



Poetry  
Aotearoa  
Yearbook

2024

revel-  
ations



# Poetry Aotearoa Yearbook

2024



# Poetry Aotearoa Yearbook

2024

Edited by Tracey Slaughter



MASSEY UNIVERSITY PRESS

# Contents

## EDITORIAL

- 11 Tracey Slaughter

## FEATURED POET: CARIN SMEATON

- 18 For Arapera and Marino  
20 Aunties talk Pukekohe  
21 Lael and Grace  
22 The Alchemist vs Posie Parker  
23 Renata anō  
25 The Fate of a Thousand Spiders  
26 Ariel  
27 Matariki Rising  
28 a musical is only 10% of the revolution  
29 Dark Passenger  
31 Flying whales on earth  
32 He calls her a bitch again  
34 My Sami Ghost  
36 Te Kāhu Pōkere  
37 Daughtr of the 90s  
38 Morning Symposium  
39 a dreadful day  
41 Ureia by the Bridge  
42 Beth yr a magic realist  
43 Meghan Markle's Sister  
45 the good auntie  
46 An interview with Carin Smeaton

## NEW POEMS

- 52 Abigail Marshall michelangeloed / how to be art  
in an automobile incident
- 53 Adrienne Jansen Five am among the pine trees
- 54 Aimee-Jane Gorse  
Anderson-O'Connor
- 55 alana hooton friday night takeaways
- 57 Alex Nolan Working Māmā
- 58 Alice Hooton AUNT
- 59 Amanda Joshua Complaints re: click and collect
- 61 Amaris Janel Henderson Pistol Lullabies
- 62 Amber Abbott This isn't Hell, but I can see it from here
- 65 Amber Sadgrove The Janes
- 67 Anna Jackson-Scott To return to the body
- 69 Anuja Mitra Reprise
- 70 Anushka Dissanayake just a teen
- 72 Ben Jardine Questions for the Self at the End of Et Al.
- 74 Brent Cantwell a dredging ship
- 75 Brent Kininmont Bits of Food in My Father's Lungs
- 76 Britt Clark Monstrous
- 78 Bronte Heron Sonnet
- 79 Charles Ross Hikororoa
- 82 Chris Stewart Mary regrets her pregnancy
- 83 Chrysa Anthemum the duality of Jane Doe
- 85 Cindy Botha penumbra
- 86 Cindy Zeiher Vers(e)
- 87 Clare Riddell lover's eye
- 88 Dadon Rowell Firsts
- 89 David Čiurlionis Waking up
- 90 David Simes when you dumped me, why did you  
quote the hot priest from *Fleabag*?
- 91 Devon Webb NEW WORLD
- 93 Eliana Gray On the plane up to Tāmaki Makaurau,  
feeling alive

95	Elizabeth Morton	In sum
96	Elliot McKenzie	Small heights
97	Erik Kennedy	This Usually Represents a Desire to Achieve Greatness in your Social and Professional Life
98	essa may ranapiri	love as a verb
99	Ethan Christensen	my boy (so gentle
101	Evie Howell	The shape of one
103	Frances Libeau	bach 114
104	Francesca Leader	Hey, ██████████, You Piece of Shit, Are You Emotionally Available Yet?
106	Freya Norris	I love you 16cm deep
107	Geoff Sawers	Too early in the spring
108	Grace Lawrence	when the pawn hits the conflicts he thinks like a king . . .
109	Heidi North	Fill in the blank
110	Holly H. Bercusson	no fat saints
111	Iain Britton	Deep down the air is rarely sweet
115	Idoya Munn	I'm writing a poem tonight
116	Imé Corkery	something to be certain about
117	Iona Winter	Lodestone
119	Jack Ross	My mother's rose bushes
121	James Norcliffe	Fade to Black
122	Jan FitzGerald	unWelcome swallows
123	Jan Kemp	Chimera — a song cycle
125	Jan Napier	I Start to tell You
126	Jane Simpson	Imagined scar
127	Janet Newman	Nocturne
128	Janet Wainscott	'In loving memory'
129	Janis Freegard	Samhain
131	Jenny Powell	<i>from</i> The Relevance of Berthe Hoola van Nooten
133	Jessica Le Bas	Driving through the night
135	Jessica Thornley	Mahuika Takes the Underground



137	Jessie Burnette	sets
139	Joel LeBlanc	Corpse Fauna
140	John Geraets	. . . from RIVERSPELL <sub>31</sub>
141	John Tuke	One of those days poetic
142	Keirryn Hintz	Eleanor
145	Keith Nunes	Mother as poet
146	Kerrin P. Sharpe	I wake @ 2am and know
147	Layal Moore	La Sylphide
148	Liam Hinton	a love poem
153	Liz Breslin	In Kathmandu, Te Tihi-o-Maru
155	Loretta Riach	Pastoral Leakages
156	Lucy Miles	Good Weather for Ducks
157	Margaret Moores	Likeness
160	Mark Prisco	worm theory
164	Medb Charleton	Wairēinga/Bridal Veil Falls
165	Megan Kitching	In the Midnight Zone
166	Michael Giacon	The kiss of light
168	Michael Steven	Strains: Northern Lights
169	Nathaniel Calhoun	blue penguins
170	Naveena Menon	if this text chain finds you, send something back:
172	Nicholas Wright	The Firebox
173	Nicola Andrews	Now that Dr Ropata is in Guatemala
174	Nigel Skjellerup	a kind of agony
175	Olivia Macassey	Millstone
176	Owen Bullock	Possibles
178	Paula Harris	If you have ever had a delayed flight . . .
180	Penelope Scarborough	Graveyard Lover
182	Philip Armstrong	Anastomosis
184	Rachael Elliott	Mild
187	Riemke Ensing	This is not goodbye
188	Sara Al-Bahar	road kill
190	Sarah-Kate Simons	Angel Parking
191	Shaun Stockley	Autumn (onset)

192	Shivani Agrawal	[in-flight meal]
193	Sophia Wilson	Do not step here, Othello
195	Sophie Rae-Jordan	Offering
196	Stu Bagby	Red Hands Cave
197	Tunmise Adebowale	A Little Grace
199	Vaughan Rapatahana	whakarongo ki ngā manu / listen to the birds
200	Victor Billot	Lost in Space
201	Wes Lee	Wearing the Night
205	Willow Noir	Obliterated Affairs
206	Wren Boyer	a crack lets in the darkness, too

### ESSAYS

210	Erena Shingade	Beneath the Linden Trees: Richard von Sturmer and the Mind of Meditation
221	John Geraets	Constant Structure

### REVIEWS

236	Abigail Marshall	Claire Orchard Hannah Mettner
242	Aimee-Jane Anderson-O'Connor	Sarah Lawrence / harold coutts / Arielle Walker Leah Dodd
248	Anthony Kohere	Alice Te Punga Somerville Jessica Hinerangi
256	Dadon Rowell	Claudia Jardine Sophia Wilson
261	David Simes	Jake Arthur
264	David Wrigley	James Norcliffe / C. K. Stead / David Eggleton
270	Frances Libeau	Hazel Smith
273	Jane Matthews	Ila Selwyn Jan FitzGerald Vivienne Ullrich

280	Jessica Thornley	Louise Wallace
284	Jessie Burnette	Michele Leggott
287	Marcus Hobson	Koenraad Kuiper
		Titirangi Poets
295	Mark Prisco	James Brown
		Rogelio Guedea
		Tim Upperton
304	Medb Charleton	Diana Bridge
		Elizabeth Smither
		Stephanie de Montalk
312	Michelle Rahurahu	Ruby Solly
317	Naveena Menon	Jane Arthur
		Morgan Bach
		Sudha Rao
325	Sara Al-Bahar	Khadro Mohamed

329 **CONTRIBUTORS**

343 **ABOUT POETRY AOTEAROA YEARBOOK**



# **Editorial**

## Writing from the red house

The day I wrote my first poem I was 12 and I didn't know what I'd done. I was living in a house I hated, with a man at the head, a place of hurt. That man had just kicked my sibling into the street and I was left behind in shock, and I hid and spat something onto floral stationery meant for thank-you letters to long-distance ancestors who had no idea about the hellish house on the hill where I felt so unsafe.

The poem came out bad, fast, hot, double vision, carved hard onto the page. It was something between dog bark and lullaby, between bird call and bared teeth. I must have been trying to both kick back and console myself, to rock myself and roar. I had zero models except shitty pop songs and musty old classics in a mouldy pocket-size book of rhyming poems (ironically, lifted from that man's stash, not far from where his shotgun sat loaded). It was a blurred, noisy mess, but that didn't matter: it was about wreckage, it was about choking. It was more like an exorcism than a moment of art: it was automatic, it was autonomic. It piled up images out of every disaster movie I'd seen — the sea rose up, the house turned red, all the elements blazed against it — cuts of wide-scale pain to collage over the small, dirty scene that had just happened at my door: that man's hands, my sibling knocked onto the asphalt.

There were some facts it couldn't hold fixed yet, in frame. But it held something, it *was* something, it had *done* something. Jerky manifesto mixed with fucked-up sob, prayer crossed with not-yet-suicide note. Whatever had left my body and rushed onto the page, it had something to do with survival. I had no muscle in that ugly house, no armour, no comeback, no voice. I couldn't see a way not to stay and get broken, there was no other shelter. But I had a piece of paper that didn't say

thank you, that didn't stay silent, that scraped black lines across the flowery page where I was meant to whisper the sweet nothings little girls are made of. I couldn't fight, I couldn't flee — but I could write. And those words didn't freeze, and they did not fawn.

We are so often detonated into poetry by our nerve ends. We flare to language when life trips our red wire. Whatever skills we acquire along the way — to direct the current, to regulate the blood jet — the *why* of poetry so often remains the same. We hone our craft and we learn to rein it in with the cortical, the critical — but most poets know the fuse, the force, the source is, as Colum McCann says, the 'electricity of suffering'.

It pays, of course, not to openly declare this: the market tends to like its poets shining not bleeding, waving not drowning, chasing the commercially angled spotlight, not casting the glare back onto our scars and the system that leaves them. There's a special kind of shame reserved for artists who risk wearing heart's blood all over their sleeves. In the poems that poured in for this issue, though, the evidence was everywhere: there's a breed of poet who is writing from the red house — writing for their lives, not for likes — and they are bent on taking the risk, on witnessing patterns of wounding, and taking apart the machine that put them there.

So, trigger warning: this is a book of revelations. Apocalypse lives here, and it's not going away, and these poets aren't apologising for facing it. The same flood, storm, flame that surged through my first-ever poem is now the permanent forecast. Our days, our islands, our skins, our seas, our skies wear the stigmata of late-stage capitalism, and these poets have no interest in concealing it. They are writing — McCann again — 'so as to not fall silent', because they see the ruins of silence all around us, its dead institutions, its gouged earth, its bound hands, its nullifying currency, its foul oils, its crushed species.

The point where personal emergency meets collective oppression is set alight again and again in their poems — they refuse to let the hurt

be siloed, classified, diagnosed, dosed, written off. They do not cover before the structures built to quietly retraumatise us. Their work ‘hits the hazard lights’ and summons all its craft to ‘hammer and wonder and cry . . . banging the tin of disappointment/and worthlessness bringing up the spectre of future/homelessness, and poverty and sickness and all that befalls’. They know the place to expose the workings of power lies deep within us, where it brands our tissue, twists our responses, sells our safety. This is the nexus that the system is so vastly invested in us *not* seeing, the flashpoint that poetry is so inextricably wired to force out into unforgiving radical light. ‘*[H]ow would you rate the pain?*’ asks the opening piece, and the answer resounds: ‘*sistine*’.

But this comes at a cost. And reading this year’s poems, I felt that weight, that toll. If the imagery of end-days was ever-present, so too was the echo of how much our poets pay to speak it. It can be a tough haul from our first poem to our last one, and after long-term exposure to the system we are so often eroded into poetry, hollowed, ground-down, exhausted into it — poem after poem that came in this year sounded voiced from ‘the end of the rope’, uttered ‘right up against this precipice’, hanging on by ‘a whimper blight a slow sapping’, a statement of precarity, struggling to preserve in the lines the frailest shred of hope.

There is nothing to be gained by not calling it: one prevailing theme this year was suicide. We all know we are losing poets. Not so long ago, we lost Schaeffer Lemalu. This year we lost Paula Harris. The witness of how deep those losses run — and how much we desperately need to treasure, to nurture our poetic community to guard against bearing any more — was undeniable. Connection, which is poetry’s tender, is more crucial now than it has ever been.

So when I inevitably waver in writing this, and want to score it through with a backlash of triggered red lines, I hold on to a message from this volume’s featured poet Carin Smeaton: ‘I’m tired of living life as though we’re walking on broken glass and might get cut by the peoples who are probably the ones who caused the pain anyway.’ And I watch late-night footage of Sinéad O’Connor, who looks punk and wounded, and mutinous and starved, and worshipful and like she’s had the shit kicked



out of her, saying artists are meant to be messed-up vessels, willing to lay everything they have on the line so the system is made to see its pain, and I think of Paula, and what this world does to its protest singers.

And I read the book that another poet links to me, Anne Boyer's *Garments Against Women*, which reminds me that 'to feel deeply, or to admit to feeling deeply' is so often treated as 'inadmissible' because it has everything to do with 'money (poverty) or violence (how money and bodies meet)', and the 'pity, guilt, and contempt' it provokes are themselves 'feelings of power . . . the emotional indulgences of those with power or those who seek it'.

And I listen to a student who happens to bring into my classroom words from Audre Lorde I first heard long ago but need to rehear: 'When we are silent / we are still afraid. / So it is better to speak / remembering / we were never meant to survive.' And I tell the girl who wrote that first poem — on the days when she still feels as though she's living in a house she hates, with an unsafe man at the head, with her siblings still getting kicked into the street, a place of hurt, climate-destroying, near unsurvivable — that she has a community around her now, to write with, to strive for, to fight on beside.

And more than anything I think of how, late last year, I stood on a stage performing one of Paula's poems — because Paula, along with a host of other poets, was helping us to salvage a journal that was red-lining — and how later in that same show I played a mangled seabird trapped in a box and then an inmate telling of the prison grid that locked them into the emptiness.

And out of her poem's final words — which were 'nothing. / it means nothing. / nothing' — poured all the impossible love we struggle to protect against those perpetual dead ends.

And if this year I need to stand up and read Paula's poem when we launch this issue — which sounds the word 'run' in a storm aimed straight from her body 89 devastating times — I will. For her.



# **Featured Poet**

Carin Smeaton

## For Arapera and Marino

she talks about you  
Arapera  
she talks about you lots  
and fucking  
i wish i'd listened to her sooner  
sweet mānuka  
i wish i knew then wat i know now  
it's only natural  
it was always u  
and u was all sex  
yr daughter says  
yr sister and kerī might agree  
you talked lots about it  
bodies & the fireflies  
& there was lots of them  
glistening wet brightenings  
beams of particles  
uenuku coming  
lots in the mornings most  
long lazy hazy hotel days  
naked  
in hong kong  
yr daughter told us all about it  
(yea)  
honeysuckle  
she was embarrassed  
but happy  
in reflection  
u wrote  
from the kitchen  
a songbird  
in full voice

in all its monstrosity yr  
touch yr blood, yr bone deep bites  
yr lost eye tooth  
drunk on cuts  
straight down the sternum  
& if it was (especially) memorable  
carried ways further down  
from inside yr womb  
into yr poems  
into this one even  
50 years later  
(or abouts)  
(and much inferior)  
(aroha mai <3)  
by me for u  
thru my bung eye

## **Aunties talk Pukekohe**

yr calling in to sort the whenua & calm the cousins while yr at it u  
travel all the ways from whangārei aunties swooping in like kahu  
from a waking sky

u weaves in & out of matua's shelves just how tāne does breaking  
code n kete in a tropical low u says who's this white guy & wtf does he  
know?

u knew that nen we all knew her she never recovered they really put  
the boot in we remember Pukekohe with its fukd up colour bars

cinema hellscape stores porn lovin bishops pukekohe with its  
headless angels grieving schools nothing 2 see here fukboys mayors  
of mediocracy

pukekohe the kahu in the sky sees u as do i (the ancient trees of tāne)  
we all knows what u r & we all kno wat u did ae

we knows where u live

we was only around for yr market gardens sustenance n five spice life  
but even we left after that we never went back eh whāea survival of  
tha aunties

once upon a time u says we wāhine had mana and we was treatd as  
such but not now eh pukekohe fuk u we only want land bk we jus  
want our mokos to feel welcome

## **Lael and Grace**

i always see them at countdown ponsonby Lael & Grace grounded in front of the olive oil & othr fancy condiments i know Lael from W's class who (by her own admission) is unfairly seen as tha grumpy auntie at the tangi

Lael's young & Diné she flew here above jetstream with her frightfully featherd wings strapped 2 her arms spiriting her all tha ways from portland to tāmaki she follows tha sun across tha horizon tha sun she says always forgives u

it forgives u for calling yr boss a cunt it forgives u for mistaking seattle for portland it forgives u for losing yr shit cos portland's in washington grace says it's easy 2 be mistaken we all are even Lael but tha sun don't care

Lael used to work for seattle library they both love libraries Grace says she visits central all tha time i want her to see our heavens our livin breathin roof when the māarakai is ready when it opens up for matariki (if i'm still there)

when it's gotten green n grown as big as gov grey's concrete cum footprint on tha whenua auntie wanna tour too libraries change so quick she says she visits central every year just to keep up with tha goss she's happiest here with a coffee

## **The Alchemist vs Posie Parker**

auntie's an Alchemist a Shapeshifter  
A good lil arawa girl gifted but auee  
Lucky that day she weren't at the hui  
when the west wind blew into the wharenu  
With their big flash shoes swayin hips in front  
of our elders all them muscle mens  
Yea bitch lucky auntie weren't present  
she woulda ripped off dem 'lashes  
thrown em out wit tha red stilettos Out  
u blow bye bye bitches i mean fuk that shit  
manipulating kawa twisting tikanga  
biological or not Don't matter the storm  
b like the kuis theyre ovr 80 barefoot n seein  
hi-fem n butches our nens Own us  
They own our shoes our soul our eyes n tides  
so out u fly theyr the whenua we breathe  
ha! it's amaze u was ever allowd in



## Renata anō

I don't know why renata stops  
she slaps  
she lifts an arm :o  
it's so sudden it's like she'd rather do this  
than shake my hand or just say hi  
kanohi ki te kanohi nē  
ever since lockdown  
i never saw it coming  
no signs no inklings  
just a loud hard sting  
of a crack of a whip  
on denim  
did u do this kinda thing in paris before lockdown  
or after  
renata?  
renata  
let down yr long hair  
down to yr waist  
bluu grey & silver fate  
& why not kuīni  
wear it like a korowai  
on yr heaviest of days  
(when papatūānuku is bleeding out more molecules than rain)  
scent of a jasmine flower  
base of an oil  
we r all just memories  
we brought to the pools  
that time eh renata  
(til a lyin tit stole them while we was in the shower)  
why not sis  
fly down the escalator  
(sketches by darwin spillin outta both sides)

like u won't ever get caught  
behind me you'll creep  
i watch my back  
u watch the dew on a leaf  
still the leaf calls out  
Witch!  
daughter of an alcoholic  
sister of a seer  
do u feel safe now?

## **The Fate of a Thousand Spiders**

she's descended from generations spinning webs on the wheelie bin  
surviving a lifetime of rubbish days droughts floods & plagues

he loved his job once he even picked up a couple of kids droppd them  
at school in his big rubbish truck the kids loved it (but whāea walkd  
them for the rest of the term)

he was always somebody's uncle somebody's waving uncle  
somebody's weaving spiderman uncle ted in a big cool truck wantd to  
pick up tha little ones on rainy days

but it never rained once that summer so the mayor got on his knees  
beggd the mighty Waikato 4 water & surprise (for a price) he was  
successful

the city could buy the sky wit its desperation but the spiders still  
made their homes in it undr it between the powerlines in the streets  
on bins sky lovd spidr spidr lovd sky

It was nobody's business but their own & uncle in his big yellow  
truck taking care lifting full to empty never disturbing the web of  
peace spinning round

& round she was an ancient one from generations of hairy ones a  
whakapapa of scary ones beelining to the sky to hineahuone & she  
was all woman uncle says yea

lil fevers in the sky spinning spirits til we die te ara o te  
hau uncle says

## **Ariel**

u never thought yr name was cringe  
till grandad changed it to AJ  
AJ he said  
when we move town when u start a new school  
then we'll change it back to ariel  
yr new friends will be older there none the wiser  
& they won't tease u about it then  
(yr cousins included)

## **Matariki Rising**

*For Dad*

we sing for him before he goes  
me & my sister late for the funeral  
our stepmother rolls her eyes  
we even got us a ukulele  
(we wasn't gonna sing her dum song)  
we're throwing hibiscus so he don't look so lonely  
throw them flowers right into the sky throw them colours  
straight into the hole the wood looks so heavy  
too polished too ded  
i turn to princess she got style n flair  
(& good hair)  
so close to pirongia eh  
princess says yea  
the faeries might come play  
we giggle n snort but the spiders stay quiet  
weaving their traps down the main street  
a rose-town a massacre  
a church and a cock  
we follow our loss  
connecting a match to our sweet valley daze  
my sister regrets throwing out her smokes again  
40 bucks  
fuk he'd laff if he was here

## **a musical is only 10% of the revolution**

annaida's read les misérables  
60% of it  
that's what she says  
i think she's showing off  
typical angel  
is she trying to scare me?  
i had to read  
every single line she says  
as if the devil forced her  
as if it's dreadful torture  
fork thru tha eye  
needle up tha nose  
then she goes says good luck  
to me touché  
u might finish it off one day  
tick it off yr bucket list  
listen cunt i was an angel too  
once i sang tha entire musical  
as earth was quietly warming  
underneath a kōwhai tree  
in the domain with brian  
we wasn't even drunk  
i was ghost of voltaire  
he was javier  
we was just a fraction

## **Dark Passenger**

pete's gone awol  
he's been missing for years now  
didn't show up for his dad's funeral  
no one knows where he is  
what he's doing or who he's with  
whether he dead or alive  
pete ha!  
whadda joker  
last seen in perth  
surfing  
under the sun  
blazing as always  
he told us all about his  
shark fights countless  
great whites in tha deep dark  
blu every xmas of course  
good ol pete  
all that bravado  
& don't forget the meth  
that too  
for the triggers  
a blunt for the ticks  
yea pete yea u  
left ya wife when she was pregnant  
fuck she was a saint  
last time we heard  
u was missing yr kids like crazy  
crying so hard  
u got tha stigmata  
blood for tears red as rubies  
warm & sticky  
it leaks out holy

we all carries it round with us bruv  
trauma from the past  
trauma from da present  
it never really lets go  
some of us tho  
r jus very high functioning