

Attn: Karyn Scherer, Editor
Mark Broatch, Books Editor

Tēnā kōrua Karyn and Mark,

Recently the Listener published some reviews by Nicholas Reid, one of which was a review of *Echidna* by essa may ranapiri. Reid has uploaded a longer version of this to his personal blog, Reid's Reader. You can find it [using this link](#) but here is an excerpt:

Essa May Ranapiri prefers to be designated as “they”. This signals being sexually non-binary, as does the poet’s photo on the back cover where the hairy-chested poet is wearing lipstick and a dress. Dare I say that I find this usage not only alien but also confusing? “They” refers to plurality. Were I to write “They wrote this book” you, like 99% of people, would immediately assume that more than one person wrote this book. This being the case I will not refer in this review to “they” but instead will designate the author as “poet”.

Perhaps this was included in the first draft that was sent to you; perhaps this is the first you are hearing of this. Regardless, this is a deliberately harmful display of ignorance that serves the purpose of questioning the validity of essa’s identity, and, by extension, of trans, takatāpui, and non-binary people as a whole. The description of essa’s author photo (given the context in which it appears) has been included to further denigrate essa’s gender identity and expression. Takatāpui is a Māori identity encompassing gender expression and sexuality, and essa choosing to express this via their author photo should be celebrated. Saying that the reviewer finds this “alien” and “confusing” speaks to the reviewer’s own ignorance, rather than the content of the writing, and has no place in a poetry review.

Later in the same review, Reid refers to essa using the pronouns ‘he’ and ‘his’. Intentionally using the wrong pronouns for the author when they have been clearly stated is both rude and harmful. Given the lengths Reid has gone to in justifying his ignorant and unconventional approach to essa’s pronouns, this reads as a pointed and deliberate attempt to humiliate the author.

The singular use of the ‘they’ pronoun in English can be found as early as 1375. Neutral third-person singular pronouns existed in Old English nearly a thousand years before that. There is a long-established precedent for the use of neutral third-person pronouns in the singular sense. Even if this were not the case, poetry is a medium in which binaries and restrictions of language can be challenged. Language is ever-evolving. We use the singular ‘they’ consistently in our day-to-day, most prevalently when we do not know the gender or pronouns of the person we are speaking about. For example, if one did not know who Reid was, they might ask, “Did you hear about that transphobic poetry reviewer? I forget their name but they’ve got some poorly concealed hang-ups about queer people.” Reid knows this. From what we understand, he has previously taught Shakespeare, an author who frequently used the singular ‘they’, at times even when the gender of the subject is known.

He is doing what many people have done before: feigning ignorance and kicking up a stink about pronouns when really their issue is with trans, takatāpui, and non-binary people living loudly and proudly.

Even if we suspend disbelief and read Reid's confusion as genuine, it becomes a clear (and self-confessed) demonstration of ignorance when it comes to how language works. Should such a person be platformed as a poetry reviewer when they do not have basic parsing skills?

This is not an isolated incident. It is well known within the poetry communities that Reid writes reviews that are riddled with ad hominem attacks against authors, particularly queer authors, and authors who challenge whiteness and colonialism. This is not to say a review cannot be critical or find fault with a collection, but Reid writes with an intent to tear down based on matters unrelated to poetry. Students in universities are marked down for being too biographical in essays about texts, yet Reid writes large paragraphs on the intersecting identities of the poets he reviews.

We request that you consider platforming other poetry reviewers. Reid should not be paid to review queer works. The transphobia in this review is inappropriate, and actively harms the author and the wider queer community. Given the current climate of transphobic hatred in Aotearoa (see [Bethlehem College](#), [Gloria of Greymouth](#), and [Rainbow Youth Tauranga](#)), it is important to do whatever we can to uplift and show support for those targeted. This is an example of something tangible the Listener can do to step up to the plate.

It is clear that Reid cannot conceal his disdain for communities he does not understand. This review in its entirety was not published within your pages, but platforming writers who are openly bigoted elsewhere signals that such matters are unimportant to your publication. This is especially the case given this review is an extended version of the one you published.

It would be irresponsible to platform similar reviews from Reid given the clear and unapologetic bias he holds against the queer community.

Signed by,

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eel mag

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Margo Montes de Oca
Jenna Thoms
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