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Making Canons and Finding Flowers
- A Study of Selected
New Zealand Poetry Anthologies

A Thesis
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Abstract

This thesis analyses the poetry contained in anthologies published between the 1940s and 1980s in New Zealand and that of some later anthologies that retrospectively covered the same period. I wanted to find out what subject matter preoccupied poets during these times, to monitor changes in the content of that poetry and to observe what techniques were used and the evolution of styles. Complimentary to the study of the poetry is an evaluation of the intentions of the editors of the anthologies and how much their selections were directed by their tastes and knowledge to form a kind of ‘construct’, or representation of the publishing of poetry.

From my reading, I conjectured that the literary canon with regard to poetry was formed in New Zealand by the mid-1970s, on the strength of publications from Penguin and Oxford University Press. The 1945 and 1960 anthologies by Allen Curnow were extremely influential - particularly the second of these two - and the editors of future anthologies from the larger publishers diverged comparatively little from his choices. Curnow’s anthologies are the subject of Chapter One, and in Chapter Two, I look at Vincent O’Sullivan’s series of three anthologies for Oxford (1970, 1976 and 1987), which confirmed and expanded that canon.

However, from the mid-1960s, and especially in the early 1970s, new trends emerged in New Zealand writing, linked to a consciousness of post-modernist literary theory. Some of the new trends, together with material that supplemented existing perspectives on poetry, are discussed in Chapter Three. The greater degree of acknowledgement of writing by women poets - which began in the late 1960s in smaller literary journals - reached a point where the first anthology of women’s poetry, *Private Gardens*, could be published in 1977. The first major anthology to be edited by a woman appeared five years later. The gradualness of these changes is

stressed, however, with regard to women's poetry included in the larger anthologies themselves.

A new bias emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s in favour of work from the University presses. Nevertheless, anthologies that presented some alternative point of view on our literary history proliferated at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Taken together, the anthologies *Big Smoke* and *Real Fire* form a more holistic picture of what went on in the 1960s and 1970s and are discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis. Concluding remarks focus on the prejudices that appear to have guided the publishing of poetry in New Zealand anthologies, the influence of major poets, and the possibilities for further study of this body of literature.

Preface

I came to New Zealand in 1989 from Cornwall, where I was born in 1967, via Wales, where I lived for two years. My growing interest in literature and the writing of poetry led me to submit my own work to magazines and journals and eventually to become more directly involved with the publishing of New Zealand poetry magazines. I edited two issues of *Spin* and helped set up *Bravado*, a first literary magazine for the Bay of Plenty. I also became interested in haiku and eventually edited *Kokako* – New Zealand’s only specialist haiku magazine - but I have not tried to address the subject of haiku in this thesis.

I was fortunate to gain the assistance of Alistair Paterson, editor of *Poetry NZ*, in the editing of my own work and I have become increasingly involved with that publication also, recently being appointed Associate Editor. My reading of New Zealand poetry has been extended by the poets I have met and corresponded with, and though I realize, and to a limited extent note in the thesis, that there are factions in New Zealand poetry (as there are everywhere), I really wish that there were not.

My enrolment at the University of Waikato has afforded me a lot of time in which to read poetry. Even when little poetry was included in the actual content of courses, I spent many hours on that topic. I would like to praise the New Zealand section of the library here since I have been able to find all of the New Zealand poetry that I looked for on its shelves - that is a very comfortable place for an enthusiast to be in!

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This thesis is dedicated to New Zealand Poets, in honour of their passion and commitment to a body of literature that never ceases to amaze and humble me.

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Introduction

This thesis is a study of a few selected New Zealand poetry anthologies from 1945 to the late 1980s. It also includes anthologies which were published after these dates but which looked specifically at the 1960s and 1970s. In my review of these collections I wanted to see what ‘picture’ the poetry made, what the poems were preoccupied with. The introductions, I was sure, would show another picture, perhaps entirely complementary to the poems, where the poetry selected exemplified the editor’s point of view, but valuable in their own right as commentary on New Zealand poetry and poetics. I did not wish to impose any overall political or theoretical idea and then try to get the information I sifted through to prove its worth. I wanted to explore the anthologies and see what emerged. One of the most significant issues to emerge is that of gender, not so much in the representation of gender within the poems, as in a perceived bias of selection by male editors.

What is an anthology?

An anthology may bring together work by a range of poets associated by time or place or style of poetry, rather than a single writer and often over a wide span of time, or directed toward some particular topic or theme. This could be said of anthologies published in any other location. The best-known or ‘mainstream’ anthologies tend to be those that attempt an over-view of the writing of poetry and a degree of representation of writers who might be included under their title. All national anthologies seem to attempt a degree of representation to the literary public and professional critics. The best known also tend to be those which are published by major publishing houses and which have as their motivation the

availability of a large selection from which to teach. In New Zealand these are Oxford University Press (OUP) and Penguin. The mainstream anthologies are likely to establish the literary canon. These are the kind of anthologies that I will be looking at in the first two chapters. The degree of value placed on the individual poems is not always as essential as the impression given to the reader that a range of voices is being offered. Often editors include something from each major publication by a well-known poet. But we must ask how did those poets get to be well-known in the first place?

One essential point is that poets already included in previous mainstream anthology are likely to be considered again, almost as a matter of protocol and certainly as a matter of practicality, for subsequent publications. Names stay in the mind; poets are often associated with other poets (rightly or wrongly), by ‘school of thought’ or location. This can mean that a literary canon is quickly built. It may be difficult for those poets who have not previously been anthologised to gain admittance. Is a poet included because he or she has been published by a major publisher – and currently in New Zealand that means Auckland University Press (AUP) or Victoria University Press (VUP) – or because their works have sold many copies (whatever the publisher) or because their work is popular with the public through readings? There is a surprising range of possibilities with regard to the means of selection. For example, some of James K. Baxter’s poetry was at the last moment included in Allen Curnow’s 1945 collection for Caxton Press, where the manuscript of the Baxter’s first book was still under consideration, though not yet published. Yet who today would doubt the need for the inclusion of some of Baxter’s early poems, which Allen Curnow immediately recognised?

The concept of a literary canon becomes stronger as time goes by. The sense of an accepted body of work no doubt comes from the assertions of professional critics, academics, teachers and the editors of the anthologies themselves. But are the experts always correct? The general reader and buyer of books may feel more comfortable with such an apparently authentic paradigm as the canon – how do individual readers know that work is good or not if we do not have such an entity to tell us what is good? But there are obvious pitfalls. For example, most major American anthologies still do not include the work of the poet Laura Riding Jackson who wrote from the 1920s to the 1940s. But her influence on poetics and her ability as a poet to produce work of great and almost disturbing intensity is today gaining in recognition, particularly through the promotion of academic Robert Nye who edited her *Complete Poems* and *Selected Poems* for Carcanet. We must question whether the anthologists have decided wisely and whether they bring biases to their decisions that we do not share. We might find that there are New Zealand poets who have been neglected, or others who have been over-rated, particularly when a new vanguard emerges and an anti-canon is formed - the revolutionaries can become the dictators then.

There is yet another class of poet to consider, comprising those who have excluded themselves from anthologies. Though their reasons may differ, each reaction implies that there are serious objections to the possibility of a representational anthology that uses the name 'New Zealand'. Alan Loney's work, for example, has been consistently absent from anthologies, occurring only in early selections by Fleur Adcock and Alistair Paterson. This creates a problem for the general reader dependent on such collections for evaluating New Zealand poetry. Loney's work is that of a successful experimenter who has assimilated the

best of modern and semiotic techniques to produce work that is lively and which evokes the state of the moment in any one time or place. (Semiotics is the science of signs and signifiers.) Why was he absent? None of the editors take the time to explain. Other poets have excluded themselves by choice. Is this decision a vote of no confidence for that particular anthology, the editor, or for the whole concept of anthologies?

Contexts

In my evaluation of the poetry contained in each of the chosen anthologies, it will sometimes be necessary to point to the historical background and social events of the times in which the poems were written to get a better sense of how the poems weave together as a reportable grouping. Or, it could be argued that the poems individually create their own references, that good poetry needs no setting, or that its aesthetic is the only thing that it is necessary to know about – its beauty sets it apart from other forms of writing. But this view might exacerbate the tendency to relegate poetry of the past to a kind of ‘also-ran’ status. C.K Stead has observed that each generation tends to overlook qualities in the poetry of earlier times ¹; we cannot fully imagine ourselves into the climate of writing of another era.

Likewise, and perhaps even more significantly, the intentions and aspirations of the editors of these anthologies will be swayed by their social climate and sub-culture and their choices create the context in which the poems are known to the non-specialist reader. The anthologies become a debating ground for the idea of representation because each particular collection is by necessity just that and, in more extreme cases of biased selection, become a ‘construct’ of the editor.

¹ C.K Stead, Review of “The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse” [1985], in *Landfall* 155, pp. 289-302, p. 294.

This is why, as time passes, the content of the canon is challenged by new writers and commentators and the approach of previous editors revised. Then is seen the emergence of an alternative view of the history of poetry. Not surprisingly, the emergence of alternative views will make it easier for the publication of still further alternatives. This has indeed happened in New Zealand recently following the publication of *Big Smoke* (edited by Alan Brunton, Murray Edmund and Michele Leggott, AUP, 2000).

That last mentioned anthology also began a flood of what I would call regional collections. These brought together poems about a particular area and by poets from that locality. I say this in regard to *Big Smoke* because it was perceived by some to be focused on Auckland writers, though ostensibly about all New Zealand poetry from a particular time-frame, i. e. the 1960s and 1970s. The regional anthologies seem to reflect a need for a grounding sense of identity from poets and community alike – often these volumes are aimed at a wider reading audience, who might identify with the collection because it is ‘their town’. Since 2000, anthologies have emerged from most of the main population centres. These anthologies are also part of what I would call the themed collections.

These changes in publishing trends indicate that the scope for types of anthologies is very wide indeed and we might wonder how far the idea of an anthology may venture. There is also an internationalism coming into discussion and publication. These are reflected in close relationships between New Zealand and Australian magazines and the publication of large selections of New Zealand work in overseas magazines and books.

Besides historical and aesthetic considerations, there is the sheer practicality of the publishing of anthologies to consider. As suggested, these are

most often driven by the needs of educators, and sometimes designed for a specific age-group or reading level. Vincent O'Sullivan pointed out in his introduction to the Oxford anthology of 1970 that some anthologies are of as much interest to the professional historian as to the student of poetry². He hopes that his own anthology will focus on the 'excellence' of the poetry. But, of course, this term 'excellence' begs the question of how to decide - the 'who' may already have been established by the publishing company's choice of editor. No doubt the politics of publishing come into the scenario as soon as the financial considerations are made clear. Any book has to sell and an editor's likely approach (based on the sales of previous publications) must be in a state of negotiation and rarely (if even) aesthetically-based.

The approach to the thesis

In considering which publications constituted anthologies, I decided not to include those that mainly published new material (such as C.A. Marris' series *New Zealand Best Poems*, 1932-1943). I also, reluctantly, avoided anthologies that included collections of poetry and prose. For reasons of space, I have not commented on all three of Allen Curnow's anthologies. The 1945 Caxton and the 1960 Penguin are the best known, so that it seemed less than essential to assess the 1951 volume from Caxton, which was effectively a second edition of the 1945 book. In contrast, I have commented extensively on all three editions of the Oxford anthologies edited by Vincent O'Sullivan, as each contained a substantial increase in the body of poetry and published over a seventeen-year period. There are several anthologies that I originally intended to comment on in detail, but

² Vincent O'Sullivan, Introduction to *An Anthology of Twentieth Century New Zealand Poetry*, selected. by Vincent O'Sullivan (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. xix.

largely omitted. The most well-known of these are *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (edited by Harvey McQueen and Ian Wedde, 1985) and *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English* (edited by Jenny Bornholdt, Gregory O'Brien and Mark Williams, OUP, 1997). This omission became necessary as I realised that the literary canon with regard to poetry was established much earlier in New Zealand than I at first thought. I have given some additional information on the anthologies in an Appendix.

Though I have commented already on the idea of the literary canon, I felt that I could not respect the canon by doing anything more than comment on those particular poems that excite a special kind of response in me. In this sense, my thesis is comparatively subjective. I am interested in the anthology as a book to be read – an idea that is easily forgotten. It is too easy to talk about the anthologies as being solely a production of the editor and many of the reviews of anthologies that I read did just that. I do wish to consider the extent to which any particular anthology may be a construct of this kind, but without neglecting to examine the poems themselves. An editor brings together a body of worked based on his or her own private experiences, tastes and interests, but whatever is assembled is still a group of poems and needs to be read in terms of whether any particular anthology – as a book of poetry - is pleasurable or instructive.

Chapter One: The Curnow Legacy

A Book of New Zealand Verse, 1923-1945, chosen by Allen Curnow, 1945.

Allen Curnow defends the relatively modest scope of his anthology by saying, “the body of New Zealand verse is not to be enlarged by seeking numbers of additional names”³, by which he means to focus on quality. Immediately this places Curnow on subjective ground. His statement, “we have begun, but only begun, to correct misconceptions of the nature and uses of poetry” (15), sounds potentially programmatic. But he works hard to justify his inclusions in his introduction and claims to be seeking ‘purposive verse’.

In reviewing the work of previous collections, Curnow seems comfortable with the much larger selection of poetry in W.F. Alexander and A.E. Currie’s *A Treasury of New Zealand Verse* (1926)⁴, but is less tolerant of the works presented in *Kowhai Gold* (1930). So that he claims there is little precedent for his work as an anthologist, which seems to suggest that he sees himself as a pioneer of more serious poetry. Curnow reflects early on that the publishing of poetry usually occurs on scant resources. Indeed, this anthology was published by a small, independent press in Christchurch, New Zealand. But we get the impression that Curnow wants the quality of the anthology to stand anywhere in the world, and certainly that it will not be read with embarrassment in England. John Geraets warns that the anthology can seem to come from nowhere: “In Curnow we encounter a new genus, that of poet-anthologist in which the poet-

³ *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-1945*, selected by Allen Curnow (Christchurch: Caxton, 1945), p.14. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited parenthetically.

⁴ This is a revised edition of their *New Zealand Verse*, 1906.

anthologist begins as the sole point of reference”⁵. Geraets comments further that because Curnow also wishes to create a cultural separation from Britain, this may make the poems on offer seem displaced from any sense of historical continuity with other English-language poetry.

In discussing the establishment of the country’s verse, Curnow quotes from a private letter from Karl Shapiro, a Jewish American poet who won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1945 for the book *V-Letter and Other Poems*⁶, which he wrote while stationed in New Guinea during World War Two. Shapiro writes: “Around the first man who reveals the true nationality of himself, a literature builds itself” (33). It was unusual at this time for New Zealand poets to have much contact with American writers, but Shapiro’s military service took him to the Pacific, and during the war over a million US troops passed through New Zealand. Shapiro’s is a grand statement for the marking off of the beginning of a new literature, but again, must be taken as subjective.

Curnow also quotes William Pember Reeves, whose lines show an association between nationalism and colonisation and gender: “We men take root who face the blast” (18), presumably because of the particular work that the ‘men’ – as opposed to women - have been occupied in: it has an heroic quality, so that the colonisers of the land may one day also become pioneers of a new stream of English-language poetry.

⁵ John Geraets, ‘The New Zealand Anthology: Initiating an Archaeology’, in *AND* 1, August 1983, pp. 66-73 (p. 66).

⁶ “The title refers to the correspondence of overseas military personnel; letters from abroad were censored and sent on microfilm to the United States, where they were reprinted in smaller format (V-letters) and mailed. (Letters from the United States to military personnel overseas were treated in the same way though they were not censored.) Thus, Shapiro’s soldier’s letter home symbolized the overlapping of personal feeling and public exposure in the life of the U.S. serviceman.” http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/stadler_center/shapiro/ 23/08/06 From *Dictionary of Literary Biography* v. 48, by Ross LaBrie and *Contemporary Authors New Revisions Series* v.66. Reprinted by permission of the Gale Group.

Curnow argues that the settler-poets left the problems of an 'exiled spirit' to subsequent generations to deal with (20). Perhaps there lies a reason for Curnow's restrictions with regard to the earlier poetry: the settler issues could not be dealt with in those times, without adequate reflection. This would tend to make poetry itself a rather retrospective, academic pastime.

Curnow remarks on the perceived need of earlier writers to retain their cultural links with England, still considered 'home' by many New Zealanders. Poetry itself could become disembodied in this environment - but disembodied from what? - presumably from the sense of being heard. Curnow observes what he calls the awful tendencies of regionalism and for the English sun to stand still (21), so that the distant concept of 'home' is retained in a way that the inhabitants of the homeland do not share. He further explains his outlook on the poems:

Local reference ought never to decide our estimate of a poem's worth. Yet anyone capable of poetry, feeling his own land and people, his footing on the earth, to be in any way inadequate, unstable, unreal, is bound to attempt a resolution of the problems set by his birth. (22)

I would suggest that the first poet we encounter in the anthology who is in this position is A.R.D. Fairburn. There is, for the first time a sense of a poet who was born here. Such a feeling occurs in the work of James K. Baxter also, but there it is obscured by the exhibition of an excess of talent in a younger man who cannot yet integrate himself into the young land.

In his criticisms of early work by Eileen Duggan and Robyn Hyde, Curnow indicates that he is unable to identify with a perspective that he can see only as romantic waywardness. Generally speaking, there is an intellectualism in some of the writing in the anthology that leaves one totally cold. In particular, I

was struck by this thought in reading the first few entries by Curnow himself. Though elsewhere he shows great insight, there is a tendency for the intellect to remove itself from reality in the way in which it comments on that reality, a kind of brooding rationalism where the brooding is not acknowledged. Curnow describes, in those romantic poems written by female poets, “an appeal for some childhood privilege, exempting from reality” (24). But the male writers may claim a different privilege, where rationalism refuses to acknowledge the possible veracity and value of a perspective outside its own. One who is raised in New Zealand may acknowledge what is ‘unstable, unreal’, but there is an insistence on the problematic here, which is wont to become a self-fulfilling prophecy, discovering only what it seeks.

Curnow claims that Hyde, “wrote impulsively and did her best unawares” (37). One wonders why that should not be the case, why self-consciousness in writing might be the only route of discovery for poetry. Here, ‘the craftsman’ speaks: that particular manifestation of the poetic vision that sees deliberation and time as the virtues of good writing. Certainly such must be in evidence in the early stages of a writer’s career, but one would hope that something is learnt through the meticulous application to rhythms, what is intrinsic in a poem, what can be removed, what aspects of the spoken word will help poetry to develop, so that a more relaxed form eventually becomes possible. Other early essays by Curnow help explain his attitude to poetry. Whereas music may give pleasure in sound and rhythm, he says, language “exists only for the mind”⁷.

⁷ Allen Curnow, ‘Poets in New Zealand: Problems of Writing and Criticism’, in *Look Back Harder – Critical Writing 1935-1984*, ed. and intro. by Peter Simpson (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1987), p. 7.

Curnow takes much time to criticise Eileen Duggan's poetry. She had a great reputation during this era, but her work was not included in the anthology. He presumably also feels justified in discussing her poetry since he had tried to include some of her work, but Duggan declined to be represented by the selection that the editor had made ⁸. Peter Whiteford writes that Duggan "chose to stand outside Curnow's 1960 Penguin anthology," but in fact she made that choice about each of his anthologies ⁹. Michele Leggott tells us "that Duggan was quick to turn down the initial request because she was unsympathetic to the project and its editor" ¹⁰. This marks a significant problem for the concept of an anthology. There will always be arguments as to who should and should not be included, but if major poets exclude themselves, for whatever reasons, this act surely lessens the importance of the anthology. Other women poets may have been unlucky to miss inclusion in this anthology, such as Blanche Baughan (see later in this chapter).

Curnow makes an interesting sociological observation that there was little verse published which referred to the Depression, the economic crisis of the previous ten years. He identifies only a general depression amongst the younger New Zealanders whose, "land was all his country's wealth" (40). I will return to the topic of the Depression later in this chapter. Curnow goes on to discuss 'kinship', and the flavours of New Zealand poems, observing that many of those in his anthology are concerned with the sea – its inhabitants can never be far from that natural defining boundary.

⁸ Peter Whiteford, 'Eileen Duggan', in *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* ed. by Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie (Auckland: Oxford, 1998), p. 151.

⁹ Peter Whiteford, Introduction to *Eileen Duggan – Selected Poems*, by Eileen Duggan (Wellington: Victoria University, 1994), p. 17.

¹⁰ Michele Leggott, 'Opening the Archive: Robin Hyde, Eileen Duggan and the Persistence of Record', in *Opening the Book – New Essays on New Zealand Writing*, ed. by Mark Williams and Michele Leggott (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995), pp. 266-293 (p. 282).

The poems

Arnold Wall's lines on the first page of the selection of poems might read as a metaphor for the exploration of a New Zealand land, poetry and national identity: "Flutter no more, but thrust / Thy beak into the seed" (59). It is very much an exhortation and in reproducing the poem where he does, the editor endorses the sentiment. Elsewhere in Wall's work we find a kind of praise for the natural world, which at the same time betrays an anxiety over humanity's place within it. Wall describes humanity as "like the puzzled ape we grin at / Who feels for his own face behind the mirror" (60) - we are intrinsically peculiar, presumably our intelligence makes us so,

Though the work of only two female poets appears in the anthology, Ursula Bethell is given seventeen pages, the largest selection of all ¹¹. In his introduction, Curnow writes of the 'proportioned view' of her work, her steadfastness in observation and description and a superior vocabulary. Bethell herself contrasts British anxiety about the weather, that most perennial of topics, with an easier outlook, for her "All weathers are salutary" (63). It may be stretching a point to suggest that the truly perpetual growth of native New Zealand fauna necessitates another view of the providential aspect of nature. The human occupies a temporary place. In the poem 'Time', she shows her own longing for a history and something to look back on. For the garden to be 'established' is the ultimate luxury for the gardener. The homestead (in 'By Burke's Pass') is merely a "halting place, accommodation / achieved" (71). Perhaps that last word, 'achieved', is an echo from the poem 'The Windhover' by

¹¹ One more page than Curnow himself; A.R.D. Fairburn has 15, and R.A.K. Mason 14 pages.

Gerard Manley Hopkins¹². For the human, mastery does not seem an option.

‘Accommodation’ – a word with overtones of travel and temporary status – is all that is possible.

The land itself is nothing if not fertile, in the garden, ashes are spread, “dust unto fertile dust” (66). After the first selection, Bethell’s poetry reads as much more personal, but there is still variety of tone. She is modern (‘Dirge’), or embellishes her work (‘The Long Harbour’ – see below) and abstract (‘Forest Sleep’) It is in abstraction that the work occasionally falls down and seems ordinary: “Forecast the consciousness of microcosm, man, / The tuned antinomies of his mysterious life?” (69) Though there is beauty still in the vowel chimes.

This work is rather different to the kind of poetry we might expect after the criticism Curnow makes of the so-called emotional female mode. This is a male retaliation, for too often the male poets in this anthology get swamped in abstraction. Bethell’s work shows an everyday detail that makes some of the work lasting in interest, whereas obsessive concerns about destiny and ‘man’s’ place in the world can tire each succeeding generation. In general, Bethell’s work is pervaded by rich and elaborate language, though sometimes overly ornamented. Bethell can be romantic: in ‘The Long Harbour’ she speaks of clematis strewing the valleys where the blackbird, tui and ‘happy colonist’ echo each other (67). Even the pines, which ‘garrison’ the burial-grounds, are anthropomorphic. She concludes the poem with a vision of further exploration. Her reference to the ‘old forefathers’ almost implies envy – she wishes that she

¹² “Stirred for a bird, - the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!” Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, sel., intro. and notes by W.H. Gardner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953; repr. 1963), p. 30.

too had been part of those vital days, but reflects that there may be more that is as yet undiscovered.

Bethell, like other poets, cannot escape the past or inherited techniques. There are some precise kennings, such as ‘sea-answering’ and ‘tempest-braving’, but a forced term like ‘ancestresses’ is very hard to say aloud. The poetry is written as if things are unresolved, which, as part of life they must surely be. There is the simple desire for flowers, an honest picture of the need for life to be better; but she resigns herself to the idea that beauty may be fugitive in this world (72). If Bethell’s style is comparatively traditional, it is also articulate. The ‘individual tongue’ makes fit response, both in the content of her poetry and the execution of it; her field of interest is the reaction of the individualist. Sometimes the ‘October Morning’ provides a clean start, it calls ‘all clear’ (79) and that individual can begin afresh.

J. R. Hervey’s poetry is also preoccupied with the possibility of change, but less optimistic about the reality of it. There is an odd relationship between change and the quality of beauty in the poem ‘Change to Snow’:

What shall we do with our piled opinions
When, facing another day,
We see that change has made a sloven
Of beauty we have proven?

No doubt the uncertainty lies with ideas of progress, with what we might lose in one area of life when we have progressed in another. Hervey is decidedly abstract and Victorian in technique, as is seen in an earlier stanza from the same poem:

Our sleep, matted upon content,
Dreams not of change, not of a revelation

That, sheering up like a wave,

Makes of the idol's court a desolation. (82)

Here, abstract words such as 'content', 'change', 'revelation' and 'desolation', the frequent use of verb inversions to fit the scansion and poeticisms like 'idol's court' control the poem. There is originality in the use of 'mattressed', but the sense of inescapable fate expressed in the poem seems to run over into the approach to poetry written along well-marked lines. In 'Two Old Men Look at the Sea', the poet speaks of their 'empty mood', which is evocative, though initially we might wish for more detail. It may be that, unconsciously, the idea of progress is tainted and is mirrored in a conservative technique.

D'Arcy Cresswell talks of "cities that are shrouds, only poets that are tombs" (86). This is taken from his poem 'O England'. Like Hervey, he considers change: "Time lies abed with change: the engendering hour / Breeds on its opposite" (87). These lines bespeak reticence, yet the general tone of a poem like 'O England' is dominated by the impetus to move forward, and in a different direction. He would go "to the fields where I might not excel" (91) - it is a risk he is prepared to take. Yet, later in the Lyttelton Harbour sequence, he concludes that, "any hope is not" (94). It is a futile drive then that humanity possesses, but because it is intrinsic, he claims, it cannot be resisted, so we attempt to move on.

J. C. Beaglehole's poem 'Lighting My Pipe' is a celebration of the moment. It is a moment that might have been experienced anywhere. It is refreshing to feel here that the editor selects a poem simply on its merit as a sustained mood piece, to be celebrated as written by 'one of us'. Beaglehole takes solace from the music of J.S. Bach, whose "prelude flowed like a spring of consolation" (101). There is a universal at work here also. The poet's need for

such compensation comes from a perceived intellectual isolation. When he looks to nature, he seems to allude to art:

enduring, ever the flower
perfect, the seed the central core
premised and grown symmetrical
enduring. (102)

The ‘Gigue’ section is spare, dance-like and modern. Bach, the musician and composer, speaks in the first person and relates a struggle in which he seems to speak for all.

Anton Vogt also writes of universal concerns and at the same time manages to suggest personal struggles against bigotry, through such lines as: “And the elaborate villainy of the corrupt / For whom only a foreign accent is apt” (183). The lines grow in poignancy when one learns that Vogt was Norwegian by birth and that his father was assaulted in Wellington on a tram in 1936 for speaking with his son in his native tongue ¹³.

In contrast to these more universal sensibilities, A. R. D. Fairburn’s work seems to embody an essential New Zealand quality, yet this is hard to define. In the beginning of my study, I had the impression that Fairburn was the first writer in the anthology who was born here. Although that is not literally the case, he seems to consider all around him and all that might contribute to being a New Zealander. Images of bones recur in his poetry:

yet in my bones I feel the stir
of ancient wrongs and vanished woes,
and through my troubled spirit goes

¹³ King, p. 366.

the shadow of an old despair. (106)

Fairburn shows an awareness of the ancient culture that he is descended from (the Norman prow and the Roman host), but there is another culture at work here: the Maori. The poet is sensitive to that spiritual fact.

Fairburn uses the image of a snake as a metaphor for change, his former self, “sloughed like a snakeskin there he lies / and shall not trouble me again for aye” (106). He implies also that he has been a kind of society fool: “I have lain too long / in the gutter of the world, crossed by a king’s shadow” (107). This multiple referencing shows a skill hitherto absent in the anthology. The poet refers to the system of monarchy in Britain and elsewhere, implying, with the word ‘shadow’, that that system is fading in influence. By pairing the words ‘crossed’ and ‘shadow’, he evokes the word ‘bow’ or ‘crossbow’ in the mind of the reader, to refer to the war-like and punitive aspect of the feudal system.

Fairburn’s (and for that matter Curnow’s) interest in the concept of Dominion seems at odds with the general population of New Zealand at this time. Governor-General Lord Jellicoe said in 1924 that New Zealanders were “even more British than their kin of the Motherland”¹⁴. Michael King highlights the lack of interest on the part of New Zealanders in ratifying the 1931 Statute of Westminster, which would have given the Dominions complete autonomy, on a par with Westminster itself¹⁵. This event finally did occur in 1947.

The opening two lines of the extracts from Fairburn’s ‘Dominion’ of “a young and wrinkled land” (115) echo Curnow’s overall vision of the young nation. The lines are isolated from the section they were taken from and even begin in mid-sentence (‘Utopia’ – Curnow reproduces the same extracts in his

¹⁴ In Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin, 2003), pp. 365-6.

¹⁵ King.

1960 anthology, but Vincent O’Sullivan includes a much longer extract from the sequence in his 1970 Oxford anthology – see Chapter Two). By making such a specific extract, the editor creates a frame through which the rest of the poem is to be viewed. This seems proscriptive on Curnow’s part.

Terry Sturm has interpreted Fairburn’s ‘Dominion’ as “the single major poem [of the time] to attempt to deal directly with the experience of the Depression”¹⁶. But the poem does this in general terms. The social context is distant from the language of the poem. The way that Fairburn speaks, for example, of ‘customary greed’ makes for a universal reflection. R.A.K. Mason is much more specific in relating the facts of poverty of those times in a poem like ‘On the Swag’. Here we meet an exhausted man tramping the countryside with just a pack on his back. No doubt, Fairburn’s universal points are valuable, but they have to be teased out of the poems. Mason’s ‘Judas Iscariot’ is an allegory for the contemptuous treatment of New Zealand loan holders whose rights were withdrawn by Britain in the early Thirties. But that context is not apparent to the present day reader and I at first thought that the poem made Judas into a kind of folk hero its irony was so light. Judas is equated with England in the poem but in a circumspect manner.

In commenting on the historical background to the Depression, Fairburn sums up the problems of migration with the line, “They change the sky but not their hearts who cross the seas” (116). There is even something in common here with Curnow’s idea of Europeans and Maori both as colonists. Three races, Fairburn writes, have formed the home (or homeland) and we British are the latest. It is unclear who comprises the third group. It may be the European settlers

¹⁶ Terry Sturm, ‘New Zealand Poetry and the Depression’, *Essays on New Zealand Literature*, ed. by Wystan Curnow (Auckland: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973), p. 19.

following the Moriori and the Maori; or the third group may be the poets who succeed the Maori and the European. Whoever it is, they still have the blood of the previous settlers on their hands, according to Fairburn. It is a succession, in blood, one colony following another.

Later, in 'Elements', Fairburn writes, "Fair earth, we have broken our idols" (120) – one wonders how the earth might believe such a statement, even if many of the old icons of religion have dwindled, humankind seems to find alternative forms of power to worship. In comparison with Fairburn, some of R.A.K. Mason's poems can seem like examples of nineteenth-century poetry. In Mason's 'The Lesser Stars', the metre creates eccentric line breaks that do not contribute to the poem, and in 'Sonnet of Brotherhood' there is a continued level of abstraction in, for example, the references to fate. However, Mac Jackson insists that Mason's poetry is very much of the nineteen-twenties in terms of his use of formal meter and rhyme scheme ¹⁷. But is this a sign of up-to-date practice or the habituation of a previous time and influence? I would suggest the latter.

There are recurrent preoccupations in Mason's work, with repeated reference to caves, and to time, past and future. Mason claims that his voice is cracked and harsh in 'Song of Allegiance'. But the poem represents an aspiration. He recounts the efforts of poets of the past, from Shakespeare to Housman and concludes "boldly bring I up the rear" (127) – is this self-aggrandisement? Other poets have made similar lists to which they have added their own names, but I wonder at the use of such statements beyond the poet's own private study.

In 'Out from Sea-bondage', Mason uses inversions which twist and shape the sonnet to the point "where fleeting phantoms drave" (121). This is most

¹⁷ MacD.P. Jackson, 'Poetry, Part One: Beginnings to 1945', in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, ed. by Terry Sturm, 2nd edn. (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 394-446 (pp. 395-6).

awkward. The poem is generalised, with a lack of detail. Poems such as the sonnet 'Footnote to John ii, 4' and 'Flow at Full Moon' are derived from thought rather than experience. He makes an attempt at a folk lyric in 'Body of John', but the ending "bones lie stark hereunder" (122) is too sophisticated for the form. Mason can be morose ('The Spark's Farewell to its Clay'), but achieves a great reversal of focus in 'Latter-day Geography Lesson', when he substitutes an Eskimo for a New Zealander visiting London ruins. By the time we get to poems like 'Ecce Homunculus' the strictest of form seems no longer to hamper the poem. Like Fairburn, Mason is critical of formal religion. He also wants his genealogical line to end ('The Young Man Thinks of Sons') - another break with tradition. He speaks of how his son might perceive and judge his father's actions: "who in his nettle-grown kingdom should curse both my sins of commission / and what is left undone" (131).

The story of Robyn Hyde's journey away from New Zealand seems to say more about the country from that external perspective than many are able to say from within. Travelling through the Russian steppes, she remembers "the purple thither-dusty grasses," the "fat rains" and the "snow-fence, black birch rotting in slabs" of the Mackenzie country, the 'growling' train and the white cocks with "combs like dusty blood" (138-9). All of these references are clearer in her mind than the land she is travelling through. New Zealand seems a "Young crude country, hard as unbroken shells" (140). Country life was hard. The mention of shells makes me think that if they had had time to pick up shells on the beach, they would have been happier. But that luxury was not possible. The cities were brighter; the stars bid her 'rise and go' - we see here the artistic impetus to travel, to stretch experience and be enriched by other cultures.

Allen Curnow's poetry often comes from a peculiarly external perspective – he rarely seems to be inside his subject. That perspective is somewhere else, not here, as Curnow captures in the subject matter of his poem 'House and Land', with the lines, "in a land of settlers / With never a soul at home" (159). He could be describing the pragmatic coincidence of neighbours visiting and finding each other absent, or, more obviously, the general lack of any sense of the land being home. The poem suggests that the land itself will reject human effort.

One wonders whether if in Curnow's famous sonnet about the moa, there is a degree of displacement: "Not I, some child, born in a marvellous year, / Will learn the trick of standing upright here" (166). Why someone in the future, why not him? This resembles the considerations of time mentioned in the introduction. Is he, the poet, escaping responsibility? Perhaps it is that closure itself is bad for literature. The issue of closure is at odds with what Curnow seems to expect in terms of an understanding of the settler era.

Denis Glover's poetry displays a deep sympathy with the land and the men who work it:

These men we should honour above the managers of banks.

They pitted their flesh and their cunning against odds

unimagined by those who turn wordily the first sods.

And on the payroll their labour stands unadorned by thanks. (171)

We cannot help wonder at 'wordily' in this context. Glover has in mind some notable, some mayor or governor who makes a little speech before ceremonially shifting a bit of soil. The poet too is a manipulator of words, but the poem makes a claim for the man who is outside the self-congratulatory world of the bankers as having established the foundation of the new country through physical toil. The

difference between the politician and the poet is that the poet pays homage to the labouring man. Can we suppose that the labourer's life was without its rewards? Glover speculates on some of the stories recounted in the pubs: "old epic deeds amid that unheeding hubbub" (171). The pub, too, is given distinction here. It does not heed parliament or stop its drinking; it is independent of that other 'official' life.

In Glover's 'Letter to Country Friends', a town-dweller communicates the tensions of modern life. The people fear by-laws and the police. They are uneasy with the gasman and feel that their dreams are being confined to quarter-acre sections. The description of the newspaper with its stories of war and concerns with finance through its 'photographic page' is somehow ominous (172). The literal quality of the photographic image seems to signal an end to authentic life. In 'Sunday morning', Glover describes apprehensions about the Christian Sabbath. The very air is allowed to breathe more naturally on a Sunday, though it remains "under the heavy yoke of bells" (175). It is the rest from labour that the Sabbath brings that the people need, rather than the form of the religion itself.

In Glover's famous poem 'The Magpies' we see that the natural world is more than indifferent to humankind. The magpies are in possession of the land - they are in possession of themselves - and one almost has the impression that Glover approves. The poem is a celebration of the birds' language with its precise onomatopoeia. By sharing that language, by trying to reproduce it in a text, Glover rediscovers himself; he is no longer estranged in the way that the characters Tom and Elizabeth are estranged from the land.

When we come to the selection of poetry in the anthology by a then very young James K. Baxter we hear a voice that is relaxed and at home. Here for

perhaps the first time is a poet who has grown up in New Zealand with enough education and knowledge of the historical traditions around the writing of poetry to be able to compose with a refreshing and local sense of freedom. As suggested earlier, the only thing that does limit his writing is an excess of talent. Curnow remarked on Baxter's "eloquence, rather than the inquisitively precise word" (55). In 'Prelude N.Z.' (even the abbreviation seems to spell confidence), there are echoes of Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Baxter's youthfulness comes through when he writes about whalers, adventures and wars.

Many of the poems in Curnow's anthology are concerned with building the nation and a history, but many are about the themes of any other group of poems from any other time. The tendency toward mood poems is as common here as elsewhere in the middle of the twentieth century. There are many considerations of time, for example, in the work of Mason, Bethell and Cresswell.

After reading the anthology, one must reflect again on Curnow's comment on the lack of poems concerning the Depression of the 1930s. One would assume that such a world-wide phenomena that affected New Zealand so deeply (Michael King has estimated that as many 100,000 New Zealanders may have been unemployed at the time) would be ever-present in the poetry of the times. Some poets did write about the Depression, but in somewhat guarded, allegorical terms. Historian Michael King's offers a possible explanation of this absence. He discusses the writers of the period and in particular the example of Frank Sargeson. King writes: "The Depression was not an unmitigated disaster for all New Zealanders, however. There were some who, because of their occupations or private means, scarcely noticed its passage. And there were others

who succeeded in making the experience positive, a source of adventure and spiritual or cultural enrichment”¹⁸. Sargeson was a clear example of this outlook and he observed the benefits of a return to an industrious independence on the part of some New Zealanders who, thanks to the economic situation, again kept house cows, grew their own vegetables and ate wild herbs and seaweed. There was also an enhanced sense of comradeship with others who had suffered, and thinking about the causes of the Depression was a preoccupation shared by Sargeson with writers such as A.R.D. Fairburn and Roderick Finlayson who became active in the Young Communist League. In quite a different context, Sturm claims that Ursula Bethell did much of her best writing during the Depression¹⁹.

It is worth noting that those who endured the Depression did not necessarily use that term. During such momentous epochs the names they eventually assume are not in common usage. It is interesting to record some of the other terminology that Curnow uses or does not yet use in this anthology. For example, Curnow consistently employs the term ‘verse’. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* assigns three meanings to the word: (a) a line of metrical writing, (b) a stanza, (c) poetry in general²⁰. The term ‘verse’ is now little used, though surprisingly the Penguin anthology of 1985 is of New Zealand *Verse*. Mac Jackson also uses the recondite word in his chapter on poetry in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, as late as 1998²¹.

¹⁸ King, p. 349.

¹⁹ Sturm, pp. 23-24.

²⁰ *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, by J.A. Cuddon, rev. by C.E. Preston (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977; repr. 1999), p. 965.

²¹ Jackson, p. 394.

Though considered by many (including Peter Simpson in the *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* ²²) to be a seminal work, the 1945 Caxton anthology has often been criticised as elitist. Part of this negative criticism may stem from the fact that thirteen of the sixteen poets included in the anthology had been published by Caxton in the previous decade and Curnow worked closely with Denis Glover at the Caxton Press. The small number of female poets represented has also been heavily criticised. But it can be seen from the topics discussed via the poetry selected, that the idea of literary nationalism, and the generation of a body of literature which represented the new nation, was an over-riding imperative in the editor's choices.

The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse, introduced and edited by Allen Curnow, 1960.

Only three poets included in Allen Curnow's 1945 Caxton anthology are omitted from this Penguin anthology: J. C. Beaglehole, Douglas Stewart and Anton Vogt. Beaglehole was an historian and seen more as an occasional writer of verse, which perhaps explains his exclusion this time, together with a growing sense of the seriousness of intent on the part of the editor. However, the strength of Beaglehole's poetry, as described earlier in this chapter, would seem to me to warrant his place. Notwithstanding these few variations, the selection shows some consistency. In his introduction to this larger 1960 anthology, Curnow claims to be making "a first really comprehensive anthology of my country's

²² *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, ed. by Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie (Auckland: Oxford, 1998), p. 122.

verse”²³. This statement would appear to disown his earlier anthology on some level, or at least to make excuses for its restrictive selection. (It also suggests a lack of approbation for Robert Chapman and Johnathan Bennett’s *An Anthology of New Zealand Verse* published in 1956 by OUP.) At the same time, we might say that the difference in scope is made possible by further time spent in literary study, both by the editor and other critics during the fifteen years that had passed since the 1945 Caxton collection. Perhaps the biggest difference is that this project is backed by a major, international publisher.

Curnow writes, first of all, of pressures caused by the isolation of New Zealand, which shape the poetry. These pressures are to do with the physical character of the land itself, he says, and the country’s history. At this point, he claims, there are no expatriate writers of note for whose work a New Zealand critic needs to argue (17). The editor is conscious of the appreciation of New Zealand poetry as indicated by some very positive reviews of the 1956 anthology by Chapman and Bennett. Though British reviewer John Lehmann misinterpreted the degree of concentration of poets in Christchurch, he did raise an interesting question as to how those poets might have assimilated developments in poetic technique from England and America. Curnow pursues this point as essentially part of an island story, which must be told if other nations are to understand New Zealand poetry fully. Accordingly, Curnow makes a long introduction to this volume - it is a full fifty pages.

Whilst Alexander and Currie wrote in 1906 that, “there has existed from the very beginning a tradition that it was a good thing to write poetry” (22), this does not mean that all the poetry published is subsequently collectable. In

²³ *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, selected by Allen Curnow (Auckland: Penguin, 1960), p. 17. All subsequent references to this text are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

discussing that approval of the writing of poetry, Curnow introduces Samuel Butler (1835-1902), author of *Erewhon* and *Erewhon Revisited*, who lived in New Zealand for four years from 1860-1864. Butler satirises Utopian visions in a New Zealand context and includes a Darwinian suspicion of the age of machines. Butler notes the money-making preoccupation of his fellow Cantabrians, and says, “it does not do to speak about John Sebastian Bach’s ‘Fugues’ or pre-Raphaelite pictures” (25). Again one might wonder about Beaglehole’s omission here. This gives a very different impression of the cultural milieu in the colonies. (However, Butler did find a copy of a book by Tennyson in a sheep-farmer’s hut in the South Island.) Curnow himself is sarcastic in his criticism of Otago’s John Barr, who, “having done well for himself, sang the blessings of the colonial life” (25). Indeed, I myself would suggest that we are all dependent to some extent on economics, in terms of what time can be set aside for the reading and writing of poetry.

For the settler-poet of the nineteenth century, there was also a great cultural and spiritual change to negotiate. Butler wrote of the experience of being in the native bush for long periods, “I felt my power of collecting myself was beginning to be impaired” (24). Stories surrounding Thomas Kendall the Anglican missionary compound the impression of the disorientation that the bush and the native way of life could cause for the European.

Curnow mentions briefly the motivation behind the inclusion of translations of Maori poetry. At the time, six per cent of New Zealand’s total population was Maori. Curnow claims that, “the pakeha (European) has generally felt his own New Zealand tradition to be enriched and dignified by association with those older Pacific navigators and colonists” (20). It is dignifying to the

pakeha population to be able to regard Maori settlement also as a kind of colonisation, and very liberating to do so: it escapes more argumentative discourse.

In his comments about the state of poetry, Curnow points out in the introduction that any good poet, of whatever nationality, will see things in a unique way and, hopefully, produce writing that is original. Curnow quotes from Charles Brasch's poem 'Self to Self' to explain his point: "if you would sing you must become news." (This sounds oddly Whitmanesque in its belief in the ability of poetry to influence the world, effectively, to sing things into being.) Curnow again cautions against giving a sampling from a larger selection of poets for the sake of seeming fastidious.

In discussing the idea of a 'national literature', Curnow has found that there were claims as early as 1883 for the "first stray notes" of national song by the Rev. Rutherford Waddell of Dunedin (27). This seems a natural inclination, this desire to establish a separate and unique identity for the new homeland. As a nation emerges, it may wish to find representatives other than the politicians, who can define in artistic terms what it now means to be a New Zealander. In G.B. Lancaster's early novel *Promenade*, brother and sister Roddy and Sally Lovell write a poem that is published in a Wellington newspaper by their Uncle Jermyn and considered a kind of first indigenous poem²⁴. In this case, the quality of the poem would be almost immaterial compared to the fact of its having been written. But Curnow is looking for those kinds of landmarks that are not entirely embarrassing as works of art.

²⁴ G. B. Lancaster, *Promenade* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1938), p. 165.

In this regard, Curnow introduces his selection from what he calls the ‘colonist-poets’, with poems by Alfred Domett, C.C. Bowen, Edward Tregear and William Pember Reeves. He says we should see them not as gifted writers, but as men of action without whose general abilities, nothing of merit would have been written. Curnow reflects on the motivation of the colonist-poets, that ‘self-vindication’ was necessary (36). He describes Reeves as the “first native-born poet worth the name” (37), though, ironically, Reeves left New Zealand in his fiftieth year and never returned. He remained in Britain where one of the poems Curnow includes, ‘A Colonist in his Garden’, was written. (Reeves’ collection, *New Zealand and other Poems*, was published in England in 1898.) In contrast, the work of Arthur Adams, born here in 1872, belongs to the second generation, which, Curnow says, “claims for the soil not only the bones but the souls of the dead first settlers” (37). Heroic terms indeed! It is a surprise at this point to read a comment from among Curnow’s early essays: “The production of good poetry cannot be assisted by the ‘national literature’ sentiment”²⁵. I think one could be excused for believing that Curnow had made that very assertion in his choices for anthologies. Stuart Murray has suggested that Curnow was in the act of decolonising New Zealand²⁶ - a useful term for reading Curnow.

In considering the work of the other early writers, Curnow’s comments on Blanche Baughan’s ‘A Bush Section’ are surprising. The poem was written soon after 1900 but it is a poem that would seem contemporary much later in the twentieth century. This impression is so strong that one wonders why it was omitted from his 1945 anthology. The editor says that nothing from that period compares with it, that “no earlier New Zealand poem exhibits such unabashed

²⁵ Curnow, ‘Poets in New Zealand: Problems of Writing’, in *Look Back Harder*, p. 6.

²⁶ Stuart Murray, *Never a Soul at Home – New Zealand Literary Nationalism and the 1930s* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1998), p. 221.

truth to its subject;” it is even, “the best New Zealand poem before Mason.” Curnow goes on to say that the drama of the poem’s perspective has been “strangely overlooked hitherto” (38). Most strange is his own choice, but he makes no comment on that earlier omission. The poem itself seems to prefigure Curnow’s ‘House and Land’ with more of the storyteller at work (I will comment further on this poem later in the chapter).

Also important in the section on early writing is Katherine Mansfield’s poem ‘To Stanislaw Wyspianski’, dedicated to the Polish playwright, poet, painter and architect who dramatised many of the major events of Polish history. Curnow comments that this poem “allows us to date as early as 1910 the emergence of New Zealand as a characterizing emotional force in the work of a native poet” (41). By addressing a Pole, Curnow says, Mansfield signals a shift in the ties and associations to Britain. I would suggest that R.A.K. Mason had achieved something similar with ‘Latter-Day Geography Lesson’. Curnow writes that Mason was able to make comments about colonialism whilst remaining local in his references. Some subtle criticism of Katherine Mansfield may be implied here, however. The editor claims that for the generation of poets following Reeves and Adams, New Zealand was far more a consciousness in their blood, creating greater difficulty for self-imposed exiles such as Mansfield and Rewi Alley. Those who chose to stay behind struggled to infuse their poetry with a local idiom that revealed sensitivity rather than ignorance. Later, Curnow makes the distinction between ‘regionalism’ and writing which manages to capture the “signature of a region” (51); effectively he identifies the regional element with parochialism. Curnow thinks that Mason achieved this ‘signature’ in large

degree, as well as managing to refer to universal subjects, in poems like ‘Judas Iscariot’.

In an earlier footnote, Curnow had mentioned some pioneering ballads, which had been revived in recent years (he does not give any dates). Though charming, Curnow claims, they did not possess “an accent indigenous to New Zealand” (26). The work of A.R.D. Fairburn surely does capture this accent to a much greater extent than that of Mason, whose work often seems guarded by intellect. Curnow acknowledges that Fairburn was more able to “look outward” (46), and attempted to overcome the idea of isolation. Surprisingly, Curnow allows the word ‘wisdom’ in relation to Fairburn’s poetic comment, which gains its authority, he says, from personal speech. Curnow notes that, in fact, these two poets were comparatively isolated until the emergence of younger voices in the thirties and until the appearance of publishers willing to produce books of poetry in New Zealand ²⁷.

In the early thirties, publication of verse was pretty much restricted to the series initiated by C.A. Marris, *New Zealand Best Poems*, and two or three daily newspapers, as well as the short-lived quarterly journal *Phoenix*, which managed only four issues. At the time of writing the introduction, Curnow refers to *Landfall*, initiated by Charles Brasch (of German-Jewish background) in 1947, as New Zealand’s only current literary quarterly. Later, the Pegasus Press was to contribute much to the growth of a local tradition. New Zealand poetry was included in *Folios of New Writing* published in England and edited by John Lehmann, and *Penguin New Writing*, and the audience for poetry grew.

²⁷ Mason threw 200 copies of *The Beggar* into the Auckland Harbour sometime in the 20s. Curnow uses the expression “he allowed himself the gesture” (46), as if it were some defining moment.

Returning to his theme of the island story, Curnow claims: “The true poet is more apt to feel underprivileged in his geographical isolation” (59). The poet of European descent is “of the greater traditions, but not in them.” This seems a subtle yet an entirely necessary distinction. By way of contrast Alistair Paterson remarks on the reversal of the trend that saw New Zealand poets leaving for Britain in the 1970s. Paterson claims that poetry has now become less parochial, benefiting poets such as Siobhan Harvey who came to New Zealand from England in 2001 ²⁸.

In commenting on James K. Baxter’s poetry, Curnow, as in 1945, is critical. He says that Baxter lacks, “that instinct for a reality prior to the poem” (62), something that poets like Fairburn, Brasch and Glover are more obviously conscious of. At the same time, Curnow speaks of the presence of ‘reality’ in some of Baxter’s poetry, a word generally avoided in contemporary critical writing, as with it seems to come the unresolved debate of late twentieth century post-modernist philosophy with respect to what can be known and what can be described by language and how far what can be described is established by the structure of the language itself. Such considerations were already exemplified a decade or so earlier by Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) and other works, and extended into literary theory by many, particularly French, theorists, such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault.

Curnow mentions the evergreen topic of the poets’ search for their own voice. However, he believes the ‘kiwi’ poet is particularly distrustful of the personal voice. He goes on to suggest that there were few innovations in the decade before 1960 and that even the best verse before that date had been dull

²⁸ Alistair Paterson, ‘Siobhan Harvey’, in *Poetry NZ 33*, (Auckland: Brick Row, 2006), p. 11.

and lacking in energy; he describes the poets as “sure of everything but themselves” (65). For example, he describes C.K. Stead’s poems as being ‘generalized’, unallied to place or country. Stead’s poems, he says, have ‘negative definition’ – that is, that Stead is sure of a kind of nothingness in things, and is perhaps therefore an exemplar of the climate of thought prominent around mid-century.

Part of the emergent thought of the period linked to literary nationalism was an increasing social conscience. Writers such as Fairburn were influenced by Marxism, and Kai Jensen has said of these times, “writing which didn’t at least gesture towards a working-class reader was bourgeois, out of date”²⁹. Curnow notes the egalitarianism of New Zealand society, one that it is more successful than most in sharing its benefits; but he stresses that they are ‘uneasy benefits’. As in the earlier anthology, there is an emphasis on difficulty. Alex Calder has observed of this introduction: “words like ‘shock’, ‘unease’, ‘loss’, and ‘isolation’ appear in context as terms of approbation”³⁰. Curnow, however, uses the word ‘culture’ with great reluctance. There is a kind of forced, or self-conscious intellectualism about this, I believe. Stuart Murray offers a contrasting perspective in some comments on the tension between Curnow’s criticism and his actual writing practice: “There is a seeming incompatibility between the prescriptions of Curnow’s criticism, its demands upon literature, and the scepticism revealed in his poetry, where the very act of utterance is often seen to

²⁹ Kai Jensen, *Whole Men* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996), p. 43.

³⁰ Alex Calder, ‘Unsettling Settlement: Poetry and Nationalism in Aotearoa / New Zealand’, in *New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre*, <http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/misc/calder.asp> (15:08:06), pp. 6-7.

be riddled with doubt”³¹. Obviously, then, the poets whose work Curnow assessed as an editor were likely to have endured the same doubt and scepticism.

As mentioned earlier, Eileen Duggan had again declined to be included in Curnow’s 1960 anthology. This time, the editor does not comment on her work in the introduction – because of the threat of legal action from Duggan – and merely notes his desire to have included some of her work. Their disagreement was over which poems would be included. Curnow had changed his mind about content, seemingly without consulting Duggan or gaining permission for the new selection. But she was not the only poet who objected to the editor’s choices. Alistair Campbell, James K. Baxter and Louis Johnson had all threatened to withdraw, though in the end they did not. These disputes delayed the publication of the book for two years³².

There are as yet no references in Curnow’s introduction to ‘multiculturalism’. But to mark the cultural shift that New Zealand went through in the 1960s and 1970s, Maori expressions are no longer given in italics the way they were in 1945. Alan Brunton in his introductory essay to *Big Smoke* (see Chapter Four) gives much in the way of historical and linguistic background to the period. Brunton cites, for example, the publication of Hone Tuwhare’s *No Ordinary Sun* by Blackwood and Janet Paul as the first mainstream book of poetry to render Maori words in ordinary type and not in italics. Editor Phoebe Meikle initiated this practice as part of the publisher’s house style³³.

³¹ Murray, p. 223.

³² Leggott, pp. 283-284.

³³ *Big Smoke – New Zealand Poems 1960-1975*, ed. by Alan Brunton, Murray Edmund and Michelle Leggott (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2000), p. 3.

The poems

In the note on New Zealand Verse and Maori translation, by Roger Oppenheim and Allen Curnow, the assertion is made that no non-Maori native speaker correctly pronounces the Maori language, and even that none are truly capable of doing so. Nevertheless, a guide to pronunciation is given. The writers note that New Zealand's Broadcasting Service had made "pedantic attempts at correctness" (68), apparently with displeasing results. The opinions at this time, then, are quite entrenched with regard to the possibilities of the general population of New Zealand being able to share in an appreciation of its two languages. There follows a discussion of early Maori scholars, in particular the work of Governor-General Sir George Grey who collected many waiata. It is explained that Maori poetry is composed of four forms: waiata (songs), tangi (laments), karakia (ritual chant) and reo tao (a chant giving power to a spear).

The section of Maori poetry begins with the story of the creation of the world, translated by the scholar and missionary Richard Taylor. To my reading, the opening lines of 'The first period' are eminently Taoist: "From the conception the increase / from the increase the thought" (79). Similarly, in 'The third period' he gives, "From the nothing the begetting" (80). I was a little suspicious of the opening line of 'The second period', which is "The word became fruitful" - rather close to the opening statement of John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the word." As the earth becomes covered in greenery, in the creation story, I was surprised to read of 'bramble' and 'nettle' - words that now seem extremely out of place in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. There follow six other Maori poems translated by Roger Oppenheim and Allen Curnow. They end with the following lines from a tangi, which refer to the Maori Chief of the Nga Puhi tribe

Hone Heke, who famously cut down the flagpole bearing the British flag precipitating the Flagstaff War in the 1840s:

The white mists hang heavy
about famous Heke's head –
disperse them, let them die!
lest the evil that is best forgotten
murmur in the memory. (87)

The conclusion suggests the desire to heal and move on. Heke, who had signed the Treaty of Waitangi but later became disillusioned with it, was eventually reconciled with Governor Grey.

The anthology moves on to poems written in English. In C.C. Bowen's 'The Old Year and the New', it is supposed that the memory of England's moral history and principles will guide the people of New Zealand's present. The sentiment is confusing. It might just as easily be asked if the present really belonged to these people, what need would there be of the past, of what is effectively now another nation? The sentiment only holds if New Zealand life and culture remains primarily derivative of any European origins.

Edward Tregear's 'Te Whetu Plains' (written about 1870, but unpublished until 1919) is impressive to the modern reader - we would not think that such pieces could have been written in New Zealand in such times if we had believed Curnow's 1945 thesis. However, Tregear also shows a European bias when it comes to personal philosophy. For him, the land is songless, because it lacks the nightingale – remarkable when we recall the sounds of tui or bellbird (or the fact that the southern and northern bellbirds use the same four notes to produce distinctly different tunes). Tregear suggests that this country is at a much

earlier stage of evolution (presumably than that of Europe), and finds the peacefulness unbearable; it is a 'ghastly peace'.

Similarly, in William Pember Reeves' 'A Colonist in his Garden', there is almost an injunction against being happy in New Zealand. This is the poem that Reeves wrote after settling in Britain. It is as if the sentiment could not have been articulated whilst on New Zealand soil. There is an emptiness, he says, about New Zealand life, "Where men but talk of gold and sheep / And think of sheep and gold" (98). Later, he is more genuinely conscious of his own sentiments in his writing, revealing that the England he thought he knew, in fact, no longer exists. This is the England described by New Zealand-born people as 'home', even by those who have never visited it. The sense of disappointment is instructive and meaningful here, I think.

Blanche Baughan's 'A Bush Section' is sparingly-written, with the flow of everyday speech:

Logs, at the door, by the fence; logs, broadcast over the paddock;
Sprawling in motionless thousands away down the green of the gully,
Logs, grey-black.

Again one wonders why this work was excluded from Curnow's Caxton selection. How much of a working brief was the period of dates he gave then: 1923-1945? Baughan's poem appeared in the first decade of the twentieth century. Had the editor decided on that earlier date before he collected the work, or was the periodic bracket set by the work itself, as Curnow seemed to suggest in his comments about the emergence of Mason's poetry? At least Curnow includes the poem in its entirety in this anthology (Vincent O'Sullivan offers an extract from it in his 1970 anthology for OUP). The poetry has captured the

essence of the work of the bushmen and a distinct moment in New Zealand's social history:

Day after day,
The hills stand out on the sky,
The splinters stand on the hills,
In the paddock the logs lie prone.

In Arthur H. Adams' 'The Dwellings of our Dead', there may be a deliberate ambiguity at work. Is it the tui that shouts incoherently, or the settler, or the dead? When writing of the trenches dug in New Zealand warfare, Adams speaks of "Brave white and braver brown" (113) – an acknowledgement of the courage of the Maori warriors. There is a longing for other climes that resembles Reeves' and Tregear's poems. These are yearnings for the glories of autumn, which do not happen here. The phrase "The nation of their making" seems to imply a spiritual quest, but one without great expectation of fulfillment.

It is a pleasure to read forward to the wit of Katherine Mansfield's work. She also displays sensitivity to the supernatural that compares well with Fairburn: "What would they know of ghosts and unseen presences, / Of shadows that blot out reality, of darkness that stultifies morn?" (127) In writing of Stanislaw Wyspianski, she draws a parallel with the voyages of settlers and travellers generally who must negotiate the "sea-shattered miles" (127).

Like Mansfield's poem on Wyspianski, Rewi Alley's poem about Sandan, China, is refreshing for its contrasting portrait of a very different and, it has to be said, less privileged life than our own. The relaxed lyrical poetry reminds me of the Blanche Baughan poem commented on earlier, and I cannot help wishing that more poets would focus on the details of the life around them rather than

predominantly on the inner workings of their lives. Alley, an active Communist, is engaged in relief work in Sandan, setting up a boiler from Toledo, Ohio and a generator from Rugby, England. The details add to the sense of a growing internationalism to some New Zealand poetry.

Alley's poetry also forms an exception to the tendency to greater abstraction in the male writers included in this, and later, anthologies. I do not think this is the influence of the editors' selections so much as the natural predilection of these male writers. J.R. Hervey's employs many abstract terms in 'Somnambulist', though where he talks of the "startled path of evocation" (129), the word 'startled' stimulates a reaction and the use of the word 'evocation' itself creates a curious self-referential quality. It is interesting that the 'Two Old Men' see life as a passing synopsis and the "total mystery masking in a name" (130) is intriguing, but too often the poems themselves are like a synopsis, rather than part of the story.

Selections from D'Arcy Cresswell's 'Lyttelton Harbour' include an explanation of some of the original sources. The ocean voyage in a small vessel mentioned in the first sonnet of the sequence is that of seven young Christchurch men (all ex-students of Christ's College) who set sail in a ketch to live an independent existence in the Pacific. When the vessel sank they returned gratefully to New Zealand. Curnow sees in this a parable for Cresswell's experience and a warning to those who seek nature merely to escape the modern world. The story as given in the explanatory notes is more compelling than the poem itself and it is a pity that the extra information was not included in the 1945 anthology. Cresswell plays with the seafaring and fishing image in the fifteenth sonnet, where, the notes explain, he reflects on the difficulty of publishing several

volumes of his autobiography and upon what the population of Christchurch might prefer to read:

Such quondam fishy gentry as inspire
A poet's licence and a landing-net?
The fattest catch is meetest for the fire
Geese may be game, but fools are sweeter yet. (135)

There is a sense of the poet as critical of audience, which is dangerous ground to tread.

A.R.D. Fairburn reveals a rather different and Zen-like philosophy: "this moment holds / within its span the sum of life" (143). For him, time is a ghost. Again, time preoccupies the kiwi poet. T.S. Eliot arrived at a similar conclusion: "every moment is a new and shocking / Valuation of all we have been"³⁴. Eliot's statement is more evaluation than epiphany, but both do indicate the importance of the single moment. It is in the moment that observations occur and, in so far as the poet needs the details of life to make that wonderful progression from the specific to the general, it is the most necessary occurrence within (or perhaps outside of) time. Eliot is by no means convinced by the trappings of knowledge, because, though knowledge 'imposes a pattern', each moment modifies that pattern.

Fairburn shows the wide range of poetic techniques at his disposal. In 'The Cave', he employs dream-like images: islands are floating, not anchored - this is the unformed land. In 'Tapu' he employs a ballad form, which is full of shocking admissions and where we may sense the presence of an unreliable narrator. But if the existential moment is an archetypal fixture for the poet, so is

³⁴ T.S. Eliot, *East Coker* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940; repr. 1941), p. 10.

this relation to the world and the landscape: “I carry the world in my pocket,” he says (145). The statement is free of egotistical ramblings, presented as bare fact, so that it rests comfortably alongside the stories he narrates of taking a piece of bone from a cave “where the old Maoris slept” and cutting hair from the woman he loved to form an amulet that symbolises the world. Symbol and fact are side by side.

The range of forms continues with the simple but moving love lyric ‘A Farewell’, which gains its potency from the almost offhand way in which the lover says goodbye. In ‘To an Expatriate’, Fairburn writes of the “nameless native hills” (154). It is as if they are too young to have been given names. There is another kind of national portrait in the poem ‘I’m Older than You, Please Listen’. It instructs:

If you’re enterprising and able,
smuggle your talents away,
hawk them in livelier markets
Where people are willing to pay. (156)

This, he suggests, is preferable to living in a “second-grade heaven / with first-grade butter” (155). Again Fairburn observes a phenomenon that is still contemporary. In light verse, and in just these few lines, he sums up the phenomenon of the ‘brain-drain’ of talent moving away from New Zealand in subsequent years. By the end of the poem, his ideas apply more particularly to artists: “don’t stay in this neighbourhood,” he cautions. There is something very apt about the word ‘neighbourhood’, with its suggestion of peeping eyes behind curtains and scathing words across fences.

Robyn Hyde also captures the mood of environment in 'The Last Ones'. There may be some influence of W.H. Auden and Dylan Thomas, but at the same time the poem has a distinctive New Zealand flavour - perhaps an aspect of the influence of Maori culture that Curnow spoke of in his introduction. Read today, it gives a feeling of familiarity and personality. Unfortunately, the long poem 'What is it makes a stranger?' included in this selection is unremarkable. It is surprising that this poem was given space in preference to her more vital 'Journey from New Zealand', which was present in the 1945 Caxton anthology.

In 'Prayer for a Young Country', Hyde writes: "Leave the nest early child. Our climate's changing, / Snow has a stiffer grip in every part." She does not view the likely changes with great optimism, but is worried that the youth may be taught "under new names the oldest arrogance" (178). There is a sense that she trusts the energy of youth – an impulse shared by Baxter in his later work – the young need to leave early to define things for themselves, the injunction implies that their parents are part of the current mode of conservatism.

Another example of the influence of Maori is found in Charles Brasch's 'Great Sea'. The sea is addressed as an ancestor: "you from whom we rose / In whom our power lives on (185). Brasch is appealing to the powers of the natural world to support the work of the people. There is a further reflection on the concept of time in the poem 'The Ruins', where he observes with flair "these ripe clairvoyant moments" (189). Again, it is in the moment that we experience such things as "the loud deliverances of sense," that is, of things previously unknown or misunderstood.

Basil Dowling focuses on a perennial theme. The man 'Scything' stoops to the ground like Adam "with a lost Eden in his mind" (190). The worker in the

field apparently knows that something has been lost to the natural world since the purported Adam's time. There is a suggestion of consequence incurred by the disobedience in the Garden of Eden: a man must labour in the field and a woman must suffer pain in childbirth. Dowling's poetry is serious content but rendered with a light touch. Charles Spear's poems, on the other hand, can seem barren. I do not think it is just a matter of the dispirited subject matter of poems like 'The Disinherited' that gives this effect. His most notable poem would appear to be '1894 in London' which shows all the advantages of the traveller's objectivity about the ancient and venerable, and a delight at what is new.

Allen Curnow's 'Landfall in Unknown Seas' again seems an essential poem. But why, I wonder, must he stress 'interesting failure'? This resembles preoccupations in the introductions, such as 'uneasy prosperity'. Though the poem strays towards the end into rhetorical language, it manages to speak with a universal voice. Indeed it is at this early stage in his career that Curnow seemed most to be speaking for everyone in the three seminal volumes published between 1939 and 1943.

Re-reading Curnow's 'House and Land', I was struck by the different sense of what history is about in the minds of the people:

The spirit of the exile, wrote the historian,
Is strong in the people still.
He reminds me rather, said Miss Wilson,
Of Harriet's youngest, Will. (110)

The ordinary person is more concerned with immediate family history than the larger sociological issues; the larger pictures come much later, if they come at all. Poets, such as Curnow, are creating history, too. Of course, they are not

necessarily reflecting on it accurately and objectively. They construct the past, just as the historian constructs it, by using the materials of the everyday and their perceptions of those details, rather than trends in political theory. This is particularly true in a poem like 'The Unhistoric Story' where Curnow gives a kind of thumbnail sketch of political events, but with the folksy reiteration of the phrase "something nobody counted on." This hints at something more than the apparent external events, something which will "rearrange the given" in a subliminal way (204). By the end of the poem, he still cannot tell us what this something other is, but we have a strong impression of an unseen force.

There is a sudden transition in Curnow's writing with the poem 'Spectacular Blossom' to a modern form of poetry that utilises the energy of colloquial speech. The first line with the command: "Mock up again, summer" (208) is perhaps indicative of the influence of American slang. The bloody dying "ejaculate their bloom," just as the pohutukawa drops its flowers. It is a strange challenge to be asked to see the victim of a situation as somehow always beautiful. The poem 'He Cracked a Word' is a metaphor for a modern world in search of meaning amidst a range of meanings made disturbingly possible by a plethora of philosophical and literary theories from which the icons of God and religion have been removed. The poem also leans towards the coming of semiotics into literature and the range of possible meanings within language itself. The 'pricking of the thumbs' may be an allusion to the action of the witches in Macbeth. Curnow returns to the topic of nationalism in 'To Forget Self and All' where his country is not just a 'whimpering' second self, but a second self 'unlicked'. The farming metaphor is apt of course and the image reinforces

the idea of something only just born, not even walking or able to stand, and perhaps motherless, since it is 'unlicked'.

The poetry of W. Hart-Smith is conversational. In 'Subject Matter', he discusses the representation of objects in the visual arts, but in doing so renders them in sound, concluding with "paint me a pub winder / with the din behind it" (217). It is New Zealand poetry at its most colloquial and vital. Hart-Smith seems to have a premonition of the influence of the telephone on modern life in 'Telephone to a farm', where he says of the telephone ringing "what wouldn't I make this singing mean!" (215) He anticipates that this sound could mean many things, bringing news, tragic or celebratory.

The anthology comes to life with Denis Glover's *Sings Harry* poems. Harry asks, "Where shall we find / The man who cares to speak his mind" (136). It is interesting to compare this question with the statement quoted by Allen Curnow from Karl Shapiro in the Caxton anthology. "Truth's out of Uniform, sings Harry," as he proceeds to speak his mind, a manifestation of both his own and Shapiro's prophecy. Truth is not official, not to be found through official channels.

In 'Arawata Bill', there is a wistfulness that reveals the hopes and dreams of the 'working man'. It is partly a dream to feel that this way of life can continue, and that it means something. If Bill had not left cairns on the lonely mountains as a sign of his presence, and if outside the derelict hovel there was not a rusting shovel, still with a good handle, would his life have been worthwhile? At the end of the sequence, we are told, "Only in you was the gold" (229). Bill did not know this, but there is an implication that the land, mysteriously, did know. The mountain melts into the river (dies) and the river to

the sea (is re-cycled) and life continues; Bill was part of that life. It is interesting to note that words of this time, such as 'grog', had naval origins. Glover became a naval Lieutenant Commander and the poems remind us of the influence of seafaring on New Zealand's cultural make-up. Also for Glover, "The mountains were always there / And the mountain water" (221). These are primary, elemental forces and there is a suggestion that the human being is a fool amidst the authority of those forces.

Paul Henderson (pen-name of Ruth France) gives a representation of a township as a graveyard in 'Return Journey' - it does not merely have a graveyard set within it. The town is set in a landscape that is like porcelain. It is as if the stones in the graveyard may break the fragile china. The poem is located in Wellington, but the shape of the town, with houses clustered on steep slopes around a harbour or estuary, could easily be Thames, Dunedin or Lyttelton, so that many of us in New Zealand can relate to the setting. Elsewhere the landscape is like gloves over the bones of earth - again an image of frailty and vulnerability. Henderson is conscious of individual perception, she asks, "Is it a hill, / Or a hill through the eyes of one human?" (234) The question seems unusual for the time in which it was written. I cannot imagine the voices of many of the other poets appearing earlier in the anthology asking it.

There are some fine rhythms in M.K. Joseph's poetry: "Then hip and shoulder to leviathan reels / In a solemn brotherly drunken embrace" (236). The lines have a drunken flow to match the rolling ocean. His poem 'Girl, Boy, Flower, Bicycle' is more modern than his other works. The short lines and elementary syntax recreate the longing and optimism of childhood. In a contrasting poem, Ruth Dallas describes the making of a boy from an apple, but

the boy created does not have a boy's hands, may not be a boy at all. The poem acts as a metaphor for the inability to return to childhood. There are further elements of mystery in her work, and in 'Deserted Beach' a hint of allegory: "Only the sea moved there" (250), implying that only the ocean may change, that we do not. There is a related sentiment in 'A Striped Shell', where she says that too many shells have been washed up on the beach. There is again a sense that the specialness of life has passed. The shell is like a flower that comes from the sea. She turns it over in her hand. What is it trying to tell her? What is she trying to tell us? The poem remains enigmatic.

Robert Chapman has an entertaining poem about a meeting with a recalcitrant and drunken poet. Chapman had met the poet before. But in this café setting, where the poet is holding forth in several conversations at once, Chapman finds, "noises, and the intimacy / You only half bargained for" (253). Chapman is astute in recording the poet's anger at his own misreading of a situation.

Returning to the theme of settlers, Keith Sinclair writes of the approach to the new land, which is an 'unconsecrated waste' (255). The settlers express their needs as if they are not negotiable whatsoever, least of all with the new land that they settle. The settlers will not be advocates for the Maori, in terms of fair prices for land. In their eyes, at that early period, there is no kinship between the two groups. The real reward, they believe is the example they set, meaning the Christian example, though their behaviour is plainly un-Christian. The Chief responds with some wisdom:

Although you have floated the land

I will not let it go to sea,

Lest the sea-birds take flight

Since we have no resting place.

The poet's use of 'floated' is clever, alluding to mortgages and land deals. But the concern for money and possession has put the land itself at risk. There is that sense from the Maori Chief that he does not own the land, merely because no-one can own the land. The Chief's behaviour is truly Christian and there is an echo of the words of the New Testament: 'The Son of man has nowhere to lay his head'.

In 'Memorial to a Missionary', the Anglican Thomas Kendall initially seeks the Maori name for sin, for hell. This suggests the emphasis of the churchman, as being like the fundamentalist who prays vigilantly against Satan, but with evil, piercing eyes. The missionary, "in seeking truth found sorcery" and "sex in philosophy" (262). Kendall was converted by those whom he came to 'save'. The poet's phrase 'unconverted flesh' is fascinating. Does it imply that this is how the flesh has to be, in its natural state? The word 'dreaming' is used repeatedly, as if this is some dark forbidden sensuous dream from which Kendall cannot awake. This poem includes the word 'Io' for God. It is purported to be the name for a supreme god within Maori culture. The section at the back of the anthology, 'Some New Zealand Words and Names' discusses the origin of the term 'Io'. Some claim it appears in the oldest genealogies and may have predisposed Maori to accept monotheistic Christian concepts, though it is equally possible that the word developed under European influence.

There are further poems about the missionaries. Kendrick Smithyman's 'Journey towards Easter: Part One' is about a priest from a North Auckland parish who is about to meet a new priest from England at the railway station. He reflects on the reception that the new man may expect from local Maori. It is an internal monologue of great honesty that may owe something to the technique of

the poet Robert Browning but is also of its time. The priest can anticipate no better treatment by the natives toward the younger man than he himself has experienced. He says, “When the priest dies/ there is no god. / When the god dies there is / no priest” (272). It is uncertain whether the priest is rendering his own ideas or those of the natives. If his own, it shows a rigid perception and an over-inflated sense of the importance of the priesthood; if the natives’, then it shows how little hope there is for the priest’s work. The priest is not part of their ‘clay’. He seems to despise them. He knows that when he speaks to them, they are uncomfortable. But is this the priesthood or the man himself? It is a fundamentally human portrait.

Louis Johnson talks of ‘proper’ fathers and hills that are ‘builded’, as if the landscape is only created by the labour of the farmers’ hands (279). These fathers are described as elders, giving them religious status. James K. Baxter imagines the land as a threshold, but it is a cold threshold, implying that passing over it takes some commitment. Overall, it is a positive vision, a possible venture. The rhythmic stresses of Baxter’s ‘Hill-country’ remind one of Manley Hopkins’ system of ‘instress’. It makes for a compelling poem. The mountains are like tigers, but they are blind tigers and so negotiable. Baxter’s literary injunctions can become rhetorical and didactic: “Surrender to the sky / Your heart of anger,” he abjures (286). Baxter regards time as a grave, which the eternal aspect of life will shake. (288) This is reminiscent of Fairburn’s ‘Winter Night’.

C.K. Stead’s work has an air of sophistication about it. In the long poem ‘Pictures in a Gallery Undersea’ there is a sense of the adventurer, the poet as reverse-colonist who travels to Britain and attempts to sum up some of its history. It begins as one of those poems of circumspect assessment of an environment,

but, in fact, Stead writes little of the place itself. He is more concerned with the cultural history, referring to Ezra Pound simply as Ezra, implying literary kinship. There is perhaps also an allusion to the poetry of Wilfred Owen, whose “a drawing down of blinds”³⁵, from ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’ becomes in Stead’s words “the drawing of curtains” (290). It is apparently simpler, less romantic, but also with a greater sense of finality. There is something outside the curtains, perhaps himself, the poet as commentator looking in through a window at the world. At a personal level that world is closed off to him, but he has knowledge of it and is the more powerful for that. At the end of the poem Stead describes an old man playing a violin on the street, who struggles “to revive / The dead years” (303). These are strong words. Does the old man parallel the poet’s experience, or contrast it? Perhaps Stead suggests that a New Zealand visitor to London is trying to recreate something. If Stead acknowledges a certain distance from his subject matter, his claim to intellectual knowledge, on a par with that of the old country, may form a kind of approbation of it. I suggest that Stead gives credence to intellectual pursuit per se, rather than the particular inclinations of any one tradition.

In selecting from the works of others, Curnow the editor again seems to exemplify some of his own ideas. In particular, ideas about the youthfulness of New Zealand are present in the poetry of Fairburn, Hyde and Sinclair. Is this a general preoccupation or is Curnow telling his story in larger terms? The suspicion begs the question as to whether any anthology has the right to tell a

³⁵ In *Poetry 1900 to 1965*, ed. by George MacBeth (London: Longman, 1967), p. 117.

particular story, beyond offering a selection of the best or most representative poems available.

There is a lack of writing in this anthology on either of the World Wars. Prose seems, on the whole, to keep closer step with historical events. Les Cleveland states, “The First World War, for all its devastating casualties and patriotic fervour, produced little literature of lasting or distinctive quality”³⁶. Fictional works by Robin Hyde, *Passport to Hell* and *Nor the Years Condemn*, are seen as exceptions, along with a number of works of personal narrative. But Cleveland does not discuss poetry on the subject until Alistair Campbell’s much later ‘Elegy for Anzac Day’, his own *The Iron Hand* (1979) and Kevin Ireland’s *Selected Poems - Anzac Day* (1997). We might expect that some poetry concerning World War One might have appeared by the time that the 1945 Caxton anthology was published in the year the Second World War ended. Fifteen years later, we would, I think, look more intently and expectantly for such poems. Perhaps we should assume in New Zealand, though, as Cleveland suggests, that good quality work on the subject was not to be found. There is no real equivalent to British poets Wilfred Owen or Siegfried Sassoon writing during World War One or Keith Douglas in World War Two.

On the other hand, it is worth bearing in mind the tendency of survivors of war to be reticent with regard to speaking out about its terrors. The situation may be analogous to that of survivors of the Holocaust. Their children have at times been the ones to write about the atrocities after drawing the stories out of their elders. Some of the contributors to *The New American Poets – A Bread Loaf Anthology* (2000) have written in this way, most notably Jason Somner in the

³⁶ *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, p. 569.

long poem 'Mengele Shitting'. The interval between an experience and the writing of it may have a deep, psychological significance.

Whatever the story told, Curnow's 1960 anthology is held by many to be the most important to appear in New Zealand writing. Among them Roger Horrocks wrote in 1983: "Certainly no other local anthology so far exercised as much influence as Curnow's." Horrocks continues, "there is great power in Arthur Baysting's *Young New Zealand Poets* and Witi Ihimaera and D.S. Long's *Into the World of Light* but these are anthologies of a different type – they record breakthroughs rather than sort out the canon"³⁷. Of course, the idea of the canon is not the only issue at stake and it is easy to forget the significance of individual poems by outstanding poets, but already a solid body of work has been assembled, of a particular type and is likely to become difficult to challenge.

³⁷ Roger Horrocks, 'The Invention of New Zealand', in *AND* 1, p. 10.

Chapter Two: Confirming the Canon

An Anthology of Twentieth Century New Zealand Poetry, selected by Vincent O'Sullivan, 1970

Vincent O'Sullivan has omitted only five of the poets Allen Curnow included in his 1945 Caxton anthology, and three of Curnow's colonist-poets and one other (Arnold Wall) from the 1960 Penguin anthology. The chronological succession from Arthur Adams to C.K. Stead leaves out only D'Arcy Cresswell, Rewi Alley, Robert Chapman and W. Hart-Smith. O'Sullivan meanwhile adds work by Hone Tuwhare, Janet Frame, Raymond Ward and Owen Leeming within that period, and after that time omits the young David Elworthy and includes seven new poets: Gordon Challis, Kevin Ireland, Peter Bland, Fleur Adcock, Vincent O'Sullivan, K. O. Arvidson and Michael Jackson. In other words, the anthology seems to do little more than bring the canon up-to-date.

Vincent O'Sullivan notes in his introduction that some anthologies "follow the contours of the country's development," providing useful material for the sociologist and historian, whilst in others "each poem is included simply because it is good poetry"³⁸. O'Sullivan goes on to say that where three-quarters of a country's poets are still living (he does not distinguish between those who are recognised and currently publishing and those who are not), an anthology of that work cannot claim any 'finality' (xix). I am not sure that many readers would expect it to do so.

³⁸ *An Anthology of Twentieth Century New Zealand Poetry*, Selected by Vincent O'Sullivan, (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. xix. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited parenthetically.

Apart from these comments, the introduction is notable for its refusal to argue any particular approach, aesthetic or otherwise, towards selecting the material, a fact that did not escape C.K. Stead's criticism: "This made his introduction and his anthology a less easy target than the others had been, but also less interesting"³⁹. O'Sullivan briefly reviews nineteenth-century poetry, noting the rather weak range of nineteenth century poetry written in New Zealand, which tended to make New Zealand exotic. O'Sullivan remarks on the problems of early epic poems, such as is found in the work of Alfred Domett, whose verse structures could not successfully frame the experiences they were meant to describe. Such inadequacy would seem to be a generic phenomenon, so that a piece like Edward Tregear's 'Te Whetu Plains' is a rarity which "owed more to the awareness of an individual mind than to what currently was thought poetry's due" (xx). O'Sullivan believes that until World War One, no New Zealand poet (except perhaps Blanche Baughan) could describe colonial life with realism (xxi). This comment echoes Curnow's thoughts on the subject in the introduction to his anthology.

Take the case of Mary Ursula Bethell. When she is in her garden, "when her poetry begins at her fingertips" (xxi), O'Sullivan believes her poems to be at their most "truthful." She does not attempt to make comment on what is beyond her experience. Yet, in a poem like Bethell's 'Fall', there is some social comment as well as the depiction of her immediate environment. She is in her garden, but reflects on the emphasis that society places on "important ball-games" for children, from an early age (13). Only old men and poets care to observe the delights of the sunny roadside. There is a quirky phraseology to the poem, which

³⁹ Stead, p. 293.

seems to match the eccentric sense of the poet's later years, coinages like 'petallage' convey this. Elsewhere, her writing is again rich and evocative, so that even silence is 'opulent' (17). Of the fifteen Bethell poems offered here by the editor, five had already appeared in the Caxton anthology (which reproduced twenty of her poems in all), something that suggests a large body of publishable work to choose from.

Meanwhile, A.R.D. Fairburn gives an intriguing portrait of the mountaineer in 'Solitude'. The solace of his death is "preserved within the glacial ice, / for ever safe, where none shall seek" (49). It is a compelling proposition, this solace in isolation, as it gives the impression that for a climber death is most acceptable on the mountain itself. New Zealand has raised many mountaineers and its readers seem to respond to the mountaineering metaphor because it conjures up a national trait of dignity in silence, reserve and a general lack of fussiness, exemplified by such heroic characters as Sir Edmund Hilary.

Again we encounter examples of the adeptness with poetic forms which O'Sullivan observed in Fairburn's writing⁴⁰, in a slightly different selection from the sequence 'Dominion' than that chosen by Curnow for the 1960 anthology. The poet uses some archaic spellings of words (e.g. 'blinde mouthes'), but gives a contemporary New Zealand context to his ideas:

This is our paper city, built
on the rock of debt, held fast
against all winds by the paperweight of debt. (36)

⁴⁰ In the introduction, O'Sullivan observed, "Fairburn's output in poetry, satire, and occasional prose bear witness to a many-sided mind," p, xxiii.

Because of the prevalence of debt in our society, this seems as relevant today as it was in 1938, when *Dominion* was first published by the Caxton Press. Another of the displacements of modern life is shown in 'Down on My Luck':

I haven't got a stiver
the tractor's pinched my job,
I owe the bar a fiver
and the barman fifteen bob (51)

What political statement could possibly sum up the situation of the redundant labourer better than "the tractor's pinched my job"? Fairburn adds a touch of panache with the fourth line above. Not only has the man kept a tab at the bar, but he has borrowed from the barman as well, who is probably a 'mate' and understands the situation.

By way of contrast, R.A.K. Mason contributes an account of an unrequited relationship on a New Zealand farm, conveying all the awkwardness of young love in 'Lugete O Veneres' ('Mourn ye Graces')⁴¹, and ends: "for a space let us mourn here this tortured boy's slobbering quivers / as we laugh at the farce" (63). O'Sullivan likens Mason to Thomas Hardy in his sympathy and attention to detail (xxii). And like Mason, Charles Brasch reflects on the move away from the countryside, and asks if the sparrows could live "as freely in hedgerow and in wood / After generations of town lives?" (75) Humanity may be likened to the sparrows, as the poet wonders if the move is irrecoverable.

In 'Letter from Thurlby Domain', Brasch reflects on the pioneering process, where we learn "in the fire the nature of fire" (80). He envisages that we will "become native / in place and time" which seems a positive vision, but the

⁴¹ It refers to a poem by Catullus in which a young woman grieving the death of her pet sparrow is consoled by a poet's song.

closing image of a lizard disappearing through dry stalks and giving a ‘flickering goodbye’ is two-edged. Is the lizard’s disappearance permanent? It also poses the question whether the extinction of animal species is the price that is paid for us to become native. Brasch is liable to slip into abstraction: “I do not know the shape of the world. / I cannot see boundaries to experience” (87). Again, some of Brasch’s lines owe a little to Walt Whitman in their repetition and affirmation of the universal ‘I’ and the limitations of the childlike view that seems to accompany it (see also Chapter One). But as poetry, it is also rather lacking in fire.

M. K. Joseph refers to “the studied accent of the human voice” (152). This is a good description of his style, which is self-conscious and carefully wrought. His approach can become overly serious. From the point of view of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the child-like ‘tum te tum’ of metrical verse can also seem an inappropriate vehicle for serious poetry. Yet there is strong imagery in Joseph’s work, such as “the salt sea that walks about the world” (152), giving some of the last lines a much-needed down-to-earth quality. Like Curnow and Glover, Joseph is concerned that “we hadn’t the talent” (155) to do what is needed in the world: man’s grasp is only “the reach of his arm.”

For all the intellectualism of Curnow’s work, it is when his reflections are more experiential - when he seems to write by instinct rather than focusing so entirely on craft - that his poetry has the greatest impact, such as: “You will not grasp the meaning, you will be in it” (114). Some of his poetry fails to engage the emotions. I do not mean by this that it is a failing that his poems are not overtly emotional: that is not the point. The point is that they appeal primarily to the intellect.

Denis Glover's character Harry reflects humorously on Curnow's 'The Skeleton of the Great Moa' in the poem 'Songs':

These songs will not stand –

The wind and the sand will smother.

Not I but another

Will make songs worth the bother (132)

Perhaps Glover's comment originates in a kind of modesty, a personal suspicion of ability. But the environment will have its effect: it will challenge the writing of poetry.

In Glover's 'The Casual man', the father could leave his son Harry little more than his old coat, but it is important to the boy. Harry again refers to himself as a fool, but, engrossed in the work of mustering, he is, "freed of fears and hopes" (135). Man is further made comical, described as, "only thistledown planted on the wind" (136). Harry, befitting his character as a happy-go-lucky working man, seems satisfied with that image; it is irreligious, and funny.

Fleur Adcock's poem 'Wife to Husband' is also arresting. The honesty and insight are shocking and set up new parameters for expression in poetry. A further personal anecdote couched in magical and dream-like tones is found in the poem 'Incident'. On the beach, she falls asleep after sitting smoking with her partner. She descends through an Alice-in-Wonderland cavern, or Orpheus' path, to a hellish doubt. She awakes to find him waiting for the tide to take her away, still smoking his cigarette. These seem among the first poems of these times to function through accessing sub-conscious messages. Sharing a child's optimism, she writes:

It is possible that for many generations
There will exist, sprung from whatever seeds,
Children straight-limbed, with clear inquiring voices,
Bright-eyed as you. (313)

Is this the answer to Curnow's riddle from 'The Skeleton of the Great Moa'? This anthology opens out into more international perspectives from expatriate Fleur Adcock's selection onwards and seems to leave New Zealand behind as the obvious or compulsory place to write about.

In Chapter Three we will encounter some strong opinions from Fleur Adcock as to the inclusion of overseas writers who have become resident in New Zealand. Whatever we might decide about this, there is no doubt in my mind that this anthology, as a book, would be the less rich without Peter Bland's work. His memorial poem 'Mother' is a poignant vision, as crocuses spring from "your buried death's black flower" (305). In 'Remembering England' he recalls, "being bred to expect so little" (306), which is a reminder to us of the advantages of this fertile land with little of the class system that pervaded England. At the same time, Bland reminds us of the complacency that the settler may feel, "What more *could* we want?" he asks.

Michael Jackson has travelled extensively and often lived abroad. He describes Leopoldville, and says that in Africa the only thing he has to burn is money, an inadequate resource. In 'Return from Luluabourg', the poet has entered a very different kind of garden to, say, Ursula Bethell's New Zealand place in the port hills above Christchurch. There is a sense that he has entered it merely to leave again. Jackson is the youngest poet represented here, born in 1940.

Second edition, 1976

The second edition of this Oxford anthology appeared six years after the first, and is enlarged by over one fifth in that short time. Vincent O'Sullivan states, "there has been more verse published in these last few years than in any comparable time in New Zealand writing"⁴². Yet, he offers little comment on that writing. Surprisingly, the note to this second edition occupies only three-quarters of a page. O'Sullivan does not reflect directly (or deeply) on whether much of that new poetry is of good quality; it can only be inferred that he must think so from the extent that the anthology has grown. The other significant claim he makes is that, during this period of growth in the productivity of poetry, the standards of literary criticism have declined. He gives no examples for this claim, nor offers an explanation. O'Sullivan notes the recent fertile periods of writing for Charles Brasch and James K. Baxter shortly before their deaths (Baxter had died in 1972 and Brasch the following year). O'Sullivan feels that a reassessment of a writer's work is natural once their entire *oeuvre* is available.

In accordance with the above reflections, the first poet to be given more space in the anthology is Charles Brasch with five extra pages of recent work. Of the poets already represented in the 1970 edition, there is new material by M.K. Joseph, Kendrick Smithyman, Louis Johnson, Alistair Campbell, James K. Baxter (a further eleven and a half pages), C.K. Stead, Kevin Ireland, Fleur Adcock, Vincent O'Sullivan and Michael Jackson. The entire selection of Charles Doyle's work in the 1970 edition is omitted. These are the only poems to be deleted from the first edition. Meanwhile, new poets are included: Alistair Paterson, David Mitchell, Sam Hunt, Bill Manhire and Ian Wedde. Fleur Adcock

⁴² *An Anthology of Twentieth Century New Zealand Poetry*, Selected by Vincent O'Sullivan, 2nd edn. (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. xxiv. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited parenthetically.

is the only female writer whose selection is increased and no new female writers are added to the contents. Given these facts, it seems difficult to understand O'Sullivan's statement about the proliferation of poetry in the previous six years. Surely Fleur Adcock was not the only female writer to develop her poetry.

Amongst the new poems, Charles Brasch's 'Shoriken' is a fascinating appraisal of modern concerns via images from the ancient world – Shoriken is one of the eight Taoist Immortals. Initially, the poem seems negative; the poet asks: "In a world of prisoners / Who dare call himself free?" Does he despair or is he 'realistic'? The poem is partly concerned with the difference between conformity and unity. Brasch reflects on the difficulty that, "nothing that is yours is yours alone" (97). The problem is how to walk 'singly' when we 'are thousands'. Perhaps the individual has largely lost sight of the self even to be able to ask such a question - or it may be a momentary despair.

M. K. Joseph may elucidate a similar issue in his poem 'Epilogue to a Poetry Reading'. Joseph adopts the persona of a poet as he draws in the crowd before delivering the hypodermic needle of social comment. His words will not cure but he has "an infallible knack of diagnosis" (168). He compares poems to panels in a triptych, one each for past, present and future. The present is the "largest and least composed." The poem ends with a metaphoric return to the concept of the poet's delivery as entertainment, or some kind of psychological or sociological diagnosis. Hands from the clouds – an angelic image - offer "lightning or music, but not both" (169).

Kendrick Smithyman seems to hark back to Curnow's 'uneasy prosperity' in a poem from a history, he claims, implied by bees. He describes "our lack / in tradition of being guilty" (212). Does he want guilt? Is this the acknowledgment

of responsibility for past action, or an on-going unease, a condition of the human entity? He sees us as capable only briefly of being content.

In Alistair Campbell's 'Waiting for the Pakeha', those awaited are referred to as 'our pakeha' (255) - obviously some association, some working relationship had been possible. But they do not come to aid the tribe in battle and the Maori will not wait again. The poem may act as a prophecy that Maori will no longer wait for help, they will take their destiny into their own hands.

A new philosophy seems to emerge in James K. Baxter's later poetry: "To want nothing is / the only possible freedom" (290) As suggested in Chapter One, Baxter is conscious of the influence of religious and family heritage. In this poem, for the young girls in summer dresses, "a dead grandmother . . . governs her limbs" (290). Baxter's now seems a fully realised voice when we encounter a poem such as 'At the Fox Glacier Hotel'. The speaking voice is entirely relaxed, as if that voice has undergone a personal revolution. It reflects on the West-coast men in the bar, the décor - for the tourists - with the Southern Alps reflected in Lake Matheson ("turned upside down it would look the same" [290]). There is also a mirror in the dining room, "for any middle-aged Narcissus" (classical references still frequently appear in Baxter's poetry of this period, Poseidon is also referred to). Baxter reflects on fantastical images of the landscape's decay and on weird manifestations of love. In the selections from *Jerusalem Sonnets* (1970), the poetry is a conversation, as if honed by friends' familiarity. Baxter's new philosophy is reiterated in reference to meditation – the first in these anthologies – and mention of a girl who came to meditate with him in Auckland's Vulcan Lane, to share his 'nothingness'. His vision for Jerusalem on the Wanganui River is one of peace. But something has been shattered in the history

of the young Maori he knows, and the peace he seeks “can’t patch again the canoe that is broken, yet all men value peace” (298). At the same time, the ideas about Maoritanga can be confused:

The kai will be welcome
To my hungry wandering children
Who drink at the springs of the marae
And find a Maori ladder to clamber
Up to the light. (299)

This is from the poem ‘The Dark Welcome’. It shows the pretentious side of the poet’s nature. He sees himself as a hippy-leader or father, calling the young ‘my children’.

Alistair Paterson’s ‘Birds Flying’ asks a disarming series of questions, which remind one of Samuel Becket’s speakers in plays like *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* and in the later prose. Questions such as ‘What am I doing here?’ and “Why do the birds fly?’ betray the ambivalence, anger and alienation that the twentieth century human being may feel. Questions along the lines of ‘Where were you?’ suggest isolation, and, where those questions focus on a distant history, show how minimal is our knowledge of the world we inhabit. His second poem ‘Overture for Bubble-gum and Flute’ illustrates his use of the ‘double margin field’ form ⁴³, that Paterson developed in the late 1960s, later used to good effect by other poets, such as C.K. Stead and Vivienne Joseph. The structure has the effect of controlling the reading of the poem but is also capable of maintaining two possible and complementary reference points throughout.

⁴³ Elizabeth Cuffin acknowledges this innovation in ‘Poetry, Part Two: 1945-1990s’, in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, p. 481.

C.K. Stead gives a strong portrait of travellers as wanting to “prize the world apart” (327). Note the use of ‘prize’, rather than ‘prise’. This is written in the context of Odysseus and Quesada’s travels, but gives us pause for reflection in terms of the impact of colonialism on New Zealand. Often in the Quesada sequence the poet is given to much abstraction, terms such as ‘opaque equities’ being common. Again, I cannot help feeling that this tendency is a trope of the male writer, which for some readers may stimulate a train of thought, but for others creates a block in the flow of the poem.

In sharp contrast, Kevin Ireland’s ‘Caroline beside the Sundial’ is a delicate lyric which ponders the potential of the natural world, the way that something is always about to happen, such as a droplet of water which is as yet ‘undropped’. The line breaks help set up a curious syntax: “you said the dial / said one” (342). This could mean that the dial read one o’clock; alternatively that the dial spoke one (the person) into being, or that it spoke into being an instant of time. By the end of the poem, we are informed: “Caroline and eternity / are linked,” and we can well believe the statement. In observing Caroline, the viewer has become frozen in time, or, other objects have become timeless. In ‘A Guide to perfection’ the poet reflects on a woman’s complaint about her body:

low self-esteem is not aware
of how to turn this way and that
to show ill-favours quite so prettily (343)

This is the first use of the term ‘self-esteem’ in the anthologies and comes as part of a new openness to considering the other gender. Louis Johnson’s poem ‘There was something wrong with my life’ is the first example I have

encountered in the reading of New Zealand anthologies of a male writer attempting to operate within the mind of a female character.

Another comparatively new venture in New Zealand poetry shown in this collection would appear to be found in Fleur Adcock's 'A Surprise in the Peninsula'. The poet says she has discovered the skin of a dog, headless, with a map of the peninsula drawn on the inner of its skin and the present position marked with a bullet hole. She is not frightened by the appearance of the object. The poem concerns a modern woman's ability to shrug off danger. It is also reflects on the male's attempts to intimidate her. As well as this – and perhaps most importantly in terms of the progress of techniques in New Zealand poetry – it is the first poem here which I would describe as surreal. The unlikeliness of the situation being described, the mingling of the domestic with the suspicion of evil, and the matter-of-fact way in which the woman deals with the extraordinary threat are outside ordinary experience.

David Mitchell's poems are childlike and immediate. He uses 'th' for 'the' and 'fr' as 'for', and elsewhere in his poetry spellings like 'thru' for 'through' (These practices would seem to anticipate the abbreviated language of texting). The technique also suggests the energy of spoken language, the simplification of speech, and perhaps the authority of consonants in the (masculine) world. Sam Hunt uses another level of the colloquial in these lines from 'A School Report':

Working with these young kids in the pastel
Clay frontier, we live near bulldozer blades.
The school I came to yesterday had loads
Of children waiting: that was all. (389)

The very everyday phrase ‘loads of children’ seems justified by the reference to bulldozers, but otherwise it might seem rather too prosaic an expression in what purports to be a lyric poem. Later he writes, “They paint houses pastel, and the houses / smudge,” showing a tonal dexterity between physical detail and the emotion it explores. Later, the children make a model city of clay. There is a cycle of progression and decay here - it is to clay that we return.

There is a tendency in some of the newer work, including selections from O’Sullivan’s *Butcher Papers* and the poems by Bill Manhire and Ian Wedde toward a more detached delivery. In Bill Manhire’s case the detachment can seem to attain to aimlessness, such as in the poem ‘Pavilion’, which ends: “Love, good morning, / Your body was all freckles” (393). In the case of Ian Wedde, the delivery makes for poems that seem comparatively empty of content, except where they consciously focus on happenings in the wider world, usually with a bleak but humanitarian eye.

Lauris Edmond, Jan Kemp and Elizabeth Smither may have been unlucky to miss out on this anthology. Edmond had already published her first collection, *In Middle Air* (Pegasus Press, 1975), from which several poems were taken for the third edition. (In acknowledging those early poems in the third edition, O’Sullivan cites the *Selected Poems*, which was published in 1985, but includes work from *In Middle Air*. By then the *Selected Poems* had won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for that year, which may have influenced his selections.) Both Kemp and Smither had been featured in the journal *Mate*, and Smither had produced her first book *Here Come the Clouds* (Alister Taylor) in the previous year. Jan Kemp was also the only female poet included in Arthur

Baysting's *The Young New Zealand Poets* (Heinemann Educational Books, 1973). Her first collection *Against the Softness of Woman* (Caveman Press, 1976) was published in the same year as the second edition. The marking-off point for work considered for the anthology must have been very close to the publication date as poetry published in 1975 by other writers: Alistair Campbell, Kevin Ireland, Michael Jackson, Louis Johnson, C.K. Stead and Ian Wedde was included.

Aside from the obvious fact that all of the poets mentioned above who had published a new collection in the previous year are male, their selections also account for a large percentage of the new work added to the anthology (I mentioned earlier in this chapter that the work of ten poets was updated). These tendencies indicate that it is much easier for the work of established poets to be considered for any anthology. The effect of the omission of Edmond, Smither and Kemp from this edition is that it was a further eleven years before their work was included in another major anthology and, arguably, eleven years before they could be accepted as part of the so-called literary canon of this country.

To the list of the excluded might also be added two more female poets, Christina Beer and Peggy Dunstan. Christina Beer published her first collection *This Fig Tree Has Thorns* (Alister Taylor) in 1974. Work from this collection was later anthologised in *Private Gardens*, *Pencil Letters*, *Big Smoke* (see Chapter Four) and *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1985). Peggy Dunstan published several volumes by 1976 and some hundreds of poems in a variety of journals. Early work by Anne Donovan and Kathinka Nordal Stene should also have been worthy of consideration if the strength and daring of their

work in *Big Smoke* is noted. There is a strong indication here that new writers were unlikely to be noticed by O'Sullivan.

The above concern reveals a general problem with regard to the editing of any anthology by a practicing poet. Implicitly, the editor knows about his or her own work, whereas the editor cannot possibly have the same knowledge of all poets working and publishing in journals or books of their own, often with very limited distribution. In a sense, the poet-editor *must* consider their own work, unless, like Fleur Adcock, in her anthology for Oxford (see Chapter Three), they make the commitment from the outset not to include any of their own poetry.

C.K. Stead claims that he was originally asked to edit an anthology for OUP in the late 1960s, which O'Sullivan eventually took on. Stead declined, explaining, "I wanted to be sure that if poems of mine were represented they were there because someone else thought they should be"⁴⁴. There is much to be said for this point of view, even though in a small country and in a subject area as specialised as poetry many of the experts are also practitioners. Partly, it is a matter of sheer old-fashioned modesty, but because of the points mentioned above it is rather more than that. The scope for what I will call 'the privilege of association' is even more complete than for those poets working in the same location, or in connection with the same journals, or out of the same universities.

As time goes on, I believe it will become more and more difficult for any one anthologist of New Zealand poetry to keep up with the necessary reading. This clearly became significant, I think, by the time of the 1997 Oxford anthology. O'Sullivan includes poems from journals, which had not yet been published in book form, but only by already well-known poets. There seems an

⁴⁴ Stead, p. 292.

inability to take a risk. Allen Curnow was a little more adventurous by including C.K. Stead and David Elworthy in his 1960 anthology when neither poet had yet published a first collection, and, in a slightly different way, by introducing James K. Baxter's poetry to a wider audience early in his career.

The literary canon

I believe that the literary canon of New Zealand poetry had begun to take shape with the 1960 Penguin anthology. That canon is confirmed by the first two editions of O'Sullivan's anthology. I originally had the phrase 'Establishing the Canon' in the title of this chapter, but realised that that made insufficient acknowledgement to Curnow's influence as an anthologist. Clearly O'Sullivan does not move far at all from Curnow's selections, merely updating records, which includes omitting a few poets as the years pass. John Geraets would suggest an even earlier date for the canon, saying that the anthologies that appeared after Curnow's 1945 book follow the direction he began⁴⁵. He may be correct, but for a body of work to be viewed, rightly or wrongly, as a canon at all, suggests, I think, some passage of time during which there is demonstrably little change in the perceptions of those who influence others through the publication of poetry.

Third edition, 1987

This edition of O'Sullivan's anthology appeared after an eleven-year interval. It includes new work from Allen Curnow, Kendrick Smithyman, Hone Tuwhare, Louis Johnson, Alistair Campbell, W.H. Oliver, C.K. Stead, Kevin Ireland, Fleur

⁴⁵ Geraets, pp. 72-73.

Adcock, Vincent O’Sullivan, Michael Jackson, Sam Hunt, Bill Manhire (ten pages – the largest increase) and Ian Wedde. Owen Leeming’s poetry is omitted completely - those are also the only poems to be omitted. Fifteen new poets are introduced: Lauris Edmond, Michael Harlow, Riemke Ensing, Rachel McAlpine, Elizabeth Smither, Peter Olds, Brian Turner, Tony Beyer, Vivienne Joseph, Jan Kemp, Murray Edmund, Cilla McQueen, Anne French, Elizabeth Nannestad and Gregory O’Brien. Finally, more of the new writers are female than male (nine of the fifteen).

O’Sullivan begins his note to the third edition with the statement that if we date the writing of poetry in New Zealand by consistent and serious poets like Ursula Bethell and R.A.K. Mason, then the first edition of his anthology could draw on the work of little more than forty years (though, of course, he included much earlier poetry as well). The editor stresses that 41 of the 57 poets in this edition are still alive and that we must go ‘cannily’ with what we say about New Zealand poetry. O’Sullivan seems to be articulating a lack of confidence here. He goes on to say, however, that he believes that the differences between active New Zealand poets is more interesting than what they have in common. He also outlines his opinion that New Zealand poetry includes any work written in this country, or by New Zealanders living overseas.

Considering the comments made by O’Sullivan in his Afterword to *Private Gardens* (see Chapter Three), he has obviously changed his opinion of women poets, about whom he says “the intricately personal has proved quite as compelling as an overtly public stance”⁴⁶. He also makes the comment that a

⁴⁶ *An Anthology of Twentieth Century New Zealand Poetry*, selected by Vincent O’Sullivan 3rd edn. (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. xxv. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited parenthetically

poet's writing is autobiographical, "despite every subterfuge." With this point, O'Sullivan tries to integrate the private and personal realms.

Amongst the poems by Allen Curnow included in this edition, it is interesting to compare his references to fishing with, say, those of Pat Wilson. Wilson was a fisherman and wrote with honesty and realism about its pleasures. Curnow tries to balance the colloquial, to get 'in character', but the poetry still has an air of rhetoric in the injunctions 'never' and 'let':

Never let them die of the air,
pick up your knife and drive it
through the gills with a twist,
let the blood run fast,
quick bleeding makes best eating. (106)

The poem is like a fishing manual written in blank verse.

Kendrick Smithyman makes more believable ventures into the demotic. Recalling old businesses in a Taranaki ghost town, he refers to "McSomething or other and Hunger, Est. 1878" (171). There is a useful reflection on the problems of history in the poem 'The Last Moriori' (the first mention of the race that I've come across in the anthologies). He says, "the fact was, and the myth / was, and they endure together" (170). Smithyman has a remarkable ability to change the register of the speaking voice in his poems, seemingly at ease with almost any mind-set.

Hone Tuwhare's vocabulary is often unexpected. In 'Time and the Child' "the sun paces / and buds pop and flare" (179). The buds then become like the sun, bringing to mind sun-spot activity and solar flares. Elsewhere, the water becomes "the brawling stream." It is an alarming metaphor for the poem, which

explores the demise of a marae. The speaker says, “my melancholy chants shall be lost / to the wind’s shriek about the rotting eaves” (180). He wishes to return to the earth, to give the berries “a tart piquancy.” He does so with the knowledge that in the same way, the dust of avaricious men will produce blooms. The poem reveals a dignity in defeat and perhaps also a kind of moral victory.

Tuwhare can also be relaxed and irreverent. In the hilarious ‘To a Maori Figure Cast in Bronze outside the Chief Post Office, Auckland’, he says:

They never consulted me about naming the square.

It’s a wonder they didn’t call it: Hori-in-the-gorge-at-

Bottom-of-Hill. (181)

These may be among the first examples of a Maori poet playing with the representations made of his own culture in the wider world.

Louis Johnson is again insightful, explaining that we cannot take another’s pain to ourselves “or teach / pain quicker than the piercing thorn” (193). But the great unease of society reaches him too. In ‘Uneasy Resident’ he claims, “Everyone here is / a migrant spat from another climate of failure” (194). And society’s apparent activity is merely ‘running-on-the-spot’. It is a bleak picture, but, particularly in that last reference, worryingly true.

The selection by Lauris Edmond includes a poem written following the death of a child. In tidying the room of the deceased, she says, “I have put away your life.” Referring to the garden outside the room, and the weather, the poet captures the displaced emotion of this time, the need for life to continue. “And yet the cold will come” (201) - the cold is the grief that has not yet struck the parent. The ‘Two Birth Poems’ are notable for the fact that they are the first on the subject that one encounters in the anthologies. For all its vulnerability, the

new baby and its 'thin cry' have "all the power to possess the earth" (202). This shows the poet's awareness of the potential of this and all human beings. The mother is "broken, scattered / fragments of me melt and flow" (201), but broken into and forming part of the mass of humankind. There is a giving, a sacrifice in her experience. The poem also contains humour, a kind of reserved rhetoric temporarily adopted to show the sheer amazement of the experience and a certain distance from it, an ability to truly comprehend it, and ending with the down to earth, and maternal, "You've done it. / You clever thing." Here the poems reveal a sensitivity to human longing and to the way memories return at the oddest moments, "suddenly a door flies open" (203), and we are returned to some previous time by an unlikely stimulus.

C.K. Stead uses some remarkable forms in *Walking Westward*, including a Venn diagram to mark off the various overlapping reactions to the end of various love affairs. He includes other diagrams in this provocative series, which seems to be designed to unsettle literary sensibilities. Stead also uses Paterson's 'double margin field' form in 'The Clodian Songbook'. He talks about an untranslatable historical statement that is "endlessly / varied endlessly the same." The way 'varied' runs into 'endlessly' in that last line reinforces the feeling of the cycle of life. It is a mysterious poem, back-shadowed by a journey around Rangitoto with the "huge havenless heaven alight" (272). The heavens are illumined but empty. The poet reveals much of his personal philosophy in this poem, but is also conscious of what he does not know. Kevin Ireland has a similar response to Stead's 'endlessly varied', with an aging literary exile (also watching Rangitoto) growing older and at the same time "closer to his past" (286).

Fleur Adcock again breaks new ground, in 'Against Coupling', by advocating "the solitary act." We encounter some unusual details: the "metallic tingling / in the chin set off by a certain odd nerve" during love-making and the way the male gaze can stir "polypal fronds in the obscure / sea-bed of her body" (303). In Adcock's 'Kilpeck' a couple talk all night, instead of going to bed:

fearful for our originality,
avoiding the sweet obvious act
as if it were the only kind of indulgence. (305)

They have walked by a Norman church. The reference to originality recalls 'original sin' and complicates the referents. The couple in the poem are seeking some deep connection other than making love physically. They may also be considering whether or not to have children – the gargoyles of the church are the colour of the newborn. But sex is not despised. The poem is a spiritual quest. The gargoyles in the church are less lined than the human faces. The last line is "We are wearing out our identities." At the simplest level, there is something more enduring about the statues than the people, but the point about identities is a subtle one. The couple are wearing out old identities concerning sexuality and gender and may discover new ones.

In her poem 'Excavations', Adcock shows a piercing insight into human relationships and motivation: "pretending you were suddenly busy / with your new job or your new conscience" (308). Most male poets in the anthologies up to this time seem unable or unwilling to write with such candour about matters that might affect them personally. It is not just that Adcock is down to earth and honest about her own wishes and not merely that she is being 'personal' on paper. Surely the sense of human dynamics she brings to light is universal. Reading the

poems is like going through some kind of counselling process, and perhaps the growth in such consultant therapy is reflected here in poetic form.

In 'Double-take' Adcock reflects on sexual chemistry and social connections:

Next time you chat
with your next door neighbour, you are relieved
to find that you don't fancy him. (309)

She identifies the next-door neighbour with a former lover, whom she subsequently meets again, and is startled to find that she still is attracted to him. She goes home 'cursing chemistry'. Again, this has not previously been the stuff of poetry in these anthologies, yet the ideas communicated are accessible to all. The title is a clever combination of the resemblance between the neighbour and lover, along with the suggestion (in parallel with 'lover') of extra-marital relations and excess.

New work by Vincent O'Sullivan is also notable for its innovative aspects. Included are selections from longer poems such as *Brother Jonathan*, *Brother Kafka* and experiments such as 'fault / line'. Here the text is divided by a diagonal break, hinging around the Latin word for Emperor, but set out with a gap in the center: 'Imper ator'. This also suggests the word 'Impersonator' so that the letters omitted spell 'son' - the subject is Christ.

Riemke Ensing's work is colloquial and says as much about what words cannot say as what they can say. She signals the beginning of her use of marginal notes within her poems, which she would later employ regularly, and which also became a feature of the poet Denys Trussell's work. Rachel McAlpine spells out the sense of the collective within one human being's experience: "I belong to

many an us: / the family long and wide, / the human race” (346). She is candid about understanding (or the lack of it) across gender. She writes of her expectations about meeting Sydney women and its men. She says she was right about the women and wrong about the men, concluding: “Now isn’t that always the way?” (349)

Elizabeth Smither’s poetry is like an opening up of poetry into life. In ‘Man Watching his Wife in a Play’ we encounter the disconcerting experience of a man watching his wife on stage, even stripping to her underwear in one scene. Afterwards we are told; “No acting on the stage compares to his / As he meets her by the dressing room” (350). In this poem the man’s sense of ownership of his wife is disrupted by the experience: “Damn it all, he owns the lingerie!” Something is changing here. He may own the lingerie, but he has just lost control of his wife and he is now forced to act a new part.

Gender issues are again the focus in Smither’s ‘Temptations of St Anthony by his Housekeeper’. The priest says to his housekeeper, “Thank God you’re a normal woman,” suggesting his sense of relief that she ‘knows her place’. But, importantly, the poem is written from the point of view of the housekeeper. She feels that he is harmless, but afraid of himself; she could tell him this, if he asked. The housekeeper concludes, “I think it makes him pray better, or at least / he spends longer and longer on his knees.” As well as a sense of frustrated spirituality, there is also a strong suggestion of sexuality, and of what might be if that feeling could be expressed. There is a similar reflection on the effect and power that the attractive woman has on the male, where Casanova is “turned by an ankle” (351). He is the one affected, rather than being the agent of sexual conquest.

Peter Olds' poetry depicts a zany life in 'Thoughts of Jack Kerouac - & Other Things'. It is as if the drive of Kerouac's famous beat novel *On the Road* had suddenly entered a Dunedin bookshop. Indeed, where better for the impetus of a great writer's art to be felt than a bookshop. But the poet works there cleaning the shop during the evenings. By alluding to Kerouac, yet discussing the bookshop in terms of cleaning it after hours, Olds hints at a different order of reality in terms of where the artistic spirit really lies. It is not in the comfortable, middle-class surroundings of a university bookshop, but in the labour of the individual who wants to get to the pub to get 'half-drunk'. The energy of the lines follows this content, creating an atmosphere of someone falling downstairs whilst still laughing as the poet hurries to leave work and get to the pub. The poetry is a further example of the conversational entering into New Zealand poetry at this time.

In Bill Manhire's poetry, there is a feeling of retrogression:

Oh we survive merely by good fortune,
by random appetite: going
outside to lie on our stomachs
as if we meant to swim in the earth (368)

Or at least of a lack of progression from an earlier evolutionary stage. Elsewhere, rain is a "second-hand miracle" (369). The poetry already seems to contain a kind of new poeticism, that of artificiality: "It is nearly summer. It is nearly autumn" (371). Visitors to a realistic film at the cinema reflect: "Afterwards, we felt / we had risked everything" (372). I think this communicates the success of film as a medium but also comments on the, sometimes ridiculous, nature of this false version of life.

Ian Wedde's 'Dark Wood' is rhythmic with some transitions that successfully convey the mystery of the setting, making one look for the snake amidst the trees. The form of the poem includes lines broken into smaller units by the use of extra spaces. It gives the impression of thoughts unfolding. Wedde presents a variety of points of view, with eclectic references.

The influence of Manhire and Wedde has become widespread in New Zealand poetry. They were joint winners of the New Zealand Book Award for poetry in 1978, Manhire for *How to Take Off Your Clothes at the Picnic* (Wai-te-ata) and Wedde for *Spells for Coming Out* (AUP). Since that time, I feel that their poetry has been a significant reference point for others. They have continued to experiment, whilst remaining within the general boundary of that kind of poetry that takes far more cognisance of its own technique than its content. There are a variety of ways in which that might manifest in a poet's work, but it seems to have remained as constant for these two poets. Manhire occasionally delves back into much older forms, such as the villanelle. Of course, their influence is also felt in teaching and editorial capacities, particularly through Manhire's Creative Writing classes at Victoria University, but I would not underestimate the direct influence of the poetry.

One poet influenced by Wedde is Murray Edmund. His poems are diary-like and reveal a philosophically inclined mind, and a sensitive one; "the moment of seeing this // and the moment of saying this are two separate moments" (401). His writing is intimate and embodied: "I have to touch you with my speech to be heard," he writes. At times, he uses phrases that very soon turn sour on the tongue, such as 'the grammar of desire', which reads as though a wordsmith was trying too hard. Some of the poems end with a disappointing understatement, as if

the poet has learnt the technique from someone else and applied it injudiciously:
“Tonight I embrace you and trust the roof will hold up till morning” (402).

Anne French’s experiment with simultaneous equations as a form for poetry seems to relate to Stead’s poem which uses a Venn diagram (see earlier in this chapter). It creates a complex version of the picking of daisy petals to discover love. Like Fleur Adcock, she is willing and open to talk about love affairs (Vivienne Joseph also has a poem on this topic). The use of the mathematical equations reveals a quest for answers about love, and show that the real life situation cannot be simplified. She also writes of the extraordinary feelings around the ‘ordinary’ experience of childbirth. She begins the poem, ‘An Evening in November’ by saying “Eight hundred of them” (408). We might assume eight hundred babies, but are they all in the same hospital, were there eight hundred born that night in New Zealand, in the Pacific? She also says that her son was once an axolotl. A reference to reincarnation may or may not be serious. I think she is using complexifying devices to help show us that this ‘ordinary’ experience is not so at all. She concludes, “As if it were / an ordinary day the sun rose,” eventually revealing her true perception.

In considering the overall effect of the changes to this edition, it is surprising that the selection of poetry by Alistair Paterson was not expanded for this edition.

Since the second edition he had published a further five books of poetry, won the John Cowie Reid Award for *Qu’apelle* (Pilgrims South Press, 1982), published his own anthology (see Chapter Three) and a book on ‘Open form’. It may be that his criticism of the academic elite contained in such publications as the book-

length poem *Incantations for Warriors* (Earl of Seacliff Art Workshop, 1987) could have estranged him from some touchy editors.

The tendency is already emerging for the publications from the major publishing houses to be considered for inclusion in an anthology almost as of right. The collections from which work by Anne French and Gregory O'Brien were taken are very recent, published in the same year as this edition; Elizabeth Nannestad's first book, *Jump*, appeared the previous year, 1986 and was joint winner (with Allen Curnow's *The Loop in Lone Kauri Road*) of the New Zealand Book Award for poetry – all are from AUP. (Anne French joined OUP's Wellington office as editor in 1979 and was the Managing Editor of OUP, Auckland from 1982-1993. The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature says: "An alliance with Auckland University Press became the basis of some prestigious publishing of local literature in the 1970s–80s, with Fleur Adcock, James K. Baxter, Lauris Edmond, Maurice Gee, Vincent O'Sullivan and many more on OUP's list"⁴⁷. What it does not mention is that AUP published four books of poetry by French between 1987 and 1993). Other inclusions from books published just the year before are all by already well-known poets: Fleur Adcock, Lauris Edmond, Kevin Ireland, Louis Johnson, and Vincent O'Sullivan himself.

I would suggest that the major anthologies are likely to continue this process, only producing something that seems radical when smaller, independent publications have mapped out the reasons for re-assessing literature from a perspective other than that of various privileges. The privilege of being male, of being pakeha and being heterosexual, have been exposed and undergone some change. The privilege of association, particularly the association amongst

⁴⁷ Roger Robinson, 'The History of Oxford University Press in New Zealand', in *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*.

academic critics and anthologists, is likely to endure for much longer. It is in the anthologies from the more independent presses and more independently-minded editors that a re-reading is possible in the immediate past and the immediate future.

Chapter Three: Supplements and new trends

Recent Poetry in New Zealand, chosen and edited by Charles Doyle, 1965

Charles Doyle acknowledges the work of previous anthologists and singles out Allen Curnow's 1945 Caxton anthology for comment. Doyle writes, "The book's importance rests in the sureness of his selection"⁴⁸. Doyle is attracted by Curnow's confidence then, and again we must respond to the fact that those commentators who have a plan, a particular conception of poetry give us the most interesting and debatable ideas to consider. Doyle tries to avoid possible arguments about the canon by claiming the poems he himself had chosen represented work in progress. He implies that a full appreciation will come much later.

In presenting this selection of work which was on the whole more contemporary than anthologies usually aim to reproduce, Doyle gives a much stronger impression than most of what was happening in New Zealand poetry at a particular time and place in its history. With the exception of James K. Baxter's work, the poets included had all come to prominence since 1950. I believe that academic assessment of literature tends by its very nature to be retrospective. This fact needs to be continually stressed. Without that reminder, we may lose track of the activity and vivacity of our literature. An anthology such as Doyle's attempts to follow more closely what has been happening in recent literature. An unusual feature of this anthology is that each poet included was asked to contribute a statement about their own work. Two poets: Alistair Campbell and W.H. Oliver preferred not to do so.

⁴⁸ *Recent Poetry in New Zealand*, Chosen and edited by Charles Doyle (Auckland: Collins, 1965), p. 11. All subsequent references to this text are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

In her statement, Fleur Adcock admits to the limitations she sometimes feels with regard to the poetic structures in which she works. Remarkably, she says “a certain submissiveness in my approach to writing might be attributed to the fact that I am a woman” (18). This submissiveness did not stop her compiling an anthology for OUP a few years later. Significantly, she acknowledges social constraints of the expectations of family and society on a woman, which may affect her artistic output.

The first few of Adcock’s poems do seem somewhat stilted, but the selection loosens up with ‘Miss Hamilton in London’. The poem begins with the statement, “It would not be true to say she was doing nothing” (23). This intrigues, but the poem is easily misread. The first line appears to be a positive statement, but in fact is a negation. We are quickly met with parallel thoughts about how someone might have been doing nothing at all – it is rare literally to be doing nothing. And we consider all the things she might have been doing, which the title sets up for us, forming a fine hook into the reading of the poem. The poem may owe something to *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf in its use of internal details of a woman’s life. The details of Miss Hamilton’s day are related in the second person, but it is obvious that the subject is the poet. Some details are generalized to give a more universal context: “she wrote a letter to someone / In Canada, as it might be, or in New Zealand” (23). This is mature, confident writing (much like Miss Hamilton’s personality); writing that is happy to have said enough, just as Miss Hamilton herself has experienced enough to consider that she herself has had a satisfactory day in London.

In ‘To my Father’ James K. Baxter reveals much about his own life and his father’s ambitions for him: “you had prayed / That you might have a poet for

a son,” and then “an answer may / Confound by its exactness” (35). It is noteworthy that he says ‘a poet for a son’ rather than a son who is a poet. It means that first and foremost he is a poet; secondly, a son to his father. The second quotation sees the poet confirming and agreeing with his father about this priority. (This puts us in mind of Caffin’s comments about Baxter and the way in which he seemed to write his life ⁴⁹.) Baxter also says that in him is the ‘true mettle’ of his father shown, and that the father is the bow and the son the arrow. These are strong claims, but the connection between them is very deep. Baxter sees the two figures as ‘out-of-time’ twin brothers, rather than father and son. Poorer fathers have gone before who gave scorpions for fruit and stones for bread. Baxter tends to use religious images, partly, I expect because they are among the strongest with regard to the identity of the father figure and because of his growing interest in religion in the late 1940s, culminating in his baptism as an Anglican (he later converted to Catholicism). Doyle describes Baxter as a “spinner of parables” in his introduction (13).

Peter Bland observes that the poetry being created around him is making a transition from the public life to the personal, that considerations of nationalism that had dominated discussion of New Zealand poetry up until this time are now less important. Bland writes, “No young poet can avoid some sort of pressure (if only that of being ignored) from the ‘official’ culture of older New Zealand writers who first discovered something called a National Identity in the 1930s and have refused to let anything happen to it since” (46). It is valuable, I think, to have this external perspective from the English-born poet. No doubt, Bland has Allen Curnow in mind as chief purveyor of the ‘National Identity’ philosophy.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Caffin, ‘Poetry, Part Two: 1945-1990s’ in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, 2nd edn., ed. by Terry Sturm (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 447-524 (pp. 474-6).

The point about the older poets is perennial and reinvents itself with each generation. The greatest power that that older generation has is to ignore the younger poets. Another is to review them badly.

With regard to his own poetry, Bland observes that topics such as work and marriage offer, “opportunities for sharing a living experience with people everywhere” (46). This is part of one of the most profound paradoxes about the poet’s work. There is much comment against the ‘personal’ poem, but poems concerned with “prophecy, hindsight and metaphysics,” as Bland contrasts it, cannot create the opportunity for reflections on personal aspects of life that effect us most deeply and most regularly. So I would suggest that a poem which is a clarion call to assume a national identity, for example, cannot open up the potential for discussion of gender issues, familial relations, or true friendship, in the way that a poem about a man and woman arguing may do. Bland contends that the exploring of an experience shared in some way is as likely to uncover a local reference, as it is to shed light on a universal archetype.

In his poetry, Bland relates an incident in which a man on a bus assumes that Bland is Jewish because of his hooked nose, and proceeds to abuse him. The poem calls to mind the incident mentioned in Chapter One of this thesis that occurred to Anton Vogt’s father. In his abuser’s face, says Bland, he sees, “all life denied.” Notwithstanding the obvious irony of Bland’s Anglo-Saxon heritage, the poet has considered the true meaning of national origin, concluding: “I do not know who I am.” He has considered racial traits - Carthaginian, Roman and Norman - but none of those categories seem to fit, to really explain who he is. The poet is honest enough to acknowledge that the other man’s behaviour stirs a hatred in Bland, which is “confined to some unspeakable void” (52). But, of

course, these intense feelings are not sent to the void because he articulates his feelings in poetry. The differing qualities of the two men are made obvious by Bland's honesty, but without Bland needing to react violently. It must be acknowledged that the poem is evidence of an enduring anti-semitism at that time in New Zealand (his publications in this anthology date from the late fifties to the mid-sixties).

In the foggy days that Bland narrates in the poem 'Kumara God', "All's formlessness – a sharpened will / Won't chip us free of it" (56). There is no escape except, paradoxically, into the form of poetry, again Bland's voice confounds itself by solving the riddle it poses. At the end of the poem, sleep has 'turned solid', but with these words a poem has been completed, and it does not sleep forever because from time to time someone reads it. In 'Mr Maui at Home with the Death Goddess' Bland assumes a very different working form to most of his other poems. The simple and open statements of the voice of Maui indicates either an awareness on Bland's part of the best of the translations of Maori poetry with its chant-like and dignified tones, or an intuitive ability to identify with such an idiom.

Alistair Campbell's reasons for declining to offer some commentary with his poems are briefly described by Charles Doyle thus: "poets write well or badly in spite of, rather than because of, their theories about poetry" (60). It is good to see theory put in some kind of working perspective in this case. Doyle also describes a swing in the direction of the writing of poetry under the influence of Allen Curnow "in favour of metaphysical poetry and the poetry of the 'maker'" (61) This is in contrast to poets of a more romantic, subjective and rhetorical inclination. Doyle says that Campbell's poetry has been described as among the

best in the romantic camp. It is strong in rhythm and dynamics, a kind of music is played out, without unnecessary elaboration; “Yet I am haunted by that face, / That dog, and that bare bitter place” (65).

Gordon Challis, a psychologist, writes of the practical aspects of therapy and ways of unifying experiences “which are felt as foreign by the person seeking help” (73). He likens this process to the writing of poetry. Challis speculates as to whether scientific research could identify the circumstances required to produce a poet, so that they might be repeated by design. Since there are now computer programs that can produce a kind of poem through random selection of words, there seems some veracity in his supposition. But Challis’ statement is among those that seem to bear little relation to their poetry. Those who did not comment may be wisest; as the commentaries open the poet to a further degree of scrutiny, I feel, as one tries to assess their ability to live up to their own standards and intentions. Much of Challis’ work is dense and inaccessible (e.g. ‘The Sinful Man’), though some attains a degree of lightness, (e.g. ‘Building’), where the longer form gives the poet more space to manoeuvre. There is a degree of anxiety in his poem ‘Three Things’ where he describes those occurrences that cause him concern. The three things in question are:

the pictures on the shelves of blind men’s rooms,
the dust on artificial flowers, and the moon
which brushes past the clouds and sounds like wind. (75)

These enigmatic images are surely beautiful. Though the poet feels he cannot explain them, they challenge the thinking. Do they need to be understood?

Perhaps in a roundabout way, this is Challis’ point.

Charles Doyle comments on the so-called subjective school of writers when introducing his own poems. He says, “subjective poets will inevitably be ‘seers’ rather than ‘makers’, and the primary assumption of seer poets is that to live equals to suffer” (87). He refers to Walt Whitman as a ‘seer’ poet whose optimism was an exception to this tendency. Doyle also seems to counter Challis’ statement about poetic creation. Doyle answers the question as to why he is a poet by saying that he was born that way. It is noticeable that Doyle does not stint on the amount of space he gives his own writing in the anthology. The poets included are given between eight and thirteen pages. Doyle’s work occupies twelve pages.

Doyle’s ‘There He Was, Gone’ is a very moving poem about a certain retired major who reminisces about the First World War as various people pass his front porch. In particular, the elderly gentleman recalls being spoken to personally by George V. But one night whilst speaking the major suddenly disappears into some inward train of thought. The narrator does not seem to have stayed to chat on subsequent occasions but wonders where the major has ‘gone’. Finally, we get an example in one of these anthologies of some kind of reflection on the aftermath of the World Wars. However, as suggested earlier in Chapter One, those reflections come from a second party and not from those who experienced the conflicts.

Louis Johnson discusses yet another background for the writing of poetry in his commentary. Though he mentions an artist’s sometimes life-long pursuit of ever-changing meanings that surround life, he is also conscious of the feeling of being ‘chosen by the work’. He uses the phrase ‘dare one say’ before the term ‘spiritual’ and alludes to something that resembles the traditional term ‘muse’. He

suggests that one does not want to undergo this experience too often because “it uses one up too quickly” (101). He qualifies these statements with an acknowledgement that this kind of spiritual activity or engagement with poetry does not guarantee high quality work. He reflects on the trends in New Zealand in the previous twenty years (1945-1965), grateful for changes, since “both the ‘island and time’ theme and the newer critical gimmick of seeking the ‘reality prior to the poem’ can lead toward a narrow and restrictive nationalism.” He also usefully sums up the problems for the editor in a small country:

where critics are not above the personal feelings that life in a small community generates, there can be no doubt that the reality of a critic’s friends and acquaintances will be more real to him than that of a stranger. Any canon whatsoever can thus be subverted to the purposes of provincialism. (102)

Criticism of Allen Curnow’s anthologies is intended, I think, in the idea of a proscriptive approach being subverted to what becomes a new kind of provincialism, the members of that province being the editor’s friends and associates. The comment also holds good for the misgivings I have outlined in Chapter Two with respect to Vincent O’Sullivan’s later choices.

Some of Johnson’s own poetry is surprisingly prose-like. Here and there, illuminating phrases punctuate it, such as the reference to the ‘residential sun’ in the ‘Song of the Hutt Valley’, where we encounter “Tucked up at home, the passive / Who own their plot of ground” (105). His sense of place and the rhythm he brings to this poem remind one of Irish poet Louis MacNeice. Johnson conjures the awful terror of ordinary humanity, the dull tolerance of the urban-

dweller. He can also be concise and humorous, illustrated by a sequence of satiric two-line poems.

M.K. Joseph acknowledges his own rather old-fashioned approach to a poem as an artefact. The shaping of the artefact is the most important element in writing, but he also makes special mention of the visitation of the muse, which he sees as “a very real and strange experience” (116). Joseph notes that poetry has lost its pre-eminence in the arts and with it its hold on narrative, description, and the didactic. The visitation of the muse means that the poet has no option but to continue writing, however poetry may be perceived, and to focus on the *making* of the poetry. In doing this, Joseph employs the same emphasis on that word as Doyle, and adds: “The poem is an object which we make and set down, like an antique torso in an abandoned city,” and one which is “waiting for the audience to come back” (117). This is a philosophy that advocates staying put and waiting; there is no sense of moving forward to meet the audience. One gets the impression that Joseph genuinely does not know what to do about where poetry now finds itself.

At the same time, there does seem to be an accord between Joseph’s comments and his poems. In particular ‘Elegy in a City Railyard’ is very much an artefact, a state-of-the-moment type of poem. It reminds one of much of T.S. Eliot’s work, or of Allen Curnow’s detailing of the moment (see later in this chapter) but especially of a poem like C.K. Stead’s ‘Pictures in a Gallery Undersea’ (see Chapter One). It is the kind of poem that someone was bound to write: it is a cultural artefact. The poem closes with the evocative line “The engines talking quietly together,” suggesting an era of change in which the machine has advanced and taken over much of human labour and activity. The

machine's contribution is so normal and widespread that the locomotive can afford to speak quietly.

Owen Leeming describes the resistance of poets he met with in London to consider any kind of intuitively based poetry. He cites his own intention to write of a 'secular metaphysic'. Poetry, he claims, "is a special way of saying special things, not just a special way of saying" (128). So he values technique, but also something more. In a sense, he is advocating a spiritual content. But his conception of the spiritual is not religious. Rather it is a measure of the complexity of human references. Poetry shines a light into an existing labyrinth (129). Part of the function of poetry, he claims, is to attempt to articulate that which defies the attempt. He further describes poets in New Zealand as being 'adrift' within the framework of their own experience.

In Leeming's poetry, there is a sense of the poet creating artefacts, but in a more relaxed manner than M.K. Joseph. There is expectation of change: "Tomorrow, as they foresaw, Cold and spray will ratify / What convention did today" (131). Leeming's use of sea imagery ties the individual island story to the natural unfolding of events, uniting the human with the natural environment, rather than promulgating a cultural island. Leeming's sense of the personal use of poetry makes an interesting comparison to Joseph's idea of the isolation of the poet's work in the current climate. Leeming writes: "all I spoke / was verse from a cold room, being broke" (132). There is a touch of realism also with reference to finance.

When introducing W.H. Oliver's poetry, Charles Doyle mentions another instructive anomaly with regard to earlier anthology selections. He tells us that the single poem by Oliver included in Curnow's 1960 anthology from his recent

collection *Fire Without Phoenix* was one of the few from that collection with specific New Zealand references. It was selected in preference to poems which one reviewer (M.K. Joseph, in fact) saw as more objectively written and therefore much stronger than earlier poems. Keith Sinclair gives a further indication of the representations of New Zealanders in earlier times: “The sense of New Zealand man’s isolation chilling the verse of the thirties may have been generated as much by theory as by experience, but the isolation of the New Zealand writer was real enough” (152). The sense of construct then, if there was one, was in the interpretation or elaboration of that sense of isolation that writers might have felt. Effectively it makes their position more heroic, a representation that human beings tend towards, especially during times of struggle.

Sinclair’s general comments about the New Zealand poem are intriguing: “New Zealand verse has a disconcerting air, like a half-remembered face, an unfamiliar familiar” (152). It reminds one of C.K. Stead’s comment about Ian Wedde’s poetry, that it was “agitating, like watching someone trying to thread a needle”⁵⁰. In Sinclair’s version of the place of New Zealand poetry in the world, it has become a vintage of wine “to be uncorked and praised despite a slight initial distaste” (153). It is a curious appraisal of the literature of one’s own country, but one must reason that such a writer is all too conscious (as others here have shown themselves to be) of the poetry of England and increasingly by now, America as well.

Like Bland and Campbell, Sinclair is able to enter into the simplicity of tribal oratory as the Chief speaks in ‘Waitara’ (see also Chapter Two). It shows the strengthening that Maori and national traditions, such as Chinese poetry, can

⁵⁰ Karl Stead, *The Glass Case – Essays on New Zealand Literature* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1981), p. 157.

bring to our language. Such language and such enrichment may be seen as a manifestation of a later line from his poem: “There is a kowhai in the blood” (155).

Kendrick Smithyman reflects on the poet’s reaction to their own work in print, citing a degree of subsequent embarrassment and regret. He describes the differences between those poets whose own life experiences provide ample material for their work and those who become poets “by being other than who they are in what they wrote” (164). The distinction shows a refreshing openness and clarity. In his poetry, it is again to be noted the way Smithyman shows himself master of evoking locations. He recreates life in the Waikato, as he has done at other times with the Coromandel (see Chapter Two) and the Far North (see later in this chapter).

C.K. Stead describes poetry as “an action of the mind towards the world” (179). Furthermore, style is “a manifestation of a temperament.” He writes that influences on his work are too diverse to mention, but that he prefers poets who are craftsmen, “busy and content.” Stead mentions a similar embarrassment to Smithyman at encountering his own older poems. He cautions that if a poet talks about himself, he should consider himself more like others than unlike. Principally, he values truth in poetry, and warns that any poet’s proclivities and character become exposed in his or her own writing.

As one can see, there is a wealth of comment about poetry in this anthology, so that its contribution to the field of New Zealand poetics is not inconsiderable. The poetry is assured without being complacent. At the same time, it must be said that the tones and experiences are not greatly varied. The

inclusion of only one female poet, Fleur Adcock, may have much to do with that common atmosphere.

***The Young New Zealand Poets*, edited by Arthur Baysting, 1973**

Arthur Baysting may have used Donald Allen's *New American Poets* (New York: Grove Press, 1960) as a model for this anthology. Baysting seems unsure whether to defend the criticism that many of New Zealand's younger poets are imitating American writers. He says that this may be repudiated in a number of ways, "if one cared to"⁵¹, but offers only two points in that defence: that earlier writers such as James K. Baxter acknowledged a debt to American poets (in Baxter's case Robert Lowell); and secondly, that older New Zealand poets might easily be accused of being insular and producing poetry which lacked energy. He goes on to say that such a debate is a 'false one' and refers to the more general consideration of what is distinctive about poetry written here. He claims that "a New Zealand poem does not necessarily need to contain specific geographical references or to be in a local dialect" (3). He observes that the distance between New Zealand and both Europe and America may, in fact, be useful to New Zealand poets, the distance giving space to evaluate other influences objectively. It is debatable whether 'influences' can be seen in this light since influences are so often unconsciously experienced. Perhaps it is more that New Zealanders residing outside historical literary traditions might be free of their constraints.

⁵¹ *The Young New Zealand Poets*, ed. by Arthur Baysting (Auckland: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973), p. 3. All subsequent references to this text are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

Frank Sargeson has suggested as much, referring to the “intolerable weight of so much civilization”⁵², after a visit to London.

Interestingly, Baysting issues a call for more support for New Zealand poets from arts funding bodies. He suggests it would be quite feasible for a university, for example, to offer residencies to support writers. Perhaps his call was heeded since each of New Zealand’s universities and a growing number of other educational institutions now offer these kinds of annual (and other) residencies.

Baysting says that this anthology aims to represent the variety of new work being produced in New Zealand. Baysting’s own poetry is characterised by a heavy irony particularly at the conclusion of each, or most, of the poems. But he also shows a passion for recording events. His poem ‘Theatre’ marks some unusual landmarks of theatrical presentation, such as a couple having sexual intercourse during a 1970 play and, more recently, a woman giving birth to a child during a mediaeval nativity play. The rather ridiculous last line, “A BORN ACTOR! screamed the papers” (6), seems to work well in spite of the cliché. The poet undermines the intended sincerity of the event, the word ‘screamed’ alluding to the birth itself, as well a new kind of experience in the theatre, which, by juxtaposition with the real birth itself is rather put in its place – that of novelty for novelty’s sake.

Eric Beach’s comment on his own work is given in the form of an ironical prose poem. He says: “Literature is the town dump” (13). His statement is refreshing and irreverent, but much of his poetry is tangled and lacks flow. A number of other poets make their comments on their poetry in a subversive form.

⁵² In Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin, 2003), p. 382.

Russell Haley's comment is a diary entry, for 2.42 pm Sunday May 28 1972. He writes, "As soon as the statement begins to be made you catch the smell of embalming fluid" (42). So he resists the comfortable distance of commentary, but what is also hinted at here, I think, is that through the medium of the poem, which is more than just a private statement, something other than recording the apparent death of an experience is possible.

Generally speaking, the poetry in this anthology is concerned most of all with technique. Alan Brunton's poetry shows a self-conscious awareness of post-modernist literary theory, for example. The poetry is characterized by breaks in logical progression, a chatty style of delivery, suggestive of a particular sub-culture that the reader is invited to join, or that the reader already shares. This is also true of Russell Haley's poetry, but at times his work contains an overt surrealism, as in:

my head is a small yellow flower
when it decays
I will excrete a luminous
green laughter (47)

The poetry on offer is not always memorable. I found myself vaguely enjoying work by Murray Edmund, for example, whilst not being able to retain a clear idea of what the poems were about or what they intended to do. They form a light, intellectual wash over the day's experiences. This could be said of Haley's poetry too, which also has a strong narrative element; it is not surprising that he became known primarily for his prose works.

Sam Hunt makes a comment on his work in common with Alistair Campbell: "My poems are their own statements. If I had more to say, I'd write a

poem about it” (55). This suggests that Hunt has no particular theoretical stance. C.K. Stead has implied, in some general comments on David Mitchell’s poetry⁵³, that a lack of theoretical underpinning to writing is a problem for such a poet. The argument suggests a primacy with regard to theory: that any poet not self-aware enough will fall into traps. Realistically, knowledge of the forms, techniques, fashions and traditions of the art of poetry may be put to good use by the practitioner. Indeed, Stead stressed that in the New Zealand poetry of the 1960s and 1970s there was a need for a movement that had a sound theoretical basis that amounted to more than the perceived need to replace the influence of critics such as Curnow⁵⁴. In some cases this may not have been achieved.

But Hunt is able to conjure the paradoxes of experience, the sense of wonder in the decayed and decayed world of the alcoholic, for example. The grandchild cannot forget the purple balloon that he associates with the grandfather, who, despite his shortcomings, dressed up as Santa Claus each Christmas and had a riotous time with the children. At the age of twelve the grandchild narrator hitch-hikes to see the grandfather in his cabin where he drinks the old man’s home made wine for three days. The old man later loses his legs to gangrene and in the hospital shows his mettle by asking for flowers and demanding to know where they had taken his shoes. That small detail about the shoes reveals the way the sick may be further disadvantaged at a time of illness and misfortune. Just because he no longer has feet, should his shoes no longer belong to him? The poem seems to escape the grotesque, however it is naturalistic and personal.

⁵³ C. K. Stead, *In the Glass Case – Essays on New Zealand Literature* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1981), p. 156.

⁵⁴ Stead, p. 147.

Jan Kemp also indicates a preference for the experiential approach. The poem, she explains, has two lives: “its formless one & now the formed life” (65). This consideration of the formless seems to me a very feminine perspective, that is that the unformed also constitutes poetry, together with the suggestion that there is much poetry in the world that is not framed formally in lines of poetry. I do not mean here a more generalized sense of the word poetry but a qualitatively similar but discretely different aspect. In ‘The New People’, Kemp describes a contemporary couple who avoid all argument because they do not want to lose “their fine / integral / line of / modern thought” (67). No doubt it is a biased portrait and one that the ‘true thinkers’ of society would challenge, but it does serve to show how readily the ego can be involved in so-called dispassionate discussion. Argument is about winning, not about learning. Her often anthologized short lyric ‘Poem’ shows the fragility of love: “light as this torn wing / we lie on love’s breath” (69). She describes also a world that has forgotten to look at flowers. The word ‘forgotten’ gets the point across in simple, understated language.

Peter Olds’ work shows the passion of a sub-culture that he displayed most clearly in his ‘V-8 poems’ of the seventies. In ‘Psycho’ we find him “celebrating the sixteen piston transplants” (149), and the excitement of the ‘scene’ where there is a “gearlever between the legs of a knocked-out / catholic girl screaming for the next party” (150). He undoubtedly captures that energy, whatever one may think of the ‘scene’.

Gary Langford emphasizes the child-like aspect of his poetry: “I pretend and out of pretence art is born.” Of course, it is not an implicit truth that art will be born. More interestingly he writes, “Poetry becomes the under-life, the subtext

of every human phrase and action” (74). It is fascinating to hear a poet take the idea of art and life’s interchangeable natures in this direction. One must expect that a poet is sensitive to the sub-texts of life, but to say that poetry is the sub-text is to suggest that it is somehow implicit and in existence everywhere. David Mitchell shares this perception of the universal in poetry: “the song’s everywhere,” he says (130). I feel that Langford’s perspective cannot easily be paraphrased without missing what he wants to say. “I don’t argue for poetry, it’s not an intellectual exercise in who scores points,” he writes. Again, there is a conception of poetry as implicit to life and experience. The ideas are regularly mirrored in the poems, where one is moved to chant at the top of a mountain: “The mountain creates / the act just as it dominates it” (79). In retrospect, Langford’s poetry is rather disappointing at this early stage of his career, though. Perhaps it cannot easily measure up to the introduction it is given through Langford’s comments. And who would expect it to do so where the poet focuses so particularly on the implicit nature of poetry rather than the production of it?

Bill Manhire prefers a more relaxed relationship with words: “Lately I have found it necessary,” he writes, “to approach a condition which borders on narcolepsy” (122). In a sense, this statement is more bizarre than any of the others. Certainly the poems are light. A few show insight, such as the much anthologized, ‘The Clown at the Death of his Wife’, and the other short poem ‘Your absence’. To the place of absence, he concludes, “I shall always ask you in” (127). Trying to make a place of that which is beyond all place in the context of a poem, is a strong approach to take in trying to convey the strangeness of loss or grief.

Rhys Pasley suggests a lifelong commitment to the writing of poetry when he says, “It’s not a hobby, or a pastime” (163). There is a sense of anticipation in much of his work, as these lines indicate: “Listen: What if / it never lifts // what if this is / all I know” (171). Yet Pasley’s work, like that of several others included in this anthology, has disappeared from literary view: for some years his work has not appeared in the journals. In Pasley’s case at least, it was as if the expectation of what could be achieved was too great, the high ideals could not reach fruition. At the time of publishing, Darryl McLaren’s work was previously unknown in book form, though he had won the Wellington Festival poetry competition. Yet, like Pasley, little of his work appeared in journals after the early eighties and not again in the anthologies until the retrospective work of *Big Smoke* and *Real Fire* (see Chapter Four). McLaren’s work finally re-emerged as late as 2005 in the journal *JAAM* (Just Another Art Movement).

Barry Southam writes: “I don’t want to wander in the domain of academics and critics – theirs the business of ‘explanation’, the poet’s that of ‘essence’” (174). Southam’s poetic practice seems to confirm this idea: “After scrambling to safety from / now crab-concealing water, they ask why? / Why did you do that? But he does not reply” (178). In his poem ‘Homosexual Lover Seeks and Finds Some Shelter’, a man is rejected by society and by the government who can find “no / place in our political programme for / non-contributing lushed queers.” The man is sent to a psychiatric hospital, though we are told, “they did choose the more progressive” (183). Homosexuality was illegal in New Zealand until 1986.

Ian Wedde’s comment begins with an arresting statement: “The desire is always to be as clear & simple as possible which means that poems are often

going to be obscure. This is not a contradiction” (185). The reduction of experience to its essential makes them ‘more charismatic, says Wedde. What is abstracted is the experience of understanding. For him, there is a sense of the poem not being entirely his own, of containing an ‘automatic message’. This may be seen as having, on the one hand, roots in the ideas of the death of the author from Roland Barthes’ famous and influential essay, and on the other, a kind of esoteric religious connotation.

Kendrick Smithyman begins the Afterword to this anthology with the wry statement that in New Zealand there are only two categories of poets, the younger and the older, and that the transition from one to the other is rapid. He suggests that a term such as ‘new’ when applied to poetry can have altogether “too many considerations” (196). He says that it is important that modernism be assimilated, even if at the same time it may be disappearing. C.K. Stead has made important distinctions about the nature of modernist poetry. For me, it began with Gerard Manley Hopkins and is identified with a realism of poetic diction which attempts to convey the innate poetry of everyday language, rather than being reliant on a formal structure (though structures can and will be used) with the structures emerging from the content of the poetry and not the other way round. Stead, like many others sees modernism reaching its height with the work of Eliot and Pound; he regards W.H. Auden’s poetics, for example, as Georgian⁵⁵.

I think there is much truth in what Smithyman says about this process of assimilation in poetry. Smithyman attempts to chart events in the advent of modernism in New Zealand, citing the influence of Whitman around 1910, the changing of influences in the 30s, the displacement of Humbert Wolfe’s

⁵⁵ Stead, *In the Glass Case*, pp. 143-145.

influence and the less than overt response to Eliot. He considers that Fairburn showed some sensitivity to Pound and that the first fully modernist poem in New Zealand was J.C. Beaglehole's 'Meditation on Historic Change' (1934).

Smithyman states that Frank Sargeson was the only writer he knew who was well read in William Carlos Williams and that other Modernist influences (such as Dylan Thomas and Wallace Stevens on the work of Allen Curnow) came much later. This makes sense of the idea of assimilation of practice occurring as the influence fades from literary view. Smithyman compares Baysting's anthology with *New American and Canadian Poetry* edited by John Gill, and observes a greater tendency in the New Zealand poets towards 'open form'. He offers a view of 'open' from Colin Smith's *Contemporary French Philosophy* as "the idea and experience as some sort of forward-looking evaluation" (199).

15 Contemporary New Zealand Poets, edited by Alistair Paterson, 1980

Alistair Paterson's anthology is intended to represent a particular trend in recent New Zealand poetry of the 1970s. In doing so he acknowledges that this must be a very personal selection and, later, emphasizes that it is not exhaustive, but that he has sought work that is innovative and adventurous. He discusses the way in which poetry can show an awareness of psychological process, whereby the poet and reader may share their respective experiences; "the poem is a starting point"⁵⁶, rather than a complete or discrete product.

Paterson explains that 'open form', "allows room for the accidental, for the vagaries of the subconscious . . . for the private vision to become public

⁵⁶ *15 Contemporary New Zealand Poets*, ed. by Alistair Paterson (Dunedin: Pilgrims South, 1980), p. xi. All subsequent references to this text are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

experience, and for public opinion to interact with private and personal belief”

(xi). The open form that Paterson proposes, “tends to move away from traditional ‘content’ and closer towards a ‘field’ of perceptual and imaginative experience”

(xii). He is conscious of the dangers of the approach, that it may become chaotic and distracted by too much detail. Instead of logical development steering the poem, Paterson suggests that the field of perception becomes the guide. This statement seems to borrow terminology from photography, where ‘depth of field’ controls the quality and effectiveness of each photograph and perhaps shows the way in which poetry may evolve in parallel with other art forms. It certainly accords with the definition of ‘open’ as related by Smithyman previously. In a later essay, which expands the content of his introduction to this anthology, Paterson uses the word *gestalt* in relation to a new approach to the arts in general, but including poetry, manifesting there as ‘open form’⁵⁷. It is an attitude of mind as much as it is a specific technique⁵⁸. Like Smithyman, then, Paterson alludes to a European origin and sensibility.

Paterson makes particular reference to the longer poems included in the anthology by Allen Curnow, Stephen Higginson, Ron Jackaman, Alan Loney, Karl Stead, Ian Wedde and himself. In devoting so much space to longer poems, the editor makes up a little for the relative neglect of such works in the journals and anthologies, from which the longer poems often suffer exclusion because of the constraints of space.

But the first poet we encounter in the anthology is Rosemary Allpress, whose work was, previous to this collection, entirely unpublished. She has a distinct feel for the well-placed word:

⁵⁷ Alistair Paterson, *The New Poetry – Considerations Towards Open Form* (Dunedin: Pilgrims South, 1981), p. 26.

⁵⁸ Paterson, p. 23.

funeral mass for whom?

the monsignor? dead?

stunned, noted (8)

The abrupt arrival of the word ‘stunned’ echoes its meaning in the poem; the word is abbreviated with the thrust of events. I had noted her exquisite use of the poetic unit of the line in a review of the anthology *Real Fire* some time ago ⁵⁹, in poems like ‘Wet Flowers’, reprinted from this period: “pissing time of day among wet flowers” (6). Sometimes she suggests that which is outside the content of the poem to show that there is a larger or alternative reality at work. Allpress invites participation of the reader in the making of her poem. She does not self-consciously confide in the implied reader but addresses that person as a familiar confidante or colleague. She uses repetition like echoes to make one conscious of the repeated experience, rather than the function of language. She suggests the other side of experience: “tall sight? But, remember the . . .” deliberately breaking off into irresolution. That which she observes is sure, but very definitely not here:

for the rest of the time, pylons, straddling

the motorway, over the landscape

looming, lacking

reflection. (3)

Use of the word ‘looming’ serves to bring the motorway closer with its sense of the explosive double oh sound.

There is a sparseness of address in her work:

I noticed how difficult you

⁵⁹ Owen Bullock, ‘Review of “Real Fire”, in *New Zealand Poetry Society Newsletter* (Wellington: Poetry Society, August 2002), p. 14.

found it

getting out of the passenger seat (5)

This is reminiscent of the lightness of William Carlos Williams' address in poems like 'To Elsie', where he follows a young housemaid through some of the movements of her day, doing quite ordinary things and ending with the lines:

no one

to witness

and adjust, no one to drive the car.⁶⁰

Allen Curnow is consciously philosophical in 'Things to do with moonlight'. The poet rises in the night to urinate and reflects on Descartes' *cogito*. He shows that the considerations of mind and body and of the mind's awareness of itself reveal a duality "that made two of him" (14). But the *ergo sum* of the *cogito* cannot be a plural *sumus*, nor can it encompass all thought processes or aspects of consciousness in the way Descartes might have hoped. The New Zealand poet undercuts any sense of deep philosophical pondering by dwelling on simpler things, and sleeps again "*Ergo sum*. Having relieved myself." I feel that there is a Taoist simplicity about this. The poet leans back with the, "comfortable grumble of the sea" (16), suggesting that both Descartes' and his own 'grumblings' are less comfortable than the sound of the sea, and certainly less useful - the sea helps him get back to sleep.

Complementary to the perceived duality mentioned above is this line from the same poet's 'An Upper Room':

We speak only

to each other as if a third were present,

⁶⁰ William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems*, ed. and intro. by Charles Tomlinson (London: Penguin, 1976; epr. 2000), p. 55.

the thing we say. (17)

Language then, or the consciousness of the working language is like an extra being for Curnow, in keeping with the sense of other of the philosopher, as in Descartes' case. This shows the sense in which the practice of the use of language in writing has completely inhabited the poet. Curnow's work here shows complex and subtle interactions and transition between different aspects of speech or speakers, mirroring in this way the interactions of our lives. Even the use of the word 'no' in the line "For godsake no" from 'Names are News' does not signal an end, but paradoxically suggests the continuous, perhaps because of the human being's comparative lack of knowledge and inability to see the 'ends of things', or to see things entirely as they are.

There are a number of reiterations of everyday detail in Paterson's selection of poems for this anthology. Paradoxically, a universal is invoked by these particular details, that of the complexity and continuation of life. At times, Curnow uses rather radical forms of disjunction, allied to the details:

I should be used to it, the way numbers
don't go by numbers, the injustice of it
that finds me guilty. A sparrow has not fallen
to the ground. Do you smell burning? (26)

The leaps from the considerations about numbers, to the biblical reference to the fall of sparrows and then the question about burning, which may refer to an apocalyptic vision or nightmare, introduce a technique into the mainstream which I think influenced writers like Bill Manhire, who utilize the seemingly unconnected in a similar way.

Whilst I may have criticized Curnow in earlier chapters for his dispassionate intellectualism in much of his poetry, here we see him as a more relaxed and humane observer: “It was their company that made it possible / for me to walk there” (24). This simple reflection says much of our social need and context. Others also meet one’s need, not just for companionship, but for the enjoyment of the natural world: they make one go out into it.

Riemke Ensing also rigorously pursues detail in her poetry, of the repetition of the note of the sparrows’ song in the garden, of a human being counting that note, and of the exact time of day this took place. One of Ensing’s poems depicts in dramatic form various piano recitals, contrasting them with the music of birds in a garden, as the poet extends her frequently indulged interest in visual art into music. She has similar thoughts to Curnow about the strange realities of language; “Spain is an idea,” and also “a gesture for words.” This is written in reaction to W.H. Auden’s poem ‘Spain, 1937’. I think that she effectively described the way that words work as signs. ‘Spain’ *is* an idea, in the sense that it is merely a word. But it conjures for her a memory of Auden’s poem, just as in other cases hearing the word ‘Spain’ brings memories of the struggles there against fascism in the 1930s. She also discusses Picasso’s famous painting ‘Guernica 1937’ which “becomes a protest in black & white” (38). There is a hint that this is at least as effective (or ineffective) as the black and white of newspaper reports. Ensing suggests a greater degree of immediacy about the artwork, as opposed to the impact of writing. Of Auden she says, “You were only selling words” (40). She also describes painting as a “voice of colour’ affirming that in being perceived it comes to life.

Though the first of the poems by Alistair Paterson from his sequence *The Toledo Room* is more of a topic poem, a poem ‘about’ something, the remainder suggest ways in which language is broken for humanity, or broken apart. Amidst the rubble, compensations and strategies are found. The bulls in Spain being fed in their stalls have “a little longer” to live and that last phrase, repeated in block capitals is a reminder to us of the brief time we have here. Paterson’s poems are often international by location – not surprising from a Naval Lieutenant Commander - but the ideas put forward are often childlike; “together people turned to stare as if / it were an invention never seen before . . .” (147) His plan emerges in the selection from another long poem *Incantations for Warriors*:

to recognize the time & the place
of power, to acquire
those strategies that open the wings
of perception, to become impeccable. (154)

Put in this way, it sounds a demanding prospect.

One or two of the selections do not seem to evidence Paterson’s ideas about ‘open form’, especially some of the work by Elizabeth Smither, which though enjoyable is conventional in style, and certainly does not reach beyond the modern era in poetry. I have a feeling that her poems could have been written without the influence of any work later than Gerard Manley Hopkins, Thomas Hardy and Dylan Thomas. Rachel McAlpine is also less concerned than some of her peers with language itself than language purely as a vehicle of expression. Elsewhere, I have offered a definition of the contemporary in poetry as poetry that could not have been written before the present time ⁶¹. The mere fact that

⁶¹ Owen Bullock, ‘Editorial’, in *Spin* 49 (Tauranga, March 2005), p. 5.

certain styles are being written at any one moment does not necessarily make them contemporary in the artistic sense.

David Mitchell observes the self-consciousness of previous poets.

Rimbaud, the French symbolist poet, he says “loved his madness / perhaps a little / too much . . .” (127). His insight extends to more generalized subjects: “since all our lives are / their own / fruition” (135). Mitchell’s poetry opens up discussion, it enables the reader to enter into the poems in the way that Paterson discussed in his introduction. The contrasts and rapid transitions range from the zany and youthful concern with the practice of poetry itself and a sense of being in love with that practice, to those that follow the natural progression of the things they relate. Mitchell’s poetry is frequently more conventional in sense than it appears on the page. The use of the devices mentioned in the previous chapter, such as the unusual phonetic spellings and use of dashes and staggered lines, belies the fact that he is ‘speaking’ in a very direct manner. Reading his work makes me conscious that, with some poets, one does not, perhaps even cannot, remember their individual poems. Is this a weakness? It is more that one is greeted with sensations and may remember those. I have noted earlier a similar response to work by Murray Edmund and Russell Haley, and, later, to Ian Wedde.

Kendrick Smithyman’s language and use of imagery and metaphor is refreshing and astute. A helicopter is compared to a dragonfly rather than the more common anthropomorphic view of comparing a dragonfly to a helicopter. In the same poem we encounter a ‘licklipping housekeeper’ (171) – Smithyman has a way of reversing the order of phrases (it should really be ‘liplicking’) to give a new possible meaning to the line. The narratives he relates he sees as ‘between fables’ (172), reminding us, I think, that the limitations of perception

and memory can unify the so-called real with the so-called fictional. This bringing together of disparate realities is given further voice in the extract from 'Intersecting Plains' where we meet "Businessmen who lock up their faces" (179) and a mechanic whose real focus is his collection of tapes of Big Band music from the thirties. The narrator reveals his focus too, with comments about a re-release of *Jailhouse Rock* by Elvis Presley, again bringing to the page a sense of unity across cultural groups, as well as an example of individual preoccupations that border on obsession.

'After Zhivago' seems an exercise in observing human complexity. The poem begins with the quotation from the Muscovite Winterburn: "To live your life is not as simple / as to cross a field" (181). The speaker is asserting the need to cross the fields and an awareness of distance. In saying what life is not, he is suggesting some of the simple things that it is composed of. The poem ends with a paraphrase of the opening quotation, showing that life recycles its own lessons.

Paterson's anthology has been heavily criticised in a review by Murray Edmund. Edmund's opening contention: "This anthology is concerned with classification"⁶², seems to deliberately ignore the comparatively speculative opening statement of Paterson's introduction (mentioned earlier) about the personal and incomplete nature of the selections. Edmund refers to the dissection and the necessary death of that which is being classified. This comment would appear to apply equally well to the problems of making any anthology.

Furthermore, the criticisms seem to be of a personal nature: "and it is all so dead, so dreary and dead," does not strike one as considered criticism. Edmund suggests that the poems by Higginson, Jackaman and Paterson pursue the mode

⁶² Murray Edmund, 'Please Classify & File: 15 Contemporary New Zealand Poets', in *Islands* 31/32 (Auckland, June 1981), p. 161.

of open form too self-consciously. He believes that Paterson's theory becomes 'the new orthodoxy'. I am inclined to agree that the first of these two writers seem to be striking a pose and, as Edmund says, Paterson's work is self-referential and romantic, but I also think that it reaches beyond those limitations. If there is a problem at all, it is that Paterson's work can suffer from an inability to live up to the high principles he expounds, but in that he has much talented company. The often self-conscious reappraisals of writing techniques in the seventies expose further dangers to the poet, but are a necessary stage in the transition between eras and styles.

The Oxford Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry, chosen by Fleur Adcock, 1982

In her relatively short introduction (seven pages), Fleur Adcock makes some powerful statements about poets who are visitors to New Zealand and expatriates living abroad. Of the visitors she writes:

Poems by immigrant Englishmen and Americans may have added variety to the pages of local magazines, but they did not arise out of the particular circumstances which fostered the writing of New Zealand-bred poets, and it was poetry created in the light of these circumstances, of this social and political climate, that the title of the anthology seemed to imply.⁶³

She says that overseas poets who brought with them distinct poetics were only reinforcing ideas that were already being considered by New Zealand poets.

⁶³ *The Oxford Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry*, chosen by Fleur Adcock (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. viii. All subsequent references to this text are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

When discussing the expatriates, Adcock describes the need to exclude her own writing, which seems a brave and modest decision. She would like to have included the work of Kevin Ireland, who, though he had spent twenty years overseas, kept in touch with New Zealand writing and was published here regularly. But she explains that considerations of space disallowed that option. Adcock says of the expatriate:

The decision to settle permanently in another country leads to a subtle but distinct alteration in one's consciousness and attitudes; without ceasing to be a New Zealander one develops a view of the world whose focus is elsewhere, and it seems to me that poetry written from such an outlook cannot rightly be called New Zealand poetry. (viii)

The crux of her statement lies with the decision the poet makes to be permanently elsewhere. A temporary stay means that the homeland is likely to remain the reference point for poetic practice, that the temporary host country has an approach to poetry that is 'other'. I am aware that for some critics any sense of the local, particularly where it seems to be accentuated in poetry is a weakness. I feel that what Adcock may be happier with is poetry that shows by its nature some aspect of life in a particular place, and has value because it could not have been produced somewhere else. So that the debate about the local and provincial is likely to become a qualitative one: the best poems written with 'local flavour' will do so without confining themselves to that place. The topic will always be under debate, whilst an editor of a book of New Zealand poetry feels obliged to justify the inclusion of the words 'New Zealand' in the title.

Adcock was herself no longer resident in New Zealand at the time of editing this anthology. This makes her an odd choice as editor at the outset, given

her own comments about localized perceptions and practice. One has to wonder if an editor living outside the country can be fully in touch with its literary activities.

Charles Brasch's place in New Zealand literature is under no such doubt. His poems range from the fiercely practical to the spiritual. In the same poem he talks about the "hard grammar of dependence" the "I-am that will not be defined," and ends with the aphorism "It is the physician's love that heals the patient." The poem concerns an emotional and spiritual journey through stages of self-reliance, out of old patterns and to a new independence that is not founded on the physical mastery of the 'strong man', but rather on internal strength. He addresses the grains of sand on the beach and the nearby city, "not in its rational laws, / But in that intangible inimitable air" (3). It is a poem to confound the mind.

Brasch's verse letter to Peter Olds is both tender and realistic. The two poets have been resident in the same hospital together (Olds had a history of psychiatric illness from the eighties onwards). Despite what they have in common as poets, they do not meet. Brasch writes, "too much seeming seems to separate us." These 'seemings' may be personal or cultural or more possibly relate to the reality of being two different human beings. At the same time, Brasch recognizes Olds in a fundamental sense as a fellow-poet, "I think of you as one who goes / Up the mountain in shadow, where I would go" (5). Brasch likens poets to wandering mendicants with robe and begging bowl and manages to lend the image a sense of dignity. It is a time-honoured occupation and suggests the contemplative rather than the indolent.

In 'An Ordinary Day Beyond Kaitaia', Kendrick Smithyman is again master of colloquialism in conjuring a rural situation and flavour. The cabbage trees nod at a church's new paintwork, seeming to give their approval, as the poet suggests the long association between the cabbage tree and the colonial-style church. Like Brasch, Smithyman drops in an aphorism from time to time: "To change your life you must understand / how your life goes, and where." It is an obvious directive towards greater consciousness, but it does not leap out of the poem like a simplistic religious moral, rather as if proffered across the bar by a stockman with some tentative advice on a neighbour's sheep. The landscape is not populated only by 'good keen men'. Smithyman describes people with "Slavic Polynesian faces." This compound term records some similarity between these two races and hints at 'multi-culturalism' without the deliberate use of that word. Again he offers advice: "You must change your life" (23). I think that Smithyman makes this statement because life itself seems to demand of us that we adapt.

Smithyman's poetry, like Curnow's, is rich in detail, but he also knows what to leave out, and that a list does not need to be overly long in a poem to suggest a certain content. Smithyman has insights into the place of the artist in society, he writes; "I am a stranger. Too facile to say / We are all strangers" (25). He keeps to similes which are near at hand. His poem 'The Last Moriori' seems to demand of us a post-romantic way of looking. This man, the 'last of his kind' endures alongside the myths that surround him. But he has become 'a poor fact'. The poem is detached so that one would struggle to call it a lament. The poet gives a shiver in remembrance of the day he met the Moriori, "taking small

comfort from our day as it is” (29). The prospect of the demise of the entire human race in the nuclear age is surely not far from the poet’s mind.

In Hone Tuwhare’s poem for Ron Mason, Tuwhare is given a suit of Mason’s after the other man’s death. Tuwhare explains that the jacket when dry-cleaned will “absorb new armpit sweat” (31). Tuwhare, the younger poet alludes to what he has learnt from the older man and suggests that these things will continue to be used. Tuwhare’s way of expressing this through the reference to sweat is typical of a poet who keeps his feet on the ground and his work anchored to straightforward language. Spanish references suggest the sense of solidarity in the struggles against facism that the two poets shared. Tuwhare associates Mason with Garcia Lorca, and describes him as having joined his ‘literary ancestors’.

The poem also records the discovery of Mason’s parting lines to his wife found behind a photograph. Dorothy deals with this goodbye with good old kiwi downplay. The poet meanwhile drinks wine “to wash away the only land / I won, and that between the toes.” He suggests the lifestyle that is his and the place of the poet in the world, or lack thereof. At times, Tuwhare’s poetry is chatty and relaxed, but his work is also structured and well edited. Tuwhare’s imagery is often original: snow is ‘lipping’ his face and the sting of sleet is “hot as ice” (32).

Lauris Edmond also writes about grief. She says, “It is not pain we fear, but triviality” (38). She considers the supposed fixed points of life, ‘like stars’. And yet we know that even the stars are not fixed, but temporary and contingent, so that the poet, by use of understatement manages to put forward two opposing points of view at once.

The editor’s choice to include the whole of a long poem like Alistair Campbell’s ‘The Dark Lord of Savaiki’ shows the work in its best light; it makes

better sense. Adcock was also the first anthologist to include Baxter's long poem 'He Waiata mo Te Kare' which is surely one of his best, and worth looking at in detail. The inflated ego is often all too apparent in Baxter's later work and he often uses pretentious rhetoric, referring to himself as Hemi (the Maori transliteration of James) and develops the persona of 'the Poet'. The Poet as a kind of cultural icon is now an idea extremely out of fashion. I do wonder though if some commentators are simply put off by the unconventional life that Baxter, as guru, led in the community at Jerusalem, near Wanganui, and by the passion and apparent lack of intellectual sophistication shown in the poems. Baxter's language is simple and everyday. He does not include words that the people he lives with would not use, though he does set up wider references.

Section three of this lyric for his ex-wife is a classic Japanese tanka. Baxter offers us the poetry of Maori words in everyday usage. He describes the simplicity of his own life: he would watch the waves, while she gathers kaimoana. Sometimes his ideas seem chauvinistic. He is aware of the limitations of his own religious heritage as a Christian. He indulges, as often is the case, in self-deprecating images. Some of this is egotistic, but I think he is aware of his inflated sense of self-importance. He finds it hard to forgive himself, but perhaps he is beginning to, at the end of his life.

Baxter avoids cliché. Waves 'wash' on the beach, they do not crash; there is a suggestion of cleansing, baptism. The phrase 'slanting spears of rain' risks sounding like a poeticism, but sets up an historical reference to the fortified pa, in 'Hilltop behind hilltop'. Observations about marriage are painfully true. Baxter is not a sociologist, he does not present the statistics to prove his points; he knows from experience, and he assumes that we know also. He mentions Te Kare's

‘troubledness’, but does not delve too deeply into her problems. He succeeds with the colloquial (“None of them have stayed together” [57]). He is also romantic and given to a kind of self-deprecating aggrandisement: “Working till my hands were blistered” (58). Yet, it is a simple story he relates: of the child in him, of a poet who cannot cope with the complications of modern society, who would rather ‘drop out’ of conventional society.

Baxter has seen his ex-wife Te Kare recently, and he remembers her as a girl; they are the same person for him, perhaps; much is embodied in the thought of the ‘first love’. The smoked eels and the references to folklore and tapu, anchor the experiences. He has been working in the graveyard, perhaps anticipating his own death. As with Van Gogh’s last painting of the wheat-field, we get a sense of the stalks golden as ever, but with the crows and the storms gathering. The last lines of the poem figuratively break the stone. As the notes to the original book indicated, Baxter was reading the proofs of *Autumn Testament*, which includes this poem, when he died. One wonders if Te Kare ever came to him again. But we do not need to know. It is a great love poem whatever actually occurred. The poem was later included in *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English* (OUP, 1997), again in its entirety.

One is conscious of the quality of the personal letter in Baxter’s *Autumn Testament*, which, though not actually addressed to his friend Colin Durning as the *Jerusalem Sonnets* were, bears a similar intimate tone. Some of the sonnets from C.K. Stead’s selection seem to work in reaction to Baxter. In Stead’s case, he addresses his friend Maurice and takes the references in his sonnets from a more modern context. So that instead of Baxter’s mention of eating goat meat and slashing the grass with a sickle, we hear a transistor radio on the golf course.

However, these sonnets, published in the late seventies, form a parody more gentle than those written by Bill Manhire and Ian Wedde, both of whom attempted to de-mythologize Baxter's life.

Stead expresses his awe at poetry itself: "Spring is a recurring astonishment – like poetry" (67). This also seems to recall Baxter's listing (in 'The Ikons') of poetry as one of the fallen icons, along with God, Mary, home and sex, in the sense of its once central importance to life. In Stead's poem, the sound of the sparrows in Albert Park "Fills the silence of God that has lasted forty-two years." The poet refers to the length of his own life. The comment about God sets a precedent that would remain more or less constant for Stead, who, strangely for a self-confessed atheist, refers frequently to God throughout his writing career – at least in his poetry – through to his collection *Dog Poems* (AUP) in 2002, where the word 'dog' reverses 'God'. There is sometimes an impression that Stead sees the beauty of life, but does not recognize it for what it is, or, to put it another way, does not have a theoretical framework that he accepts to judge it by.

This publication marks Cilla McQueen's first inclusion in a major anthology. Oddly, considering the very quirky nature of her later poetry, the poems on offer here are reminiscent of Lauris Edmond. There is a feeling of comfort within the natural world. In 'Weekend Sonnets' we meet an innkeeper's daughter feeding the ducks, "her long striped hair clean as flax" (137). Her hair is washed by the rain, maintained in an entirely natural way. But she is not merely feeding the ducks, remarkably "she's feeding the water." The image becomes mythic in the sense of her giving power to the elements.

There are a few exceptions to the general air of caution about this anthology. I was conscious of the curious openness of Bill Manhire's short poem 'The elaboration.' It is really uncertain as to whether the subject is death, a woman, or a male friend. It is a poem that is truly an example of the reader creating the poem by means of interpretation. One could read an environmentalist perspective into 'The poetry reading'. A reference to England describes it as containing "certain small animals / Which have made their home there" (103). In 'The collection' human beings are animals similar to the small animals of England:

My friends, never in danger,
make a perfect descent from
the tree. The moon drives
light into your spine. (105)

The image of the moon can be taken literally, but metaphor is not far away. There is a sense that the natural world is trying to tell us something, to imbue us with some other quality we do not understand; we are part of the natural world, but do not entirely feel ourselves to be so. There is a related sentiment in Murray Edmund's 'Stopping the Heart'. Edmund visualizes a rose being planted where a book had been lying. The book is necessarily a closed one because he conjectures that it has no 'groundplan'. Like Stead, then, he laments the lack of theoretical basis for certainty. The rose bush is described as being "more real and more inconclusive / for being / totally inhabited" (134). This contrasts with Manhire's thoughts, that there is something to be gained from the lack of conclusions.

The political content of Manhire's poem 'Wellington' reminds us how few poems of political satire are included in any of the anthologies examined in

this thesis, and this may reflect on the fact that few New Zealand poets attempt the genre. Baxter's balladeering satires are the first examples that come to mind. One tendency in this anthology is toward the modern sonnet, probably because of the influence of Baxter's long sequences of sonnets – the other sonnets included here were written later than his series.

Overall, there is little poetry that is challenging in this anthology, the collection asserts the writing of poetry within traditional content-based techniques. For example, Sam Hunt's 'Notes from a Journey' (written for Hone Tuwhare) is especially acceptable and safe; compared to Tuwhare's for Ron Mason it is rather trivial. The anthology is one that I see as supplementary to the largest 'mainstream' anthologies, joining Charles Doyle's anthology in this role. Doyle openly acknowledged the importance of Curnow's work, and I think that Adcock seeks to collect recent poetry which, whilst extremely accomplished, does not sit easily with the title 'contemporary'. The other two anthologies in this chapter attempt to describe the new trends in poetry in the 1970s. They take risks, and they do not always succeed, but they are an important part of the evolution of New Zealand poetry and poetics.

Chapter Four: Some Alternatives

Private Gardens, edited by Riemke Ensing, 1977

Private Gardens was the first anthology in book form of work by New Zealand women poets. Before this time, only special issues of smaller magazines in the 1970s, such as *Outrigger*, had been devoted to women writers. Editor Riemke Ensing was born in Holland and came to New Zealand at the age of twelve. She was at this time a senior tutor in the English department at Auckland University. Ensing first notes Janet Frame and Ruth Dallas' disinclination to be included in the anthology. Frame had asked if a companion volume of male poets was planned, and Dallas suggested that poetry should stand on its own merits whether written by men or by women. Ensing acknowledges the sentiments and says that the anthology is based on possibly arbitrary grounds, or at least no more arbitrary than a collection by 'young' or 'recent' or 'Georgian' poets⁶⁴. This seems extraordinary. She quickly refers to the individuality of an editor's taste (which is always relevant) and says that her classification is one of convenience. She makes no apology for that. The problem with this defensive argument from the editor is that she has failed to explain in any way, the response of Frame and Dallas, or to put them into any context in terms of whether these writers did or did not identify with the politics of the Women's Movement or feminist principles in general. I feel that their non-involvement gets the anthology off to a difficult beginning.

The editor had asked the poets for some comment on their work, which she intended to publish alongside the poems. But, she included comments by only

⁶⁴ *Private Gardens – An Anthology of New Zealand Women Poets*, ed. by Riemke Ensing, afterword by Vincent O'Sullivan (Dunedin: Caveman, 1977), p. 10. All subsequent references to this text are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

two poets: Fleur Adcock and Gloria Rawlinson, saying that, in the first case, they were especially relevant to the poems selected, and, in the second that general comments “made interesting reading,” which seems a little vague. Of the other submissions, she writes, “There was a disturbing similarity about the problems encountered in being a poet and a woman at the same time – problems which had to do with the *condition* of being a woman – of being a wife and mother first, a poet second” (11). These comments mirror the problems that women were facing generally, and still face, in society. The all-encompassing role of mother, for example, is not one easily negotiated with a desire for work and activity outside the home.

Ensing observes that much of the poetry tends to be ‘safe’, to avoid taboo subjects such as sexuality. There is also a conservative approach to the choice of language. She says: “It would appear that women are taught early how they should use language and how they should not. This is important because vocabulary frames people’s image of themselves and of others and a conservative use of language restricts that potential” (12). The sense here is one of reticence and moderation generated by social context, then, rather than any political outlook. This moderation is perhaps reflected in the choice of cover for the book. A photograph of a garden framed by an exotic archway is disappointing for the fact that inside the garden, though there are beautiful borders, the centre is occupied by a mown lawn. The bourgeois conservatism may, in part, be the editor’s. One can see from the selection by some of these poets in later anthologies that Ensing did not always use the most challenging work available. I suspect that Ensing was trying to anticipate the reaction of male reviewers and perhaps her choice of Vincent O’Sullivan as contributor of the Afterword reflects

this. Ensing notes some damning criticism of women writers published in New Zealand by Denis Glover, C.A. Marris and Kendrick Smithyman (though the latter's criticisms have been more moderate, she says, they are still wide-ranging). The back cover of this anthology displays a series of quotes from male writers of varying periods in literary history who have disparaged female efforts. It is a daunting list and shows a complete inability on the part of those male commentators to consider that a woman might have an intrinsically different perspective on life and literature than a man. This is the context into which Ensing's anthology must enter. It is not surprising that the whole appearance of the book is tentative.

One of the most challenging female poets of this time is Christina Beer, challenging, that is, for her use of sexually explicit language and discussion of the female body and sexuality. Her poem 'Foxglove Song' is redolent with poison and beauty, and symbolic of the landscape the poet finds herself in. Opposite the poem is a photo of the poet in pseudo-American Indian garb. Her hair is in plaits with a feather sticking out. She wears beads and what looks like an animal skin top. Her face is strong and masculine. She stands contemplatively by a hillside. No doubt the emergence of hippy culture in the late 1960s is present here. The photograph seems to represent a new type of woman, who is native and indigenous and non-European, whilst being conscious of older European traditions, such as Romanticism. The prominence of the photograph (it is a full page, early in the book) emphasises this impression. There is an element of revision in Beer's writing:

i have seen the cannon
the white men traded for the Wairau valley

its chained to a painted trolley
outside the plunket rooms (28)

Beer deliberately misspells even the simplest words, uses mistaken grammar in her poems and omits apostrophes. She does this, I think, to upset prevalent interpretations of the types of language acceptable in poetry. It is a practice that would not have ingratiated her with male editors, focused on correctness and precision. Along with the fact that Beer centre-justifies her poems, they may, on the surface, have the appearance of amateur poetry and this is where the less discerning editor may fail to see its value. Beer is attempting, I suspect, to charge poetry with a different kind of energy. Partly this relies on memories of the power of the spoken word, the loose grammar and odd spelling makes for a genuine oratorical and even anti-rhetorical voice.

Marilyn Duckworth is better known as a novelist, and had by this time published four novels, including *A Barbarous Tongue*. Her poetry is competent but rarely more than that. There is an intriguing line at the end of 'Karori Cemetery': "Who doesn't sleep alone?" (44), which reminds one of the intrinsic isolation of the human experience, but on the whole it is disappointing. It is tempting for an editor of an anthology like this of an early type to include better-known writers from other genres, but, overall, the quality of the poetry suffers. Her work does not compare favourably to a poet like Peggy Dunstan, committed to forging out structures that balance the content of the poetry.

A poem by Lauris Edmond asks the question, "What is a woman that she / should wake and sleep in other people's lives?" (51) The children are in bed, doors are closed and lights put out. The woman's action is surrendered to the situation. The poem ends: "Time passing in silence touches / the unresisting

embers into ash.” There is a circularity to the poem, which begins with the dying fires of day and images of dust and moves toward this ash at the conclusion. In ‘Scar Tissue’ she composes a lament for youth and the thrill of being in love. Parts of the Wellington known to the poet in previous years are being demolished. Before the ‘big drills’ and simpering shops the old steps were “dark, clay-smelling, convolvulus / and periwinkle sprawling on the stones / and fennel, ripe and strong, / grasping the bank.” There she met her lover. This place has always evoked those experiences, though with time the pungency of the memory has dulled, so that now she is able to say with the other townspeople, “I know / it has to go” (53). The poem is evocative, sense-laden and universal.

Riemke Ensing’s own poetic style reveals the influence of the visual arts, both in the layout of her poems and in forming an intellectual or creative backdrop. She is also working in her second language (her mother tongue is Dutch) and it is perhaps this fact that gives her the inclination to play with its structures. She is adept in turning a noun to more verb-like use: convolvulus is “convolving blue through tree and shrub” (55). The fresh perspective which second-language writing can bring to literature should not, I think, be underestimated. We have seen fine examples of it in more recent times in New Zealand from the Bulgarian-born multi-linguist Kapka Kassabova and, perhaps even more obviously and playfully, from Sonja Yelich, also of Eastern European extraction.

Helen Shaw’s poetry shows a strong technique. There is the sense of a poet who has sought the very best way to express herself and gets the most from her language. Mary Stanley’s work is similarly accomplished. Though relatively

formal – she uses sonnets, the sestina and carefully rhythmic structures – but there is a tension in the lines that holds one’s interest:

Being a woman, I am
not more than man nor less
but answer imperatives
of shape and growth. (127)

This is the poet commenting on the ‘condition of being a woman’, that Ensing mentioned in her editorial. Lines three and four are particularly instructive. In this regard she uses the word ‘imperatives’, which has an overtly intellectual overtone, but balances it with the more sensuous ‘shape’, and, to a lesser extent ‘growth’. Both may allude to childbirth (the poem is titled ‘The Wife Speaks’), but more than that, refers to the female as the embodiment of the production of life and, by association with it, of art, including poetry. Perhaps an essentialist element has crept into the writing and philosophy.

Of the experience of being a mother, Mary Stanley writes with intense, religious passion, but in the end turns to irony: “My son, my Christ / in diapers” (124). More than one of Elizabeth Smither’s poems gives a child’s perspective, and brilliantly so in ‘The Children’:

Today they learnt solidarity, people’s liberation against the parents
Whose barking voices like the seals in the public zoo
Nagged the ears of everyone around.

One can feel the embarrassment. The children have resolved to make changes in the world, but when they wake next morning they leap out of bed and laugh, forgetting their resolve of the previous day. The poem gives a kind of mystical

explanation for the ways in which children can be blamed for phenomena that their parents have set in motion.

The name Tolla Williment no longer appears in anthologies and journals, but I suspect that her work must have been underrated earlier in New Zealand. There is a crispness of detail and originality and fullness of phrase that is not common to any writing. She uses the metaphor of a new plant for 'Adolescence': "it knew / At equinox the vast and potent hour / When gendered sap assumes the deep release / of veins constricted" (135). This is probably the first use of the term 'gendered' in the anthologies. (Alan Brunton has noted that the word 'gender' was borrowed from grammar studies sometime in the sixties ⁶⁵.)

Elsewhere, Williment writes, "The morning had the feel of fur / And the sad specific air / Of a stray animal." The phrase 'specific air' works as a kind of paradox. She uses the abstract phrase when most often in poorer examples of romantic poetry it is the detail that is needed; yet she gains the desired impression in spite of this. Her poetry is very much that of relation, one thing to another. In her poem 'Tide at Flood' a woman is walking on the beach and in a state of grief. But she soon sees, "A boy and girl, like water and the moon, walk arm in arm" (136). The poet's similes and phrases that have long since passed into the realm of poeticism or cliché are renewed (a practice that some poets call 'recycling clichés').

In her self-commentary, Gloria Rawlinson accentuates the importance of the text, claiming that who wrote it is secondary. It is true that too often we speak of poets rather than poems. A poet may produce just one or many great poems in a lifetime; but the contribution is valid whichever it may be. Rawlinson reflects

⁶⁵ *Big Smoke*, p.5.

on the process of writing, suggesting that the gem conceived in the mind often falls short when 'reduced' to paper. She also refutes the domineering importance of academic theory: "while theories of poetic practice may broaden the scope of some talents, they just as often narrow the appreciation of others" (140). In this regard, she refers to the value of the 'woman's chant' of unlettered societies and the power they contain. Christina Beer's poetry comes to mind in such case. Rawlinson's most penetrating comment on the differences in the perceptions of poetry by men and women is that, "no group judgment is ever passed on the host of male poets who fail the critics' measure of acceptance" (141). This is palpably true.

As the book's acknowledgements suggest, women poets fared well in little magazines such as *Mate*, *Arena* and *Outrigger*. Not so in the larger anthologies examined in this thesis. As I suggested in Chapter Two, there seemed to be an inability on the part of some editors, notably Vincent O'Sullivan, to accept newer voices. It is ironic then that O'Sullivan provides the Afterword for this book. But he does so in such a way as to undermine much of its contents, to make clear that he does not regard all of the poetry contained there as worth preserving, and maintains the impression of this anthology as a kind of 'B' team effort. His Afterword is as long as the editor's introduction, showing, I think, that he feels that what he has to say is at least as important as what the editor wishes to communicate.

Each instance of praise of poems contained in Ensing's anthology is undercut by O'Sullivan's criticism. Even of Fleur Adcock - who is clearly one of the 'A' team poets in O'Sullivan's estimation - does not escape. Some of the other poets reveal a greater breadth of emotion, he claims, but in Adcock's case:

“Her gift for holding up a family event for examination, as one might hold up a block of bright gum to see the preserved fly, at times may seem disagreeable” (143). I very much got the impression that it was O’Sullivan’s own distaste that was under discussion. Why is this topic any kind of limitation? I have noted in Chapter Two the various poems of Fleur Adcock’s that seem to open up entirely new subjects for poetic discourse. Obviously O’Sullivan is not blind to this fact or he would not have selected some of her poems for his own anthology, but it is a pity that the praise is undercut. O’Sullivan does admire the self-sufficiency of Adcock’s poems and her precision with words, something she shares with Mary Stanley, Lauris Edmond and Gloria Rawlinson. He writes, “There are other writers I enjoy reading, but not in the same way. Whatever they offer the reader, it is not that sense of making, of ‘fabrication’. For by that I mean nothing more than something constructed and carried through” (143). It is obvious that the poets O’Sullivan picks out are the most structured, I would even say the most masculine in style. The vision of the poem as a constructed artefact is a particular one; it is not the only representation of modern poetic expression, but many male commentators retain that vision of an art form almost chiselled out of granite, or dug like gum.

O’Sullivan seeks not just the universal in the poems, but also evidence of a literary paradigm. This is another example of the insistence of a theoretical base for the art. O’Sullivan becomes increasingly widespread in his criticism of these poems, so much so that one wonders why he agreed at all to write an Afterword to a book which contains such flawed writing, even if he says it is worth reading. O’Sullivan confirms his attitude to the poems with this statement: “they are poems of quite another order to the best” (143). Perhaps this is also the answer to

the previous question. By making these comments, he retains judgment over the poems, effectively a kind of control of appreciation. That the editor of this book should have been willing to publish such comment along with the poems she had selected now seems surprising, but in retrospect it fulfils another function. It forms a kind of proof for the fact that women's poetry has not been viewed without bias. Again I would suggest that it is an unconscious bias that O'Sullivan brings to the book, continuous with a western male mindset and an insistence on craft, similar to the ideas about the 'making' of a poem in the previous chapter, and the seeking of an 'assured voice' in the poetry. But why must the voice be assured? Why can it not be disturbed, frightened, uncertain, irreverent or hysterical?

Eleven years after the publication of *Private Gardens*, Lydia Wevers edited the second major anthology of women's poetry in New Zealand, titled *Yellow Pencils*. Wevers begins her introduction by discussing *Private Gardens*. She quotes a review by Bill Manhire in which he identifies the sense of 'protective worry' in that earlier book⁶⁶. This seems justified given my earlier observations about the sense of reserve in the anthology, but the reason for that protection is masked by the direction from which Manhire approaches the subject. Manhire seems to suggest that most of the sense of worry is associated with the editor, whereas I would see the context of the times and the concerns about the reception of the book as more important. The sense of worry in the book is suggested by the fact that it has not only an introduction and acknowledgements, but also an Afterword, appreciation, comment, photographs and an inscription, as if to justify its publication.

⁶⁶ *Yellow Pencils – Contemporary Poetry by New Zealand Women*, chosen by Lydia Wevers (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. xviii.

Wevers next refers to C.K. Stead's review of *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* in which he claimed, "I don't believe that in my lifetime any male editor in New Zealand . . . has ever discriminated against a woman writer on the grounds of sex"⁶⁷. This comment seems also to me to come from an entrenched point of view and one that is unchallenged. Wevers' next referent begins to shed some light. She quotes Anne Else's article in *Landfall* about the treatment of female writers in that journal during the period 1947 to 1961. She writes of women poets in post-war New Zealand: "they had increasing difficulty in making their voice heard let alone understood"⁶⁸. The crucial word here is 'understood'. An editor does not have to be discriminatory to exclude certain poets. This can occur because of sheer lack of understanding and appreciation. If aspects of the female (or feminine) point of view are not understood by a male editor, then the energy and intrinsic quality of that writing, where it is expressed, will not be identified. It is a subject too big for literary analysis, and certainly beyond me at this time.

But it should also be noted that during the period Stead was writing about, there were few or no female editors of journals in New Zealand. There were none that I have discovered until the emergence of *Argot* in the late sixties. Not until Michele Leggott took up the editorship of *Landfall* in the eighties was there a female editor of a major journal. Currently Raewyn Alexander is the only sole female editor of a journal in New Zealand, that of *Magazine*. This means that we have very little with which to contrast Stead's comment about male editors.

⁶⁷ In Wevers.

⁶⁸ In Wevers, p. xviii.

***Big Smoke*, edited by Alan Brunton, Murray Edmund and Michele Leggott,
2000**

Alan Brunton's introductory essay, '1960-69: Restoring the Commune', is largely political, and at the same time describes cultural responses to political events. Some of these are analogous to the practice of the writing of poetry, such as the seeking for sexual liberation during the height of the Cold War in the early sixties, when the availability of the contraceptive pill and changes in social outlook made the idea of sexual liberation seem possible. This sense of personal liberation must have been particularly appealing at a time when forces beyond the ordinary human were at odds and holding world peace to ransom.

Brunton makes a vital observation: "The notion that the first European immigrants [to New Zealand] brought with them, that native society would be assimilated into theirs, still guided government policy"⁶⁹, in the 1960s. He cites the Waitangi Day Act of 1960, which set aside that day to commemorate the pakeha arrival, as if history began then. Despite the fact that "the state functioned with disregard for difference," Brunton says that nothing characterised the sixties more than the awareness of *difference*, or 'otherness' as he calls it (2). So non-functional was the state government in this regard that Brunton sees the racial issues confronting South Africa, and brought to attention by the 1961 Springbok tour and the visit of some Maori All Blacks to South Africa in 1964, as 'honorary whites' as forming a 'surrogate consciousness' for New Zealand's

⁶⁹ *Big Smoke – New Zealand Poems 1960-1975*, ed. by Alan Brunton, Murray Edmund and Michelle Leggott (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2000), p. 2. All subsequent references to this text are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

own racial problems. Brunton reminds us that a Race Relations Act forbidding racial discrimination was not passed in New Zealand until 1971.

Brunton cites issues of race as the first difference in the sixties. A second was the change in consciousness brought about by such incidents as the suspicious death of the United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold (a poet), when his plane crashed on his visit to the Congo following the upheavals there and the assassination of the first Independent Premier Patrice Lumumba. Brunton describes the normal state of mind during this period as paranoia. Complementary to this idea of Brunton's is Murray Edmund's later comment with regard to the desire to see the 'Big Smoke' as part of the "psychosis of Modernism" (24). This explains part of the significance of the chosen title of the anthology.

The third difference was the issue of sexual liberation of all kinds. The fourth difference was recognition of the fact that the status quo was basically patriarchal and uninterested in difference itself. This set of ideas might cover almost any topic, but Brunton cites religious oppression, the threat of a nuclear holocaust and sexual liberation, in particular sexual segregation, as examples. In terms of poetry, he makes reference to James K. Baxter's 'A Small Ode on Mixed Flatting'. Baxter wrote this poem whilst Burns fellow at Otago University in Dunedin in response to an edict by the University's Chancellor against male and female students living together. Baxter was in an awkward position, as, effectively, a kind of employee of the University. He chose satire as his mode of expression to identify the ridiculous aspects of the establishment's thoughts on the matter.

Brunton feels that many artists of this period took their inspiration from the idea of the commune and of the 1871 Paris Commune itself. He considers this new climate of thought as “nostalgic and revolutionary,” having to face both public and private issues and being at the same time “optimistic and hopeless” (9). In particular, he cites the scandals surrounding the mid-nineteenth century French poet Rimbaud, whom he quotes: “The poet makes himself a seer through a long, prodigious and rational disintegration of all the senses” (11). (See also Charles Doyle’s comments on the ‘seer’ poet in Chapter Three.) The self-consciousness and youthfulness of such a statement is very evident. The long disintegration of the senses must be felt in quite a particular sense when one bears in mind that Rimbaud did most of his best writing between the ages of sixteen and twenty. The energy, passion and commitment of the aims are also redolent of youth. The degree of commitment might be questioned when one recalls the fact that Rimbaud stopped writing soon after this period of his life. But perhaps his is a more experiential sense of commitment, that its intensity is more important than its longevity.

It is not surprising, given the sense of Brunton’s leading article, that Murray Edmund, in his introductory essay ‘Poetics of the Impossible’, goes as far as to say, “*Big Smoke* is more a cultural history than an anthology” (21). It is likely that this contention enhances, or exacerbates, the sense of the anthology as a particular construct of the editors. Both these editors have criticised Allen Curnow’s 1960 anthology in their essays. Brunton is quite eloquent in the severity of his comments; Edmund is more circumspect when considering Curnow’s choices. Most importantly, Edmund makes note of the fact that twenty-nine of the poets in *Big Smoke* had not appeared in any other anthology and that

others were only anthologised in *The Young New Zealand Poets*. He claims that *Big Smoke* is very much a collection of poems rather than of poets. They are poems, he says, which ‘put people’s backs up’. I think it is here that Edmund identifies their value. I would suggest that, at the time of first publication, a poem that is seen as controversial is judged by those whom it has discomfited, those who are established as critics and commentators. As time goes by, the question is surely asked by critics at a distance from the points of view of those times, ‘Why were they upset?’ At a purely artistic level, I cannot help feeling that any work of art which obtains a strong reaction must have some quality that the reader or viewer needs to engage with.

In terms of the discussion of the poets, a comment about Hone Tuwhare is worth noting. Edmund cites the changes in Tuwhare’s technique, comparing him to Allen Curnow and Kendrick Smithyman, who made special efforts to change their work between 1960 and 1975. But, Edmund claims, “none moved as far or as fast as Tuwhare” (24). He considers this progression exemplified by the difference between the writing from *No Ordinary Sun* to the poem about the Hikoi or Land March in 1975 (see later in this chapter). Bill Manhire has made similar comments about Baxter’s work from the time of high rhetoric in the early sixties to the pared down peacefulness and authority of his last poems in the early seventies⁷⁰.

The poems begin with a waiata by Rangi Harrison, ‘Waikato te Awa’ published in *Te Ao Hou* in 1962. It is formal and oracular. The translation by Kitty Leach was published in the same magazine the following year. The editors of this anthology depart from a purely chronological presentation of the poems to

⁷⁰ Bill Manhire, ‘Events and Editorials: Baxter’s ‘Collected Poems’’, in *Islands*, Vol. 8 No. 4/Vol. 9 No. 1 (Auckland, June, 1981), pp. 102-120, pp. 103-4.

foreground them with a Maori voice. Indeed Maori writers in general are given much more prominence and space in this anthology than in most others. The waiata is followed by Hone Tuwhare's poem 'No Ordinary Sun'. The juxtaposition of the sun with the nuclear explosion is a shocking one. The language is partly that of the Old Testament. It is a modern, apocalyptic prophecy, in a sense, already fulfilled. The poem was published in 1958 in a local journal called *Northland*.

There is a shocking insight too in Kuki Kaa's 'A Soldier's Letter Home' – now more insights into the World Wars are coming through. The poem, set in Egypt during the Second World War, was originally written in Maori. The translation tells us:

We charge. We retreat.

The rain is pouring down.

Bullets are cracking

How it warms my skin. (48)

How rarely does a writer give an example of the comfort the human being may find in the small details of life amidst what is otherwise a horrifying experience. The warm rain is intrinsically ironic, and yet it cannot be totally foreign for one native to New Zealand's 'greenhouse' climate. There is a sense of the familiar and a sense of displacement, concurrently.

W.S. Broughton begins 'Threnody' with an illuminating description of the first person singular pronoun, "I, that single, initial, lone capital" (49). It makes me wonder if the movement in literary theory away from consideration and use of the word 'I' begun by the French theorists is at base part of the trend away from a purely historically religious interpretation of the origins of the world and with it

the sense of the Christ as the great 'I am'. Jim Langbeer's long poem 'way of life' is a stinging satirical comment on contemporary living. It is phrased most essentially here: "all your civilised needs are free just ransom your life for seventy statistical years" (62 – this is just part of one long line). The poem takes an ironic look at the idea of freedom. Statistics are also mentioned here, the manipulation of which has become a factor with direct input on human decision-making.

Many of the poems are long - by which I am referring to poems above two pages in length. In journals currently published in New Zealand, even poems longer than the single page are not at all common. No doubt the financial consideration is most significant, but I think it also shows a limited view of the potential for poetry. The short lyric is more accessible and dependable, artistically. There is an analogy here with Langbeer's statistical reference. The economy of the page has taken over. The supposed scope of the ordinary reader's concentration span has altered; society does not apparently want to read long works; there is a so-called 'time poverty' at issue. Recent collections of poetry in New Zealand are characterised by the breaking up of the book into four or more sections, as if a reader could not take in more than a dozen or so poems at any one time. This is especially surprising when one considers that effectively the poem is a unit *in itself*. Unless there is an obvious and sometimes numbered sequence, poems can and do stand alone, so that one may pause in reading at almost any time.

Kathinka Nordal Stene plays with ideas of political changes that may have an impact on the intellectual life of a community in the poem 'Kennedy's Finger'. The poet dramatises her own supposed encounter with different coloured

cheeses at a delicatessen. She fears lest the assistant suspect her of some deep political intrigue if she buys an overtly red cheese. In the end, she makes a stand and buys the cheese only to find that it is not brightly coloured at all, but “yellow like mild or tasty.” She concludes “there is no longer a place for the true intellectual in today’s society.” (68) The symbolism of the red cheese clearly refers to communism, as she satirizes American foreign policy, and perhaps at the same time America’s own sense of paranoia with regard to difference (see Brunton’s opening remarks). But the poem is written in such a way that it is timeless. On the surface of things, she only satirises herself, but her position could be compared with any alternative point of view and how it finds response in the world.

There are a number of poems about the war in Vietnam. One is laid out like a board game, with instructions referring to flags and helicopters and what the northern and southern armies may or may not do. It was published anonymously in the little magazine *Kiwi* (1965). This anonymity is interesting. Did the writer really feel it was necessary for his or her own protection? Was it perhaps written by someone in political office who did not usually write poetry? Was an adverse response from the individual’s community feared? All of these questions may themselves be ones that the author wished to raise. Its place in this anthology seems to be a comment on the calculated stupidity of the war in Vietnam. Many of the poems show the influence of American poetry from a slightly earlier period. These are not so much concerned any more with the creation of a kiwi vernacular in poetry as a sense of general rebellion at the established mode of living and writing.

Other works are noteworthy for technique and lyricism. John Esam's poem 'Knowledge and Vision' is spare in its lyricism:

Black to the eyes of the watcher,

White to the eyes of the sailor.

Whose eyes can be trusted to see the heart

Where the heart never changes? (46)

Vanya Lowry intersperses her 'Fragments' with flashes of genuine recollection, such as, "I remember pumpkins swelling under a fat sun" (83). Such evocation is vivid and flashes before the eyes almost as if already embodied in one's own memory.

Hone Tuwhare's work seems to justify the claims made about the progress of his poetic practice by Edmund in his introductory essay. In his poem about the Hikoi, Tuwhare imagines himself preparing for the walk, and begins by asking who will lend him a rucksack. He repeats the question at the end of the poem. It seems to have the effect of asking the people whether they trust him as a man and as a poet, much as that question could be asked of a political leader. The closing lines are piquant, referring to the flowers that are in bloom, and that it would be a good time for a walk.

Ngahuia Gordon makes interesting use of the date of the year Tuwhare's poem was published, in the poem 'Pukeroa'. The conquering white man has taken, "the base we knew so well" (referring to Pukeroa, 'The Long Hill', a fortified pa near Rotorua) and replaced that heritage:

With muskets, fire and bricks

With industry, with progress

With 1966. (86)

It is startling the way that the European-style Anno Domini date rings out at the end of the poem. It is as if the modern era itself is in conflict with the culture that has been lost; the very existence of '1966' is an affront to a traditional tribal society.

In Sam Hunt's 'The Gulls' there is a sense of the poet's distance from the intimate and the personal. The woman he is with is only ever 'a woman'. As the gulls perch on the cliff's edge of a volcanic island, so the poet is balanced on the edge of a bunk with his lover. He finds next morning "pecked remains / of some woman beside me" (96). It is perhaps this kind of indifference and even contempt of womanhood that anthologists such as Riemke Ensing feel compelled to oppose by putting forward more examples of a woman's point of view. Unfortunately, Bob Orr is similarly ambivalent about relationships in 'Baudelaire's Scarf'. After going out for food, the poet arrives home to "the woman 'in my life' who / I take for granted" (187). He is at least aware of his own attitude in this regard, but nothing in the poem signals change. These poems reflect an image of the male poet as a freewheeling philanderer, but also suggest a society where relations between the sexes are disjointed and uncertain.

Selections from Charles Doyle's book-length poem *Earth Meditations* reveal a glaring omission from earlier anthologies. This is a poem that goes beyond the lyric and the tendency to be satisfied merely with a certain degree of elegance in that form. In a way, it shows a more serious approach, from a poet who is concerned with creating an *oeuvre*, a body of work, as opposed to a focus on each individual poem. A poem such as Doyle's tends to move into the language and rhythms of ordinary speech, together with a sense of the interruption and juxtaposition that pervades modern life. There is no slow,

continuous pastoral scene here. The poem is wide-ranging and experimental, full of verbal wit and philosophical ideas. It jumps time, place and cultures. This also includes poetic approaches, and Doyle may be confirming his own preference:

An object is not
so attached to its name
that one cannot find for it
another
which is more suitable (101)

Is this the poet's job? Doyle includes visual and other signs, together with words from German, French and Maori, and English neologisms.

Alan Brunton's page-work that introduced the first edition of *The Word is Freed* (July 1969), an iconoclastic and avant-garde journal, is reprinted here. It is full of references to poets and poetic theory. Brunton refers to ideas from the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (121) which parallel William Carlos Williams' famous dictum 'no ideas but in things'. There is a sense in his writing of borrowing and subverting language, for example in this statement: "a Nagasaki in the brain at each small breath of the earth." Brunton shows himself to be anything but a romantic. For his purposes, any language and any image is fair game. No doubt he feels compelled to re-create images of or references to Nagasaki so that the topic does not pass easily into complacent memory. The following seems a key passage in identifying a philosophy and approach to poetry:

the ideology of language - words
as things and not as signs (as sartre said). as a mode of revelation.
a logos that has the essentiality of the object as a referent.

defoliation. of the language.

He definitely leans away from semiotics towards Sartre's existentialist ideas on the subject of language. But 'sartre' is not capitalised – nothing is given a capital in this section of the poem, though in other poems every word is capitalised. The language is an eclectic mixture. We have the Greek word 'logos', in common use in philosophy, and also the term for Christ in John's Gospel. It is preceded by the word 'revelation' – a religious term, and 'referent', which is linguistic and from the study of logic. The last line has a telling full stop after 'defoliation'. The defoliation came first and then the impact on language. He refers to the use of Agent Orange to expose and destroy the Ho Chi Minh trail in Vietnam. This is a philosophy of despair. The destruction of the land must be matched by a destruction of the structures in language. Or, he may be advocating an absolute realism. There can be no joke, no untruth and no euphemism in an age in which thousands of people may be killed by one nuclear bomb. He goes on to expound: "A WORK OF ART HAS NO RIGHT TO / LEAD AN AUTONOMOUS MORAL EXIST-ENCE IN A WORLD DIVORCED FROM / THE VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE" (122). It is as if these ideas are seen as the ground of the 'old language', and, one must suppose, of the old 'reality'. As suggested by his criticisms of Curnow earlier, Brunton is no longer concerned with nationalistic ideas from the 1930s. These early concerns have been superseded by global issues, such as the rise of communism and peace activism in the face of nuclear threat.

Brunton mentions the poets Garcia Lorca, Louis Zukofsky, Theodore Roethke, Charles Olson, Hart Crane and Rob Duncan, revealing his role models in the 1930s left-wing movement. What is curious is that the references to writers

make those names into a clear reality, as if art were now as significant as reality, or to put it differently, that the two cannot be distinguished from each other. Perhaps this is simply a new kind of overt intertextualism. In parts of David Mitchell's 'The Singing Bread' the external references are so constant that one wonders if the poet would have anything to write about without them. Though, it has to be said, this is not Mitchell's usual or best mode of operation - more commonly he is an observer and the poems experiential. This poem is also founded on wordplay, e.g. between the word 'pain' and the French 'pain' for bread. The poem concludes with a reference to Baudelaire, showing a similar allegiance to those mentioned in Brunton's introductory essay.

There are many poems in the anthology about poetry and poets. They are not always without insight. Nigel Roberts lays out his agenda and the motivation behind the creating of new literary journals in the poem 'For Free Poetry Terry Gilmore & Johnny Goodall':

Poetry is not an escape / but
an appreciation / of reality. (259)

David Mitchell sees the poet "taking himself in / & / putting himself down" (245). Mitchell keeps his sense of humour in a way that some of the other poets do not.

One wonders if part of the foundation of the literary revolution attempted by the magazine *The Word is Freed* originates in a revulsion against technique and craft in poetry. This would seem the case reading a poem like Murray Edmund's 'Revolutionary Poem 5', published first in that magazine. The poem is noticeably broken apart in its structure, but the message contained is of a different nature: "I offer // (you too / this monolith / which will not be still" (130).

That monolith is presumably life itself. The missing bracket in the parentheses is indicative of the elusive nature of ‘true’ poetry. Edmund gives another indication of the fundamental philosophy behind much of the work in the anthology in the poem ‘Night Shift 2’. He describes a morning scene at a bohemian flat:

No one has got up yet.

Stephen is slumped with his head on the table.

I find it quiet, darkwinded, clear,

a little euphoric – (185)

Even the confusion of such a situation is seen as part of its charm; it is made heroic. Another aspect of the Bohemian life is the frequenting of cafés and bars and they often appear in the poems. Bob Orr explains their appeal, they are the places, “where I owe nothing except money” (188). The café represents a kind of freedom. There are no expectations on the individual, other than to pay for a cup of coffee. Because of the relaxed nature of this particular establishment, even that may be deferred.

Wordplay characterises much of the poetry in this anthology. It can be funny, as in Alan Brunton’s, “abandon hope all ye who entrail here” (131), and sophisticated, as with Ian Wedde: “hymn and hymen leander / high man and pen meander” (156), but it is tiresome when extended through too many poems. Brunton also spells a number of words eccentrically in the same poem. Such techniques tend to assert the visual in poetry, the importance of the way words look on the page. Riemke Ensing is another poet who breaks words unconventionally with the use of brackets (in the poem ‘Peeping Tom (asina)’, for example). Read aloud, these effects could pass unnoticed. One can change intonation within phrases, but it is difficult to do so within a single word. Less

commonly, a visual cue may contribute to a sound experiment. Frederick Parmee, for example, tries to reproduce the movement of telegraph wires by repeating one side of the parentheses to suggest long ringing sounds. Curiously, this is also pleasing to the eye.

Both Ian Wedde and Bill Manhire write acrostic poems. One wonders, though, if use of the form enables the poet to conjure something new, or whether it is an exercise in legitimising the form selected. Wedde's 'In Index' uses phrases beginning with each letter of the alphabet. Manhire's is in response to a quote from John Ruskin, the nineteenth-century English essayist and art critic, about 'New York Rabbits'. Manhire uses each of the letters from that phrase to construct a poem. It refers to Edgar Allen Poe and seems as much an affirmation of the tradition as an experiment, concluding as it does: "So those old habits still bear watching" (254). These poets have not yet completely separated themselves from the influences of England (and perhaps never will) and are still assimilating the influences of American culture. It may be that some poets are still reacting to Allen Curnow's desire for a degree of separation from English culture. If those poets who were not sympathetic to the nationalist idea are not duty bound to be writing New Zealand into being, then they may relax and enjoy the influences of their cultural background.

Dennis List's poem 'Franklin in the Valley of Foreboding' was first published in Victoria University student newspaper *Salient* in 1969 in censored form. It was still censored in the 1973 *The Young New Zealand Poets* anthology, with nearly half the poem missing. The poem makes much better sense now that one can read it in full. Presumably the last line of the second stanza was the offending one: "FRANKLIN FUCKED AGAIN" (125).

Writing of this era attempted to expose taboo subjects. There are many references to drug use: Peter Olds' '30 Nights on Mandrax' and Alan Brunton's 'The Man on Crazies Hill'. There is mention of flashers in work by Russell Haley and Martyn Sanderson, and prostitutes: Alan Brunton. Mark Young writes aggressively of homosexuality and male rape. Anne Donovan writes of lesbian love ('songs for the virgin'), as does Nuru Jaya, sometimes with contempt for heterosexuals: "I hate your discipline / for dinners and straight parties" (305). Jaya writes in challenging terms on the different experiences of sex, and about prostitution: "being fucked / by tall men whose gravity is / different from women" (306). In 'answers to circle quiz' (from the journal *Circle*) anger towards men boils over: "Knee him in the balls, punch to the stomach, elbow to the head, karate chop his neck. Knee him in the balls punch to solar plexus, trip him, then stamp on his nose" (304). The piece was published anonymously. One wonders if that motivation was the simple fear of retribution, or a more subtle suggestion of a universal experience, that is, that no single woman signs the poem, because so many women feel this way.

Warren Dibble's long poem 'Maori Surveyor: His Field Notes' (almost 250 lines) was first published in *Landfall*, still the best-known journal, in 1968, suggesting that not all journals resisted longer work. It takes up nine pages in this anthology (which has a large page format) and would be difficult to make a selection from, which perhaps accounts for its omission from other anthologies. The poem uses many terms from Maori and a glossary is appended immediately after the poem.

The anthology ends with Nigel Roberts' poem about a meeting between David Mitchell and James K. Baxter just three days before Baxter died. It is

effectively a tribute to Baxter. The elder poet had been giving to Mitchell a list of rules for poetry. Mitchell improvises an additional eighth rule, “pour don’t perk” (311), as the coffee is poured by the waitress for Baxter. It is in keeping with one of the charges, to improvise. Both poets are satisfied.

This conclusion seems very much in keeping with the styles of poetry within *Big Smoke*. The writing is instinctive, experimental and indeed has the feel of improvised music, of a verbal jam session. Overall, the impression of the anthology as a construct by the editors in terms of the anthology as ‘cultural history’ is not immediately noticeable. The editors’ selections are made so seamlessly, with the poems seeming to present a ‘united front’ of an experimental period of writing and thought, that the reader easily believes the story of the period as told by the book. However accurate or otherwise that story may be, it is at least a gripping story.

***Real Fire*, edited by Bernard Gadd, 2001**

Like Riemke Ensing, editor Bernard Gadd is something of an outsider on the literary scene. A schoolteacher for much of his career, he published a number of anthologies for use in schools from the late 1970s onwards, as well as numerous articles on writing in New Zealand and the bias in publishing practices. In particular, he brought Pacific Island writing to greater exposure through school anthologies. Gadd is open about the fact that the main motivation in publishing this anthology was a reaction to *Big Smoke*. He views the selections in that

anthology as “partial and bias”⁷¹, and wishes to reproduce work by poets whom he feels were wrongly excluded.

Gadd also discusses in his introduction the small numbers of female poets in the anthologies. He feels that during the ‘target period’ more female writers than male were still writing Georgian-style poetry (9). Gadd cites the ‘generous trawling’ by the editors of *Big Smoke* to obtain a ratio of one-third female poets. I think this comment would have been more correct of *Private Gardens* than of *Big Smoke*, where the quality of the poems by female writers seems to entirely justify their inclusion in the latter anthology, much as it does in *Real Fire*.

This volume includes an inspiring range of styles – perhaps more than is present in any other New Zealand anthology. It includes poems from the almost traditional to semiotic influenced, haiku, concrete and narrative poetry. An early feature in *Real Fire* is the freshness of syntax and line, from Julia Allen:

Rich velours. Cease

Less than redness. Heartfelt

Thud (11)

In common with *Big Smoke*, there is a much greater degree of political and social comment on offer here than in New Zealand journals at the present time. Vietnam and Hiroshima have been much on the minds of these poets. Tony Beyer satirises justifications of war in ‘Home’. In an imaginary scenario, it has been decided that war is, overall, best for the community, providing a sense of common purpose and structure. The situation is recounted in prosaic language as

⁷¹ *Real Fire – New Zealand Poetry of the 1960’s and 1970’s*, selected by Bernard Gadd (Dunedin: Square One, 2001), p. 7. All subsequent references to this text are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

if from a monotonous political speech or council memo. Peace is 'ambiguous' for the populace.

Barry Mitcalfe, on the other hand, describes a protest march in muted terms: "All walking casually / purposefully, drably, / dangerously / together" (75). Some war poems branch into the surreal, perhaps anticipating another war to come, the war against corporatism, as in Michael Harlow's 'The final arrangement', a chilling vision of the manipulation and abuse of people, which also brings to mind images of the Nazi Holocaust. Eric Brenstrum's 'The city' is a similar vision of organised and futuristic terror, where guards with guns process the crowd: "as one locked the door / another took note of the time" (16).

Barry Southam delivers the most disturbing and sad social criticism in 'The film-goers' where an old man injures himself in entering a cinema, but is given no assistance. If he paints us that gloomy picture, Southam also offers the most hopeful image at the close of 'Autumn Evening, USA, 1978'. After a day of riots in Los Angeles following the release of a double-murderer, a man walking in the evening sees someone riding as a passenger, flopped across the occupant of an electric wheelchair and squealing with delight.

There are a number of substantial extracts from longer poems. This is helpful for appreciating the poetry of Rob Jackaman, Gary Langford and Bernard Gadd himself. The Maori work included is refreshing. What struck me most was the power of repetition. The pace of 'Spell for a new house', translated by Margaret Orbell, swells into a rhythmic breath at "Warmth, heaped-up warmth, heat and Well-being." This is achieved just as strikingly in the poems translated by Barry Mitcalfe and D.R. Simmons.

There is a short haiku section, which includes related forms by Howard Dengate: “A man offered me a ride. / I offered him a walk” (45), and Don Long: “mirrors left to their own devices / grown confused” (46). The group of concrete poems asserts the fact that language itself does not need to be limited, and suggests that we do not have to be so in our use of it. Those which use a technique which seems to be based on randomness, reminded me of John Cage’s assertion that no matter how much we try to be meaningless (or random) we can’t escape meaning (or melody).

Towards the end of the volume there are several poems about the art of writing. ‘The poem’ by J.E. Weir works well, its paradoxical self-reflexiveness saving it from falling in on itself. Perhaps Richard Packer speaks for other poets, not just the assassin protagonist of his poem in these lines:

I have never wanted to be a rich grocer, not one
of those applauded for being obsequious mirrors.

It is interesting to compare the two book covers, as well as the titles *Big Smoke* and *Real Fire*. The first has a naked couple riding a kind of assemblage art horse. The second has a more representational painting of a real horse galloping in a stormy landscape. Presumably, the editor of *Real Fire* sees the poetry in his collection as more natural, perhaps also suggesting that it is less of a construct than the previous anthology. The comments on the previous page indicate a perspective of social concern in this anthology, as opposed to political and philosophical consciousness in *Big Smoke*. Indeed, the poems in this anthology seem to have been selected to show that there were some poets (or some poets other than those represented in *Big Smoke*) who were writing about social issues during the 1960s and 1970s.

The reading of this anthology and its embellishing retrospective view of 1960s and 1970s poetry seems a fitting place to end the chapter. Taken together, these two retrospective anthologies give a holistic and multi-faceted impression of this exciting period in New Zealand's literary history. No doubt other perspectives and anthologies covering the period will emerge at some later time.

Conclusion

Privilege

What I have called the privilege of association has been in evidence since Allen Curnow's 1945 anthology, with its strong bias towards poets associated with the Caxton Press. In O'Sullivan's case, though, the privilege of association seemed to operate initially in favour of those poets who were already successful and recognized in the public press, and was increasingly embellished by the role played by the university publishers. The associations or cliques were frequently male. One could argue that Arthur Baysting excluded female writers, that Paterson excluded the more traditional modernist poets, or that Adcock excluded any sense of experimental language in her anthology. The editors of *Big Smoke* seem to have created a unified picture of writing in the 1960s and 1970s, but I am sure this was less apparent at the time. The sense of a school of thought and the naming of it generally occur after the phenomenon they apparently represent has passed.

The editors

Several editor-poets have included a large selection of their own work in their collections, most notably, Allen Curnow, Vincent O'Sullivan, Charles Doyle and Alistair Paterson. Fleur Adcock is the only anthologist studied here who does not include her own poetry. It might be refreshing to see a New Zealand poet-anthologist select a modest sampling of his or her own work.

There is also a tendency for some editors to select the kind of work that exemplifies their poetic theories. Such work is sometimes atypical of a particular poet's style. This is noticeable in the case of selection of David Mitchell's work

in *Big Smoke*, M.K. Joseph's single contribution to *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1960) and, less significantly, in the case of various selections for *15 Contemporary New Zealand Poets*. I say it is less significant because the poetry was chosen on the grounds of a new trend emerging in the work of some poets of that period.

The poetry

The content of the poetry discussed in this thesis evolves from the orientation of the 1930s to the 1950s of building a national literature to a more universal subject matter. Very gradually, it seems, New Zealanders start to write about the rest of the world, though in the verses of a few poets the sense of settling the land here and creating one's own lifestyle seems to have a universal quality, comparable to the experience of any settler group, or any individual marking out a new life, as in Mary Ursula Bethell's poetry. This is an example, I feel, of the poetry mentioned earlier which creates a local flavour without the narrow-mindedness of regionalism.

In the 1960s and 1970s new poetic subjects began to emerge in the work of poets like Fleur Adcock, just as the language of emotional and psychological states and ideas began to manifest themselves. This is evident even in the mainstream anthologies, and consistently and increasingly from the female poets included. At the same time, a radical outlook can be observed in retrospect through the later collections *Big Smoke* and *Real Fire*. Other anthologies that diverged from the mainstream, such as *The Young New Zealand Poets* and *15 Contemporary New Zealand Poets*, did so because of a growing consciousness with regard to literary theory and the possibilities of literary practice and

technique rather than considerations of the content of poems. These are the new trends I described in Chapter Three. It is noticeable that the editors of anthologies outside the mainstream saw the need for an Afterword by an established critic. I am thinking here of *The Young New Zealand Poets* and *Private Gardens*. Again I feel that fear of adverse reviews was behind these decisions.

Of the other two anthologies discussed in that chapter, *The Oxford Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry* sought to re-assert traditional approaches, perhaps disturbed by challenging new trends. There also seemed a sense in which OUP wished to re-capture the word ‘contemporary’. The use of the word in the title in this anthology might be taken as a significant indicator of style for the general reader, and therefore a good marketing ploy, whilst being at the same time basically untrue, or at least ambiguous. The arguments in the background of publishing may also sometimes mask the fact that the different schools of thought are not always as different to each other as they like to think they are.

The poets

Some poets included in *The Young New Zealand Poets*, *15 Contemporary New Zealand Poets* and *Private Gardens* have already faded from view. Is this a good or bad thing? It is a situation that editors like O’Sullivan obviously wished to avoid. Others might applaud those editors who were prepared to take a risk. On the other hand, some poets have been rediscovered by the editors of *Big Smoke* and *Real Fire*. Today the work of those editors has restored to us perspectives that were missing from the most prominent records of New Zealand’s publishing history, that is, the major anthologies.

There are some writers who have had a more subtle effect on the literary scene and who perhaps, themselves, should have had very much more influence than they did. These are the poets whom I call the ‘self-excluders’. It is debatable as to whether Eileen Duggan fits this category. Allen Curnow would have included her work in his anthologies if she had agreed to his selections. One does wonder how much control a poet ought to have over their own achievements when one bears in mind the fact that most poets find it difficult to stand back from their work and assess it objectively. Janet Frame and Ruth Dallas declined to be included in the first anthology of women’s poetry edited by Riemke Ensing (see Chapter Three). Ruth Dallas presumably got over her own objections and finally allowed her work to be included in the later collection *Pencil Letters*. Alan Loney remains excluded from most major anthologies.

Murray Edmund has related the underhanded behaviour of OUP as they prepared *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English* (1997). Edmund tells us that he and a number of other academics objected to being asked by the publishers which poets they wished to see in a New Zealand anthology. They felt that the publishers were asking them to do their work of selection, unpaid⁷². Alex Calder later corroborated this account⁷³. There was also a dispute about remuneration, when it was revealed that some of the better-known poets were being paid more than the others. Alan Loney was the one poet who carried out his threat to withdraw his work from consideration. The thing that these ‘self-excluders’ seem to have in common is that their writing is amongst the most vital in New Zealand literature, though in Loney’s case, in my opinion this was less obvious in work actually included in the anthologies I have discussed than it is in

⁷² Edmund, Murray, ‘Re-a-Prizing the Oxford Anthology’, in *Pander OS 2.0* <http://www.thepander.co.nz/literature/articles/medmond1.php> (15:08:06)

⁷³ Calder, p. 11.

his recent work. The judges of the 1977 New Zealand Book Award, however, must have felt otherwise as they gave Loney the poetry prize for his collection *Dear Mondrian* (Hawk Press). This volume was effectively self-published, since Alan Loney ran Hawk Press; this shows, I think, that not all self-published works should be considered 'vanity publishing'. In the case of Lauris Edmond's receipt of a major award, this seems to have more or less guaranteed her inclusion in subsequent anthologies (see Chapter Two). Not so for Loney.

Influences

Certain poets, I believe, have influenced New Zealand poetry in a lasting way and one that means that New Zealand writing would not have become what it is without their contribution. They are the poets who have unquestioningly influenced others, who have brought new ideas and techniques into the canon. I am not merely listing my favourite poets, for several of these are definitely not poets I am fond of, but they are the strongest influences that I can detect. They are R.A.K. Mason, A.R.D. Fairburn, Ursula Bethell, Allen Curnow, James K. Baxter, Fleur Adcock, Hone Tuwhare, Bill Manhire and Ian Wedde.

Mason, as Curnow suggested, was the first poet to write consistently well. He recorded a sense of place as well as displaying innate ability. Fairburn represented New Zealand in terms of the personality of some of its people and also in terms of the preoccupations of those who sought a new country of their own, separate from Britain. Bethell showed how a poet located in a particular place and with a particular occupation could reveal herself and at the same time open up possibilities of seeing. Curnow was the seminal poet of the late thirties and early forties when New Zealand was attempting to define itself. He wrote

about the larger cultural and historical issues, but did not lose sight of how those things might affect the individual. Nor did he lose sight of the expansion of techniques and the details of subject matter at any point in his writing career. After a gifted youth in which Baxter displayed great skill in his power of description and inter-weaving of older cultural references, he moved onto quite a different period. Baxter spoke for new types of communities of the sixties and seventies, articulating a populist voice that would become better known than that of the more scholarly writers.

Adcock put women's writing on the map and women's issues in the public eye. She revealed things that men had not dared to reveal, and perhaps feared. Some of these were aspects of the female experience, which only a woman could articulate genuinely. There is an openness to speaking, which is in sharp contrast to earlier male voices. Her gift is that she would not be repressed. Tuwhare was a new conversational voice. He articulated his Maori background into a new branch of English. Manhire demonstrated that the content of poetry was becoming less important to practitioners. Language was all-important and he brought a freshness and concision with his choice of words. Wedde delved obliquely into philosophy with something of the multi-referential about his work, and an eye to the importance of other arts in terms of their influence on poetry. A further study of the influence of this list of poets would be rewarding.

I see no stronger influences than Manhire and Wedde after their work came to prominence, at roughly the same time, in the late seventies. That their impact has been such a constant one since those times I find negative rather than positive. The control of the publishing of poetry is now so firmly in the hands of academic publishers, especially Victoria University Press and Auckland

University Press, that voices outside that particular sub-culture are extremely unlikely to gain the same kind of recognition and support. There are occasional exceptions, such as in the work of Glenn Colquhoun whose first book, *The Art of Walking Upright* (2000), published by a relatively small, independent press, Steele Roberts, won the Montana NZ best first book award for poetry and whose third book, *Playing God* (Steele Roberts, 2002) won the best book of poetry prize.

The study of the New Zealand Poetry anthologies eventually reveals a wealth of diverse poetry, but without some retrospective reassessment, much of that diversity would be invisible. One must be grateful that copies of the literary magazines of the times still exist in private collections, libraries and archives. Further study of those also would repay the time spent.

Appendix

Note: Where I give the number of poems published in an anthology, I do not include poems that form sections of longer poems, even where those sections are individually named.

Anthologies studied in detail:

Chapter One

A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-1945, Selected by Allen Curnow

(Christchurch: Caxton, 1945)

There are sixteen poets in this anthology and 123 poems. Two poets are represented by a single poem. The earliest works are by R.A.K. Mason, the latest by James K. Baxter. Only two of these sixteen poets are female. Allen Curnow (1911-2001) was thirty-four years of age at this time, and had already published five volumes of poetry (three from Caxton). The Caxton Press was a small, independent publisher set up by the poet Denis Glover in 1937. This edition has 195 pages. The anthology was re-published in a revised edition in 1951.

The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse, Selected by Allen Curnow (Auckland: Penguin, 1960)

There are thirty-seven poets in this anthology, represented by 178 poems, as well as the seven poems in the Maori section, which are not attributed to individual authors or given dates. The editor includes fairly extensive notes on the poets. This was the first New Zealand anthology to attract the interest of a major, international publisher. The anthology runs to 340 pages, and was re-issued in 1966 under license to Blackwood and Janet Paul without changes.

Chapter Two

An Anthology of Twentieth Century New Zealand Poetry, ed. by Vincent O'Sullivan (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1970)

There are forty poets represented and 318 poems. Vincent O'Sullivan (b. 1937) was thirty-three years of age and had produced two books of poetry. He was beginning to become established in his work as an academic. This was Oxford's second major anthology of New Zealand poetry and was re-printed several times up to 1979. This edition runs to 356 pages. It includes a bibliography and a glossary of Maori words. A second edition was released in 1976 and was then reprinted in 1979, 1983 and 1986. The second edition runs to 435 pages. A third edition appeared in 1987. The third edition has 433 pages, but because of its much larger page size still offers an increase in volume from the second edition.

Chapter Three

Recent Poetry in New Zealand, Chosen and edited by Charles Doyle (Auckland: Collins, 1965)

This anthology contains 144 poems by 15 poets. The volume also includes essays by all but two of the poets on their own work and biographical notes on the poets by the editor. Editor Charles Doyle (b. 1928) came to New Zealand from England in 1951 and at this time was a lecturer in English at Auckland University.

The Young New Zealand Poets, edited by Arthur Baysting, (Auckland:
Heinemann Educational Books, 1973)

The work of nineteen poets is arranged alphabetically with each providing a statement about their work. Editor Arthur Baysting (b. 1947) was a journalist as well as a poet, having worked for four years on the staff of *NZ Listener*, as well as for *Thursday* magazine. There is an Afterword by Kendrick Smithyman.

15 Contemporary New Zealand Poets, ed. by Alistair Paterson (Dunedin:
Pilgrims South, 1980)

These fifteen poets contribute 123 poems. Editor Alistair Paterson (b. 1929) had by this time published four books of poetry, and edited *Mate*, later *Climate*, since 1973. This anthology was later reprinted in America by Grove Press, one of the largest publishers of anthologies in the world.

The Oxford Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry, Chosen by Fleur
Adcock (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1982)

Twenty-one poets contribute 96 poems. Surprisingly, for the late date, only four of those are women. Fleur Adcock (b. 1934) did not include any of her own work, even though by this time she was a well-known poet, living in London since 1967. She had published six books of poetry at this point (from Reed, OUP and Bloodaxe Books [UK]).

Chapter Four

Private Gardens – An Anthology of New Zealand Women Poets, Edited by

Riemke Ensing, afterword by Vincent O’Sullivan (Dunedin: Caveman,
1977)

Editor Riemke Ensing (b. 1939) collects poems by 35 female poets. The volume also offers comment by Fleur Adcock and Gloria Rawlinson. There are biographical notes (not necessarily in alphabetical order) by the editor with extensive acknowledgements of previous publications, a section of ‘appreciation’ by many of the poets towards those editors and friends who had assisted in their writing of poetry and a photograph of each contributor, some of which are reproduced amongst the poems. There is an Afterword by Vincent O’Sullivan. Ensing had not yet published her own collection but had contributed regularly to journals such as *Arena* since the mid-1960s.

Big Smoke – New Zealand Poems 1960-1975, Edited by Alan Brunton, Murray

Edmund and Michelle Leggott (Auckland: Auckland University Press,
2000)

Fifty-six writers contribute 175 poems. The anthology begins with essays by Alan Brunton (1946-2002) and Murray Edmund, both original editors of the magazine *The Word is Freed*. Brunton was also a founder of the Red Mole theatre group. Edmund is an academic, lecturing in Drama at Auckland University, and now has eight books of poetry to his credit. Michele Leggott (b. 1956) is a poet and academic working in Auckland and had published five books of poetry by 2000 (all from AUP), edited *Opening the Book* and works by Robin Hyde. The anthology concludes with an essay by Leggott, a listing of the

magazines where these poems first appeared and biographical notes. Work is presented in the order that individual poems were published.

Real Fire – New Zealand Poetry of the 1960's and 1970's, Selected by Bernard Gadd (Dunedin: Square One, 2001)

Editor Bernard Gadd (b. 1935) collects 122 poems from 53 poets. The anthology includes Maori poetry in translation (translations by Margaret Orbell, Barry Mitcalfe, D.R. Simmons and Mervyn McLean). There are sections of haiku and concrete poetry and the work of three writers listed specifically as Maori poets. Gadd had published several volumes of poetry, short stories and plays at this time and was an editor of *Spin* magazine.

Chronological bibliography of New Zealand Poetry Anthologies

Note: In the bibliography of anthologies, I have deviated from standard MHRA notation. Instead of the usual 'ed. by' to denote editorship, I have recorded the original wording on the title pages of the books, such as 'chosen by' and 'selected by'. This seemed to me to offer a truer account of how the editors saw their role. The terms used may also suggest a degree of reticence that may have surrounded the words 'editor' and 'edited' and a degree of power of which some anthologists were wary. (There are some confusions, such as that the cover of *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* of 1960 has 'Introduced and Edited by Allen Curnow' on the front cover, but 'Selected with an Introduction and notes by Allen Curnow' on the title page.) From the 1970s onwards, the term 'edited by' is much more common, but there are still many exceptions.

New Zealand Verse, collected by W.F. Alexander and A.E. Currie (London: Walter Scott, 1906)

The Oxford Book of Australasian Verse, chosen by Walter Murdoch (London: Oxford University Press, 1918)

A Treasury of New Zealand Verse – Being a New Edition of “New Zealand Verse”, by W.F. Alexander and A.E. Currie (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1926)

An Australasian Anthology, ed. by P. Sealey (Sydney: Collins, 1927)

Kowhai Gold – An Anthology of Contemporary New Zealand Verse, chosen and edited by Quentin Pope (London: Dent, 1930)

Lyric Poems of New Zealand, ed. by C.A. Marris (Wellington: Tombs, 1942)

A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-1945, selected by Allen Curnow

(Christchurch: Caxton, 1945)

A Centennial Treasury of Otago Verse, gathered by A.E. Currie (Christchurch:

Caxton, 1949)

New Zealand Farm and Station Verse, 1850-1950, ed. by A.E. Woodhouse

(Christchurch: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1950)

A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-1950, chosen by Allen Curnow

(Christchurch: Caxton, 1951)

An Anthology of New Zealand Verse, selected by Robert Chapman and Jonathan

Bennett (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1956)

The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse, selected by Allen Curnow (Auckland:

Penguin, 1960)

Recent Poetry in New Zealand, chosen and ed. by Charles Doyle (Auckland:

Collins, 1965)

An Anthology of Twentieth Century New Zealand Poetry, selected by Vincent

O'Sullivan (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1970)

- New Zealand Poetry in the Sixties – A Bulletin for Schools*, ed. by Vincent O’Sullivan (Wellington: School Publications, 1973)
- These Islands*, ed. by Gwenyth Jones (Auckland: Puffin, 1973)
- The Young New Zealand Poets*, ed. by Arthur Baysting (Auckland: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973)
- Ten Modern New Zealand Poets*, chosen by Harvey McQueen and Lois Cox (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1974)
- Private Gardens – An Anthology of New Zealand Women Poets*, ed. by Riemke Ensing, afterword by Vincent O’Sullivan (Dunedin: Caveman, 1977)
- A Cage of Words*, chosen by Harvey McQueen (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1980)
- 15 Contemporary New Zealand Poets*, ed. by Alistair Paterson (Dunedin: Pilgrims South, 1980)
- The Oxford Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry*, chosen by Fleur Adcock (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1982)
- The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, ed. by Ian Wedde and Harvey McQueen, intro. and notes by Ian Wedde and Margaret Orbell (Auckland: Penguin, 1985)

The Caxton Press Anthology of New Zealand Poetry 1972-1986, ed. by Mark Williams (Christchurch: Caxton, 1987)

The New Poets of the 80's – Initiatives in New Zealand Poetry, ed. by Murray Edmund and Mary Paul (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1987)

Yellow Pencils – Contemporary Poetry by New Zealand Women, chosen by Lydia Wevers (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1988)

White Feathers – An Anthology of New Zealand and Pacific Island Poetry on the Theme of Peace, ed. by Terry Locke, Peter Low and John Winslade (Christchurch: Hazard, 1991)

New Zealand Haiku Anthology, ed. by Cyril Childs (Wellington: New Zealand Poetry Society, 1993)

The New Place – The Poetry of Settlement in New Zealand, 1852-1914, ed. by Harvey McQueen (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1993)

100 New Zealand Poems, chosen by Bill Manhire (Auckland: Godwit, 1993)

An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English, ed. by Jenny Bornholdt, Gregory O'Brien and Mark Williams (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1997)

The NeXt Wave, ed. by Mark Pirie (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1998)

The Second New Zealand Haiku Anthology, ed. by Cyril Childs (Wellington:
New Zealand Poetry Society, 1998)

Eat These Sweet Words, ed. by Sue Fitchett, et al (Christchurch: Publishing
Giant, 1999)

When Two Men Embrace, ed. by Johnathan Fisher (Christchurch: Publishing
Giant, 1999)

Big Smoke – New Zealand Poems 1960-1975, ed. by Alan Brunton, Murray
Edmund and Michelle Leggott (Auckland: Auckland University Press,
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Doors – A Contemporary New Zealand Poetry Selection, ed. by Terry Locke
(Hamilton: Leaders, 2000)

Coastlines – Prose and Poetry from Wellington to Foxton, ed. by Judith
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Essential New Zealand Poems, selected by Lauris Edmond and Bill Sewell
(Auckland: Godwit, 2001)

Real Fire – New Zealand Poetry of the 1960's and 1970's, selected by Bernard Gadd (Dunedin: Square One, 2001)

Spirit in a Strange Land: A Selection of New Zealand Spiritual Verse, ed. by Paul Morris, Harry Ricketts and Mike Grimshaw (Auckland: Godwit, 2001)

Big Sky – A Collection of Canterbury Poems, selected by Bernadette Hall and James Norcliffe (Christchurch: Shoal Bay, 2002)

With Our Eyes Open, ed. by Kathleen Gallagher and Peb Simmons (Christchurch: Chrysalis Seed Trust, 2002)

Porirua Poets – Porirua Poems, chosen by Bob Maysmor (Porirua: Pataka, 2002)

Whetu Moana – Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English, ed. by Albert Wendt, Reina Whitiri and Robert Sullivan (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003)

Manukau in Poetry, ed. by Bernard Gadd with Bruce Ringer and Melissa Steiner (Manukau: Hallard, 2004)

Spirit Abroad: A Second Selection of New Zealand Spiritual Verse, ed. by Paul Morris, Harry Ricketts and Mike Grimshaw (Auckland: Godwit, 2004)

Under Flagstaff – An Anthology of Dunedin Poetry, selected by Robin Law and
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