

Ockhams Sampler

Extracts from
the finalist books in the
Mary and Peter Biggs Award for Poetry
at the 2021 Ockham New Zealand
Book Awards

 OCKHAM

NEW ZEALAND

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AWARDS

Mary and Peter Biggs Award for Poetry



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 \$10,000.

Judging the poetry award in 2021 is convenor Briar Wood (Te Hikutu ki Hokianga, Ngāpuhi Nui), a teacher and 2018 Ockham New Zealand Book Awards finalist; teacher and award-winning poet and novelist Anne Kennedy; and professor of English at the University of Otago Jacob Edmond.

The judging panel says the poetry collections published in Aotearoa in 2020 show a wealth of exceptional and original work. "It's an exciting situation for New Zealand poetry. The four shortlisted collections are striking, all exhibiting an acute global consciousness in difficult times."

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

www.anzliterature.com

www.nzbookawards.nz/new-zealand-book-awards

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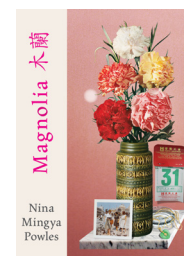


FUNKHAUS

Hinemoana Baker

Published by Victoria University Press

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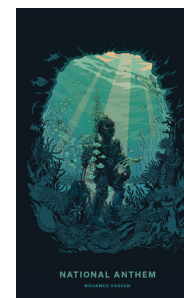


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THE SAVAGE COLONISER BOOK

Tusiata Avia

Published by Victoria University Press



Published by **Victoria University Press**

Funkhaus

JUDGES' COMMENTS

The language of *Funkhaus* pumps and flows as if the collection were a great red heart. Hinemoana Baker's poems reference Sylvia Plath, Wi Parata, aunties, and P.J. Harvey. Vacuum cleaners, dogs, and polaroids also appear in imaginative ways. The book's shifts in subject matter, migratory metaphors and language encompass satirical political poetry, tender love lyrics and memorable street tunes. Like the emanations from the radio station of the title, these poetry messages travel; from Lake Geneva to Waitangi, Berlin to Ihumātao, *Funkhaus* transmits an unshakable array of emotions in rhythmic form.

Poems overleaf

MOTHER

Mother is a north wind and she stops the trembling.
Mother has hands of flax and butter.
Linseed and two-stroke, all the same
we hear the rain try and squall.

Mother is Ūkaipō and East Coast.
She is not north this early morning.
Feet of cause and effect, feet of bridges.
All of the mother around us, all of the mother
under and above us: with her we feel un-clumsy and on-shore.

The adzed and hand-smoothened
mother of play, of katakata, of laugh.
Mother of church and kindergarten, of live and die.
Mother of born. She calls me dreamer, knee-kicker, nail-biter
6 calls me in to eat. My feet are a plant, in real life too.
Whakataka te hau, kia hii ake ana te atakura.

Mother oh Mother, now no one can make
a non-human object out of me! Mother
oh Mother, we have half a bright red hour
we have the whole bled-out night through.

If you have to be diving, Mother, be deep under
with a good heavy roof of ocean on you, good engineering.
Mother of Language and Mother of Land.
Flaxfuls of seed and a hand in your hand.

IF I HAD TO SING

I have no idea what to call this rebirth
and yet I'm here to name it
to feed the new flame

with wood from the old.
Language is a flute, a lily,
a chair overbalancing,

a church we teeter
on the threshold of.
There are places where

they harvest water from the air –
drink fog from a glass then overnight
hang the rag back on the bayonet.

Does a thing which is reborn
need to have died?
All those cities still live

in my mirrors, they rise
and fall again with the sun's
rounds, the way the planet

carves its own seismic
trench in the solar system.
The spring charges

and recharges its river system
while on the columns of our lives
press unimaginable stresses.

Hold me up now, as I do you.
Sing, and steady me under
your strong, sure feet.

NARCISSIST ADVICE COLUMN

Pepper blacks the pan so never
Shake it near me, wait
For the flagrant animation
In my bed base
In mountain situations
Sleep swaddled, wake ecstatic

My frantic menus in your mind
I taste of them all
Refuse to refuse me
Waste your time on my errands
Squeeze your lime
On my lemons

Turn up wearing
The whole bird not just the feathers

DECEMBER

December make me forget May.
Walk with me in summer mist under power lines
where the loud tūi bells out over the valley.
December I dream about you with your harbour
face in your sunshine hands.

Here we go again writing to each other, December.
On the other side of the aisle you lied about your list.
Mine was all porridge and salted fish, yours
was machetes and Christmas ornaments
drilled with holes and filled with salt.

December, in August the Hutt River flooded but
not for long enough. August went clucking off with a bottle.
In September you walked lightly off the ferry into a drift of soft night-rain.
In this yellow square of light above Waiteata
I am a dark bird opening and closing its beak.

Magnolia 木蘭

Nina
Mingya
Powles



Published by Seraph Press

Magnolia 木蘭

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Magnolia 木蘭 grows and blooms through mother-daughter conversations across generations, cultures and languages. Seeking to understand her place in the world, a young writer journeys from New Zealand to China, England to Malaysia, from film to contemporary art, and from English to Mandarin, Hakka and Māori. Subtly but insistently exploding prejudices and expectations, Nina Mingya Powles presents a poetic mosaic that more than lives up to the brilliant elegance, or *mingya* 明雅, promised by her Chinese name.

Extract overleaf

from Field notes on a downpour

一

The first character of my mother's name, 雯 wén, is made of rain 雨 and language 文. According to my dictionary, together they mean "multicoloured clouds" or "cloud tints".

There are so many things I am trying to hold together. I write them down each day to stop them from slipping. Mouthfuls of rain, the blue undersides of clouds, her hydrangeas in the dark.

Also in the dictionary under "wen":

文 *language, character, script*

温 *warm*

吻 *lips*

纹 *lines, veins/cracks in glassware or jade*

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二

I read an article about a boy in China whose name contained such a rare, ancient character (half dragon, half sky) that it no longer existed anywhere except when written down by hand. The computer could not print his name.

There is always something disappearing here. The skyline goes dark at 10.30 p.m. Old buildings are crushed to pieces and replaced by shopping malls. The subway map rewrites itself at night.

Not long after we met I learned the word 霓虹, neon, which is both a type of light and a type of memory.

霓:

a secondary rainbow

the name of a species of Japanese cicada

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三

In order to make learning Mandarin easier, I started to see the characters as objects I could collect and keep close to me.

魔 (mó), spoken like a murmur, an evil spirit or demon.

One night you said my name in the dark and it came out like a ghost
鬼 from between two trees 林. A ghost that rhymes with *a path*
between rice fields which rhymes with *a piece of steamed bread* which
rhymes with *paralysis of one side of the body* which rhymes with *thin*
blood vessels.

In June the cicadas were so loud we thought the trees would swallow
us whole.

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四

It was the summer of the watermelons. They were everywhere,
tumbling out of fruit shops all along the footpath. The ripest ones
split open in the gutters.

Every day there is another downpour.

More than a hundred characters share the same sound.

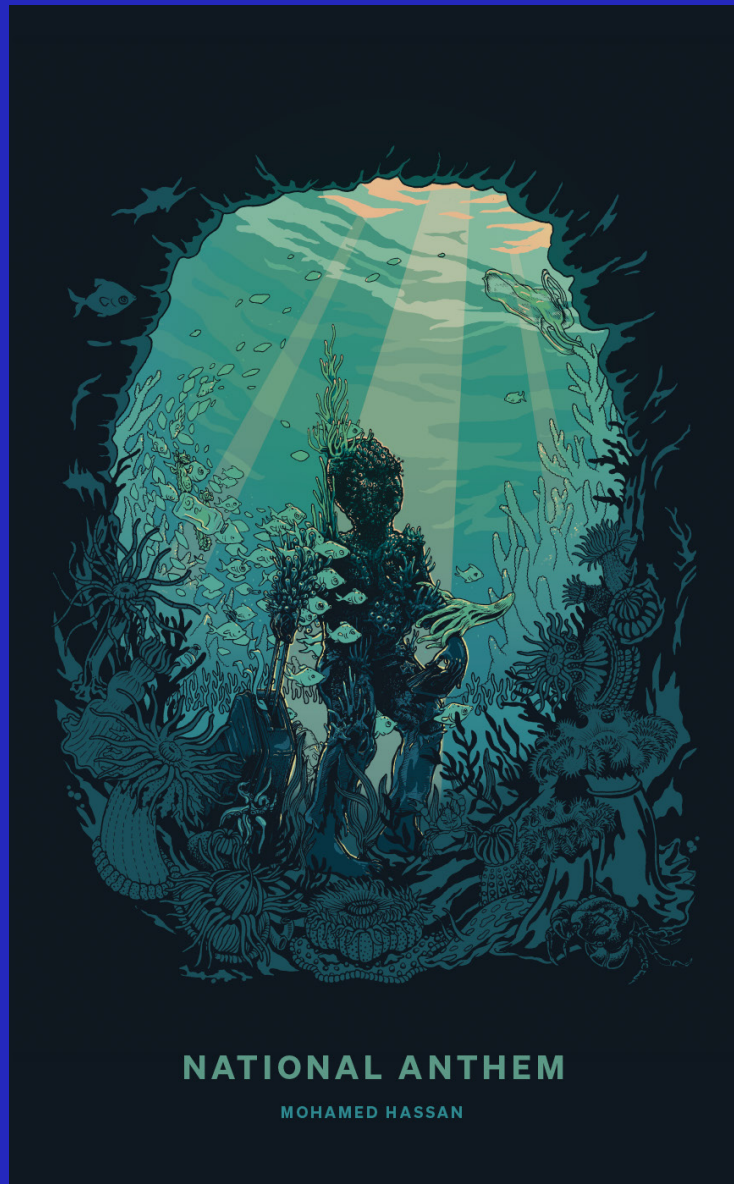
“zong”:

总 *assemble, put together / always*

踪 *footprint, trace*

翱 *the uneven flight of a bird*

In the morning outside your apartment, the wet leaves from last
night's rain had already been swept away.



Published by **Dead Bird Books**

National Anthem

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Mohamed Hassan shapes the emotional outpouring of performance and the fast footwork of slam into perfectly timed poems of political commentary, personal awareness and metaphorical virtuosity. Refusing the easy refrains of nationalism, *National Anthem* syncopates family history, displacement and personal trauma with a devastating commentary on racism's most ugly manifestations. It mixes compromise and commitment, Egypt and Aotearoa, English and Arabic, laughter and anger, skepticism and love to sound out a new beat for poetry in this country and beyond.

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Poems overleaf

Office Christmas party

All my life I've wanted to fit in and never have
like a hippopotamus at an office Christmas party
who doesn't drink for religious reasons

no one knows what to do with me
small talk feels like root canal
I am bored by my own existence

waking up a premature birth
work a doomsday bunker
I didn't choose to survive with you people

no, I didn't watch the rugby
no, I don't care about your boat
or your children

those who really know me call me asshole
my politeness an act of professional avoidance
a canary singing in my throat

boredom has paved me into the darkest places
it is more satisfying to fantasise
unspeakable violence against myself and others
than fend this gravity alone

here's what none of the pamphlets
at the university health clinic tell you:

the path of least resistance is self-loathing

you can't see your value when the lights are out

if you hold everyone at arm's length
you never have to apologise

or ask for help

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Bury me

All of my recurring dreams
take place in my grandfather's flat

they hang around with the ghosts
sticking to the shelves

they drip from the long neon bulbs

my dad hung me out to dry
in front of the whole family

said I hadn't been raised right

I cried because I wanted Amr's rocket ship
and not my blue sippy cup

I don't know why this still lives here
22 years after my grandfather died

he's still there framed next to the windowsill
the armchair and laptop and my grandmother's

voice

we taught her how to play *Fayza Ahmed*
on YouTube and abandoned her frantically

trying to shut it down when his song came on

she pressed all the keys and then sat
in her tears until one of us showed up

when the Lebanese talk of love they say
a prayer to never have to bury the one you love

to'borny

that they should be the one to dig your grave
and plant flowers and live with the memory

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you can't discard a loss the way you can
a birthday gift or a broken laptop

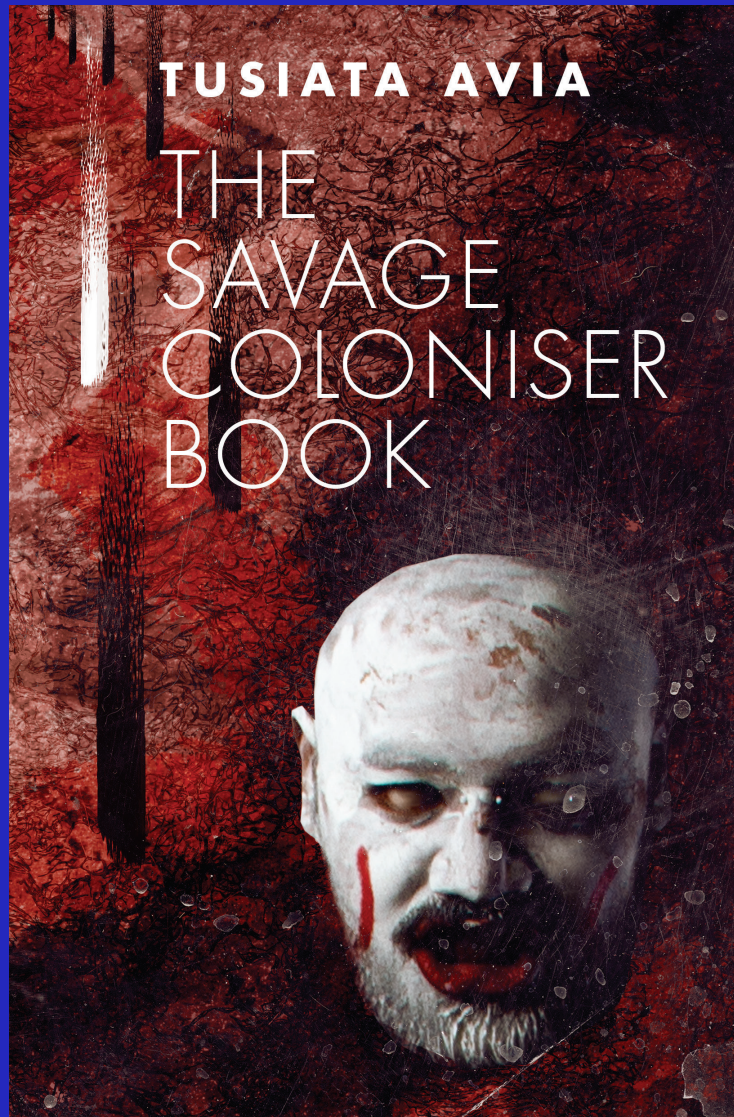
it lives with you, sleeps in the spare room
by the laundry and occasionally eats your food

I want to never lose my parents
but find a loss like that in someone

a love that sears into your lungs and lingers
if you draw the short straw and not die first

When they ask you where you are (really) from

Tell them
you are an unrequited pilgrim
two parallel lives that never touch
a whisper or a window
to what your country could be
if only it opened its arms
and took you whole



Published by **Victoria University Press**

The Savage Coloniser Book

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Tusiata Avia turns her vociferous intellect and satirical vehemence to recording recent events and finds a base space for poetry in which to pick up the pieces and keep on moving. While furiously rejecting the destructive legacies of colonialism, her poems acknowledge that contradictions live at the centre of contemporary commitments. From garrulously hilarious observations to expressions of profound grief, the collection activates her insights, reforming our consciousness of what constitutes poetry as she goes.

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Poems overleaf

250th anniversary of James Cook's arrival in New Zealand

Hey James,
yeah, you
in the white wig
in that big *Endeavour*
sailing the blue, blue water
like a big arsehole
FUCK YOU, BITCH.

James,
I heard someone
shoved a knife
right up
into the gap between
your white ribs
at Kealakekua Bay.
I'm gonna go there
make a big Makahiki luau
cook a white pig
feed it to the dogs
and FUCK YOU UP, BITCH.

Hey James,
it's us.
These days
we're driving round
in SUVs
looking for ya
or white men like you
who might be thieves
or rapists

or kidnapers
or murderers
yeah, or any of your descendants
or any of your incarnations
cos, you know
ay, bitch?
We're gonna FUCK YOU UP.

Tonight, James,
it's me
Lani, Danielle
and a car full of brown girls
we find you
on the corner
of the Justice Precinct.

You've got another woman
in a headlock
and I've got my father's
pig-hunting knife
in my fist
and we're coming to get you
sailing round
in your *Resolution*
your *Friendship*
your *Discovery*
and your fucking *Freelove*.

Watch your ribs, James
cos, I'm coming with
Kalaniōpu'u
Kānekapōlei
Kana'ina
Keawe'ōpala
Kūka'ilimoku

who is a god
and Nua'a
who is king with a knife.

And then
James,
then
we're gonna
FUCK.
YOU.
UP.
FOR.
GOOD.
BITCH.

BLM

I'm looking straight into the camera
My ancestors standing behind me
I'm holding my hands in my pockets
I'm holding my knee on his neck

My ancestors standing behind me
White knights in a long line behind me
I'm holding my knee on his neck
This is the way that we do it

White knights in a long line behind me
Shout, *Look into the camera with pride*
This is the way that we do it
This is your God-given right

Look into the camera with pride
Kneel like a prayer full of lynching
This is my God-given right
Crushing the head of the black man

Kneel like a prayer full of lynching
Behold the power of God
Crushing the head of the black man
This is my God-given white

Behold the power of God
Holding my hands in my pockets
Ancestors kneeling to join me
We're looking straight into the camera.



Hinemoana Baker
Funkhaus



Nina Mingya Powles
Magnolia 木蘭



Mohamed Hassan
National Anthem



Tusiata Avia
The Savage Coloniser Book

Join us at the **Ockham New Zealand Book Awards** ceremony on 12 May, during the Auckland Writers Festival, to hear readings from all the shortlisted books, and the winners announced. And seek out these fantastic books in bookstores and libraries countrywide.



The Ockham 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 Mātātahi o Aotearoa