successes
of my life, a summit I barely
registered, so short a time was I
there – minutes, perhaps
then over the other side
carrying on,
descending

We stood and
looked at it
together / bright
atop the table
in the sun
under the window
– he put a hand
on my shoulder –
the whole thing
fresh and complete
as the day I wrote it.

Amelia Kirkness

organised list of desires

after Isla Huia and Sheila Heti

I want a box full of love letters. I want a butterfly tattoo. I want a more employable degree. I want a more interesting cocktail order. I want a signature semiprecious necklace I can wear in the shower. I want an iPhone. I want answers. I want everything to be a love and a comfort to you. I want her on my thigh. I want my consciousness switched with that of a small grey rabbit. I want new shoes. I want sex. I want soft picnics and chaste kisses on the cheek. I want the deletion of self. I want the perfect knitwear. I want them to feel guilty. I want to be bought flowers. I want to be clean-faced in a lace singlet. I want to be famous. I want to be made the world's most delicious pasta. I want to believe this is better. I want to drink wine with an aunt. I want to explore the seemingly contradictory politics. I want to express that, and have it seen on the outside. I want to exude this energy. I want to feel good at my core. I want to feel that, give it to me! I want to go anywhere that will take me. I want to go back and shake her. I want to go for a walk in a rose garden. I want to have ridden a horse. I want to have wanted to go to the Eras tour. I want to lay down in traffic. I want to leave lipstick kisses. I want to look perfect in a linen dress. I want to not be smart. I want to stab myself with a fork. I want to stand on a hilltop and puncture a silence. I want to tell myself I'm an adult. I want to turn to stone. I want to upload a video just for him. I want you all in black. I want you to bridge the space between us on the couch. "I want you to know, you were thought of as possible." I wanted for us to be...friends. I wanted to have a chat about the current arrangement. I wanted to be a pop star. I wanted to be a part of that because I knew it would be impactful for the world. I wanted too much to be seen.

(All lines in this found poem are taken from the author's Google Drive and Notes app.)

Lyndsey Knight

oh what a night

we were standing in the porch light's glittering rain
cooling off listening to frankie valli serenade from
the open door not caring how late it was, how wet
we were it was still summer in your neck of the woods

those days and nights still floor me how so close to
the end you kept unfolding such tough grace
encore after encore nurturing the beauty of process over
end healing that hungry gap between darkness and light

how your open heart held each moment fully gently
how you told me with a cheeky grin as you blew smoke rings
at the moon *we cannot rely on a next time girlfriend*
oh that the earth reswallows its flowers so fast

Anna Hoek-Sims

Vers la Flamme Op. 72

The piano wasn't there for long.
Its mahogany stained with
students' coffee rings, cheap red
wine sloshes, and a pizza box's oily residue,
the keys a tanned ivory, fingerprints invisible
but for the grey smudges
around middle C. Add a few scratches, a loss
of tone from the van ride into
Dunedin's hills before the first bombs
fell in the lounge next to
the fire – an 18-month-old's
fists pounding shouts from its open mouth.
The children crowded around, the house's
state walls peered at its shape,
groaned an acknowledgement
in the wind. They were a symphony
of ragged individuals, their crescendo timed
for 3.15pm when school finished; parental pianissimo,
and the chance to ease the hammer blows, over.

Even in summer, they cooked khubz on the fire,
the burner door propped open as though the lounge
was a makeshift camp, ate with their backs
towards the pedals, played bruising games where faces
wore mottled shades, served guests Kibbeh, yelled
words whose sounds shivered the strings.

Today.
they're out of wood. Their jaws
shake teeth, chew dough before
they rearrange the room. The father
grunts it out along the hall, past
the empty dining room, the table sold or
burnt, the stairs draped with kids' coats,
past a cupboard, and the kitchen. Out
the back door to the concrete steps where it
plummets to the grass, into gravity's clutches.
Chords disembowelled, tiger wood crushed
beneath size 2, 5, 6, and 12 shoes. The lawn
open-mouthed.

Sara Qasem

Bayna'al ard w'al Samaa' (Between earth and sky)

A glissade of shadow chasing shadow
white doves locked in a wooden cage, smoke
coiling skyward; we are
winged and weightless a
meeting point between earth and sky.

On Jumma I tried to pocket one but
she slipped away, leaving
only the heavy scent of Kuwait, my
grandmother's lap and the
streets of Nablus, braided
in oud.

I sit still and cage my
breath watch dancers coil in
incense spirals, eyes now
stinging with their nearness – Teta
lights the next stick:
another siren called home – I

think I've been here before.

Sam Reichman

Alone again

in the corner seat of the coffee shop by the water, the daylight fizzing out
beyond the sliding glass door and large window-walls, I wonder about
dualities – do we all have these shadow-selves stalking our peripheral

vision, the would-not and did-not greeting the did and will with a secret
handshake, laughing as they stroll behind us, beasts padding the sidewalk,
sand, grass, cement, wooden floorboards, always creaking, always asking

would-you-mind and beg-your-pardon as they slide a needle slowly into our veins,
stroke our long hair and caress our stiff collarbones, whispering please, please
me, please me. What to tell these subterranean freeloaders as dusk crawls

over the harbor, sharp, blue, what to tell you, my sweet and delicate blood, pulsing
remorse like a cancer into the spongy swamp inside my bones, lymph nodes aching
for double-vision deaths, pasts that part the future into will-be and might-have-been –

nothing to say, really, or do, just wander the waterfront, watch dusk split gulls in two.

Michael Giacon

Waiting for light

When she looks at the day she sees
a solar eclipse her vision fixed on the halo play
of siren light cresting an obscured centre

she'll cross the city at night crawling by cliffhanger
for her choice happy meal old habits her shady friends
routines can still get her home embracing
the roundabout for its orange glow

wide-eyed dawn finds seams of sun
in curtain cracks the gilded mirror paintings
on lemon walls *Printemps Bleu, Love is Blind*
colour waiting in shade for light

stars shoot the blinking sky for the vast screen
of the grand theatre luminous monochrome
finds the long fingers of the maestro solo
he conducts his opus in farewell

notes wash silver on closed eyes
sound blooms as phosphorescence
on a shore in moonlight

as the lights come up she rolls
with the black and white of final credits
follows brass handrails out to afternoon sun
into the sooty core of the floating street
for the bus ride home.

Whaitiri Tua-Warbrick

Comely, the Moon

And like it, I centre
a sphere of influence –
a glinting holo-halo
of shine – whose curving
edge I love dearly, pressing
against its rolling rhythm,

a clear bubble against the
milk-sea of void,
from which all come
from, and thus return
(but not yet. Not
yet).

So, comely is the moon,
'cause it lets me rise
like it does, my feet
lifting three inches
from the pavement,

my steps leaving
no sound in the pre-
pre-dawn night, in stark
difference to the day.

Sofia Drew

The Woodcut Print

Is scraped raw / is bleeding from its kneecaps / is inverted colours / it tells you about light / you can find a subject in it / if you want hard enough / is anxious / is repetitive / is claustrophobic / is cut back / cut forward / is so scared / it screams in tar-black cries of angst / is unwilling to exist / is culling out the shadows / it depicts you in several silhouettes / it keeps your head / scraps the rest / it pictures as it sees / it is so sharp / but still not close enough / to any real sharpness / is a knife edge / that's split / and split / again / it cleaves you to breathe / in / and out / it places you / at eye level with yourself / it hungers / for the sense of itself / as both a body and an image / it moves / in one continuous motion / of architectural impossibility / it is faithfully non-abstract / it throws you / onto the jagged path / of an oncoming street / it howls / is you

Colleen Doucette

is Halloween 2023 in Brunswick, Maine

and I ask my roommate if he can
please, clean the restroom
because it is grimy and he hasn't
in a couple of weeks
and I've barely slept seven hours today,
It's my choice to stay up late but
it's really not fair
my poetry teacher gave me 10.7
essays to read
and my stomach hurts because the cafeteria workers pour
too much oil when they cook
and they ran out of olives at the salad bar
a while ago and I'm thinking
about which party I go to tonight;
my roommate reaches slowly when he moves
I see him lighting candles on my way out
I haven't got the time to
tell him they are banned on campus
and I catch a few words of his phone call
something about a vigil and general meeting
I have one of those too, a general meeting
for my sports team where
we will strategize how to sneak more points across enemy lines before the whistle blows

Zia Ravenscroft

second fish

it's the last month of this dreamlike spring
there is no way i can write about sadness so i'll write about the way i feel whole instead
and you can infer the opposite

today: the last days of november, the sky clear, your laugh clearer
i've never been happier, i would say, but there are no degrees of joy here
just you, glorious in the river, sun glinting on my skin, the world forgiving me again

i think i was made for water and love
it's sacred, it's magic, and nothing could ever be wrong
when the pine trees dapple the dusky sun into a million pieces of light

look at you, six of you and i make seven: glowing
i read a million years ago that christ and the madonna had circles around their heads
because they were shining with god's love
i am no god, and still, heads bathed in light. in glory

don't you see? there was never any need for prayer.
sink back into the water this world knows you are beloved and acts accordingly

the trees canonise us
i love this place, which is synonymous with i love you

the sun touches your temples
it is as easy as that

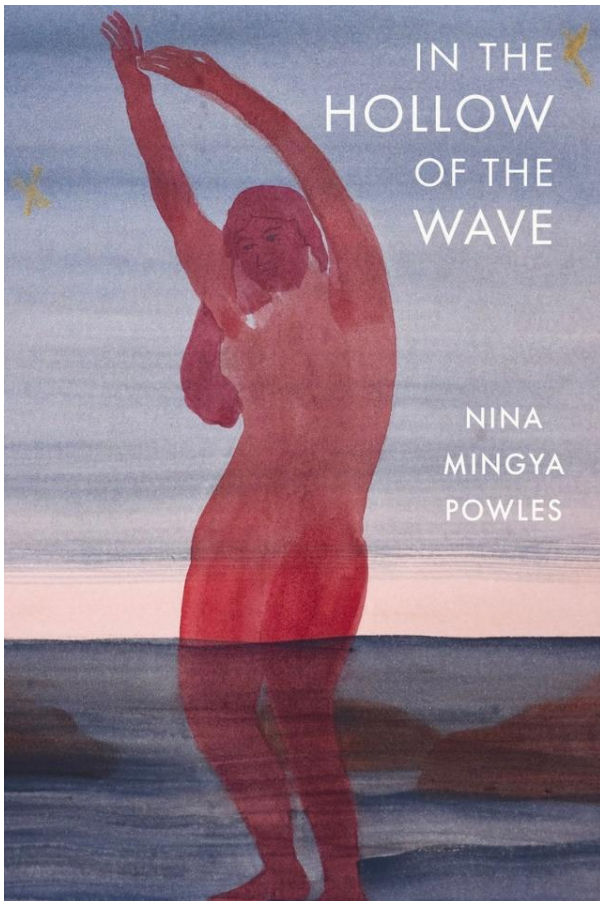


Clarooscuro— Mariela Durnhofer Rubolino (Artwork created at Morag Stokes's art studio in Waikanae, who provides the material, focus of work, style and inspiration.)

Anuja Mitra

In the Hollow of the Wave – Nina Mingya Powles

Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2025
ISBN: 9781776711512. RRP \$24.99. 96pp.



‘People asked me where I learned / and I said I taught myself the slow work of making’ (“Slipstitch”). Nina Mingya Powles’s writing has always focused on this slow, ruminative work: the work of unpicking memory, of understanding the changing seasons of oneself. While embodying many of the same themes as her acclaimed first collection, *Magnolia* 木蘭, the poems in *In the Hollow of the Wave* feel distinctive in their sense of place, beauty and mystery. Powles turns both inward and outward; mining her history as well as her present, including the present belonging to all of us in a world afflicted by climate change. The result is a book compelling in form and rich in imagery

Powles turns both inward and outward; mining her history as well as her present, including the present belonging to all of us in a world afflicted by climate change.

and intertextuality, deeply personal while speaking of and to our times.

Sewing and weaving seem to be having a moment among Aotearoa writers, featuring prominently in Flora Feltham’s *Bad Archive* and Maddie Ballard’s *Bound*. In “Slipstitch”, Powles traces the history of a family sewing machine and her efforts to ‘mirror [the] hands’ of ancestors. This first part of the collection (“A Woven Sea”) pairs text with textile, collage and photography. There are sky-blue squares of fabric, a needle slipped through cloth I glide my finger across. I wonder if there was scope to weave more visual media through the book. As it is, I like the tactile feel of this section, how it places us beside Powles as she navigates ‘the gathering, the careful pulling apart’. Quilt blocks laid side by side are a ‘sentence’, then an ‘island’. There is a clear metaphor here for writing and its imperfect excavation of the past, the way it makes something new and yet not new. To write is to echo other voices, just as Powles works with fabric caressed by the ghosts of other hands:

‘Our threads crossing over the fold.

To enclose my raw seams, I mirror her hands.

I follow her along a blue patterned edge.’

(“Slipstitch”)

The second part of the collection, “The Metropolitan Museum”, might be considered something of a centrepiece. This and the remaining sections of *In the Hollow of the Wave* are highly referential, comprising many poems in dialogue with other works of art. There can be a risk in this for a writer if readers are unfamiliar with those works. On the other hand, these kinds of allusions can enrich engagement with a text, as the reader is encouraged to do their own research (as I did and discovered writer Theresa Hak Kgyung Cha). “Seams / Traces” pulses with loss and blurred boundaries. A glove goes missing from a pocket. Museum visitors reach out to touch Chinese and Japanese silks ‘forgetting they are behind glass’, asking who is the ‘they’ encased: the visitors or the exhibit?

One of my highlights of the collection, “A gown is a glacier, receding” (after Auckland Art Gallery’s *Guo Pei: Fashion, Art, Fantasy* 郭培 : 时装之幻梦), addresses the politics of being on display. Clothing, heritage, orientalism, industrialisation, global warming, gendered labour – Powles pulls at a multitude of threads while maintaining her usual lightness. There are many excellent lines:

‘a gown is a glacier, receding
a gown is a slow accumulation
a gown is an edifice that forms around
an opening’
 (“A gown is a glacier, receding”)

The poem ends perhaps too neatly – ‘I am made of the clothes I wear and the hands of the women who sewed them’ – but Powles’s imagining of her ‘body like a forcefield ... against the coming dark of winter’ segues well into the next longer piece. “Spell of the Red Flowers”, inspired by artist Yayoi Kusama, opens with the ‘soft dark wave’ caused by an earthquake. Powles again skilfully explores themes of fantasy and otherness, but with a stronger sense of place, and arguably a stronger sense of haunting. Fear blankets the poem: fear of foreigners, of illness, of earth itself. I feel the atmosphere of COVID-

19-era xenophobia, mingled with the more timeless awe and unease in nature. ‘Dear river,’ Powles writes, ‘would you hold my fear in your hands? Dear river, my

Clothing, heritage, orientalism, industrialisation, global warming, gendered labour — Powles pulls at a multitude of threads while maintaining her usual lightness.

body possesses knowledge of things before I know them myself.’

“The Heart Works Harder” is the final part of the book, and feels like both a change of pace and a culmination of everything that had come before. I’m enchanted by “Dog-hearted”, a tender look at the human-animal bond, from its first words to its last (opening with ‘If a pulse of a dreaming dog drops below sixty beats per minute, / the wind stops to listen.’) This poem and several others stand out among the more referential works in this section, but all build on similar themes – like a collage, or the quilts in “A Woven Sea”. “Emulsion” returns to the motif of making and how it engages body and spirit. Something profound lurks in “The Harbour”, styled as a letter to ‘[the] whales inside the waves’. I admire the movement of this piece; the almost-urgency of its short lines: ‘The fact is the running. The dream is the sea’. With *In the Hollow of the Wave* lingering with me some time after finishing it, I suspect I, too, may start dreaming of that sea.

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

Diane P. McCarthy

The Midnight Plane: Selected and new poems – Fiona Kidman

Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2025.
ISBN 978-1-991348-00-5. RRP \$40.00.
172pp.



Dame Fiona Kidman is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most prolific writers. Novelist, playwright, memoirist, short story writer, crime writer and poet, Kidman's creative genius encompasses multiple genres. At 85, looking back over her life through her poetry, *The Midnight Plane: Selected and new poems* is a timely publication with gravitas, humour, and reflection. Her preface shares the significance and joy that poetry brings a – generous sharing of her approach to her work.

We encounter Kidman's world through this elegant hard-back volume, with its dark aspect,

...we are privileged to be able to immerse ourselves in two strongly moving complementary visual and written texts. In both, she is accessible, expressive, open and one of our most skilful creative minds, motivated to engender her poetry with 'the power to shake the heart'.

turquoise ribbon book-mark, grey-green end papers, and cover photo of Kidman looking out over the vista from her cliff-top home in Hataitai – a palette of dark blue, charcoal, and pale after-sunset-coral.

Published after the release of Joshua Prenderville's documentary on Kidman, *The House Within*, we are privileged to be able to immerse ourselves in two strongly moving complementary visual and written texts. In both, she is accessible, expressive, open and one of our most skilful creative minds, motivated to engender her poetry with 'the power to shake the heart'.

The Midnight Plane: selected and new poems includes poetry from *Honey and Bitters* (1973), *On the Tightrope* (1978), *Going to the Chathams* (1985), *Wakeful Nights* (1991), *Where your left hand rests* (2010) and *This change in the light* (2016), as well as twenty new poems.

Unity Books recently launched the book with an enthusiastic audience in attendance. We heard Sue Wootton, the editor at Otago University Press, speak of the inception of the book. Harriet Allan, Kidman's editor for 33 years, launched the work and reflected on her poetry. Dame Fiona Kidman read from her collection and new works.

As Harriet Allan described, the theme that holds this collection together is love. The curated selection of poems follows Kidman's travels, relationships, and reflections on the past and present. Often returning to her Hataitai home and its expansive views, Kidman's conversational style captures many different challenges, such as past love, illness, exhaustion, grief, and re-adjusting after surviving a crisis. I found these reflections, with their emotional honesty and intensity, very moving.

'There is a sudden swift turn in the light,
dusk coming up over Tinakori Hill
at the end of the road. We leave. We hold
each other at the door. We leave. We hold.'

("A Thorndon Poem for Kirsty")

As her preface and documentary show, being made aware of the significance of writing and the power of words came early to Kidman. As a six-year-old child, being nursed for childhood ailments away from her parents, she learned to read and write quickly. A letter written home enabled her release – a lesson that has stayed with her. Being a librarian also fuelled her desire to write:

'until I found my own words and wrote them down'.

("Like everyone who likes to read books")

...the theme that holds this collection together is love. The curated selection of poems follows Kidman's travels, relationships, and reflections on the past and present.

The poems vary in their voice – sometimes reflective, sometimes ribald, each time with changes in mood or theme that amplify the setting, effect and openness. Often self-deprecating, Kidman's humour is playful and fun.

'I have recovered the lost art of filling
a vol-au-vent - the expression means
flight

of wind, wind blown

whatever ...

... murmuring vol-au-vent

the French way under my breath ...

... well Dr Suess I could write

you a whole new series of books

about Green Eggs and Ham now

I have recovered the lost windy art. '

("Vol-au-vents")

Other poems reflect on her childhood, family and friends. The use of assonance and alliteration is subtle and blended into the conversational style, such as in this instance where layering with sounds underpins her memory of her parents' rare expression of affection on a train:

'Still, in '43. When I was three, in a
night train full of Yanks

Shoo-sh-shoo-sh-shoo

He in blue, she in best, my heavy lids
spied hands locked fast

Shoo-sh-shoo-sh-shoo'

("Train song")

The title poem, “The Midnight Plane”, is a metaphor for Kidman’s creative journey. Comprising images of how we experience our existence, there’s a uniquely Aotearoa New Zealand perspective of travelling across our narrow and long archipelago, surrounded by sea, through time. It reflects the unique outlook of Kidman’s home, overlooking Wellington Airport, seeing planes taking off and landing, giving a sense of a bird’s-eye-view of the landscape but also of life events.

The mood of the poem engenders creativity, as though writing a poem is like a night flight where the unknown and familiar converge against a gentle hum with pitch-black sea and shining bright stars. Travelling alone but feeling the presence of those already passed on. Not knowing how far we are from home, yet the approach of the plane to landing is familiar. The poem is a homage to all the flights that have been and all those yet to come, in all senses of the word.

‘Here it comes swooping
against the stars, perfectly poised
above the unruly winds

that still sweep across Te Whanganui-a-
Tara,
above the shadowy sea, over the cliffs
at Massey, above the lids of pastel-

walled houses like mine. It comes every
night,
the last plane before curfew. I like to
watch
people at airports reuniting with those

they love – there was a girl I remember

at International bearing a red balloon
floating on a string, painted

with the words *I love you*, her anxious
smile
hovering and wilting as one person after
another
emerged from Customs until at last

he was there, lifting her aloft
in his arms, and the way the whole
crowd of us began to cheer

because it is human to long
for love to be requited, for us to witness
the evidence that there’s a pay-off

for hope, and so I lie in this midnight
hour
in this cavernous house, thinking that
out there in the dark
some people will be coming home.
 (“The Midnight Plane”)

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

Members' Haiku

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



Untitled – Mariela Durnhofer Rubolino (Artwork created at Morag Stokes's art studio in Waikanae, who provides the material, focus of work, style and inspiration.)

Jenny Polstra

first light
a swallow's silhouette
becomes sky

Sue Courtney

— — . . . touchdown
a godwit pirouettes
around its bill

Anne Curran

youthful limbs
clamber up weathered boughs –
the old plum tree

Desna Wallace

sepia faces
locked in frames of gold
smile forever

Jenny Fraser

letting go
the painting
reveals itself

John Paul Caponigro

dawn stars
retreat into light
taking their reflections with them

Contributors

Felix August grew up in Wellington and currently lives in Sydney, Australia.

John Paul Caponigro is an internationally collected visual artist and published author. View his TEDx and Google talks at <https://www.johnpaulcaponigro.art/poetry/>.

Sue Courtney lives by the estuary in Orewa. She writes haiku for mindfulness and creative well-being, and finds inspiration from nature and the changing seasons.

Anne Curran is a poet who resides in Hamilton. She likes to write short verse forms as times allows. She draws inspiration from experience and observation of everyday events, and natural life.

Colleen Doucette was born in Parma, Ohio. She spends most of her time writing, swimming, and spinning around in circles. They were awarded the Academy of American Poets Collette Inez Poetry Prize, and run a poetry concert series at BATS Theatre.

Sofia Drew (she/her) is a poet currently in Te Whanganui a Tara, where she studies English Literature and philosophy. Her work has featured in *Starling*, *Salient*, and *Symposia*.

Mariela Durnhofer Rubolino was born in Paraguay and grew up in Argentina. Her home and art studio are in Paraparaumu, Aotearoa.

Born in New Zealand, **Jenny Fraser** of Riverweaver – nature lover, musician, artist and poet – lives in Mt. Maunganui. Jenny began writing haiku in 2010, since then her haiku, senryu, tanka, haiga & haibun are published in New Zealand and international journals.

Michael Giacon lives in central Tāmaki/Auckland. This year his poems have been in *a fine line*, *Poetry Aotearoa Yearbook* and *Fast Fibres 12*. He self-published his first book, *undressing in slow motion*, in May 2024.

Rebecca Hawkes is a painter-poet, author of *Meat Lovers*, winner of the Sappho Prize, and head shepherd of *Sweet Mammalian*.

Anna Hoek-Sims is based in Pōneke while studying a MA at the IIML. After travelling overseas, she worked in the book industry which only increased her love of books, tea, and cats. Anna also enjoys cycling while brainstorming poetry ideas.

Amelia Kirkness is a Pōneke-based student and writer. Her work has been featured in publications including *Starling*, *The Spinoff*, *bad apple*, and *Catalyst*. She is also one of the founding editors of *Symposia* literary journal.

Lyndsey Knight plays with collage and writing. Her poetry and short stories have been published in *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Ginosko Literary Journal*, *Landfall*, *a fine line*, *The Listener*, *Mindfood*, and more, with essays in publications at home and abroad.

Rachel Miller is a visual artist and poet living in South Hokianga, with poetry and images in the NZPS and several regional anthologies.

Anuja Mitra has reviewed and rambled about books for places like *Cordite*, *Kete*, *a fine line*, *Aniko Press* and *Lemon Juice Zine*. Her poetry, fiction and essays have been published in local and international publications.

Jenny Polstra lives in the Waikato, Aotearoa, and writes Japanese short-form poetry. Her poetry has been published in online and print international journals. She enjoys shinrin-yoku and beach walks with her partner and keeshond.

Sara Qasem is a Palestinian writer and spoken word poet based in Ōtautahi. Her work explores grief, resilience and advocacy for marginalised communities, using storytelling with the hope to inspire meaningful change through shared human experiences.

Zia Ravenscroft is a transsexual menace, actor, writer, drag king, and student. He has previously been published in places like *Starling*, *Cordite*, and *The Spinoff*, among others. In 2023 they performed at the National Poetry Slam Finals.

Sam Reichman is a writer, translator, and visual artist. His work has previously appeared in *Washington Square Review*, *ArabLit Quarterly*, *Cagibi*, and elsewhere.

Diane P. McCarthy lives in Te Aro Wellington in the old Hannah's Factory building. While her novel, screenplay and poetry remain unpublished, Diane continues to write and care for her mokopuna with her husband Chris.

Joshua Toumu'a is a queer Pasifika poet and uni student living in Te Whanganui-a-Tara. He was the winner of the 2022 Schools Poetry Award, and has featured in *Starling*, *Symposia*, *The Spinoff*, *Bad Apple*, and elsewhere. Recently, he performed in *Love Letterz* at the 2025 Kia Mau festival, and attended the writers' wānaka for the 2025 New Zealand Young Writers Festival.

Kieran Trainor (Pākehā, Tangata Tiriti) is a painter, writer and researcher living in Te Whanganui-a-Tara on unceded Te Āti Awa/Taranaki ki Te Upoko o Te Ika whenua. Their research is centered on the lessons of ecosystems and how these lessons can create better relationships to people, land and culture. Their paintings focus on light ecologies, abstract representations of how light moves in space, heart and mind.

Whaitiri Tua-Warbrick (Rangitane/Ngati Raukawa) is a Palmerston North based poet/writer. You can find him in *Starling*, *Nine Lives Poetry*, and at @maoribytheriver on Instagram.

Desna Wallace is a published poet for both adults and children. Her novel *Canterbury Quake* was a finalist in the Children's Choice NZCYA book awards. She enjoys playing with words.