

a fine line

TE RŌPŪ TOIKUPU O AOTEAROA
NEW ZEALAND POETRY SOCIETY

Summer 2026
Scene



Featured Poet

Xiaole Zhan

Featured Article

Sarah Lawrence

Cover Art

Brooke Kennedy

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Quotation of the season

'A kletic poem is a calling, both a hymn and a plea. It bends in obeisance to the divine, ever dappled and shining, and at the same time it calls out to ask, *When will you arrive? Why is your radiance so distant from my eyes? You drop through the branches when I sleep at the roots...*' – Selby Wynn Schwartz, *After Sappho*, (Galley Beggar Press 2022)

Contents: Summer 2026

Editorial

Cadence Chung

Featured Poet

Xiaole Zhan

Featured Article

Sarah Lawrence — The Intersection of Poetry and Performance /
Playing Violin for *Amélie the Musical*

Poems

Robin Peace — *Whose country*

Zac Hing — *Andromeda*

Hāwea Apiata — *The Carving Shed*

Carol Maxwell — *All the colours of leaving*

Loredana Podolska-Kint — *Sonnet on a speck of dust*

Isi Unikowski — *The Cowboy Leap*

James Denmead — *Bastien-Lepage's Jeanne D'Arc*

Mary Kelly — *Always the Moon*

Sherryl Clark — *Eggs*

Perena Quinlivan — *After the Heat*

Brett Reid — *Dialogue*

Reviews

Moon too Heavy by Jac Jenkins, reviewed by Linda Collins

Voices from the Barn, reviewed by Lynn Jenner

Haiku

Anne Curran, Greg Judkins, Jenny Fraser, Gareth Nurden, Oshadha Perera, Kanjini Devi

Youth Blackout Poetry Competition Winners

Victoria Manford, Mishika Mehta, Ella Pilkington

Cover Art

Brooke Kennedy

Contributing Art

Brooke Kennedy — *Carousel*

Ella Quarmby — *Emergency*

Reihana Robinson — *The Body at the Scene*



Cadence Chung



Cadence reading from *Mad Diva* at her curated concert of songs, opera, and poetry.

Tēnā koutou,

I've been the managing editor of *a fine line* for almost a year now, and it's been a huge privilege to read all of the submissions for the past four issues. It's been a joy to get to know repeat submitters, and also hear from brand new voices. This issue's theme of *scene* was especially delightful in the vast range of interpretations I received. This issue includes a conversation with a painting of Joan of Arc, a sonnet on a speck of dust, a woman drinking wine alone in Portugal, nearly-gothic farmlands, boys diving at dusk, and even a conversation in Middle English. *Scene* in this issue refers to landscapes, conversations, paintings, theatre; performativity and perception are explored in equal depth.

Our cover art by Brooke Kennedy reflects this: I came across the piece a while ago and knew it would be perfect for this issue. The wintry vista inexplicably features a bed in its midst, with a lamb sprawled in its sheets. This reminds me almost of a theatrical set; a constructed reality made up of isolated parts. A poem, too, can be set-dressed in such a way, consisting of fragmentary conversations, views, or situations, made whole through the lens of art.

Xiaole Zhan's guest spot in this issue takes an ekphrastic leaning, consisting of a set of poised yet clear images. Nostalgia and opacity feature in equal measure. And then Sarah Lawrence comes in with a gorgeous reflection on being a poet and actress in this era, and what it means to put yourself on display in more ways than one.

In our reviews section, Linda Collins examines Jac Jenkins' (who has featured recently as a reviewer!) *Moon too Heavy*, while Lynn Jenner ponders upon the anthology *Voices from the Barn*.

Our next issue has the theme of *Secret | He toropuku*. We want to read poems that whisper to us; that speak of unexpressed (or perhaps inexpressible) yearning, of scandal, of drama, of gossip. Please send submissions through our Submittable by the 10th of March 2026.

Happy writing, and have a wonderful rest of your summer.

Ngā mihi,
Cadence.

Featured Poet

Xiaole Zhan



New Year's Poem

This year, I spent December
in the city I grew up in
where every day
could have happened any day;
a kid stumbling from Countdown
in the summer heat, carrying
nothing but a bulk pack of toilet rolls
with both arms;
rough beach waves
beating like the wingwind
of a truck passing by your skin;
and then the minute hand as if rehearsed
lurched into the year with the fireworks.
All along the Auckland skyline
everyone had the same idea
twenty, thirty explosions all
at once, like so much sparkling dust.
Oh, my solitude.
The Sky Tower smoked afterwards
in the mud-eyed dark like
a candle lit for a father.

After Brueghel

The ports reported a shortage of nouns.

I walked through the world
as through a child's encyclopedia.

Parapets occurred.
Everything was almost.

Icarus fell. Ploughing
mattered. All the world's

trees were scallop-clung
pilgrims. No one could tell

a choir from a forest. A fisherman
lamented: I've spent my whole life

saying one thing stands for another!
A poet lamented: I've spent my whole life.

Sadness is a noun like any other.
The last unanswerable

is placed on the table, beside
the empty vase, casting

its own shadow.

Still life with flowers

I've grown my own bone home. People come and go, but I never leave. I've lived here my whole life. Though the lilies, the liver-lilies will outlive me. And the tap-drip in the dark stomach of a well no-one can see into is collecting coins. While northwards, the lungweeds have become unlovable. And my! The heart needs gardening. The dead leaves gather under somebody's tongue. And always, a chorale quivers through the wrists, melodies & counter melodies, in and out, quiet as locked jewels. The cemeteries are gridded like calendars. The nocturnes are non-eternal. The voices are conductorless, ears to one other, death-close. Remember you are body-heavy. Remember your own toes. Remember, remember. The coins will rust. The milk will sour. The sopranos will asphyxiate, one by one. February after February, the moths will flicker lively until the last tooth.

Year of the Snake

The first time
I weighed myself
I was a teenager.
I was worried
I was underweight
for a blood drive.
People told me
I was pretty
in high school.
Thinking back
all I hear is
skinny. Being
diagnosed with
depression at 20,
I was prescribed
Lexapro. I gained
close to 20kg. Being
diagnosed with
PCOS at 22,
I was prescribed
weight loss. I
starved myself.
It didn't work. I
went off Lexapro
& starved myself
again. This time

the weight came off
like limbs. See how
I did that? A poem can
survive things a body
can't. I hacked off
my arms, my legs,
my extra chin
just to see the scale
drop. This
was always
my destiny,
being born
in the year of
the snake, to
become
all torso.

And I did, I did
change my life.

I snapped
the neck of
gravity itself
& called it

enjambment.

What do bodies

become in a poem
but symbolic
against their will?

Look here —
I set a cello
on fire

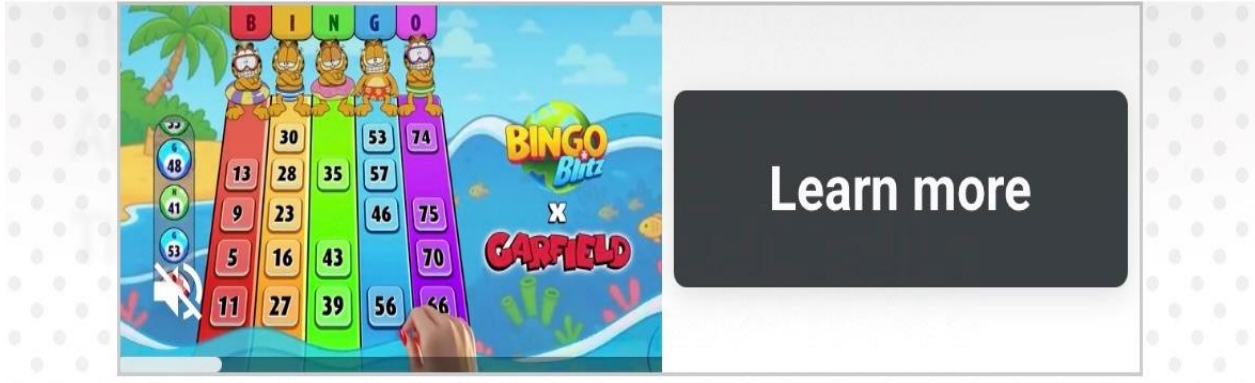
& call it
a woman.

Featured Article

Sarah Lawrence

The Intersection of Poetry and Performance / Playing Violin for *Amélie the Musical*





They say times are hard for dreamers
And who knows, maybe they are
People seem stuck, or lost at sea!
And I might be a dreamer
But it's gotten me this far
And that is far enough for me

iPhone screenshot of the lyrics to “Times are Hard for Dreamers” from *Amélie the Musical* / Ad for Bingo Blitz

I am an actress
This is a poem:
Each night of November I walk
To and from the Hannah Playhouse
To play the violin behind a black mesh curtain
While musical theatre singers put on French accents
And perform all two and a half hours including interval
Of the West End musical adaptation
Of the hit French film *Amélie*

(Local critics describe *Amélie the Musical* as
'A delightful break from the realities of life')

The body of an actress does not know
What is and isn't real
This audience should know:
I already
Watched you read this
Like a camera
Since I was 19 and magick
I have fought to believe
A poem to be worth much)

When I was 19 and a self-proclaimed poet I liked to say all kinds of disparaging things about Hera Lindsay Bird. I only did it because I was an actress. Hera Lindsay Bird was a voiceless character in the show of superior undergraduate taste I was performing to the 4-6 people in my life who cared. Five years later, I think about Hera Lindsay Bird at least once a week: specifically, the opening of her self-titled debut in which she describes writing poetry as 'pissing your pants...extravagantly...in a supermarket aisle...age 14,' which was once funny and is now haunting, especially since Hera Lindsay Bird is not even an actress. She has probably never bought a ringlight from K-Mart out of professional necessity, recorded herself saying 'this is my path, Dad,' in an American accent for money, clowned academically, played the violin for *Amélie the Musical* just to be near a theatre, or shed tears for her imaginary dead children in front of a green screen. No, Hera Lindsay Bird has never pretended to be a cow for a room of silent high schoolers and so perhaps cannot understand the full magnitude of what it is to piss in public.

In my second year of drama school I was reprimanded by a tutor in hui-ā-kura for saying I don't think being an artist is as important as being a doctor, since art does not save lives. Actually, I was told, theatre can save lives. Three years later, I was a fresh graduate with a string of mysterious illnesses, one of them being a particularly persistent eye infection the chemist told me was an allergic reaction to theatre haze. I couldn't afford a real GP at the time, but I would frequently go to the hospital to sit in a room full of second-year med students and pretend to have various ailments so they could rehearse their skills of performed empathy on me. When each student was finished with the consultation, I was asked to give them feedback on their execution of the role of Doctor, which is how I came to understand that my tutor was right: theatre does save lives. Still, the last time I was invited to the hospital, I sat on an orange chair under white fluorescent lights, unable to act my way out of the huge red streaming eyeball on my face while the med students watched me like a leper. I was thinking I would quite like to ask them some real questions. Unfortunately, I was busy pretending to be a 50 year old man called Richard who was trying to get on ozempic to lose weight for his high school reunion.

A ticket for *Amélie the Musical* costs
Between 40 and 60 dollars
There are 263 seats in the Hannah Playhouse
Which sell out
Almost every night
Meaning
Every night an average of 13,150 dollars
Is spent on watching
Amélie the Musical
No one has told me yet
The exact numerical worth of
The 68 hours of my life
I have spent playing Amélie the Musical
Meaning it will be significantly less than
Minimum wage

(No one in this theatre has seen me
Play a whore with a heart of gold
So being in this theatre is like watching
A man I'm in love with slowly
Kiss someone else
I don't know what happens onstage in *Amélie the Musical*
I sit on the mezzanine where I can't see the actors and
Play violin behind a drape through which
The audience can't see me
But I can see them
I can turn them all to
Actresses through the black mesh and
Watch)

After 5 long years of being a scholarship kid at an all girls' private high school in Christchurch, the only logical way forward was to abandon all my artistic pursuits, enroll in a law degree at Victoria University and transform into a miserable loser who opened Russian novels at the Weir House dining hall in the hopes it might prevent my new friends from talking to me. My grand plan to be of use to society was quickly bulldozed by a very dangerous drug: Anna Jackson's Introduction to Reading and Writing Poetry course. Being from Christchurch, I wasn't aware that reading or writing poetry was something you were particularly allowed to do.

Within a few weeks, I was diseased. I read Ashleigh Young's "Ghost Town" and it chased me down the street. My legal education turned from boring to unbearable. I was no longer capable of rote learning information about the separation of powers when I could instead stay up all night trying and failing to get to the bottom of Jericho Brown's "Duplex". The world was suddenly awake, and talking to me, and what the world wanted was to be turned to cryptic stanzas for online poetry journals. I realised then that most people are wrong, about everything: reading and writing poetry is probably the meaning of life. Armed only with poetic notions and the complete audacity of a 19-year-old, I joined a youth theatre company, made a bunch of clearly world-changing physical theatre shows with names like *Eat Your Landlord*, and stopped attending my lectures. The first person I called to tell I got into drama school was my mother. She said, 'Oh. That's a shame.'

Here are some things I know
About worth:
In two weeks my city spent approximately
210,400 dollars on tickets
To *Amélie the Musical*
40 dollars spent on a cheap ticket
To *Amélie the Musical* might save
A child in Gaza from death
I often audition for ads
Which would earn me 10,000 dollars
The starting rate for screen actor in this country is
750 dollars a day
During *Amélie the Musical*
I auditioned for a TV show which would earn me
320,000 dollars

(I spent most of this year living on
405 dollars
A week
I earn more money

Than many full time artists I know
Some weeks I have an extra 40 dollars
I don't use to save one child from death)

A few months into drama school, I stopped reading and writing poetry. In fact, for reasons I can't articulate without poetry, the idea of it disgusted me. There's nothing like reading poetry in a room full of people who do not read or write poetry to make you starkly aware you have been wetting yourself in a supermarket. It wasn't until years later I could bring myself to go to readings again, and often, they still disgust me. Just as often, they remind me that actually, hearing in verse about the idiosyncrasies of someone's flatmates can be inexplicably inspiring and life-affirming. It seems to me an immense act of hope to look at the ugly mess of adult existence and convert it to witticisms and small epiphanies. Even so, in January 2025 I am rejected from every of funding body I apply to. Even so, I walk into a random cafe to ask the manager if I can put on a play there for free, and he says, 'sure,' and hands me the keys. When there is a bomb threat in Newtown, a couple of my actor friends have to go watch *Amélie the Musical* to pass the time. They don't know I'm there. Even so, they enjoy the show. After staying up all night at the afterparty I sit in Rogue and Vagabond with my high school friends who are junior doctors and woodwork teachers and hope I am not the one who is wrong, about everything. The intersection of poetry and performance is a collection of anecdotes which do not make sense.

Everyone in *Amélie the Musical* is pretending
To be from Paris
No one in France
Gives a shit
No one in *Amélie the Musical* talks about
The government
I worry that
To people my age
Language is so violent
Which might be why
We don't read many poems
All of this to say

I find *Amélie the Musical*
Incredibly moving
It is full of Disney-esque ballads
About a girl who won't risk
Connecting with anyone
During the songs I don't play
I've been watching so many reels
It feels culturally relevant
I've been so exhausted
Some nights it makes me
Cry in the dark

Once, in a youth theatre company rehearsal, my friend who plays the double bass said, 'Ugh, poetry – we get it, things are like other things.' It is true that all things are like other things. For instance, being an actress and a poet in the year 2026 is like pissing on a housefire. Like watching a musical because of a bomb threat. Like finally going to the optometrist and finding out the mysterious eye infection you've been joking about is actually bacterial keratitis and you could have gone blind. But you don't go blind. You pay another week's rent pretending to be a man called Richard, begging for ozempic. Like walking on water. Like a disease. Like David Seymour on *Dancing with the Stars*, I have been pissing in public for a while now. Still, ask me about the best moments of my life and I will tell you about rehearsal rooms. Still, I will have to write a poem.



Amélie the musical – the audience through black mesh, Hannah Playhouse 2025



Emergency – Ella Quarmby

Robin Peace

Whose country

What is a farm but black steer on a broken
slope, a sprawled lamb, a road
beside a ravine in the impossible
mints of spring. It's paddocks of lush and a fence
akimbo, a mountain gauzed in white,
air bitter with snow. Sleet in November.
Up here, on the horse, on the survey,
he feels the cold like a sober
of chilly words culled from the ground.
All around there's a hair's breadth
whistling a sleeping dog.
It could be insult. It could be honesty.
It could be the lie of the land
unpicked by a hoof. Agitation comes
toward risk. Echo plunders the hills
with a roll of thunder, rain strikes
puddles with prodigal force.
Down there, the white ute glimpses the road
snaking ahead on the whine of tyres,
ripped feathers of straw torn
from the bales on the back,
that lad from the roustabout gang
speeding out from his past,
from long nights sleeping in huts.
A shepherd shouts. A tractor farrows
the turf. A huntaway barks, puts
grip on the nose, turns the flock
to the gate, closes the day as dusk
brings the outside in, opens a door
on beggarly accounts. Empty boxes,
musty seeds, remnants of packthread
where blatherskite mites dance
in the worsted floors. Hail blusters
the roof. It's a galvanised
truth of bare bones. But it's an owned
home with a tableau view –
see the lights splinter and catch
in the window glass – fracture and spill.
It's a headlong colliding a bigoted bridge
eclipsing that boy and all he's already lost.

Zac Hing

Andromeda

Looking up, he traces the shape
of Andromeda, chained by her mother

to the sky. Earlier that day, a flock of birds
headed east overhead, while he

attempted to sketch the leaf-like pattern
on the back of a cabbage-tree moth.

In the dark, after zipping up his tent,
he imagines patterning his own body

with stars, disappearing against Andromeda
like a cabbage-tree moth against the forest.

Hāwea Apiata

The Carving Shed

For Bob Koko's whakairo damaged in Cyclone Gabrielle

E tīraha kiri kau ana
ngā tinana rākau rā,
kua ngū katoa te whare whakairo,
he mahi haehae kei te haere.
Tē mōhio au mēnā
he kaupapa whakaoho,
he take whakamoe rānei.

Ka hīkarohia he kiko
e te ringa rehe, hei tirotiro māna,
kia ine i te pakeke me te pirau.
Me poro atu rānei i te
pūkorukoru me te whakahou
anō i tōna āhua?
Me waiho rānei kia waipawa
me te whakahoki i ōna
mōmōhanga ki tōna whenua tipu?

Kua kino kē pea te karawhiu
a te arero koi o Tāwhiri.
Kua mātītore rānei ngā pou nei
i te riri o Tamanuiterā.
Māna, he pānga kirimoko noa iho.

He tākuta, he korona hoki
te kaiwhakairo—ko tāna
he tūtohu rongoā, he pānui aituā.

Bare bodies lay silent
on make-shift slab tables,
prepped for dissection.
I am unsure if this is
surgery or autopsy.

Skilled hands perform timber biopsies
to measure age and atrophy,
deciding whether to scoop
the rot from limbs and skulls,
surgically reconstruct,
arboreally transplant—
or let dead flesh fall away
and return skeletal remains
to familiar soil.

Maybe these frames have taken
too many lashings from
Tāwhiri's sharp tongue.
Too worn with split
wounds and lichen scabs.
Still, maybe the infection is
only skin-deep.

Today the carver is both
physician and coroner,
prescribing treatment or
announcing death.

Carol Maxwell

All the colours of leaving

There is nothing glamorous
about Portugal today;
castles and ramparts litter the skyline,
disintegrating apartment blocks
fall off cliffs and miles of fishing line
tangle in the rocks.

A woman in a pink dress
finds the yellow cafe on the roadside
and sits in its shadows.

Drinking vinho verde, alone, at noon,
her journal is out and one hand moves
from wine glass to pencil to spoon.

Her dress is too tight and too short and
she looks like she knows both this,
and that the blue envelope
she now opens
is venomous.

She rereads this latest letter
from a man she left because
he refused to move
and who now follows her
flinging tirades beneath postmarks.

She empties her glass.

She walks into a white sky,
past a donkey burdened with bags
left parked inside parking lines.

Loredana Podolska-Kint

Sonnet on a speck of dust

On public stage, a speck of dust is bright
as shrapnel, in the glare of critics' eyes,
from drowsy nooks, in velveteen disguise
to tear across the manufactured night
seen only for the beacon aimed at forms
of more proportion, higher-reaching shapes.
Gravity is soft, the speck escapes
beyond the public door. Enigma swarms,
dust and its sources linger when they cleanse
the costumes, to coquette uncaring lens,
and stirs in the tumultuous applause.
The hand which swats from mask and fairy-deck
one lingering blot, a sisyphian speck,
may first suspect the spotless for a fraud.

Isi Unikowski

The Cowboy Leap

In this old Western you're watching, you'll see me
perform what stuntmen call 'the Cowboy Leap':
from the saloon's first floor
into the flailing scrum below,
or down from a treacherous crouch
above the bank where I'm lying in wait for the hero.
The trick in the Cowboy Leap is to hold back a little,
in velocity and arc, to calibrate the fall just enough
so as not to draw attention to oneself.
Instead of a low-slung gunbelt, my trousers sag,
dragged down by phone and wallet
as I join the posse or a gang.
Cut to the saloon scene.
I'm at the next table, slightly out of focus. I gesture
at my companion with my fork
with just enough animation to show
that the extras in a scene must always agree –
it's only the protagonists who differ.
No dialogue for me, though; apparently,
this isn't the movie of my life, after all.

James Denmead

Bastien-Lepage's *Jeanne D'Arc*

In this grey tone, iris or burying shawl,
you may stand with me too.

Later, fireworks tonight when I sit
ricochet the siege gun sounds over
and over on a belly of air,
which must reform even from the fills
of your yarn-work or portraiture.

French is known from the windowsill;
two to tease about the fireworks.
By the tone in their relief, of centuries,
they are proud of you and stay deep
in the old greens of a vision.

Knowing you before, by sycamore
and luminosity I was confronted
in your eyes; paintings of plum hung
for visits in now's night-theatre,
the glass box in my hands, of world
trapped into the black.

It's all here, a slippery surface and you,
are a picture and lead player –
you may pick up the tarnished war hat
seeing yourself of any type,
a comédienne; anyone you wish to be
is your trick on those who reprise
your name over centuries.

Mary Kelly

Always the Moon

It does not matter which direction

I weep. It does not matter

which direction winds blow

your bodiless form. There

along the cupid's bow of Pākuratahi,

our tarpaulin still held together

by a punctuation of knots

& our heads a semicolon.

It does not matter how

my beloved, as I weep, runs

our beater further into oblivion.

I do not mind my surrender

to the water's lip. Stranded at the

rivering Eigengrau of forest.

It does not matter the condition

in which I decipher the coordinates

of your echo. All the places you eddy.

I dream you into a desire path. Behind

an amputated limb of red beech, quiet

in the presence of kererū, you talk

my tears off a cliff. Look, you say,

how goodness has wings

& chooses to stay.

It does not matter

which direction I follow dusk

& its gossamer on wet pebbles. I kick

at the shore of remembering. Your name

snapping in a nearby bush. Water cleavers my feet.

Still. It does not matter in which direction

I am far from you, our tarpaulin,

& the moon, always the moon.

Sherryl Clark

Eggs

From here I can see the eggs
warm this morning from the hens
and my cup of tea, cooling.
Faded light spreads across the cloth,
shadows the shape of his hand
curled around the sheets of newspaper,
touches his frayed shirt cuffs.
I hear the cat hiss and slide
past the door, prowling hungry.
Fresh-poured coffee sings the air
mingles with bacon, smoked and crisp.
All this through the keyhole
of this cupboard where I will
be locked until evening
and the dark lets me out.
I long to feel the eggs again
smooth and fragile in my palm,
to close my fingers against
the possibility of cracking.

Perena Quinlivan

After the Heat

Polynesian boys dive at dusk,
laughter ricochets off the wharf
into air thick as warm syrup.
They circle the fat-cat boats,
sleek as reef sharks,
while I sit on the balcony,
gin sweating in a jade-green glass.
I bite the lemon's bitter edge,
your silence coiled beside me.
Once, this hush held us together.
Now the sun has slipped,
and far out, shadows chase
the pulse of their own dark tides.

Brett Reid

Dialogue

‘We limit the comely parts of a woman to consist in foure points, that is to be a shrewe in the kitchin, a saint in the Church, an angel at the bourd, and an Ape in bed’ – George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesie* (1589)

Modir: It maketh me sorwful to see thou weep
 agayn and agayn. Prithee, do not tarry
 another day. For thine own sake.

Doughter: *(Wipes her eyes.)* What of the preest? Notice of the pledge
 hath been nailed to the door.

Modir: *(Scoffs.)* I will take care of God’s gifte to wommen.
 I holde no candel for hym. Alwayes his plate out.
 For what? To have our sinful ears
 straught by tales of fealty and golden spires.

Doughter: And the huntsman with his answering houndes?
 Will he not treat me as sport at the asking of my ypsoused?

Modir: Those dogs from hell have stomaks for braynes.
 Ere the huntsman wakes – as be his custom,
 the efnung’s mead will maketh him a slow sun –
 I shall journey to the northe woods,
 wounde a white stag, afraie it toward the Greet Cold.
 As sure as I wouldn’t honey my hand for a bear’s mouthe,
 those houndes will follow blinde the blood-let.
 So, doughter, be sure thou go southe.

Doughter: *(Looks doubtful.)*

Modir: We've spake of this. Thou understondes
 he'll take more than thy hande?

Doughter: *(Nods.)*

Modir: You have hear'd the wommen –
 their eyes like wet coal –
 holde court with tales of tribulacion.
 At first wanted well by their husebonds,
 they now retire with stones in their pockets
 and dreame of ryvers.

(Pause.) What have I alwayes taught ye?

Doughter: Land, croppes, sows. All else is nought.

Modir: And?

Doughter: Keep thy pouch tied tight till tax be paid.

Modir: Goode. Fetch thy bagge and garnymment. Tis tyme.

sorwful – sorrowful; *priethee* – please; *tarry* – linger; *straught* – stretched; *yspoused* – betrothed;
efnung – evening; *ere* – before; *garnymment* – cloak, coat



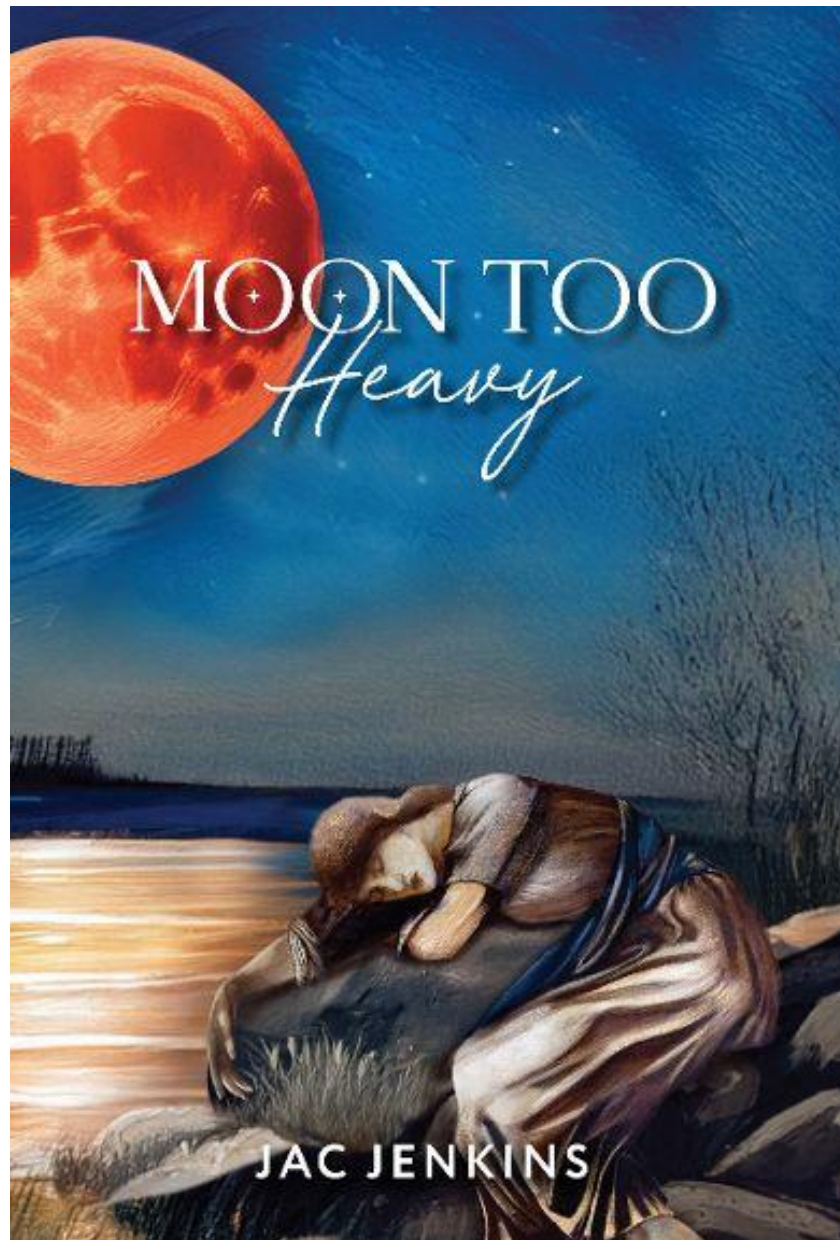
The Body at the Scene – Reihana Robinson

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Moon too Heavy – Jac Jenkins

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inside | walls crawl with mould | curtains sulk
in corners | a woman crouches in front of lazy flames | wan | not
so much warm as

uncold

(“Raising the fire”)

The opening poem, “Raising the fire”, takes us to hearth, home, and an unhappy woman in a corner. There’s no man in this dullness; presumably he is out in the light expecting to come home to a tidy house. The woman is unnamed; she could be everywoman.

I first read Jac Jenkins’ poetry when we both did an MA in Creative Writing in 2017. The course combined poets and non-fiction writers. I was writing a grief memoir, and had not studied poetry formally. This was a class that included now-critically acclaimed young poets who took this non-fiction writer’s workshop critiques in good heart, though my feedback mostly comprised feelings, and recollections of the 70s poets of my youth – a drawling Sam Hunt, and David Mitchell introducing me to the lower case ‘i’.

There were some emerging poets in my class closer to my age, and they included Jenkins. We non-young ones often found ourselves doing the washing up after workshop afternoon tea on Wednesdays. There, in the cramped kitchen in Bill Manhire House, up to our elbows in soap suds or wielding tea-towels, talk turned from writing to our domestic lives; children, husbands, houses; the cosy murmur of women doing household tasks together.

How ironic that years later I encounter Jenkins again in another domestic setting, this time one evoked in her debut collection, *Moon too Heavy*. Jenkins’ focus is on patriarchal expectations shaping what it is to be a woman. Think oppression, child-rearing, cleaning, obedience, social constructs. Jenkins highlights the misogyny behind these expectations with the book’s epigraph, from Pythagoras: there is a good principle that created order, light, and man and a bad principle that created chaos, darkness, and woman.

The opening poem, “Raising the fire”, takes us to hearth, home, and an unhappy woman in a corner. There’s no man in this dullness; presumably he is out in the light expecting to come home to a tidy house. The woman is unnamed; she could be everywoman. The scene is domestic, but not cosy; there are mouldy walls, sulking curtains, the fire is ‘lazy’ – as if inviting masculine critique of slovenly housekeeping. The time factor is slippery, with a reference to settler terms such as ‘slate frame’ and ‘hearth’, yet the use of ‘we’ – ‘we swirl over the pale flames’ – invites in a contemporary reader. Indeed, we ‘rouse’ the flames. Jenkins implies these are flames of rebellion.

Jenkins, who has a Bachelor of Veterinary Science and an MA in Creative Writing, dismantles Pythagoras’ claim of the chaotic, dark, female mind with poetry that moves back and forth between that, and a female mind that is rational, scientific, and a creator of order and light.

At times Jenkins’ register is formal and dives into the intellectual – ‘What, sir, is the difference between *infinity plus* / and *infinity minus* on a scale of nothingness’ (“Arguing with Milosz”) – and at other times it is earthy, unexpected, sinuous and sexual – ‘One of the walkers wears a placard and nothing / else. JESUS LOVES SLUTS. Sometimes her left nipple flicks out from behind.’ (“Slang”)

Jenkins’ work arises from her own life experience, coming of age in the later years of the feminist movement. “Slang” also maintains the rage of those years:

I glance to my right where my husband, who is not my daughter's father, keeps pace with us. He is here because *The Penguin Thesaurus of Slang* lists many more derogatory words for *woman* than *man*.

There's a hopeful aspect, in that the next generation is marching for a cause, and that the speaker's male partner is on board.

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However, for me, the strongest poems are "Émilie" and "Tres", drawing on the real-life Émilie du Châtelet, born in 1706, who defied the expectations of the times to become a mathematician and physicist. Jenkins brings to life the essence of Émile, a French woman, the author of a famous essay on the nature of fire, which Jenkins uses as a motif. Du Châtelet also wrote about Newton's theories and established that the moon was 70 times denser than he had believed. Cue: Jenkins' title, *Moon too Heavy*.

The moon and its pull on tides have often been written about in terms of a feminine persona. Jenkins unites the scientific with the reality of womanhood:

Three men keep
a flicker of inclining light
on a woman forming

and reforming Newton
in French, who ignores
her clenching womb

until a daughter is born and placed
on a geometry book.
("Émilie")

Jenkins drives home the tragedy of this duality in "Tres", describing how Émilie functions within the expectations of society at the time – 'knows how to flirt' – yet can 'divide / a nine-figure number / in her head'. The ultimate tragedy, outside the realm of the men around her, is that she knows '... how to die / post-partum'.

In addition to Jenkins' book in 2025, another that same year is Dame Fiona Kidman's career retrospective, *The Midnight Plane*. It also explores domestic settings:

I'm encased between the kitchen walls,

While all the house is sleeping still.
Trim and neat, my house is full of other people's
Dreaming. Piles of ironing, flat and folded
Are testimony to my day's endeavours.
Black pits outside hold only silence,
Or wait – murmur in the void.
("The baked bean flutters")

This 1975 poem, as with Jenkins' 2025 opening poem, shares the domestic setting of the house and a critique of the female role in that sphere. But here, the subject has subsumed herself to the housekeeping role, and to 'other people's dreaming'. There is no fire smouldering amid the discontent, but something undefined, a 'murmuring'.

Jenkins and Kidman provide a continuum: the latter, raised in a more restrictive era; the former, finding her way in a very different society to then, but with those restrictions still chafing.

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It's interesting, too, to compare *Moon too Heavy* with another recent collection, Alison Glenny's */slanted* (Compound Press, 2024). Glenny, like Jenkins, has a muse who was a real-life historical figure – Australian mountaineer Freda Du Faur. Born in the 1880s, Du Faur was a feminist and queer at a time when lesbianism was seen as a psychological disorder. Glenny's approach is experimental, and the presence of Du Faur forms a narrative. However, these final lines of Jenkins' "Raising the fire" remind me of something the two collections share:

... we swirl over the pale flames | rouse
them to blaze | not so much conflagration | as cautery

Both poets use language to deal with emotional pain, cauterising the wounds, with the poetic process itself scarring the experience into a new shape. Glenny, for example, echoes the misery of Jenkins' room 'crawling with mould', and transforms it:

a mountain in the scullery
and dampness in all rooms
~
covered in fur, a hill is purring.
("Appendix: Séance Notes")

While *Moon too Heavy* sits outside much of current liberal dialogue, it needs to be read on its own terms. This is poetry exploring the bounds of a speaker's particular experience of the burden of societal expectations. Just as the moon has a waxing and waning, Jenkins' book plays with dark and

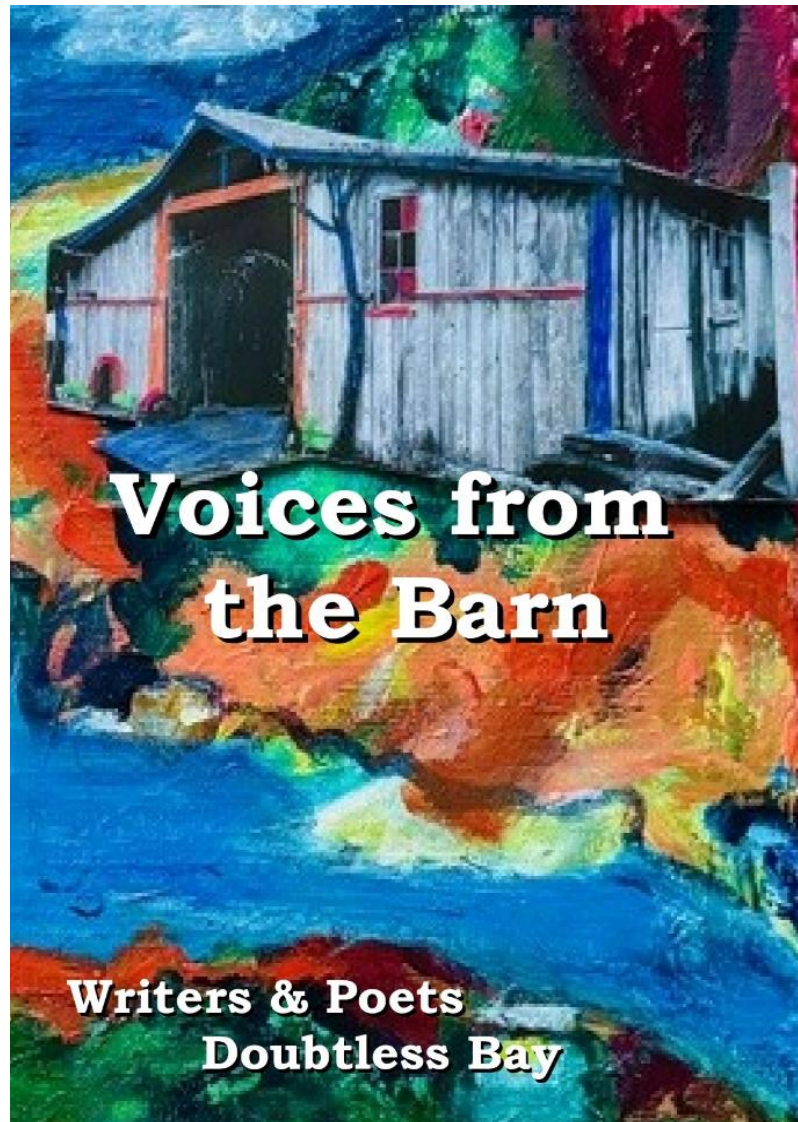
light through an astute balance of logic, research, and the imaginative chaos that creativity involves. It celebrates that women aren't sulking in corners now. But a cold, hard fact remains: someone's still got to do the dishes.

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

Lynn Jenner

***Voices from the Barn* – Edited by Prue King**

Northland: Writers and Poets Doubtless Bay, 2025. RRP \$20.00. 110 pp.



The best way to look at this book is to look at the title. *Voices from the Barn* is an anthology of 86 pieces of writing by Writers and Poets Doubtless Bay, a group of 33 people who have met weekly since 2023 to write and to exchange ideas about writing. These are the voices. The writing in the anthology is a mix of prose stories, memoir, poems, and lyrics, divided into nine themed sections including “People and Places”, “In & Out of Love”, “Nature’s Call”, “Barn Tardis” and “Body and Soul”. If you believe, like me, that every person is a whole world, this is a book for you.

The Barn is a music venue set on rural land in Taipa, just north of Doubtless Bay, in Northland. It has comfortable, homely furniture, a stage, a warm and friendly host, and a feeling it is hard to describe except to say that there is no glass in the windows, the sun shines a lot because it is Northland, and when you are sharing writing there, it feels as if you are among friends.

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Marie Gallyer describes the Barn in her poem “I don’t think”:

But here in this place, this place called The Barn
the people, the vibe and the musical space
all hold inside a gem
of dignity, love and grace.
 (“I don’t think”)

The initial impetus for Writers and Poets Doubtless Bay came from Jackson, a poet, who found themselves in Mangōnui and wanted to create a writing community there. The group thrived with Jackson’s support and has now produced this, their first anthology, edited by group member Prue King.

The writers include people who have had their work published and people who are taking up writing creatively for the first time. There are also people who have been writing in different genres and have now turned to a new form. Writing, and then sharing your work either in front of a live audience, or in a book, takes courage. As one of the writers, Jen Whittington says in words to her song, “Ye Olde Barn Ditty”,

Here’s a drink to the wordsmiths who share their
ideas
Who bravely expose both their joys and their fears
It’s in this good place we expand and we grow
For we test and we nourish the words that we sow
 (“Ye Olde Barn Ditty”)

The writers all live in the general area of Doubtless Bay and the poems and prose have a strong sense of the Northland environment. Yes, there are poems about the sea, the hills, the rivers, trees and birds. Boyd Goodwin’s haiku “Oceans and Oldies” brings the sea and people together:

Current lines, ripples
Hint of the wonder beneath
Like an old face
 (“Oceans and Oldies”)

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Jen Whittington's "Kaitaia" is a love song to the town:

Kaitaia has a humility I like.
It is a place for people who appreciate life and its
complexities over posh facades and money.
Sure, there's always room for improvement.
But just secretly we're lucky to be here.
Kaitaia, a taonga, a place to stay.
("Kaitaia")

There is beauty and community. But the place is not all benign. Prue King's poem "Washing Day" describes a dog attacking a woman as she hangs out her washing.

He came at her hard
no growling
propelling his massive head
at her neck
blood hitting the concrete path
before her head did
("Washing Day")

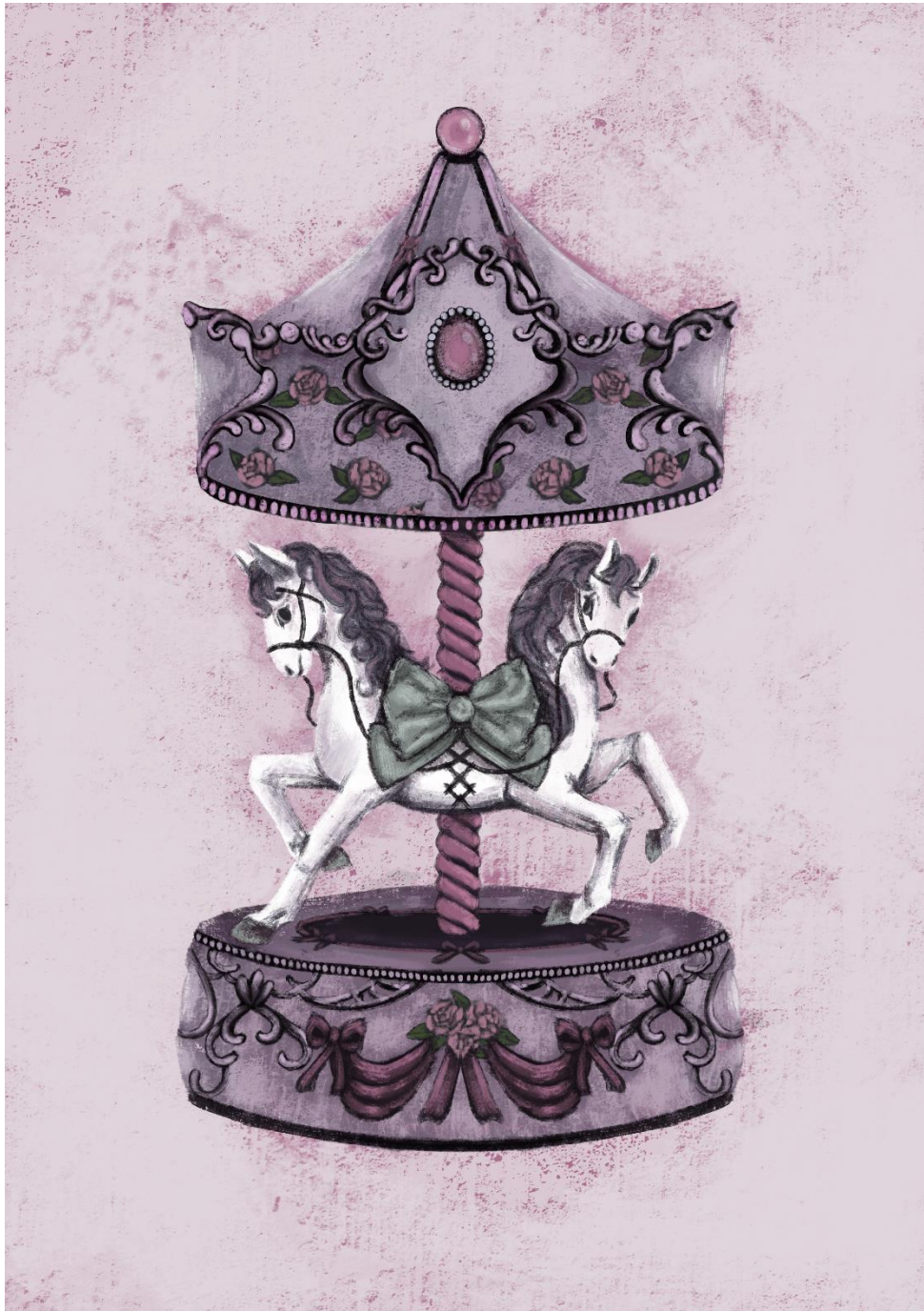
Voices from the Barn is a bit like Kaitaia. There is a place for everyone in this book and everyone's story is worth hearing. The text on the back cover is a perfect summary of the contents: 'A collection of heartfelt poetry, prose and lyrics from New Zealand's Far North'. Whether you love Northland, or you have never been, this book will be a taste of the place.

Contact lisaspicer67@gmail.com to purchase.

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*.



Carousel – Brooke Kennedy

Anne Curran

in a pink sky
the tremor of a naked branch –
morning breeze

Greg Judkins

waft of paraffin
with warm waxy tears
light like a child

bedraggled flag
the contrite morning sky
believes a wild night

Jenny Fraser

light slips over
sand tussock
the way of your smile

Venus close
to the crescent moon
fishing boats catch last light

Gareth Nurdén

returning tide
a castle surrounded
by stars

Oshadha Perera

driving lessons –
the way dad smiles
in the rearview mirror

Kanjini Devi

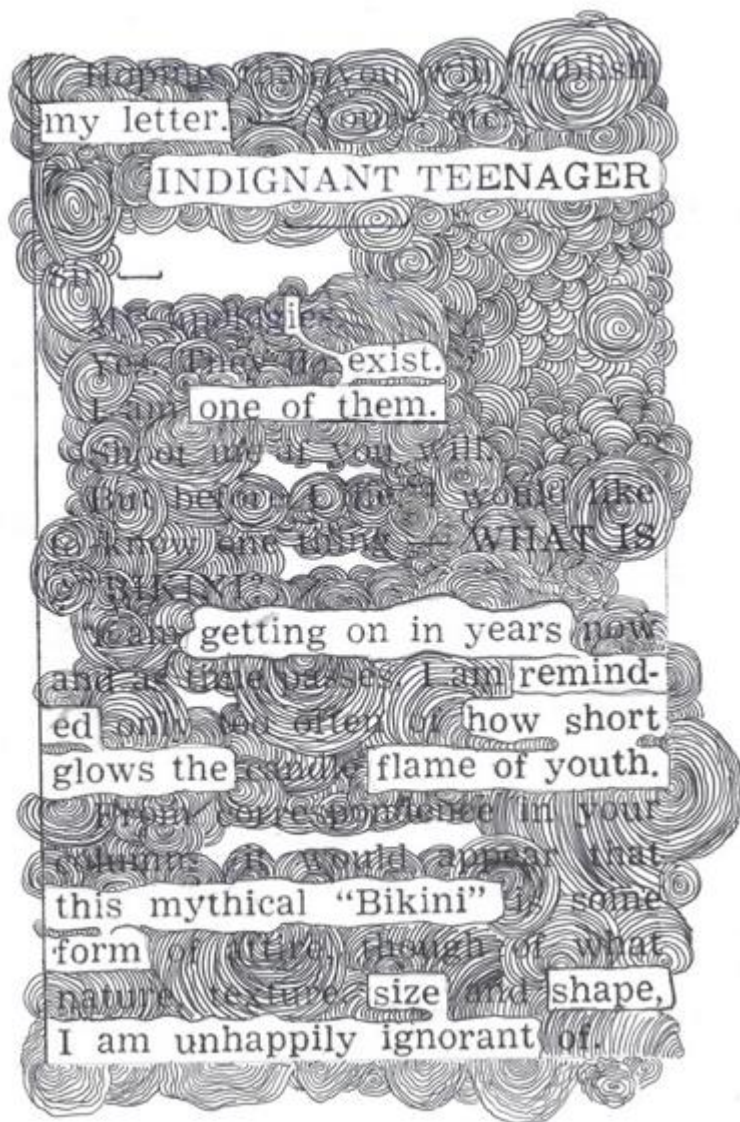
quarry garden
echoes of Ave Maria
from the tunnel

Youth Blackout Poetry Competition Winners

Judged by Hebe Kearney

First Place: Victoria Manford

Hobson Point Primary School, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland



'...I selected this piece because of its harmony of form and text. I enjoy that the whole page isn't covered, that attention is paid to punctuation and each selected word is clearly highlighted. The pattern emphasises the shape of the poem, and draws the reader's eyes to its flow...the spiralling pattern communicates the sort of whirling thoughts this poem hints at – the confusion of being a teenager...in dialogue with the original text,...each word and pen stroke here feels necessary, and part of a united whole – an excellent example of blackout poetry.' – **Hebe Kearney**

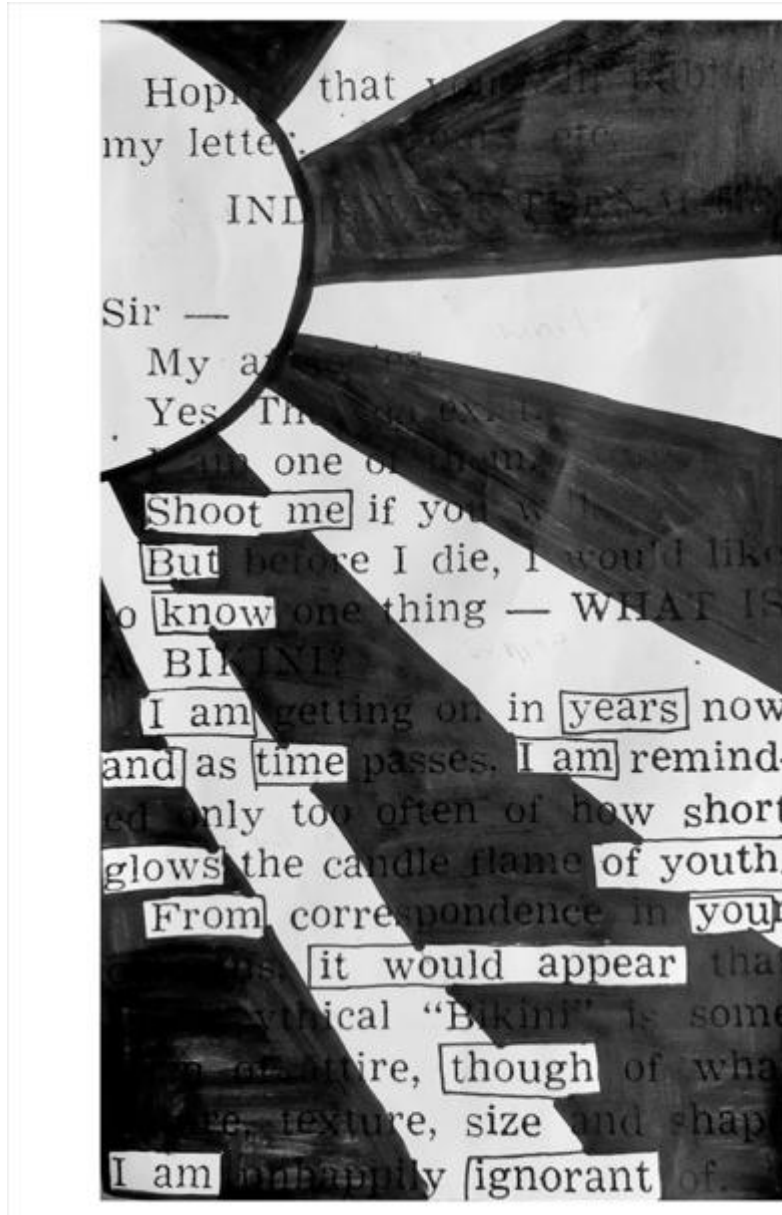
Runner-up: Mishiko Mehto



'If I loved the last piece for its considered harmony, I love this one for its destruction... [it] does a beautiful job of capturing how, while the sentiment [of the original article] may seem outdated now, it still represents...real pressures that teenage girls face. The added text focuses on having or not having a 'crush', as either could be met with derision. This is a very powerful piece in its message and execution, and also a beautiful demonstration of how you can create great blackout poetry digitally just as well as with pen and paper!' – **Hebe Kearney**

Third Place: Ella Pilkington

Huanui College, Whangārei



'...This piece follows the bold opening 'shoot me' with 'I am years / and I am time'. This fabulously poetic sentiment seems to inform those arguing about the morality of teenagers that they will soon be outlived, because time cannot be halted, even if individuals can...Several other entries used the original text's 'candle flame of youth' to influence the illustration, but I agree with the author that the sun is a more apt metaphor – the sun won't stop burning anytime soon, and neither will awesome young people!' – Hebe Kearney

New Zealand Poetry Society / Te Rōpū Toikupu ō Aotearoa united with Blackout Poetry Aotearoa to offer this Poetry Contest during October/November 2025 for poets, 12-18 years. Certain advertisements from the 1940s – 1970s reflecting concerns of youth at the time, provided foundations for the poems. Full judge's commentary and competition details can be viewed [here](#).

Contributors

Hāwea Apiata (Ngāti Kura, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Toa) is a Waikato-based writer & curator. He completed an MA in reo Māori lit and has writing in *Landfall Tauraka*, *Takahē*, *Turbine* | *Kapohau*, *Mayhem*, *Quick Brown Dog*, *Poetry Kiosk*, *PŪHIA*, & *Huia Short Stories*.

Sherryl Clark writes poetry and fiction, both for adults and young readers. She lives in Whangarei and works part-time as an editor.

Linda Collins is the author of a memoir, *Loss Adjustment*, and a poetry collection, *Sign Language for the Death of Reason*. Her poetry and prose has appeared in *bath magg*, *Mslexia*, *Cordite*, *Lighthouse*, and *Short/Poto: The big book of small stories – Iti te kupu, nui te kōrero*; and is forthcoming in *Poetry Aotearoa Yearbook 2026*.

Anne Curran is a Hamilton haïjin. She loves to write short verse forms. She draws inspiration from everyday life and events, and natural phenomena.

James Denmead is a poet and part-time philosopher working in Auckland, Aotearoa.

Kanjini Devi lives in the Hokianga. Her published poetry in various journals and anthologies can be seen online and in print. She has taught Yoga all her adult life, and is the present haiku editor at Under the Bashō.

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 & international journals.

Zac Hing (he/him) is a writer from Aotearoa. He enjoys meeting cats on the street and cloudwatching.

Lynn Jenner lives in Waipapa in Northland. Lynn's fourth book *The Gum Trees of Kerikeri*, which won the 2024 Kathleen Grattan Poetry Award, will be published by Otago University Press in March 2025.

Greg Judkins is a retired doctor who has abandoned his profession and embraced his love – writing poetry and fiction. He has published a collection of poetry, and had individual poems published in *Landfall* and *Shot Glass*.

Mary Kelly is an Aotearoa-Canadian poet. A current MFA candidate at The University of British Columbia, Mary's work can be found in *Ensemble*, *Starling*, *Yolk*, *League of Canadian Poets*, and elsewhere. You can find more of her work at www.marykelly.ca.

Brooke Kennedy is a Canadian-born artist based in Wellington, currently honing her skills in concept design and illustration at Massey University. Brooke has a passion for art across different media and is primarily inspired by dreamscapes.

Sarah Lawrence (she/her) is a poet, actor, musician and playwright who graduated from Toi Whakaari in 2024. Her theatre company, Society for Little Ugly Girls, was awarded most promising emerging company at NZ Fringe. *Clockwatching*, her first chapbook of poetry, was published in 2023 as part of the *AUP New Poets* series, and her writing can also be found in *Landfall*, *The Spinoff* and *Starling*.

Carol Maxwell's poems and essays have been published in magazines and anthologies in NZ, Australia and England. Her first collection, *The Geologist's Daughter*, was published in 2024. She lives in Blenheim, Aotearoa, with her husband, garden and boat.

Gareth Nurden was born in Newport, Wales, and has had pieces of haiku and senryu published in seventeen countries worldwide.

Robin Peace Since retirement from full-time work, Robin has published two collections (2018, 2024). Individual poems have been published in: *Ōrongohau | Best New Zealand Poems* (2025), *Persimmon Tree* (2025), and *The Spinoff* (2024, 2023).

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).

Loredana Podolska-Kint unpacks her mind through writing rhymes and walking among trees. Her work has appeared in *Circular*, *a fine line*, and *Tarot*, and will be in the New Zealand Poetry Society Anthology as the winner of their 2025 International Poetry Competition.

Ella Quarmby is a student at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington, studying English. She is a poet and painter appearing in *a fine line*, *Mayhem*, and *Poetry Aotearoa Yearbook*.

Perena Quinlivan (Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Ranginui, Waikato-Tainui) is a Tāmaki Makaurau-based poet and art critic who works in the area of Māori economic development. Perena's poetry has appeared in a range of journals.

Brett Reid lives in Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland, not far from the former site of 'a square lava block building where for years a family made the best of all cough lozenges'.

Reihana Robinson. Scottish/Arawa/Ngāti Whakaue/Ngapuhi is a writer and artist living between the Coromandel wilderness and western Massachusetts. Her first collection of poems appeared in *AUP NEW POETS 3*, her three volumes of poetry are *AUE RONA* (Steele Roberts), *HER LIMITLESS HER* (Makaro Press) and *BE THE RISING HUMAN* (Off the Common Press). She has held artist residencies in Red Wing MN, and the East West Center, Honolulu HI.

Isi Unikowski lives in Canberra, Australia. His collections *Kintsugi* (2022) and *Re:Vision* (2025) are published by Puncher & Wattman, New South Wales. His published poetry can be viewed at <https://www.isiunikowski.net>.

Xiaole Zhan (詹小乐) is a Chinese-Aotearoa writer and composer based in Naarm. Their work features in Auckland University Press's *New Poets 11*. They are a 2025 Creative New Zealand Fellowship recipient, a 2025 Red Room Poetry Varuna Fellowship recipient, the 2024 Kat Muscat Fellow, as well as the winner of the 2023 *Kill Your Darlings* Non-Fiction Prize. Their name in Chinese means 'Little Happy', but can also be read as 'Little Music'.