

Ockhams Sampler

Extracts from
the finalist books in the
Mary and Peter Biggs Award for Poetry
at the 2023 Ockham New Zealand
Book Awards



Mary and Peter Biggs Award for Poetry

OCKHAM



The Mary and Peter Biggs Award for Poetry at the Ockham New Zealand Book Awards considers both selections and collections of poetry, from one or more authors. The winning book receives \$12,000.

Judging the poetry award in 2023 are Dunedin poet, author and creative writing tutor Diane Brown (convenor); poet and kaiako Serie Barford; and Wellington poet and Grimshaw-Sargeson Fellow Gregory Kan.

The judging panel says the category finalists all portray a precarious world where nothing can be taken for granted. "The turbulent events of the last few years are reflected in the four finalists' collections, with poets interrogating language, racism, sexism, climate change and systems. These tensions are often reflected in poetic forms, long lines with fractured spaces dismantling the barrier between prose and poetry."

This Ockhams Sampler gives you a taste of the craft at play in each of this year's shortlisted poetry collections. You can read the judges' comments about each finalist in orange at the start of that title's extract.

Look out for samplers of the finalists in the other three categories in the Ockham New Zealand Book Awards. As they are rolled out in the coming weeks, you will find them here:

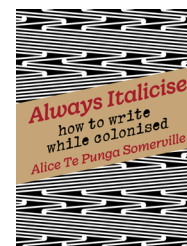
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Alice Te Punga Somerville

Published by Auckland University Press

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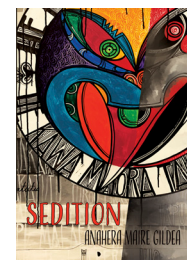


PEOPLE PERSON

Joanna Cho

Published by Te Herenga Waka
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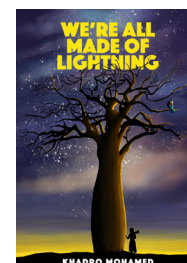


SEDITION

Anahera Maire Gildea

Published by Taraheke | Bush Lawyer

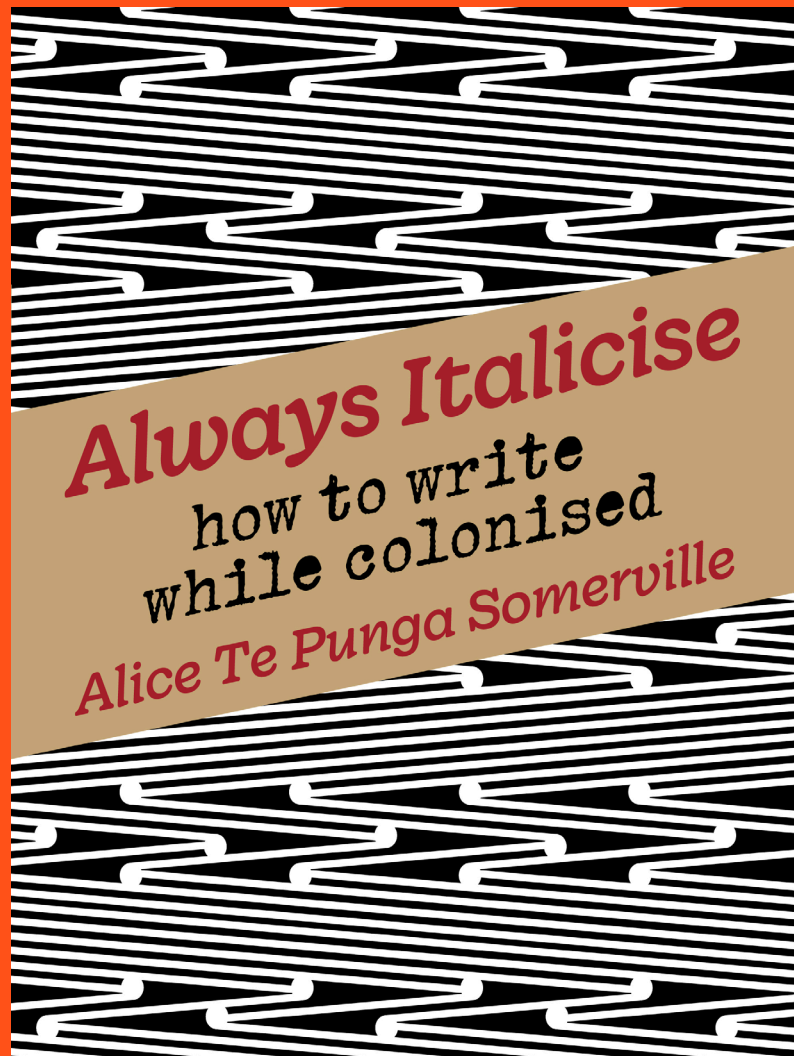
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WE'RE ALL MADE OF LIGHTNING

Khadro Mohamed

Published by We Are Babies Press,
Tender Press



Published by **Auckland University Press**

Always Italicise: How to Write While Colonised

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Alice Te Punga Somerville's meticulously crafted collection resonates with aroha, wit, sadness and anger. Advice to "italicise all of the foreign words in her poems" becomes a catalyst to exploring the dynamics of racism, colonisation, and writing in English as a Māori writer. Poems float like gourds strung with musings and personal recounts. English words incline as foreign words, but te reo syllables evade linguistic ambushes, camouflaged soundscapes and erasure. They stand upright, mark Space-Time like pou.

Poems overleaf

Kupu rere kē

*My friend was advised to italicise all the foreign words in her poems.
This advice came from a well-meaning woman
with NZ poetry on her business card
and an English accent in her mouth.*

I have been thinking about this advice.

*The convention of italicising words from other languages
clarifies that some words are imported:
it ensures readers can tell the difference between a foreign language
and the language of home.*

I have been thinking about this advice.

6 *Marking the foreign words is also a kindness:
every potential reader is reassured
that although you're expected to understand the rest of the text,
it's fine to consult a dictionary or native speaker for help with the italics.*

I have been thinking about this advice.

*Because I am a contrary person, at first I was outraged —
but after a while I could see she had a point:
when the foreign words are camouflaged in plain type
you can forget how they came to be there, out of place, in the first place.*

*I have been thinking about this advice
and I have decided to follow it.*

*Now all of my readers will be able to remember
which words truly belong in Aotearoa and which do not.*

room

*there are captain cooks amongst us too — bullies,
throwing their weight around*

*they think they are the centre of the room but that's only because
they have never been anywhere but there
they have no idea about the edges or even how far the room extends
one day they will realise that we in the corners are really in other centres
they will realise there are no corners
no walls*

is it a room? is it a room then, when there are no walls?

*i used to want to tell them to move over because they take up all the room
but there's no room
there is no room*

no walls, no room — just links and connections and space

*you're not at the centre; there are no centres
you're just standing there
one node in a massive network
like the rest of us*

Missing

*I miss those of you who have twisted words into ropes for our people.
Had you spliced your cords to the woven lengths the rest of us were making,
Instead of showing off your own lovely strands,
We could have slowed the sun.*

An Indigenous woman scholar's prayer

(for Teresia Teaiwa and Tracey Banivanua Mar)

May I grow old enough to be forgotten.

*May my questions become passe,
may my bibliographies become outdated,
may my theories be superseded,
may I be obsolete.*

*May I teach students who teach students who teach students:
may I meet these younger thinkers at conferences,
may I read and cite their work,
may I watch them stand more stably than I could ever have
dreamed.*

*May I sit in committee meetings where young colleagues raise new challenges
because the old ones have finally been put to rest.*

*May I watch the old guard quietly move on, but more than this:
may I live long enough to be part of an old guard
who younger scholars wish would retire.
(May I get to retire.)*

*May I see scores of Indigenous scholars
write hundreds of Indigenous books
that ask thousands of Indigenous questions.*

*May I meet Indigenous vice-chancellors, presidents, professors, and deans;
may they not all be men.*

*May I lie on a future deathbed and look back with regrets related to work
rather than regrets related to family.*

May my passing be unshocking, not early, not unexpected.

May I run out of ideas before I run out of time.

People Person



Published by **Te Herenga Waka University Press**

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Joanna Cho explores relationships, identity and survival with an aching, ironic honesty. A people person may have a name bought from a fortune-teller, drive battered cars, light up rooms with their hearts, or miss the smell of kawakawa ointment. Cho navigates expectations and choices in imagined and recalled stories, skilfully connecting folklore with autobiographical snapshots from South Korea and Aotearoa. Whimsical, surreal, magical and mundane elements meld and clash in poetic vignettes.

Poems overleaf

The Magic Sock

The magic sock fitted us all—엄마, 오빠, 언니 and me. No one knew where it had come from, but we found it in the box of toys. It fit in the palm of my hand. There was only one, and it was the colour of ripe tomatoes, like my favourite snack: 엄마 sliced raw tomatoes and brown sugar sprinkled over them like dandelion seeds. We used a fork to eat the tomatoes and then passed the plate around, taking turns slurping the sweet water.

We took turns with the sock, too. We sat in a circle on the carpet in the living room. In this house we only experienced summer and everything was gold and dusty and warm. The sock was the brightest thing in the room. First, it ate up 엄마's foot, which was pale and slender. In Korea, a long, slim foot is called 칼발. She lifted that knife foot up and wiggled it around, the red nylon catching the afternoon light. Then us kids tried it on, from oldest to youngest: 오빠, 언니, then me. How could one tiny sock fit us all? It was magic.

One day, when the others were off doing their own thing, I went to try the sock on. I touched its shimmery skin and parted the lips. Suddenly the sock whispered, 'Eunsun, what do you want?' I jumped a little and rose onto my tippy toes. I glanced around the room, making sure no one was there, and whispered back, 'Can you make me loved by everyone?' And then I knew what to do. I put my right foot into the sock.

Later, 엄마 went to the kitchen to prepare an afternoon snack. I smiled my broadest smile and she picked me up from the wooden bowl. She popped me down on the chopping board, brought out a knife and began slicing me from one side to the other. Then she spread me out on a plate and began showering me in sugar. The crystals scattered onto my face, pooled into my ears. I lay there smiling, shaking my head to gather all the sugar I could.

The Gift

In first year I liked a band called DIANA,
capitalised like that

and every time I introduced them to someone, I had to type
'diana band' on YouTube.

Sometimes, it's like that.

When I was seven, I had a crush on a boy whose full name
was longer than the English alphabet. He had no middle parting
and two middle names. They sat next to each other, like he and I
on the green bench, eating lunch, getting along.

I liked him at eight, and nine, too.

Sometimes, it's like that.

I have no middle name, but two first names.
Sometimes I hold the door and let my first name go ahead
and at other times, my surname deserves it more.

So sometimes, it's like that, too.

If I decide to give birth, I will write a list of potential names
and ask my partner to cross out any they've had a thing with.

It is quite likely that our children will not have hot people names.

Our parents bought our names from fortune-tellers,
each of the three syllables laying out our ancestry and personal truths
in the immortal wind

our names are gifts and expectations

but our English names were picked hastily
while flicking through TV channels.

Some people have an 'English name' and a 'legal name'.
They forget which names they have given to which institutions,
use one for ordering takeaways,
and for making friends.

Once, a bouncer looked at my ID, laughed and said
Ching Chong China...

Once, I applied for labouring work and they texted back
Jo, are you male or female...

Once, a little girl was introduced to the class...

14 Once, I was a lotus, pirouetting in the spring air...

Once, I was 조은선...

Someone Else's Dream

He teaches me how to ride a bike and that is one less fear.
I ride it to the gas station, him running beside me,

across bumpy roots and sunburnt grass, on the lake front
but I am not his wife.

We order pies and coffees and eat them on
the bench, looking out at pine trees. We do this often.

He shows me how to stand on the bike
and coast,

even and carefree but
I am not his wife.

Today I rode to the shop alone, got a pie and coffee
and the guy said, 'Is he resting today'

and the 'he' made me smile, the certainty and singularity of it
but I am not his wife.

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Published by **Taraheke | Bush Lawyer**

Sedition

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Sedition flows through generations of dis-ease, enlivens tongues stilled by loss and trauma, excavates a genealogy of resistance. It's a contemplative, defiant collection that resists the commodification of culture and whenua, and the ongoing perversity of neo-colonialism. Poems float upon the notion that we walk into the future facing our past, which embodies and shapes us. Anahera Maire Gildea agitates, untangles and reweaves threads of outrage, dystopia and anguish as she resolutely redraws detrimental power.

Poems overleaf

Uplift

When the wharenui was built, it took a life,
karakia were spoken over the carved faces, into the tukutuku, shy
bodies endowed, responsibility
shifted into position, the po po
in place of poupou, and the walls –

the council bulldozed it up, uplifted
the fence
a public works act –

but the tapu of the piles stay firm,
tamped like plugs into the earth

on the confiscated land a church
white, weatherboards hard
rows of dark script
treats and torts, summon its preacher

it wasn't clear who would lift the veil at the hura kōhatu,
words underneath set in something harder than stone
sent back across the road to the urupā
– fantails at the gate, keeping out the pregnant

mōteatea remember
the sound of the coast, the crying of the seashore

beneath this structure, collected skulls
stacked up in soprano cries,
forehead to chin,
the bones of their ribs, curtains
in our theatre of state care.

Time

Time can heal anything.
It can staple over that hole in the ozone
feed the starving, end racism.
Time is the idealist's last hope.
It can buy that big house
and take back that miscarriage,
it can do up those buttons
that you undid
and put that shirt back on.
Time can take your hand
from my breast
and remove those fingers
tracing my spine.
It can take your lips off my thighs
and increase the pressure
of my hands against your stomach.
Time can silence your quiet laughter in my ear
and stop my breath from hasping
ragged and caught.
Time can heal anything, you said.

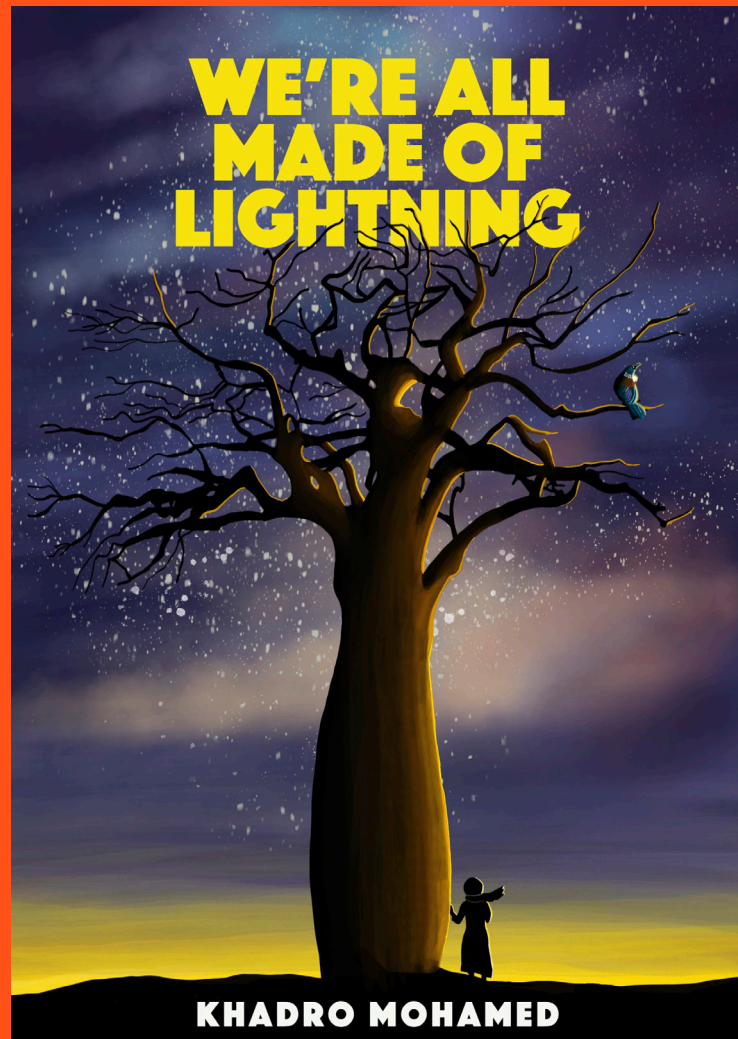
Shift

Sometimes there is nothing
that can shift the dark
black sadness that sticks like tar
inside my chest so that
when I think of drowning
it's not in water
it's in the thick
swollen veins of Papatūānuku
under her skin
where the world slows
mineral rich
with oil from ancient dead
deprived of oxygen
and sealed in their own heat –
trapped, reduced –
and lightly called “fields” or “springs”.

But if I was punctured
bored into
penetrated or explored –
my tides used
to find my deepest complexion
so I could be extracted
exsanguinated
“let”
until the viscous well
dried up, was fucking empty
would my temperature not rise?

Would my rage not spill
not leak from every crusted vent
to swirl in pools of emerald and magenta?

Perhaps it is too hard to shift too crude
to not expect
the pressure that has formed to be my darkest self.



Published by **We Are Babies Press, Tender Press**

We're All Made of Lightning

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Khadro Mohamed's elegiac collection features a speaker torn between multiple worlds. Pendulating from prose to lyric, it is a ghostly work in which dreams and memory bleed into each other, as do its places: Egypt, Somalia, Newtown and Kilbirnie. Even time becomes concurrent, and for Mohamed, the past is right there in the present. In this collision of languages and worlds, the possibility and impossibility of home is both grieved and celebrated.

Poems overleaf

Ginger Flakes

did you hear the news? about Hawa
I heard she's given up on speaking

it happened yesterday
when someone told her she reminded them

too much of her mother. a tall woman with an
East African nose, and Ghanian skin

a woman with a heavy hand who uses too much
hawaji in her curry and not enough ginger flakes in her tea

she climbs date trees with her bare hands, harvests fruit
and makes cakes for the elderly man with a missing eye next
door

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a woman with far too many thoughts in her mind
each one bleeding through her skin and forging a

path to her heart

so, she sits back and lets her mother's
ghost do all the talking

You Are Not

You are not violet
You are not hands filled with morning light
You are not skin made of bone
Of tears pooling in the corners of my eyes
You are not the pāua shells that cling to the end of your hair

The same ones you brush back before going to sleep so
You don't have to think so hard about the home you left behind

You are not your mother's smile
Or the twinkle in your father's eyes
You are not past musings, or whispers left unsaid

You are not broken coastlines
You are not chipped fingernails
You are not the pharaohs you read about
Or the corn fields in Madagascar that grow widely in the spring
You are not the winds of Island Bay
Or the seaweed-rich shores next door

You are rain, the soft type
That slowly eases into a catastrophic storm
And causes a typhoon that sinks entire villages
And creates swamps filled with mossy water
That overflow in the palms of my hands and create a spring
The same rain that covers my change in the morning
When I'm drenched from head to toe

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The Fine Print

Okay. So I have some. News about the. Lady that got.
Stabbed the other night. In McAlister park. She'd tried. To
climb out of the dried up creek. With her fingernails. But
there was no use. She got stabbed. 13 times. By a man. Who
lives. On the other side. Of Karori West. According to the
Dominion Post. And her blood. Coated the dead grass. He
must have. Thought she was Muslim. But she wasn't. She
was an Ethiopian. Orthodox Christian. Who wore white
cotton. On her head. That looked like a hijab from. Far
away. I guess. That's why he did it. I guess. When you're.
Full of hate. It blinds. You. And. You never read. The. Fine
print. Do you?

Lilac

Halimo, with bits of lilac caught in the coils of her hair
told me she'd once saved the world in a single

night. That she'd told the Askari boys of Somalia that she'd
killed European
imperialism with a single branch of castor beans, so they
could go home and

chew gum. That she'd collected pine needles, growing on one
side of Mt Kilimanjaro
and drove them through the hearts of the elephant poachers
in East

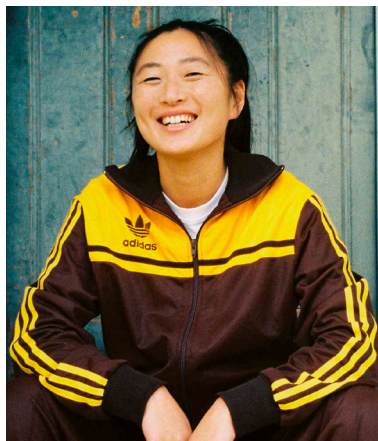
Africa. That she watched them bleed out and become one
with the

earth. Then she'd sipped cardamom-rich shaah on an island
that floats
above the horizon, licking blood clean from her fingers.



Alice Te Punga Somerville
(Te Āti Awa, Taranaki)

*Always Italicise: How to Write
While Colonised*



Joanna Cho
People Person



Anahera Maire Gildea
(Ngāti Tukorehe)
Sedition



Khadro Mohamed
We're All Made of Lightning

Whakamihi to all the authors whose work has been recognised and honoured in this year's Ockham New Zealand Book Awards. We urge you to seek out their titles in bookstores and libraries around the motu, and to join us to hear the finalists reading from their books, and to celebrate the ultimate winners, at the awards ceremony on Wednesday 17 May, during the Auckland Writers Festival. To find out more follow [NewZealandBookAwards](#) or [#theockhams](#) on Facebook and Instagram.



The Ockhams Samplers were compiled with the assistance of the Academy of New Zealand Literature.

Look out for the other category samplers at:



ANZL Academy of New Zealand Literature
Te Whare Mātātūhi o Aotearoa