



Te Whāriki

Reading Ten New Poets
from Aotearoa

Anna Jackson,
Dougal McNeill,
Robert Sullivan,
editors

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1 He Kupu Whakataki / Introduction

Anna Jackson, Dougal
McNeill, Robert Sullivan

A whāriki is a fine mat, one that is made by a community of weavers. There might be a single weaver overseeing the project, but the skillset that created it is intergenerational. You cannot weave a whāriki with one strand: it is the product of many strands, many makers. This collection takes its method, direction and guidance from Kukupa Tirikātene's whakatauākī:

Te whāriki kia mōhio ai tātou ki a tātou
e kore e taea e te whenu kotahi
ki te raranga i te whāriki
kia mōhio ai tātou ki a tātou.

Mā te mahi tahi o ngā whenu,
mā te mahi tahi o ngā kairaranga,
ka oti tēnei whāriki.

I te otinga

me titiro tātou ki ngā mea pai
ka puta mai

a tana wā, me titiro hoki

ki ngā raranga i makere
nā te mea, he kōrero anō ki reira.

*The tapestry of understanding
cannot be woven
by one strand alone.*

*Only by the working together of strands
and the working together of weavers
will such a tapestry be completed.*

When it is complete

*let us look at the good
that comes from it.*

*And, in time, we should also look
at those dropped stitches
because they also have a message.*

This book wants to speak to us as tātou. It is aimed at all of us – readers, listeners, writers, poets, critics, students, teachers – as part of a community who want to engage with poetry being written now. Just as a whāriki cannot be woven by one strand alone, so too the contemporary in poetry cannot be grasped without attention to the previous generations it speaks to and the futures it anticipates.

We have gathered writers from different generations, places and traditions to consider a particularly exciting moment in poetry in Aotearoa now. We want to look at the working together of strands, to explore patterns that become visible when we look across poets' work. But we do not want to diminish the specificity of individual gifts along the way. Each piece of a whāriki can be appreciated for its own artistry, just as the whāriki can be admired as a whole. This book tries to do justice to individual poets, and individual poems, as well as to trace poetry in its current movement. We invite readers to look at particular details, and to follow the work of weaving together.

The essay by Amy Marguerite in Chapter 2 gives a taste of the literary landscape by way of the small presses and online journals and platforms for poetry that young poets are running for themselves. This essay is followed by Tru Paraha's account of visual poetics in contemporary poetry, looking back to the influence of Albert Wendt on younger poets experimenting with the possibilities of form and layout today. The remaining essays look in detail at the work of ten poets we have selected for the significance and beauty of their work; the forms of renewal each poet offers; the sense of community and friendship the poems arise from and express; the Romantic profusion and exuberance of the writing; and the ways the poets are playing with layout, punctuation and form in expressing a contemporary sensibility and identity. Other poets, some of whom are referenced in this and other essays in the collection, could as easily have been selected. The ten we have chosen began publishing their work relatively recently and have done so to significant

acclaim. Chris Tse, New Zealand Poet Laureate 2022–2025, is the most established, with his first selection of poetry published in *AUP New Poets 4* in 2011, and the first of his three major collections published in 2014. We have included a chapter on his work because it is so exemplary of the sensibility and style we identify as characteristic of the younger generation of poets on whom he has been such an important influence.

Poetry always renews itself. Ideas spread; friends share forms and experiment with them, circulating the results and spurring further experimentation; writers go rummaging in the past for workable models, traces of ancestors, traditions to work with and against. This moment feels to us like one of particularly energetic renewal in the poetic lines of both tangata whenua and tangata Tiriti. Poetry feels new: it can be read in new ways, on devices and in performance circulating digitally. New technologies facilitate new possibilities for expression. The lines between performance, stage, page and screen are less clear now than they ever were. We can hear poets' voices through recordings, as well as in live performance, and the page reflects how words can be arranged on the screen. A number of poetry's younger practitioners are especially interested in its traditions – in form, in sensibility, in audience – as they make them their own and make them new.

Kāi Tahu poets Ruby Solly (the subject of Chapter 12) and Arihia Latham both show how the new is wrapped in and sustains the old. Both have the mōteatea 'Manu Tiria' as part of their inheritance through whakapapa; both use it to extend their poetics. For Solly, the digging of the mōteatea (*e taua e kōia* encourages us to dig, dig for their first shoots) connects to her father leaving 'school to dig graves', his labour then piling 'up dirt higher and higher' until it makes 'a lofty mountain / for us to bow to.'¹ This, in turn, evokes the whakatauki 'Whāia te iti kahurangi, ki te tuohu koe, me he maunga teitei'; *Seek the treasure that you value most dearly; if you bow your head, let it be to a lofty mountain*. Solly's 'Six Feet for a Single, Eight Feet for a Double' from the same collection threads together Kāi Tahu knowledge, family memory and poetic invention. The ear might make a connection with Seamus Heaney's 'Digging'; a more likely connection is with Keri Hulme's poems of bones, graveyards and earth in *The Silences Between*.² Arihia Latham's 'Manu Tiria: Digging Bird', on the other hand, is an ekphrastic response to Tia Ranginui's photographs in her exhibition *Gonville Gothic*, and looks at 'the earth / piles of decaying stink' as it registers 'desire and resentment'.³ We do not need to choose between 'vertical' and 'horizontal' lines of influence here. These poems register *both* ancestral connections *and* the shared inspirations of friendship and community.

Friendship is another way of imagining poetic connection. Ash Davida Jane's 'transplanting', dedicated to Dorothy Wordsworth, begins: