

December 2025

Kia ora koutou,

A very warm thank you to all our members for their ongoing patronage and support this past year. Without you the Athenaeum would not be the vibrant, evolving space that it is.

I wish you a rejuvenating holiday break and a happy new year.

We re-open as usual from

Tuesday 6th January.

Mere Kirihimete,

Holly Fletcher - Head Librarian



What's Happening

Saloon for Members

You are warmly invited to the first Athenaeum & Mechanics Members Saloon. Family and friends' welcome

Join us on Thursday 29th January
From 5pm-7pm

Expect refreshments and light entertainment. More details tbc I will send out a reminder early next year.

Puzzles- if you're interested in lending and borrowing puzzles, please feel free to get in touch. We currently have two 'World of' puzzles to lend out.



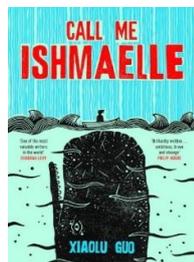
Book Review

By Danica Wyber-Thomas

Call me Ishmaelle

By Xiaolu Guo

I feared *Call Me Ishmaelle* by Xiaolu Guo would be a dull tome and was delighted to be proven quite wrong! The short chapters make it easy to pick up and put down and Guo's writing style is compelling and direct.



As the title would suggest *Call Me Ishmaelle* is a reimagining of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* told from the perspective of Ishmaelle, a young woman who, disguised as a boy named Ishmael, joins a whaling ship in Nantucket. On her way she becomes firm friends with the Māori harpooner, Kauri, and earns the respect of the crew as

the Captain's obsession with the white whale becomes increasingly evident and destructive. Guo queers the original narrative in a multitude of ways, decentring whiteness, challenging gender norms and offering a non-Christian religious perspective.

Ishmaelle/Ishmael's gender fluidity offers the reader a practical framework to consider how much our own gender influences our expectations and experience, with a further invitation to reflect on the trans-speciesism as Ishmaelle enters whale-space via their dreams. The whales are given voice throughout the book, rounding out the inclusivity of Guo's narrative

Guo moves rapidly through trauma, depicting harrowing and terrifying experiences as part of everyday human (and whale) life; suffering does not define Ishmaelle/Ishmael, it challenges and demands something of them. Instead of lingering on trauma, Guo brings the reader back to broader musings and poignant existential questions about what it is to be in the world where adventure, beauty, power and horror all exist simultaneously.

Call Me Ishmaelle is both a good, accessible yarn and important storytelling which centres the plurality and queerness of life at sea.

