

Ockhams Sampler

Extracts from
the finalist books in the
General Non-Fiction Award
at the 2024 Ockham
New Zealand Book Awards

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The General Non-Fiction Award

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The General Non-Fiction Award at the Ockham New Zealand Book Awards recognises excellence in primarily text-based non-fiction work from one or more authors. The winner of the 2024 award will receive \$12,000 in prize money.

Judging the category this year are journalist and academic Jim Tully ONZM (convenor); writer, editor, broadcaster and literary festival curator Kerry Sunderland; and academic, researcher and author Rebecca Kiddle (Ngāti Porou, Ngā Puhī).

The judging panel says this year's General Non-Fiction entries treated them to a wide array of narratives – rich life stories; biographies of birds, sea life and waka; and deep investigations into Kaupapa, from communes to ora (wellbeing). "The judges came to the unanimous decision that the final four represent the best of the best – accessible yet robust academic inquiries; novel and unheard stories; and narratives that warm, sadden and unsettle all within the same cover."

This Ockhams Sampler gives you a taste of the writing craft at play in each of this year's shortlisted books in the General Non-Fiction category. You can read the judges' comments about each finalist in mauve 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:

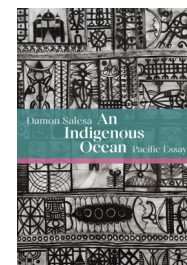
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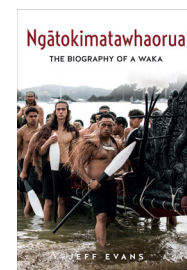


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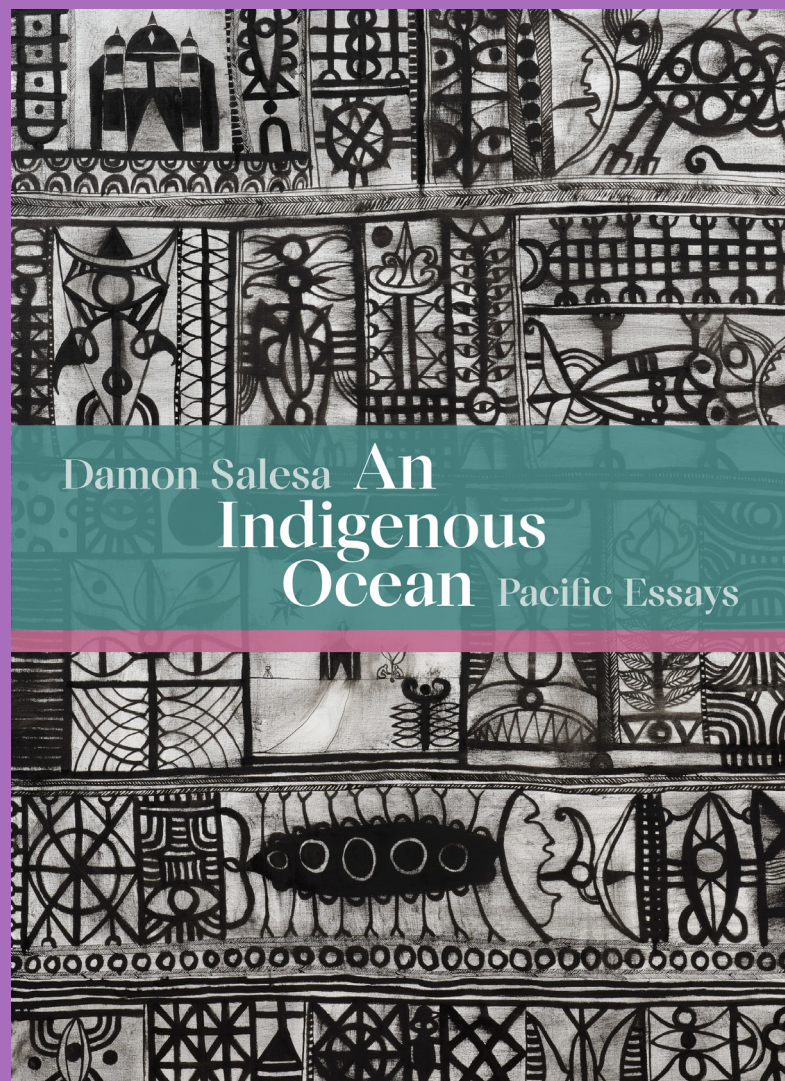
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THERE'S A CURE FOR THIS: A MEMOIR

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(Ngāti Tukorehe, Ngāti Porou)

Published by Penguin,
Penguin Random House



Published by **Bridget Williams Books**

An Indigenous Ocean: Pacific Essays

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JUDGES' COMMENTS

Damon Salesa's collection of essays re-frames our understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand's colonial history in the South Pacific. A seminal work, *An Indigenous Ocean* asserts Pacific agency and therefore its ongoing impact worldwide, despite marginalisation by New Zealand and others. Salesa brings together academic rigour, captivating stories and engaging prose, resulting in a masterful book that will endure for generations.

Extract from Introduction overleaf

The subjects and narratives, the stories and analyses we produce are powerfully shaped by the conditions from which they emerge and in which their authors operate. It is a profound insight that ‘history reveals itself only through the production of specific narratives. What matters most are the process and conditions of production of such narratives.’ And it is an insight that could be made more broadly, beyond history, as it is true of our collective knowledge.

I often refer to this as a problem of symmetry. This means the critical capacity that scholars have to find the influence of discourse, culture, history, politics and society on the work of those they analyse, and conversely their inability to discern the same influences within their own work and thinking. This should be a cause for humility: we too, if we are fortunate (or unfortunate), will have our historians. The idea that others might be shaped or even determined by their contexts, cultural and historical limits is now (seemingly) obvious. It must be counterbalanced by the ability to understand how complex parallel forces operate in our own lives and work. Of the essays that follow, each makes a contribution, not only to a particular field or subject, but to this critical enterprise of connecting stories, both past and the present, to the processes and conditions from which they emerged. In one sense this, for historians, is bread and butter, as it involves contextualising evidence and past actors. But other elements of this exercise are considerably more challenging, especially two tasks. The first is to connect historians and scholars to their own contexts, and to do so in ways that interrogate many of the assumptions about the autonomy and

independence of scholars from the worlds they inhabit. The second relates to the encounters with other cultures, other ways of narration: for me, most centrally, an array of Indigenous narratives and cultures. This unmoors many assumptions, but treats past and present with symmetry. Indeed, this active entanglement between past and present requires us to critically interrogate and be enriched by both.

This is a precarious moment to write in, and about, the Indigenous Ocean — though one would be hard pressed to think of a time that wasn’t. The Ocean, through its scale and global significance, convenes a multitude of local, regional and global challenges. This confluence cannot be distilled into a few pages, but its immediacy for all analysis and scholarship on the Pacific, whether past or present, must not be avoided.

As I discuss in several of the following essays, the now-canonical approach to Pacific history was radical at its time of origin, focused on Indigenous agency, with explicit decolonising motivations and goals. This set it apart from other parts of the historical discipline, perhaps even more remarkably so as history is not a discipline famed for innovation or its embrace of progress. Indeed, history in North America and the UK is a stark example by many metrics, even when compared with the slow change evident in the academy more generally. A recent study in the UK found that a mere 0.5 per cent of staff in UK history departments were black; an important commentary in the US found that diversity in US history departments had remained flat since the 1980s. As one scholar recently put it, ‘history has a race problem and it’s existential’ — there is a significantly higher proportion of white students and staff in US history departments than in the broader population, and non-white

students experience one of the worst failure rates at universities. A series of recent works that has done similar analyses for the New Zealand academy made, unsurprisingly, similar findings for New Zealand universities more generally. A quick tour across New Zealand history departments suggests history would be no different, and may be worse.

I have been noting for some years that the crisis that history faces, and that Pacific history faces with it, is not a crisis in belief about the importance of historical knowledge or thinking, but a crisis of confidence in the discipline of history itself. One analysis associates the decline of history with a move away from a traditional audience and higher public status (a focus on politics and men of power) to a more progressive approach, concentrating less on historical mainstays (political, diplomatic and military) and more on other subjects that include gender, race and underrepresented groups — ‘hyphenated histories’. History books remain popular, history has its own satellite channel even; but a brief look at the covers and the programming makes it clear these versions of history are quite different from what interests younger historians. There are deep tensions between a public interest in history, a popular interest in history, the senior echelons of the academy and those who hope to define its future. All this comes as the popularity of history as an academic subject, particularly at universities, is in considerable decline.

Pacific history was from its beginnings intentionally at odds with most of the rest of the history discipline. This was partly because it had no place for the Pacific (something it still struggles with, as discussed in chapters 3 and 4). But in larger part this was thanks to Pacific history’s interdisciplinary openness, Indigenous

engagement and most especially its explicit decolonising framework. And while decolonisation for the first generation of Pacific historians had a different meaning, and a different freight, to today’s Pacific scholars: these different views are far more alike than they are dissimilar. Where progress was made, though only marginally, was in the attraction and retention of several generations of Indigenous Pacific historians. To be sure, there were a number of Indigenous Pacific historians from the 1960s, but they remained few, and the discipline itself never gathered a critical mass. This was no doubt due to the relatively low number of Indigenous Pacific peoples who could access university education, and the relatively high level of opportunity available to those who did, as well as to the ways in which the discipline itself acted.

Pacific historical scholarship looks very different now compared with three decades ago. The rise of Indigenous scholarship and Indigenous scholars is now much more apparent, but has occurred in a way quite different to that anticipated decades ago. Indigenous scholars have proven to be as convinced of the deep importance of history as any historians; but there is no sense that the only way to approach the past is through the history discipline itself. Pathways are different, and so is the destination. For one thing, a significant proportion of university academics are coming from the diaspora: one can see this impact in the large (or relatively large) Indigenous Pacific undergraduate student populations in places like Brisbane, Auckland, Honolulu, Los Angeles, Salt Lake City and Seattle-Tacoma. Perhaps even more importantly, Pacific people have tended to follow different paths. In particular, certainly in my observation, Indigenous students have been more attracted to

Pacific or ethnic studies, sociology, criminology, law or health, than to history — even when their primary interest is historical.

Indigenous scholars are doing more and more history, and they are doing it less and less within the discipline and institutions of traditional history. To an extent this is due to the way that history has been institutionalised, and has struggled to change both its audience and, particularly, those who at the university level teach and research history. This is necessary so that history represents the diversity of pasts that we should be aiming to recount. Part of this has to do with the struggle to diversify the methods, nature and texts of history, which have changed significantly, but not at all in some places and not much in most. Another aspect is not about history at all, but about the attraction and availability of the many other disciplines and venues within and beyond the academy. I would earnestly tell my history colleagues that history needed Indigenous scholars more than Indigenous scholars needed history: and so it remains.



Published by Penguin, Penguin Random House

Laughing at the Dark: A Memoir

JUDGES' COMMENTS

In this beautifully crafted memoir, Barbara Else reflects on her writing career and its impact on her life. Else's narrative is both resolute and nuanced, artful and authentic. A story that perhaps could only be told decades after the death of her first husband, Jim Neale – the archetypal patriarchal man in the 1960s and 1970s – Else also explores how toxic masculinity took its toll on him while examining when she herself needed to be held to account.

Extract from Part 1 overleaf

The house is crammed with the classics, modern novels, non-fiction. We're a musical family, with songs around the piano. We're a story family. A. A. Milne. Fairy tales. Library visits. Tardi loves *The Bobbsey Twins*. Tom loves *Just William* and *Biggles*. I lie on my stomach in the hallway, turning the pages of *Buller's Birds* to look at the colour plates.

The Ladies Handbook is kept in my parents' bedroom. It has a thick black leather cover with gold lettering and marbled endpapers. It has colour plates too. The best one has a woman's body in profile, and it consists of a series of flaps. The top flap is her bare skin and some modest drapery. Lift that with a careful finger and underneath are lungs and heart and all sorts. The very best flap is a big oval — when you lift it there's a baby curled upside down. Its eyes are closed and it is smiling, but that position must be uncomfortable. How extraordinary that it's in the middle of a lady at all.

I take my friend Joanna into the bedroom and show her this book with a baby in a lady's tummy. After that I cannot find *The Ladies Handbook* anywhere. I don't connect it with having shown Joanna, or that the baby was something not to be talked about. And nobody explains to me that babies really do grow inside ladies. I suppose I imagined the idea was a joke, a fiction.

But Dad and Tardi wake me one morning, leaning over my bed, excited and grinning.

'You've got a baby sister,' Dad says.

'I have not,' I reply with utter scorn.

We take the bus from Highbury, perhaps even a taxi — somehow Dad, the twins and I visit Mum in hospital.

In a tiny cot beside her bed, wrapped round and round in a white blanket, is a baby with pointy black hair and a screwed-up face. It is a mystery.

My first weeks at Kelburn Normal Primary School do not enchant me. Several times, I climb on the bus at Highbury in the morning with all the other children, but as soon as it stops at Kelburn Parade I cross the road and start marching home.

The children shout, 'Barbara! You're not meant to do that!'

I don't care. I trudge right up the hill again, up the zigzag, and tell Mum I don't feel well. She puts me to bed. At the end of lunchtime, I can spot the bus starting to head downhill. It's safe to jump out now and tell Mum I'm better.

I'm not sure how many times I get away with it.

The teacher is tall with grey hair in a grim bun. There are little blackboards all around the walls. We sit on the floor in front of our own. The teacher has neatly printed our names at the top, and our job is to copy them. I'm intense with purpose. But Penelope, the child next to me with short fair hair and a round face, pushes me with her feet.

'Stop it,' I say.

'Let's play feet,' she says, and kicks harder.

'Stop it,' I say again. I want to try my printing.

Penelope keeps kicking.

'Stop it!' I say more loudly. She kicks harder and harder.

At last I pick up her arm and give it a bite.

She tells the teacher.

I'm called into the middle of the room. 'Do you think you are a little dog?' the teacher asks. 'Do you want to be fed under the table?'

I'm astonished at how unfair she is not to ask why I bit Penelope. It was an excellent reason. She deserved a bite. My parents laugh when, indignant, I tell them. I'm starting to learn that being good is a complex business.

By Standard Two, age eight, at Kelburn Normal Primary, I've become shy. Why? I've no idea. But something has happened, or an accumulation of things. At school I won't open my mouth.

One day, however, our teacher — Mr . . . ? Mr Nice-man — gives us half an hour to do whatever we like, then report back to the others. I take a group of classmates to the school hall, make up a script on the spot and direct them in a rehearsal of *Puss in Boots*. Naturally, I am Puss. We return to class and perform.

Apparently Mr Nice-man is surprised at this hidden side of shy Barbara.

A few weeks later he gives us another half-hour to do what we like. I take a handful of boys to the hall to direct *Joan of Arc*, also unscripted. The boys are the French and English armies. Naturally, I am Joan. I lean on a stuffy-smelling vaulting horse, press a hand to an imaginary wound in my side and cry, 'Men! Come to my aid!' The warring armies take no notice at all, pounding after each other with imaginary swords. There's nothing to perform later.

I'm disappointed, offended, but realise I have learned something about boys.

It is not unfair to say this: the next thirty-odd years of my life are spent unpacking what that something consists of.

Ngātokimatawhaorua

THE BIOGRAPHY OF A WAKA



JEFF EVANS

Published by Massey University Press

Ngātokimatawhaorua: The Biography of a Waka

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Beginning with an expedition into the Puketi forest alongside master waka builder Rānui Maupakanga, Jeff Evans takes us on a vivid journey of discovery as he tells the story of the majestic waka taua Ngātokimatawhaorua, a vessel that is both a source of pride and a symbol of wayfaring prowess. Evans' biography showcases both the whakapapa of the waka, including the influence of Te Puea Hērangi, and its role in the renaissance of voyaging and whakairo (carving) traditions.

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Extract from Chapter 6 overleaf

The morning of 6 February 1940 dawned overcast but warm for the spectators who had made their way to the Treaty Grounds. As the focal point for the nation's commemorations, the event was well attended, with an estimated 10,000 people converging on Waitangi. An army of media, eager to report on the day for those who could not attend in person, arrived early to claim the best spots. Senior announcer Clive Drummond from Wellington radio station 2YA was among their number. Born at Marahau, near Motueka, in 1890, he was a handsome man with a confident smile, and he endeared himself to his audience by retaining his Kiwi accent when most others in his profession chose to adopt the highbrow BBC English. He was also noted for taking pride in pronouncing te reo to the best of his ability.

From his vantage point on the lawn across from the Treaty House, Drummond could see all of the important landmarks but, initially at least, his attention was fixed firmly on the waters off Hobson Beach. The sandy cove was where Hobson and Nias had come ashore from HMS *Herald* in 1840 to present their treaty to the Māori rangatira, and it was in that very bay that *Ngātokimatawhaorua* would capture everyone's imagination 100 years later.

By 8.45 a.m. a vast crowd had assembled, swarming over the Treaty Grounds and packing the then bare hillside overlooking Hobson Beach. Soldiers marched to their allotted seating and at some point in the morning, a quartet dressed as settlers rode past Manley's camera on horses. Anticipation grew until someone spotted a canoe out in the bay, and then a second. Adults stood and craned their necks to get a better view; children were hoisted

on shoulders to see over them. Few if any of the spectators would have seen a waka taua on the water before, and none would have seen one as large and imposing as *Ngātokimatawhaorua*.

Out in the bay, the crew aboard the giant waka revelled in the occasion, surging across the harbour as their ancestors once had, their white-tipped hoe flashing against the calm blue water. It must have made a daunting sight for the actors playing Hobson and Nias in the small pinnace as they, too, headed for shore. Watching the action on black-and-white film from across the decades, it's clear that *Ngātokimatawhaorua* was a worthy descendent of the waka taua that terrified any enemy who caught sight of them.

By the time the pinnace reached land both waka taua had landed and their crews had disembarked. Once ashore, the British party was greeted by a group of rangatira, who led them up the track to the Treaty House. Waiting patiently for them at the top was an excited crowd of spectators and the entire 28th (Māori) Battalion, immaculate in their khaki uniforms. There was also, not unexpectedly, a full complement of dignitaries, including Peter Fraser representing Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage; Governor-General Lord Galway and his wife Lady Galway; Lord Willingdon representing the British government and his wife, Lady Willingdon; and Senator and Mrs McBride, envoys from Australia.

A ripple of applause sounded as the actors playing Hobson and Nias emerged from the Treaty House and began to make their way to the large tent for the re-enactment. Both men were dressed in period naval uniforms, buttons polished, swords swinging from their hips, bicorn hats firmly in place. Following behind them were actors representing officers from HMS *Herald*,



Fully manned, with white-tipped hoe flashing in the morning light, *Ngātokimatawhaorua* looked majestic on the calm waters of Pēwhairangi Bay of Islands on Waitangi Day in 1940. Close to 10,000 spectators were present when the waka was first put through its paces.

W. B. Beattie, *New Zealand Herald* Glass Plate Collection, Auckland Libraries, 1370-M010-4



The two waka taua, both named *Ngātokimatawhaorua*, at Hobson Beach, 6 February 1940. Captain William Hobson's pinnace has just reached shore. It was from this beach that Hobson and Captain Joseph Nias were escorted to meet with rangatira in 1840.

New Zealand Herald Glass Plate Collection, Auckland Libraries, 1370-671-11

various administrators and several of the missionaries who had witnessed the signing.

The tent itself, Drummond announced to his radio audience, was a fair representation of the original, which had been fashioned from spars and a large sail brought ashore from Nias's ship. Backed up against the flagstaff, the replica was decorated with ships' signal flags and housed a large table. Adding authenticity to the scene were numerous rangatira sitting and chatting around a low stage that reached out from the centre of the tent. Representing various hapū, the rangatira wore korowai and many were armed with period-appropriate weapons. Some had moko drawn on their faces. Completing the cast were several dozen actors playing European settlers. Beyond them a throng of spectators crammed into the few wooden bleachers that had been built, as the rest stood around the perimeter. A small number of soldiers, naval hands and civilians braved the displeasure of officials and found spots inside the roped-off lawn area. Lost in the excitement of the moment was the fate of two unfortunate men. The branch they had chosen to sit on, which overlooked the scene, broke under their combined weight, sending them crashing to the ground. Regrettably, both men ended up in hospital with broken ribs.



Published by Penguin, Penguin Random House

There's a Cure for This: A Memoir

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Engaging, eloquent and occasionally confronting, Emma Wehipeihana's memoir is comprised of a series of powerful essays about her journey as a Māori woman through both her early life and her time in medical school. Emerging as a doctor, she recounts the racism she and others experience and highlights the structural inequalities in New Zealand's health system. This book brims with candour, pathos, and wry humour.

Extract from 'Practical skills for the
zombie apocalypse' overleaf

I have always loved apocalypse fiction, and my favourite phase has always been the fall. I can never be bothered with the rebuilding civilisation bit; it's imagining the immediate aftermath that has always been the most interesting. I guess some people want to break things just to see what the pieces look like. I will be careful what I wish for in future, having inadvertently completed medical training just in time to see what happens when a country's health system tries to break.

One of the saddest things about entering the medical profession during the Covid-19 pandemic has been seeing my colleagues bleeding for a flawed system. The newest doctors in the hospitals don't know another normal and we have been struggling not to exsanguinate, wondering if it will always be like this. Black humour, combined with a robust constitution, has been protective for as long as healing has been called medicine, but the fissures inside the system are too often burrowing their way inside the people working here — into their mental and physical health, their relationships and, worst of all, their hope for the future.

But now we're into the rebuild and life just goes inexorably on; there's a new prime minister, the kid has another birthday, the family wants to get together sometime in September for a reunion, a handful of friends pass their exams, and a handful of others don't, someone I like gets onto the plastic surgery training programme and someone else is picking out bridesmaids' dresses in four different shades of green. In his essay 'Middlemore Is My Hospital', Glenn Colquhoun writes: 'There is a special love reserved for those who have been

comrades through such endeavours.' He name-checks a friend of his, who I recognise is now an emergency medicine consultant at Middlemore. The truth is that the best parts of this job are the relationships, and the most profound are those where you suffer for your aspirations together and succeed.

There are the patients, the people we point to in our earnest naïveté during interviews for medical school as our 'why'. Once we realise that our encounters with them affect us both, and that we're not immune to changing in response to those we set out to help, we end up entering a much more profound relationship with these people than simple doctor and patient.

Today a man tells me that Middlemore is the place people go to die. He reminds me of my old boss, who said he and his whānau hated my hospital: 'Everyone dies there.' Another patient starts crying from gratitude — 'for the care. Everyone has been so kind.' I think back to my first evening ward-calls shift, when the consultant on my team asked why I looked so traumatised. I explained the special horror of being alone, four wards under your care, being pulled in a million different directions by patient requests, nurse requests, the phone ringing, your own heart pounding in your ears.

Just lose yourself in one person, he said. Go and see the sickest patient you've been asked to review, and immerse yourself in that person. Everything has to fall away in that moment. It's a bit like meditation, actively slowing yourself down.

Fuck me if he wasn't right.

In the lull between calls from nurses I find excuses to go and visit my favourite patients. The retired judge with a deep tan that's actually jaundice from a cancer obstructing his biliary system. The kaumatua who cried because he was alone in

a hospital room without windows and he missed his wife. The gentleman-farmer dentist with Alzheimer's who knows he's forgetting things but can't remember what they are. The morbidly obese woman who is younger than Mum and is probably going to die soon but who has the most committed and dignified family around her, and has the sunniest smile. The tiny Polish fashion designer who is seventy- four now, shaking in her quilted bed jacket with her son, worried, by her side.

Sometimes being in this job feels like you're having an out-of- body experience. I remember sitting in a teaching session on face lifts, the plastic surgeon showing us photos of women's faces ageing. As the oldest 'junior' in the room, I could feel my face sliding off its scaffolding in real time. When patients come in with bowel obstructions caused by adhesions, I fancy that the scars from my previous abdominal operations are twisting in my body in response. The contrasts are obscene. You can be in the most unimaginably awful situation and get the urge to giggle like a kid at a funeral, just to release the tension. You hover above yourself and wonder how the fuck you ended up here.

But while you're looking into the void, the void is looking back — and medicine changes you. Aided by the numbness of moral injury or compassion fatigue or burnout or whatever you want to call having more work than hours in a day, you gain enough distance to watch yourself change. You are conditioned by the environment, the work and the pressure into becoming something different from what you were before.

The worst days seem worse than anything a human being who is, essentially, just doing a job, should be asked to endure. Telling your favourite patient they have cancer, apologising to whānau because you've reached the limit of what you can do for their

mum, keeping your shit together while someone says they were trying their best, they want to be well, but they have experienced so much trauma in their life that they can't stop smoking this week, even if it delays their operation.

But the best days exceed everything we hoped for, with our naïve aspirations to become doctors in the airless claustrophobia of medical school. On the bright good days, there's a chosen family of beautiful, brilliant people you can't believe accept you as one of them, and patients you feel confident you've done everything in your power to help. People at their worst, to whom you give your best, your hours that you should be in bed, your evaporating time with your family: somehow it makes sense and has meaning.

After two years, I don't think that the challenge is to preserve our humanity, as many people exhort us to do, but to find a way to cultivate optimism, and to find enough space in the madness to be there for each other. The intensity of the relationships formed in the acuity of a hospital is intoxicating. I love medicine so much because it's an endless source of people and stories and community, constantly changing.



Damon Salesa
An Indigenous Ocean:
Pacific Essays



Barbara Else
Laughing at the Dark:
A Memoir



Jeff Evans
Ngātokimatawhaorua:
The Biography of a Waka



Emma Wehipeihana (Espiner)
(Ngāti Tukorehe, Ngāti Porou)
There's a Cure for This:
A Memoir

Whakamihi to all the authors whose work has been recognised and honoured in this this year's Ockham New Zealand Book Awards. We encourage readers to seek their titles in bookstores and libraries around the motu. And we invite you to join us on Wednesday 15 May to hear the finalists reading from their books, and to celebrate the ultimate winners of the \$125,000 prize pool at the awards ceremony, 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 Matatuhi o Aotearoa