

2016

# Master of Creative Writing

University of Auckland



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**AUCKLAND**  
Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau  
NEW ZEALAND

ARTS



This is my second year as convenor of the University of Auckland MCW, and I'm proud to bring you this sampler of work written by the 2016 cohort.

Our eight novelists, one memoirist and two poets roam the world. They transport us to Fiji, East Africa, Croatia, Manila, England. They draw us into post-apocalyptic futures and war-torn pasts. In their work we get to attend weddings and funerals, time-travel on Karangahape Road, witness a murder on Point Chev beach, and drive to Levin.

I'm grateful to the eminent fiction writers in New Zealand who agreed to serve as external examiners this year, and to my inspiring colleague Selina Tusitala Marsh, 2016 Commonwealth Poet, who co-supervised the work of our two poets and inflicted 'reading performance' training on all the writers.

Many thanks to our VC, Stuart McCutcheon, and the Dean of Arts, Robert Greenberg, for their strong support for Creative Writing. Malcolm Campbell, Head of the School of Humanities, continues to generously fund this sampler and support other Creative Writing initiatives, including hosting the NZSA's first National Writers' Forum.

We remain in awe of Sir James Wallace, who supports our developing writers with scholarships and an annual prize, the largest for Creative Writing graduates in New Zealand. Two of our novelists this year received his scholarships, and our two poets shared the Kendrick Smithyman Scholarship in Poetry. This kind of practical support helps us to build a broad-based and diverse programme, and support new voices and perspectives in contemporary New Zealand literature.

## **Paula Morris**

Convenor, Master of Creative Writing  
Faculty of Arts



**ARTS**



# Master of Creative Writing

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# CYBONN ANG

Before moving to New Zealand in 2009, Cybonn Ang worked as a copywriter in Manila's top ad agencies for 13 years, writing international campaigns for Nestlé, Johnson & Johnson, and Unilever. Her poetry has appeared in the *Naugatuck River Review*, *Vine Leaves Literary Journal*, *Page and Spine*, *Lament for the Dead Poetry Project*, and *The Philippine Graphic Magazine*, and was a finalist in the 2015 Pen2Paper Competition sponsored by the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities. She has a BA Hons in English from the University of the Philippines and is a recipient of a 2016 Sir James Wallace Master of Creative Writing Scholarship.

Her novel *12 Corazon* is set in contemporary Manila and Auckland. On his deathbed, Ricardo pleads with grandson Ricky to restore the family home. He'd come to Manila as a ten-year-old refugee and fought hard to make a mark on the land. Ricky, himself a struggling immigrant in Auckland, faces opposition from relatives who believe that Ricardo is a scoundrel. Meanwhile, the deranged Mayor has been setting fire to the town's poorest, ugliest streets. Corazon seems to be next. Through threats of fire, flood, pythons, and ex-cons, Ricky strives to rebuild his childhood home, pining for the Manila of his memories and the Auckland paradise that seems forever out of reach.

## Novel extract

Ricardo Ongcayco Snr wondered who on earth concocted the idea that heaven was white. He lay in bed mostly nowadays and nothing tormented him more than having to stare at the white ceiling day after day after day. It made him dread the idea of paradise. Surely— he thought— after having conceived the blue beetle, the red rose, the emerald snake, God didn't run out of ideas for his own abode.

He counted this as one of his most rational thoughts. Cooped up in this inner sanctum with hardly any energy left for breath, lifting his head only to take some accursed medicine at a certain hour, and feeling his legs just whenever he sat on the arinola which happened less and less often these days, his thoughts were habitually getting lost. Out of the blank canvas above, he saw *Iluminada* alive

and baking cakes. Iluminada dancing to an Elvis Presley song in her red and yellow balloon skirt. Iluminada calling his name. He couldn't tell which was the memory and which was the dream. His thoughts were loose, meandered, flying like dandelions, and didn't seem too concerned about returning where they came from. It was as if they sensed that their ephemeral husk was about to fall apart.

In the midst of this, as if to verify that he was still alive, a long hacking cough would erupt from his chest, threatening to disgorge blood and bowels through his throat. Having confirmed his existence with this explosion, he would seize whatever came in sound and sight, and became alert whenever a practical problem overtook his mind. He observed the crown moulding, the last part of the house to succumb to decay. Months ago, in the corner above where the electric fan stood, a spider began to weave a palatial web. The only regular occupants of the room, they stared at each other during quiet, breezeless afternoons. He could see its fuzzy shape through his cataracts which must say something about its tremendous size. Sometimes he would wake up from a nap to find it gone and he would feel distressed, like an abandoned child, only to realise that his friend had taken a stroll near the window, perhaps to find food.

Ricardo's room used to belong to one of his sons and had been unused for decades. It was at the end of the hall, near the family room and a narrow stairway that led to the back of the house. Half of it was taken up by new fixtures— a wheeled side table with various medicines, thermometers and gauges, antiseptics and cotton balls, and all the other paraphernalia of the dying. An oxygen tank stood near the closet with a plastic tube coiled around its body, an aid which his lungs found useless. By his pillow, a buzzer clicker dangled from a cord. On the far side of the room were iron-grilled windows that looked out towards the river. Yellow muslin curtains embroidered with daisies gave a perpetual warm glow to the room. To the left of the windows was a standing fan and behind it an aircon that was now Ricardo's only luxury. Two rattan chairs which stood by the windows were rarely used. There was a third one beside the bed, more battered and brown, where Gilda sat when she fed him or gave him medicine or massaged his back.

Nearly a year on his deathbed, he had seemed to grow into the kapok mattress. It made way for him in places, sinking for his head, his arms, his back so that his heart seemed to beat within it and he felt its exhausted complaints. Ricardo Jnr was born on this bed, and so were Milagros, Carmen, and Santana— that child who went straight to the grave without opening her eyes. At nights, through the mattress stuffing, he could feel the tremors in the joints of the house, akin to his own. He heard the soft sighing of the floor, sad and swollen by years of floods.

Fifty years ago, when they broke the ground to lay the foundations for the house, the villagers— for San Joaquin was just a small parish then— pressed

him to slaughter a white hen that its blood might bless the earth, to drive away evil spirits. So he went to Iluminada's mother's silong and chose the fattest of the chickens. Then, having hung his one and only coat on a branch of acacia, he knelt on the grass in his spotless trousers. The bird in one arm, its neck stretched out and secure in his hand, he sliced the plucked throat swiftly, letting its blood pour on the grass while an albulario chanted a long prayer, most of it in deep Tagalog that he couldn't understand and which he thought included allusions to the spirit of Sulaiman. The albulario blew into his own hand and released his breath over the soil. Ricardo bowed his head and tried to look solemn as he carried the bleeding chicken around the marked perimeter. Anything to make Iluminada happy. When he handed the carcass to her so she could make a nice, warm adobo for lunch, he realised he had a small cut on his hand. He examined the spot where the land soaked up the blood, curious to see if it had swallowed his too but, of course, it was impossible to tell.



# TODD BARROWCLOUGH

Todd Barrowclough is a writer of Samoan and Pākehā descent who graduated from the University of Auckland with a BA in English and Anthropology in 2011. He is a Librarian at Ngā Pātaka Kōrero o Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland Libraries and previously worked in family and children's programming at Tāmaki Paenga Hira, Auckland Museum.

## Novel extract

*Friday May 19, 2023*

*Pātaka* is a novel set in Auckland in 2023, two years after a flu pandemic has decimated the world's population. Finn, a 28-year-old wisecracking pacifist with a gun, dwells in the Central City Library with eight other survivors. He is helping Tiaki, a 60-something-year-old hoarder who loves books more than people, save the library's long-abandoned collection and the knowledge it contains. But not all of the residents think this is a worthwhile task and when a stranger with a link to everyone's past arrives at the library, things get complicated.

In the abandoned noodle house on Dominion Road, Finn yanked out the book wedged between the metal cash register and the linoleum counter. The register clanged against the counter and the empty cash draw slid out. He pulled his surgeon's mask under his chin and blew the dust and balls of dead spiders off the cover. Coughed in the stale air. Motes danced in the afternoon light from the skylight above.

The stupidly cursive *Chicken Soup for the Soul* was emblazoned across the tattered cover, the letters faded to pink. Black block letters along the bottom read: 101 stories to open the heart and rekindle the spirit. Finn doubted that sappy stories could rekindle the spirit of anyone who'd dragged themselves through a flu pandemic but he knew that Tiaki would want the book. She'd snap it up and clutch it to her chest and sway, the Tino Rangitiratanga flag

print on her black t-shirt bunching. Chinese characters were scrawled across several yellowed pages and some pages had been torn out. Tiaki wouldn't care. She kept everything.

Finn dumped his purple backpack on the counter and fished out a plastic bag to protect the book in case he got caught in the rain. Wet pages curled when they dried and Tiaki would waste hours trying to flatten them out. She spent enough time with the books already. In the net pocket his black Moleskine notebook sat cocooned in more plastic. The bottle of Inzidine pills had its own Ziploc bag.

First-aid kit. Check. Three rifle rounds. Check. Electrical tape. Check.

He zipped up the bag and picked off a lick of nylon from the frayed outline of the Dora the Explorer decal he'd ripped off the front. He'd happily tossed her face, its saucer eyes and orange-peel grimace into the dark of the library's ground floor.

On his way out past the metal-legged chairs and beige round tables in the pokey dining area, the only sound was the fricative swish of his zip-up jacket. Had he missed anything on the way in?

Nothing under the islands of Lazy Susans on the tables – just puckered plastic table cloths gleaming in the light from the smashed front windows. In the darkened corners, there was nothing but the build-up of mould. The linoleum tiles were greyed with dust, edges black with silt. No crumpled notes scribbled with orders, no discarded receipts. People had looted everything.

Four identical faded prints of a long-whiskered dragon snaking through clouds hung in gold-plated frames along the grubby white wall. Finn decided not to take them: he'd already handed Tiaki something similar. She didn't need another picture of Falcor dancing across the sky, wind blowing its hair, at one with the universe. He nabbed a dog-eared laminated menu from a table and slipped on the glass shards on the way out.

A chill wind howled through the knot of vacant Balmoral shops. Finn hunched on the curb, re-strapping his Air Jordans to their hiking boot soles.

Across the deserted road, the door of a weathered BYO restaurant creaked on its hinges, remnants of curled images of steaming meals taped to the shards of windows. An empty plastic Coke bottle rolled along the cracked pavement past a Happy KTV joint, splinters of tinted glass canines in the open mouths of the windows. The grey patchwork sky had darkened.

Finn hoisted his sagging cargo pants and grabbed his mountain bike that leaned against the noodle house. A poster fluttered on the dusty pink front of a massage parlour next door. Some white woman dolled up in a kimono cradled a hair straightener as if it were a baby.

Finn walked into the Samoan Methodist Church. Dust clouded the wooden pews and floor and sheets of cobweb hung from the roof beams as if they were curtains. He dusted off a leather-bound *O Le Tusi Paia* lying open on a step in

front of the altar. The pages were warped from the sunlight that must stream through the high windows on sunny days. Old woman Sina who lived with him at Kane's settlement in the Bombay Hills was the last Samoan he met.

*What do you mean you don't speak Samoan?* Sina had asked him. *On the palagi side of afakasi, you are.*

Just before they'd left the settlement, he and Tiaki had found Sina dead, slumped in the dim corner of the communal sleeping hall. In her limp weathered hand was the knobby wooden crucifix he'd fashioned for her out of a broken chair leg. They'd divvied up her belongings. Reuse, recycle. Finn was wearing her woolen socks.

Finn pocketed the Bible even though no one at the library could read Samoan. *Enduring interest*, Tiaki always said. Her way of not calling it a museum piece.

From the church door, Finn spotted an emaciated dog standing five metres away in the middle of the carpark. His hand shot to the nylon rifle strap slung over his shoulder. The dog was a Labrador, wearing a pink collar. Mangy fur, twig body, knobbed joints. Saliva yo-yoed from its jaundiced mouth. Rabid.

The dog wheezed. Finn grabbed his bike and walked it to the road, eyes plastered on the dog. Easy now.

He pedaled down the middle of the empty road, his rifle rattling against his back. The Labrador trailed him but it kept its distance, head drooped to the green line of the bus and cycle lanes edging the road, now chipped and cracked into giant mosaics.

Shops stood vacant, their frames and awnings crumpled on the side of the road spelling out ramen and donburi. A petrol station. Black squares that used to display the fuel prices before the electricity went out. A currency exchange office, the shell of a corner store.

Birds trilled from a Pohutukawa that hung over the road, the sound of rice tumbling down a rain stick. Their droppings dappled the tar-seal so Finn rode along the opposite curb. There was no telling what other mutant virus strains lurked in the dark of their guts.

Finn peered back. The Labrador barked at the Pohutukawa but the birds didn't disperse. Did nothing spook them anymore?

Further along, the shops gave way to large weather-beaten villas. He'd hunted through them the last time he'd biked out here on a book run for Tiaki. Picked his way through bare room after room after room, coming away with the odd paperback and discarded newspaper. Tiaki had wanted photo albums, family snaps slapped to fridge doors with magnets, but few people had left photos behind. The albums of thousands of families were gathering dust on the backseats of cars lined up along the motorways leading out of the city. Finn wasn't venturing that far south again. Too close to Kane.



# STEVE CHARTERS

*Every Now and Then* is a bleakly comic exploration of the fatal consequences of uninformed choices and false assumptions. When Ralph Wainwright re-encounters Nathan Lockhart, Jocelyn Davenport and Marjorie Marshall at a funeral, the exposure of long-held secrets is threatened and questions demand answers. What was Marjorie's role in Jocelyn's parents' double-drowning? Why has Jocelyn no recollection of what happened in Oz? Was Tinkerbelle actually Adrian? If not, what became of Tinkerbelle's body? Will Alistair's unexpected return prevent Nate and Ralph reconnecting? How can they extract Alistair's DNA without arousing suspicion? And could Lucy really become New Zealand's richest dog?

Steve Charters grew up in West Auckland. After abandoning an acting career in England he returned to New Zealand to earn a living, and to snatch odd moments for studying Spanish and English at the University of Auckland. He has won The Macmillan Brown Prize for Writers and been highly commended in the CBA short story competition. His flash fiction is published online at *Flash Frontier*. His short stories are published in Readers Digest, the HarperCollins anthology *Creative Juices* and *The Rangitawa Collection 2014*. In 2015 he was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Short Story Prize.

## Novel Extract

Alistair's Nautical Bon Voyage party at Stonehaven was going with a swing and Monty in his kimono, toupee askew, attracted by Russell tickling the ivories with *The Pirates of Penzance* (and by the prospect of a drink), had drifted up to moan about the noise. Not that there was any real cause for complaint. The permanent residents from the floor below (a hula-hula girl and an octopus) had both turned up and, by a coincidence consistent with the theme, the ground floor front was let for the weekend to a noisy crew of tars.

'And anyway,' yelled Nate, filling a shrimp paste jar with Palomino sherry and handing it to Monty, 'It's Saturday night, so what the hell?'

Monty mingled while Russell thumped out *What Shall We Do with the Drunken Sailor* on the old upright baby grand. His beer glass, shimmying

towards the edge, was rescued by one of the colony of starfish clinging to the piano giving voice and watching Alistair (Blackbeard) and Leona (Pineapple Poll), improvising a hornpipe, and delivering the coup de grâce to the long-suffering Feltex.

Ralph was drunk. Wasn't everyone? It was hilarious. Giddy and busting for a pee after sharing a fiasco of Chianti with David, he excused himself, squeezing between revellers and out onto the landing. But the lavatory was occupied and there was a queue: a stingray and a pony-tailed mermaid locking lips. He pushed the timer button at the head of the stairs, the dim light came on and he started down fast, skidding his hand along the balustrades for safety. There was a ground floor bathroom, with convenience, for the use of tenants. Failing that he'd go in the garden.

Running down the three flights he thought about Nate. Eager to get back upstairs and be with him, and afterwards at Edna's flat – probably too stuffed to do anything – but tomorrow, spend the day in bed, get up to all sorts. Being alone together was best thing ever, the best thing since sliced bread, literally. He was safe with Nate. It felt so right, it couldn't be wrong. No matter what people said. As his feet hit the ground floor the stair lights went out.

But the door of the Number One front room was open, noise spilling out into the vestibule, and enough light to see by. Or be seen by. He felt a bit awkward, away from the party in his Errol Flynn get up – old shirt with the sleeves ripped off, knotted at the waist, scarlet sash over pyjama bottoms, spotted bandana. He hesitated near the bottom step with his hand on the newel post. There was another party underway in there. Gruff voices, raucous laughter, shrieks and giggles and the radio on. He slunk across the floor on soft bare feet – busting to go – keeping close to the shadowy staircase, nearly colliding with the aspidistra, heading for the short panelled passage with the big kitchen on one side, the tenants' bathroom and wash-house on the other, and the back veranda and garden beyond.

The bathroom door was ajar and the light was on. He stopped, leaning forward to peep past the door frame, then jerked back again. It was occupied. In that brief instant, reflected in the mirror over the hand-basin, the smooth pale chest of someone angling flexed arms up, patting and arranging his blond quiff with a red plastic comb. Ralph took a breath and slipped by fast, not that he was doing anything wrong.

Outside, the long grass, cold underfoot, soaked his pyjama bottoms, the damp air was sobering. By moonlight he saw the thin strand of clothesline slung slack between propping poles above the black cross-hatching of hydrangeas, leafless now, mid-winter. From the attic flat high behind, the sound of gramophone music wafting down, more or less distinct as the night breeze blew or lulled. Russell must be taking a breather.

*whose heart is aching for breaking each vow*

He crossed the lawn unwinding his sash, looping it round his neck, tugging down his pants and jocks in one, coaxing his cock out into the cold air. He stood, legs wide, swaying, spraying the grass from side to side. To his right, the bridge. Stark black in the diffuse fluorescence of equidistant street lamps. The song, dropping from the party, washing over his swimming head.

*right to the end just like a friend*

Nate. Upstairs waiting. Later. Together.

*I tried to warn you somehow*

Ralph never heard him approaching from behind. Perhaps masked by the drifting music, the party laughter, the flush of a lavatory, the muffled isolated rumble of a late car on the bridge. Or it might have been his stealth, the soft ground, the long lush grass. He never heard him coming.

He felt first the forearm choke-hold locking round his throat, his futile grab to keep his trousers up, a universal clench as if contracting at an instant into nothing, expanding on the instant to infinity. Then he heard, grating through the ringing in his ears, what must be words

*you had your way*

*and now you must pay*

felt teeth grip, rip his earlobe, the cheap cotton of the scarlet sash stuffed rough between his teeth against his tongue, felt himself forced forwards, thrown down and winded, the hot strong hump of body pinning his.

He flailed wildly, mutely, in the rank wet weeds, head tossing, struggling for purchase, pushing vainly back and up, snorting air. The pungent stink of pennyroyal. Then in a sick convulsive heave his guts purging in a sluice of stinging vomit, squirting from his nostrils in acrid streams. Chianti, tinned pineapple, Chesdale pasteurised cheese and terror. He snorted it back down, choking, desperate for air, scouring his lips, his cheeks through the sharp grass, dislodging the sodden sash, ears ringing – limp and fuzzy – blacking out ... coming to ... coming round, flopping, gasping, flipped over, seeing him. The one they called Tinkerbelle—



# PIPPA HENDERSON

Pippa Henderson has a degree in Fine Arts, majoring in filmmaking, from the University of Canterbury. She began her career as a news video editor at TVNZ in Auckland before moving to London where she was a promo producer for The History Channel and The Biography Channel at British Sky Broadcasting. Back on home turf she worked for TVNZ Blacksand before focussing her creative energies on writing. She now lives in Hillsborough Auckland with her husband and three high-spirited children, and works part-time as a sub-editor at *OHbaby!* magazine.

Drawing on the memoirs of multiple English ancestors dating back to the late 18th century, *Flock* begins with Pippa's family's birth stories – through eight generations – and ends with the marriages of the same ancestors, stepping back down through the generations to her own. At the centre of *Flock* is Pippa's Kiwi childhood and adolescence, intercut with extracts from four key English ancestors. Despite the disparities of time and place there's a parallel in circumstance, a likeness of faith, and a continuity of character which make way for the telling of an intergenerational memoir.

## Memoir Extract

When the dust had been ordered into bones and fleshed out into features and the approximate time had come, I hurried head first into this world, all slippery and wrinkly, glistening with mauve and magenta. It was late morning, 18th January 1978. A high pressure system hovered over the Tasman. The giant red arrows from the weather maps had swept in from Cook Strait, rolled up the damp bushy valleys, pushed themselves into St Helen's hospital, where they fractured into the small red arrows of biological diagrams, and entered in. My tiny lungs inflated with Wellingtonian air, exuded their first cry, and the cycle began.

In ... Out.

In ... Out.

And that common purplish skin tone settled into a common white, and my eyes blinked at the light, and my lips blinked for a breast, and I

suckled. And my mother, Caroline, couldn't stop talking, and my father, Hugh, called it verbal diarrhoea. She just couldn't get over how quickly I'd arrived. I'd been induced her, yes – as Granny had already arrived from England to help – but then they'd sent her home, but she'd felt the need to go back, but they'd said no, but she'd gone anyway, and *thank goodness* she did, as they'd seen my head in the prep room, and before she could say Jack Robinson, there I was in her arms.

Again, Caroline and Hugh had the privilege of Adam; studying my facets, bestowing me with a name. For nearly six weeks they deliberated before they made it official. Philippa was a tip of the hat to my paternal grandmother, Phyllis, and also to my mother's great uncle Pip, who was killed in WWI.

Philippa Webber. A big name for a seven pound six baby. A name I never grew into, like a pair of giant, almost masculine high heels. My feminine middle name, Jane, tucked out of sight, an inner sole.

*Philippa Webber.* The sound of my two year old self, flipping in those floppy heels, and wobbling onto the floor.

'Philippa,' my mother asked me to repeat, with her sterling English accent: 'Phil-ipp-a.'

'Pippa,' I replied, staring up with blue-green eyes, 'Pip-pa.'

I slipped myself into the word as though it were a five lettered glove, and never took it off. Philippa Webber, from then on, was a foreign name from the mouth of a new teacher at the very first roll call, or the first two words of a scolding. The older I became the less that name was spoken. It appeared on grown up documents like passports and academic transcripts, while journeyed out clothed as Pippa, with a youthful spring in my syllables, and the explosive double P's of happiness at heart.

I was latched in that hospital with my mother for six days, standard for a healthy mother and baby. We came home to a weatherboard ex state house: 13 Victory Avenue, nestled into the bend of a hill, high in the dense green back roads of Karori. There were 27 steps up to the front door – un-noteworthy for Wellington, where houses cling like limpets to rugged kelp-covered hills, but noteworthy for my mother. Once Granny returned to England a week later she wouldn't have enough hips or hands to juggle four-year-old Angela, two-year-old Mark, and a baby, while lugging groceries up from the car. There were 20 steps to the washing line. My siblings weren't interested in the washing line's breath-taking view, and my mother's breath would have already been taken by the icy southerlies that whipped up the valley with the intent of a wet flicked tea-towel. Even indoors, tucked away from the elements, there were cold fronts blowing in from the in-laws. So when my father was offered a role in the Department of Statistic's Auckland office, my mother saw it as a ticket to the Promised Land.

Before we left, I was bundled off to St Paul's Anglican Cathedral to be

christened by Glenys Lewis, an older English friend of my mother, one of the first women in New Zealand to be ordained. The beauty of Glenys' slide show at my English grandparents' house in 1967 had been Mum's inspiration to choose this country for her 'working holiday'.

I was three months old when we drove north, away from the harbour that had welcomed my mother on the Northern Star almost ten years earlier, and the city my father had always called home. Family fable has projected the journey into my mind like a Super Eight movie. We travelled in our canary yellow Toyota Corolla station wagon, with my father at the wheel. FX6479, my father still recites fondly, as if recalling the name of a pet. My mother would have packed a picnic of cold boiled eggs and a Thermos of tea, along with her small strappy handbag. Inside this bag was a bottomless abyss – an entire wardrobe, office, medical cabinet and toolbox – our lifeline in any potential catastrophe. Ange and Mark sat in the back seat, and behind them, in a cardboard box in the boot, along with our family's most treasured possessions, was me. I'd been a hungry newborn, and my stressed mother had struggled to produce enough milk, but she says that the further north we drove, the more my fat cries thinned to coos. It was as though I reflected her growing sense of well-being, that I'd also perceived this new land to be the land of milk and honey.



# MIRANDA JAMES

Miranda James was born and raised in Wellington, and started her career as a regional newspaper journalist before moving to London in the mid-1990s. She spent several years travelling and working in the UK as a journalist, editor, copywriter and PR, before returning to New Zealand in the early 2000s. She works as a communications consultant and lives in Auckland with her partner and two daughters.

## Novel excerpt

In *The Boathouse*, small-town Motunui childhood friends Jay, Nina and Willow start a restaurant in one of the island's historic buildings. Embraced by locals and feted by critics, this venture is the realisation of a dream – until some years-long secrets come to light, threatening to derail the venture and their friendship. Pressure mounts when a strong-willed developer plans to demolish the old Boathouse and build holiday apartments – igniting bitter tensions in Motunui and forcing the three women to take a stand. When everyone wants a piece of paradise, should you even try to keep the future at bay?

*'Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone...'*

From the edge of her pew Jay swivelled and subtly, she hoped, scanned the congregation.

It was virtually a *Who's Who* of Motunui: farming families, business owners; golf club, tennis club. Simone's extended family from Auckland and Canterbury, some cousins from Sydney. And Mark's family and friends: unfamiliar people, same tribe. Large red-faced men in crisp shirts and ties, women in expensive florals and high-heeled sandals who looked like they were on their way to the races.

It was scorching in the church, even with the doors wide open. Some over-powdered elderly aunts had been assisted out on the arms of young relatives, and were propped up on deckchairs outside. Small children were on the lawn, sleeping in the shade of the big macrocarpa. Jackets were slung over backs of pews and hats had been carefully removed. The women fanned themselves with the order of service to prevent make-up running.

It was only October, yet the heat had descended

early, like a hot wet towel. It had skipped the usual spring gusts and leapfrogged straight into balmy midsummer, bringing that uneasy feeling of misaligned seasons. No one had had time to get the tomatoes in, or book their sunbed sessions.

*'Only the hand of life can contain your hearts...'*

The celebrant was a thin, wispy woman who laboured over every word.

Bloody *Prophet*, thought Jay. Why was it read at every wedding? Each line said exactly the same thing. Tree. Ocean. Yawn. You could get the key message across in a pithy strapline. Be best friends; don't finish each other's sentences. Never wear matching leisure suits.

It was an Anglican church and strictly speaking, should host only religious weddings with ordained Ministers. But historic little St Matthews had recently been restored – Kauri tongue and groove stripped back, damaged windows replaced with locally-made leadlight. Simone's mother was chair of the St Matthews Preservation Society and the family donation had earned them a brass plaque on one of the pews. So of course Simone could have a lay celebrant.

The paper in Jay's hand was moist and claggy, disintegrating along the folds. She'd slotted her sheet of A4 inside the order of service, had absently creased and re-creased it, worked it with sweaty fingers, until the surface peeled and the gold letters were illegible – Ma-k & Sim---, 12th O---ber 2004... for the umpteenth time that afternoon she sensed it wasn't there, felt a panicked jolt at the thought she'd lost it.

Her heart was clattering like an old V8 and her hands were trembling. *Don't hold your notes up or they'll shake*, her dad had told her. *Keep it low, just look at it to prompt yourself*. She tried to calm her breathing with long slow inhalations – but the air was too warm – it just made her giddy.

A fan at the front of the church was sending a breeze towards the bridal couple. Simone wore a low-backed dress the colour and texture of cappuccino froth. Her back was an even caramel, and she wore her hair high in a plaited bun with pearls dotted through. Like a glossy German loaf. Jay tried to work out how the pearls remained in place; super-glue, she decided.

*'... and the cypress and the oak grow not in each other's shadow.'*

Christ, she was up.

'I'd like to invite Jay Gaskell, a dear friend of Mark and Simone's, to share a reading.'

Shoulders back. Walk slowly. Smile, without teeth. Breathe. She prayed there wasn't a damp patch on the back of her dress. She made it to the lectern, flattened her soggy paper. Her ears were pounding so hard she could barely hear her first line.

*'Let me not to the marriage of true minds...'*

It was a horrible piece to read aloud. The archaic language a minefield of snags, the rhythm awkward and jerky. It wasn't even Simone's type of thing. After her first run-through she'd asked if she could please pick her own reading – a modern poem, maybe even song lyrics. The wounded tone on the end of the phone made her retract the suggestion. No, forget she'd said anything – it was beautiful, of course she'd do it.

*'Oh no! It is an ever fix-ed mark...'*

She'd made little scribbles reminding her what to emphasise, when to pause – but she was too nervous, she just had to get through.

*'Love's not time's fool – though rosy lips and cheeks...'*

She was rushing, sacrificing the impact, but didn't care. Nearly done. She risked a quick look up. Simone, smiling benevolently. A sweaty crowd fantasising about the ice-buckets in the marquee. She could almost see the condensation in the air. And – holy fuck.

Nina.

Nina Matthews. As if she'd just beamed in from eight years ago. Jay felt a fast, hard sensation like a kick in the stomach. Older, longer hair, but apart from that Nina, really her, exactly as she remembered. A few rows back, grinning, giving a subtle thumbs-up. Holy. Fuck.

Jay paused, drew breath, forgot where she was. The words on her paper were squirming, pixelated grey fish. She had a vision of that faintly idiotic, I'm-going-to-get-you-in-trouble-grin. There was a terrible surge deep in her gut that wanted to become laughter; she took another breath, stifled a giggle that became a choke, then a clearing of her throat. Another breath.

She heard a cough, could sense the crowd shifting uncomfortably. *I've stuffed this up*, she thought. Then suddenly, miraculously, she found her place and delivered the final lines with a flourish:

*'... I never writ, nor no man ever loved.'*

She almost ran to her seat with relief. When it was safe she turned to catch sight of her old friend, but there were too many heads in the way.

It was only then that she realised she'd been wearing her sunglasses throughout the whole reading. She must have looked like the stoner friend headed for rehab.



# DAREN KAMALI

Daren Kamali is the author of two published collections: *Tales Poems and Songs from the Under Water World* (Anahera, 2011) and *Squid Out of Water: the evolution* (Ala Press Hawaii, 2014). He is a Fiji-born Wallis and Futunan, Fijian and Scottish background. He migrated to New Zealand in 1992 at the age of seventeen and graduated with a Bachelor of Creative Arts degree from MIT. Daren was awarded the Fulbright/Creative New Zealand Pacific writer-in-residence at the University of Hawaii in Manoa in 2012. He was the New Zealand writer in the International Writers' Programme at the University of Iowa in 2014. A founder of South Auckland Poets Collective, Daren is a Pacific Educator at the Auckland War Memorial Museum and a freelance youth poetry facilitator in the Auckland region, primarily in South Auckland.

*Vunimaqo and Me: Mango Bar Collections* is a collection of 48 memoir poems about growing up in his grandparents' barrack of Tubou Street Samabula North in Suva, Fiji. The collection explores the Fijian lifestyle, the people, the fun, the struggles and memorable times of Daren's upbringing in the village of barracks, reflecting his Suva surroundings and experience.

## Poems

*Vunimaqo*  
for Ipolito and Emmaline

All routes leads to me  
*Vunimaqo'*

I was here before the Wallisians arrived

God knows  
how long I have stood on this hilltop of Tubou

1941 nothing but those trees and  
Paragrass on this hill

Then there was the roads in 1943  
Then Behold  
*The Barracks'*  
Freshly built in 45  
That's when it all started

\*

Ipolito a soldier  
Ready for the Malayan war  
He was no grandpa back then

Ipolito  
Young fit sculptured Polynesian man  
Uvean and Futunan  
Charming and ready  
To die for the Union Jack

Lack of post war support saw  
Bloody floors  
Smashed windows and doors  
In the barracks

Sunday confessions of guilt  
Hymns of regret and sorrow

Ipolito was a product of it all

He and Emmaline  
Nurtured me  
Nurtured everyone  
Especially that Emma  
Man!  
I bore amazing mangoes  
Ripe and juicy  
Supplied the barrack families  
Season after season

\*

Nana Emma was young back then  
83 now  
Incredible woman  
Nana Emma  
Biggest Boss  
She has seen it all

\*

I have seen it all

The Vulgar  
The not so great and the (Small)

Use less  
USE FULL of nothings

I've watched them

Heard (Herd) Them  
Fed Them and gave them bread

\*

Papa Ipolito sacrificed his life  
For military affairs  
For church  
For country and culture

*Master of Creative Writing*

Became an elder in the village of barracks  
Everyone respected and adored him

Sergeant Major Ipolito Augustus Kamali  
*Lost and Found Refugee Camp*  
27 Tubou Street  
Samabula North

Everything changes in the barracks  
Nothing changes in the barracks

Same happenings different decade  
Taki 96 degrees under the mango tree

\*

He would pray sometimes  
Ipolito was a deep thinker  
*Saint Michael the Archangel defend us in the hour of our battle*  
His children and childrens children  
Still recite the prayer

I listened closely to his heart

I would love to hear Ipolitos thoughts again  
Worried about his wife more than himself  
GOD FORBID Anything should happen to him  
to her

\*

Ipolito  
Always full of stories  
Profound  
Funny and intelligent  
Memories precious as Tabua

Plantation his favorite pastime  
Early evening  
Hunched over military reports  
Type writer  
Tiktiktik tiktik tik  
Only one in the village

Fiji Military Forces reassigned Ipolito in '87  
He had retired by then  
I was only 12  
Looking down into Suva Streets  
The Itaukei movement  
Burning and looting  
I remember  
A voice on the radio  
Major General Sitiveni Rabuka

This was the first coup

\*

In '93  
Every man's Tei-tei was taken away  
Plantations seized  
American Embassy fenced us out  
  
Ipolito was paralyzed by burden that year  
Saw it in his eyes  
Without his plantation and old age  
He never  
Really recovered

Ipolito gone now  
fifteen years

His favorite spot  
Right there  
On that branch

He'd cut open a ripe mango  
Catching the cool breeze  
Blowing just right from Nausori

*White Wash*

Adrian Johnson

The brightest boy in the barracks

Whitest boy in the barracks

Holder of the name

*White Wash*

Given to him by us

My son, Darius

The new *White Wash*

Red haired, freckled face

Skin white as washed up waves

On the shore of Pacific Harbor

Home in the barracks

Away from his Auckland home

His heart is an island heart

His white skin

Blending into the barrack paint

Bare feet playing rugby

With the kids

His island tummy

Always hungry

Chin high

Proud chest and shoulders

*Daddy I have a Fijian name now*

My friends call me *Sava vulavula*

*White Wash*

# ANGELIQUE KASMARA

Angelique Kasmara has lived and worked in Jakarta, Sydney and Auckland. She's been a barista, intellectual disabilities support worker, magazine writer, coordinator for a refugee coalition, web content writer, translator, and film and television researcher. She is a recipient of a 2016 Sir James Wallace Master of Creative Writing Scholarship.

## Novel extract

Symonds St Cemetery behaves as if it's a secret. Despite its 5.8 hectare spread over a main intersection, it's hidden in plain sight. Stretching from the tail end of K Road to the western slope of Grafton Gully, it smells of roses or urine or petrol fumes or cypress. Depending on where I'm standing, where the wind is heading. A public toilet obscuring it on one side. Verdigris-steeped sculpture of two men on the other. Everything behind may as well be viewed through a lens set to shallow depth of field, the eye just doesn't see beyond. Or maybe, for locals like me, I'm used to not noticing. Focused on the path ahead. Clocking the landmarks in the periphery of my vision. Unseen until something happens. A drunk dying of emphysema amongst the roses. Jewish headstones desecrated with racist slogans. An old cottage torn down, replaced by a shiny tower block.

It's used to such offhand treatment. Frank gives us a potted version as we walk. The voraciously spreading city sacrificed the graveyard's entire Catholic section to the motorway gods in the mid 1960s. Marble and sandstone headstones were

*Isobar Precinct* is a speculative fiction novel set in contemporary Auckland. Through a chain of events sparked by a murder in a cemetery, tattoo artist Lestari finds herself hooked into the orbit of an unpredictable time travel drug. The novel uses the causes and consequences of this double-edged gift, to explore issues of loss, love and the human condition.

ground in as road filler. More than 4100 bodies were moved, and over 2000 more bodies than they expected to find were discovered.

The cemetery officially closed for burials in 1886, so live family members of the deceased are far and few now. There's bound to be a bunch of frustrated developers who resent its heritage status. Prime real estate, taken up by dead people who haven't a clue that their plot is now worth millions. Crumbly old statues of long gone city founders. A metropolis of forgotten great-great-aunts who nobody comes to visit any more.

However, one proliferating community still remains. The graveyard's a thriving open air hotel for those whom the current overinflated property ladder may as well be some stairway to heaven, for all their access to it during this lifetime.

For Frank, it's the perfect place for St Michael to hang out in. His celestial outlines will blur from rain, sun, frost, bird shit, moss. Or a sharp, quick death at the hands of vandals. It doesn't matter which, for documenting the entropy is part of the project.

Lurching through the steep pathways, gnarled tree roots fissuring the concrete.

'Can you two mind my mate for a bit? I'll just shoot on ahead to make sure the area is all clear,' says Frank. We park the trolley up by a tree. He dashes down the path. Jasper walks around, reading the inscriptions.

'Ebenezer Fitness,' he says. 'Mean name.'

Two ginger cats circling, hissing at each other. I lean against a tree, close my eyes, lift my face to the dusting of sun flickering through the canopy. Then. A scream, rising from the gully. Sound of feet hitting the path. Jasper, shouting –

'Run!'

Frank. My first instinct is to run towards him, down the slope.

'No, not there, Lestari! Run away!' Jasper's in front of me, blocking my way. Shooing me back up.

Another scream. Breath, seized up in my throat.

'I'm coming!' Has he been attacked by a rampaging psychopath? Jasper steers me up the slope.

'He's fine. Come on!'

'What's going on then?'

Then I see. Deep in the depths of the gully, thrashing around in the branches like frightened children waking from a fever dream. It's two strange men. And blood. Bright curtains of it, spraying out in a fan, saturating the thicket. Soaking a white naval uniform on one man. Streaming into a matted beard, frayed clothes, on the other. I can't pinpoint its source.

Frank's close at hand, recording it all.

Idiot.

One of them falls backwards, gurgles bubbling up in his throat. It's Matted Beard. No. It's Sailor. Flash of steel. My turn to scream. Frank charges up the slope, towards me. Steering past gravestone fragments, a fallen branch or two.

'Oh thank Jesus you're okay,' he says. I'm fuming.

'You could've been killed!'

I don't want to look back. I need to look back. One, two, three. We all turn back, at the same time. In silent communication that three pairs of eyes sharing the view, will lessen the terror.

The two men are gone. Take a few tentative steps down the path. Nothing to hear but the wind flickering through the leaves. Nothing to see but a quiet cemetery, warming in the morning sun.

One thing is clear from the police interview. You wouldn't put any of our names forward to play the reliable narrator. Jasper remembers a green jacket, I was sure there were two hissing ginger cats, Frank recalls a naval cap. None of this was there. Watch the footage. There's a brown jacket, a sleeping black tom, and no hats. Sure, it's a shitty low-res phone recording, but some things aren't open for interpretation.

Unlike a murder.

We're viewing it now, in the overlit confines of Central Police Station. A fresh faced girl with crimson hair, crimson tutu, rockabilly tattoos, gives Frank the thumbs up as she walks into frame. He recognises one of his own – Betty Page curved above her right breast. The action lurches to the cemetery. Purple roses bleed through cracks in the gravestones. A homeless man with grizzled hair, stained safari suit, stirs on a park bench, a sleeping bag protectively wrapped up in his arms.

Stutter to black. Then, a jerky shot of a cypress tree.

And freeze frame. Frank takes his hand away from the button.

'Here.' He resumes play.

We all lean in closer. There. There it is. A smash of branches, a guttural cry, slithering through a thicket. The lens swings around, snapshotting a man in a naval uniform and buzzcut, his hands around another man's neck, the sounds dying as the choke hold closes in. Sailor's a man in his prime. The other is on the side of the nearly departed, both in age and life force. Jasper runs towards them. The older man pulls together the tiniest sliver of strength. Draws a knife. Slits Sailor across the throat. Blood sprays out in an even stream. Sailor falls backwards. The old man keeps stabbing him, even though Sailor is clearly dead. The viciousness of it turns my stomach. Of the three of us, I'm the first to scream, camera jerking towards me for a microsecond, Jasper yelling, 'Lestari,

run! When it returns to the scene of the crime, only the thicket is visible. The two men are gone.

A slow pan around what remains. Sleeping bag. Knapsack. An empty bottle of bourbon. A jacket, the colour of stale tobacco, definitely not green. Frank's voice – 'oh fuck, what the fuck?'

# VHARI LENNOX

Vhari Lennox grew up across three continents. She started life in Scotland, school in the USA and writing in New Zealand. It was while studying for an undergraduate degree in Psychology with Film, Television and Media at the University of Auckland that a screenwriting course sparked Vhari's passion for stories. A subsequent Honours degree in Screen Production inspired her to consider writing a novel. Vhari currently lives in Wellington, New Zealand, where hobbits may or may not exist.

## Novel extract

In her YA novel *Millennia*, set post-global warming, citizens of Waterstation #71, a technologically advanced underwater city, are stratified into four levels according to the ranking they obtain at Millennia. The day before eighteen-year-old Kiana Ngaio is due to leave, her brother disappears. Determined to find him, Kiana assumes a new identity. She uses her hacking ability to uncover the dark secrets behind corporate surveillance and control. Kiana soon learns that freedom and equality are just an illusion.

I had always known I was trapped. Locked in by the ceaseless terrors of the ocean. It taunted me daily, pounding the waterstation where I lived with endless nightmares. But I only discovered there was no escape, that the entire system was a prison, the first time I saw the bars.

It was a simple, unassuming list, four items in total. Blue, Red, Green, Yellow. Marked by the year, 2862. The Order of Colours for this year's Ark Assignments shone from the rotating holographic screens of the Millennia Inc. xyrotop. Beneath it, the differing orders of the previous years. The ranking was meant to be a myth. Something people talked about but could never prove. Ark Assignments were not supposed to matter.

'Did she get it?'

A digitized voice echoed across the office, scrambling the tone of its speaker. My head snapped up, half expecting to pick out which of my classmates had spoken, but the hexagonal room

appeared deserted. My classmates were masked from view by xxero suits. The shifting fragments of the suits cyberscopic colour replicated the sloping walls of the Millenntia Inc. office. Silence stretched into awkwardness, before I realised the speaker was referring to me.

‘No,’ I said. ‘There’s nothing here.’

My fingers darted between the xyrotop’s circling screens, shutting off the file. The Order of Colours disappeared from sight, replaced with the encrypted folders of Ulysses Laird’s private archive. Some things couldn’t be unseen. It was better not to know.

‘I knew we shouldn’t have trusted her!’

‘That’s what happens when you leave it up to a lower leveller 2.’

‘Total waste of time.’

Positioned safely by the exit, the voices rung out, unapologetic in their cacophony of accusations. As if it wasn’t just a few hours before they had come to me for help. Said they needed my hacking ability. Couldn’t do it without me. Drowning out their criticism, I typed in a series of intersecting codes to delete all traces of my recent actions. Who cared what they thought? Alliances were fickle. But every word was a blade, tipped with poison.

‘I thought you said she was Tane’s sister?’

‘No, that was Jed. I’d never heard of her.’

Kiana. My name is Kiana Ngaio. I wanted to scream. To inscribe it on the KnowledgeCaps that were inserted in their brains at birth. Seventeen years at the same education centre and they still didn’t know. But my throat stayed dry, it wasn’t worth being picked up on a surveillance alert.

A low rumble shook the thousands of palm-sized nonagons of miroglass which encased the walls. Luminescent bands of crimson, cobalt, seeped through the cracks, tinting the air with magenta.

‘They’re coming!’

Xxero suits flashed against the back wall, my classmates escaping from the room. Miroglass rippled in the dim light. Xxero suits would offer little protection from the rhythmic footsteps that edged closer and closer. The Watch knew no mercy.

Hands shaking, I punched in the final code. Clicked back to the circling white discs of the xyrotop’s start-up screens. Jangling weapons resonated from down the hall.

My arms stretched wide to enclose the screens between my open palms. I clapped my hands together. White discs rose and merged, exploding in a kaleidoscope of colour. The xyrotop retreated into a solid black box on the floor, leaving behind the grey flexichair swinging behind it.

‘I’ve shut it off,’ I said.

My words bounced off the slanted walls. No response. Everyone had already gone. Goose bumps prickled against my xxero suit. What would the Watch do if they found me here alone?

I sprinted towards the back wall, searching for the nonagon marked with a single *E* for exit. Hundreds of nonagons stretched out before me, with two letters imprinted on them. The logos of companies Ulysses Laird owned.

One nonagon, a golden one, burned brighter than the others. A dark purple *P*, with a crown looped through the top, the symbol for the leader of the Popularists. Laird was the richest man at our waterstation. It made sense he would have been made leader during his time at Millenntia.

Just beside the *P* was a larger nonagon. My fingers pressed against the *E*. Shaking. The miroglass around it melted into a pink, plasmatic screen. I jumped through. The rubbery texture slid over my arms, my legs.

A moment of complete darkness then, activated by the pressure of my feet, two panels of white light streaked across the floor. The corridor burst to life, saturating my senses with neon colour.

Floating bubbles dropped from the ceiling, boasting new products and services. Recently developed gels for gelpools, guaranteed for a better night's sleep. The latest flavoured pills with fewer chemicals, a purer nutrient content. Four for the price of three at the Memory Extractor Centre, to remove painful KnowledgeCap memories. They were the same lies, different coatings. Corporations always took more than they gave.

A holographic man in a blue suit reached out and tapped me on the shoulder, his sensor pad emanating heat. He shoved a small screen in front of my face, beckoning me to interact with the new software upgrade he was selling.

I turned my back on him and rubbed the LifeChip implanted in my inner left forearm. A holographic square panel shot out of my arm and hovered just above it.

A warning of impending expulsion flashed red across the screen. It faded into an internal map of the Millenntia Inc. administration offices. The Watch was strewn across the labyrinth of corridors like clumps of seaweed after a severe storm. Three Watchers to my left, four up ahead, two to my right.

The nearest Water Transfer Room had too many guards but if I was fast enough, there might be a chance of getting past the two Watchers on the right. My xxero suit would be enough to obscure me from view if they were being manually operated. If not, I had to hope for some sort of algorithm delay in the processing of my prototype xxero suit. My legs trembled. I had to make a decision fast.



# RUBY PORTER

Ruby Porter is a prose writer, poet and visual artist. She has been published in *Argos*, *Aotearotica*, and the upcoming *Geometry* journal. Recordings of her poetry are available online as part of New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre's *Six Pack Sounds*. She regularly performs at readings, with venues such as the Auckland Central Library, Rannoch House, Malcolm Smith Gallery and Artspace. In 2016 she was the tutor for English 252: Introduction to Creative Writing.

Ruby's novel, *Slaughter Weight*, is a blend of *Goodbye Pork Pie*, the work of Jacques Rivette, and an 'out' *Crush* (the Alison Mclean version). It is the story of a road trip between Auckland, Whāngārā and Levin told by an unreliable first person narrator. The route is one she knows well from taken trips with her birth mum as a child, so the present is constantly interrupted by the past. It is written in a fragmentary style that nevertheless attempts to show connections between its collaged elements, as they deal with issues of memory, obsession and inheritance. This excerpt comes at the start of Chapter Four.

## Novel extract

Gisborne, I am entering you. Your hills lie around, naked, great thighs enclosing us. Here, I can see how the land ripples and bulges.

Not like Auckland. Auckland hides beneath its concrete shapewear. The coverall wraps of city struggle to stretch themselves over its curves. Only occasionally do you get a glimpse of what lies beneath – a strip of bush, a field that always floods, a very steep road. Only occasionally do you remember her belly full of fire.

\*

I say it's going be hot, and we're probably not going to want much food during the day. We're already getting a lot of fruit.

–I'm not a fucking bird, Ilana says, as she puts a couple bags of Eta chips into the trolley. Chicken flavour, salt and vinegar.

Pak 'n Saves are always stressful for me. Too many people, too much Arial Condensed Bold. The yellow signs – really just white, A3, 100gsm paper – all pucker with printer ink. *Twisties for ninety nine cents. Home Brand white bread, five for four dollars. Coke Range 1.5 Litres, \$1.49.* Cardboard boxes tower around us. A kid is screaming in front of the Arnott's selection.

Ilana grabs a loaf of Vogels, Hellman's Mayonnaise. She would never admit it, but she has expensive tastes. She grew up in Kohimarama but now she just calls it *out east*.

–We'll need ice cream eh, she says.

–What's your favourite flavour?

Ashi is looking at me but I can't think what to say. I can't even remember what flavours I like. We get JellyTip.

A woman barges into me while I'm choosing tampons, then tells me to be more careful.

There's a faint smell of linoleum and Dettol and that fresh muffin scent they pump straight into the air conditioner. The floors and ceilings echo muted greys and high-pitched reflections. The lighting is giving me a headache. For a second, I feel like I might throw up again, then it passes.

There are certain aisles I dread. The confectionary aisle doesn't tempt me, neither does the bakery, but I don't want to go past dairy. Cheese is the reason I'm not vegan.

And Ashi and Ilana keep piling the food in. Penne and spaghetti, pizza bases, garlic bread, basmati rice, tins of chilli beans and chickpeas and tomatoes in pulp. I try to explain that there's probably already the basics at the bach. Ashi just turns to me and says, –Don't worry about it, we won't go thirds. Ilana and I will pay more, cause of the meat.

(Bacon, chicken nuggets, pork and fennel sausages.)

I don't make any more suggestions.

\*

I come from a long line of butchers. My great granddad Conrad had his shop, right here, on Gisborne's main road.

Now, palms line it like soldiers at attention. There's a colonial boat hoisted on a pole. I think it's supposed to be a replica of the Endeavour. Pita said that, to Māori, the ship had looked like its own island – above, white kapua, clouds, blown taut. Cook and his men killed nine tāngata whenua that day, down on Poverty Bay. Pita grew up not far from here, Ūawa, and he read about these parts in *Māori Boy*. When I told him I was coming here the first thing he said was,

–You should read it, e hoa. Whāngārā’s mentioned in there. You make sure I give it to you before you go.

He said this often but he never had the book on him, in his hostel. I stopped asking – I think his copy had been on loan from the library. He texted me a few weeks ago to say he’d bought one for me, a Christmas present. *Ahakoā he iti he pounamu. Though it’s small, it is pounamu.* I didn’t have anything for him so I put off meeting up. I never got around to it. But last week I found, nestled among the snails in my letterbox, the book – still wrapped in its Whitcoulls paper bag.

\*

Every time I return to Gisborne another family shop has closed, replaced with some chain, Australian mostly. Bendon, Paper Plus, Bunnings Warehouse, Rebel Sport.

There’s a Stihl Shop on the corner of Carnarvon Road, telling me to love my land.

But it’s not mine, is it?

\*

My mum grew up in Kaitī. Her old house is only a street back of the main road. I ask Ilana if we can drive past it, then regret it immediately. She scoffs. –Are you going to show me baby pictures next?

I get these kind of urges all along the way. The route from Gisborne to Whāngārā is one I know well. I point out the things I can, the generic things. Like the dairy where they blend berries into your ice cream right in front of you. Like the place at Tatapouri, where you can feed the stingrays, go cage diving with sharks. –Let’s do that, Ilana says, like I knew she would, even though we’re all too poor.

But I don’t mention how, one summer, I bought so many ice creams they knew me by name. I don’t mention that I cut my foot open on the rocks at Tatapouri during low tide and had to have two stitches. I still have a faint scar. I don’t mention the time I ran away, angry I was being made to miss Lucy’s eighth birthday (wave pools and hot chips) and made it as far as the paddocks we’re passing now. We have peeled away from the sea. This is where the trees come close – huddle in and reach around. They tunnel the car. Driving along these roads feels like tracing the lines of a palm, worn and outspread. I am overwhelmed by something, something stronger than just memory, something bone-deep. It warms me and it aches me. I don’t mention that either.



# NEEMA SINGH

Neema Singh is a New Zealander of Gujarati Indian origin, and was born and raised in Christchurch. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Canterbury. She studied audio engineering at SAE Institute in Melbourne, Australia and has worked at various recording studios in London. Neema is a secondary school English teacher with a passion for teaching and writing poetry. She lives in Auckland with her husband and two-year-old son.

Neema's poetry collection is entitled *Ash and Gold*. The collection captures three generations of family experiences and explores ideas of migration, identity, belonging and culture. Neema writes about her grandparents who were born and raised in Gujarat, India, and who then migrated to Uganda and Kenya. She writes of her parents' experiences growing up in Jinja, Uganda and Nakuru, Kenya, as well as her own experiences in Christchurch and London. The collection is a rich and detailed piecing together of a family history spanning the globe.

## Poems

*The Proper Way to Make Tea*

I take the Jubilee line to Bond Street,  
change for Mile End  
wait for the District line  
to slowly deposit me at East Ham.

I knock on the door  
she peers through,  
opens it  
we both smile.

The worn aluminium pan  
on the stove is waiting,  
thick slices of white bread brown.

She pours milk and  
heaped teaspoons of  
tea leaves and sugar  
into the pan,  
finishes with a dash  
of masala.

Her tiny body  
stands watchfully,  
years of  
    heating  
        stirring  
            pouring  
suffuse this daily ritual  
with ordinary comfort.



*Master of Creative Writing*

*Boots*

When I first saw you  
I was eighteen,  
seduced  
by your sassy  
red.  
Your trademark yellow stitching  
told me I could finally be  
the rock chick  
of my dreams,  
black bootmark imprints  
boasted  
refusal to conform.

I bought you  
at L & L Shoes  
Box Hill Centro  
after being abandoned by the group  
(out on a merry sightseeing trip  
to the Twelve Apostles)  
who could not wait  
for an acquaintance  
they had invited  
out of politeness.

You remind me of that day.  
A lucky  
lonely  
discovery.  
Together  
we have journeyed:  
cobble lanes in Bruges;  
Battery Studios in Willesden Green;  
dusty op shops in Amsterdam;  
muddy Glastonbury;  
\$2 shops on Onehunga Mall.

You have outlasted the hurt  
just as  
I have outlasted the pain  
of breaking you in.  
Together  
we stride in red.

*Master of Creative Writing*

*Bapuji Speaks – Modhvada Veraval Mombasa Kisumu*

Don't ask me about my journey.

Ask my brother.  
He did it himself  
only  
he had no  
one at the other end.

Sharvat ma kaay nathu –  
in the beginning there was nothing.

I saw  
the brown-red earth  
from the train,  
unwavering companion  
I grew to like  
chug-puff-clack  
speeding along freshly laid track.  
I reached Kisumu –  
two-storey houses  
criss-cross verandahs,  
bananas coffee cassava guavas mangos.

He didn't know I was coming:  
when you are sixteen,  
sailing the open sea,  
riding the lunatic express,  
wading in the Indian Ocean to Mombasa shore,  
you don't write ahead.

That first morning  
we ate pickled green mangoes  
with deep fried poori –  
round and puffed with steam,  
floating balloons stretched thin  
about to burst.  
I ate forty,  
the story goes.  
My brother  
told the owner,  
'What's it to you if he eats that many?  
I'm paying you aren't I?'

I got a job at a tailor shop,  
but by the end of that first day,  
decided  
I would work  
for no one.

I set my sewing machine  
out on the verandah  
next to my brother's.



# BARBARA UNKOVIC

Barbara Unković is of Croatian and English descent and is a cousin to DH Lawrence. She is the author of six published books. Her latest, a rustic kitchen notebook, *The Adriatic Kitchen*, will be released in April 2017. A flash fiction specialist, Barbara is the recipient of more than thirty writing awards in the UK and the USA including three International Book Awards and one USA Best Book Award for her books *Weeds in the Garden of Eden*, *A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing*, and *Moon Walking*.

Her novel, *The Hair Shirt*, is a political saga of war, love and loss set in Yugoslavia, France and Croatia. Dominik is writing a book about the civil war in The Balkans. When he becomes aware of a sea chest, given for safe-keeping to his mentally unstable mother, he knows he must destroy the contents. Dominik's older sister Dunja endures a childhood disrupted by men in black suits meeting her grandfather in secret. Determined to escape her nightmares, and also communist mentality she flees to Paris. Who are the men in black and what are the implications of the disquieting contents of the chest?

## Novel extract

Dominik knows he must find somewhere to hide for the next couple of hours, otherwise he risks losing his life. He searches in all directions, but nowhere safe presents itself. His only choice is inside the Pile Gate, where the massive towering thick walls of the city could hide him. He runs across the road clutching his back pack to his chest. He is relieved when he finds that the drawbridge, leading to the centre of the old city, is still open. The cobblestones inside the gate are wet from a shower of rain during the night. Although Dominik notices several small puddles of rainwater, he fails to anticipate the slippery state of the uneven stones. He is too afraid and intent on his purpose. His city shoes are old and the soles have worn smooth. Before he can stop himself he slips and falls. He lands with a thump on the base of his spine. For a minute he stays on the ground in a heap as pain spreads through his lower back. When he plucks up the courage to sit up, he notices his wrist is grazed and beginning to swell.

He had put his hand out to break his fall.

*'Jebati!'* he exclaims under his breath, picking himself up and limping inside the confines of the wall where he slumps down in a huddle. He pulls his jacket over his head against a new shower of rain and steels himself for the long wait.

Half an hour goes by. He is restless. His lower back is on fire, and when he stands up, he cries out in pain. Perhaps a short walk might help, he thinks, setting off, regardless of the continuing detonations resounding in his ears. When he reaches the gigantic stone archway leading to the Stradun, Dubrovnik's main street, he stops.

Underneath the archway he lifts his knees to his chest, one after the other. The ache at the base of his spine has abated a little. When a thunderous explosion makes his ears ring, Dominik knows it is time to seek cover again. Retreating from the archway, he thinks he hears a voice.

*'Pomoć, pomoć.'* Dominik stops. Perhaps it is his ears playing tricks on him. But then it comes again.

*'Pomoć, pomoć.'* Louder this time. He stands still. It is less distinct the third time, but he knows for sure he has heard correctly. With deliberation, he begins to retrace his steps. Once again he halts, but this time after he has dared to step through the massive curved stones above his head.

Horrified by the vista in his line of sight, he draws back, flattens himself against the cold stone wall and closes his eyes. The insides of buildings are burning, flames leap and dance out of the gaping holes that were once windows. A woman, running from one side of the Stradun to the other, is felled before she reaches her destination; dead bodies are lying on the cobblestones along with rubbish, and homeless hungry people cower in doorways close to him. He squeezes his eyes shut. If only he hadn't dared to look. But it is too late now. This war will be etched in his mind forever. Dominik retreats to the shelter of the wall, but then moments later he wonders if he should try to help the woman lying motionless on the cobblestones. Maybe she is still alive. Plucking up the courage to brave another assault on his senses, he dares to look once more into the Stradun. The woman has not moved from where she has fallen, but then he thinks he sees her arm move. He takes a step closer and as he does so, he hears a high pitched whistling noise. Unsure what it is, he has no time to react before an explosion, followed by a tremor, sounds too near to him. Shrapnel mixed with masonry chunks come flying through the air towards him. He ducks. His reaction is too slow. A sharp pain tears at his right leg. He looks down to see what has hit him when a piece of stone guttering that has been dislodged from above, strikes him on the temple. He sinks to his knees and his vision fades.

Hours later, when Dominik tries to open his eyes, his left one won't respond. His leg and his head are both aching and he is completely disoriented. In a state

of shock and chilled to the core of his being, he tries to focus his mind and will his body to sit up. When the cold stones beneath him dig into his back, his memory returns. From a sitting position he drags himself to the shelter of the wall. Lacking any useful strength, he uses the last of his reserves to struggle to a safer place. With his back against the wall he reaches up and cautiously touches his head. His hand encounters a sticky substance glued to his face and matted in his sparse hair. He knows it is blood. He shivers, overcome by shock.

Dominik wakes up without knowing he has fallen asleep. The sun has already risen and it is light enough to see the face of his watch. It is nine-twenty in the morning – an entire day and a night have passed. He stands up gradually. As soon as he is upright his head begins to pound. It is almost unbearable. With both eyes shut, he concentrates on blotting out the hammers beating a steady rhythm inside his brain. He licks his lips. He is terribly thirsty and his mouth feels as though he's consumed too many wafers at Holy Communion. His stomach has long since given up squealing with hunger, resigned to the fact that no food is coming to satisfy it anytime soon.

When he finally opens his eyes his vision is blurred. Using his fists, he presses his eyes closed and massages the lids. This time when he dares to reopen them, his vision has cleared sufficiently to enable him to look down at his body. His jacket is splotched with semi-dried brownish blood, and through the rip in his trousers a blood-covered gash in his leg is visible. His hat is missing and his head is cold.

How he wishes he could walk through the archway to Onofrio's fountain and drink his fill before cleaning himself up. It would be impossible as well as suicidal to go back to where he'd been when the shell exploded. There is no water in the fountain anyway. The water supply to the old town has been cut off by the Yugoslav Army. He is in the best place he can be, given his circumstances.

How long will it be before Zagreb suffers the same fate, he wonders? He hunkers down with his arm through the strap of his back pack, to wait out the length of the day for the next bus.

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