

Sonnet for a young woman and her skin  
(for Katerina)

Those clouds passing now over Tawhirirangi,  
where they dissolve, I can see Tawhaki's vines appearing.  
And who is that, if not Punga in the distance,  
plummeting out of the sky like a meteor?

Where pōhutukawa buries his knuckles in the soil  
and beyond, there, where the sea opens and closes,  
I swear I see footsteps. Skin too is unreliable.  
Fantails bob every day between it and the heart.

These words passing now back and forth:  
me asking questions, you answering them;  
is that all that is said between us?

One day they will grow tired and unravel.  
One day that child waiting in shadow will  
stumble out into the light and be given voice.

He mōteatea mō tētahi taitamāhine e whātoro ana tōna kiri  
(mō Katerina)

Ēra tōmairangi e tuturu nei ki Tawhirirangi,  
ka memeha, ka puta ngā aka o Tāwhaki.  
Ka puta ko Punga, he matakōkiri.

Kei raro i te tumu o Pōhutukawa,  
kei raro i te wahapu o te moana,  
he kaupae e haere iho ai.

He uhi noa nō te kikokiko. Ka rere te tīrairaka,  
mai i te kiri ki te ngākau, mai i te ngākau ki te kiri.

Ēnei kupu i waenga i a tāua,  
he rārangi pātai, he rārangi whakautu,  
koinā ērā? koinā noa?

Ka pahemo rātou ka puta te ngaro  
e noho ana i te ata, hei waiata ko te manu,  
hei waiata ko te manu e.

Note: The Māori world is divided into a number of overworlds and underworlds. Fantails are thought to carry messages between them. Tāwhaki is a Demi-god renown for climbing into the sky on vines. Punga is the father of misshapen things. He was famously cast out of the sixth heaven.