

TAROT

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TAROT



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Introduction to this edition

Haere mai ki *Tarot* #7. I am delighted to welcome to you this edition.

This last reading period, I received a number of high-calibre submissions; my shortlist was the longest yet! I thoroughly enjoyed reading these poems, and I have selected my favourites for your perusal.

This edition is a journey through forty poems, from the concrete into the abstract and out again. Along the way, you will learn what returning home feels like (p.11), what the stars look like 'from the hilltop looking out to the mist beyond' (p.12) and just where Jackie McCullough left her keys (p.32). You will hear water fall 'through the air like drumsticks' (p. 42), feel 'comfortable torture / of being apart' (p.53), and taste a freshly-segmented orange.

There are sensory, affective, and cognitive treats for you in this edition, and I hope you enjoy. I commend these poems to you.

Kit Willett, Dec 2023



Things that feel like a beginning

Anuja Mitra

waking up to a morning unblemished by rain
to the enlivening sip of coffee on a frigid day
to the contented hum of voices in the room above
to the wash of wintry light on a face that you love
to the lilac bush as it trembles with bees
to a kiss of snow on your unsuspecting cheek
to the crunch of leaves on the path near your house
to the cool steel gate and its familiar sound
to the gentle steps of a childhood pet
to the armchair that always welcomes your rest
to a distant piano playing a lilting tune
to all the birds shouting new! new! new!

Whittling

Ruben Mita

I am the bear
in the branch

the branch on the wave
the branch-born bear

cut by wind, cut by
water, cut by a knife

branch born of root
non-thought, slow time

michelangelo said
'release the angel in the marble'

ruben said, 'I tried my best
here is a bear, for you'

smoothed by wind, smoothed by
water, smoothed by sand paper

the pipe in the pear tree dreams
of smoke tickling her spine

and the porcini in the peach wood
imagines rain-swollen size

I remember fishing sugar
from phloem streams

the bear before the blade
the solid ghost

I am the bear in the hand
and I had to die and float, die and float

sealed in bark, sealed in
salt, sealed in olive oil

the bear in the branch
the branch in the wave

the bear in the hand
the bear who wears sun

home

Theo Coles

returning feels like an apology
it is written in the blue, hazy horizon
lines, it is written in cold mornings
on the frost that collects like dust on
the windows, i think i should write more,
but i never do, i have skeletons
here i never disposed of
i worry that there is only pain
and nothing to come of it, i worry
that i am trying to talk of healing while
still shuffling forward on a cliff face
in my dreams, or nightmares
i never learnt the difference, really
i'm fifteen, i'm twenty-three, i'm eleven
tangled in time, webbing on my skin
i am writing apologies to a city
my skeletons still haunt
what is palpable except fear
what is moving on except looking at the sky
and yearning for how it looked elsewhere.

Matariki

Perena Quinlivan

In the still of the paua black night
 ngā wāhine karakia ki ngā whetū o Matariki
from the hilltop looking out to the mist beyond
 aching voices soft-scoop us up with their embrace
Auē, at last, a consoling salve
 long suffocated by barbed wire saying no.

Bracing winds of Ururangi uplift the throats of ngā kaikarakia
 releasing fire from our collective memories
burning bright before Pōhutukawa, he mihi ki a koe, he Rangatira
 no tears though fall before these embers
consumed with guilt and remorse, whacked with trauma by the dead
 a hand-me-down dish-cloth by the years.

Billboard

Lincoln Jaques

Directly opposite the Mt. Albert
Baptist Church on a billboard
out front of Rocket Park they advertise
The Lesbian Road Trip Art Show
at Charlotte Gallery in New Lynn
the Sunday schoolers were calling
for a new curriculum (to bring us closer
to the message) but I'm not sure
this is the message they had in mind
they sent out petitions like napalm bombings
while ignoring the drug dealers gathering
in the propulsion mechanism of the rocket
dishing out ten-dollar squares of crack and coke
as parents swing their Audis into the bays
of the New World Fresh Collective
swipe their Am-Exes their Visas
while a short walk away a young man
is knifed to death in an alleyway
adjoining the mess hall of the old college
where our colonialists and prime ministers
sat on cold wooden seats getting piles
the young man whose life was taken
in that dark alley happened to attend the Art
School where I sat at a desk for 8 hours a day
learning names and checking lists I remember
our Head of School sent an email with the words
"died...in a brutal way" and on the bus home I passed
Rocket Park the Mt. Albert Baptist Church
the Fresh Collective the billboard that advertised
The Lesbian Art Show when those words gripped
me in a tourniquet like an Afterpay account that says
they've sucked all of my wages before I've even seen the money
I considered how they should have started a petition
to stop the violence on our doorsteps or at least went along
to the show in New Lynn before setting the new curriculum.

There Is No Champagne in Champagne Ham

Jane Bloomfield

To be fair I just turned up at my father's wake
but I'm still bitter about the sandwiches served

Tombstones of margarined white bread
champagne ham shaved with square cheese
lettuce of crisp icebergs mayonnaised

But the women who delivered and released
their cling film shrouds had wide sympathetic smiles
this wasn't their first bone rodeo

So as the empty afternoon dragged on, I directed
my regrets in one big dainty club sandwich at his not-wife
causing platters of blond crusts to curl in the heat
and tomato pips swim away in search of peat

No mourning champagne was served

pōhutukawa
Nathaniel Calhoun

pōhutukawa stretch in chorus over void
locking elbows in shallow dirt.
they rubber neck round headlands to wink at relatives beyond.
their flowering schedule:
some years rowdy others coy
sometimes none.

improbable fretless crenellated necks lean whiskered into precipical space—
reaching tremor free over driving brine strutless toward moonrise.
early evening light drips gather on matte leaf.

the structure of staying put cranes
counterweight constrictors burrow—
ground yields to gripping below
and depleted boulders cleave.


acquiescing giants tumble from above
to bolster intertidal rockspace
landing amidst mollusks chancing sun over snapper—
their bent complexities sanded
in mute testimony
to the beautiful choice
of edge dwelling.

I placed my hand on your chest

Courtney Speedy

I placed my hand on your chest
and told you to rest for your body
is feeling weary and tired now with
the ache of age settling into your
bones yet you still look at me with
love in your eyes and call me home
even though sometimes you may
roam which makes me panic for
my darling should not be left alone.
I can see the rise and fall of you
breathing and I just pray that soon
you won't be leaving although we
both spent many hours discussing
the grieving and the way you might
possibly go makes my heart so slow.
I have loved you for many years and
you have witnessed all my fears and
tears but also the beautiful mornings
where the sun hung low enough in
the sky for us to chase after it and
bask in the cool rays of moonlight
when I knew you would be alright.
We watch over you with concerned
gazes for this illness is a maze for
me to understand and I just want
to feel you kissing my hand for I
am in pain knowing you will never
be the same again with your youth
and energy for now the simplest of
tasks are done slowly and steadily
under my watchful eye when we
both know I am going to sit on my
bedroom floor and cry at the idea

of having to one day say goodbye.
The weight has fallen off you now
and you rely on medication to give
you much needed salvation to help
your body process the coming and
goings of life because a body clock
can only tick over for so long without
some additional help to stay strong.
You are still there in your mind and
are as sharp as a whistle and I know
you used to hate getting thistles in
your feet but you barely leave your
room now and spend all day sleeping
the aches and pains away with some
much needed hugs and kisses to keep
them at bay yet you never once have
been angry towards me for having a
stay in what happens to you for you
are not capable of making a decision.
I look back at photographs of us when
we were both much younger and I want
to take you back to those times before I
knew how to rhyme and make sure you
stayed fine except I know I am not able
to change the final impact on your health.
But these years I have known you were
richer than any wealth that I could ever
own for having you in my arms and being
able to help each other stay away from
harm is worth its weight in gold but the
idea of growing old and no longer being
bold makes my heart break for you are
a gift that I know I must give back to the
big beautiful sky one day soon for you
belong amongst the stars and the moon
with the sun there as a reminder for you
lived so well and once were young before



the rainbow stretched across the sky as
I had to utter my last bereaved goodbye.
But I know we will meet again when you
are no longer in pain and do not mind the
rain and I will be older too yet glance at
you with familiarity and softly say I loved
you all my life and you will just look back
at me with love in your eyes for that is
something you always knew to be true.

Banks of the Ohinemuri

Timothy Martin

This river cuts low through time and rhyolite
reaching earth's bones in a mountain cleft.
Searching for gravity
past silica
and a million misty mornings.

Exposing veins
quartz and gold
this river ignited the hopes of men
who bled and toiled through fatigue, scrub, and soil
to uncover her riches beneath.
Or not.

And now all that remains
are the rusting hulks of failed intentions
slowly falling groundward
through relentless oxidisation
and the growing weight
of honeysuckle
and gorse.

Eroding
gathering
carrying
never failing
this river flows
in its journey to the plains
eventually
the sea.

Fine man

Tony Beyer

my neighbour Jim who played
halfback for Taranaki in the 1960s
and had two All Black trials
would drop one of the wings
from the current test squad
because he has female hands
incapable of reliably
scragging a bloke
from the other side and thus
a weak spot in our defence

not all his opinions are by
any means so stern but having
lived and breathed the game
for over eighty years he knows
what he's talking about
praising in detail
in their suitable positions
active players he admires
or summarising the careers
of past team mates and opponents

a short and solid figure
well into his ninth decade
he's out there on a weekday
pushing the white paint spray-
machine around the local park
to freshen the touchlines
goal-lines and halfway
and the twenty-twos
in preparation for Saturday's
grades and their supporters

there's something generous too
about his habits of thought
characteristic of a time
when sport wasn't work
but recreation after
or between spells of work
derived from the community
and embedded in it
while there were still communities
worth being proud about

what i've done since you died

Theo Coles

wept, not beautifully, wept with my knees up
with my chest heaving, with my tears blotting
the wooden floors in my bedroom, noticed
my ceiling for the first time, the way it rises
and falls, like a breath, i have forgotten how

it felt to want to live in the world, without fearing it
but not the way you said my name
almost childlike. so sweetly
i have texted your dad and thought about
running the car into the concrete wall
by the mcdonalds parking lot

thought about how to live a life without you
about how the death of a stranger is like losing
you again, in a different font
forgotten to take my meds / started taking them again
thrown up in the toilet, stopped kissing people
texted your dad, again

changed the dedication of my poetry book to your name
called in sick to work, the flu, a stomach bug
a dead best friend- is there a prescription for that?
no. googled the french phrase tu me manques
wondered where i first heard it

taken pills for sleep and pills for nausea and
pills to stop my heart beating so fast,
thought about what it means, that i want my heart to slow
and yours to start
punched a wall, punched a pillow, thrown white plates at
white walls
almost picked up the shards to make mosaics

decided that's the kind of thing i would've only done before

hugged your mother and your father and your grandmother
and both of your brothers, and your boyfriend
braided my hair, the way you used to
painted my nails the blue you chose
when we got them done together

wept, when it chipped off
lost the ability to weep, lost the ability to text back
wished i believed in god
wrote you letters, with questions
knowing you can't write back
wondered if when the doctor sees my wrists
she reads the old news reports across them
and worries more than she usually would
wondered if the nurse drawing my blood has
ever lost her best friend

texted your dad, again
almost called the crisis line,
wondered when everything
will stop feeling like a crisis
bought pet rats

gone through a break up
asked my mother to stop messaging me so often
wrote your name in sticks at the pond
wrote poetry without the energy to wonder if it was good
tried to claw out of this universe like a

forgive me, i couldn't think of metaphors
so i googled that phrase
someone on reddit says, it feels like her baby is
trying to claw out of her cervix
yes, like that, perhaps,
with my knees up, and my cheeks stained

thinking, this is not the right version of this story
this is not the right version of this story

wondered if whether you enter a new world
the light is always too bright, wondered if it always
feels like the apocalypse starts, right after that
wondered if dying feels like the lights going out,
opened my phone and scrolled to your name, before remembering

everything is a reminder, and still yet,
here i am forgetting, everything is a memory,
and yet i have amnesia
tu me manques means you are missing from me
i'm a poet and i've tried
but it comes down to those three words
and, i suppose, no one is better at the french
then writing about love.

June

Perena Quinlivan

It is wet and cold.
Your birthday June mist

hovers over us like a still grey blanket.
Mud stays on our gumboots

long after we leave you Mum
behind at the urupā, alone. Auē!

Staring from the bedroom door
at your empty peggy-square bed

we're silent now too
forever hushed, desolate.

in the living room among friends.

Jedidiah Vinzon

i

i want to tear open my neck, unzip my ribs,
unwrap the length of my lungs and name
the streets with my veins as i untangle
myself from the spine; i want to squeeze
my eyes shut until the final pus of grief
bleeds along the lines of my flailing skin—
drought of oceans, deserts in the scorch
of the quiet: oh, the silence, taped over
my mouth: i am kidnapped in my own home,
a hostage in my own body, a son without
a father
let me etch his name along the rims
of coffee-stained mugs and the yellowed
petals: oh, to be the nectar of my flowers
the flies are drunk with.

ii

i'd talk, but it'll be like sweeping an elephant
under the year-old carpet we bought when we
got the house; when we speak, we dodge its
silhouette, tip-toeing around the linen like under
a faulty chandelier; and at any moment it swerves
its trunk—when it sneezes, it is a broken waterfall
of coffees and crackers over the wooden edge of our
new table; and then the clink and the clash of
ceramics and cups, and pretending like the elephant
disappeared—like the dead had forgotten to die—
but in the caffeine-tainted air and marble hot water,
the husks have found a song in my chest.


separation
Hebe Kearney

in a clay bank at tauihu beach
kōtare were nesting, their chicks
burbled from a small hole,
sounding like a dial-up modem.
we walked as a family then,
intrigued, soaking in sun,
synched in sorrow.

kōtare, you said,
bludgeon small rodents and birds,
then their croaky young
tear and wrench;
a sparagmos feast
in gurgling darkness.

—

those great, cold mudflats
unveiled by the manukau
gleam today
and I am alone.
my sneakers squelch then crunch
over slimy, sharp-lipped oyster shells.
the clay bank beside me is empty, in it
violent, shining kōtare once nested,
but they won't be nesting now.



Shaking Hands

Wyeth Chalmers

Kinetic hands push their way through static,
Sparks fly as negative meets positive
In this essential energy exchange.
Important moments of electric touch happen so carelessly;
Nearly none are remembered.

Boys are taught to have a strong shake,
Without intention you're left red handed.
How many trails of destruction
Lead back to a misinterpreted shaking hand?

Businessmen expose teeth, squeeze blood from hands
In powerless moments
That blow away in the wind.
Sweaty, shaking young hands come together
In exiting moments that surge the national grid.

Wisdom keeps hands still, bound together
Inside a moment.

Empty Hotel Evenings

Tessa Barker

This air feels like
Empty Hotel Evenings
like dreams that come from the
bottom of your stomach
and it tastes like paper that money is printed on
unscented, rough air
intentional like it was made to rust this place
and would but for the wax
surfaces.

This place feels like
the kind of paint that flakes the moment
it goes on
as if the years just gave way
and piled up,
this kind of Empty Hotel Evening

I cannot just sit here
otherwise I might become
just another lobby lampshade
in this existential air
as if fresh from the
manufacturer's truck

and I crave the bar
where if I could continue to sit
because at least I would become
another barroom bottle
for others' Empty Hotel Evenings.

BFF

Jackie McCullough

Your friendship is having a rare incurable genetic disease
diminished and spent, a horde of self-congratulatory millennial hipster
doctors burst into your hospital room
flocks of organic feta speckling their luxuriant beards
they announce a belated cure that has no time for you

It is finding out you are pregnant after untold cycles of IVF
blessed twins
but you live in emergency housing
your husband's lover burnt the house down

It is finally finding accommodation
in a flat with a dear old lady
and discovering she is a Covid-denying, common-law sheriff
with her daily Zoom meetings

It is planning a delicious meal
the supermarket awash with grey empty shelves
another unexplained shipping shortage
so you have microwave rice instead

It is a car breaking down on the Desert Road
headlights sparkle and a car pulls over
"my rescuer!" you sigh
but the car just departs, trailing sad face emojis and elderflowers in its wake

The watermelon, the seeds and a magpie

Stephen O'Connor

I sever the watermelon
Into two monstrous halves.

Stow one at the bottom of the fridge
While the other is mine.

I take it outside and sit seiza
Under the clear blue sky.

Sucking on the pulp and
Spitting the seeds on the lawn.

(Red juice murk snaps over bright blue veins)

Sucking pulp
And spit
Then suck
And spit
Suck
Spit.

Until the seeds in the grass
Shine like beetle shells.

Hundreds, it seems, until
A diving magpie chewing and, smiling,
Takes some away.

And I think the worst because
It looks like they are moving.



Perhaps

Jackie McCullough

Perhaps the inanimate objects
in my house
do not have a fixed place in
time and space

Upon reading a textbook
in your social studies class
about pre-European
Aotearoa
you see a picture of my car-keys
lying next to the
kumara pit

Look closer
you can see my reading glasses
in the pocket of the man
in the Place de la Concorde
as he lets the guillotine
swish down
chop

Floating alongside
Buzz Aldrin
and his can of Tang
is my copy of
Fifty Shades of Grey

You can keep that one,
Buzz

Georgia
Michaella Steel

Only Georgia could make me fantasise
Swapping out “son”
for “daughter”
And pretending I had written it first

I like to think I could write as prettily
As the girl who sings Georgia Georgia I love....
 Synesthesia images of you
But I can't even say *sin uhs thee zhuh* right
And I don't think "prettily" is a word

But you're not a word
...you're more of a feeling

Because I'll bitch about university
Say, "I'll never go back."

Only to leave and realise
That I miss the pat on the back
A hand moving in a circular motion
Telling me
(Tell me)
that I'm
good

And I'll carry that fossil fear
Of flying
over
seas

But for you,

Oh, you...

I am Icarus reborn

For you

Are the streets of my hometown
That I know so intimately
but will always avoid walking

Or the cold morning air
That beneath my window
seeps

(To make me shiver

To bring me relief

To cut through the heat in my room)

All of it
All of it
brings me back to you.

...

There are better ways to say
I. adore. you.

But ours isn't a language one reads
or should even attempt to write

It is the 8pm dance party
In the middle of Countdown
And the sound of your laughter
As we find our way home

I dream of the dead

Jose Thomas

they never visit.

at night I rub
ointment on my elbows
my temples
my feet.

I float
in wind that whirrs
too clunky.
another moon-rise traces the cold flesh
my aching abdomen,

I wait for their whispers
they never come.

faltering across webs of blue
cold breast and
blushed nipple.

diaphanous transience
of the thin hide
of the long dead.

I watch myself age,
bitter about it.

Te Matua Ngahere

Nathaniel Calhoun

eight hundred years ago
 he towered fully
three four times beyond
 today's conservative hunkering
 and no rise betrays
 which way his topospine toppled.
for centuries that kingdom
of beautiful decay
 became a catacomb swale
an off-contour hollow burrough—
 majesty rematerialized
 by brother roots
 for the furthering—
its ceremonial braid
 woven into legendary bird nests.
 now epiphytes nuzzle
 the soft cradle of old fracture
offering unheeded advice—
 warming the whispered ear
 while infant trees
sprout through combed-over hair.

in an abandoned house is west footscray, I

Jose Thomas

think of home and

paint a picture

like this:

the window down in old ute

a thousand stars and gravel road

bedding in the back and we

brace the cold air for the warmth of the

roadside rivers.

sunlit all dappled

across nose and lip

waiting for that giddy

teenage/d feeling

waiting for that

are we absent in our absences?

are we following through or

swept up in idealisms

hiding pestilent hope

I wander

through dark doorways

chiselling away at patience

until she loses her fucking head.

bury that thought

Penelope Scarborough

i.

After I had another thought of you I
Buried it in my backyard / a
Corpse of all the days we could've counted coerced into
Dirt / decomposing with half-dead fruit flies / destined to
Eat at the earth beside them /
Each thought existing only through
Fever dreams / scenes where you're fastening your seatbelt to meet me at a
Gas station / 10 years from now / the gravitational pull between our bodies
going / going / gone

ii.

How do I tell you that hatred handed me a fruit
And it rots / in every room I carry it into
I swallow it (stone and all)
Teaches me that you can be held by the love of your life
/ yet feel nothing at all

Inside my head I built an empty table
Imagine dragging knife to fork through all that nothing
Imagine ingesting each fruitless action
Should have known I didn't have to plate them up
just to prove that they were mine

iii.

All I asked for was an unconditional love
That wouldn't violate the lack of conditions that we loved.
Wishful thinking is a dead animal in the yard
and we're too old to be convinced it's only sleeping
Waking it anyway / watching it crawl guiltily into its owner's warmth

Please exile it back into the ground when we part
Please forget the fruit that didn't rot and
 please know
 I am trying
Not to bury you
 with me

The Gradation of Fire

Mark Young

after the painting by Magritte

The literal meaning of jan
ken pon, the Japanese equi-
valent of rock, scissors, paper,
is 'beginning with stone.' That

was the given. To go with it,
various other items were
then subjected to a battery of
tests. This painting shows

some of them undergoing the
fire test, to see how easily
they burn, how long for, &
how much is left behind. Only

one additional item survived
the testing relatively unscathed. To
choose the third, a handoff was be-
gun between the best of the

first round failures. Paper won.

Reign fall

Tony Beyer

a sunny Saturday along the foreshore
with youthful associates of Jesus proselytising
could be the last chance for some
or salvation for others

the sky offers neither
evidence nor denial
while somewhere beyond the low-rise city
a rooster crows

the now cynically bilingual council
agrees it's always good
for our rangatahi to have something in common
to interest and amuse them

but history's a tight fist
knuckling the back of the neck
two centuries of colonisation
have done nothing to alleviate

nor can changing the labels
on the package go far
promises broken are still broken
with new promises pasted over them

Rainsticks

Susan Glamuzina

water falls through the air like drumsticks
damp soil, rejoicing roots
blossoms open—adapt

I watch while I dance, also damp
passes by cower under umbrellas
not I, I come rejoice in the rain

essence of fifty.

Jedidiah Vinzon

for such is
the ebbing of the tides
relentless in its steps
its kisses wet from parting
and so returns to the shore
panting for another

i watch as
the ocean comes running
from the sunset to the beach
and spray the purple with its mists
my feet are rooted and buried
between the lips of sand and water

i am touching love
through a plexiglass
in front of a cinema
i am watching so close, yet so far
we are wandering stars
i, jupiter, hollow and distant
and you, the earth and her moon

i see it now,
the tugging, the ebbing
of tides into the shore
is only as true as your embrace
written like the dance of the flowers
and the bees, your kisses are
sun-like, returning the day
to his night.

An Invalid's Catalogue of Old Beginnings

Lee Jane Taylor

(Index I)

In the beginning, the sky has striped itself into a paua shell
the wind here caresses, shrieks, distresses in the sly slant
mouth of a bohemian bard promising a dance to the end of
love, now if blackest dark is upon us let it come look
on loss it's just a shipwreck of us, words could not name it
not contain it, that decade rushed it gushes as I stretch in my
sit my doors of consciousness creak ajar, with a dig behind
brow and an earworm devotions

begin deliberate and ascetic, moments here being only ash
their smoke signals say maybe souls are made of poetry but
this morning I read verse in thin streams of violet mist, I
watch them fade, take me there now foggy to those woods
perhaps some greenshade will reach on in, words will streak
me sweet and taste just right, in the middle of the ill twilight
weeks I rinse it off, scrub my skin soft knowing tough girls
crack sudden as asphalt, and the things I still like tell of
other things a round vase, a red scarf are that stroppy mare
we gave her

fists of clover, hollandaise on a cheek, a stuck country gate
the blue eye above the road opening up inside us and I still
love these sunfed late mornings when eyes of children
bloom again as daisies, earlier will mood my view of me all
hangs by a thread batted by dread morning people, silently
spurn their sunburnt

smileshine enquiries fast and hard their hail is leading
questions swallow, nod it off and open a window, stop and
sip, try to sit again in rhyme, as she is always many things at
once my past my future my place are lions,
they shut me up, they feed on me til I am heat I boil over and
later comes the cold. In the end, the rain will wash it all
clean. There will be
a new beginning.

**The Catalogue chronicles a collection of 'first lines' excavated from the poet's journal entries 05/-08/*

(Index II)

In the beginning, I take my soul out for breakfast, please don't judge me for walking on the berm, I amble til I fall asleep beneath forests of neurones, my mind in a poem your hearts in my hands, find sweet subversions of their mind traps take me nowhere, listen there to Malcolm McClaren piano, recall chords of romantic discord today it's only seagulls and crabs, some suffering won't rest while ideas wait wiser than any one of us and I wonder if she watches where she goes her folly is the thrill of falls part desired

wisdom is a midnight sky it wakes me stars stunning studding wide and wild, land and lid how it fits is not fixed, tomorrow my hair hangs stage curtain heavy hope then will be a trim, the way out dear is a bridge. I forget

what is meant by wellness but Ms Dickinson yes they shut us up still, well or sick, under rohotu heavens tiny sparks spin she's in my head again anonymity keeps free her, not me, I am the small man in tall offices I blunt the sharps in twilight hear the old gods whispering truths unkind, their slups of rain plink my grubby panes learn the art quick of lighting halls between leaving cells to drip in dark for only winter knows me

its opaque melodies loan me mist and fog look how fast they run they pass this life of birds and mountains miss the boundlessness beyond our own carbonic sway, the gray of unremembered wellness paints me away I'll come home I swear, I don't care for words they won't live for me, admit one wish two gulls a sparrow

I wake in the arc of a rainbow I take up ache arched arms a list, beloved earworm is the torn edge of sky sheisdustcrowds eyes, our house, a spill, I wear too many colours obsessions become circles, tie the strings of winter masks tight ignore that pink bath towel unstill life the cotton polyester organ glisten twitches

I see it now in echoes of nausea and almost admire her thoroughness in tuning the mundane into these halogen avenues of strange. An invalid's collection of old beginnings and false starts an ill season tipping to one singular ripped edge, swing in its fray, in the beginning there is a limit where peace lays and perfect chaos waits at the end of beginnings.

**Materials of original artefact: (lang.) Engl. Mod.; compressed pine wood-pulp pages, thread bound; carboniron ink. Late modern era (approx. early Pandemic Era, C21st)*

Fall Out of Key

Lee Jane Taylor

After storms unlock gust fronts mast cells calm
late season trees litter in shards of silver bright
as mirrors in leafing wake, inside is always dull
motion aircycles
stales mouths
minds will only
refresh enlight
in pride specific
humility wry, kind
wise eyes wise advice

of a child

go outside all you need stand still
in gardens out is simplest therapy chill breeze
stirring noiseless thrill, unterrific side effects
neighbour catching sights
me, my bedhead self akimbo
pyjama pantomime scandal, socks with sandals
glassy retinas
roll all fondstroke
stem stamens
axils tips
daunt worthwhile for gulps
of fresh, stagnant days
green silvered fingers
kindly come unpick
before what comes next
the scrape of keys
on knuckles and napes
the glint of crystalline
breaths only
fools hang on
even falls let go
in the deathless tumble
of slow white cold.

The Algorithm

Tim Wilson

Attributes:

xsize, ysize : horizontal and vertical size of the board
state : set containing (x,y) coordinates for live cells.

My ex-brother-in-law with Motor Neuron disease first;
we hadn't spoken in decades so text.
Apologies, sympathy,

etc. Methods:

display(update_board) -- Display the state of the board on-screen.
erase() -- clear the entire board
makeRandom() -- fill the board randomly

Nothing. No reply.
I kept forgetting to persist.
Got a new job. Was bad at it. Tried not to be.

Forgot. set(x,y) -- set the given cell to Live; doesn't refresh the screen
toggle(x,y) -- change the given cell from live to dead, or vice
 versa, and refresh the screen display

We have kids you know...
The phone is ringing.
Then my birth father, newly revealed by DNA testing.
Three cancers: spine, prostate, liver. His other son, my

brother: throat cancer in Australia. def __init__(self, xsize, ysize):
 """Create a new LifeBoard instance.

scr -- curses screen object to use for display
char -- character used to render live cells (default: '*')
 """

self.state = set()


```
self.xsize, self.ysize = xsize, ysize
```

Nick, blood clotted and brave, fell, shattering his arm.
Sister Maureen, so gregarious, Holy Spirit-ed: cancer again, incommunicado.
'I'm quite sick,' said Wilfie, our two-year-old, pushing Lego around the table.
 'I'm quite sick.'
He'd been unwell three weeks before.
 'You're not,' we reply.

```
Smiling: 'I'm are!'
def is_legal(self, x, y): "Returns true if the x,y coordinates are legal for this board."
    return (0 <= x < self.xsize) and (0 <= y < self.ysize)
```

```
def set(self, x, y):
    """Set a cell to the live state."""
    if not self.is_legal(x, y):
        raise ValueError("Coordinates {}, {} out of range o..{}, o..{}".format(
            x, y, self.xsize, self.ysize))
```

```
key = (x, y) self.state.add(key) def makeRandom(self):
```

“Fill the board with a random pattern”
An ex-colleague takes leave. Brain cancer. Another, 48, two teenagers. The same.
My niece, reminds me one weekend in Tauranga of her ailing father. We drive.
Just outside Rotovegas, where the light is Swarovski,
he hovers between this, and an abyss.
‘Are you dying?’ asks Wilfie.
The weather pours in,

```
coughing and spitting. def step(self):
    "Compute one generation, updating the display."
    d = set()
    for i in range(self.xsize):
        x_range = range( max(o, i-1), min(self.xsize, i+2) )
        for j in range(self.ysize):
            s = 0
            live = ((i,j) in self.state)
```



```

for yp in range( max(o, j-1), min(self.ysize, j+2) ):
    for xp in x_range:
        if (xp, yp) in self.state:
            s += 1

```

Soon his voice will be silenced forever. My phone again, vibrating;
 I don't recognise the number. He's
 recorded a speech for his other daughter's wedding. She doesn't have
 a boyfriend yet.

Because of my new job I wake early, breath wet.
 Light seeps around the curtains, disrespectful, like
 my colleagues. I fail to synch calendars, eat celery
 in the office, promise to try harder,
 can never locate
 the whiteboard eraser.

```

# Subtract the central cell's value; it doesn't count.
s -= live
##print(d)
##print(i, j, s, live)
if s == 3:
    # Birth
    d.add((i,j))
elif s == 2 and live:
    # Survival
    d.add((i,j))
elif live:
    # Death
    pass

```

Over breakfast, a friend from the job I'd left says
 he visited our mutual friend, the one with brain cancer,
 who can now actually no longer speak, the one
 whose last text to me ended, '...anyway, that's enough
 mutual admiration for one night.'

The phone again. Number might be spam On Facebook a priest posts a selfie in
 hospital gown and mask. "This is not Covid," he writes.
 I remember my ex-colleague. Remember. Go home.

'I'm quite sick.' # Subtract the central cell's value; it doesn't count.

```
s -= live
##print(d)
##print(i, j, s, live)
if s == 3:
    # Birth
    d.add((i,j))
elif s == 2 and live:
    # Survival
    d.add((i,j))
elif live:
    # Death
    pass
```

The next day: a forwarded email. He died last night.

The damn phone again, buzzing.

I pick up, shouting, "Hello?

Who is this? Who's there?"

Down the line, it comes afresh,

that sound. I recall what the old ones said: that

death's mocking horrible

laughter, when first heard,

resembles children singing. # Subtract the central cell's value; it doesn't count.

```
s -= live ##print(d)
##print(i, j, s, live) if s == 3:
# Birth          d.add((i,j))          elif s == 2 and live:
# Survival       d.add((i,j))          elif live:
# Death          pass
self.state = d
```


love from the transcendental post office

Theo Coles

when we were children, we squeezed into a single bed
my head on the pillow and yours at the other end
you laughed as my ankles tickled your neck,
in those days i didn't know two girls could be anything
more than horizontal bodies and faces that didn't touch

i wanted to be someone who fell in love
you wanted to be someone who obeyed god
i tried to send up a prayer,
please dear god, find me someone whose face i can be close to
that same year i chopped my hair to my earlobes

it started to fall out in the months before, i told you
it wasn't all of the truth
but how do you say help me,
i am afraid because i have butterflies in my ankles
how do you say help me,
i think prayers are getting trapped in the clouds
stuck in a transcendental post office

if we were still children i would have said, 'i want to play romeo'
and perhaps you would have understood it then
before you loved any god, you loved me
but we are almost two decades old when i say
bleary eyed and staticy on the phone
i am in love with a girl

in this version it is juliet and juliet
it is romeo and romeo,
in this version she chops my hair in the bathroom mirror
shedding me free of it with sewing scissors
i do not have to explain these things anymore

when her forehead touches mine, it is a prayer
please dear god, if love can't be between two girls
then i don't know if we've got the definition of love right yet
in this version you leave what i have found in the transcendental post office

a letter, unopened
i wrote about juliet and juillet, falling in love
living happily ever after
praying definitions of love might expand

to her and to me, our love is love, which is someone whose
forehead pressed against yours, feels like a prayer

when a tree falls in our forest

Penelope Scarborough

There's an unexplainable warmth
of the moon
of the bottom of the lake

Where we hang elegies beneath the water
for the trees cut without a sound

There's a magpie that sleeps alone in the cherry tree
adorned in sterling loneliness
A raven that steals lines of conversation
back to its quietest nest.

There are the candles of our voices catching on every curtain
The boiling of sap beneath our skin.

There's a comfortable torture
of being apart, of being together—
a violent indifference to the forest fires
beneath our feet.

Too many things axe-to-wood split
between us.
So many things axed
before they could be said.

My Father

Lauren Gibson

My father taught me to peel an orange today.
He has taught me many times,
But I still ask him to do it for me.
I watch as he gently tears the peel from the flesh,
And splits the segments from one another.

My father has taught me to think quietly.
I have seen him do so many times,
But I still blurt out my words.
I watch as I dig myself a hole
deeper than I am tall,
And rip my hair from my scalp in noisy frustration.

My father has taught me to ride bikes and fly kites and
Read poetry.
My father has tried to teach me maths,
And although it still gets the better of me,
I try not to count on my fingers.

I have given up peeling oranges the way my father taught me.
I am not methodical and gentle like him: I rip
At the orange's outer with my teeth to make an opening,
And then haphazardly pick the skin off until the orange is exposed,
Barely covered by a provocative chiffon nightgown of pith.

I am careful when I segment the orange though.
I slowly separate the segments into quarters,
just in case anyone wants to share.
If they don't, I peel the segments apart and eat them
one by one, remembering my father's lessons.

To cut an orange is impious.
To caress it gently is an act of god.

morning in parnell

Hebe Kearney

the summer moon this morning
isn't plath's mother.

she is instead misshapen in the west,
a phosphate tablet
dissolving in a glass of blue sky.

pale, floating above
zig-zagging oak trees
their rambunctious leaves

dance to
perfectly circular pigeon coos
echoing smooth
over ōrākei basin

where trains don't run
and a furious sun
is tempered by a humid horizon to the east.

it is tepid heat
tickling the tiled spinal cords
of multi-million dollar mansions, making them
squeamish with laughter.

and so the day opens,
both celestial bodies in opposition
equally diluted
in an opulent sky.

From a Poet

Rosie Copeland

After Pablo Neruda's The Poet's Obligation

To whomever has a shuttered heart
I recommend:

Plucking the snail leaving its silvery trail
on the concrete footpath
slick from the rain,
placing it in the flower bed
and wishing it well;

Reading a child a bedtime story
filled
with starry skies and magical boats
that take them to faraway places
where there are only
tears of joy;

Walking through a forest and listening
to the lyrics in the susurrating
of the leaves
and writing them down
to craft poems
that make your heart sing;

Waiting patiently for the wild animals
to make their presence known.
They are as curious about you as you
are of them;

Watching a herd of cows.
We can learn a lot from the humble cow.
Their lives are not so different from ours.
They love as we do and are loved.

Childhood

Lincoln Jaques

It's all gone now; all over.
Your brothers unhinging the
differential from underneath
a Zephyr Mark IV. Oil spilling
onto the driveway, making a
mask of ghosts in blood spots.

The go-kart with a broken axle
partially hidden in the long grass.

You become an empty
cicada shell. Voices distil
through the trees. Reaching
higher, but never looking up.

I wish I could put words to light
to describe the long reach of gravity,
like a memory pulling planets.

The house, years later, sits empty.
How many of us have brushed
its hollow walls, painted murals
on its underbelly, kissed our
first loves under its arches.

Does it still hold the memory of us?

Before taking my leave I plant
a row of clues. By morning
the moon will have pulled them
all up by their roots.

Kahukura — Red Admirals

Hebe Kearney

Mother, together we fed the caterpillars plump
little fuzzy bodies ballooning
their black swivel-heads heedlessly munching
along stinging nettle stems
safe from waspy predation.

You grew *ongaonga* for them
enough to kill a man
fenced off by the compost with chicken wire,
harvested it with tongs, wearing pink rubber gloves.

We kept the caterpillars in a yellow-lidded container
but when it was time they went AWOL
around the lounge, attaching themselves
upside down to bookshelves
metamorphosing next to Ovid and Kafka.

Hatching, they stained the wood with rusty drops
and sat on their chrysalises, wing-pumping
before fluttering off to tap against the windows,
begging for release.

The sickly ones
were fed sugar water from a pink dish sponge
their long tongues unfurling tentatively.

I named them things like *Tiger-Rose* and
Love-Heart Dew-Drop before inevitably
they had to be buried
wrapped in white paper towels
next to the washing line; butterfly graveyard.

When we set the survivors free

they rose redly into the blue,
where there isn't a word
for *thank you*.

Night sky like an opera

Annabel Wilson

They stayed up late, cataloguing moths. Puriri: *ghost moth*.
Emperor, Brown Plume. Things they thought about saying
would not be said, yet — this velvet night, frosted with stars.
So quiet so far out of the city. There was a point where they
knew the point was not really the talk. Tentative tenderness.
Shouldering the night. Eloquent wrists.

These were written in four dreams

Ruben Mita

i.

They were talking loudly
about the faceless ones,
about the sexless creatures
of Miramar.

ii.


There should be no stones
in the lake of my palm.

iii.

I like the idea of holding
little stones in the palm of my hand,
holding them up and shouting;
“Expand, expand, expand!”

iv. (Recipe for a Pigeon)

Fill a pigeon-shaped cup with meat.



Poet Biographies

Tessa Barker is a Law and Communications student at the University of Auckland, where she is currently president of the Poetry Club. She also works part time as a Literature tutor. This year Tessa has particularly enjoyed writing poetry, and is looking forward to developing this part of herself further.

Tony Beyer writes in Taranaki, New Zealand. His print titles include *Dream Boat: selected poems* (HeadworX) and *Anchor Stone* (Cold Hub Press).

Jane Bloomfield is a Queenstown-based writer and the author of the Lily Max children's novels published by Luncheon Sausage Books. Her nonfiction writing has appeared on The Sapling, The Spinoff, Newsroom, and Sunday Magazine. She was a Michael King Writer's Centre Summer Resident, 2021.

Nathaniel Calhoun lives in the Far North of Aotearoa and works on teams that focus on biodiversity monitoring and restoration. His work has been published in *Poetry Aotearoa*, *Landfall*, *New York Quarterly*, *Oxford Poetry* and many others.

Wyeth Chalmers has been a comedian and actor for twenty years. Wyeth has been writing and performing for the last ten years. He has produced several poetry videos and is working on a poetry collection.

Theo Coles (*they/them*) were first published by the NZSA Local History Competition in 2011. In 2020, they were awarded the Marie Dunningham Spirit of the Slam Award. Theo is currently writing a book of poetry about their experience in the New Zealand mental health system.

Lauren Gibson (*she/they*) is a 19 year old English and Criminology student from Tāmaki Makaurau, currently residing in Pōneke. They spend their time looking at bugs, procrastinating, and writing poetry.

Susan Glamuzina is a New Zealand author and poet who feels at home when there's sand between her toes and her thoughts are in the clouds.

Lincoln Jaques' poetry, fiction and travel essays have appeared in Aotearoa and internationally. He was the Runner-Up in the 2022 IWW Kathleen Grattan Prize for a Sequence of Poems (judged by Janet Charman).

Hebe Kearney is a poet and librarian who lives in Tāmaki Makaurau. Their work has appeared in publications including: *Mantissa Poetry Review*, *Mayhem*, *Overcom*, *Riverstone Lit*, *samfiftyfour*, *Starling*, *Symposia*, *takahē*, and *Poetry Aotearoa Yearbooks*. You can find them at @he__be on Instagram.

Rosie Copeland is a word-artist based in Wellington. She is currently writing a novel. Rosie completed writing papers at the IIML and belongs to several writing groups. She is published in *Mayhem*, *Reading Room* and in the USA. She has placed or being commended in several writing competitions in NZ.

Timothy Martin lives in Whangārei, Te Tai Tokerau. Timothy has a PhD in dendroecology. Observing the natural world and writing are two of his great loves. Most of his poems are simply self-therapy, as he processes grief and an acute awareness of the environmental loss that surrounds us.

Jackie McCullough is a medical laboratory scientist, wife, and mother of three towering sons from Masterton who has very recently discovered the delights of reading and writing poetry. Poetry is her happy place and gives her a whole sense of being. She writes about the small things in life.

Ruben Mita is a writer, musician and ecology postgrad student in Pōneke. He has been published in journals such as *Landfall*, *Takahē*, *Starling*, *Sweet Mammalian*, and *A Fine Line*. He loves fungi, sounds, and trying to write poetry that plays with overlapping realities.

Anuja Mitra lives in Tāmaki Makaurau. Her poetry has appeared in *Landfall*, *takahē*, *Poetry New Zealand*, and most recently *Haven Speculative*. She has also reviewed and written about Aotearoa poetry for *Cordite*, *a fine line* and *Minarets*, and hopes to continue promoting the work of Kiwi poets.

Stephen O'Connor is a writer and his work appears in journals both on and offline. He is originally from the Wairarapa, and in his spare time likes to contemplate returning to Japan to live.

Perena Quinlivan (*Ngāti Ranginui*, *Ngāi Te Rangi*) is a Tāmaki Makaurau based writer whose work is primarily concerned with the impact of colonization, language revitalisation and the environment.

Penelope Scarborough is a second-year psychology, philosophy, and poetry student at Victoria University of Wellington. She is addicted to writing poetry about the ugly things.

Courtney Speedy was born in 1997 and resides in Tasman. She has had poetry published in *Re-Draft*, *Tauranga Writers Write Off Line*, and *Poetry New Zealand Yearbook*.

Michaella Steel (*she/her/ia*) is a Pōneke-based theatre practitioner, writer, and librarian. Her work has been published in *Starling* and *Awa Wāhine*, while others have been performed at BATS Theatre and Circa Theatre. In her spare time, she thinks about the lore behind Ethel Cain.

Lee Jane Taylor is a poet, psychologist, mother and "migraineur" living in Otautahi with a menagerie of auto-immune weirdness, teen ebullience and pet anarchy. See Lee's work at SkyHousePoetry.com

Jose Thomas is a writer, communicator and educator from Tāmaki Makaurau. They live in their whānau's overgrown garden with their beautiful partner, deaf dog, and half a dozen unfinished yarn projects.

Jedidiah Vinzon is currently studying toward his Bachelor of Science (Physics). He enjoys writing poetry and listening to jazz in his free time. You will find him catching sleep like fishing with a yoyo – please wish him all the best in this endeavour.

Annabel Wilson lives in Ōhinehou. Her first book *Aspiring Daybook* won Best Fiction: NZ Mountain Book Festival, was longlisted for the Ockhams, and seeded the play, *No Science To Goodbye*. Her writing has been widely published. Annabel completed a Creative Writing PhD through Massey in 2023.

Tim Wilson drives a blue 2004 Suzuki Swift; he is more (and less) blue than this vehicle.

Mark Young was born in Aotearoa but now lives in a small town in North Queensland. He is the author of more than sixty books, the most recent of which are *with the slow-paced turtle replaced by a fast fish* (Sandy Press, 2023) and *Mercator Projected* (Half Day Moon Press, 2023).

