

# TAROT

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# T A R O T



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## *Introduction to this edition*

Welcome to the December 2024 issue of *Tarot*. This collection of poems brings together a diverse range of voices from Aotearoa and beyond, and they offer a glimpse into the many, varied ways we experience life.

Some poems within invite us to connect with the physical world—rivers, mountains, and skies. Others take us on journeys in pursuit of the universal through the personal, the internal, memory, or relationship. These are poems of land, belonging, spirituality, and identity.

Each poem in this issue offers itself as it is, and offers itself as just one piece of a wider conversation about our connections to place, to each other, and to the truths we struggle to communicate. It is my hope that, by placing these poems in conversation with each other, we can explore the diversity of perspectives and experiences that shape our understanding of the world.

These poems are reflections of lives familiar and foreign, and they are inviting us to pause, to reflect, and perhaps to see ourselves or others in them in new ways.

This issue of *Tarot* celebrates the power of poetry to illuminate the complexities of life, offering not just answers, but provocations for connection and reflection.

I invite you to take your time with these poems. Let the words settle, and see where they lead you.

Stay curious.

*Kit Willett, Dec 2024*

# Tikanga

*Tony Beyer*

rivers and mountains  
stay with us  
all our lives  
origin then journey  
then destination

the flow  
is the umbilical cord  
the mound the  
subsiding contour  
of a grave

introducing oneself  
always identify  
awa and maunga  
beginning  
and end

hickory  
*Robert Rinehart*

select wood. grace,  
pitch-piped, & straight:  
feathery strong,  
giving, shaped just  
so, balanced. too  
notched clean, no split  
braid: thick. its cord  
pulses, still as rain.  
draw the arrow  
smooth. never stall,  
sure as practised:  
again & then  
stretch string swiftly  
(still smooth). elbow  
locked thus, eye firm.

machine. align  
gaze with centre  
steady, exhale  
taut breath  
hold  
release. render.

# The land

*Baxter Williams*

A land of grace & raw beauty,  
where the air is spiced with possibility  
& gods walk the dirt roads,  
shirts of rough linen on their tanned shoulders,  
their strong hands warm in the salty air.

These gods do not perch  
on gilded thrones in heavenly palaces  
but rest  
on wooden benches in village squares,  
wide-brimmed hats pulled low  
to keep the sun from their wrinkled faces.

These are old gods.  
They are fishers & farmers,  
poets & painters,  
the sowers of seeds of grain.  
They are of the land, & their gifts  
are of the land.

From snow-capped mountains to the glittering sea,  
this is their land.  
They share its beauty graciously,  
with a smile or nod,  
their friendship offered to all  
who come in peace.

# How It Should Have Gone

*Georgia Agnew*

The ship arrived, the men disembarked,  
and froze—nothing warm and welcoming,  
no fire burning and no witch waving.

Only an island fit to die on,  
and each other to feed on.

This time, Circe wasn't there to save them,  
to ruin them, to find them,  
no gullible ear, spun into love.

Only a stop on a journey,  
and fear, and weary bones.

They stayed overnight and were lost again  
by morning, early to the underworld,  
with no story and no excuses.

This tiny skin of truth

*Renée Hill*

The milk never  
came after you were cut  
from my body  
on your birth day.  
I went mad  
for you.

Shaving each valium  
with the blade, I  
strain to make it  
into unlickable dust  
so I can stop using  
them.

It is hard to look  
at this tiny skin of truth  
in its flakiness—  
I might want to die  
again if I go  
off script.

While you sleep  
during the day I lie  
stretched taut on the  
rack of blue denim couch.  
I binge on a tv series  
about a defective

family, the Mum  
a reckoning power  
house, hoping you  
won't wake up

so I can get to the end  
of another episode.

When I hear your  
staccato whimpers  
my pressurised  
guts rush down  
the chute of my body  
to slosh in my feet.

Power surges  
through my  
house, your cry  
is the only thing  
I can answer.

Two universes relentlessly expanding  
*Grace Shelley*

Something coarse and exhilarative happens in the womb of a bath towel. My whole existence narrows to the safety of life's most supervisory hands. My hair is dried: a world is created.

So I create the world for him, one hand on either side of his head, all vigour and love, reassuring him that I will reappear, just as soon as I take the towel away.

# Dad makes a filter coffee

*Baxter Williams*

He came home with a small box,  
a twelve-dollar piece of plastic inside.  
He boiled the kettle & opened the box  
to produce a funnel-shaped cup  
with a hole in the bottom.

In went a paper filter  
& sixteen grams of freshly ground  
light-roasted Peruvian coffee beans,  
then he placed the holey cup  
atop a mug.

Clear water mixed quickly  
with the dark coffee granules,  
a light-brown foamy crema forming  
atop the murky liquid:  
a pool of thick, golden oil  
dripping fragrant drops  
into the waiting mug below.

Two & a half minutes later,  
he removed the plastic cup,  
its paper filter now full  
of sodden coffee grounds,  
to reveal a dark pool  
with sweet earthy aromas  
wafting up in thin tendrils of vapour.  
He lifted the mug to his lips,  
closed his eyes & sipped.  
He put it back down, a smile playing  
at the corner of his mouth.

# An Elegy for St Paul's Church Rangiaowhia

*Kassandra Hart-Kaumoana*

A dear friend and I, one Sunday, ventured  
along the Kīngitanga hilt to a halt then

up the path  
a door unlocked

pews in rows of varnish  
& scriptures on podiums.

Rays pooling luminous  
saints in rainbows

of stained glass.  
For a brief moment

glory.  
Before an intruder alarm

buckles the snares  
of our ears so

we cannot hear  
the good bell ring,

we cannot hear  
a fair chime for novice communion.

Not even silence  
is free anymore.

We left before  
state security could arrive

to tell us to  
or take us away.

‘Show Me the Place’ by Leonard Cohen  
*Molly Crighton*

Lights of Dunedin through silver-grey fog gauze  
the car’s engine purring  
a mammalian bead of light

and white condensation-windows,  
like I’m Rose and you’re Jack  
except there’s no disaster, just Cohen on the radio

his brassy declarations of love  
making shapes in the car-light  
and my head bending to the curve of your side.

Your face is impossibly well-shaped  
you are evidence against the dysteleological argument.

In fact you are so lovely  
that the world ending would be okay  
and we could watch it together from here,

black bowl of night around the car windows  
an endless absence of sunlight  
slowly concealed by white breath.

# I/我, U/你 & E/伊: a Modest Proposal

*Yuan Changming*

As classic Chinese suggests, we can  
Reasonably attain linguistic equality  
In English as long as we all agree  
To use *I*, still for the first person singular  
But *U* for the second, &  
*E* for the third

All single-lettered  
All capitalised  
All sexes inclusive  
Either case applicable, subject or object  
& all equal in creation as  
In speech acts

So, say after I:  
I love U  
U love E  
E loves us all

# In a climate of fear

Keith Nunes

The words sound awkward,  
The jagged unfamiliarity of them,

*lake, rainfall, waterfall*

They've slipped out of use,  
Archaic, irrelevant, uncomfortable memories  
From when there was the illusion of plenty.

Dry in the season of rain  
Wealthy women and men moisturise,  
A prince drowns in gold,  
An old blind woman predicts  
The rain will never come again,  
Those who laugh at her are left behind  
To shrink into their parched skin,  
The wise rise at dawn, pack silently,  
Don't look back.

Sweeping beaches  
Swept out to sea,  
Heroic beachhead  
Pounded like a boxer down and out,  
Crinkle cut cliff falling in strips as if soldiers dying in battle,  
Fence posts topple like a dominoes run,  
The front line moves inland,  
The war being lost tide by tide.

# ode to the Sheffield pub

*Zoë Deans*

ham raffle on a Saturday night:  
rugby-stubbied lads in the roar  
shedding horns and velvet childhoods  
stand lowing 'round the pool table

the air is thick with tobacco  
and the clack clack of the jukebox  
peddling choices like a careers counsellor

outside, the moon is a cracked windshield  
and winter whines at the door

soon, the young men fledge  
to the cities, other dank-valleyed towns  
or high, star-ridden stations

and the cold pub air sits disused  
smelling of rancid fat and urinal cake.  
it gets so you can't get a meal half the year  
just a piss-weak draught

but still the slow old boys come in,  
chewing through the days like a combine harvester  
to lean back on scratchy square chairs

and affix you with their opinion:  
the horses      the rugby      the rest of your life

until the final grind of rural siren  
draws the street out to bear witness:  
billow of smoke, structure buckle,  
the wild-eyed windows filling orange  
as the blaze roars low and final

the neighbourhood stands  
with their hems dampening in the dew  
and slowly the chat seeps into the night:  
births deaths marriages,  
the lamb prices, the drought

and like hoggets in a southerly  
they turn as one  
to warm their burry backs

# One Friday

*Brooke Soulsby*

we sit across from each other at that café-hotspot on Willis Street  
I order granola, You, eggs on toast.  
nice and simple, like the long black. I order a half strength of the same  
just to be different

but also because I don't want to be difficult  
& ask if I can pretty please have a half  
strength oat milk flat white.  
too many syllables, You see.

It is Friday morning, 8.06 am  
I woke up in a bustle of thoughts  
not unusual for me, as You know.

I was starting to think about how I should ask for consent before I vent  
before I divulge all that's going on  
in my inner monologue that's all moving  
pictures & scattered letters that I trace  
repetitively along that fleshy part of my  
hand between my thumb and forefinger.  
yeah.

but then I thought, idly, amongst many other things  
that You might not ask me what's on my mind  
because of my tendency to let all spill out anyway.

would You even be used to  
my silence?

but then You ask me.  
You say 'would you like to talk about it?'

and I smile to myself, expressing the very thought I'd had in the last fourteen lines.

we talk (I talk) & You listen  
we talk (You talk) & I listen

It's 8.30 am and I need to go to work  
You, to the library.

the sun is out today  
the air, crisp.  
we hold onto each other a few moments  
I watch You walk away & You turn your head  
& You smile.

Looking for my dirty lime green converse high tops  
*Renée Hill*

the ones with stencil flies  
on the rim that enclose

my ankle, as it looks for love  
in all the wrong places.

It is always night time  
when I notice we are

still together. Maybe 3am.  
We don't need to talk,

I use your pace as soft  
focus, while my thoughts

concrete themselves in  
layers. No one is around

to draw a stick through  
my brain cement,

to shape a heart encasing  
the initials of two lovers,

just us. I have looked  
at your soles slapping

the pavement a thousand  
times as you skirt the icy grass.

Even though you are scuffed  
and deal in chipped rubber,

even though you lace  
wet jeans and are humbled

by cobblestones and  
unreliable steps,

you keep coming  
back for more of me.

what I miss about summer

*Holly Rowsell*

cherries  
stinging saltwater eyes  
peachy skin thirsting for cold aloe vera  
the feeling of paddle pops melting down sweaty wrists  
evenings arriving without goose pimples  
incense hanging in the air without a wind to whisk it away  
flowering pōhutukawa trees  
red stamens blanketing your windshield  
sitting under the warm fiery glow  
spilling G&T over your copy of *Wuthering Heights*  
hanging it up to dry on the clothesline  
beside our t-shirts wet only around the tits  
your face in the three o'clock sun  
chocolate hair melting—dripping down your neck  
nose stained pink—tiny lipstick kisses  
freckles left spilt across your cheeks  
til autumn came to pick them back up

A doctor says men have hormonal cycles, too

*Joel LeBlanc*

and as I'm driving through traffic I listen  
to him explain about

the rise and fall of testosterone with the  
shortening and lengthening of days

as the sun pulls our blood by  
invisible threads

coaxing chemicals from glands, like  
glass eels hunting the moon.

As I work and pay bills and drive home  
and cook a dinner I can't remember tasting,

my body still knows the sound of the sun,  
and the feel of night fingers reaching

inside me.

Even here, buried by the world,  
the stars find us.

# Step out of your vehicle

*Lee Fraser*

please, we have reason  
to believe you are in danger. Have you noticed  
you are being followed by a suspicious, persistent  
sense of urgency?

Step out of your car and onto footpath or cycle lane  
for that trip just down the road.

Some wish the special features of their  
bodily, family, industry factors would allow it  
but are bound for now to various chairs and chariots.

For those who are not:

When did you last breathe the outdoors  
all the way in, feel the thud  
of your purposeful powerful footsteps  
jolting your brain back into your body  
and out of the to do lists, replies, should'ves  
that will truly never end?

Feel the rush of the breeze, thump of your woken-up chest  
as you bike past bored lines of impatient cars.

Kowhai  
cat  
cut grass  
kid drinking the wide windswept day  
you were there all along and I  
never noticed.

Get out of your groaning fuming deadweight  
crashable stealable metal glass boxes  
that we hurtle forwards  
right next to oncoming traffic  
while scroll-gram-tok-texting ourselves to death.

Get out of fuel-gauge peering  
grindy gearing, belt-squeal-fearing  
insurance arranging, oil changing, WOF fundraising  
parking  
and crumbs on the crumpled car mat  
hand, nose, tongueprints on the window again.

What if you swapped white knuckles at 10 and 2  
for cycling gloves and bus card  
keys for wee stack of petrol money  
dashboard for longboard  
brake pedal for break.

Insular personal vehicles may get me  
the most efficient transport flow  
but they don't get US that.  
If I wait my turn at the bus stop  
releasing on-demand instant convenience,

I might pick up  
the actual up-close sights, smells, sounds  
of real-life people  
with different stories, ideas, shortages, abundances to mine  
who are nonetheless going somewhere  
just like me.

Relational, collaborative and human-powered transport  
like it all used to be.

What if we slowed down  
full-time, part-time, once a fortnight  
marinated in the humanity of A to B?  
On the way, checked in, zoned out, caught up  
and, in tandem, shaped up  
traffic, air, pockets, headspace  
and Papatūānuku, in the process?  
See you out there.

# sweater weather

*Holly Rowsell*

you watched the buses snake  
through the curly kelburn hillside  
and accidentally ashed your cig  
over the unmarked grave  
of the mouse I found that morning  
beneath the kitchen sink  
while telling me how the pine smelt  
like trees and not your father  
burnt christmas candles  
low-grade bleach.  
you started shivering  
should we have gone inside?

the moment before the world ends.

*Jedidiah Vinzon*

i pretend that the  
lashing strings of  
that broken guitar is  
rain. and that the  
bloodletting is  
the tablature. and i

am the song. i pluck  
my tongue to catch  
the storm and call it  
singing. do you hear  
my wet body whistling?

can you latch onto  
the melody the hole  
in my mouth is spilling?  
my sonorous navel  
echoes. inspiring my skin

to dance. can you feel  
the rhythm? can you  
catch the syncopation?  
do you feel the dress  
slipping off your shoulders?

in a moment the sky will  
fall. let's pretend that our  
bodies are water when we  
touch. that when we move  
we are the earth rearranging  
the islands into a continent.

in a moment the sky will  
fall. let's pretend that we are not  
afraid of the sun. if the moon  
could stand the day, why  
can't we?

# building

*Robert Rinehart*

fingers tingle, brush  
taste, bristles arouse,

pain as resurrected fire. sole  
next, rough heel pads, toes:

indiscreet blood rush, amoral  
tsunami toppling colonnades

like salt pills, graveling  
the edges of feeling.

rough hand work, chiselled  
years of labour, microbial

chunks of flotsam. life. nothing  
sure, accretions of stubbornness

signifying so like wooded rings,  
passed years, tight. together time

remains: perceiving little  
of the world. unknown.

## Be a Tidy Kiwi

*Kieran Haslett-Moore*

The liturgical calendar is marked in greens and yellows. Solemnity days and feast days alternate across the spread of the year on a piece of glossy parchment. When the offerings are ready, they are hauled to the edge of the procession, dressing gowns pulled taut around bulging torsos. The municipal implements of rebirth rumbling around the streets accepting our plastic penance. The gods are shrill with worn old brake pads. It is our call to prayer. 'Reuse, reduce, recycle' the holy mantra goes. Like all mantras the words are said so we can avoid the deeds. The offerings disappear off down the highway and our part in the ceremony is done. We go back to a simple life, on a waste land, in a waste sea, a tribe of tidy Kiwi.

# Back Fence Scorecard

*Lee Fraser*

I've made peace with your dog  
am besties with your cat  
and do battle with your buttercup stems  
elbowing under the palings.

I might've queued behind you  
at a liquor store; your Monday  
morning yellow bin clink torrent  
isn't all organic apple cider vinegar  
and toasted sesame oil empties.

Adjacent strangers, scored:

- nil-1 Your washing is always out first.
- nil-2 Our trees block your line, and your indoor light.
- 1-2 You decapitated every mature tree on your side when you moved in.
- 2-2 I hear your outdoor can crusher go and go and go.
- 2-3 Through the fence cracks I see a nice garden.
- 3-3 We never drift weekend weed wafts across your lawn.
- 3-4 You hear our kids argue, yell and whine on repeat.
- 4-4 Our teens never dry retch on Sunday afternoon grass.
- 4-5 Our 7am garage podcasts are louder than our treadmill.
- 5-5 You have a bandsaw.

# Covent Garden

*Hayden Hyams*

I popped into a pub in Covent Garden to watch Charles receive a crown  
Then I left

I walked past the Carrick, through Chinatown, to the Toucan for a Guinness

I looked at photos on my phone and read snippets of  
*Sapiens* by Yuval Noah Harari and  
decided  
My dying wish is to be a skull in a museum

My frying wishes is to eat  
another fish sandwich in Istanbul  
Only 14 lira  
Non fungible as fuck

# Ostara

*Les Wicks*

Down in the clearing

they shed their clothes & gender.

Imperatives nest in the tree hollows  
anti-colonial transgressive bush-pagan post-logic open-air  
they somehow lost the suburbia that had trimmed  
& polished hard-worked suppressions.

Up on the ridgeline  
the sun squats unknowable  
beats down upon six naked humans there's  
stars bacteria leaffloss  
plunder nesting death.

Six small humans have their call  
amongst all the calls  
down in that clearing.

The fire is lit  
forest thanked  
as though those fallen branches now aflame  
are a conscious offering.

The ridge was its own project  
over eons.

Two lovers join  
dark & holy as the loam  
rut upon this bed  
of autumn leaves & ink-stained paper.

Feral cats come gather  
engrossed in those cries  
upon which humans build a marriage.

They are plucked up by the witnesses  
& thrown into the firepit.

Sacrifice. Ecology.

# Tears Lie in Cataracts

*Gregory Dally*

Staring at the sun as it rouges tundra,  
you're craning a head which laughter  
has furnished with crags.

Songs erupt over you, gentle trills  
from affection stored in reserve.  
The result, oh yes, is nutritive fodder.

Lyrics assuage your forehead,  
rimming the smiles you've gathered  
for this night's keep.

That's how melodies lodge here;  
as fuel to the warmth you've stashed.  
Tunes ripen in a freezer, you canny thing.

The scars from tramping have run  
to abysses of your mind at Ketetahi.  
The moon's rays lighten tussock,

lavishing scads of the heavens  
from your thoughts all over a home  
you like to call silence.

Fissures around you have deepened.  
Gulls are trying to copy the strains  
of taut nerves, a hell of a scream.

to the girl on the pavement floor.

*Jedidiah Vinzon*

in the rain of dandelion seeds  
drawing curtains in the wind

the lamp post was an eye  
and i was the moon

because i could not catch  
the tears and the orange

stood over her – like a headstone  
and they were the shovelling:

how cruel are the lights?  
that they pass you by

in winter's sobs and midnight's  
zealous talons, but the winds

were your mother when she  
covered your tears in her hands –

when it rained, you disappeared:  
the lamp post was the eye

and i was the moon  
because i did not catch

you when you flew onto  
the floor without a father.

# Loving someone

*Baxter Williams*

Loving someone  
is like playing the guitar.  
At first, you make  
lots of mistakes.  
Then after a while,  
you still make  
lots of mistakes.

# Winter Wait

*Yuan Changming*

With their most tender touches, snowflakes  
Have painted the whole night white  
Including the darkest corner in sight  
    Even within a forgotten dream

Except the plum tree, standing alone there  
    Under the eastern sky, whose  
Flowers are blooming boldly against  
The entire season, more vibrant than blood

# We Are the Sad Ones

Lee Jane Taylor

we are the sad ones

never kissed by sun

the  
kohl of night  
circles our eyes  
faces grow slowly  
wan we cede to  
sorrow we

u  
n  
-  
-

the  
forgetful and  
the forgotten  
lost, our loss is  
passport to the  
risen rites

d  
o  
n  
e

of all  
days gone living ghosts

mourn long, the abstract tokens, ask the value of  
access and belonging against the owning of time and its  
aberrant joys the busy go by at freckled speed stopping only in your  
spontaneous turns undeliberate visible ease such a feast of freedom with such  
seriousness, much unnecessary hesitation

I want to call shout Run! you carry

it all everything worthwhile in

a firing pattern of your nerves if sketched in ink would serve as a map to fortune, startlingly  
botanical in symmetry are the lace works of your sensate nodes, don't look down trust  
innate to muscle fibre is fight fly touch, taste it all for us, we are the sad ones  
the hungry with empty hands please show us what  
we can hope to hold.

# Te Toka Tapu

*Kasandra Hart-Kaumoana*

Talisman where Kupe's hand  
once traced oracular lines  
stands steadfast as guardian of times  
nautic-skies converge for prayer.

Surface etched by the palette of tides  
testifies to the old whispers of ariki  
ordained aboard waves that bow black  
and revere the silent endurance.

Nearby arcane ballrooms caved  
in. Here the earth holds its breath  
to anchor shipwrecks drowned

beneath each crevice, a vessel for stories unspoken  
of those who sought, fought, and those who found

ways pirouette winds weave kākahu spools  
in confluent baptisms of sea salt and spray,  
for those who dare stand and say  
the whenua pulses underfoot.

A strength that guides sails  
onward through travails,  
entreating the remnants carved  
in the beckoning rock—

Ninepin pedestal of vows bear as  
witness to allegiance sworn  
in the stillness of the dawn  
when light dances on your brows

may the world remember still the touch  
of the one who first called you special.

Cold water helps panic attacks  
*Felicitas Weisbach*

Jaws  
Gaping, sea  
Spray scratches at  
throat.  
Drowning  
thoughts  
Tumbling waves  
Smooth the edges  
Of an overworked mind  
Ears crackle with ocean foam  
7pm  
Iridescent blue body  
Of water  
Laps at tired skin,  
Okay again.

# Water burial in Ōwheo

*Molly Crighton*

When I'm hiding her car keys I find an old pill

    a cylindrical orange/red sun

forgotten in the fireplace's ogee curve.

I add it to the bag with all the others,  
where they rattle like multicoloured bones.

If on my way to the pharmacist—  
doing the safe thing, the getting-rid-of-them thing—  
if a suicide bomber ran to me like a long-distance lover  
    and caught me in his red-halo explosion,  
my body would scatter with pills like chemical confetti.

Before work I find a bench and a dead bird

    rigor mortis having frozen it

into the position of perfect flight: wings tucked in,  
tiny claws curled against the icy wind.

    Not one bone of it broken.

I wrap it in winter-damp leaves;  
let it drop from the side of the bridge  
wings seized forever for its last plummet.  
If you freeze the moment it isn't even dead  
just flying in the wrong direction.

This passes enough for a life:  
hiding from death in the sunshine,  
    a bench by the river,

confetti pills tipping into some pharmacy's bin  
like an incandescent meteorological phenomenon.

Life is so close to its opposite.

    The sky is vibrating  
with the cries of gulls  
    and sunlight scatters  
as bright and clear as water.

# Goodbye

*Georgia Agnew*

The hills are half covered in snow,  
just enough to forget the stories  
they told last week.

Winter is so long now  
I'm not sure I'll ever see roses grow again,  
gorse won't be burnt back and even if I run  
to the top above the fog  
the clear air will be so thin.

I might catch a glimpse of  
the setting sun  
as it dips  
below the horizon.

# Together

*Joanne Tasker*

As much as you love me and see me  
you will never understand me fully  
you are a fast pace, and I go slow  
you are loud enough for us both  
you always push  
yourself  
your body  
your boundaries  
you embrace discomfort  
tighter than anything  
tighter than me

I am soft, steady, and slow  
I am gentle like your compassion  
I am quiet like your resolve  
I am emotional to my detriment  
you are practical to a fault

you make me better  
while I bring you peace  
we balance each other  
take only what we need

While we sing the Nunc Dimittis, Russia carpet-bombs  
Ukraine  
*Molly Crighton*

which the priest tells us before evensong  
his cope glittering like a green diamond  
and the blue glow of Facebook frozen buttercup-light  
under his chin.

It's like waking up in your house  
and doing watercolours and petting your cat  
while firemen shout at you from the cupboards  
about a gas leak

like you hear them and then the postman  
chucks a Molotov cocktail through your mailbox  
and your house is engulfed in flames  
and your watercolours and your cat, too.

If I try to carry the weight of the world's grief  
I will buckle like a three-legged table  
Risk boardgame sliding off me  
and all the world leaders ending up  
in a hyena dogpile.

A man hisses at me on the bus  
and my partner kisses me  
while the lights of Dunedin glitter  
like dissected Hannukah candles.

God is a pinwheel  
spitting beautiful bright spikes over the ground  
while mountains melt like wax and ash  
falls like snow.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant  
    depart in peace  
or strike down the postman  
    or at least  
    save the cat.

# Arcus Way Stomach

*Violet Patterson*

my eroded  
converse soles  
skid across algae concrete  
dampening odd socks  
giving me athlete's foot

I fear the  
Trident Hot and Spicy  
noodles  
have killed the butterflies  
in my large intestine  
leaving only a stubby swan plant  
rested in unwatered soil  
its roots wrapped around  
and merging with  
my nervous system

I can shift my atoms to teleport  
through walls and under beds  
someday I will make it  
out of this atmosphere  
and maybe then  
I will finally understand why  
we never really talked about it

# Congenital Arrhythmia

*Joel LeBlanc*

My heart was never good with rhythms, it could  
never master being a drum, a timesheet, or a clock.

It was too busy being a beehive: a record  
of sun paths, the name of every flower

written in dances, a nuptial flight, the way  
I crawled into your mouth hunting for pollen,

a burning drop of bee venom, a beeswax  
castle, a queen telling herself

that she ate her infant sisters because  
it was war, a thumb-lick of honey

from noxious weeds, the colour of mustard  
and old coins and hot sand,

the bitter tang of sprayed blossoms,  
irradiated fruits, genetically modified roses,

the old beekeeper opening me with smoke, and  
sixty thousand bees shivering with prayer

for him to stop.

# A green heart

*Jackson*

Let me give you  
this green heart  
with seven main veins that fan out  
from a starburst, supporting  
an intricate web

This heart makes a lovely tea  
Don't be put off by the little round holes  
letting the light through  
They were made by workers, not thieves  
They show it's a good one,  
with anti-inflammatory strength

Turn your hot human cheek a little,  
brush this heart against it  
Feel the subtle resistance,  
the coolness that's only  
the usual mood of the air

What I want to give you  
is peace

It smells like the forest where I found it—  
tūī chatter, understory, sweet wet earth—  
but if you want to know it,  
use your own breath

# Pussies Galore

*Jane Bloomfield*

I'm a cat lover so it may come as no surprise that in a past life  
I have joyfully uttered the words—

*I'd like to be reincarnated as a cat.*

The first time, I was fourteen, out from boarding school  
for the day with a friend visiting her brother in his single  
bed, single desk room at Massey Uni, Palmy North.

*Why, he hissed, aren't you happy with the pussy you've got?*  
Grey fur walls fell in on my quiet-girl innocence. My secret  
feline desires. *The cat got your tongue? Ha ha ha . . .*

In my twenties I wrote bad poems about that sting;  
nowadays, I cuddle my kitty, Cowboy, while watching cat reels  
on IG of other cats and cat lovers. This brought me to the  
conclusion—a lot of people want to come back as cats.

I might do too when I'm tired and all I feel like doing is laying  
about in the sun stretched luxuriously on a velvet coverlet  
or hidden from the world in a hut made of sheepskin cushions  
and throws, assured a variety of textured foods will appear if I meow.

Until the other day when Cowboy came in from a rainstorm  
and began the task of drying his thick fur coat lick by lick,  
and I realised there is no way in hell  
I could towel myself down post shower

with my tongue.

# Homesick

*Simon Anton Niño Diego Baena*

It took you decades to enjoy wine  
and crawl on all fours.

Picasso's paintings still hang on the wall,  
as do those blue skies.

One terrible summer funeral  
cannot undo the beauty of a leafless winter.

There are no typhoons, storm surges,  
or floods this far north.

It's up to you to take pictures of gulls  
and that crumbling harbour.

# Skylight on a Summer Night

*Yuan Changming*

Not really the rain  
Tapping it aloud  
Like sparrows' beaks  
But all the stars  
From the outer space  
Splashing down  
Into a Bai Juyi's  
Plate for the dancing  
Pearls that I am  
Trying hard to catch  
And embed within  
This foreign stanza

# Harakeke Bob

*Lee Fraser*

Rain status  
uterine status  
flowering status  
actually remembering status  
finally align.  
On my knees  
knife in hand  
head in harakeke.  
Karakia  
Tahi, rua, toru  
45 degrees  
A year on from moving in  
I have almost erased  
the convenience scars  
of the previous owners' management  
decapitated children and parents laid to rest  
blunt-truncated grandparents relieved of  
their rain-catching frayed disgrace.  
Our ignorance will always encompass  
most of the knowledge in existence.  
If no-one had told me  
or I hadn't thought to ask  
I'd be trigger hacky too.  
Snail, clueless  
is in the way  
like me  
like the harakeke  
(or the driveway).  
I tip my hat  
skip ahead  
step around  
circle back later  
no more dishonour in these leaves.

Harakeke tikanga is slow  
patient  
courteous  
the cosmetic submitting to wellbeing  
tidy deferring to remembrance  
closure yielding to honour  
and I know  
I don't yet know  
the half of it.

## Two poems about my gender

Zoë Deans

1.

*Gendre* is French for son-in-law,  
your daughter's husband. One Tuesday night  
I make cheese souffle because you said  
your dad made it when you were small.  
I'm sweating, fretting, setting multiple timers  
for its final fart-blown emergence.  
I did not realise I wanted to be  
in direct competition with your father  
but the feeling now is that I am  
the opposite of a possessive dad with a gun:  
I am an egg-beating son-in-law.

2.

My gender is a paper fortuneteller, grubby at the edges  
and I've already read all the fortunes, so pick  
your colour with care and I'll recite it like a mantra:  
G R E Y

(which incidentally might be the most common non-binary name)  
A S H      L E A F      C R E E K,  
bodies that turn to the earth. I'm your dog-eared darling,  
your schoolyard talisman. My gender is as much for you  
as anyone else, as much for me as nobody.  
Someone wise once said that everyone ought  
to be forced to touch expansiveness,  
and these things roll unaligned  
like my tyres—which of course  
are wearing on one side. As is customary with gender,  
we all run a little uneven and none of us  
can handle the terrain. I hate  
writing about my gender.

# Touch Grass

*Michelle Franks*

Take off your shoes  
Let your socks get soaked through  
    with condensation  
Take off your socks  
Let soft, slippery blades  
    slide between your toes  
Take off your hat  
Replace it with a crown of daisies  
Take off your glasses  
Find faces in the clouds  
Take off your shirt  
Rolly polly down a hill  
Take off your pants  
Use leaves as a loincloth

Take off your skin  
Sprout cellophane wings  
Follow a bee home to its hive  
Sneak in through the back  
Dance to show the workers  
    where you've been  
Live a full life in a matter of weeks  
Make love to flowers  
Produce life giving goo  
Start the cycle all over again

# I'm Eating Gluten Again

*Joel LeBlanc*

For centuries, wheat wasn't suspicious, a criminal  
to be watched from the corner of your eye

in case it reached for the gun.

It was goddess-touched, gold-scented,  
a wild grass descended from neolithic plateaus,

where horses, who never knew what it was  
to be broken, followed the sun.

Today, I'm eating toast for breakfast, chewing softly,  
urging my body not to be afraid,

wishing I hadn't wasted years measuring goodness  
by everything I denied myself,

my hungers collected and hung around my neck  
like bone charms to keep evil away.

I wish I had spent more time with dough in my  
fingernails, and flour in my hair.

I wish every gluten-free, sugar-free, dairy-free, vegan  
protein bar had been a cookie,

and that I hadn't made myself sick with worry,  
when no food could ever be dirty.

I wish I'd remembered the taste of mom's brownies,  
and how when I got to lick the chocolate spoon,

nothing hurt.

Good

*Georgia Agnew*

(after Mary Oliver)

I want to be good. To crawl on my knees  
and erase every terrible thing I've done.

My despair is so deep it has triggered volcanoes—  
can you help me? Let's survey the carnage,  
the newly formed terrain. The waterfalls burst forth,  
the sun glancing off the sea.

If every inch of me is covered in scars,  
That means you can't see any one, yes?

Like the weed clings to the side of the mountain,  
I have found my place, right here.  
We'll carve it out and polish it smooth.

Tell me I'm good.

**Georgia Agnew** lives in Ōtautahi, Aotearoa. She loves to write about how things break and how we put them back together. As an award-winning short film director, she brings strong visual language to each poem. When not writing, she can be found reading fantasy novels and drinking matcha, or wrangling her boss in her day job as an executive assistant.

**Simon Anton Niño Diego Baena**'s fourth chapbook, *With Different Wars Raging*, is forthcoming from Jacar Press. He has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize. He lives in the Philippines with his wife and child.

**Tony Beyer** grew up in South Auckland and now lives and writes in Taranaki.

**Jane Bloomfield**, Tahuna | Queenstown-based writer, is the author of the Lily Max middle-grade trilogy. Her poetry and CNF are published in *Tarot, Turbine / Kapohau, a fine line, Roi Fainéant Press, Does It Have Pockets, The Spinoff, Sunday Magazine* and elsewhere.

**Yuan Changming** holds a PhD in English and edits *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Yuan in Vancouver. Credits include 16 chapbooks, 12 Pushcart nominations for poetry and 2 for fiction besides appearances in *Best of the Best Canadian Poetry* (2008-17), *BestNewPoemsOnline* and 2,119 other publications across 51 countries. His first (hybrid) novel *Detaching* can be found on Amazon.

**Molly Crighton** is a writer living in Ōtepoti Dunedin. She currently works as a Library Assistant at Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka and studies an MIS at Te Herenga Waka. Her work can be found in journals across New Zealand and internationally.

**Gregory Dally** has had poetry, fiction, scripts and other material published in various journals, including *Antipodes, Meanjin, Popshot Quarterly* and *Quadrant*.

**Zoë Deans** lives in Ōtautahi. They have had poetry published in *Overcom, bad apple* and *Dark Mountain*. They are pretty good at backing a trailer.

**Michelle Franks** is a queer, disabled poet from Ōtautahi, Christchurch. They were a finalist at the 2024 Ōtautahi Poetry Slam. Their work was published by WORD Christchurch and *At The Bay* for the "Ōtautahi is Flash" takeover.

**Lee Fraser** grew up in Aotearoa, was a linguist overseas in her 20s, collided with domesticity in Ōtautahi during her 30s, and has since rediscovered health through writing. In 2024 she's been published in *Catalyst, a fine line, London Grip, Micro Madness, Ōtautahi is Flash, Quick Brown Dog* and elsewhere.

**Kasandra Hart-Kaumoana** (Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāpuhi) is a law tutor at the University of Waikato and host at Te Awamutu Museum. She spends her time piecing together heritage stories of Te Rohe Pōtae—ideally without reaching for too much coffee. Find her [@thedevochka](#).

**Kieran Haslett-Moore** is a poet, writer and brewer who hails from South Wellington, descended from migrants from the South and West Country of England, he lives in Waikanae on the Kāpiti Coast with a terrier named Ruby. He was once Lauris Edmond's Postie.

**Renée Hill** lives in Auckland and works as a creative arts therapist to support people with their mental health. She loves to write, eat hot chips and hang out with her dog Daisy.

**Hayden Hyams** is a poet from Aotearoa New Zealand currently living in London. In his day job he is a chef at a pasta restaurant. Sometimes he wishes he could drink on shift.

**Jackson** (they/them), now living in Aotearoa, is known across Australia as a poet and performer and was the founder of Perth Poetry Club. They have published 4 full-length collections, most recently *A coat of ashes* (Recent Work Press), based on their award-winning PhD. [writerjackson.com](http://writerjackson.com) | [facebook.com/writerjackson](https://facebook.com/writerjackson) | Instagram: [@thewriterjackson](#)

**Joel LeBlanc** (he/him) is a poet, freelance writer, reviewer, baker and naturopath based in Wellington, New Zealand. His poems have appeared in various publications, including *Takahē*, *Poetry NZ*, *Semaphore*, *Tarot*, and more.

**Keith Nunes** (Aotearoa-New Zealand) has had poetry, fiction, haiku and visuals published around the globe. He creates ethereal manifestations as a way of communicating with the outside world.

**Violet Patterson** is a Pōneke based student currently studying acting at Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School. They have been published by *bad apple* and on the back of their exercise books. You can normally find them dilly dallying around op shop jewelry sections.

**Robert Rinehart** (he/him) is a dual citizen of Aotearoa New Zealand and the USA, on the ancestral homeland of the Ngāti Māhanga iwi, Tainui confederation. Work has appeared in *a fine line*, *Mayhem*, *New Feathers Anthology*, *Sky Island Journal*, and *Syncopation*.

**Holly Rowsell** (she/her) is a student living in Te Whanganui-a-Tara. She considers herself a lover of burgundy and an involuntary poet. You can find her work in *Catalyst*, *Sweet Mammalian* and *bad apple*.

**Grace Shelley** (she/her) is a writer, teacher, editor, and parent from Tāmaki Makaurau. She is the founding editor of queer literary journal *Overcom*. Her writing has appeared in publications including *The Spinoff*, *bad apple*, *Tarot*, and *Sweet Mammalian*.

**Brooke Soulsby** (she/her) is a writer, reader, publishing professional & overthinker who was born in Whangārei and lives in Te Whanganui-a-Tara. She is one of three co-founding editors for *circular publishing collective*. Her work has been published in *Salient*, *bad apple*, *circular issue 1*, and *4th Floor Journal*.

**Joanne Tasker** is a poet based in Whangarei, Northland. She has been writing poetry for over five years and has been published in *Tarot*, *Fast Fibres*, and *Mayhem*.

**Lee Jane Taylor** is a poet, mother of teens, former psychologist, of Scots-Māori/Pākehā ancestry, living with health disability in Ōtautahi. See more at [SkyHousePoetry.com](http://SkyHousePoetry.com)

**Jedidiah Vinzon** is studying physics at UoA. His poems have been published in *Symposia*, *circular*, and *Fleeting Daze Magazine*, among others. His poem 'monachopsis', first published in *Vellichor Magazine*, won in the Seven Days of Poetry Contest.  
[@jayv.poetry](http://jayv.poetry)

**Felicitas Weisbach** lives on Aotea/Great Barrier Island with her partner, their 7.5 year old self proclaimed "bush-kid", and their wolf-dog, Fig. She likes to watch the world, and she likes to write. People find her writing a bit too honest, a trait she learned is due to ASD. Her writing is a form of translating the bizarre thing that is the human experience into a way her brain can comprehend it.

**Les Wicks** has performed performed widely across Australia & internationally over 50 years and is published in over 500 different magazines, anthologies & newspapers across 39 countries in 17 languages. Les conducts workshops around Australia and runs *Meuse Press*, which focuses on poetry outreach projects. More at <http://leswicks.tripod.com/lw.htm>

**Baxter Williams** (he/him) is a PhD student in engineering at the University of Canterbury | Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha. Alongside his studies, he reads and writes poetry in Ōtautahi.