



essa may ranapiri

## *Alba and the atua*

**Dear Alba**

what runs through this broken engine  
what spat up out of Albion  
what whakapapa gets cross-wired  
the viking anachronistically clicks  
on the image of themselves  
helmet adorned with horns  
two for each devil on their back  
eagle wings eagle wings eagle wings  
these wings turn into a bird  
or seraphim so many-eyed  
and many-wheeled  
building their own way through the water  
how meat did we have to make of life to get here?  
fish and boar and other beasts  
my own mythology of segmented flesh  
strike up conversation in the savagery of it  
from where I'm standing I can see all the tongues  
that the English have cut out  
did you bagpipe along to the gargling

blood pooling in the cavities of language  
when it dries you have a new red paint job  
making everything brand new for the next four seasons  
a breath that takes the ashes out  
what weapon did they give you  
what mascot-ed populace  
the first of you to come here  
were on the endeavour  
with that one that the k̄anaka maoli  
would turn cooked  
a part of me wished this line of blood never happened  
look at how much it spilled  
do I turn myself inside out  
screaming peace or war ad nauseum?  
but it looks like you decided  
the alba in albion the war machine  
chugging along  
let me lie inside it and fall asleep to  
its rumbling  
praying that the highlands hadn't been  
so utterly compromised  
that you never had to leave

## A Shadow or a Snake

(after 'Address to the Devil' by Robert Burns)

did the devil exist before you lot got here?

the fish of Māui had ātua with their own

ways of seeing the world

of being the world

but none to mark so utterly with horns

before the Devil came

Whiro got to hang out in the dark

like night-time was something completely natural to be in

then a story came

from Christian mouths

that turned us in Whiro's stomach

evil was uttered over their sleeping form

when they arose again

the creatures in the dirt took on a new meaning

and we learnt to carve the word

evil into the night-sky

## Tartan

when I found the words for who I was  
or what it is I am  
there was a knife-edge glint on the word woman  
transformed in the light of the sun  
just to see what it would be like  
I started trying on  
my best friend's skirts  
one was the colour of wet hair in a storm  
the other a baby's blue room  
freshly gendered  
I slipped one up over skinny jeans  
*some grotesque parody of early 2000s fashion*  
*a preschool child trying on their parents' make-up*  
but if it was a kilt?

someone shares a picture of Oscar Isaac on twitter  
he's wearing a suit jacket with a grey kilt  
there is no tartan

the kilt and the skirt  
or the skirt and the piupiu  
would they all get the same  
reaction  
from men at the service station?

I look up Gunn tartan on Google  
there are so many possible options  
that I'm overwhelmed  
I save as a dream of who I was

piupiu rustling around my hips  
as I swing the poi  
as I whir myself into being  
lain on the ground as my mother wraps me in  
tartan secures me in the fabric  
would these moments have  
settled my disturbed stomach?

the only Gunn I've met  
a man who gave me a Marvin the Martian  
bike helmet for my ninth birthday  
the house smelling of Christmas pies  
or was it the slow turning of life into death?  
his funeral was the first I attended  
the first time I learnt that celebration could  
look like a tear trailing down the cheek  
bloodshot eyes trying to see where he had gone  
I don't remember anyone wearing tartan at the ceremony  
nothing of that line made it into the church  
the original colours have all been lost anyway  
the sticks used to test the threads rotting  
in the highland mud

## Tangaroa at the Loch

Tangaroa watches his moko raise  
their head above the water  
like a finger breaking  
through a black line

the taniwha of the loch is cautious  
concerned about more bad flash photography  
still feels a kind of way about that first photo  
monochrome and grain  
when the monster knows there is no one  
except for  
the foreign sea  
sitting in the grass  
they will climb up onto the land like a seal  
all oily rainbow and flippers  
bounding like a dog  
to visit the carvings the long dead Picts  
left to remind us  
of their existence



Nessy thinks about crossing the short distance to  
their koro  
how easy it would be to bound  
that gap between  
but something stops them

and Tangaroa just watches with tears in his eyes  
he has had time for some of his moko  
oceans of it  
but he never got to establish a proper relationship with  
this lochness monster  
the hours of staring at a screen and not pressing send  
and the days of not even thinking about it  
how long had it been?  
was it before Tangaroa was even Tangaroa  
Tagaloa perhaps  
when the domain of water meant everything