



***English 204:
Pacific Literature in
English***

**Course Outline
Semester I, 2017**

***KIA ORA, TALOFA LAVA, BULA VINAKA, MALO E LELEI, KIORANA,
FAKALOFA LAHI ATU, WARM PACIFIC GREETINGS!***

‘Naming Myself’

Tusitala
Teller of tales
That I never heard
Till yesterday
Born away
For another life

Today
The tale I tell
Is theirs
And yours
A way of seeking
Some more of
Sa Moa
Of my
Sacred centre

Today
The tale I tell
Will book its way
Through
Tonged histories
Sanctioned mysteries
Spaces of silence
Timeless lives

Tala tusi
Tell the book
Word the spirit of brown
In theory
In creativity
We make our sound
Renowned¹

Class Times

Lectures: TUES 2-4 PM, HUMAN SCIENCES NORTH, 370

Tutorials: TUT 1: TUES 5-6PM, ARTS 1, 210
TUT 2: THUR 2-3PM, HUMAN SCIENCE EAST, 704

Teaching Staff

Convenor, Lecturer, Tutor: Associate Professor Selina Tusitala Marsh, s.marsh@auckland.ac.nz, office hours: By Appointment

Course Content/Aims/Outcomes

The course considers recent Pacific literature written in English by authors whose work is characterised by multiple crossings of cultural, political, gendered and geographical borders—crossings particularly acute for writers who are connected in some way to genealogical and ancestral ties to Maori and Pacific communities, but write from other places.

Students will learn how to contextualise and critique Pacific creative writing and performance.

There are three genres: Poetry, Young Adult Fiction, and Short Story. Six texts are required for this course and study of all genres are required to fulfil assessment criteria:

- 1) Poetry: *Mauri Ola: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English, Mauri Ola II*. (Eds, Albert Wendt, Reina Whaitiri, Robert Sullivan, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010). Also available via Library: http://search.alexanderstreet.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C2402011#page/20/mode/1/chapter/bibliographic_entity|document|2402019
- 2) Young Adult Fiction: Trilogy by Lani Wendt Young
 - I. *The Covenant Keeper*, Auckland, N.Z.: L.Wendt Young, 2011. See <http://www.amazon.com/Telesa-Covenant-Keeper-Series-Book-ebook/dp/B005I3WD8Q>
 - II. *When Water Burns*, Auckland, N.Z.: L. Wendt Young, 2012. [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B008F6CLY4/ref=series_rw_dp_sw]
 - III. *The Bone Bearer*, Tauranga, N.Z. Lani Wendt Young: Kale Press, 2013. [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00DM9L6FO/ref=series_rw_dp_sw]

Optional Extra: *I Am Daniel Tahi*, Auckland, N.Z.: Lani Wendt Young, 2012.

- 3) Short Stories: *Black Ice Matter*. Gina Cole, Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2016.
- 4) Short Stories: *Niu Voices*. (Ed. Selina Tusitala Marsh. Wellington, N.Z. : Huia, 2006), available online via library at:

http://search.alexanderstreet.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C2696339#page/75/mode/1/chapter/bibliographic_entity|document|2696379

All core texts have been placed on Short Loan in the Library. Both *Mauri Ola* and *Niu Voices* are available online. Black Ice can be order via Huia Publishers website or

Recommended readings will culturally, politically and theoretically contextualise these works. All students are expected to read these materials.

Lectures are text-centred and used alongside the use of the internet, audio-visual material and performance to enhance reading engagement. Students are encouraged to develop a critical approach that synthesises Pacific-infused practises and aesthetic concerns (inherent in orature, performance, and a communal ethos) alongside conventional tools of literary analysis.

To this end, students will consider the following questions:

- What are the **distinct developments and features of Pacific literature** in New Zealand, and other regions of the Pacific?
- In what ways does this literature **reflect and expand wider global trends in diasporic writing**?
- How and why have writers **reframed their Pacific identities**?
- How and why have writers **reflected, challenged, and redefined stereotypes** about their communities?
- How and why do they **negotiate social and cultural tensions** within and between their own communities?

Assoc. Prof Tusitala Marsh will lecture on all material.

Pacific Literature (204) complements **Global Literatures (112)**, **New Zealand Literature (221; 355)** and is an appropriate companion to **Novels from the Post Colonial World (325)**; **African and Caribbean Literature (346)** and **The Novel, the Native and the New (308)**. It provides an excellent pathway towards the post graduate courses **Pacific Poetry (700)**, **Postcolonial Literary Studies (702)** and serves as a foundational course for anyone interested in pursuing **Maori, Pacific** or **Postcolonial Literature** as a research topic for post graduate work.

ASSESSMENT BREAKDOWN

60% Coursework:

Assignment 1: Close Reading (15%)

Assignment 2: Seminar (15%)

Assignment 3: Essay (30%)

40% Exam:

Exam: 2 Essays in 2 hours (worth 20% each totalling 40%)

• **ASSIGNMENT 1: 15% Close Reading (800 words) DUE: Fri 7 April**

Designed to develop close reading skills of poetry, based on both critical and creative responses, in order to extract a Pacific-specific concept, principle, ethos, or idea.

- **Write a 1,000 word close reading** of one poem from *Mauri Ola* anthology. See Guides 1 & 2 at the back of this document for useful guides on how to close read a poem.
- **Answer the question:** What is one Pacific-specific concept, principle, ethos, or idea addressed by this poem?

• **ASSIGNMENT 2: 15% 'Teu le Va: Poetry for the Peeps' Seminar, Write Up (800 words) DUE: During Week 6 Lecture and Tutorial times**

Designed to get you to think about how to creatively 'nurture the spaces' ('teu le va') between the poem and its receivers.

- Take the poem and the Pacific-specific concept, principle, ethos, or idea you identified in Assignment 1: Close Reading and re-present it *creatively* in a public space conducive to receiving public responses.
- Present a 5-10 minute seminar on your event/activity to the class.
- Hand in Write Up at the end of your Seminar to Selina.

Event/Activity

Some ideas include:

- a performance (reading/dance/mime/magic act etc) with recorded public responses (photos, on paper, on film, reenacted in class, audio etc)
- a questionnaire distributed (in person, via social media etc) with collated answers to present to the class
- a multimedia response (a sculptor, painting, sketch) along with viewer feedback
- a public performance of some sort (poetry released in helium balloons; traffic light demonstration)
- graffiti, responses recorded
- a public display of the poem, responses recorded
- a composed song, released somehow
- a letter to the Editor, responses included
- a filmed street magic show

Remember, your 'Teu le Va: Poetry for the Peeps' event/activity should be connected somehow/way/shape and form to the Pacific-specific concept, principle, ethos, or idea you identified in Assignment 1.

Write Up

- You must include a record of the public's response to your event/activity.

Your write up must answer these 2 questions (800 words):

1. How and why did you publically re-present the poem's Pacific-specific concept, principle, ethos, or idea in the form you chose?
2. To what degree do you think you succeeded in 'nurturing the spaces' between the poem and its receivers?

After your presentation there will be a question and answer time with the class.
(NB: You may do Poetry for the exam, but not the same poet/poem)

ASSIGNMENT 2 (30%) 1,500 word Essay: Students are to conduct a sustained exploration and analysis of text/s informed by ideas contained in at least 2 required readings.

In Week 6 you will be given a selection of quotations from which to construct an essay question that will be discussed with me.

Essay Instruction: Select a quote and formulate an essay question. Ensure there is a line of argument in which you can draw on at least 2 readings. Self-reflexively position your critical focus and explore aspects of interest in your chosen text.

- **EITHER POETRY: a selection of poems (2-4);**
- **or YOUNG ADULT FICTION: a novel/s;**
- **or FICTION: OR two (or more) short stories**

Restrictions on Duplication of Material

You must not repeat any work or writer selected for the first or second assignment for the third assignment.

EXAM: you may *NOT* do the genre in Ass. 3 for your Exam. That is, if you select POETRY for your Essay, you may not do POETRY for the exam; if you select YOUNG ADULT FICTION for the Essay you may not do YOUNG ADULT FICTION for the Exam. So, throughout the course you will cover ALL 3 genres (Coursework and Exam).

IMPORTANT ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION INFORMATION

English Policy on Extensions and Late work

LATE WORK WITHOUT AN EXTENSION WILL NOT BE MARKED.

English requires the timely submission of all coursework.

If you are unable to hand in an assignment by the due date, you must put your case for an extension to the convenor; if an extension is granted, you must attach to your submitted essay EITHER an Extension Request Form bearing the new submission date and signature of the staff member, OR a document such as an email from the staff member. Extensions will only be granted for compelling reasons, such as illness, or other unforeseen emergencies, and a Doctor's certificate (or equivalent) must be provided to the staff member concerned. An extension must be requested in advance of the due date for the assignment, unless there is a genuine cause preventing this, in which case the extension should be sought as soon as is practicable after the due date. Any work handed in late without an extension will not be marked.

What this means: Coursework (without approved extensions) recorded as 'received' after the due date will be designated 'late' and will not be marked.

The only way to ensure your essay is recorded as 'received' on the due date is to submit the essay by 4pm that day. The office closes shortly afterwards.

Communicate **early with your tutor** and Convenor if you foresee any issue with the set deadlines. Having multiple deadlines due on the same date is an issue of time management and not cause for an extension.

All University assignments now require barcoded coversheets when submitted. Instructions on how to generate a coversheet can be found under 'Resources' in Cecil for 204. You will still hand in and collect your assignments at the level 3 reception, Arts1 Building. The department cannot accept assignments without this barcoded coversheet.

• EXAM (2 X 20% Essays = 40%) 2 hours

2 essay questions (approx 1000 words) worth 20% each, prompted by a selection of quotes. You must use two different genres for each Exam question. Do not repeat *material* used in any Assignment – you will be awarded a zero. Do not examine the genre used for Assignment 3 – you will be awarded a zero. Each question within the Exam must cover a different genre. So, the genre covered in Assignment 3, and both Exam questions should cover all three genres: Poetry, Young Adult Fiction and Short Fiction.



LECTURE SCHEDULE

CONVENOR/TUTOR:
Assoc. Prof. Selina
Tusitala Marsh

Room 647, Arts 1
s.marsh@auckland.ac.
nz

ENGLISH 204:
PACIFIC
LITERATURE
SEM 1 2017

TUT 1: TUES 5-6PM
ARTS 1, 210

TUT 2: THUR 2-3PM
HUM SCI EAST, 704

TIME:
TUES 2-4 pm

PLACE:
HUMAN
SCIENCES
NORTH,
370

Week	Date (lectures in red)	Topic	Reading
1	6 Mar – 7 Mar	Whose stories? Whose perspectives? Course overview, Pasifika pedagogy, epistemology, class expectations, assessment, resources English Seminar: Rangatira: Interrogating Points of View, Novelist Dr Paula Morris, Pat Hannon Rm Arts 2, 501, 4.30pm	Teaiwa Smith
2	13 Mar – 14 Mar	POETRY: MAURI OLA TUT 1 Knowing and Doing	Tusitala Marsh Wendt TUTORIALS BEGIN, 10 IN TOTAL
3	20 Mar – 21 Mar	POETRY: MAURI OLA GUEST POET: FRANKIE MCMILLAN How do I close read a poem? TUT 2	Keown Teaiwa
4	27 Mar – 28 Mar	FIELD TRIP: YUKI KIHARA	Hau'ofa Treagus

	29 Mar LOUNGE READING # 54, 5.30pm, Black Friars...	'DER PAPALAGI' EXHIBITION	Hereniko/Allen
		TUT 3	
5	3 Apr - 4 Apr 'WORD THE SPIRIT OF BROWN' ASS. 1, DUE: FRI 7 APRIL CLOSE READING	POETRY: MAURI OLA TUT 4	Trask Raymond
6	10 Apr - 11 Apr 'TEU LE VA: POETRY FOR THE PEEPS' ASS. 2, DUE: IN-CLASS (11 April Lecture and Tutorial) SEMINARS + WRITE UP 12 Apr LOUNGE READING # 55, 5.30pm MID SEM BREAK EASTER/ANZAC	SEMINARS TUT 5	Wendt Tamaira Taouma ASS. 3 ESSAY QUOTATIONS DISTRIBUTED
7	1 May - 2 May	Y/A FICTION TRILOGY TELESA TUT 6: DISCUSS YOUR ESSAY QUOTE AND QUESTION	Wendt Young Sinavaiana- Gabbard
8	8 May - 9 May	Y/A FICTION TRILOGY WHEN WATER BURNS/ THE BONE BEARER TUT 7	Suali'i Subramani
9	15 May - 16 May	SHORT FICTION BLACK ICE MATTER	Listen: Book Review

TUT 8

10	22 May – 23 May	SHORT FICTION BLACK ICE MATTER AUTHOR VISIT: GINA COLE	Hall and Kauanui Macpherson Dunsford
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TUT 9

11	29 May – 30 May 31 May LOUNGE READING # 56, 5.30pm	SHORT FICTION NIU VOICES TUT 10 (FINAL) DISCUSS YOUR ESSAY QUOTE AND QUESTION	Te Punga Somerville Tawake
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12	5 June – 6 June	SHORT FICTION NIU VOICES
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**‘IN THEORY, IN
CREATIVITY, WE
MAKE OUR SOUND
RENOWNED’**

**ASS. 3 DUE: FRI 9
JUNE, 3PM**

ESSAY

Exam Prep
Choc-Fest
Evaluations



*This schedule may be subject to
change*

WEEKLY READING

Students are expected to keep up with all readings allocated that week. Each week, we will (in pairs, then as a class), collaboratively construct mind maps of the set articles. You will also be required to pose a question based on the reading to the class.

Week 1: All in the waka together – collaborative learning and Indigenous Research Methodologies

Teresia Teaiwa, “The Classroom as a Metaphorical Canoe”

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.486.843&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. "Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory" *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London, New York and Dunedin: Zed Books Ltd and University of Otago Press, 1999. 19-41.

Week 2: A New Oceania: Scoping the Field

Tusitala Marsh, Selina. 'Nafanua and the New World': Pasifika's Writing of Niu Zealand', *A History of New Zealand Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/a-history-of-new-zealand-literature/nafanua-and-the-new-world-pasifikas-writing-of-niu-zealand/16264C3CE1F060DC55974E50CFEB7C08>

Wendt, Albert. "Towards a New Oceania"
<https://ethnc3990.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/wendt-toward-a-new-oceania.pdf>

Week 3: Pacific Literature and Reading Critically

Keown, Michelle. 'Introduction', *Pacific Islands Writing: The Postcolonial Literatures of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Oceania*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Teaiwa, Teresia. "What Remains to be Seen: Reclaiming the Visual Roots of Pacific Literature"
http://www.jstor.org/stable/25704471?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Background Viewing:

A New Oceania (Dir. Shirley Horrocks)

View: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBsPg6XYMBg>

Week 4: How We See

Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands"
<http://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/handle/10125/12960/v6n1-148-161-dialogue.pdf?sequence=1>

(or: *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*. Eds. E. Waddell, V. Naidu & E. Hau'ofa. Suva: USP, 1993. 2-16.)

Mandy Treagus, 'Yuki Kihara's 'Culture for Sale' and the History of Pacific Cultural Performance'. Canvas pdf under FILES.

Vilsoni Hereniko: Review of *Mauri Ola*:
<http://www.landfallreview.com/showing-us-around-oceania/>

Chad Allen: Review of *Mauri Ola: Sing: Poetry from the Indigenous Americas* ed. by Allison Adelle Hedge Coke, and: *Mauri Ola: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English: Whetu Moana II* (review)

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/505408/summary>

Background Reading:

Selina Tusitala Marsh, "Teaching Pacific Literature"

<http://www.review.mai.ac.nz/index.php/MR/article/viewFile/317/369>

Week 5: Mauri Ola

Trask, Haunani-Kay. "Writing in Captivity"

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/02690059708589532>

Rosanna Raymond aka Sistar S'Pacific, "A Body of VA'rt"

<http://tekaharoa.com/index.php/tekaharoa/article/view/243/191>

Week 6: Seminars

Wendt, "Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body"

<http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/authors/wendt/tatauing.asp>

Tamaira, A. Marata. "From A to Fully Tusk: Reimagining the 'Dusky Maiden' through the Visual Arts." *The Contemporary Pacific* 22, no. 1 (2010): 1–35.

Taouma, Lisa. "'Gauguin Is Dead...there Is No Paradise.'" *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 25, no. 1 (2004): 35–46.

Week 7: Y/A Fiction: Telesa Trilogy

Wendt Young, Lani: "I wrote Telesa for me. Because it's a book I wanted to read." ('2015: The Year I Quit', posted Dec 31, 2015,

<http://www.laniwendtyoung.me/>)

Selected excerpts from: 'Sleepless in Samoa' <http://laniwendtyoung.me/>

Sinavaiana-Gabbard, Caroline. "Sina and Nafanua: Mother Goddess Enacting Primordial Spirituality in Samoa." *Whispers and Vanities: Samoan Indigenous Knowledge and Religion*. Edited by Suaalii-Sauni, Tamasailau, Albert Wendt, Vitolia Mo'a, Naomi Fuamatu, Upolu Luma Va'ai, Reina Whitiri, and Stephen L Filipo. Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2014.

Week 8: Y/A Fiction: Telesa Trilogy

Suaalii, Tamasailau M. "Deconstructing the 'Exotic' Female Beauty of the Pacific Islands." In *Bitter Sweet: Indigenous Women in the Pacific*, 93–108. Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago Press, 2000.

Subramani. "The Diasporic Imagination", *Navigating Islands and Continents: Conversations and Contestations in and around the Pacific*. Eds Cynthia Franklin, Ruth Hsu, and Suzanne Kosanke. Honolulu : College of Languages, Linguistics and Literature, University of Hawai'i and the East-West Center : Distributed by University of Hawai'i Press, 2000.

Week 9: Short Fiction: Black Ice Matter

Listen to Book Review:

<http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetoon/audio/201819094/book-review-black-ice-matter>

Keown, Michelle. 'Conclusion: Pacific Diasporas', *Pacific Islands Writing: The Postcolonial Literatures of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Oceania*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Week 10 Short Fiction: Black Ice Matter

Hall, Lisa Kahaleole Chang and J. Kehaulani Kauanui (1994) 'Same-Sex Sexuality in Pacific Literature.' *Amerasia Journal*: 1994, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 75-81. https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=MkPXAwwAAQBAJ&pg=PT158&lpg=PT158&dq=same+sex+pacific+literature+lisa+kehaulani&source=bl&ots=L9cT_VIP3t&sig=cqrRxxHprIMV4AQB6cAzyfqm_dg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj7dyuha_SAhUDgLwKHViXAQgQ6AEIJzAC#v=onepage&q=same%20sex%20pacific%20literature%20lisa%20kehaulani&f=false

Dunsford, Review of *Niu Voices*:

http://www.apwn.net/index.php/edition/more/water_edition_book_review_niu_voices_contemporary_pacific_fiction_1/

Macpherson, Cluny. 'One Trunk Sends Out Many Branches: Pacific Cultures and Cultural Identities', *Tangata O Te Moana Nui: The Evolving Identities of Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa/New Zealand*. Eds Cluny Macpherson, Paul Spoonley, Melani Anae. Auckland: Dunmore Press, 2001, 66-80.

Background Viewing:

Documentary: Children of the Migration (IC)

Week 11: Short Fiction: Niu Voices

Te Punga Somerville, "In the (Brown) Neighbourhood: An Aotearoa-Based Oceania." *SPAN*. 54/55 (2005): 68-75.

Tawake, "Transforming the Insider-Outsider Perspective: Postcolonial Fiction from the Pacific"

Useful Reading

SPAN 62 (available in class, \$10)

Clifford, James. 'Diasporas', *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Further Inflections: Toward Ethnographies of the Future (Aug., 1994), pp. 302-338. (http://www.jstor.org/stable/656365?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Johnathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, 223-237.

<http://www.anthropology.ir/sites/default/files/public/anthropology-files/13566.pdf>

McRae, Jane. "Maori Literature: A Survey", Terry Sturm, ed, *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, Oxford University Press, 1991, 1-30.

Meklin, Margaret and Andrew Meklin. "This Magnificent Accident: An Interview with Witi Ihimaera" *The Contemporary Pacific* 16.2 (2004) 358-366.

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/contemporary_pacific/v016/16.2ihimaera.pdf

Mila-Schaaf and Elizabeth Robinson, Karlo. "Polycultural' capital and educational achievement among NZ-born Pacific peoples.'

<http://www.review.mai.ac.nz/index.php/MR/article/download/307/378>

Perrott, Alan. "Pasifika – Identity or Illusion?" 4 August, 2007, see [nzherald.co.nz](http://www.nzherald.co.nz) http://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article.cfm?c_id=6&objectid=10455473

Subramani. "Artists in a Changing South Pacific: The Oral Poet and the Writers." *Language and Literature in Multicultural Contexts*. Ed. Satendra Nandan. Suva, Fiji: The University of the South Pacific and The Association for Commonwealth Language and Literature Studies. 1983. 317-325.

Subramani. "Interview" *The Girl in the Moon Circle*. Suva, Fiji: Mana Publications, 1996, 121-132.

Subramani. "The Diasporic Imagination", *Navigating Islands and Continents: Conversations and Contestations in and around the Pacific*. Eds Cynthia Franklin, Ruth Hsu, and Suzanne Kosanke. Honolulu : College of Languages, Linguistics and Literature, University of Hawai'i and the East-West Center : Distributed by University of Hawai'i Press, 2000.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. "Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory" *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London, New York and Dunedin: Zed Books Ltd and University of Otago Press, 1999. 19-41.

Tawake, Sandra. "Transforming the Insider-Outsider Perspective: Postcolonial Fiction from the Pacific" *The Contemporary Pacific* 12.1 (2000) 155-175 http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/contemporary_pacific/v012/12.1tawake.html

Teaiwa, Teresia and Sean Mallon. "Ambivalent Kinships? Pacific People in New Zealand." *New Zealand Identities: Departures and Destinations*. Eds. James Liu, Tim McCreanor, Tracey McIntosh and Teresa Teaiwa. Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005. 207-229.

Te Punga Somerville, Alice. "In the (Brown) Neighbourhood: An Aotearoa-Based Oceania." *SPAN*. 54/55 (2005): 68-75.

Va'ai, Sina. "Developments in Creative Writing in Western Polynesia: Fitting the Self into the Mosaic of the Contemporary Pacific." In *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, edited by Hereniko Vilsoni and Wilson, Rob, 207-20. Maryland, United States of America: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999.

Wendt, Albert. "Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body" in Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson (eds) *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999.

Williams, Les & Henare, Manuka. "The Double Spiral and Ways of Knowing". *Mai Review*, 2009, 3, see <http://www.review.mai.ac.nz/index.php/MR/article/view/220/295>

Other Material

New Zealand Identities: *Departures and Destinations*. Eds. James Liu, Tim McCreanor, Tracey McIntosh and Teresa Teaiwa. Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005. 38-51.

Te Punga Somerville, Alice. "If I Close My Mouth I Will Die: Writing, Resisting, Centring." *Resistance: An Indigenous Response to Neoliberalism*. Ed. Maria Bargh. Wellington: Huia, 2007. 85-111.

Texts on Pacific Literature

Keown, Michelle. *Pacific Islands Writing: The Postcolonial Literatures of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Oceania*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Va'ai, Sina. *Literary Representations in Western Polynesia: Colonialism and Indigeneity*. Samoa: National University of Samoa, 1999.

Carroll, Jeffrey, Brandy Nalani McDougall, and Georganne Nordstrom (eds), *Huihui: Navigating Art and Literature in the Pacific*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015. (see esp introduction, pp 1-13)

DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M. *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007.
Marsh, Selina & Te Punga Somerville, A. Eds. *SPAN 62*, Wellington: SPACIALS.

Najita, Susan Y. *Decolonizing Cultures in the Pacific: Reading History and Trauma in Contemporary Fiction*. Routledge Research in Postcolonial Literatures 14. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2006.

Subramani. *South Pacific literature: from myth to fabulation*. Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, Institute of Pacific Studies, 1992.

Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific, edited by Hereniko Vilsoni and Wilson, Rob, 207–20. Maryland, United States of America: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999.

Key Postcolonial Texts

Ashcroft, Bill. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. 2nd ed. London ; New York: Routledge, 2009.

Innes, Catherine, Lynette. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London ; New York : Dunedin, N.Z. : New York: Zed Books ; University of Otago Press ; Distributed in the USA exclusively by St. Martin's Press, 1999.

TUTORIALS

There is one weekly tutorial for this paper, held between Weeks 2-11. Discussions will focus on texts in light of suggested critical readings. It is courteous to email me if you are going to be absent. My office hours will be by appointment. I'm there to help you so please do contact me – especially if you need to discuss any extenuating circumstances that might compromise your ability to fully engage with this course.

Requirements for the presentation of coursework.

- Referencing conventions: Essays must be submitted with the appropriate signed cover sheet (available outside the English departmental office). Essays must be referenced in accordance with the departmental Guide to Writing Essays (pp.36-44), available from the English departmental office).
- Turnitin: Your assignments must be submitted to www.turnitin.com within two days of the due date. Credit will not be given for assignments that are not submitted to turnitin.com as well as submitted in hard copy.
 - Class ID – 7535940/ Class Password – pacific
- Departmental policy on Extensions and Late Work

LATE WORK WITHOUT AN EXTENSION WILL NOT BE MARKED

English requires the timely submission of all coursework. If you are unable to hand in an assignment by the due date, you must put your case for an extension to the convenor; if an extension is granted, you must attach to your submitted coursework EITHER an Extension Request Form

bearing the new submission date and signature of the staff member, OR a document such as an email from the staff member. Extensions will only be granted for compelling reasons, such as illness, or other unforeseen emergencies, and a Doctor's certificate (or equivalent) must be provided to the staff member concerned. An extension must be requested in advance of the due date for the assignment, unless there is a genuine cause preventing this, in which case the extension should be sought as soon as is practicable after the due date. Any work handed in late without an extension will not be marked.

What this means: Essays (without approved extensions) recorded as 'received' after the due date will be designated 'late' and will not be marked.

The only way to ensure your essay is recorded as 'received' on the due date is to submit the essay by 4pm that day. The office closes shortly afterwards.

Generic information

1. The University's Statement on Plagiarism

The University of Auckland will not tolerate cheating, or assisting others to cheat, and views cheating in coursework as a serious academic offence. The work that a student submits for grading must be the student's work, reflecting his or her learning. Where work from other sources is used, it must be properly acknowledged and referenced. This requirement also applies to sources on the world-wide web. A student's assessed work may be reviewed against electronic source material using computerised detection mechanisms. Upon reasonable request, students may be required to provide an electronic version of their work for computerised review.

For more detailed information, see the University's guidelines on the conduct of Coursework at

<http://www.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/home/about/teaching-learning/policies-procedures>

2. Complaint Procedure

In the first instance, students or the class representative should take any concerns they have with their course delivery or assessment to the lecturer or tutor or convenor concerned. Students or staff may approach the Mediator's Office or the Student Advocacy Network at any time for assistance. In the event that the matter is not resolved satisfactorily at an informal level, students or the class representative should approach the Head of Department with a formal statement of their complaint.

For more detailed information, see the University guidelines regarding Student Learning and Grievance procedures at:

<http://www.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/home/about/teaching-learning/policies-procedures>

AUSA also offers advice on grievance and harassment issues. See the AUSA website's 'Need Help?' section for further information.

3. Other sources of information and assistance.

Guides to Library sources for all undergraduate papers in English are available from the Learn home page: follow the links from Resources By Subject / Arts / English

Announcements and Resources for this paper are regularly posted on CECIL. The University's policy is that all communication with students is via their university email address—please check your university email address regularly.

Please contact the convenor, Dr Selina Tusitala Marsh, with any queries about this course. This coursepack is subject to change.

GUIDE 1:

How to Read a Poem

Use the guidelines below to learn how to read a poem and understand it.

1. Read with a pencil
2. Examine the basic subject of the poem
3. Consider the context of the poem
4. Study the form of the poem
5. Look at the word choice of the poem
6. Finishing Up

Read with a pencil

Read a poem with a pencil in your hand.

Mark it up; write in the margins; react to it; get involved with it. Circle important, or striking, or repeated words. Draw lines to connect related ideas. Mark difficult or confusing words, lines, and passages.

Read through the poem several times, both silently and aloud, listening carefully to the sound and rhythm of the words.

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Examine the basic subject of the poem

- Consider the **title** of the poem carefully. What does it tell you about the poem's subject, tone, and genre? What does it promise? (After having read the poem, you will want to come back to the title in order to consider further its relationship with the poem.)
- What is your initial impression of the poem's **subject**? Try writing out an answer to the question, "What is this poem about?"--and then return to this question throughout your analysis. Push yourself to be precise; aim for more than just a vague impression of the poem. What is the author's attitude toward his or her subject?
- What is the poem's basic **situation**? What is going on in it? Who is talking? To whom? Under what circumstances? Where? About what? Why? Is a story being told? Is something--tangible or intangible--being described? What specifically can you point to in the poem to support your answers?
- Because a poem is highly compressed, it may help you to try to unfold it by **paraphrasing the poem aloud**, moving line by line through it. If the poem is written in sentences, can you figure out what the subject of each one is? The verb? The object of the verb? What a modifier refers to? Try to untie any syntactic knots.
- Is the poem built on a **comparison** or **analogy**? If so, how is the comparison appropriate? How are the two things alike? How different?
- What is the author's **attitude** toward his subject? Serious? Reverent? Ironic? Satiric? Ambivalent? Hostile? Humorous? Detached? Witty?
- Does the poem appeal to a reader's intellect? Emotions? Reason?

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Consider the context of the poem

- Are there any **allusions** to other literary or historical figures or events? How do these add to the poem? How are they appropriate?
- What do you know about this **poet**? About the age in which he or she wrote this poem? About other works by the same author?

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Study the form of the poem

- Consider the **sound** and **rhythm** of the poem. Is there a metrical pattern? If so, how regular is it? Does the poet use rhyme? What do the meter and rhyme emphasize? Is there any alliteration? Assonance? Onomatopoeia? How do these relate to the poem's meaning? What effect do they create in the poem?
- Are there **divisions** within the poem? Marked by stanzas? By rhyme? By shifts in subject? By shifts in perspective? How do these parts relate to each other? How are they appropriate for this poem?
- How are the ideas in the poem **ordered**? Is there a progression of some sort? From simple to complex? From outer to inner? From past to present? From one place to another? Is there a climax of any sort?
- What are the **form** and **genre** of this poem? What should you expect from such a poem? How does the poet use the form?

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Look at the word choice of the poem

- One way to see the action in a poem is to list all its **verbs**. What do they tell you about the poem?
- Are there **difficult** or **confusing** words? Even if you are only the slightest bit unsure about the meaning of a word, look it up in a good dictionary. If you are reading poetry written before the twentieth century, learn to use the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which can tell you how a word's definition and usage have changed over time. Be sure that you determine how a word is being used--as a noun, verb, adjective, adverb--so that you can find its appropriate meaning. Be sure also to consider various possible meanings of a word and be alert to subtle differences between words. A good poet uses language very carefully; as a good reader you in turn must be equally sensitive to the implications of word choice.
- What **mood** is evoked in the poem? How is this accomplished? Consider the ways in which not only the meanings of words but also their sound and the poem's rhythms help to create its mood.
- Is the language in the poem **abstract** or **concrete**? How is this appropriate to the poem's subject?
- Are there any consistent **patterns** of words? For example, are there several references to flowers, or water, or politics, or religion in the poem? Look for groups of similar words.
- Does the poet use **figurative language**? Are there metaphors in the poem? Similes? Is there any personification? Consider the appropriateness of such comparisons. Try to see why the poet chose a particular metaphor as opposed to other possible ones. Is there a pattern of any sort to the metaphors? Is there any metonymy in the poem? Synecdoche? Hyperbole? Oxymoron? Paradox? A dictionary of literary terms may be helpful here.

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Finishing Up

- Ask, finally, about the poem, "So what?" What does it do? What does it say? What is its purpose?

(<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/ReadingPoetry.html>)

GUIDE 2:

The Close Reading of Poetry: A Practical Introduction and Guide to Explication

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INTRODUCTION: There is no single way to do a close reading of a poem. Sometimes an impression is a way in; sometimes the “voice” in the poem stands out; sometimes it is a matter of knowing the genre of the poem; sometimes groupings of key words, phrases, or images seem to be its most striking elements; and sometimes it takes a while to get any impression whatsoever. The goal, however, is constant: you want to come to a deeper understanding of the poem. There are, nonetheless, steps you can take toward this goal—the first being, obviously, to read the poem very carefully—as well as specific elements you can look for and questions you can ask.

Keep in mind that whenever you interpret a poem, it has to be backed up by reference to the poem itself. Remember, too, that no one close reading of a poem has ever “solved” or mastered that poem, and that rereading a poem or passage is often like doing a new reading, inasmuch as more is usually seen with subsequent readings.

A note on “key terms”: hundreds of terms are associated with the study of poetry. In our *Guide* you will see we have selected only a few, mainly those that might offer immediate application for your close reading; you can scroll over these underlined words for their definitions. For a more extensive list, consult either of these sites: [Poets’ Grave](#) or [Representative Poetry Online](#).

1. THE TITLE. A poem’s title does not always have great significance. The title might not make much sense until you start to understand the poem. The title “The Sick Rose” (by William Blake) gives us a reasonable hint about what the poem means. T. S. Eliot’s title “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” seems to give some direction, but after reading the poem, the title might be considered misleading or ironic. Wallace Stevens’ title “The Snow Man” gives very little help.

- *Does the title immediately influence what you are about to read, or does it, at the moment you begin your first reading, remain mysterious or vague?*
- *After you have thought about the poem, how do you think the title relates to it?*

2. KEYWORDS: DICTION, REGISTER & TONE. Pay exceedingly close attention to what individual words mean—and especially to what you think might be keywords, since this is where meaning can be concentrated.

- *Which words stand out, and why?*

Consider how words may carry more than one meaning. A dictionary is obviously useful, especially one based on historical principles, since it will point to how the meanings of words may have changed over time. “Silly” once meant “helpless.”

- *Do any words carry non-contemporary or unfamiliar meanings?*

- *Do any words likely carry multiple and/or ambiguous meanings?*
- *Do repeated words carry the same meaning when repeated, or do they change? Words often gather or evolve in meaning when repeated.*
- *Do particular words or phrases seem drawn to or connected with each other? These often add up so that a clearer sense of the poem emerges.*
- *Do you notice lots of material or immaterial things (nouns) or lots of action (verbs)? Is the poem concrete, about specific things and places, or is the poem more abstract, about concepts or ideas? Is the poem full of movement, or does it seem to stay still and look at one thing?*
- *Do certain words seem to clash with each other, and what effect does this have? Think in terms of oppositions, tensions, conflicts, and binaries.*

Consider word choice, or **diction**:

- *Is the word choice distinctive? Does it add up to a kind of **style**—for example, is it elaborate, dense, simple, archaic, formal, conversational, descriptive, abstract, and so on?*
- *How would you describe the level of language and vocabulary (**register**): informal, formal, common, casual, neutral, mixed?*

Tone. Address the tone of the **speaker** or **narrator**, which is the attitude taken by the poem's voice toward the subject or subjects in the poem:

- *What is the attitude taken by the “voice” of the poem toward the subjects of the poem? Is the tone serious, **ironic**, amorous, argumentative, distant, intimate, somber, abrupt, playful, cheerful, despondent, conversational, yearning, etc.—or is it mixed, changing, ambiguous, or unclear?*

[**Key terms:** style, diction, register, tone, irony, ambiguity.]

3. WORD ORDER. Focus on how the words are ordered. Look for patterns; in drawing attention to themselves, they require your attention:

- *Is the word order or sentence structure (**syntax**) unusual in any way, and what is the effect of this?*
- *Are there any noticeable patterns in the ordering of words? If so, how do the patterns contribute to meaning?*
- *Do the lines have strong **end-stops**, or do they break across lines (**enjamb**)? Do the lines end with a final **stress** or **rhyme**? Does each line tend to be a self-contained, grammatical unit, or does it vary? What effect does this have?*
- *Are there lots of long, complete sentences (simple or complex?), or are there many sentence fragments and phrases? Does the poem stop and start, or does it move or flow continuously? What is the effect of this?*

Punctuation. Punctuation organizes and creates relationship between words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. In poetry, where lines are often seen as units of meaning, the importance of punctuation is sometimes magnified, though often overlooked. Punctuation can create or reinforce rhythm. It can also control meaning or make meaning uncertain by its placement and usage, especially if it is used minimally, or in some cases, not at all.

- *What role does punctuation have in the poem?*
- *Does it follow accepted rules and conventions, or is it used in unusual ways?*

[**Key terms:** syntax, enjambment, end-stopped line, stress, rhyme.]

4. FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE; IMAGERY. Related to word meaning is **figurative language**, which often plays a crucial role in both condensing language yet expanding meaning. Most generally, figurative language refers to language that is not literal. The phrase “fierce tears” (the **personification** of tears) is not literal, but it is both precise and suggestive in carrying meaning.

- *Are certain words used in unusual, non-literal, non-standard, exaggerated, or metaphorical ways? What effect do these **figures of speech** have?*
- *Which words or phrases are used literally (they **denote** something literal) and which are used figuratively (they **connote** something figurative)?*

Much of what we read is literal: *The evening sky was dark; he looked up; he felt sick.* Figurative language refers to language not used literally—it is used abstractly, indirectly, and often evocatively. *The evening is spread out against the sky like a patient etherized upon a table.* Here we have an evening (a thing), spreading (an action), a patient (thing), etherizing (an action), and a table (thing). But an evening cannot be a drugged patient spread out upon a table, perhaps ready to be operated upon; this description cannot be literally true (there is no patient, no etherizing, no table, and evenings don’t literally spread out against skies); this language is used figuratively.

- *How does non-literal or figurative language suggest a certain meaning?*
- *What mood or feeling is evoked via this figurative, non-literal language?*

Imagery. When **figurative language** (like **metaphor** or **simile**) provides a picture that evokes any of the senses, we call this **imagery**. “She is the sun” (a simile) contains imagery of light and warmth (the senses of sight and touch).

- *What imagery—pictures or senses that are evoked in words—is present in the poem? What imagery, if any, is most striking, frequent, or patterned?*
- *What images seem related or connected to each other?*
- *What mood or atmosphere is created by the imagery?*
- *Which details stand out? Why?*
- *What sense (if any) seems to dominate the poem: sight, sound, taste, touch, smell?*

Allusion. Poetry sometimes contains brief references to things outside itself—a person, place, or thing—that will expand, clarify, or complicate its meaning. Sometimes they are obvious and direct, and sometimes they are subtle, indirect, and debatable. **Allusions** are frequently references made to other texts (for example, to the Bible, or to another poem).

- *What allusions, if any, can you detect?*
- *What effect do the allusions have upon the poem?*
- *If it is a literary allusion, how does it relate to or connect with the original text?*

[**Key terms:** figures of speech, connotation, denotation, metaphor, simile, irony, imagery, personification, allegory, symbol, allusion.]

5. SOUND: Rhythm/Meter/Melody/Rhyme. You probably first read a poem to yourself, silently, but most poems also create sense through sounds, unlike **concrete poetry**, which operates visually. Try reading the poem aloud. Sound brings attention to both individual words that are drawn together through their sound as well as to the overall “feeling” or experience. For example, repetition of sounds like “s,” “m,” “l,” and “f” might encourage a soft or sensuous feeling: “Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness . . .”

- *What words are drawn to each other because of sound, and how does this influence meaning? What tone do these sounds create (quiet, loud, sensual, aggressive, etc.)?*

Also, think about whether the poem “moves” slowly or quickly, jerkily or fluidly.

- *Does the poem move differently at different places in the poem? What effect does this have?*
- *How do the poem’s sounds contribute to its meaning? Does a particular sound or sounds dominate the poem? What is the effect of this?*

Rhythm. A poem’s **rhythm** can be regular or irregular. When it has regular rhythmical sound patterns, we say the poem has a certain **meter**. The type of meter is based on the number of syllables per line and how many unstressed (x) or stressed (/) syllables there are. (“I **WAN**-dered **LONE**-ly **AS** a **CLOUD**”; x / x / x / x /). A small, distinct group of accented words is called a **foot** (“a **CLOUD**”; x /). The various meters—tetrameter, pentameter, etc.—are based on the number of **feet** per line. (The meter in the above example has four regular feet, and is therefore tetrameter; because each foot has an unstressed syllable [x] followed by a stressed one [/], this is called an **iamb**. We would then say that the line is in iambic tetrameter; if it had an extra foot—that is, five feet—we would call it iambic pentameter.)

- *When you count out (**scan**) the syllables of a line, do they follow a rhythm? Is there a name for it?*
- *How prominent is the poem’s rhythm? Does the rhythm have any influence on the poem’s meaning? If so, in what way or ways?*

Melody. Melody refers to sound effects, such as **rhyme**, **alliteration**, **assonance**, and **consonance**, with each producing a unique melodic effect. **Rhyme** is a type of melody, and rhymes can be **perfect** with identical vowel sounds (“guy” and “high”) or **slant**, when the sound of the final consonants is identical, but not the vowels (“shell” and “pill,” “cement” and “ant”).

- *Do words at the end of lines rhyme? Why kind of rhymes are they? Do they form a pattern (a [rhyme scheme](#)) that is regular or irregular?*
- *Do the rhyming words have any relationship with each other? Does the rhyme concentrate meaning in any way?*

[**Key terms:** concrete poetry, rhyme, [rhyme scheme](#), rhythm, meter, stress, alliteration, consonance, assonance, [scansion](#), [prosody](#), foot / feet, iambic pentameter, melody, slant rhyme, perfect rhyme, couplet, blank verse.]

6. SPEAKER/ADDRESSEE; NARRATIVE/NARRATOR. All poems have a voice, which can be called a **speaker** (or in some case speakers, if there is more than one person “speaking” the poem).

- Who “tells” the poem? Are there things you can say about the speaker’s personality, **point of view**, **tone**, society, age, or gender?
- Does the speaker assume a persona at any point in the poem, and speak “as” a particular person (e.g., “I am Lazarus, come from the dead . . . I shall tell you all”)?
- Does the speaker seem attached or detached from what is said?
- What effect do the speaker’s characteristics have on the poem?

Likewise, all poems have a silent or implied listener/reader, an **addressee**.

- *Is it possible to figure out to whom the poem is addressed? Is there an ideal listener or reader?*
- *Does the speaker seek anything from the listener/reader (sympathy, support, agreement, etc.)?*

Narrative/Narrator. Poems capture thoughts, ideas, feelings, impressions, experiences, and incidents, but sometimes poems also tell a story. Ask yourself:

- *What is happening in the poem? What action, drama, or **conflict** is present? Is there more than one event in the poem? Does anything change in the poem (is an action completed, does an attempted action fail, or does someone change in an important way)?*
- *Who tells the story, and what relationship does the narrator have to the story?*

[**Key terms:** speaker, addressee, tone, persona, point of view, ideal reader / listener, narrative, narrator, voice, conflict, dramatic monologue, lyric poem, irony, theme.]

7. TIME; SETTING.

- *What is the temporal structure of the poem? Does it take place in one time (the present, the past, the future) or does it move back and forth between times?*
- *Does it present single actions in time or continuing actions? Does it bring different times together or set them apart (e.g., “then” vs. “now”)?*
- *Is there a particular occasion for the poem (an incident, an event, a realization)?*
- *Does it focus on indicative states (“I am, I will be”) or conditional states (“I could be, I would be”)?*
- *Are different parts of the poem located in different times?*
- *Does time move smoothly? Are different states of being, or different ways of thinking, associated with different times? (“I used to think ‘X’, but now I think ‘Y’”)?*

Setting answers the questions “Where?” and “When?” in the poem, though often poems are not set in a specific location or time.

- *Is a sense of place clear (urban, pastoral, forest, desert, beach, etc.), or does the poem seem to occupy an abstract time and place (such as mental or emotional state)?*

For some poems, a difficult but key question may be this:

- *Where are we?*

8. SYMBOL. A symbol represents or stands for something other than the image itself. A symbol, then, is often something concrete—a word, a thing, a place, a person (real or fictitious), an action, an event, a creation, etc.—that represents something larger, abstract, or complex—an idea, a value, a belief, an emotion. A river (a thing) can be symbol for life; Gomorrah (a place) can be a symbol of shameless sin; Homer Simpson (a fictitious person) can be a symbol of innocent stupidity; a strawberry (a thing) can be a symbol of sensual love.

- *Does the poem have any clear or central symbols? What meaning do they bring to the poem?*

9. FORM. Poetic form usually refers to the structure that “holds” or gives “shape” to the poem—in a way, what it looks like to you on the page. This will include groupings or sets of lines, called **stanzas**. Another, more interesting way to consider form is to say that it necessarily determines the content of the poem, especially in the case of a particular **genre**, like a **ballad**, **epic**, or **sonnet**; these specific forms (sometimes called “closed forms”) often have structures and stylistic conventions that are both structural and that convey units of meaning or conventions of **rhyme**, **meter**, or expression. If the poem you are reading has a particular form or structure determined by genre, learn something about the conventions of that genre, since this can direct your attention to certain expectations of content.

- *Is the poem of a particular genre? What are its conventions?*
- *If it doesn't fit particular genre, how would you describe its form?*
- *What is the relationship between form and meaning in the poem?*
- *Are there clear parts to the poem, and if so, how are they similar/different?*

Poems that do not follow determined, formal conventions or genre have an “**open form**.”

[**Key terms:** style, stanza, genre, closed form, open form, ballad, epic poem, sonnet.]

10. IDEAS & THEME.

- *Are the ideas of the poem simple or complex, small or large?*
- *Is there one main problem in the poem? How does the poem think through that problem?*
- *What are the ideas that the poem seeks to embody in images?*
- *What is the poem's process of thinking? Does it change its “mind” as it proceeds?*
- *Does the poem proceed logically or illogically? Can you tell the way it is thinking, or is it unclear, opaque, and confusing?*
- *How do the ideas change from line to line, **stanza** to stanza?*
- *Does the poem offer an argument?*
- *Does the poem reflect a particular experience, feeling, or concept?*

Theme. “Purity” is a subject, not a theme; “purity is vulnerability” is a theme. “Theme” refers to a larger, more general, or universal message—a big idea—as well as to something that you could take away from the work and perhaps apply to life. One way to determine a theme is to

1) ask yourself what the poem is about;

2) come up with some one-word answers to that question (subjects of the poem); and

3) ask what general attitude (**tone**) is taken towards those subjects in the poem.

You might conclude that, for example, “love,” “trust,” or “loss” are subjects. Now, try to figure out what the attitude in the poem is toward that one-word subject and you have theme—for example, “love is dangerous,” “you cannot trust people close to you,” “loss makes you stronger.” But don't think this is always easy or straightforward: many poems resist reduction to simple themes or even subjects, and such resistance—sometimes in the form of **ambiguity**, **paradox**, abstraction, or complexity—strengthens our interest in and engagement with the poem. Poems are not necessarily answers, but they may be problems or questions.

<http://web.uvic.ca/~englblog/closereading/>

And don't forget:

Still stuck? Have a look at these resources:

<http://web.uvic.ca/~englblog/closereading/>

¹ *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, edited by Hereniko Vilsoni and Wilson, Rob, 207–20. Maryland, United States of America: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999.