

March 2026

Kia ora koutou,

The AGM was held on the 19th of March and was followed by an informal salon. We had refreshments and readings from the Athenaeum's collection. I read Peter Old's Pie Poem from the library's growing collection of New Zealand poetry. Nicola Cummins read poems from her superb collection of Ruth Dallas's work, *This Moment Every Moment*, published in October 2025 by Otago University Press. And Fiona Farrell gave a inspiring speech about the library before reading a short extract from one of the books in the romance collection.

The existing committee was reappointed: Alexandra Blig, Nicola Cummins, Tony Eyre, Fiona Farrell, Shef Rogers and Bridget Schaumann.

We look forward to further developing the Athenaeum library into a thriving literary events and lending library.

Ngā mihi nui

Holly

What's Happening

If you would like to read the article about the Athenaeum in the Ara Toi newsletter—Toi Oho— follow the link [here](#).

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Earlier this month we welcomed a zine collection into the library from Black Star Books. This collection dates back to the 1970s and is a welcome addition to our library. We hope it will encourage more people to come into the library and engage with our space.



Book Review

Ash By Louise Wallace

Ash, the first novel by Ōtepoti poet Louis Wallace, is a luminous and formally experimental book, weaving together motherhood, emotional reckoning, and ecological disaster, all with a close eye on the beauty and miraculous truths that can be found even amidst collapse.

Thea is a young woman working as a rural vet, barely coping with the drudgery of parenting two young children, while also navigating a misogynistic work environment and a barely present husband. Whatever fragile balance she has erodes further when the nearby mountain erupts, coating the land in a layer of ever-falling ash. Daily life and work must go on in a world now radically transformed.

Throughout, we encounter a taut poetry between the mundane and

the sublime. “Mark, I have been here longer than time. Longer than the trees and birds. Find your own damn cup,” Thea imagines saying to her workmate. Despite being in the midst of burnout, she can dissect the complexities of her inner life with razor-sharp precision. “Nothing in my life is performative any more and that feels both good and terrible,” she says, watching a bare-midriffed jogger.



Experimental elements create shifts in the text's rhythm: bordered, textbook-like 'figures' occur regularly, documenting Thea's fragmented consciousness and unfiltered cognition. Her morning routine is captured in excruciating detail - “...bringcoffeewater eat toast *turnaround sitdown* get cloth to wipe hands...” After the eruption, a haunting fable (based on notes by Sylvia Plath) begins running in the footnotes at the bottom of every page, drawing parallels with Thea's life.

At its core, Wallace lays bare in *Ash* the tooth-gnashing, infuriating complexities of being human, particularly a woman, with all the brutal and beautiful precision you would hope for from a poet. At the same time, the book remains uplifting, capturing the numerous small marvels that provide solace both in Thea's fractured world and our own.

Review by Caitlin Lester