

## LISA SAMUELS / Aotearoa Experiments

This section presents four poets—Ya-Wen Ho, David Kārena-Holmes, Stephanie Christie, and Kelly Malone—who live in Aotearoa/New Zealand and write poetry one might call experimental. The topical and formal directions of their poems include history (the now as it's embedded in other temporal strata), hereeness (multiple and simultaneous), text-weave, line patterns, and ontological limit: what the self can make and stand for.

Ya-Wen Ho conveys a translingual sense of contingency, presentness, closeness, and distance. The difference between being “here” and being “elsewhere” marks any margin. In Ho's poem, the here is both local and planetary: the term “Jafa” is a derogatory term for Aucklanders (“Just Another Fucking Aucklander”) used by some who don't live in its principal city, while anywhere there might be a “Mother,” or her signage. Like migrating language birds, Ho's poem forms are a journeying syllabary, pseudo-phonetic English reinterpreted as syllabic (sound-ideogram) Mandarin then translated semantically into English again.

David Kārena-Holmes's *From the Antipodes* recalibrates allusion: occidental literature opens up to include some of the languages, topography, distinct flora and fauna of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Kārena-Holmes brings Dante to Aotearoa, making a new literary whakapapa (family tree), making room for myths of Māori origin and hemispheric placement alongside myths of occidental “sacred” text: “(i.e. Dante, with Virgil's ghost) clambers (finding himself / now ascending) at first on the ‘ladder’ provided by / the hairy (n.b. pūhuru = ‘hairy’) / legs of the (now inverted) Lucifer.”

Stephanie Christie's poem “Mag[net]ic” transacts a subject made to “gasp illegally” in the grips of power, vocabulary, desire, and geo-events in the “shaky” isles. As with Kelly Malone's text-weaves, the transacted affect of the occidental and Oceania subject is uppermost. Both writers are conscious of their postcolonial situatedness, what it means to put together something resembling a self in that situation. For Christie, the poetic charge is always brimming with its potential for breakage at the level of line, image, nation, ecology, and self, and it's human glue that (barely) holds each suture together.

In Kelly Malone's text-weaves, self-writing is stripped of its continuities and turned into plaits resembling the Māori kete (woven basket). Of her developing tracking weave, Malone writes “I took seven years of this writing in exercise books to the

rubbish dump last year before moving. There were about 30 plus exercise books filled with writing-dross. Here, weaving strips of these pages is a way of grafting a stripped back self, recouping, reconstructing, a self expressed in language and discarded."

The performed contingency of Kelly Malone's text-weaves is part of a re-doable that characterizes these poetry selections as well as one topic of postcolonial Oceania culture. These four poets are also mentioned in my forthcoming essay "Six types of poetry experiment in Aotearoa/New Zealand" (Tinfish), where I discuss experimentalism and the subjective correlative, which neither stabilizes a paraphraseable meaning as a deliverable consequence of a poem nor conjures a consistently repeatable experience across different readers or even for the same reader at different times. These subjectivities are both the mirror of the poem's composition—in terms of place, techne, context, authorship—and its moving reflection in reading's idiolectical connections and contexts. I think we see some of those mirrors shining in these works from Aotearoa, the Land of the Long White Cloud.