featuring the poetry of Jan Kemp

comment by Charles Bernstein & Alistair Paterson
Subscribers please note that issue 48 will be the last in the traditional A5 format, and that changes to subscription rates and submission procedures are listed below.

From *Poetry NZ* Number 49 onwards:
One bumper double-sized issue per year

*Managing Editor:* Jack Ross
J.R.Ross@massey.ac.nz

*Advisory Board:*
Thom Conroy  Jen Crawford  John Denny
Ingrid Horrocks  David Howard  Alistair Paterson
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Dr Jack Ross
*Poetry NZ*
School of English and Media Studies
Massey University, Albany Campus
Pvt Bag 102 904
North Shore Mail Centre
Auckland 0745, NZ

*Subscription rates:*

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<td>$NZ 30.00</td>
<td>$NZ 45.00</td>
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<td>$NZ 55.00</td>
<td>$NZ 80.00</td>
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Do you write poetry to be read silently by others or do you write it to perform it out loud? Do you prefer to read poetry off the printed page (or computer screen)? Or do you prefer to hear it read by its author?

Many will respond to these questions by asking simply ‘Does it matter?’ Poetry can be that purely literary and even typographical experience, which allows ‘shape’ poems and experiments in lineation to be devised, and the absolute luxury (from a space-rationing editor’s point of view) of one-word-per-line verse to be indulged. Poetry can also be declaimed, shouted, chanted, acted and otherwise vocalised in public. It can work either way, and there will always be English 101 students to remind us that all poetry began in public performance; that ‘lyric’ poetry was originally poetry performed to the accompaniment of a lyre; and that the repeated catchphrases in epic poetry (‘the wine-dark sea’ etc.) were there to cue the bard who had memorised thousands of lines for a listening audience. Poetry was around for millennia before most people could read or write.

Yet it seems to me that there is now an essential difference between the poetry meant primarily to be read in private and the poetry meant primarily to be performed. In November last year I had the great pleasure of attending and contributing to the poetry conference in Hawkes Bay, organized by Bill Sutton. One of the many highlights was a jocular and ironical piece acted out expertly by a young performance poet. I joined the whole audience in applauding it lustily. Then the worm entered my skull. No names, no pack-drill, but I at once recalled the good public performances I had heard pub-poets give of poems which, on the printed page, I found to be nothing in particular.

My mind flew to the damning comment John Dryden made in 1681 when he read a printed version of a play he had enjoyed in stage performance, George Chapman’s tragedy Bussy D’Ambois. Said Dryden ‘I have sometimes wondered in the reading what has become of those glaring colours which amazed me in “Bussy D’Ambois” upon the theatre; but when I had taken up what I supposed a fallen star, I found I had been cozened with a jelly; nothing but a cold dull mass, which glittered no longer than it was shooting.’

Are we sometimes ‘cozened with a jelly’ when we enjoy the public performance of a poem? In poetry, density of meaning and good public performance are not necessarily mutually exclusive. But what grabs the attention of a listening audience can often be thin in texture, meaning and allusiveness, like the lyrics of a good song shorn of its music. It is good to be reminded of this in an age when rap and poetry slams are talked up as if they were the best current poetic practice.

Nicholas Reid
Jan Kemp

PNZ 48’s featured poet Janet Riemenschneider-Kemp, better known as Jan Kemp, has had a distinguished career as a poet beginning with the publication of her first two volumes Against the Softness of Woman in 1976 and Diamonds and Gravel in 1979. She has written six collections of poetry since then, her most recent being Voicetracks (published by both Puriri Press, Auckland; and Tranzlit, Kronberg im Taunus) in 2012.

Jan spent the first 25 years of her life in New Zealand, then taught in many countries before settling with her German husband in Germany in 1994. After a return eight-year sojourn in New Zealand (1999–2007) she wrote the poems of her Dante’s Heaven (Puriri Press 2006). In 2012 it was released as Dantes Himmel in Germany, translated by Dieter Riemenschneider in a bilingual edition. Jan Kemp now writes poetry in both German and English. Currently she’s working on a new collection, Slippery Ice & The Love Planet.

She has played an important part in collecting and archiving sound recordings of New Zealand poets performing their own works—the Waiata Archive (1974) and Aotearoa New Zealand Poetry Sound Archive (2004) <www.aonzpsa.blogspot.com>. In the Queen’s Birthday Honours in 2005 she was awarded an MNZM for services to literature. Invited in 2006 to have her own webpage & CD on the Poetry Archive (UK) <www.poetryarchive.org>, she was Project Manager for 25 N.Z. Poets for the P.A. (2012). A member of PEN-Germany, the Rilke Gesellschaft and the Katherine Mansfield Society, Jan Kemp brings a distinctively New Zealand sensibility to encounters with European high culture.

Discussing her poetic practice, Jan says ‘My view of how I write hasn’t really changed since I first wrote of this in the anthology The Young New Zealand Poets (1973) . . . . I still hear a line or lines or just a phrase in my head and have taught myself to listen, to let the words keep on coming; I chant them aloud, to remember them, say if out walking; when I can get to paper and pencil, I write them down. Later, I type them up into a text and spend time finessing them. I do the thinking work then, once I’ve seen what I’ve said or am trying to say. A poem can take years or a moment to write itself. The music or cadence of the line and its rhythm are of utter importance to me—the speaking voice of the poet in me who, if I’m lucky, sometimes speaks up.’

As influences she cites ‘all the poets I’ve loved reading’ including the Metaphysicals and Blake; Moderns including Wallace Stevens; and classic German and Italian poets; ‘plus the New Zealand poets I grew up on, Fairburn, Mason, Curnow and my contemporaries like Mitchell and Wedde; later Hone Tuwhare, Alistair Te Ariki Campbell and Sam Hunt with whom I toured in 1979 on the Four Poets Tour.’
Un jardín suspendu: to Music

Le jardin suspendu, c'est l'idéal perpétuellement poursuivi et fugitif de l'artiste, c'est le refuge inaccessible et inviolable—Jehan Alain

With each note
I fall in love another thousand times,
as Goethe with his Friederike,
princess of freedom,
Wagner with his Cosima,
the world is in order,
(the cosmos too!)

Love is being the resting point for the other;
the hanging garden is refuge for artists as well as lovers.
Jehan Alain sought escape to Semiramis's, wrote there his Le jardin suspendu.

You are the green summer willow leaves, wafting slowly over me, again and again, like an oriental fan, whose soft feathers glide & glide, drifting lazily over me.
Going into the Gewölbe/
turn to where the light’s coming from

i.m. Elisabeth (Else) Riemenschneider (1905–2008)

like a sunflower
as yet unwearied

after efforts
of a lifetime

she reads the signs:
the harbour light

vatic,
pouring

from the vault
where she’ll fly

to wing about
& dance on God’s

right hand—when
you’re 103 in 2008

what else might
any Else wish for?

* das Gewölbe — heavenly vault
all men are tyrants, even he . . .

or is it anger that implodes
and did you
trigger it in him

you are implicated
but must step
away
and beyond

you have your mountain
sit on it
watch the sea

Rilke’s early poems

I dreamt
I wheeled them
in a white perambulator
into a pond
where
they sank
& I suppose
we all
drowned.
A death, its toll

i.m. Bruce Purchase (1938–2008)

Now his book I’ve read
he’s too soon dead
this kind man of talent.

There’s no one to tell
when you grieve
save his friends.

Yes, I knew him too
so proud of his dad
of his mum, yet his

son’s sad story. The
world his stage, all
of our bit parts.

If only I’d said: I’m
beaut at death, knocks
me out every time in rime

so he’d know: here’s one
for you Bruce, to
give us purchase.
Answering call

S//CRAPBOOK iv Why I didn't get to Jan and Dieter's party
‘The Black River’ — C.K. Stead

Come to the party
bring plums bring

birds from your pocket
bring Kay, Karl.

We two too are alone.
A lone—all one.

Mutti’s 102
& still asks why

as night the stars
as we the sea.

As did Wagner, Händel
Xerxes, Agamemnon

any of your heroes
they handled it as

you do: as Cosima did
her huge head Sphinx-like

a statue in the now full now
deserted gardens at Bayreuth.
Echoes in the off-season
*Hihihahi hihihaho* from the Valkyries

be Siegfried, Karl, step out
of the wings & come.

We have a leaf for the patch
on your back from your new

book—we’ll cover (for)
you, should an arrow fall.

*Osama—Obama—we*

that they can sit there grouped
watching the filming as it occurs
the squad’s cameras fixed to their helmets
helicopters still whirring

high-tech reports the shots
the death the shattered face
the terrorist unarmed
fast buried at sea—no pilgrim spot

whatever he did & he did
our will to kill appals
sin laden our lot
such bloody hands such deeds
Mediterranean

the word’s so big you swim in it
bashing its basin sides
& then near Malta
bobbing saltily
you’re all at sea

she married here
a pebbled shore
with Cocteau’s pictures
on wedding walls
Hôtel de Ville & Händel’s
Queen of Sheba marched
them out into sunlight
a crêpe-paper arch
over her wedding hat
from a chapellerie

a straw sunbonnet
the girl wore
& the fisherman
a red cap—they each
said oui—then forever
we—it’s that
mid(dle)terrain.
César Franck’s feet . . .

. . . are not to be seen
though we hear
they’re there
glimpse a sliver of shoe
after he swings
onto the seat
& walks abroad
legs dangling & swivelling
over the pedals
treading this one that one
with his feet inner sides & heels,
the magnificent hands
holding a chord
pulling a stop
in the famous photo of
Jeanne Rongier’s painting:
*César Franck at the console
of the organ at St Clothilde
Basilica, Paris, 1885.*

César’s white-blond hair
& grand side-whiskers
suit his creamy skin
fine face—
& he looks onto
the moving surfaces
as he works
in quiet command
with attentive grace.
Cri de coeur de Katherine Mansfield

I hear her cry out from her grave
not leave all fair but:

leave me alone!
Let me RIP through
your societies your conferences
your codswallop about me
& tear it all apart

read me read me
for all you’re worth
that’s why I wrote

but STOP
carving me up
& serving me
at too many tables

stop the industry
stop the production

get off my back
stop flying on my wings
fly on your own

let me be
please
let me
are eye pee

(on you all)

hear me!
Easter in St Johann, Kronberg im Taunus

A spot-lit effigy of the Crucifixion throws shadows right & left: Kosmas und Dismas, the diocese Bishop explains.

*Think of me, when you reach Paradise & to His left the terrorist’s already there, as the scorners scoffs.*

A long, wooden cross, black-draped, like the altar candlesticks rests on the chancel steps: *the mallet & nails with barbed wire & halo, symbolic,* a chorister reassures.

On Sunday, above the organ pipes peeling Hallelujahs, from under a curved 1617 painted wooden ceiling, dancing *putti* pluck & pass round roses: their petals fall as singing sounds.
Songs for four-part choir

bucolic soprano

a hare’s ears
are like
two treble clefs
pitched for
the high notes

mellow alto

your love
doesn’t wilt & turn
yellow with age:
it is tender, warm
& soft—it holds me.

bass clef tenor

A cat’s silhouette
with two emeralds
glinting
in the moonlight

bassi profundi

Tibetan monks
hold deep
to the sounds
from where
mountains come
The Kiwi in me

I've swapped Tane Mahuta for two mighty Eichen, the woods for the sea
tui, tuatara for Rotkehlchen, Eidechse, but the Kiwi stays me.

I now speak the language of Goethe & Grass, like a palimpsest
over my Kiwi-English, Maori place-names & songs I learned as a child.

These stay me.

I long for the sea, for islands even the kea’s raw call,
but love our Berg & Burg with its cobble-stoned wall. Now trim & as neat
as a Hausfrau should be, but my unruly nocturnal rambles stay me.
Two questions for the Archbishop

I
Was the Easter Sunday Christ
a shade like Dante’s? Did He know
an embrace would go straight
through him till her arms
wrapped herself around?

And so he kept Mary at bay,
knowing she would find herself
again bereft.

But might she then have
found Him within her? Her chance
of a taste of Paradise?

name my name, you bring me close
noli me tangere, you keep your space

both of these. Is this the story?

II
Or, because on his way, did He
not want to be held back?
A little pneumonia

to Katherine Mansfield

The German for lung is Lungenflügel—lungwing—clever you, Katy, calling it your ‘wing’ to fly. Now, one of mine’s infected too & antibiotics will kill all those bacteria, well, on the wing. Also cures gonorrhoea, would have cured your TB & you’d have had more life, looking in death’s face at 34:

‘shall I try to get up, if I do will I cough, if I cough I can’t breathe,’ ‘lift my head Ida,’

‘say it pathetically, please’ (you quote yourself) into the pillow. ‘I’ve got to try.’ Your will, that steel.

Lunch over, having to lie down again, (know what you mean & me a swimmer. Lungs!), then,

all those stories like mist off the land lifting up to your pen; then, all that quick,

fine, flying work till they found their places: your children of the sun.
The anniversary

(for Sumra)

The wedding day washed away
wisdom says the pot-lickers
inundate their bridals—

guests squeezed without embraces
huddled women sang no songs
only calmed their bawling children

winding up last words hurriedly
the Molbi* pampered his dripping beard
anchored us an island surfaced
we claimed a shore

marooned by the first night
which brought its drizzling dispersals
from the chinks in ceilings
lateral drops fell on thumping hearts
we remained noiseless

in time your white elbows dangled
like egrets enfold oceans in wings
now another year the flight is downwards
but cruising all the way

passages, rails, ferries we boarded
sit in the albums  coasting us home.

* cleric
The English lesson

Inside a falling room
I learnt the first lesson;
vowels ejected sluggishly
from a throat oiled by Ghazals
the skin collected
jaws and palate resisted
verbs messed up the taste buds
I traversed punctuations
but all freedoms are short-lived
the English teacher
reined the rebel in me
the subdued ones
stilled into mock-alligators
swallowed a tricky idiomatic
figurative or metaphoric
God knows! I chewed and gobbled
but some of it remained
beneath the tongue
with fricative diphthongs
and signs of exclamations
I choked cramped
made faces like a harlequin
until the appetite for Punjabi tales
and Urdu flourishes
perished in caries
then consonants took root
in time the local enamel went away
they made a new denture
for I was their advanced learner.

Come! and pluck me, each entry
each page is a bleeding gum.
Pakistan meets a terrorist

The world had one 9/11 and one 7/7
we live through them each moment

every day rehearse a dumb-show
of ridiculous stares  silently

sift through the detritus
fingers limbs heads

a heck of imagery on roads
a grin tagged to each anatomy

out there on ticking check posts
police place their heart on triggers

under yellow bulbs rains pelt in ditches
all over cities  cradles of fear

rock children to terrorist’s dissonance
now they speak powdery rhymes

ripped end-lines pelleted syntax
climax riddled  form obscured

in smog and flames
like surreal poems trapped

between detonators and detectors
peeled and barbed bodies

in TV footages  virtual reconstructions
thrice removed from reality

RIZWAN AKHTAR
cameras run through smoke as ghosts
find out a way of communication

jacketed in contentment
people respond to *azans*

in this debris of confusion
life plays its tenebrous rhythms

battery and gun siren and yell
downlink mortuaries with hell

still not enough to stop world’s tongue
from screaming headlines

*the dangerous corner of the world*
not knowing that our poetry is terror-free.
Raewyn Alexander

**Iowa where Everyone is**

‘nobody goes to iowa’ Dean said—grinning a charm to stay put while on great fields spring trees pretty danced and greened corn cut or scorched—pale yellow stalks short and scratchy our green nakedness and iowa’s rolling fields could blend

*the plane from seattle then atlanta, (yes Ma’am)—a curved window*

back and forth this and that messages coloured with years accidental sameness—Julie and I style-snappy met in cyberspace then turned into shandies with fried fish on a Friday in a bettendorf tavern with TV basketball

*le claire’s main street high noon tourist cars—on a Mississippi angle*

in the Buffalo Bill Museum Julie recalled she copied the Gettysburg Address yards of hard writing detentions towards our stubborn laughter cases of guns and quilts beside framed indians and sharp-shooters we escape pounding laundry on rocks to be Annie Oakley with her rifle

*Buffalo Bill wrangled over 200 cowboys and indians—bang bang shaving wallets*

arrive to squirrel trees and davenport confectioned houses woodpecker knock knocked while I walked uphill from a deli sandwich to a green Victorian bed and breakfast where electronic love arrived family of bluebirds on the vintage wardrobe and the clock blind

*you and I writing about kidnaps and stealing each other’s moments*

parked in the driveway by Bert’s black amrkn muscle car an overture revved behind the sleek red 70s V6 with white upholstery hammered iowa rock brain in my cherokee medicine pouch swapped pounamu and geode to own each other’s land and *o don’t let go*
ropes of sentences bridge our impossible everywhere swinging

a sunset chair below plans in their wood-panel garage ceiling
into a fairy tale with a furious blonde child to tell us off
and Dana held a tell finger on the notebook re alcohol
while a handsome stetson man vocalised about journeys

but a woman sang her curtains off til everyone’s windows cleared

me a hi-jacked guidance counsellor to a liar texting ransom
the band louder than the evening dark so we rode light home
next day Jo placed a decoy spider with twirly-gigs of poppet
gas station on the way a message to a soldier leaving town

large black letters above the logo where truth plays

in their gingerbread house Miguel and Veronica’s swirl of children
cherry tree blossom and violets studded the lawn like bravery
spiced food built by grapefruit-soda tequila and spanish
clues to a test and our picture guide talk smiles

this waiter earlier studying quantum physics and my accent

but almost first of all they drove me to the Miss spread wide
my blessed mother I had to think then traipsed pale rocks to touch
three fingers into the drink while shouting about insurance companies
Mississippi rolling Twain’s books through shimmer and deep

since we’ve got our arms here other full of each found

photographs passed back to me captive on cream upholstery
row upon row of white markers with bright flower outbursts
discussing grandfathers who’d fought for our countries
river outlook a vast graveyard of their fallen ever brought home
driving policy asserted with outspoken flim flam foreigners

‘watch for the anvil-shaped cloud, it’s just like that’
Julie said if a tornado appeared we’d have to leave the car
she’d been in two and you need to get out
and then underneath something like a bridge

all the ‘things’ she wanted to show me were people

on her brother’s cleansing lawn a recently felled tree circle
(cedar’s creosote-sap-soil—difficult to grow anything when they’re gone)
his man-cave wall Jim Morrison silk with black dog behind glass
we found a Hendrix chaos song Dean hinted a travel return with

warm snow over me from balloon words and wishes

and a Galesburg railway station swooning eagle was you
‘we’ll protect each other with the nonsense of this careful’
the artist said to me, ‘good-bye an’ you go and sing your song’
so here I am with my voice back

no one may take from me as if I were an abandoned shop or store dummy

my genius pretenders lit up a true woman with a wall
fine places we live have protective signs
here now let us plant the carbon-soaking trees then dance
amongst true singing of love and our beautiful
Dialogue

I want to know you, sweet pardonerg
to think that I know you, come
sit beside me, this is the season of feast
we consume all that is beautiful, make it part of our blood
and wait—

Is dying easier if you escort me?
Will you carry my soul on the palm of your hand?
Or did you teach us an elaborate dream?

You dazzle me, your never stutter, never slip,
and here I am with my broken nails, buckled knees,
my screaming, whiplashed paradise.

I was parroting you, your words, your gestures. I tried hard.
I studied like an owl, I broke your laws.
I confessed to thin air my pitiful sins. Did you hear me?

The seat beside me is vacant. I know I will never see your face.
Why, then, waste a moment on you, imaginary being,
who has a hundred thousand dwellings,
churches and cathedrals built with blood and tears,
to please you? in absentia? to humble ourselves to death?
Cut loose

and what do you do for the universe
press your shoulder against the mountains?

not enough to raise your cup and taste
the salt and the tang?

chip in with riots of smiles?
a new breeze could build a city

limbs lax and permissive are assets
your task to find the sweat glands of freedom

a willing branch supple and green
is a happy babe at a milky nipple

take away the darkness
fill your inner chambers with sweet thoughts

escort the censor to the door
let your hair down
Paula Bohince

Young man with hawk

Talons latched on its minder’s wrists, the hawk has chosen a companion. Seduced by the vivid green of the hillside, the new-shoot Spring of the cloth, draped over an arm, but mostly by being whistled to, and summoned. The pair look up, where two hawks ride across a pillar of sky. Choosing one partner means forsaking all others, though the young ones do not yet feel the ax of this, in their happiness.

After the woodblock print Young Man with Hawk by Isoda Kory Sai, 1735-1790, Japan

Girl playing samisen

Patient one, plucking the trio of strings and reading the music on her lap, struggling to leave behind her body, become the vibrating instrument, quiver of song. The caged bird over her shoulder listens: solo audience. Its notes once called forth a mate, or answered a request. Now the marriage is between itself and the girl who will be one day a true wife, and wants to learn before then the lonely joy of the samisen.

After the woodblock print Girl Playing Samisen by Unknown, Edo period, Japan
The stranger

In macrocarpas click cicadas
The somewhere females (assessing)
Flutter by on tips of hedge a searing orange butterfly, breeze hardly
And every window open, kids in
Pool over fence, a scream and splash, and
Chilled in fridge the next glass of lemon
Barley. bird sees behind with eye a
Flick of head and sees right with rife eye
The stranger passes by, I dream another life, of less ground down and grudge
of home in heart and rosy wife

Crumbs

In middlemarch the drought, brown and dead
And dust the grass, the broken cattle
Sold to works, the crops parched. in town the
Sprinklers, the few still-clicking crickets
And to and from retainer walls the
White black-dotted butterflies flitting.
Adrift on self, a mind is dual
And worries churn like fly round a room
Buzzes and through a door at last (peace)
Claws scratch the eaves and drop to boards hop-hop for crumb but not too near—keep guard
Sparrows—for mine’s a species and some
te ohonga ake

mauri breathes me in
breathes me out
my chin re-awakened

six waka pakeha
have carried me
here

five generations
later this aotearoa
this green and brown

has made its way
under my skin
into my veins

tinted my heart
another hue
this aotearoa

centuries of te reo
underfoot this
the place I stand

opening my throat
to waiata
i long for powhiri

to karanga
into the light
of luscious lines
carved, curving
to walk with
to be proud of

on my otherland face
beneath my silent mouth
a living ancestry

first haiku (tanka)

a future springtime
see myself among petals
language snows on me

cherry blossoms framing their
heaven of walking people
Ulysses and the sirens

(J. W. Waterhouse, 1891)

Everything is in flight
the wind breathing hard into the sail
ropes stretched bowstring-taut
oars flailing at the sea
the ship wide-eyed, horrified.

Only the hero strains to hear, but why?
not lust for these undesirable sirens
 gliding in on raptor wings
with their blank implacable
Pre-Raphaelite faces.

The artist has painted the music
but failed
as words fail to describe it
as every attempt to sing it fails.

We are silent witnesses
lured and repelled
as deaf as the oarsmen
to that unimaginable song.
Canongate, 12.04am

the moon is yellow on a painted backdrop
with an artful smudge of cloud

the cars are last-minute props
in hardboard and acrylic

canned laughter disturbs the airless night
but is switched off
fast

I hurry through spotlit circles of grace
and the ominous dark in between
I am neither actor nor viewer
I have opened a door in a dream
and again and again I cross the empty stage
I cannot find a way out

yet once at twilight
a subtle shape comes out of those bushes
a shadow moving in shadow
small lithe self-possessed
not dog nor cat nor possum
   a stoat

I stop dead

I hold my breath

it vanishes
and I know it has returned to its nest
in the illuminated margin of a prayer-book
to feed its young on
a basilisk’s gilded flesh.

JONATHAN CWEORTH
Greetings

She moves away.

He comes out wearing
a plastic glove on one hand
he bows deeply once and then again
he follows up with a cricket wave,
a country wave, a wave at full stretch.

He returns to the kitchen,
as if he'd only had time
for this one grand farewell.

She boards the bus, pausing
to greet the driver who,
keeping his face in neutral,
wants for her to swipe her pass.

‘Please, check your balance,’
the recorded voice says blandly.

Every day we smile and bow to our neighbours
unable to engage in more than simple
conversation. Our cooking smells are shared;
fish sauce, garlic, roast chicken or lamb.

We watch out for each other, help if asked
but discreetly part at each identical front door.
Control

Taiwanese cherry trees brighten
the edge of the bush when
we should be waiting for kōwhai.
Imported in the sixties then
purple and orange were in fashion.
Those were days of hope and freedom.
Consequences were all to be positive;
marches and sit-ins would change society.
Peace songs would bring war under control.

No-one thought cherry trees
would need to be eradicated.

Mating tuis in the cherry trees,
destroying bright pink blossom
drunk on the fermented nectar
they hang upside down almost in reach.

Kowhai

Today I watched the removal of a dead kowhai.
The van towed the mulcher across the mown grass.
The machine switched on and off to force the trunk through.
Only leaves remained to rake and shovel.
The tree's gone. No stump remains.
The park's taken back the roots left in the ground.
No-one will notice the circle of dead grass.
Through the window I see the space for other trees.
Long ago I watched through a different window. The pine trees round the farmhouse were felled. We sat on unfamiliar branches. The spiky snags caught at our clothes. The trunks were trimmed to take away. The stumps remained to remind us where we had climbed before.

How to read murder-mysteries

First work out the key character, who will survive (probably the detective who has a TV series)

only identify with him/her

be indifferent to the family,
(they may be victims)
be objective about the crime scene
count the bodies, the forensic scientists
don’t worry about the innocents
ignore blood, the wounded flesh
knifing, decapitation and torture

be immune to f--- and c--- words
they don’t refer to anything.
On leaving the youth hostel

The boy manoeuvered his pack over a home-made hose reel that lay halfway across the hostel path. Nearby, a tap hung from a pipe on the side of the house where it dripped incessantly.

At the letter box he looked at the morning sun and sea, which were set well back, each blue and variegated.

Over the city, cranes slewed, raising and lowering their loads as some dog men stood in steel caps on flexing rusty steel, or balanced on other loads.

Some children looked smart in uniforms as they walked close by, with the pedestrian workers who mostly looked fresh on the first morning of the week.

To the left, a taxi stopped two doors further down the hill. The driver retrieved luggage from the footpath while the passenger stood looking flustered and annoyed. She stood close to where a tree branch had fallen the night before. Its leaves appeared marginally wilted on the parched mown verge.

Then, two small cars raced up the hillside. The red one gave a tiny automatic surge as it went ahead on the other side. It caused some loose leaves to flutter away from an expired starling that lay in the gutter.

While the boy stood, he contemplated his journey to another place and thought about his next walk on the road.
Alexandra Fraser

Dancing on the edge

we believe in extinction
the coldness of old basalt

it's our city
we'll dance if we want to

balloons and fireworks
little wooden houses

big-leaved whau
snowdrops and sheep
runners at dawn

but come to the volcano's edge
look down imagine

nights of liquid fire
tall tephra columns

fire fountains blazing nights
and far below

dull embers sleeping deep
drifting molten plumes

awaken to rise through cracks
steam and turmoil lava bombed

lahars would settle all our laughter
slow our foxtrot hip-hop boogie

our faith could be in scientists
and seismographs but

may I have the next dance?
you ask because we both know
that is all we can do
River city

to grow up in a river city is to get used to seeing things pass by
the river goes north takes broken trees friends volcanic ash
a lover arsenic jobs flowing water unrelenting current

high snow melts
river force spins turbines
lights go on

we learn not to build on a flood plain hopes gardens consumed
‘the river is high today came up quick in the night’
we learn there are no sandbags for the heart

grey-green river
drifts sullen
swollen with spring rain

a narrow bridge each step a fight against vertigo
a goods train grumbles past a breath away count the wagons
count footsteps don’t think of the river below

summer-humid air
heavy wet breathless
the scent of lemons

long days spin out to winter drowned in a river of darkness
black fog lifts from the river fingers into gullies
rolls down roads ‘careful driving home watch for the white line’

river fog
wraps the silent willows
a dog barks

‘you can’t see your hand in front of your face’
we are invisible forgotten frangible as the last
dried rose turned to blood-smear underfoot

we go north
live by the sea

which returns to our footprints each day
We stood like two icicles in the summer night, as though Hoping for the moon’s light to melt us back from a State of suspended animation. But with our bodies Shackled almost with a cement of fear which even Jonathan Could not rival or produce, puzzled with disorganized Thoughts unable to reach a synthesis of the happening It had perceived, knees shakened with an involuntary horror Spasm, eyes dazed as though hypnotized or iced and blinded With confoundment, faces contorted more than that of a Stutterer left dumb, hands trembling as though struck with A palsy with fingers more fidgety than two gunslingers Standing at a close distance, lips trembling as though Enthralled: in some ancient ritual prayer to the dead, we Staggered toward the holy or unholy place as the four winds Converged and smacked our faces, the grass tripped us, the Branches and twigs smote violent blows and hindered and Choked us and we perceived ourselves to be moving through Some mad jungle when we finally converged at the spot just as My eyes suddenly opened, straining under an intense ray of Sunlight which had slipped through the half-drawn curtain Before my bed.
Cosmic metamorphosis: a twentieth century Galileo

(Immanuel Velikovsky)

A Huss of nebula wilderness bones,
Napthal melted rouge rod of Exodus,
‘Van Allen belts’ robbed from his honored zones,
He mocked the fire, chain and stake of dazed fuss.

Drunken stars swerved out of orbit, nailed
Near collision of Venus, Mars and Earth:
Oil fields born, rivers reversed, gods unveiled,
Ritual prognerated prime hearse.

Cunning scholars with jealous gray matter,
Pelted warped stones at his space synthesis;
Moved less than snails to view data lettered,
They coldly buried new analysis.

Truths surfaced like bites of tsetse flies,
Now hailed a god among peers, prophet-size.
Altostratus

The rim of the sky will be the colour of hard crimson, and your heart, as it was then, will be on fire — Акхматова

Anna, the tundra swan
nested with you that squandered winter.
The vast ocean was icy, and displaced
to the shore, you hissed at the watery sky

which imprisoned you. This was spite
peculiar to commonplace clouds.
When the eye was overcast,
there could be no poetry.

The steppes, the mud
on your valenki and the snow-fox
teased at your thoughts once more.
With wing and bill, an altostratus flew

across a low sun. The sky crimsoned
with words, cloudberrries that will ripen
in some uncertain summer inhabited
by four year old Cloudboy who’ll read you.

He’ll imagine a miracle flowering for you.
It will be clean as paper, prescient as pencil-lead
you were persecuted for. Anna, he’ll bear witness to it
and will memorize: Серое облако в небе накладные расходы . . . *

* ‘A grey cloud in the sky overhead’ — Anna Akhmatova
A parental guide to clouds

All parents know that we never own our children. We’re gifted them to caretake, to raise for lives brief as strati. The milky astonishment of their births. The evolutions generated for us by first steps and first words, a startling of new clouds. The full skies which form when our children start school. The tears of the honoured shed, as mares’ tails, when they love someone else. Such simple beauty as our offspring possess—in wisps of hair, in float and vapour of their bodies—exists in us as a mirage momentarily.

When they leave us never to return, we remain buoyed, like altocumuli, at having had them sail through the world at our sides.

When we’re old, this knowledge floats us to our beds and allows us to close our eyes.

SIOBHAN HARVEY
An occasional boat

Aotearoa’s first waka were clouds bearing, like precipitation, our future gene-pools in their bellies. They began life in Hawaiki, Portsmouth, Apia and Hong Kong.

Even now, in settlement, our people turn to their ancestors, the clouds for connection, understanding and loss. And the clouds oblige with reassuring rain, silvereyes, stargazers, dragons, trains and even an occasional boat.
Every body continues in its state of rest

Day one of six, you’re having mechanical issues.
‘Jockey wheel’s chewed up. Damn rear derailleurs. Where’s the mettle?’
Your bike won’t let you crossgear to chase me up a hill
to be the first to see the Tasman. (We are fresh-limbed;
bull-willed.) You have to work your way up, cog by cog. This is fair.

The pannier bags are doughy backsides waggling. They are equal
and opposite to our Daedalian bodies. We equipoise the question
of feather versus carbon crankshaft, hammer versus asphalt gradient,
drag coefficient as opposed to Kevlar purchase: the acceleration
is inversely proportional to the mass of the frame. This is tedious.

We are a pair of lunatics we are repeatedly informed, seesawing
the extremes of bliss and agony, blood and sugar, natural beauty
and freight traffic. We push the road behind us so that we might outpace
our calendars. We make ‘lifecycle’ jokes. Eight hundred kilometres
is enough to talk ourselves tire-flat, saddle-sore. This is inertia.

The pollen in so many cubic metres of countryside is countless.
I sense you fall back from the joy of it: the theoretic physics of the peloton.
Head down, heartrate constant, One Square Meals clogging in your gut.
You note placenames like a bibliography: We have been here, we will go there.
In between, there may be photo opportunities, subject to punctures.

This is fatigue.

Mauve doesn’t suit my buttocks, you say, let alone crust. Let’s hitchhike.
‘Are you done?’ You shrug the oil-stained condor shoulders—the bastard wings
we have developed. The velocity is fitful. We violate the conservation of spirit.
Our itinerary is not a closed system. I fight the damp nor’wester;
pry apart a slipstream.

‘Come draft off me.’ I grimace. It’s the pollen, you say, eyes streaming.

This is endurance.
Ross Jackson

Dreams at the end of a string

He sees her:

Orange skulled bather, in melanin lightly clad, he would protect this Celtic Tinder from the sun, if he could. Would trap her creamy, curdled beauty in a camera box. But Irish to the bone; and tough, she’d buzz him off like a fly. Coffee alone at South City, then.

Spilt Coke sweetens counter tops. Panoramic beach views, a hint of chip fry. Gulls boss all the plastic stools. Glove puppet gulls.

Tide water running through plumbing. (A noisy reflux at The Gents.) Walking by. Rickety. He’s an old dude tied to a balloon; responsive to its string. Obedient to his flighty red rubber wife. Following string to its very end, he takes off.

A Mako shark in thongs. Stencilled silk shirt billowing pineapples. His bodyweight plumbing pillowed sand. His spirit a dirigible in the sky. Reaching the end of that, oh so long knotted piece; the lifetime of a dreamer.
Observation for an activist

Without your envy
smoking from the road

bringing tears to their eyes
or changing their perspective

penthouse people might look down
at the boxed flowers on the glass lip
of a lower apartment

scan citizens slipping chains
of fitful, shifting traffic

spy me, having Mexican on the pavement

discriminate that pigeon
mining specks beside my feet

excrete their dew of
languid disengagement.
Illustrations in a history book

Buller, at the relief
of Mafeking;
Richard the Lionheart
landing at Joppa;
the early Britons
with wooden shields
and short swords
wading out
to do battle
with boatloads
of armour-clad
Roman soldiers;
blind Milton
being read to
by his daughters;
and lastly
the Duke of Monmouth
grovelling before
James the Second
as he unsuccessfully
begs for his life.
Writers

Children like me
can’t take responsibility.

No-one expects
any special effects
from this man.

To be a wizard
it helps to be wizened,

I still like sombre poetry
though it seems too deep to see,

Giving cheek

If the boss were stupid
he’d shoot
himself in the foot.

But he isn’t,
so he doesn’t.

After listening to him
wouldn’t it be funny
if I turned out
to be ordinary.
Andrew McIntyre

What better totem

I dreamt a tiger seized my throat in his jaws, which wasn’t the nightmare you’d imagine. He spoke to me telepathically in a despotic dialect, our minds one pyre chained together; I felt his claws on the knuckles of my spine: his breath was hearthy as home.

I should have been terrified but was honoured that this majestic creature had chosen me, as if in silence the selector selected the selectee free of his prejudicial brethren, daring to brave the grieving realms of a dreaming man’s brain to stitch his torn heart with threads of fire, kindled by time to twist crepuscular forests to its burning, muscular favour.

Out of the blue of our lives black with the loss of our son, this tiger stole into my skull and cuffed me into epiphany by saying, as the homiletic cleric to the animalist:

*I will teach you about blood.*
Whither the bunting of a wild dependency
—still flush in tremors of outset—,
strung across spindled foreground:
burlesque birds, sleek and shining black,
pull up into warm unsteady air.

If anything needs be celebrated,
let it be light (photosynthesis is astounding):
moments between dusk and dawn;
moments, especially, between rains,
when everything, the sum of it, is flung wide open,
gates swung true by sunshine
and summer comes haring over fields.

Celebrate, by the by, indomitable Green:
bursting like gutters, thick with life
and getting thicker still. But there is a green
so dark it remains untouched
by this shaking loose of light. There is something
ever-green, ever-growing, ever-dying.
It is something older
than the weatherboard United Church;
older than any fluttering standard; older
than the face carved into wood; older than everything
but the hill itself. And the kauri tree leans
into the present.
Beyond the hollow-way and its wellspring
deeper than its roots, time stalls
and rigs itself with darkness. Roots
and sap and stems and rot—
its life is all that lives, sustained
or not by something past indifference.
It has outlived its own promise.
Yet futures twinkle in its shadows.

Water mutters from the stone hole
under the tree’s massive bulk
and flows down an iron drain onto the roadside,
singing thereabouts of blackness.

Later, in the churchyard behind the tree,
light rattles little butterflies
from the flowering bushes—they can’t help
but fly
above our names and dates,
drawn up
and on towards the sun.
Fruit salad sky

Cold air clings to rain-soaked skin, whilst crashing waves provide a constant soundtrack. Walking along an empty beach, footsteps dissolve in wet sand. The artistry all or nothing. When a seagull swoops and glides away, there is an immediate sense of freedom. Suddenly, the sky seems closer, almost within reach.

Melt

A slice of lemon floats precariously. It provides a necessary distraction. Tears become camouflaged when staring into a shiny glass. Like an ice-cube lost in water. Silently, slowly, shrinking.
Keith Nunes

the kiss

watching me
watching her apply lipstick

practised
swift

eager to attach
those lips to mine

she says sure,
be my guest

and we do

next door

tenderness sossed its way out of the room
and left us with lust
to be issued like a uniform

afterwards there were faint attempts at contact

but we knew
neither had the desire
to leave fingerprints

so we’d get up
wipe away the evidence
and talk as though the crime was next door
teetering

teetering
on the edge of something that looks like a brink

I should jump
and avoid the hours of angst

measuring up
is for tailors

I like to lurch,
stammer

walk the boards
backwards

if only for a moment
before everyone turns up

devoured

in through the unguarded door of her emotions
asking for support,
for unconditional love

she believes
like a congregation in front of a false prophet
she gives more than is fair

you take
devour
discarding what can’t be digested

engorged, you throw her up
onto the footpath
for everyone to see

there,
you say,
it’s over
John O’Connor

From the poetry sequence

Transactions

Beanie

With his beanie off
Jake looks 20 years older . . .

never goes into the church proper
sits in the foyer / regular as clockwork
thinking things through.

Jake knows almost everyone &
everyone knows
Jake.

•

Last birthday he was 90
this time he’s 81.

None of it matters—
he’s OK
by the guys he knows

‘that’s what counts’.

So what if he’s ‘old as the hills’?

You would be too
if you’d lived by them ‘since

Adam was a cowboy’.
REAL

Zima says she won’t be here next week
her brother-in-law’s coming for a visit
& she’s looking forward to it

‘Better than church,’ she says.

He lives somewhere else. ‘There—’

She doesn’t have a brother-in-law
but it makes her happy. Tom’s operation
didn’t / and Joe dying
—both on the same day—made her lower lip tremble.

But she’s OK now.

HARD

Likes to think he’s quite a man

quick witted, knows his way around a bar bordello

& all the stuff between—that he’s heard of somewhere on the street.

Has a twinkle in his eye
can ride a bike
read a little
‘even swim’. So he says. Didn’t like getting caught though when Di needed assistance. Hard men don’t help out.

Cakes

A behaviour problem, or more of a disappointment problem certainly disappointed Bill who had hoped for a bit of nookie & got a cuddle. Disappointed herself once too but who hasn’t?

When she brought along cakes for supper one night you could tell she meant it.

Made sure no-one saw / as if you could hide it.

You wouldn’t call her ‘smart’ but you couldn’t call her ‘dumb’. She calls herself ‘Mum’ / when no-one’s around.
Wheels

Certainly paid his dues
been singing out of tune for years
likes to help out where he can
being tetraplegic’s never held him back.
Greets you with a smile every time.

Steps

If I were him I think I’d just forget the whole thing
& string myself up.
But he wouldn’t know how to tie the knot. Not
that he thinks that way.
Wouldn’t cross his mind. As far as I can tell he just
takes it
step
by step.
Vincent O’Sullivan

Your word against mine then, is it?

As long as we sleep, the partisans are ready,
the cleverly sly housekeeper distracts the search,
the handsome underground agent fingers his throttling
wire, rather than leave a comrade in the lurch.

As long as we wake, the collaborator considers
the chances for sex before he decides to run,
the chubby grocer slips notes between the layers
of the habit he hi-jacks from a weary nun.

And those hours then between sleeping and starting up,
between stark awake and out to it like a light?
Jesus, we say, not sure which side we’re on.
Hero and swine at once about gets it right.

To finish the story . . .

When he came to enrol, quite in fact by chance
timetables suited for ‘Mythic Studies’.
He sat fourth row from the centre front
to watch and attend a very nice-looking
woman almost as young as his mother, who ran
through Creation stories before upsetting
some at least of the class with ‘Saviour
Figures, Divine Sons.’ By second vacation
Babylon, Gilgamesh, already completed.
They came then to the stories he knew
with a sudden flaring, as when tilting a plastic
ruler the sun corruscates its blade,
were Berhampore, all over. Give or take
the actual murders, voices from off-stage could be gods, or even himself—he knew, ‘So it’s home they were on about, even then.’ Maths he decided on for the next semester. Numbers don’t lose you sleep the way life does. Don’t wake you, their wrenched breathing, the bedroom cry.

The hare, he said,

‘You can’t imagine what it was like, to see a creature other than rats,’ to see, he meant, its living pertness, its ears alert and standing and the sun pink through them, ‘a kind of warmth we’d as good as forgot.’

Its bizarre, insistent confidence, its paws casual even, between coiled snagging wire as if mere brambles, not a dozen yards to the left a corpse-infested ditch. He said, ‘We watched him with childish wonder, as though an angel had landed at an atheists’ picnic,’ a Methodist as he’d been then, wryly thinking back. ‘And no one, none, the hare, the angel, the bleeding enemy, us, knowing who should disturb it first, who’d regret for ever wrecking its undamaged world.’

Who did? He did not remember. ‘The one fine thing I brought back with me,’ he says. ‘The hare.’
So much to remember, dad, at the Colosseum

You ensure slaves have calories enough, for instance, to be dead beat by evening, but not dead by the next day.

You choose a man with a gifted eye commanding where great rocks begin, the splendour mounting, the shaped stone beneath to bear the stone above.

The arena’s angles neatly lock. The sky blue if the day’s well-chosen. (One gift of Rome being the weather it requires.)
The brass conches racket streets away to excite you imagine yourself being the boy a father brings to a treat,

until ‘Ecce! That’s your prize!’
the black raking of sand once stabbed losers are lugged off. But red, the brilliance of so much red, before getting to that!

Hot and red as the games you re-play when it’s maths you should be learning, declensions to spell out, as dad will tell you, who otherwise builds the future? Knows the right words to chant at dying Gauls?

‘When the wind lifted . . .’

When the wind lifted the curtain, an intruder about to step in,

then minutes later flung at the open door so the house quivered,
and you’d hear the moan as it set up
in the wires at the dark end of the drive,

it’s then his aunt would call, not ‘beastly’,
but ‘the beast.’ She knew it lived,

she knew behind its roar was a body
we might not see but was there, was vile.

‘Of course it will win, either now or later.’
When the sun next morning skidded

the lino, picked carnivals along anything
that shone, she’d forget she ever said it,

as normal, her smile, as the next woman’s
who fears, if not the rising wind,

some beast of her own. His aunt
could not believe in a beastless world.

Fame among the siblings

They were talking about being very famous
which after all is what being alive is about,
and one whose exquisite arse as she knew
was her ticket to acclaim, said ‘Like the Empire
State Building, that would be really famous.’
And her brother who fancied ‘Stud’ as the screen
name he would go by, said ‘Like the Great Wall of China.
Beat that.’ And the weed in the family with imagination
the size of a pebble couldn’t do better the loser
than come up with—can you believe it? grass.
You did it, Allen, whatever it is poets do, gathered together what the climate, or what seemed to be the climate as it was seen by you & all those others, your friends (those others not known so well) believed it to be an acceptable view

as it was discovered here in this little town Hardy Street, Collingwood, Trafalgar laid out in squares, the pattern Wakefield & the Company officers thought to be well-shaped, orderly the way to do it

getting things right, giving shape to the shapeless, the half-formed the ill formed as in the famous table (periodic) making sense of it all quarks, hadrons, bosons (Higgs) held together by string theory strong forces, weak . . .

which is the way to do it, Allen, the very best way to do it as can be seen in the New Scientist even better in the reports & papers it summarises, & in literature the exquisite shape poetics & theory provide super symmetry the ultimate theory

timing is everything . . .
Big Jack

(Jack Iverson, 1915–1973)

Big Jack, mystery spinner’s
in the nets at Brighton, flights
his orb, and leaves the batsman
grasping, as it spins and turns
delightfully away from and
around the bat. Hear Big Jack
roar with delight each time
the ball lands and leaves the
batsman in disarray. Big Jack,
a legend of the game, who
emerged from obscurity and
bowled Australia to Ashes victory
in Sydney, 1951. Big Jack who
learnt his trade with a tennis ball
and ruler playing French cricket in
WWII. Big Jack, also family man
and estate agent who had to
put cricket second to his family.
Big Jack, mystery spinner with
his solid frame, who often felt he
was an impostor in the game, but
who was great. Big Jack, sad Jack,
who shot himself, and yet remains
an original, with his finger bent.

The old house

The old house is still there obscured by branches, leaves, at the top of the street. He doesn’t look, and I won’t look. It’s where we’re not going. Not now.

Childhood was there, is still there. Adulthood is here, as if both are housed differently in what we see and do.
He doesn’t mention the old house, that place where we lived. For more than 20 years we were there, and now we are here.
The branches, leaves, obscure it, and neither of us will look.

Time ball tower, Lyttelton

My first camera took a photo of it; now, destroyed amid the ruin.

For years it stood doing its job; then preserved as an attraction. Any restoration work looks difficult. How you’ve crumbled, fallen. Time tells and tolls.

After the Chch earthquake, February 2011
Visiting the rest home

Sunlight fades photographs. After a while features are chastened into faintest blur; faces acquire white anonymity.

Sun lightens writing on cards, to sepia at first. Then lines of the script disappear until all is expunged: the greeting (familiar or not), the message, so carefully phrased, and the name of the sender—all gone. All of it, gone.

Subversive

Daily, we expend effort negotiating the waterways of language (snagged, ever-changing, chancy), skirting stagnant reaches of cliché, rapacious rapids of verbosity, and obscurity’s clogged canals.

But the sub-text, the intonation? ‘Awful dog,’ I say, fondling the soft, black ears.
Octopus

Old shirt sipping waves, a closet of surprised ocean spread across the bottom, found feeling

up the shallows among kelp for crabs. Shrinks into the reef on approach (however cautious),

savvy of my kind, casting as we do the shadow of a common story: long centuries of murder

in hot pursuit of coal, skirting the floes for tail, outlawing fauna. So this dotted chemise,

thrown into the corner, stone-washed, crumpled, of generic fabric, this cloudy moon

anchored to the rock with its vested passion, distrusts, rightly, we flipper-flappers.

Remote cousin, of an age before numbers rose out of the floor into human apprehension,
I come in peace, poet
behind the glass and rubber.
Come to sip with you,
the water laughing—

small waves on the shore
in whose collapses
the naff of ages echoes—
share a moment

eyeing up the other;
how your head dithers,
follows cautiously behind
trending tentacles

away from the human,
off into that deeper ocean
in whose back rooms
I remain unwelcome.

Honorary vertebrate,
back-tracker sifting through
territory unshaken
by the shopper’s roar,

will you one day walk
the footpaths of Dunedin,
your arms in business
working the Octagon?

Mankind the wastrel
has walked off the job.
Gangly restaurateur,
you mop up the past.

RICHARD REEVE
Westport

Sodden weatherboards, stink of sweating coal, and always the mountains, misunderstood, oblivious to misunderstanding though men’s mines seep into their rivers. Town muzzled by the Care of Children Act, town at pains to prove itself after dark, raining, musty, drunken, sun-lit peeling town,

after Rununga, the buck-toothed coast, wave on wave wearing through limestone, then lowland manuka, sprawling paddocks, and stretching north

the slow profound swell of range on range confronting, concussing its elemental other. By the highway, dottery cows. Poetry is here neither irony nor the pastel peaks of sentiment. The subdivisions jostle, on the Paper’s front page two children flash posters, ‘Save the World’;

the world doesn’t give a fuck about Westport. The world, being all about itself, is the Buller River, gathering its poetry in an irrepressible surge.
Surf Nazis

watching the 1987 trash movie classic Surf Nazis Must Die—
about a gang of sick bullies in California,
a glorious wave of politically incorrect fantasy shot thru me.
I was feeling as happy as a Jew on the day Hitler shot himself!

how could I use this gift?
I remembered a friend of mine back in ’83, taking a shit on the bonnet
of a CEO’s car—which I didn’t fancy doing myself—
but it did lead me to consider how victims feel.

I remembered laughing & teasing a boy at school one day—
for the crime of ‘looking like an ugly warthog’.
a friend & I teased the crap out of this kid,
reducing him to tears, chanting ‘Warthog! Warthog!’

we thought it was so funny—in a vicious, thrilling kind of way.
what do I remember most?
the look on his face—the hurt & disbelief.
the world was picking on us, so we picked back.

we enjoyed our roles that day:
innocent little fools, stuck in our ugly, frustrated adolescence.
trapped in the cruel school playground—itching
to do anything that might release us.

it all came back so clearly
& a feeling of shame swept thru me—so many years later.
I decided to do nothing—
even though the world loves a victim.
The tree outside my window

for Owen Bullock

class act:
wind is a free-ranging show pony—lacking finesse at times:

able, say—to slip exclusively thru portals,
tending to fly straight into anything it approaches

but forever regulating power, changing direction.

I’m envious—

floating in the pool, watching lightning overhead—
stuck on how much we gaze.

\textit{an intense outflow of electricity in the air—occurring within clouds, among clouds, or between a cloud \& the surface of the earth}

rele\-\lentless precision, interaction—
an exploding nest of verbs!

my behaviour?
not so tree-like.

freeze-frames of choosing \& tasting—
the details of which are ultimately lost in summation:

an existence—
somewhere between waiting in line

\& riding the tick-tock click track up to the final roaring descent.
Dancing bear

I’ll be your fierce bear in a vest
With little bells

I’ll dance at the roadside
Until my footpads scrape raw

Until my flanks
Are matted with dust & sweat

O put a ring in my nose
I’ll dance I’ll dance

Put a shackle round my neck with a chain
I’ll be your fierce bear in a vest

Driftwood

So they bring this hunk of driftwood home.  
It’s got a damp smell to it. But if you touch it—  
if you stick your finger into it—it’s dry.  
There’s talk of attaching some googly eyes  
to the driftwood. ‘Ya know, glue gun ’em right on.’  
They wanna borrow my green scarf—tie a nice bow  
round the neck. They give him a name.  
‘Skeeter.’

After all the planning, Lizzy’s sleepy. My wife goes  
to put her down for a nap & I guess Lizzy grabs Skeeter  
& demands that he sleep beside her.  
She wakes up with mites.
L. E. Scott

Lost keys

sleep dreams
walking in the house
from locked room to locked room
daylight coming dressed
in ghost colours

God’s kiss

this candle burns with memory
yesterday was a match
time has locked the door
your coming death
is god’s little dirty secret

Birth gives birth death

Time enters darkness
with no regard
for the randomness of life
as abrupt as the water breaks
so too, the thread
this journey
never was moving to the light
fleeting phrases

i) black & white photography

street light traces a tree
on bedroom louvre door
a black lace filigree
its bones in sharp relief

juxtaposed by a thick
charcoal line down the side
dge fuzzes out of focus
like feathers or toetoe

ii) on-call

slipping between worlds
she floats her poems
on the wonder of
red & gold autumn

the airy creature
is dragged down by drear
dank days of winter
a slip on her deck

wishes the weather
would settle into
a less slithery
stylistic track
iii) a cold cryptic night

stars shiver
window shakes
black sky opens
folds carpets of cloud
weaving through fingers of stardust

cloud faces morph in moments
leap over a train to town
track a man in black fedora
smoking a cigarette
red reflecting off
a wet window of words
End-stage motor neuron disease

Fred Simpson

His drapes, even at night, are never drawn. They frame in paralysed light our star, (and others blinking), bitter rain, and birds too old to reach Siberia.

His windows too are set ajar, even after dark, and bare air, (lung-forbidden), forces his eyes to drip. They are the last to live, his eyes, and he watches as drops spread like spider on linen.

His preference though, especially at night, is looking in—in to REM with eyes flicking:

It is then that his hands can resurrect caress, and his dead feet dance.
self-censoring

The white
dishdashed Omani
company driver
says little from the Dubai
marbleclad arrivals hall
to the Hilton Al Ain’s
oldest hotel.

We keep missing
each other
Kiwi mixed with
Buraimi broken
English air
currents icy
A/C airconditioning
now I hear you.

Humour is riskier than
juggling two mobile phones
at the wheel checking
texts, surfing the net
cruising on a near
empty superhighway with no
upper limit.
## folded light

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On receiving a rejection letter from Mr Paterson

I am on a beach. Not a sandy beach,
a beach covered with black pebbles.
One catches my eye and I pick it up and put it in my mouth.

It is a word, round and smooth and salty with tears.
It clinks against my teeth as I polish it with my tongue.
I spit it into my hand and cast it into the sea.

There are other pebbles. Flattened, balanced, skipping stones.
I flick these sounds across the lapping water
they bounce and dance and make a splash and sink.

There is a glossy, glassy piece of obsidian.
I splinter it on another pebble and have a note sharp
enough to slip between my ribs and pierce my heart.

Beyond high tide, driven by wave and wind are bits of pumice.
Tangled in the kikuyu and clover, ash cold,
an insubstantial phrase, they float like scum when tossed away.

Here too are the green waxy pods, seeds of the mangrove.
I pick them up with care, feel their weight, throw them furthest.
An utterance that will find a soft muddy shore and germinate.
Hedged in

Grazing this graying planet, necks stretching
reaching for more, cool death stalking
the tangled remains
when twice under a tune
the sad bell tolls
down the hardscrabble hill.

Steel-edged waltz cuts the thinning air
these last few times around the sun,
that burning star of one last hope.

Elixir of life whose rolling viscosity
once flowed for all
no longer bears the price of its keep.

Oh, master of the once-dark universe,
would your churning mind
still send its thoughts
knowing this?

So when will the end begin?
The steeple-stalked abyss proves no match,
potentialities unprovoked
pointing the compass round.
The watching

and of rock
that is as iron,
earth-cast, standing in sea, jagged,

and of coast, its trees
salt-tempered, twistings
out from the root,
long limbs of a black
searching the whitening
of sky over water,

and of no beginning
the immense of day,
a widening by light,
its cyclorama pale,
standing over Moehau,

eastern spur
of the land/fish/spine,
a long music,
te Moengahau o Tamatekapua

before you
actual,
and in the lens
of mind that is you
and your knowing
of it by sight. Moehau.

Such physical
structure of being
that is time
in the terraqueous body
of its many durations.
And you in it,
duration.

That you also
have taken up time.

It beds in you,
sixty-seven winters
of thought, of weather,
phenomena of earth resonant
in the remembering bone;
time languages layering
seven hundred years
here of human speaking.

And of locus . . .

That you also stand
in space, a site
between two seas, its names
word seed germinating
beneath curved seasons
that swing over land
and Hauraki’s run of tide.

You here a fraction
of the world sounding as word.

An eye in it
for the watching
of weathers, that sees
dawn translate night’s
single sea black
into day’s myriad
figurings of light.

And at all times climate.
Watch it at all times, its
world haul of winds, its
physics unresolved of cloud,
metamorphosis at all times
outside the cranial earth.

Gaian thought it is
temperature shift,
the tide in skies
entering your body
to be there the living
of heat and cold.

At all times weather
large as death
storms breaking down
certainties of coast
and the raised nature
of land above seas

or pregnant
with the warm
that starts the plant,
folds mind into structure:
its fractal branching trees,
its stamen thrust of flowers.

october
2013
and the
international
panel on
climate
change
records
the scale
of
human
influence
(ii)

Day coming in
making its manifest
of islands
from the touching of photons’
waves on stratified cliffs,
scoria fields, black inlets
of lava opening out
to the bird-seas

inshore of Moehau.

Soundless the touching
of the light, its wave
over Kawau,

the touching
over Hauraki. Over Wai-te-mata
and Auckland,

the touching.
Soundless over Kaipara and over
Waitakere,

the touching.

In such witness
you to live, to die,
a knowing shaped
by world enigma of surfaces,
its meanings of depth.

And without sound
the touching of light
indivisible.
What kind of thing

In memory of Sarah Broom

What kind of thing is the soul, Sarah asks when we are between nothing but the ridges of waves and blue becomes blue. I should say, I am high up in a propeller plane, a testament to miracle, some might say the soul is a testament. But I don’t know what to say. They weighed a soul and I know it is lighter than paper and clings like pitch. My father has a collection of ties he showed me only last night saying ‘Everything is what it is’ bulimic ties of cloth, living now within moths, broad 70s ties of polyester and, more important, the labels. Herzog’s used to be on the village green and Dad says it has gone—a place cars zip between. I should say, we are in a car in the bucket seat, a kind of rumble, on the way to his new, dry house and each tie a weightless stone I will snug around my neck. One from Reese’s of New Haven, hand-made
by my own Great Aunt Clara and Reese’s
of New Haven is gone too and Aunt Clara
and the hands that touched these ties,

we know where they are, we have closed the box.
And I am sure when dad opens his box of ties
he can see her hands, small with knuckles fat

as marbles, a thumb that has been pinched
and pricked and some red nail polish, left over
from the holidays but chipping off like resolutions

in the new year. And if Aunt Clara has a soul still,
it is with my father when he lengthens and knots
her hands around his own neck. And if my father

has a soul I would like to feel it when I wrap
his cloth hands around my own neck and maybe
the ties of our work, and the names they bring

are all we can keep. And I am sorry
I need to pay attention,
to look out the window and wonder

the name of that river, that peak,
that snow, that mirrored pond, that spit
of islands and the good light hitting the cape

casting a gold, pleasing color of an old tie.
And I wonder what it would be like to stay
up here, looking down, onto everyone

you could name, every face bathed,
occasionally, in the gold gleam of sun.
We were near centre court where two Americans, J. Connors, 22, a left-hander of medium height, would play A. Ashe, 32, 6ft 2ins. and right-handed, in the men’s singles final, Connors being the odds-on favourite as he had won Wimbledon in 1974 and would do so again in 1982; Ashe, an African American, had won the U.S. Open in 1968 and the Australian Open in 1970, however.

Connors liked to hit his ground shots from the baseline a lot, as did Ashe, to a lesser extent, so it was not just rush-the-net-smash. Ashe, however, soon unsettled Connors with his big serve, continually breaking Connors’ own less powerful service. Connors hit the ball on the rise—his usual strategy—but Ashe slowed the game down, using lobs, to win the first two sets 6-1, 6-1.

Connors did not look too flustered to me, and, using his strong, two-handed backhand more, won the third set 7-5. Impassive, like Bjorn Borg, Ashe won the fourth set 6-4—and the match. Arthur Ashe, an iconic civil rights activist, is now at rest on a higher court where there are no rallies to win or lose. Jimmy Connors married a model and is now a coach and commentator.
The location of heartache

I’m gazing at a published page,
of someone else’s writing,
words as bouclé as raw silk
nubby with flecks of colour,
the meaning slipping away now
along with my dream
and a company of poets
who collude to some signal that excludes me,
surface puffy with night meaning
awkward, dismantled,
heart-sore, here, in the area of the left breast,
certain that the most meaningful part of life
is lived while dreaming,
and that to awake is to fail, to fall
into an abyss of light.

Each day begins with fastening and fixing.
The rhythm and meter of feet on pavement,
poets whispering and hinting
just out of sight along the ridgeline.

A hiatus in traffic as quiet
as on Blake’s heath,
and I too am pacing the imagination
navigating the body of god,
searching in the luminous velvet of moss,
dappled spaces of old garden,
caesaurae where cats bed privately
and grass grows feathery.
Life is not edited,
marches on without explanation.
It is hard to know where it begins
and where it will all end.
I pray for a poem, to have something to live for.

Sometimes I dream of a surprise,
the unexpected. Often I’m running late,
missing something. There are particular locations—
auditorium,
rock wall vertical against bright turf
with vast, filigreed copper doors
like the first gates to paradise
or guarding the entrance
to under the mountain.

In the matrix of city,
dream poets disguised as real ones
at the launch of somebody else’s book.
I’m patchy, spectral,
escape to cool air,
taillights and head lights streaming,
the mercy of a bus driver
reaping his transport—
minimal wage, cheap shoes,
jacket pocket dragging—
his face keeps turning towards me,
flattened by street lighting, saying
if they drink and drive and won’t stop
they deserve all they get,
he’s got no sympathy, none at all.

There’s no margin for error.
I step over cracks so I don’t marry a Jack, 
resist walking out into traffic, 
we don’t have a bath and I’d have to find blades, 
it’s an end I want not intensification, 
someone to find me before I drift away. 
I’ve looked after myself well enough, 
but if I tenanted this body as a temple 
would it be squat mausoleum? 
Palladian folly with elongated pillars? 
Or Angelino crematorium, 
all smooth and cream 
with niches and colonnades, 
smoke puffing into blue sky?

Distant traffic on the causeway 
slides across surplus light. 
The tide is high, pillows the mangroves 
like blossoms dark on light on dark. 
I navigate blind, 
following gravel underfoot, 
passing Max the dog 
twitching and dreaming, 
he knows the smell of me 
and doesn’t bother barking. 
A lifetime on the chain, 
but Max inhabits his garage 
unburdened by the incessant hopes and fears 
which activate my human mind.

On the field, dew wets my shoes.

David Hume: . . . the incessant hopes and fears, which actuate the human mind.
Road trip to Paeroa

It’s my day tomorrow.
Come with me in dreams.
Travel through late autumn trees
shimmering antique gold coins &
plum jam spread thickly
over green velvet fields.

I arrive in this vintage town
searching for ghosts
& find oak, glass, pottery, the kitsch
of other people’s lives.

I give you brightly-coloured pieces of me
to take with you—
yellow, turquoise, red and orange—
retro, found oddments
rescued from contempt.

You store them with care
& rediscover them,
the dusty junk of every lived life
hung on to in the hope of an increase in value.

They are tucked away
in your heart for now, hidden
but not lost.
I wait for the day
when I’m in fashion again,
you turn me round in the light
& I sparkle once again.

Mothers Day 12 May 2013
Nowhereeverywhere

There is nobody of whom to ask directions,
no way at all to get to know my whereabouts.
You may go searching for years, or never move:
your chance of locating me would hardly increase,
even if you swept the whole of space from star to star.

Because I’m here, and there, and everywhere:
I’m over this plain and on top of Everest,
by this river and on Lake Baikal shore,
on this street and in Times Square,
in this town and thro’ Beijing.

Yes I’m in Rome and in Singapore,
in Buenos Aires and in Antananarivo,
in Moscow, in Wellington and in Tokyo;
in, or far from, every given city of the Earth.
Along the Equator and amid Antarctica at once.

I’m in deserts, in swamps, in glaciers and in oceans;
I’m in billabongs, in maelstroms and in geysers;
I’m also in the mist and in the highest clouds.
I may be right here, or who knows where:
nowhere, or where the universe ends.
Dedication to Gertrude Stein

Charles Bernstein

Distinguished American poet and critic Charles Bernstein has given PNZ exclusive permission to print the following commemorative speech given in 2001, to which he has added his own introduction.

On October 29, 2001, Gertrude Stein was inducted into the American Poets’ Corner at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, in New York. As part of the annual ceremony, which fell on the day Eastern Standard time resumed, a chorus sang a few settings of Stein’s work, among other choral works, poet Honor Moore read from Stein’s work and Molly Peacock, Cathedral Poet-in-Residence, spoke about Stein, along with New York University Dean Catherine Stimpson and myself.

Walking through the cobbled streets of Providence on Thursday night with the poet Keith Waldrop, I mentioned my great pleasure that Gertrude Stein was going to be inducted into Poets’ Corner on Sunday. Keith immediately replied, ‘And the time is changing too.’

It is indeed, and there is no time like the present time for time to change, as Stein might say, for for Stein there is no time like the present because the present is like no time at all.

And the time is changing too.

The Poets’ Corner honors both poets and prose writers. And while Stein can certainly best be described as a poet, one of her remarkable achievements is to have written lustrous works in all genres of literature: plays and novels, autobiographies, librettos, essays, lectures, mysteries and valentines, portraits and landscapes, children’s stories and travelogues, and, well, about half a dozen literary types for which we haven’t yet come up with a name.

In Stein’s most immediate generational company at Poets’ Corner are Eliot and Williams, Cummings and Stevens and Frost. And Stein is the first of any of the poets included here whose parents were immigrants and indeed the first whose parents did not have English as their native language.

She is also the first Jewish poet to join the poetic elect here at the cathedral.

And the time is changing too. So much to celebrate.
The newness of Stein’s family history in America made America if anything more important to her, as she wrote in her epic novel *The Making of Americans*:

It has always seemed to me a rare privilege, this, of being an American, a real American, one whose tradition it has taken scarcely sixty years to create. We need only realize our parents, remember our grandparents, and know ourselves and our history is complete.

The old people in a new world, the new people made out of the old, that is the story I mean to tell, for that is what really is and what I really know.

Gertrude Stein was born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, in 1874 and lived in the United States, mostly in Oakland and Baltimore and Cambridge. She moved to France early on and that is where she died in 1946.

Stein was not always celebrated, as she is today. Throughout much of the 20th century, her work was derided and belittled. She challenged the prevailing notions of poetry, language, and communication in such a powerful way that even today you will find that her work stirs controversy. But maybe this is just what verse needs to be contemporary, to stay in time and not be ‘out of it’ as Stein writes in ‘Composition as Explanation.’

And the time is changing too, even now, exactly now, exactly now as is as as is now as now is as and how and now and as and is and wow.

So now let’s actively repeat it all, exactly as she do, she does too, she does truly, exactly as she do. As as and as is and as is now. And how.

Among all twentieth-century American poets, Stein was the most radically inventive, the one who went the deepest into the turn toward language that characterizes much of the modernist art of her time.

In her modernist compositions, Stein found an alternative to the teleological thinking that underwrites much aesthetics as well as ethics: the idea that meaning lies outside or beyond what is at hand. She found meaning inside the words of which a poem is composed, a discovery and exploration of the wordness of words that has parallels in Einstein’s discovery of relativity and Freud’s of the unconscious.

In Stein’s work, every word has a potentially equal weight in a democracy of language. Rather than emphasize nouns or verbs, Stein created a writing in which articles and prepositions, pronouns and conjunctions, would have an equal weight and where the words and phrases are no
longer subordinated to received prescriptions of grammar but shimmer in syntactic equality in poems that avert beginnings and endings for the ongoingness of middles and that elide past and future for continuous presents.

Perhaps this achievement is best described in terms of representation, for Stein created works that do not represent some thing other than what is happening as it is happening, works where the entity of writing takes on a fullness it rarely is allowed to sustain, where literary figures are grounded in actual word stuff and where the hierarchic distinction between figure and ground is collapsed into a compositional plane where words sing not so much for their supper as for our collective succor.

As Stein says in *Tender Buttons*: ‘Act so that there is no use in a center.’

Stein, like several of her contemporaries, was a poet of everyday life, using common words to create new constructions for the new worlds we are hourly craving. Stein’s aversion to symbols and allusion created a poetry richly saturated with sounds doing their business of making meaning as it is made not reflecting meaning as if it were already a done deal.

In her essays she insisted that doing was much more significant than explaining or anyway that what is done is always more important than anything won.

One of the last things Stein wrote, in the year she died, was a preface to the Modern Library edition of her *Selected Writings*.

‘I always wanted to be historical, from almost a baby on,’ Stein writes. Well now, just in time, and the time is changing too, and Stein, always historical, all of us are always historical, is being taken out of time as we celebrate her as someone necessary for her time and our time.

And the time is changing too.

When I was 14 [Stein continues] I used to love to say to myself those awful lines of George Eliot, may I be one of those immortal something or other, and although I knew then how it went I do not know now, and then later when they used to ask me when I was going back to America, not until I am a lion, I said, I was not completely certain I was going to be but now here I am, thank you all.

And now here we all are and the time is changing too and thanks for that, thank you all, yes thanks for that, that Gertrude Stein is here, all here, here and now, and how.

And the time is changing too.
Selina Tusitala Marsh’s second collection Dark Sparring forces us to consider how exactly we react to performance poetry—specifically the sort of performance poetry that depends on chant and repetition and strong, overt rhythms. The topic is unavoidable. Auckland University Press has released this volume with a CD on which the poet reads 13 of the collection’s 43 poems, accompanied in a low key way by musician Tim Page.

I made the mistake of first listening to the CD while following the printed text of the 13 poems (which have some slight variants from the performed versions). I call this a mistake as I think I should have just listened. The prologue poem ‘Matariki’ is rather too politely enunciated by the poet’s voice when the story it tells is a feisty one—an assertion of the power of poetry by a young woman symbolising the Maori new year feast. Two of the performed poems are clearly occasional pieces. ‘Lead’ was, according to its heading, written for the Best Leadership Academy and ‘New Zealand, the Lucky Country’ was written for Leadership New Zealand.

I imagine they would have worked very well in their intended purpose of telling young people, at a public gathering, to take up leadership positions and to enjoy and make use of the democratic freedoms that New Zealand offers. Hearing only the voice of the poet reading them would have allowed us to enjoy their cadences, verbal skill and sly rhymes. But regrettably, on the printed page they come across as sloganeering. There is no irony here, no analytic thought, but the phraseology of a tourist brochure. New Zealand’s a lucky country / where our birth-right civic duty / lets you vote, or not—it’s free... We’ve got water like no other / wind turbines and solar power... and so on.

Conceivably the poet is proud enough of these pieces to include them in this collection, because they did efficiently the intended work for which they were commissioned. But I think they stand uneasily beside the better poems in the volume.

And yet not all the poems recorded on the CD have the same effect. The long ‘Chant from Matiatia to Orapiu’ is not only a sprightly sequence of rhyming couplets, but a very specific piece of description. The poem ‘Noose’ is a witty variant on the old spelling game of Hangman. ‘Fatele’ is a reflection on the death of a grandmother which earns its rhythms as it mimics a dance, where the cycle spins / a line is sung / fl yhty taketake hands
kava cloths wrung / ocean wave sway / pounding of tin / the salt-ridden tide
seeping back in all remind us that an aged life ending can be as much cause
for the celebration of the life as the mourning of the death. And then there
are, both on CD and in collection, three poems reflecting one of the poet’s
new interests—Thai kick boxing. The poems are ‘Muay Thai on Saturdays’,
‘First spar’ and ‘Kickboxing cancer’. Dare I say that the repetitive self-
assertion of these is a matter of specialised taste—and perhaps represents
a poet ‘psyching herself up’—I am the sought-after woman / I’m the seeking
woman / I’m the woman skinned with taboos / I’m the censoring woman / I’m the self-censored woman etc.

I have deliberately focused on those poems in this volume that have
been released simultaneously in two formats, because I think something
needed to be said about the disparity between printed word and spoken
performance.

I’m more comfortable making the point that the balance of this vol-
ume—the three-quarters of its contents which have not been recorded—
fulfils the promise made in Marsh’s first collection Fast Talking PI.

As the blurb reminds us, Marsh is of Samoan, Tuvaluan, English
and French descent. The chief commitment is to Pasifika, but there is
a conscious distancing from Pacific cultures as often as there is sheer
celebration of them. A poignant protest poem like ‘Girl from Tuvalu’, for
example, suggests the girl is like her nation / running fast / nowhere to go /
held up by / Kyoto Protocol / An Inconvenient Truth / . . . her face is 10,000 / her land is 10 square miles / she is a dot / below someone’s accidental finger / pointing westwards. This does not identify with the girl. It presents her as a
situation. In other words, it sees her and her culture in terms of the wider
world that impinges upon them. The many poems of mourning (which
dominate the collection’s second half) situate the death of a relative in the
modern Pacific world with references to the neon signs of Hong Kong,
television transmissions and so on. Do not look in this volume for a naïve
idyll.

The poem to which I kept returning is ‘Niu Sila Skin’, about a man
hanging in soul between New Zealand and a Pacific island—deracinated,
but unable to replant himself: uncle always wants to go back / even though
all the kids are here / lining up for pay packets, groceries and state houses…
/ but every time he goes back… / /… he gets sick. This is the sense of cultural
dislocation, of being neither fully here nor fully there, which is the lot
of many of New Zealand’s Pacific peoples, and to which Selina Tusitala
Marsh is particularly alert.
Getting reacquainted with Alan Ross and D J Enright

Alistair Paterson

It was a strange place for a second meeting—Alan Ross and D J Enright—Tawharanui, a camping site an hour and a half north of Auckland. We were camping there to escape work, responsibility, literature and the city, to enjoy sea and sand, the sunlit coast. And there certainly was sunlight and blue water and birds (dotterels, pukeko—many of them), and the horizon leaning over the edge of the world. But I’d brought a book with me, just one of them, a book on writers and writing and found in it two people I’d met previously—Enright and Ross interviewed by Alex Hamilton in 1978 and 1975 respectively ¹.

I met Enright in 1968 while serving in HMNZS Otago, a New Zealand frigate based in Singapore in accordance with New Zealand’s obligations as a member of the South East Asian Treaty Organisation. The ship went into dry dock half way through the commission and I was temporarily assigned to HMS Terror, the Royal Navy’s shore establishment. Not much was going on as most of the people were on leave. I used what leisure time I could find on things that interested me—phoning the university for example and making an appointment to meet Edwin Thumboo, a lecturer in English and already Singapore’s leading and later most honoured poet. Arriving at his office I found an extremely agreeable man in his mid-thirties who welcomed me with green tea (cold because of Singapore’s heat) which he poured from a traditional Chinese teapot into handleless Chinese cups.

He told me of his students’ increasing interest and involvement in poetry and particularly poetry in English, as well as about the then head of Department, expatriate British poet D J Enright. I knew little of Enright at the time, although I’d encountered some of his poems in British anthologies and magazines and was impressed by his having such an international reputation and poetic status that he’d been appointed professor of English in Singapore. Thumboo could see I was interested in Enright’s achievement and we chatted about poetry, readings at the university and the department’s recently inaugurated magazine, Poetry Singapore which he edited and invited me to contribute to—as I did, finding myself in the company of a wide variety of Singaporean poets and Grace Perry (founder and editor of Poetry Australia who published some

¹ Writing Talk, Conversations with top writers of the last fifty years, Alex Hamilton, Matador, UK, 2012.
of my poems\textsuperscript{2}). Thumboo was interested in New Zealand’s poets—A R D Fairburn, and Johnson, Baxter and Campbell who he knew of and who as a one time member of the Wellington group I knew and could talk about. It was a great feeling to be greeted so warmly by a poet I’d previously never met, who was obviously a committed professional and wanted to know what I was writing myself.

Talking with Thumboo was doubly enjoyable as the naval officers I was serving with had little interest in poetry, which forced me to confine my writing to what I could manage in the minimal space of my cabin and reading what books I had with me or could get hold of. W B Yeats’ \textit{Collected Poems} was the most important of these which I dipped into and read and reread almost every day. Searching for additional reading in HMS Terror’s Singapore library (quite a good and well stocked library) I discovered Wilfred Owen’s biography—three hefty volumes if I remember correctly—written by one of his brothers (the painter) and covering Owen’s brief life in almost endless and minuscule detail. During off duty time between naval exercises in the China Sea, work ashore and the ship’s courtesy calls to Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, and Thailand, I read all three of them, but meeting Thumboo and making the acquaintance of Enright were the highlights of being stationed in Singapore.

Enright was somewhat different from the formal academic I thought he might be, an impression which was reinforced by Alex Hamilton who in 1978 quoted the poet as saying, ‘If you have this craze for writing DIY poetry . . . which perhaps should be rooted out [presumably meaning readers were writing poetry themselves instead of leaving it to real poets] . . . you would naturally not want to read your contemporaries.’ He was equally condemnatory of and claimed to be baffled by ‘the spread of writers’ workshops, little groups, cosy cliques,’ and thought that, ‘In America it was felt that everybody is as good as everybody else where poetry is concerned.’ Not knowing anything of this, when I met Enright I found him elusive and difficult to understand. The occasion of the meeting was the reading Thumboo had invited me to where he introduced me to Enright as ‘a poet from New Zealand’. His response, ‘Is that so?’ was vague and quirkish, tossed off hurriedly in between rushing about organising his readers and stirring things up with ‘Get a move on,’ or, ‘Make sure you know what you’re doing,’—nothing like

\textsuperscript{2} I was fortunate to meet Perry and talk with her in the early seventies when she visited Auckland at the invitation of a women writers’ group, and doubly fortunate that one of my poems published in \textit{Poetry Australia} was picked up in America for the Borestone Mountain Poetry Awards and published in the international anthology, \textit{Best Poems of 1971}. 

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the calm and assured way Louis Johnson had organised things at Victoria University in Wellington.

His attitude towards his performers was puzzling. They seemed very young, very naïve. English was their second language which might have made them nervous, but they did their stuff and did it well. Enright himself read which was strange in view of his later condemnation of poetry readings as ‘drag[ging] down standards . . . reduc[ing] the sales of books’. His delivery was coloured by a sardonic, cynical tone, his poems often denigrating Singapore and in one piece referring to it as ‘the arsehole of the East’. He was applauded of course, but the applause seemed fragile and somewhat polite. After the reading there was a talk and chatter amongst the various participants and a cup of tea. Strangely though, and despite Thumboo’s efforts, he seemed unable to connect closely with any of us—kept at a distance as if he didn’t particularly approve of the people around him and again unlike Thumboo, wasn’t interested in writers in New Zealand and could only talk about those he knew in the UK.

Again Enright’s inaugural address as the newly appointed professor of English in 1960 so offended Singapore’s officialdom that he was forced to write and publish a formal apology. He lost his appointment in 1970, principally because Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, his senior politicians and the university’s administration could no longer see him as a suitable person for enhancing the country’s reputation—which Enright wrote about as follows:

An odd sensation, to enter a favourite bar  
And hear oneself denounced on the radio.3

Enright also had strange habits, one of which gave him a connection with Coleridge. As Hamilton reported of him, ‘He and his colleagues . . . used to mark their exam papers in their favourite [opium] dens,’ and, ‘The exam papers tended to be marked rather high, but at least they were consistently high.’

Alan Ross was another matter—a man I first met through a chain of unexpected (or perhaps not so unexpected) events. It began with my writing a short story—the first short story I ever wrote. I thought it might be suitable for the pages of *Landfall* and sent it off. A reply came back from Iain Sharp, the magazine’s fiction editor, who described it as ‘a fine piece of writing’ and had no hesitation in telling me so. His enthusiasm caused me to ask him to hold off publishing it so I could put in for the Katherine

Mansfield Short Story Award—which I did but without success. I went back to *Landfall* but the fiction editor had changed and declined it with the condemnatory observation that the characters were contrived and the plot artificial and unconvincing. I was disappointed and unaware this was taking me a step closer to meeting Alan Ross.

Still hoping it wasn't too bad a piece of writing, I entered it in the NZSA's Lillian Ida Smith short story competition. Again it didn't win but it was highly commended and much praised by Phoebe Meikle⁴ the judge. It was now *Sport*'s turn to look at it but the editor posted it back almost as soon as he'd received it. Again disappointed, I thought to give the piece a last try and sent it off a second time to the KM competition in the waning hope that it might be successful—and this time it won taking the first prize of $5,000!⁵ But the saga didn't stop there as the KM committee tried without success to get the piece published in the *Listener*.

There was nothing else for it, I'd have to seek publication overseas, and discovering that the prestigious *London Magazine* had printed one or two New Zealand writers I sent a copy of the story off, and by what seemed return mail received an acceptance from Alan Ross. Eventually, when my copy of the magazine reached me (the October/November 1995 issue) I was extremely pleased to find my name in the short list on the front cover in company with such distinguished writers as Harold Pinter and Roy Fuller, thus moving me to hope that eventually I might meet Ross himself.

According to Alex Hamilton, Alan Ross was an 'all rounder' and among other things a yachtsman, which on account of being one myself I wished I'd known earlier. As Hamilton who once sailed with him said, 'We had trouble with a gale off the Needles.' Ross was seasick but as they shipped water, kept at the pumps all day which he explained as, 'want[ing] to do something . . . he felt too overwhelmed by the situation to try anything else.' I liked the comment because I've been seasick myself and admire the man who persists when things become difficult.

Hamilton’s book gave me my second meeting with Ross—even though it was at a distance and Ross died in 2001. The first took place in 1996 when I was visiting the UK, and having been the editor of *Poetry NZ* for three years thought talking with him might help give me ideas on how to improve the magazine and extend its circulation. Ross, in terms of the kind of description the American poet Robert Creeley who used it often

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⁴ Phoebe Meikle—at the time a well-known publisher and editor of considerable standing.

⁵ The judge was Ken Arvidson, the Massey University English Professor, who later acknowledged he’d thought the award had been won by C K Stead.
would almost certainly have given him, was ‘a charming and lovely man’. He was as pleasant and as welcoming as I’d found Edwin Thumboo earlier. We met at his office—surprisingly small but well-organised and entirely different from the ill-assorted collection of cardboard boxes I so often worked from—and talked about the magazine he operated and some of the writers he’d published. He told me of London Magazine’s openness and his willingness to include work from anywhere, and of course the magazine’s history (it was founded in 1732, and beginning as a political journal evolved into the distinguished literary publication it had now been for so long). I felt flattered to be in the company of a man who had edited the magazine for thirty-five years and established it as a leading publication known throughout the English speaking world.

Ross suggested we have lunch, and a little later we settled into a rather pleasant mid-market restaurant where the discussion turned to poetry and writing and included nothing of Ross’s interesting earlier life and the fragility of the magazine he published—a fragility Hamilton described in his book as the result of ‘an excellent formula for losing money’, and its editor as having ‘schemes . . . that would allow him to lose money on a much grander scale’. Ignorant as I was of these difficulties, I asked Ross what he saw as the best way of increasing a magazine’s circulation and securing its financial position.

‘Variety,’ he told me, ‘make the magazine’s contents as various as possible—print reviews, fiction and non-fiction, essays, articles on art and literature and illustrations as well as poetry. It draws people in because of the variety of material and this results in more copies being sold.’

He was right of course. It helped if subscriptions increased and sales from bookshops decreased—no distribution costs, no percentage mark down for bookshops. I’d tried the same tactics with Mate and Climate magazines which I edited for 10 years and at their best printed 1500 copies—a considerable print run for New Zealand literary journals of the time. But Poetry NZ was a specialist magazine. Its sole interest was poetry and therefore none of these strategies except the subscription approach seemed appropriate. The luncheon, which Ross paid for, went very well with a good chicken salad, a dessert and a bottle of wine to go with it.

Like Thumboo, Ross was interested in what was happening with writers in New Zealand. He knew of and had met people such as C K Stead and he wondered if I would write an article for his magazine on the New Zealand literary scene—which sadly on account of pressure of work, I never got round to. But there were things about Ross that I didn’t learn while we were lunching, things that Hamilton wrote about: his interest in cricket, the seven
years he served in the Royal Navy which included the WWII Murmansk run—the same run New Zealand poet Denis Glover participated in. But we didn’t discuss the parallels that we both sailed yachts and had served in naval vessels—a missed opportunity and one I regret.

I liked Ross and Th umboo. Discovering them again at the Tawharanui campsite and looking out over clean white sand towards the sea, the clouds and the sky, brought a peculiar awareness of contrasting realities: the world of people and books, and a sense of isolation, of solitude, and the world’s wondrous indifference to human hopes, aspirations and needs. And there was Enright as well, a man inclined to distance himself from people and therefore that much more difficult to understand or get close to—but a poet whose career has interested me and which I’ve followed. They were professionals committed to the pursuit of literature and writing. Their example, irrespective of personal circumstances—of the costs and difficulties, and the stresses and strains of a literary life—confirms such a life as of worth and value.

Books and magazines in brief

Intercolonial, Stephen Oliver, Puriri Press, 76 pp, $28.50 plus postage

In 60 pages of loose, unrhymed quatrains, Stephen Oliver has created a poem ambitious in its reach and dizzying in its effect. Intercolonial is a personal epic, but being an epic it links the personal to the cosmic. In its different sections Oliver traverses his own childhood in Wellington in the 1950s; the whole geological formation of Wellington and the shipwrecks on its coasts; the history of his great-grandfather Thomas McCormack who came from colonial Australia; the cruelty of old penal Van Diemen’s Land and its hangman; the earliest of Maori navigation; and the deep Celtic background that takes in Viking raids upon the Irish coasts. Is this a loose congeries or grab-bag? No, because Oliver has the control to let us see that this huge history leads, as all history does, to the individual. By blood, inheritance, location and family legend, we all of us carry as capacious a history on our backs. The title Intercolonial underlines the strong links between 19th century Australia and New Zealand. The poet gives real weight to specific and telling features, whether he is noting that ancient streams still flow under solid Wellington suburbs or describing his great-grandfather’s foundry in the heart of grim Calvinist old Dunedin. A short notice does not allow extensive quotation to prove the poet’s skill, but there is much that is quotable, whether the conjunction of Lucifer with the ‘Big Bang’ or the charming vignette of dolphins butting through Wellington harbour: hear dolphin pods cog and hiss the harbour, / side-slap a wave, sonar click a herd of herring, sound an estuary, / ping-pong playfully off steel-plated hulls, mid-harbour. An expansive and affecting poem.
Aspects of Reality, John O’Connor, Headworx, 80 pp, $20
Melancholy Romanticism met Surrealism en route to Jim Baxter’s hideaway at Jerusalem. They said ‘We can’t be too serious about things’, so they joked. But they joked in a wry, melancholy style. They thought of Napoleon living in Sydney and hanging about the opera house while Josephine worked in a fish-fry. They quoted poetry. They imagined Dr Johnson and Bozzie in a modern café sipping cappuccino. They imagined Osama Bin Laden having a tourist centre named after him and glad-handing the customers. They arsed around the page a bit, with a fragment of a sentence here and a fragment of a sentence there and typography running this way and that way horizontally and vertically. Oh, they were erudite! They could quote and reference the best. But they never let old Gravitas waylay them. For this was only ‘aspects’ of reality, after all. Flashing, joking apercu, not sententious statements. And wasn’t the first 70 pages called ‘Twilight Over the Sanatorium’ after all? The broken bits and pieces of civilization, not hanging together. But their tune changed somewhat in the last 10 pages, called ‘Blues for Cousin Sylvia’, for now Melancholy Romanticism gained the upper hand even as Surrealism still did handstands. And there was real anguish in this lament for not finding meaning, for not finding a ‘dominant theme’, for not being able to shape the bits and pieces meaningfully. A true and widespread condition, accurately reflected.

Aue Rona, Reihana Robinson, Steele Roberts 68 pp, $25
In Maori mythology the moon takes Rona as his lover. And though this collection of (mainly) short lyrics is not one single narrative poem, the spirit of Rona hangs over it in the form of the maternal principle in nature: the controller of tides, the mother of warriors and lost men, the mourner for destroyed nature. Reihana Robinson writes robustly. Nature here is not always pretty, but if irony enters into poems like ‘God of ugly things’ (about the weta) it is not for the purpose of deprecating nature. Even more to her credit, the poet has a strong sense of the present, as well as of the distant and mythical past. Rona’s descendants are often people deracinated from an indigenous culture and unable to find their way back in. ‘Rona’s descendants: Raro Taro’ is a poem just this side of bitterness in its account of a teenager alienated from ancestral society, more attracted to the bright lights of the big city, and most likely to live off the tattiest scraps from the table of modernity. Satire might hit at Pakeha misconceptions in a squib like ‘Treaty’, but there is a subsumed satire even in a poem on mythological themes like ‘In the beginning was fire’. It is as if the gods of creation myths are wearing jandals and strolling the beaches. They are taken seriously enough to provide a framework for the understanding of the world, but they are not reverenced with awe. This is a strong collection tasting of salt and purpose.
Notes on contributors

Rizwan Akhtar (Pakistan) is Associate Professor of English at Punjab University. His poetry has been published widely in international reviews, including PNZ.

Raewyn Alexander (Auckland) is an editor and writer of fiction and poetry whose work has frequently appeared in PNZ.

Madeline Barna (Canada) is Hungarian by birth and Canadian by choice. Widely published in North American journals, she has a special interest in comparative languages.

Charles Bernstein (USA) is a distinguished poet and literary theorist widely known for his contribution to language poetry and semiotics.

Paula Bohince (USA) makes her first appearance in PNZ in this issue.

Chris Cantillon (Wanganui) has appeared previously in PNZ.

Michelle Chote (Auckland) makes her first appearance in PNZ in this issue.

Jonathan Cweworth (Dunedin) is a Sydney-born poet, musician and playwright, resident in Dunedin since 2001.

Maryrose Doull (Auckland) has been published in Takahe, Poetry Live and PNZ.

James Fagan (Palmerston North) has appeared previously in PNZ.

Alexandra Fraser (Auckland) has had work appearing in both on-line and print journals, including PNZ.

McArthur Gunter (USA) is a Maryland poet with a special interest in astrophysics.

Siobhan Harvey (Auckland) is an expatriate English poet who teaches creative writing. She was featured poet in PNZ #33. Her collection Lost Relatives was reviewed in PNZ #42. She is the recipient of the 2013 Kathleen Grattan Award for poetry.

Caoilinn Hughes (Wellington) is undertaking a degree in creative writing at Victoria University of Wellington, and her first collection is nearing publication.

Ross Jackson (Australia) has been published in a number of Australian poetry journals and makes his first appearance in PNZ in this issue.

Will Leadbeater (Auckland) is a former poetry reviewer for the New Zealand Herald who has several books of verse to his credit.

Simon Lewis (Auckland) is a West Auckland poet, who appears from time to time in PNZ.

Andrew McIntyre (Hastings), born in Wales, is a field worker in Hawkes Bay. He makes his first appearance in PNZ in this issue.

Robert McLean (Lyttelton) was featured poet in PNZ #40. He has had four volumes of poetry published, his most recent being the long, discursive poem A Grave Yard by the Sea.

Linda Nathaniel (Australia) is a poet and short-story writer who makes her first PNZ appearance in this issue.

Keith Nunes (Tauranga) is a former journalist who likes grunge music and has been widely published in New Zealand poetic journals.

John O’Connor (Christchurch) is a long-time contributor to PNZ who is noted for his expertise in haiku. He has had ten books of verse published. His latest, Aspects of Reality, is briefly reviewed in this issue of PNZ.

Vincent O’Sullivan (Dunedin), Professor Emeritus of English, is widely regarded as one of New Zealand’s greatest living poets. His long and distinguished career has
included editing the *Oxford Anthology of Twentieth Century New Zealand Poetry* and the collected letters and fiction of Katherine Mansfield, writing the biography of John Mulgan, and the publication of many works of prose and poetry. His most recent collection is *Us, then* (VUP).

**Alistair Paterson** ONZM (Auckland) has been *PNZ*’s editor since issue 8. A prolific critic as well as a poet, he has had many collections published and is noted for his mentoring of other poets.

**Mark Pirie** (Wellington) is a prominent New Zealand poet, editor and publisher. His work has appeared frequently in *PNZ*, and he contributed a major essay on New Zealand’s ‘forgotten’ literary history to issue #46.

**Kerry Popplewell** (Wellington) is a native of Napier who now resides in Ngaio and has contributed to a number of anthologies.

**Richard Reeve** (Otago) is a literary editor, lawyer and conservationist whose doctorate was in poetics and hermeneutics. He has had five collections of poetry published and was featured poet in *PNZ* #41.

**Jeremy Roberts** (Auckland—currently sojourning in Indonesia) is a widely published poet who is particularly concerned with poetry as performance and who has regularly MC-ed Auckland’s ‘Poetry Live’ events.

**David Romanda** lives and works in Kawasaki City, Japan. His poetry has appeared in a number of international reviews.

**L. E. Scott** (Wellington) was born in America and came to New Zealand in the 1970s. He has published many collections.

**Ila Selwyn** (Auckland), originally from Winnipeg, lives in West Auckland. She is a key figure in Auckland’s live poetry scene, arranging readings and musical performances.

**Fred Simpson** (Cambridge) is a doctor who was raised in Africa and has long been a general practitioner. His work has appeared previously in *PNZ*.

**Jane Simpson** (Christchurch) teaches literacy in the workplace, writes both words and music for contemporary hymns, has had two collections of poetry published and has appeared before in *PNZ*.

**Barbara Stanley** (Auckland) makes her first appearance in this issue of *PNZ*.

**Charles Thomas** (USA) lives in Tennessee and has had his poetry published in a number of American reviews.

**Denys Trussell** (Auckland) is a distinguished poet, biographer and pianist who has appeared often in *PNZ*. So far, he has had ten collections published.

**Ryan Van Winkle** (USA) is an American poet currently sojourning in Edinburgh who has won prestigious awards for his first collection *Tomorrow, We Will Live Here*.

**Michael Walker** (Auckland) makes his second appearance in *PNZ* in this issue.

**Kirsten Warner** (Auckland) has been widely published in poetry magazines, has edited two anthologies, performs as poet and musician and currently manages the New Zealand Society of Authors.

**Pamela Williamson** (Auckland) makes her second appearance in this issue of *PNZ*.

**Alessio Zanelli** (Italy), resident of Cremona, is a prolific poet widely published in European journals. He writes in both Italian and English, although English is his writing preference.