

# Dunedin Athenaeum & Mechanics' Institute

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## Newsletter

April 2025

### From the Librarian

Kia ora koutou,

It has been a year since I started in my role here at the Athenaeum Library. During this time, I have really enjoyed engaging with the collection and meeting all our wonderful members.

We have 8571 books listed on our catalogue. This is made up from the books on the ground level. The books on the mezzanine level remain unlisted.

- Holly Fletcher

### What's Happening

We warmly invite you to come and celebrate the Athenaeum Library & Mechanics Institute 155th year in the Octagon.

May 8<sup>th</sup> 5.30pm

Archivist Tom Riley from Dunedin's Hocken Library, will be giving a talk. Followed by readings from award winning authors Laurence Fearnley and Fiona Farrell.

FB event:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/18QwSE3QP0/>

Please RSVP by May 7<sup>th</sup> to  
[librarian@dunedinathenaeum.org.nz](mailto:librarian@dunedinathenaeum.org.nz)

We have new tote bags for sale.  
\$20.00 each

To celebrate the 155<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we're offering a 50% discount on one-year memberships for anyone who joins in May.



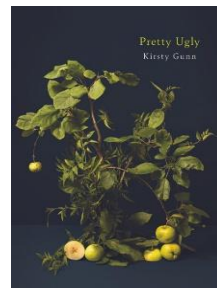
### Book Review by Fiona Farrell

Pretty Ugly  
Kirsty Gunn

The library has just received the short listed titles for the Jan Medlicott Prize for Fiction in this year's Ockham Awards. The judges this year include an innovative novelist, creative writer teacher and short story writer, Thom Conroy, bookseller extraordinaire, Carole Beu from the ground breaking Women's Bookshop on Ponsonby Road, and the wonderful YA writer, Tania Roxborough. Their skill and experience is evident in the books they have selected for the award.

Kirsty Gunn's *Pretty Ugly* is one of their choices, and it's fantastic: fourteen dark and complex glimpses of other lives and the secrets they conceal. Gunn is, like Mansfield, Davin and Catton, a writer born and raised here, but resident in the UK. The stories shift easily from the

Scottish Highlands to the Wairarapa, from a suburban garden that feels like Edinburgh to the guns and male violence that feels like rural King Country. You have to check the dialogue for clues to decide where you are. The writing throughout is effortless and assured, each story building to a conclusion that feels inevitable but surprising just the same, the way short stories should.



The book's title says it all: these are beautifully written stories, but they are not cosy. A woman surveys the garden where she has buried the evidence of her own deliberately-induced abortions. A group of friends are on a walk in the Scottish hills among a forest of wind turbines, where a dark flock of migrating birds flies among them and their leader disappears, possessed by the place. A woman previously married to a compulsive gambler goes on an online date to a dubious hotel, taking another kind of chance.

These are not comfortable stories, but I can guarantee you won't forget them in a hurry!