

# *a fine line*

TE RŌPŪ TOIKUPU O AOTEAROA  
NEW ZEALAND POETRY SOCIETY

Autumn 2026

*Secret | He toropuku*

Featured Poet

*Zia Ravenscroft*

Featured Article

*Chris Tse*

Cover art

*Meiya Takahashi*

*M.T. 1/20*

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**Managing Editor:** Cadence Chung

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#### *Quotation of the season*

‘You have roads whose secrets  
never end. They descend and  
ascend, descend and ascend  
...Walk according to your  
dream’s measure: either a lily  
follows you or the gallows.’

Mahmoud Darwish— from *To a  
Young Poet* (translation Fady  
Joudah).

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*Cadence Chung*



*Cadence in the Italian Renaissance garden at the Hamilton gardens*

Tēnā koutou,

It's hard to believe that it's already autumn! At the start of this year, I moved to Hamilton | Kirikiriroa to take up my place as a national young artist at Te Pae Kōkako - The Aotearoa New Zealand Opera Studio. My days have been filled with coachings, lessons, performances, and rehearsals – so it has been a real balm to have poetry to return to in the evenings. Submission numbers have been skyrocketing in the past year, and it's wonderful to read work both from experienced and emerging poets, NZPS members and new voices.

This issue's theme of *Secret | He toropuku* brought out a deep sense of tenderness across the submissions. We have conversation poems that speak of small, intimate moments, such as Michael Giaccon's "Super Luna", Isabel 玥 Li's "before taking my breath away", Maya Field's "Undersheets", Annabel Wilson's "Wayfinding", and Allison Li's "Higanbana". The speakers wander through the empty streets, hide out near Jupiter, rustle beneath bedsheets, disappear within mirrors. Some poets, such as Lisa Stanley, Freya Turnbull, and Lisa Maule, deliver a distinct bite, while Holly Rowsell, Denise O'Hagan, and Topher Shields lay out crystal-clear and thoughtful images.

Our haiku poets, as always, provide a collection of stunning images. Julie Bates and Jenny Fraser tackle the moon, a perennial subject of poetry, while other poets like Debbie Strange, Cathy Silk, and John Zhang provide delightfully original turns of phrase. We also have a Shakespearean nod from talented young student Eliza White.

Zia Ravenscroft gives us the best of both worlds in his featured slot, which contains both tenderness and viscera in poems that range from long epics to compact postcards. In the featured article, Chris Tse examines the concept of secrets from the lens of being a queer poet. In a review that's sure to make you hungry, Michelle Elvy examines the anthology *Potluck*, while SK Grout reviews Paula Green's *The Venetian Blind Poems*.

Lastly, our cover art is by Meiya Takahashi, who I first encountered as a jewellery maker (in fact, I am wearing one of her lovely necklaces as I write this!). The watery blue cascades of her piece "Sunken" bring to mind a sense of opacity – images obscured by water, or memory, or time. You'll also find two other delightful art pieces sprinkled into the issue.

Our next issue is the winter edition, which is our unthemed student edition. We're on the lookout for a featured student poet, who will provide a slot of roughly four poems. I especially love to highlight high school students in this slot, so if that sounds like you, I'd love to hear from you. Please send submissions through our Submittable by the 10th of June 2026. For the featured student slot, there is a discount of \$5 for two poems – just mark on your submission that you are going for the featured slot. Submissions are free for members.

## Featured Poet

### *Zia Ravenscroft*



## fire season

*i.* this town is on fire.

outskirts of this town are all desert. sky of this town is all orange.  
forest fires on the horizon. someone said arson.  
someone painted the road sign red last night  
and it's all anyone can talk about. this town  
sings the sound of a lighter clicking  
or petrol pumping or sirens; two boys kissing in secret  
or the rugby field or, again, fire. this town is sick  
of the dry grass. the water restrictions. the bone months of summer.

*ii.* it's like the first time you saw him. everything  
was a lightning strike. ok. the drama of it all  
sucks the air from your lungs. you want to be kicked  
in the stomach right out of your weird open-mouthed  
sort of lovecrush. so the rain stops  
falling and you're still that sad. ok. what are we going  
to do about it. drive fast. jump off a bridge  
into the iron hot maw. shove yourself into his ribcage. make  
yourself fit. it should be easy. you're used  
to making yourself fit. to the iron hot maw.  
the burning burning. this knuckle-type  
kiss. your teeth shaking in your skull.

*iii.* i tell myself nothing bad happens here.  
truth is, in fourty different versions of the story,  
he still would've died by the river the way he did  
– with sunhot rocks at his fingertips  
half-lived cigarette between them, the smoke  
not quite behind the mountains –  
in only one is he alive. he wakes up  
on the riverbank and pulls himself up by the cheek,  
a creature of sunburn and freshwater secrets.  
he mouths them quiet into my ear

through my window on the second floor.  
in one version of the story he lives  
and it isn't this one.

*iv.* it's summer it's fire season  
it's sweat, murder, and cutoff denim baby  
and everyone is talking about how  
the car sped away, how the house burned,  
how the river washed you away,  
how the newspaper had our names in it  
we just didn't know it yet.

you always had the face of an angel  
who wanted to do something dangerous.

i dare you  
to stand on top of your pain  
and scream in its face.

the dark is a knife  
the knife is a thing to bite until you  
scream, until the ugliness is inside you.  
a basement kind of fear.

it'll drive me crazy, goddamn it,  
to look in your eyes and know.

*v.* we have already died this  
way, if you'd forgotten. dragged  
over and through the bracken with blood  
leaking out of our ears, cold  
to the touch, our bones yellow.

i hate to bring it up, but  
march was classically handsome  
and pummelling summer only  
to steal what was there. mostly  
leaves and river-findings and must  
i speak of his knuckles?  
yes. you could choke on them.

and remember all the dragging.  
the bracken. the clearing.  
the stones under your shoulder  
blades. we are dense with our own ghosts.  
we are overfed with  
misremembering.

vi. the house went up because something  
wanted it to. we gathered, troop of concerned,  
our mouths full of smoke and shaped  
like billow and burn.  
i reach my hands into my pockets  
and just find ash. i've got a cough  
that won't go away and a hot  
thing in my chest. tell me it'll save us all.  
tell me right before you slipped it out  
and into your own pocket. you hide  
the matches there, you hide the lightning  
that started it all, you hide your love and all  
of ours. we went looking and instead found  
the house fire. it's moving fast, we said.  
look at the wind blowing all that our way  
i'll be surprised if the whole thing isn't gone  
by morning.

## wayfinding

wanna be that good boy desirable for you.  
maybe lift up my shirt & be that way with my soft stomach,  
that way a sunset is right before it happens.  
i'd be any kinda way. that hip grab way, that way i move my body  
like the river at high tide & pull you under. this strange version of a siren i am,  
wish i could be, with the way i breathe in & move  
this way. so i open my mouth & a whole flurry of insects  
come out. do you mean that kind of way? so sexy in my sicken.  
how my eyeballs are martini olives or otherwise brined. give me a tongue  
& i'll fasten the jaw shut just to be a little more presentable  
or follow me into the water. so much of this i hurt to be.  
tender as the fish with its gut open on the rock.

## **baby teeth**

last night i had a dream about metastasis  
& a friend with a name meaning honey who  
wanted my words like i want to eat normally  
& never look in a mirror with my shirt pulled  
up, or how i want to learn piano again  
so i can make something sweet & earnest  
like i did when i was younger & filled  
with the lack of knowing my own name. need  
like a full body ache. got to get  
myself back, whoever that is  
& when he arrives i'll feed him  
from the palm of my hand like a deserving horse.  
need to ride home with wet hair  
in the very back of the car, feeling dangerous  
with no seatbelt & the kind of tired that  
is a victory. i need to be stained with fruit juice again  
or at least have trails of it down my arms  
after making my strawberry yoghurt cake. if you  
look past my halved chest you might  
find a common fig & the wasp it feeds.

## afterparty

it's late, but listen – there's the shape of my friends curled around the sofa bed  
my second favourite mary oliver poem asks *what the world means to us*  
*if we can't trust it to go on shining when we're not there*  
light. glinting off your eyes in the half-dark.  
which is hardly what the world means to me but it is something.  
the neighbour's cat in the garden sounds like a car backfiring  
you're all basked in light. from the candles, from the streetlight, from my phone's torch

tell me you're still alive. i'm not sure i am

listen, for many summers i didn't touch anything  
not the magnolia flowers, not the blackberries growing on the street below me  
i didn't drink from the mountain river, didn't name my desires, my bruises, didn't whisper  
my own name. i sat as the seasons rolled past and didn't see me  
obvious and oblivious, and loved me anyway, and i think  
you're looking up at me now, waiting for your uber in my bedroom.  
six eyes waiting through my yawns, through the leftover vanilla coke in the fridge.  
the moon rises, steady and quiet, as it will every night  
as it will if we were all gone from this world tomorrow  
i think that this is the world: full glass recycling bin, cake trampled into the carpet, eyelids  
shedding glitter.

i am in it with you: late, listening, alive.

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## Featured Article

*Chris Tse*

**The secret lives of poets**



“*Je suis un mensonge qui dit toujours la vérité. | I am a lie that always tells the truth.*”

— Jean Cocteau

Whenever I hear the word ‘secret’, I immediately think of a pivotal scene in the film *The Fellowship of the Ring* when Gandalf tells Frodo to ‘Keep it secret, keep it safe’. He is, of course, referring to the One Ring, an object of unfathomable power with the ability to corrupt whoever possesses it. The extreme close-up of Gandalf’s face leaning into Frodo’s as he utters his instruction heightens the scene’s intimacy and intensity. Frodo has been trusted with this secret; the fate of the world depends on his ability to keep it.

However, when a secret is used as a plot device in a story, we know it’s only a matter of time before it’s revealed. Writers, particularly those working in fiction, pay close attention to how a secret is revealed – it’s integral to creating tension and ensuring a satisfying release for the reader. The same principle can be applied to poetry, either in a single poem or over the course of a collection, but given the nature of poetry being a more compressed form, poets often use other tools and techniques to construct their poems around a secret and its revelation.

I’ve often found myself reconciling two opposing forces when drafting a poem – the power of confession and the human instinct for self-preservation. I’ve relished the freedom of being able to express my inner-most thoughts and desires through poetry, but there have been times throughout my writing life where doing so felt dangerous. It’s this opposition that creates the tension that can give a revelation or a confession in a poem its impact.

Poetry is synonymous with deep emotional expression for many people. It’s no wonder that many people use poetry as a creative outlet to interrogate their feelings or to confess things they could never say to a friend or a loved one. These private thoughts might take the form of poems hidden in diaries or locked in bottom drawers, never meant to be shared widely, but some of us might gain the courage (or audacity!) to share it with the world – on social media, in journals or at open mics. Sometimes I’m astounded by the things poets are willing to reveal to a roomful of strangers, but I can understand why they would want to: it can be a way to remove the power our secrets have over us or to simply feel seen. As Mary Ruefle wrote in her essay “Pause”, ‘being invisible is the biggest secret on earth’.

In an interview with RNZ, Dr Val Bianchi, a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Psychology at the University of Melbourne, discussed her research into the psychological load of carrying secrets. Her work shows how secrets can consume our day-to-day lives and how writing down secrets, when possible, or sharing secrets in a safe space can help people’s well-being.

My own early forays into writing poetry weren’t exactly private – I happily shared most of the poems with high school friends. Those poems didn’t reveal anything that they didn’t already know – in fact, they could’ve been written by any angst-y teenager who listened to too much Alanis Morissette and Nine Inch Nails. It wasn’t until I got to university and began to reckon with my queerness that poetry began to serve a different purpose. It was more than just a creative outlet – it was a way to relieve myself of the pressure of holding on to my biggest

secrets, if only for a moment. Poetry provided me with escape and a way to explore my queerness and my desires by writing about them in veiled, coded terms, burying the truth under imagery and metaphor. Maybe I was naïve to think no one could decipher these clues; maybe they were an attempt to reach people like me.

*HE'S SO MASC*, my second poetry collection, is a book of secrets and revelations that revels in the catharsis of being able to scream from the top of a mountain after years spent whispering to keep my inner world secret and safe. Although many of the poems are proudly and explicitly queer and autobiographical, I still felt a need to protect myself to make it easier to write about coming out and all the good and bad that followed, from my first relationship to my first heartbreak. To do this, I employed the use of masks and characters, which also echoed the experience of moving through the world as a queer person constantly code-switching or trying on new personas. In a way, I was hoping to create an unreliable narrator so readers might question just how autobiographical the poems are. Björk was right – poets have a tendency to lie, even when they're telling you the truth.

By the time I wrote the poem “I was a self-loathing poet” for the collection, I had come out to my family and friends. My queerness was no longer a secret, but something I could discuss and express openly. And yet, there was a lingering feeling of shame or sadness – perhaps a touch of regret for not coming out sooner to embrace the life I had yearned for. I wanted to capture this feeling in a poem while also celebrating how far I'd come, so I could share the emotional journey of keeping then releasing a secret. Humour felt like the best way to approach it because it has the ability to reveal the deepest truths about ourselves while also setting up some expected emotional turns for the reader. It also felt appropriate to counteract the many tortured and melodramatic poems I'd written on the topic. “I was a self-loathing poet” is a poem that doesn't shy away from what it's really about, even though it was born from a world of secrecy and the fear of being exposed.

Poetry's capacity for nuance and transgression makes it the perfect vehicle for exploring and writing about queerness. It's also a form that rewards close reading to discover what is between the lines – what is hiding and flourishing in the gaps? Perhaps this is what draws so many queer people to the form, both as readers and writers. As queer people, we're so accustomed to needing to hide so much of our lives from the people we love while finding ways to reveal them, safely or covertly, to others like us. I like to imagine us as secret agents always on the lookout, gathering evidence of queerness in everything we encounter – keeping it secret, keeping it safe.

## **I was a self-loathing poet (excerpt)**

‘There’s no such thing as the perfect time or the best way to tell loved ones about your poetic inclinations. You need to muster up every ounce of courage in your being and just say it: *I’m a poet*. You could say ‘I write poetry’, but there’s something non-committal about that phrasing, like you only dabble now and then and would prefer not to attach labels to your preferences. Prepare yourself for a full spectrum of emotional reactions, from ‘You’re still the same person to me’ to ‘I can’t be friends with a poet’. And it’s true—some people do think poets lead immoral lifestyles, and that enjambment is the slippery slope to the decay of civilisation. The night I finally told my parents, I had returned home from a book launch, tears streaming down my face, my body attempting to reject the awful chardonnay I’d been drinking all night. At the launch, I was overcome with a sudden need to come clean, no longer willing to hide my drafts in shoeboxes under my bed or a labyrinthine folder structure on our shared family computer that my brother later told me wasn’t as effective as I thought it was. Perhaps it was the emotionally charged poem the poet had read about her relationship with her parents, or maybe I just can’t process white wine like I used to. Whatever the catalyst, it all came out: the creative writing workshop I’d secretly taken at university; the poems I’d published in a handful of journals; and the poet who had urged me to tell them everything. My mother sobbed, her body slumped over our dining table. ‘What will other people think? Our son—a poet! You won’t be able to make a living!’. My father kept his distance, not knowing what to say or do. I can’t imagine he’s personally known any poets in his lifetime, nor had friends whose children turned out to be poets.’



*You are one of us* – Mariela Durnhofer Rubolino

## *Topher Shields*

### **Toropuku: Line Not Entered**

In the shed  
a hammer worn smooth  
where his thumb rested.

Aye.  
Hold it firm.

I do.

The nail veers  
toward the awa –  
a line drawn over what was already named.

At school  
inheritance meant property – acre, wire, title.

Whenua.

In the land record  
one corner reads: approximately.

Because of that  
the fence never meets the water.

Because of that  
the water keeps its own line.

Älskling –  
a sound that closes  
before I do.

Taketake.

I wake and it is already  
in my grip –  
an extra knuckle  
no one signed for.  
Entered.

*Lisa Stanley*

**The coalition government secretly contemplates sending biometric data belonging to the people of Aotearoa to the president of the united states of america**

We the People  
of Aotearoa  
a pimple on a planet  
while we sat  
in blinders  
watching over  
one big beautiful bill  
on our phones  
in our cars  
away from the fire  
that extinguished  
the flame  
of Renee Good  
we sat fluffing our feathers  
water worlds away  
ICE closer.

*Lisa Maule*

**people disappeared**

in the summer

I got interrupted

& in the weekend I play dead under the covers

a war party across the water

I don't see anything

when something goes

it simply drops from view

the cup of tea delivered was lukewarm

& very sweet

I see them glance back

there was no one there

the seeds of disaster brought by wind in the dark

wailing in the brain as free as remorse

I destroy the remnants of the bouquet

the key is above the door

tears and blood long since soaked the land

all they found were the eels left hanging

& they were aware

## *Michael Giacon*

### **Super Luna**

Closer to you  
10% bigger 30 brighter  
let's hide out near Jupiter  
just to the south  
behind a rain bead veil  
no one can see us  
everyone will know  
our elliptical dance  
our perigee embrace.  
Are you still the supermoon  
if you can't be seen?  
Yes.

*Isabel 玥 Li*

**before taking my breath away**

honey palms ahush.  
pink sweat, soft ivy teeth,  
along your cheek to meet me.  
we are skin-to-skin in disbelief,  
massaging out a miracle:  
*but how did you find me –*  
here, bone marrow heat  
baking us under  
summer's dare.  
wet cotton shirts  
give away to gentle  
swoops of stomachs,  
our ribs embarrassed by  
their desperate lattice.  
strawberry-freckled nailbeds,  
four walls of my chest, war  
drums close behind. but  
when else can we make  
a hostage of time?

soon, they'll come for our  
rings and the right to  
pluck petals, make daisy  
chains, link arms,  
forget-me-not.  
for love as  
crime, not  
made, just  
committed.

our laughter, our  
exhale, first, then  
inhale too. ambush  
through innocent air  
life lines losing touch  
sunburnt heel tethers  
finally peeling away  
toetoe angel hair  
taking to the sky  
as if no one had  
ever given us  
names

## sisters

candy floss dream days of being barely a body  
and just a grin of musical chairs, baby teeth, hungry  
hungry caterpillar nursing monarch dreams. the age  
of spray tans, bottle-grey cavities, total girl magazine.  
your perfectly opi'd index finger, looping rollercoasters  
over the words: which disney princesses are we?

before tears dragged our cheekbones in different directions,  
before the backspace key became stuck. before i blinked  
wet staccatos and smashed your red lippie into a stub  
*(but this wasn't enough.)*

before your violet patent leather heels were mysteriously  
dismembered in the garage.  
*(my little palms cold, closing around the garden shovel's  
heavy spine. over my head, spoiled horror movie ending.  
down, down, down.)*

you used to tell me everything was because of the fairies  
in the pantry. we're left home alone now and imagine,  
collectively, nothing.

but i remember those blush afternoons, when i couldn't fall  
asleep. you crossed my arms over my chest, more vampiric  
than sleeping beauty, then pulled the curtain across, floral  
apricot nectar twill. one flourish and wrinkle of your pink  
elbow. my favourite colour, back then, was pink.

## *Allison Li*

### **Higanbana**

At 7, the bell rang  
and I peered up at you  
through the school gate  
with my bottom lip quivering  
as if this scene was fated  
Had I been acquainted with  
legends of the red spider lily,  
I would seize your hand  
instead of letting go

At 27, we are worlds apart  
and I am a budding scholar  
chasing distinction  
at a cost of filial piety  
Seeing you without an arm  
in the dead of night,  
the scientist in me  
rules in stress dreaming  
with wings in my stomach

If I knew you were making  
an eleventh-hour attempt  
to call across the Pacific Ocean  
because I am dear to you  
like your right-hand man,  
I would trade all my honours  
for a chance to shout my love  
until my voice gave out

but I can't catch you now—

For as long as I could remember,  
I followed your footsteps  
instead of matching them

## *Freya Turnbull*

### STUPID GAMES / STUPID PRIZES

figure your lip: sprite spiked

dizzy light

running silver rings around

me.

my mouth has been dry since you met it.

test-tube anarchy, alkali to your ice water, upsetting the  
chemical balance at the gunpowder hours.

180bpm in a green vein, your hip bones spreading like antlers.

i feel so softly for you, even though we look sharp.

i'll strip off the leather til it walks again,

welt stitch sealed hot as breath.

figure my body:                    peer-reviewed

skin flick

scarlet

now figure it as something precious.

the kind of hangover where you can't use mouthwash  
because it burns like last night, clean like a crime scene.

i lived up to my red lipstick and i'll never be sorry enough.

write me a love letter that isn't 'A' to hold to my chest;

i'm not allowed a wound but i'd love a souvenir.

o, philosophers:                    if i tell someone i'm theirs,

will that make me mine?

## *Maya Field*

### **Undersheets**

I think it's kind of funny how you say  
you are afraid of the vastness of time;  
you manage it so much better.  
Is it anything like how the big deep blue sea  
frightens me, but I am the stronger swimmer?  
Or is it like how our Suns are incompatible neighbours,  
but our Moons and Venuses are identical twins,  
so at night, behind the door and under the sheets,  
in hushed voices, we have the same kind of souls,  
the same sea of tranquillity,  
that no one else gets to see? Perhaps so,  
or perhaps these are nice coincidences  
that hindsight and heart-eyes give meaning to.  
I'd rather we believe in the former

## *Annabel Wilson*

### **Wayfinding**

*We are wandering, wayfinding; there is no clear path; this will be found in the process of adventuring...*

— Christine Hatton

Through a hole in the wall at Yummy Jianbing on a cool Queen St evening, we watch an expert flick of wrist and spoon swirl batter like a hieroglyph on the hotplate. We're handed our pancakes, smooth and thin as bat wings. *That's poetry*, you reckon. Shifting to the far end of the park bench in Aotea Square, you say *I can't sit near you because my body's full of static*. Tonight's all frequency, vibration. The buses have stopped running so we'll wander down to the docks, flow with the ghosts of Wai Horotiu to those Tidal Steps they built for the America's Cup. *Water always finds its way. There are ancient networks of streams flowing under all our cities*, you say. *This is the rohe of Horotiu, the taniwha*. Lying on concrete, we speak of 100-year-old eels spawned in the Pacific's trenches, drifting with the currents, a freshwater adolescence, then swimming the darkness beneath these streets to return, finally, to open seas. Let's look for meteors or satellites, or something else, cool and silver, flying

*Previously published as second place winner, National Flash Fiction Day 2023; and in the chapbook dusk & us (Ghost City Press, 2024).*

## *Denise O'Hagan*

### **The looking glass**

A shadowing of the glass, a sudden misting  
as of a breathing past, the turn of a powdered cheekbone  
caught on the off-chance.

How she'd lean in to smooth her hair at night,  
glisten her lipstick in the hall's half-light, softly  
cursing all tight-fisted landlords from here to eternity,

And always stopped at the door to flutter me a kiss  
as she departed at odd hours in high heels. How  
I'd never have swapped my ma for one of those boring ones.

How even now I find myself seeking the wells of her eyes  
in the watery light of other halls, only to be offered  
the mirror's smooth return of me to myself.

*First published in the Strokestown International Poetry Prize website, 2024 (under the title 'Mirror')*

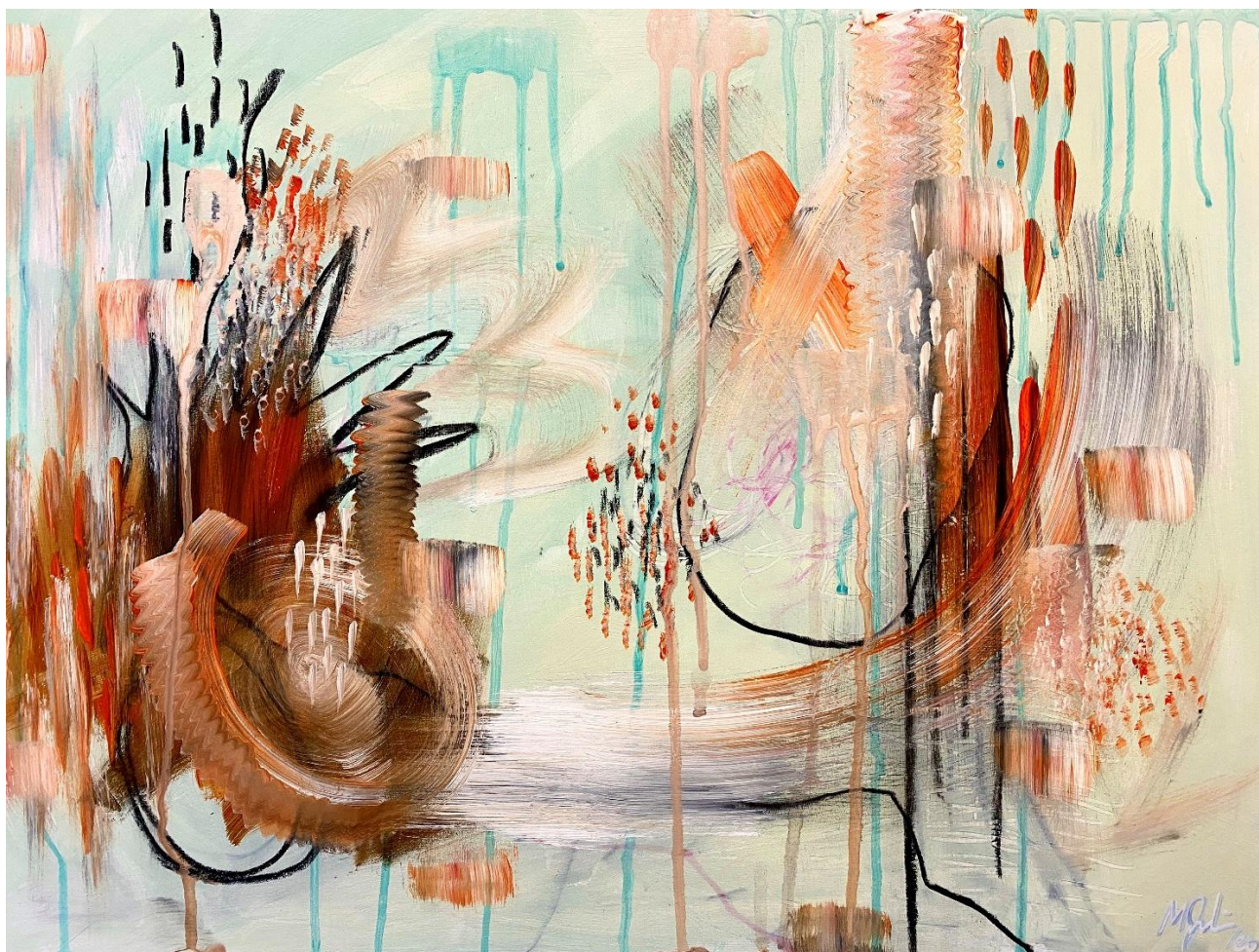
<https://strokestownpoetryfest.ie/strokestown-international-poetry-prize-2024-shortlisted-poems/>

## *Holly Rowsell*

### **i like terracotta and stoneware**

best descriptor  
not quite the same –  
molded and shaped  
each other yet  
remained malleable  
and the grooves  
kinda remain  
and are added onto  
as time passes as we  
change and grow  
as people? also thank you  
for the journal! i'll tell  
you my favourite  
poem via letter  
six months from now

*crafted from a text message exchange*



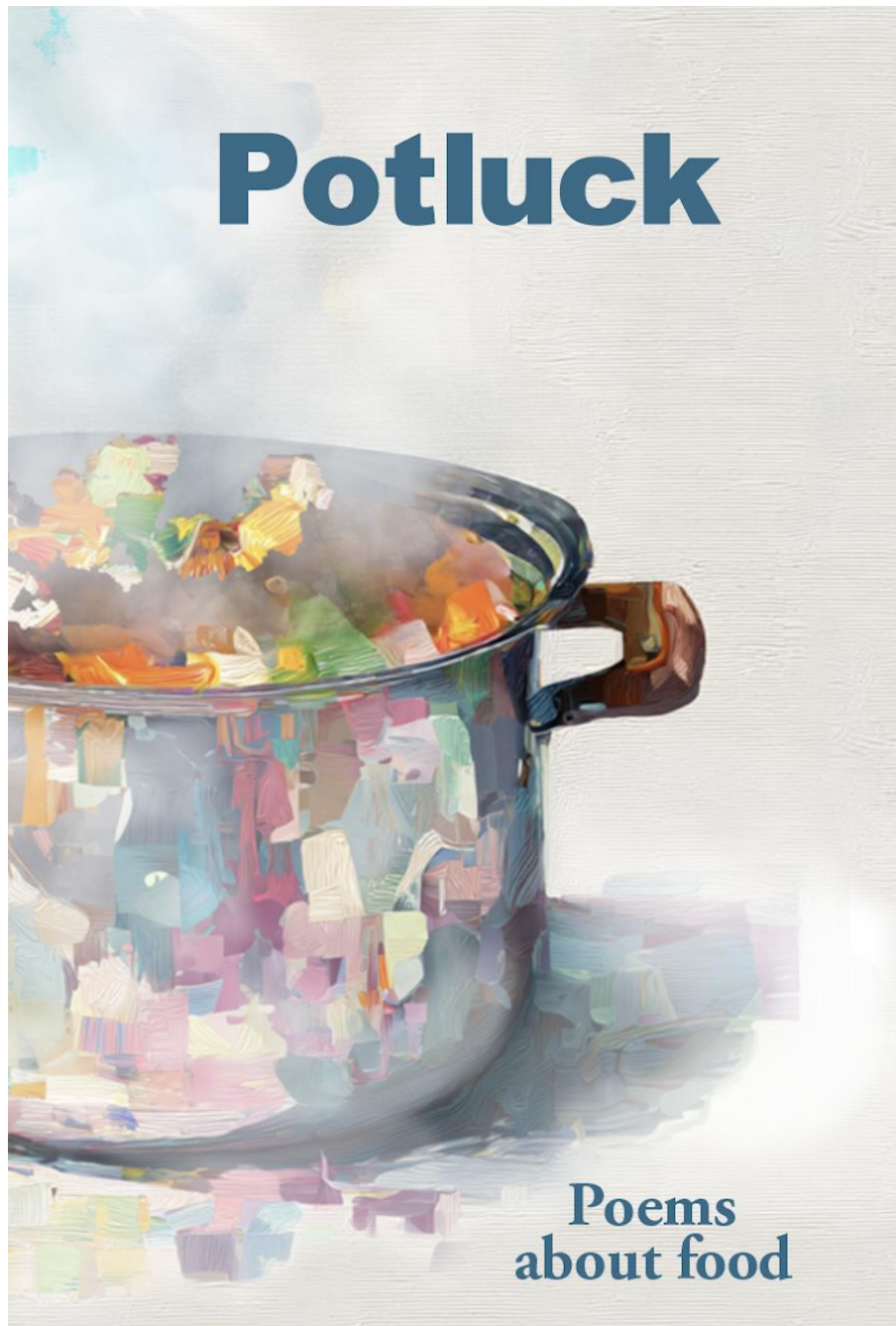
*Koi* – Meiya Takahashi

*Michelle Elvy*

*Potluck ed. Adrienne Jansen et al*

Wellington: Landing Press, 2025

ISBN: 9780473759292. RRP: \$25.00. 225pp.



The newest offering from Landing Press is a collection of poems about food. Poems about food are, of course, not only about food. The subheaders offer hints at what to look for – for example, “Something to grow”, “Something to chew on”, “Something to savour” and “Something to finish with”, the last a poem by Vaughan Rapatahana. Each section takes us into recipes, bites, tastes – and the lives of the poets, with poet notes appearing on each page. The introduction notes that food ‘connects us with culture, history, memory, rituals, celebrations, agriculture, foraging, fishing...’ but also things like hunger, disorder, chemical additives, suggesting this is less comfort food than food for thought.

The book opens with “Pancakes” by Etienne Wain, a poem that comes from time spent with the poet’s grandmother during a family visit in Melaka. It offers a glimpse into family life, and change that comes when the poet’s grandmother cannot cook anymore – togetherness now found in eating papaya.

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*...food ‘connects us with culture, history, memory, rituals, celebrations, agriculture, foraging, fishing...’ but also things like hunger, disorder, chemical additives, suggesting this is less comfort food than food for thought.*

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The ways food connects is a key element in many of these poems, and in that connection there is often quiet beauty. “E kai” by Sonya Kaire Judson is about the writer’s Nana’s banana cake as well as about wellbeing and much more, with a line in the middle that shines: ‘Red,’ she would say, ‘Your hair looks beautiful in the firelight.’ (“E kai”). Many of these poems are about generational gifts, things passed on, ways of carrying the past. Sometimes these things are suggested by a jaunty recipe for Victorian sponge cake (Jane Bloomfield), or by careful listing of recipe items. ‘Each ingredient holds a memory, a story, a piece of my family history,’ writes Hannah Phillips in “All in one dish”. Sometimes generations open a poem, like these lines from “Achchi” by Githara Gunawardena:

My mother and I were fed by her mother,  
Conjuring *her* mother’s woodsmoke  
From a rushing Kawashi gas cooker

(“Achchi”)

And speaking of generations, here we have work by both very young and experienced poets. A haibun by 89-year-old John Ewen takes us to early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Blackball miners, while two poems nestle on facing pages with unexpected observations of poodles and cheetahs, written by Leah Hong, age 7, and Claire Bai, age 11 – and another two poems take on Brussels sprouts, these by 10-year old poets Rahi Key and Emily Jade Barrington.

Recipes and how-to poems abound. In Gabrielle Huria’s “Pāwhara eels at Pokuku”, we are guided through seasons and steps to food gathering, while Renee Liang delivers a different kind of instruction in “Energy recipe”. Laurice Gilbert’s “The dietician advised me to” is a tale of choice, agency and rebellion, and Eleazar Kener’s “Let’s not pretend” is a series of “5 minute depression meals”. On the other side of depression is good feeling: 12-year-old Claudia Anderson delivers “A recipe for peace”; Éimhín O’Shea’s “I am making you soup because I love you” is a recipe for friendship; the poem

quoted on the back cover is Michele Powles' "Hope cake" and Jenny Clay notes the importance of paying attention to small moments in "A wedding gift":

just remember to turn  
the pikelets  
as the bubbles  
start to burst  
on the surface

("A wedding gift")

Humour is also here, from David Eggleton's "Jamie Oliver's TV dinner" ('Never eat anything that just walked in and sat down in the kitchen') to Ziu Tua's "Yummy turtle guts" and Kate Butcher's "How to improve school lunches". The mix of humour with real-life difficulty goes down well when you're writing about grief lasagna, as Sophia Henderson does. Sometimes meals are presented in vivid horror: Lin Youssef's "Bamya" is described by the Syrian poet as a 'classic dish adored by adults and dreaded by kids'. Susan Jacobs' "Snails for dinner" had me cheering for the snail, choking on the indifference and siding with the poet who has now turned vegetarian.

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*The mix of humour with real-life difficulty goes down well when you're writing about grief lasagna...Sometimes meals are presented in vivid horror...*

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Some poems demonstrate the importance of form. Take the shape poem "Rice" by Preeta Menon, which, like the food itself, is plain and of substance:

A  
grain  
of rice  
is shaped  
like a bullet  
the bullet feeds  
graves; the grain  
of rice feeds  
fields and  
lives

("Rice")

Robin Peace's "What lemons and oranges prove about Israel's occupation" is a found poem, based on a 2024 article in *The Washington Post*, and shows careful curating of the article's contents to bring it to its form on the page. When the poems are personal-political, they are particularly poignant. Erin

Donohue's "Hunger" takes us into a world of need, personal and historical-political, examining death and starvation in 16 layers. M.M.'s "Madleen" references the vessel raided by Israeli soldiers last year in June as it was delivering aid to Palestinians in Gaza, and the story of the boat's name (in the author note), honouring Madleen Kulah, the first and only fisherwoman in Gaza, gives power to the poem.

Meanwhile, Manjit Grewal's "Saturday morning at St Peter's" is noticeable for the collective and meaningful 'we'. The 'we' voice is strong in several poems, in fact: M.A.'s "Having, not having" reflects on a family's personal struggle, arriving from Syria and not finding the land of plenty, while the 'we' suggests many who share this experience. Nikeel Kumar's "What we know" has simple structure and form, yet the burden of what is known and not known strikes a deep chord by the end (she is another young writer, a Year 11 student who arrived in Aotearoa from Fiji in 2023).

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*This collection is a view to our urgent times; a collection about food is, necessarily, about the collective need to survive.*

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There are quite a few poems for and about Palestine, about people facing difficulty, about people who wish to do more. Trish McBride's "Difference" reflects a personal and spiritual search for justice that many are feeling these days. This collection is a view to our urgent times; a collection about food is, necessarily, about the collective need to survive.

Others pay close attention to rhythm and sound – this is, after all, a poetry book. Take Rebecca Ball's "Midwinter Christmas", which opens 'winter hangs in the spokes of a spiderweb' ("Midwinter Christmas") and continues a delicate threading of words and images to the last note of light. Harry Ricketts' "Survivor's fridge" offers a listing of things on the cool shelves but holds together with tight spacing and careful placement, leading to the punch of the last line. While Ricketts writes of losing his wife, Michael Hall writes of his mother's Alzheimer's in two poems that sit on facing pages, delicate in their arrangement, 'the potatoes thock / unquietly moiling' ("Left on the stove") on the left, a chopping board's 'strange hieroglyphs' ("Mum's chopping board") on the right. These, too, are survival poems.

Our lives are written in poems. Michelle Zhao's "Pizza, across the world" is the story of a long marriage. Kerry Dalton's "First food" speaks for the early (and silent) stages of nurturing life. And "When I leave here..." imagines a first meal after confinement, penned by a man in Unit 9, Te Whare Manaakitanga, at Rimutaka Prison: 'I will use that first meal to share with them/what it means to be back in their lives' ("When I leave here...").

The personal narratives are aplenty: Diane Brown's tally of giving thanks (or not), Kirsten Warner's conversation with the egg man, Janice Marriott's observations of citrus. Also Apirana Taylor's planting of kūmara in the aptly named "e tipu"; here the lines cascade down the page, glide us into the sensation of earth, taking us deep into generational connection with the soil:

when i plant kūmara i feel  
something strong and deep  
as i furrow the rich mounded  
earth with my forefinger  
and settle the tender

sensitive shoots to bed  
row upon row i tuck  
them in puku down  
lay them to sleep  
beneath a blanket  
of earth, a sense of  
another time over-  
comes me, when the  
kuia planted the shoots  
ngā tipu, it was known their fingers  
were wise and gentle

(“e tipu”)

Of course, some poems just make us hungry, laying the table with the varied foods on offer in Aotearoa: Rangī Moanaroa’s “Celebratory food, marae food”; Jian Zu’s “The Lunar New Year feast”; Emily Luisetti’s “Lemon meringue pie”. It’s also worth noting poems that include languages besides English, serving up more richness. Majed Burhan’s poem in Arabic; Jian Lu’s poem in Mandarin: yes – more, please.

The book opens with a whakatauki, and it’s a good place to end here:

Nāu te rourou nāku te rourou  
ka ora ai te Kaupapa

Your basket, my basket  
Together will sustain us

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

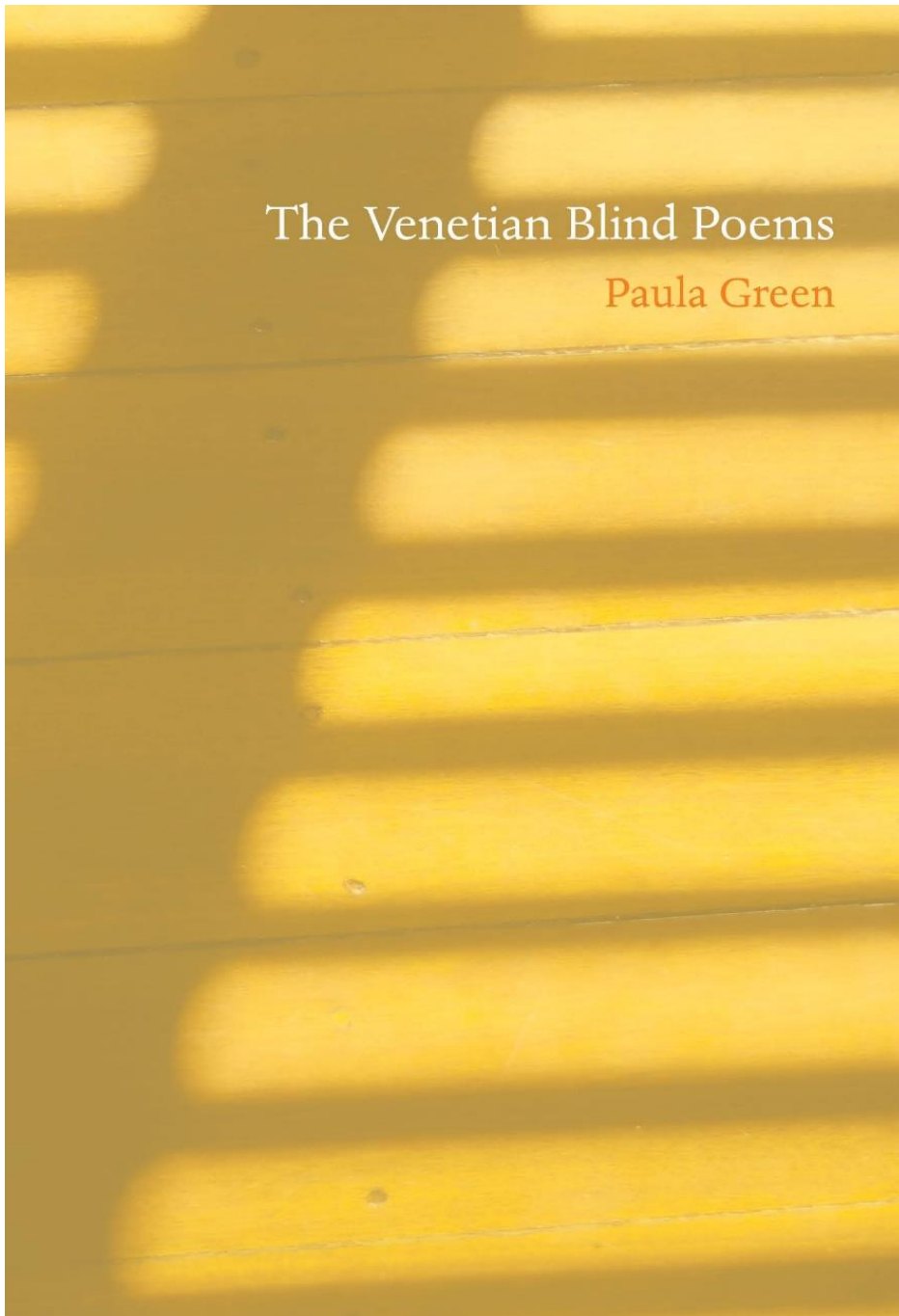
*SK Grout*

***The Venetian Blind Poems – Paula Green***

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Wellington: The Cuba Press.

ISBN: 978-1-98-859595-5. RRP: \$30.00. 98pp.



‘For the last few years, after my bone marrow transplant, I have been travelling along a rocky recovery road and have devised various mental and physical aides to help. I recognise my energy jar is small and picture each morning as a patchwork quilt.’[1] *The Venetian Blind Poems*, by much-loved, much-awarded and multidisciplinary poet, children’s author, blogger and national taonga Paula Green, is the first collection she has written and published in the wake of her cancer treatment. The poems are small windows of sensory observation of a hospital and post-hospital world.

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*...each poem is formed into a small block of text, a patchwork-like shape, reminding me of the traditions of prose poetry and haiku in their spare and sparse style, saying only what is necessary to the moment.*

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Divided into two sections – “The Venetian Blinds” and “The Open Window” – each poem is formed into a small block of text, a patchwork-like shape, reminding me of the traditions of prose poetry and haiku in their spare and sparse style, saying only what is necessary to the moment. The first section, interpreted as the world of the cancer ward, is where the patient in treatment and recovery looks out at the world through small slits of light:

Everything uncertain  
is placed out of reach  
beyond my stretching arm  
and peeking eyes (...)

Some days the pain is so  
intense, like a clinging dressing  
gown (...)

(p. 43)

The speaker is constantly looking out, both visually and with imagination: ‘A triangle of the domain’, ‘The moon is visible through the blinds’, ‘Today I plant a happy garden / in my head’. But this observation is always tempered through ‘a morphine nightmare’. The language in the opening section is surreal and unsettling – ‘pain box’, ‘inedible’, ‘a rickety bridge’ – the world is askew and distorted through this intensity of the present moment.

The telephone in the room  
rings and I can't reach it  
It keeps ringing and ringing  
out of reach and is covered  
in a metre of dust  
It's a metaphor  
Nobody knew it was there

(p. 36)

Outside, there is an 'albatross soaring as high as the moon' and workers that look like ants 'with secret lives' all listening to the Muttonbirds' love song to Auckland, "Dominion Road". There is freedom and movement outside; the speaker's imagination perseveres despite, despite – but we are always drawn back:

but when I am in the thick of it  
all I focus on  
is managing the thick of it

(p. 25)

The attention to detail in each poem is precise and delicate. Observation comes from inside to what is happening outside the speaker's body, but everything exists within the present tense movement from one moment to another, the minutiae of the minute.

In contrast, the second section has a curiosity and future-focused shape to it: 'The cucumbers are ripe for picking' – what the world outside the hospital bed can look like.

Today I am wearing grass  
slippers in the sand

I am wearing silver  
fins in the clouds

I am wearing new cells  
I am hosting a battleground

(p. 77)

Through careful choices, Green actively shifts the language and tone of the first section into the second section's 'well-thumbed novels', 'Slippery light', 'a breath of cloud', 'The light is sweet talking'. The voice and observation skills remain the same, but there is a subtle shift inside the speaker towards the reader; it is not overly performative but requires the reader to pay close attention.

The mountain sleeps  
but soon it will whisper  
me awake with comfort chants

(p. 61)

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*Throughout the collection, Green catalogues each of her impressions from a world that remains wide-open to her; she is constantly curious, seeking and searching.*

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The impressions from the world around – what she sees, tastes, smells, hears and touches – remain, as do the intermittent moments of absurdity: 'Someone sits on top of a hill / but their head is not in the clouds' (p84). These references are sometimes obscure, as if only making sense to the speaker. But the world has changed into something new.

How to move through the day?  
How to count the dandelions?

(p. 87)

Throughout the collection, Green catalogues each of her impressions from a world that remains wide-open to her; she is constantly curious, seeking and searching. The poems work like a hybrid diary of annotations. There are references to musicians (Lucinda Williams, The National, Boy Genius), artists (John Reynolds, Frida Kahlo, Robin Hyde), poets (Anna Jackson, Cilla McQueen, Tusiata Avia) and writers (Virginia Woolf, Maggie O'Farrell, Airini Beauvais). Nurses and healthcare workers move sympathetically in and out of poems. There are kererū, zucchini, mosquitoes; the Waitākere hills, the Rakiura headland, the Sky Tower. The natural world is a strong force within the poems; she is gathering food, preserving vegetables, making meals. 'It's Moroccan roasted carrots on a blue plate' (p.78). Green listens to podcasts and Spotify playlists, reads *Charlotte's Web* and listens to the Beatles' "Get Back". In the second half, she is able to move beyond geographical borders and extend her observation skills and rallying calls to support Gaza.

I longed to water and comfort Gaza  
to listen to the aid workers speaking  
to listen to the young children weeping

(p. 83)

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*...what remains in each poem is the desire to be a poet, to write a poem, to live inside the poem: 'I am driving the poem at low speed'*

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While I subconsciously hum along to The Muttonbirds' "Dominion Road" as I write the review, I'm reminded of the sense of movement in that song: we are always halfway down Dominion Road, from a halfway house, moving toward somewhere, remembering from where we have come. From a high enough hospital window, Green might have been able to see Dominion Road – but this song acts as a microcosm of what she is trying to do imagistically inside each poem: observe the immediate world of lived experience around her, layer it through the melody and memory of song (or other artistic endeavour), then expand and stretch the idea through poetic metaphor so that the small moment of observation becomes an intense new accordion-like moment of music, words, images, books, memories, tastes and smells. These poems are quiet observations of the world on a macro and micro level.

But what remains in each poem is the desire to be a poet, to write a poem, to live inside the poem: 'I am driving the poem at low speed' (p. 88). The poems are haiku-shaped, moon-obsessed jigsaw pieces; the speaker and reader are working to put the pieces back together, just as a person in recovery is working to put the pieces of their life back together or into a new shape. I'm reminded of the long tradition of poems as archival fragments, pieces of something not yet whole, whether missing through destruction or simply the writer's will. These poems are fragments like Sappho or haiku or a commonplace book. 'Most of this poem / is in 1000 pieces' (p. 91).

A poem might be an envelope  
to store things in for a later date  
old train tickets postcards buttons  
a map of Rome a bookmark

(p. 71)

In 2025, Green delivered the Storylines Margaret Mahy Medal Lecture and spoke about poetry as a place of exploration that 'establishes travel routes, discovery channels, points of recognition, switchboards of invention, moments of wonder.'<sup>[2]</sup> At the end of the lecture, she read a number of poems, the final being a newer poem, "blood test", that addresses her cancer and treatment. As in *The*

*Venetian Blinds Poems*, the final line is tender and exploratory, outward-looking in its observation, necessary and uplifting: ‘and how in the early morning light we can roar and hope and sing’ (“blood test”).

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[1] Green, Paula, “Kites and Anchors: a collage of writing poetry for and with children”, Storylines Margaret Mahy Medal Lecture 2025, <https://www.storylines.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Storylines-Margaret-Mahy-Medal-Lecture-2025-Paula-Green.pdf>

[2] Ibid

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[reviews@poetrysociety.org.nz](mailto: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*.



Goodnight kiss – Isabel 玥 Li

***John Zhang***

how sad can an old  
garlic be?  
as sad as me

***Julie Bates***

alone  
on the pond  
autumn moon

***Debbie Strange***

mom's vital signs  
we decipher the code  
of lightning bugs

*Selected Haiku, 2025 Yamadera Basho Memorial Haiku Contest*

***Jenny Fraser***

half moon  
the body  
kept hidden

***Eliza White***

a forbidden love  
hands tangled up in her hair  
Shakespeare would be proud

***Cathy Silk***

sun slips slow  
into horizon's secret seam  
a gold coin in night's arcade

*Meiya Takahashi*





*Waiting for the arrival* – Meiya Takahashi

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## Contributors

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

**Michelle Elvy** is a writer, editor and creative writing teacher in Ōtepoti Dunedin. She edits at *Flash Frontier* and *At the Bay | I te Kokoru*. Her books include *the everrumble* and *the other side of better* and the forthcoming *ocean sky marble eye*. In 2025 her poetry was shortlisted in the Kathleen Grattan Poetry Award, and she held the Riddell Residency in Oturehua and the Auckland Regional Parks Residency in Huia. Her poetry-art exhibit *The Wild Edge* featured at the Arataki Visitor Centre Jan–Mar 2026.  
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**Maya Field** is a Wellington-based writer. She studies English Literature at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University. Her work has been featured in *The Spinoff*, *a fine line*, and *Salient Magazine*.

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 have been published in New Zealand and international journals.

**Michael Giacon** is a Tāmaki Auckland poet. He published his first volume, *undressing in slow motion*, in May 2024. He enjoys performing and has organised and emceed numerous poetry events including the annual PRIDE Poetry Speakeasy and Open Mic.

**SK Grout** (she/they) is a writer, editor and poet who splits her time between Auckland Tāmaki Makaurau and London, UK. Their debut pamphlet, *What love would smell like*, is published with V. Press. Their poetry and reviews are widely published in the US, UK, Europe and the Pacific. <https://skgrout.com>

**Denise O'Hagan** is a Sydney-based poet of New Zealand background, born in Rome. She worked in academic publishing and is co-editor at *The Marrow*. Her awards include the Monica Taylor Poetry Prize and the NSW Poetry Prize. <https://denise-ohagan.com/>

**Allison Li** is a member of The New Zealand Society of Authors and her writing has been published in literary journals including *Poetry NZ*, *Landfall*, *takahē*, *Elixir & Star Press*, *Shot Glass Journal*, and *The Cortland Review*.

**Isabel 玥 Li** is a writer, illustrator, and new media maker with roots buried in the beaches of Tāmaki Makaurau. Their work appears in *The Seventh Wave*, *Starling*, *Re-Draft*, *Sine Theta*, and others. They laugh easily.

**Lisa Maule** is Pākehā with English and Scottish heritage and lives in her hometown Wellington, New Zealand. She is a producer and designer of performing arts, and finds joy in creativity and storytelling.

**Mariela Durnhofer Rubolino** lives in Paraparaumu. Her painting is largely intuitive, a kinetic flow that manifests unseen forces, creating a sense of depth and connection.

**Zia Ravenscroft** is a writer, actor, post-graduate student, and drag king by the name of Judas Kiss. He has recently completed a Bachelor of Arts majoring in English Literature and Theatre and minoring in Creative Writing and Gender and Sexuality Studies. They are the recipient of the 2025 Ruth and Oswald L Kraus Innovator-in-Residence scholarship at the Wai-te-ata Press.

**Holly Rowsell** is a philosophy and literature student living in Te Whanganui-a-Tara. She has founded two poetry journals, *Nine Lives* and *The Free Body Problem*. You can read Holly's poetry in *Catalyst*, *Sweet Mammalian*, and *Starling*, among other places.

**Topher Shields** is a poet from Aotearoa New Zealand. His work appears in *Puerto del Sol*, *The Shore*, and *Cordite Poetry Review*, among others. He explores inheritance, whenua, and the quiet conditions transmitted through language, land, and the body.

**Cathy Silk** loves experimenting within the edges of the shorter forms. Her words have appeared in *Flash Frontier*, *At the Bay*, and the *NZ School Journal*. She placed third in the 2023 Katherine Mansfield Sparkling Prose competition.

**Lisa Stanley** (samoan/pākehā) is an emerging poet based in Tāmaki Makaurau. Her poems appear in *Turbine | Kapohau*, *Yellow Lamp Poetry*, *Tarot*, *takahē*, *Landfall Tauraka*, and internationally, in *Moonflake Press*.

**Debbie Strange** (Canada) is a chronically ill short-form poet and artist whose creative passions connect her more closely to the world, to others, and to herself. Please visit her publications/awards archive: <https://debbiemstrange.blogspot.com/>.

**Meiya Takahashi** is a small business owner, contemporary artist, and secondary Visual Arts teacher based in Auckland. Finding interest and inspiration from organic and natural forms, Meiya explores a variety of art practices like painting, printmaking, sculpture, and jewellery. She is currently working on her first group exhibition set to be held at Studio One Toi Tū in October 2026.

**Chris Tse** is the author of three poetry collections published by Auckland University Press and co-editor of *Out Here: An Anthology of Takatāpui and LGBTQIA+ Writers from Aotearoa*. He was New Zealand's Poet Laureate from 2022–25. His fourth collection of poetry will be published by Auckland University Press in September 2026.

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

**Eliza White** is a poet from Ōtautahi. She is a student at Write On School For Young Writers.

Writer and teacher **Dr Annabel Wilson** lives in Swannanoa, NZ. Her poetry has been published and performed in Aotearoa and overseas. Her most recent work is the chapbook *Making mixtapes with Seichan* (ngā pukapuka pekapeka, 2025). [annabelwilson.net](http://annabelwilson.net)

**John Zhang** is a poet who likes writing about daily life experience.