

Growing Into the Language: The Discovery of New Zealand Poetry

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I

AS DEFINED BY ONE OF ITS OPPONENTS, a nationalist sense of culture maintains:

that imagination, sensitivity, and above all creativity, are bound by race and place. . . . This view elevates the landscape and depresses the human mind. It insists, at its most extreme, that each nation, each so-called "culture", has its own truth, to be judged in its own terms. . . .¹

One deprecates the phrase "so-called 'culture'" and repudiates the implied "tall poppy"² perspective of Professor Kamenka's definition of true culture as emulation of "the best that has been thought and said, felt and done, anywhere." In the same number of the *Times Literary Supplement*, the reviewer of an Australian poetry anthology begins by saying that the "hunger for national self-awareness and definition . . . are long forgotten in England;"³ in contrast, the anthology-editor notes in his introduction that "the land" is the preoccupation of an overwhelming proportion of "white Australian poetry," past and present. Certainly, in the parallel case of New Zealand "place," if not "race," has long been an important issue. Today, indeed, "race and place" is appropriate, and we must add language as well.

My present task is to look at New Zealand poetry anthologies and rather than seek in them⁴ for samples of "the best that has been thought and said, felt and done, anywhere," despite my own position as perforce an "internationalist" I prefer a defini-

tion of culture diametrically opposed to Kamenka's, namely that, "a culture represents an original system of values between persons and a geophysical reality."⁵ But there, anyway, are the two sides of the equation. The old European cultures, at least the dominant ones, long ago ceased seeking "National Identity." Yet for better or worse, in this era of the Global Village, New World countries, some until fairly recently jewels in the British crown, are still very much in the identity-seeking business. As to literature, I am reminded of the old joke about "How do I know what I think till I see what I say?" Today, though, Australia and New Zealand seem far advanced in the business in question.

A few more preliminaries. For at least five hundred years before becoming a self-governing British colony in 1852, New Zealand was the Maori homeland *Aotearoa* (Land of the Long White Cloud). European settlement occurred throughout the nineteenth century and was formalized in 1840 by the Treaty of Waitangi, but until around 1890 the majority of the white (*pakeha*) population were settlers, or immigrants. Quite probably the distinctive New Zealand speech came late, and certainly the sense of full nationhood was long delayed. Writing in 1898, the poet and politician William Pember Reeves said that he had "listened in vain for any national twang, drawl or peculiar intonation."⁶ To the degree that his ear was accurate, this would mean according to recent theories that a national poetry was then an impossibility. Ten years after Reeves's comment in 1908 the poet-feminist Blanche Baughan called the brand-new British dominion "a country to come." These are stages in the background of Allen Curnow's 1945 remark, "We are beginning."

Between Baughan's and Curnow's comments New Zealand was blooded in two world wars and the Great Depression. In his pleasantly-titled, but largely indiscriminate anthology *Kowhai Gold*, Quentin Pope remarks of his countrymen: "Great readers, they have written stumblingly. Living has been easy, environment kind, and the nation has become Socialistic and lazy, living in a state committed to paternalism and agriculture" (p. vii). Pope saw this "state of affairs" as changing, due largely to increasing numbers of periodicals. As, within a few years, New Zealand was to become more and not less Socialistic, he cannot have liked

the changes; but his attitude is interesting if only because it is later matched by a strain of anti-statism in Allen Curnow.

Curiously, Curnow speaks of a "rebirth" in New Zealand writing in the 1930's. He seems to have believed that there was some "real" local writing before about 1890, so this "rebirth" means that an emerging group of poets are engaged in making "a new discovery of their country," including the conditions for forwarding an independent national literature. Curnow chose 1923 as the date which begins the "tradition" because that was when R. A. K. Mason issued his first tiny collection, *In the Manner of Men*.⁷ Eventually, from work of "a number of young poets and one or two older ones," Curnow gathered *A Book of New Zealand Verse* (1945). That a crucial moment had arrived is indicated in that eleven of the book's sixteen poets have become established and seven are major figures in the context. The anthology itself has taken on canonical status.

In consequence, some of Curnow's editorial assumptions have until recently been accepted almost without question.⁸ Yet some interested scholar might well test Curnow's conclusion that most local poetry prior to 1923 was vitiated by rhythmical deadness and thematic colonization and was in fact "ghost-poetry." To take more or less at random from Alexander and Currie, Dora Wilcox's "In London" — jog trot iambs, certainly, but a true feeling for the New Zealand bush; despite banal metres, Wilcox's "Onawe"⁹ carries genuine feeling for the plight of the Maori. Wilcox and others wrote in a period of cultural imperialism and metronomic rhythms, but possibly some of that work is salvageable for other reasons.

Alexander and Currie's *New Zealand Verse* (1906), as a conglomeration of poets, is broadly speaking a "historical" anthology (a cross-section of what was actually written). In contrast, Curnow's book is "programmatically" (focused in a thesis, that poetry has begun to be "a real expression of what the New Zealander is," [p. 15]). Curnow's book is clearly a more coherent and forceful statement, except in one respect. Of his chosen poets, only Charles Brasch shows any extensive consciousness of the Maori. Curnow's own historical sense in his poetry is largely focused on the white voyagers, explorers, and settlers. An epigraph in his

Introduction (he has a liking, even a weakness, for epigraphs) poses a question from the American poet Karl Shapiro: "Where do the Maoris fit into your world?" The answer is a resounding silence. Alexander and Currie, in contrast, include four pages of notes to their second edition, mostly on Maori language, history, and lore, and these are needed because of their poets' themes and materials.

In a recent article,¹⁰ John Geraets suggests that Curnow's prescriptions in the introduction to *A Book of New Zealand Verse* signal "a discontinuity" between its contents and the past, banish any sense of poetry for its own sake, and set up Curnow as sole arbiter of "the New Zealand thing." "Strictly speaking, New Zealand doesn't exist yet," Curnow observed in 1945.¹¹ Gaerets and, more benignly, Roger Horrocks in the same issue of *And* suggest that Curnow's purpose was "the invention of New Zealand." "Curnow speaks for the poems," Geraets says, "before them, round them, over them; the 'land and people' theme allows him to immerse the poems totally in his own words." In *A Book of New Zealand Verse* and later the *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1960) Curnow allows himself a large editorial say.

Curnow was not on his own, though, in the formative years. He had Mason ("Latter-Day Geography Lesson," "Song of Allegiance," and that bleak, hard sense of being "fixed at the friendless outer edge of space"); he had the surprisingly extensive publishing programme of the Caxton Press in Christchurch, the periodicals from *Phoenix* to *New Zealand New Writing*, the scholarly interest of Eric McCormick, the essays of M. H. Holcroft, and, as promise for the future, the young James K. Baxter. Glover's Caxton Press had by 1945 published "slim volumes" by most of the poets in *A Book of New Zealand Verse*.

An important part of Curnow's task in 1945 was ground-clearing, in which he is aided oddly enough by a bundle of imported quotations: from Yeats's *The Trembling of the Veil*: "my country was not born at all"; a Moses-like passage from Matthew Arnold to the effect that "it will not be ours to enter" the Promised Land (of full nationhood), but virtue is to desire entry and work for it (seen in another light this "promised land")

equals full contact with genuine first-hand experience). Ground-clearing consists then in removing all "approximations, substitutes, genteel subterfuges, mimicries," repudiating the plaints of a people "Homesick for a 'Home' they have never seen," and shucking off the craven prevailing sentiment that "British is best." What then remained would be "these islands" seen as "a common inheritance and a common cause" (the phrase this time is seconded from T. S. Eliot).

As to "approximations," somewhere around 1917 Boyce Bowden penned:

The soft winds of Silverstream walk down the valley aisles
Laden with the gorse-scent and many tui-tunes . . . ¹²

Fifteen years or so later and a short bus-ride away, Denis Glover observes that:

In Plimmerton, in Plimmerton
The seabirds haunt the cave,
And often in the summertime
The penguins ride the wave.¹³

What's the difference? Glover is more adroit, but is there a difference in kind? "Silverstream" is typical of Bowden's stumble-footed Georgianism, but Glover is using the same mode tongue-in-cheek. He's having fun, not waxing maudlin. Quite apart from the question of truth-to-experience, Glover and a handful of others in the 1930's introduced locally a new level of literary sophistication.

When *A Book of New Zealand Verse* was done it was arbitrary, courageous and intelligent in its timing. Some of its poets are makeweights: Beaglehole, who was to become a major historian; Wall, whose work has been passed over by later anthologists; Douglas Stewart, because he had already become an Australian; Basil Dowling, though he provided several fine local poems including the classic "The early days," became a prime example of "the unreturning native"; Cresswell was a sort of tin-eared knockabout-colonial Thomas Rowley; Witheford barely makes an appearance here; Anton Vogt, who earned an honourable place in New Zealand writing for his lively general contri-

bution, was only a moderately interesting poet, and became an example of "the retreating immigrant."

Having disposed of lesser figures, we are left with, well, let's call them — why not? — the "radiant node or cluster," the magnetic core (or corps) who represent Curnow's serious purpose. Even after forty years, we can recognize quality in his selections of Fairburn (how moving still to come upon the intensity of, say, the little two-quatrain "In the Younger Land"), of Glover, Mason, Brasch, Hyde, Bethell, and of himself. We set aside, of course, such larger contexts as Modernism. For Curnow the test is a special kind of authenticity, truth to place. Fairburn captures its tone and measure, though he has subsequently been attacked for his sentimentality; Bethell's material is New Zealand and she is really there in the poems, though her voice is genteel English; Mason includes his country naturally in strong poems dominated by the Latin classics. Both Brasch and Curnow are poets of the will. Brasch had a feeling for what we may call the "deep geography" of his country, but like Bethell he is reduced by an insidious element of British gentility. Curnow has become almost universally accepted as "cunning artificer," the finest craftsman so far among New Zealand poets, so that only Baxter today and for broader reasons commands greater respect. Curnow's poetry has, very markedly, a deliberate quality. This has become its strength. Up to 1957 the poetry was sometimes undermined by self-conscious rhetoric, but this very characteristic in the late work is transformed into masterly irony, cool aplomb. Of the rest, Robin Hyde's poetry is somewhat prosy, lacking in that problematical quality which Baxter once called "incandescence," but she has, especially in her late work, what Curnow was seeking, eye-on-the-object genuineness. Glover has been mentioned earlier, though we may add that New Zealand poetry would be the poorer at least without the handful of his anthology pieces, such as "The Magpies" and "Sings Harry." Lastly, Curnow was very proud of the eighteen-year-old "James K. Baxter, of Dunedin," for Baxter already manifested "incandescence" in plenty and rich promise for the future, but not the least of his attributes from Curnow's perspective was Baxter's "frankly confessed debt . . . to some older New Zealand poets."

II

Curnow sought to set the terms for a self-sufficient indigenous poetry. In going about it, he discounted at least three decades of verse before 1923, though eventually he would return to sift through it. Meantime the honour of first doing so goes to Robert Chapman and Jonathan Bennett, editors of the Oxford *Anthology of New Zealand Verse* (1956). Chapman, in a relatively brief introduction, also sees the 1930's as when "Time, place and tradition had met" in a viable poetry. Yet he assumes as part of his task tracking down the "successful few" poems which precede the canonical period. He finds that period's themes anticipated in poems of Pember Reeves, Alfred Domett, Hubert Church, and others. Chapman departs from Curnow's insistence on the indigenous; on the contrary, "Plainly the fact is that what we share with the English-speaking world in general is far more important than the ways in which we differ about living and about art" (p. xxiv). Yet he counts an important related criterion: "From about the turn of the century, the problem becomes principally one of deciding when departing New Zealand poets have lost contact with their country" (p. xxxi). That problem remains current.

Chapman's anthology is "historical." Of his pre-Curnow poets, only Pember Reeves may be accepted largely on grounds of poetic worth. But in the canonical period itself his inclusion of Eileen Duggan corrects a substantial Curnow omission. He advances the chronology, too — about a quarter of his material is from what we may call the "Baxter period."

In the late 1950's, Curnow began work on his own "historical" anthology, the *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*. Chapman had usefully weeded out and put in some sort of order the pre-canonical period, going back to January 1854 for Henry Jacobs's sonnet "The Avon" (i.e., the river in Canterbury, New Zealand). Now Curnow, choosing to pass over such figures as Jessie Mackay, David McKee Wright and John Barr of Craigielee (all in Chapman), took Maori work translated in Richard Taylor's *Te Ika a Maui, or New Zealand and its Inhabitants* (London, 1855), plus some traditional Maori poems, translated

with the anthropologist Roger Oppenheim. All this, with ten pages of notes, precedes the main anthology.

With characteristic flourish, Curnow opens his fifty-page Introduction by declaring himself (presumably on grounds of his new interest in the Maoris) as "making a first really comprehensive anthology of my country's verse." A key document, the Introduction is written with sufficient elegance and underlying passion and, for its first half, with disarming modesty, though the over-hasty reader may boggle at: "Whatever is true vision belongs, here, uniquely to the islands of New Zealand" (p. 17). Curnow quickly adds that there "must be no Little-New Zealandism," but appears not to notice his own qualifier, that "much is also attributable to 'the clayless climate of the mind'." Once more endorsing the local, he declares: "it is this vital discovery of self in country and country in self which gives the best New Zealand verse its character" (p. 21). Notwithstanding his earlier canonical dating, he now felt he could trace this condition a generation earlier, in Blanche Baughan's "A Bush Section" (p. 104) and even recognize New Zealand as a characterizing emotional force in Katherine Mansfield's "half-poem" "To Stanislaw Wispianski."

Curnow is a "strong" critic, but just as *A Book of New Zealand Verse* is not qualitatively all-of-a-piece, so the Penguin is partial, even at times idiosyncratic, in serving a thesis about "local and special" reality. Claiming too little for some (Baughan, Duggan), he claims too much for others. Arnold Wall's work, for example, is no more interesting than that of a dozen other Alexander and Currie poets. Part of Wall's appeal is related to the sort of "sheepocratic" snobbism which causes Curnow to conclude the Penguin with the slight, irrelevant poems of David Elworthy. Curnow claimed too much for the pseudo-archaic lucubrations of D'Arcy Cresswell, and even managed to overstate Mason's claims, notwithstanding that poet's cluster of powerful work, by asserting that "his peers . . . are (I think) not very many in this century." A telltale parenthesis, that! When Curnow finds a local poet whose work is simply good but shows no traces of "self in country," etc., such as Charles Spear, he can rationalize this as "a system of defences." Against what, and for what?

Perhaps, concentrated as he was on "a reality prior to the poem," Curnow is to be credited for even having taken Spear seriously. For himself, he was immersed in the "reality" of "a land of settlers / With never a soul at home" (p. 202), and the vision that "failure to adapt on islands" will be overcome when "some child, born in a marvellous year, / Will learn the trick of standing upright here" (p. 205). Curnow's "House and Land" (p. 201) and Glover's "The Magpies" (p. 219) — both classics — make an interesting contrast, each taking as subject a run-down farm. Curnow focuses on its historical vibrations, Glover on the effects of the Depression. Both men, however, were intent on exploring their country's emergent identity, seeking answer to (Northrop Frye's question) "Where is here?" Brasch's brooding measures also hold a sense of its being the cultural question, of "what things are trying to be" (p. 186). The young Baxter, too, shared this sense of the still partially "inhuman," "darkly known" land, but quite soon (as Horrocks entertainingly shows) he explored beyond the external realism of the 1930's.

By 1960, Curnow was still reluctant to let go of that 30's heyday. Towards Baxter, then midway through a short but brilliant career, he had become patronizing, and even more towards the "Wellington group" around Baxter. This group was thought to be "romantic" and "internationalist" in character, but its ablest poets were sharp observers of the immediate realities of suburban life. In some respects, Curnow's Introduction and selection of younger poets was a parochial performance, but the *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* was unmistakably authoritative, so that some later editors have felt the need to respond.

Briefly, my *Recent Poetry in New Zealand* (1965) was such a response. The dustjacket states, with bald arrogance: "Where previous anthologists have used as a core the poetry of the thirties, Charles Doyle feels this to be no longer necessary." Retained against advice, the book's title intended a distinction between "New Zealand poetry" and "poetry written in New Zealand," in the belief that immigrant poets such as Peter Bland and Gordon Challis were contributing to the country's broader mind-life. Curnow's claim that the art had been established was, in unconscious compliment to him, the starting-point. A new

feature was the inclusion of statements by the poets. An assumption of the book was that what matters about true poetry is not its provenance but its particular excellence.

III

Although it does not cover the full time span, Vincent O'Sullivan's Oxford *Anthology of Twentieth-Century New Zealand Poetry* is both a "historical" anthology and "a considered report on how New Zealand poetry stands now" (in 1970). O'Sullivan tends to affirm Curnow's general position, but is closer to Chapman in believing that New Zealand life must relate to the "extensive birthright" of Europe.

Poems are included by Hone Tuwhare, the first Maori poet to gain national recognition. As a group, they could fit seamlessly into either of Curnow's anthologies. Along with Tuwhare, the most significant addition is of several immigrant poets, notably Peter Bland, whose witty insights into the nullities and vellications of suburbia derive partially from growing up in Britain. Bland and others were part of a wave of post-war immigration, mostly labour for various hydro-electric and other projects. Presumably this labour was welcomed and largely assimilated, but any voice which came with it has not in the long run been easily accepted.

None of the nineteen writers in Arthur Baysting's *The Young New Zealand Poets* (1973) is represented in any earlier anthology. Four later appear in O'Sullivan's oddly edited second edition (1976), eight in the Wedde-McQueen Penguin (1985). Such figures indicate either new depth in the poetry scene or, some have said, merely easier access to publication. Either way the situation was loosening. Here, too, the poets provide statements, many of them "post-Curnovian" — dismissive of "the real thing" or "the reality squad," exhilarating in free association, language-play, and the feeling, as Jan Kemp puts it, that "to write because of instinct to write / is enough."

It is instructive to compare this book with the *Poetry Yearbook* in the early 1960's. Somewhat due to a liberating American influence, the mid-1970's was a richer scene. The *Yearbooks*

show that American influence had not been unknown in the past, but then individuals were affected — e.g., Smithyman, Baxter. Now the influence was wide. Baysting argues that New Zealand poems need no “specific geographical references” because New Zealanders, like anyone, are conditioned by their environment. Of course, this begs the question. The nationalist poets of the 1930’s saw themselves as working to bring a “New Zealand environment” into full being. To whatever extent that was possible they have succeeded, but the all-pervasive American culture has had its effects. The idiom of poets such as Alan Brunton, David Mitchell, and Ian Wedde is quite distinct from the dominant idiom of the Penguin book or of O’Sullivan. Sense of line, tone, world-view, all are generally different, modified by such factors as blues rhythms, projective form, reference to detail which ignores or goes beyond the small immediate external “reality prior to the poem.” One cannot usefully compare the beginning work of a group of young poets with the best that has been done over an extended historical period, but notably these poets no longer feel bound by Curnow’s prescriptions. Particular poems do not leap out at the reader as totems, but the book has a zest comparable with Caxton joint efforts of the 1930’s and more humour than any anthology prior to it.

Alistair Paterson’s “programmatic” anthology, *15 Contemporary New Zealand Poets* (1980) is a “highly personal” selection based on “open form.” One is puzzled and interested to find Curnow, Smithyman, and Stead, featured as proponents, along with Wedde, Alan Loney, and a bundle of new names. Certainly, all three have been influenced by Americans at one time or another, though only Stead towards “open form.” Some of the poetry (starting with lead-off poet, Rosemary Allpress) is old-fashioned “free verse” rather than “open form,” that is, if we take the latter as defined in Stead’s “From Wystan to Carlos” (a source cited by Paterson): “the poem as imaginative act rather than as vehicle . . . maximizing of linguistic energy . . . language as the material of art not the servant of idea.”¹⁴ How this applies to much of the anthology is hard to see, but two of Stead’s three points quoted here seem to rule out Curnow’s work. Paterson adds that New Zealand awareness of “open form” is

not "a local quirk," so these poets are participating, regionally if somewhat belatedly (though Stead has been thoroughly familiar with the implications of "open form" throughout most of his career), in an international shift of consciousness. This book, too, indicates a shift away from Curnow's "island" realism, but by now Curnow seems to have felt free to focus primary attention on poetics.

Fleur Adcock's *Oxford Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry* (1982) may seem from its prescriptive title (not "Poetry in New Zealand," notice) to be a more "coherent" or less "personal" offering than Paterson's but it turns out to have quirks of its own. Excluding "Englishman and Americans (who) may have added variety to the pages of local magazines," the editor also excludes herself because she "has for many years been published abroad." Carefully indigenou, the editor never questions her competence, as a long-time foreign resident, to edit such an anthology. Covering a twelve-year span, selections are from the last three years of work by Poet A and Poet B ("cheating" a little on the latter, to include a favourite poem) and from two years of "returning native" Poet C, and so on. How this helps our understanding of "native New Zealand poetry" (the editor's phrase) is not made clear, though we learn from the Introduction that Denis Glover (who is not included but was around for ten of the twelve years covered by the anthology) "never took himself seriously as a poet!"

Another Oxford anthology, Jackson and O'Sullivan's 1983 general coverage of *New Zealand Writing Since 1945* is a decorous, effective historical survey, which offers 258 pages of poetry, taking Curnow's 1945 end-point as a beginning. Such anthologies can never be judged definitive, but the selecting here is rigorous (from the aptly chosen poems of Glover, for example, to Adcock's moving "Kilpeck," which the editor singles out for praise). Jackson's introduction to the poetry endorses as "the simple truth" Curnow's dictum that "reality must be local and special at the point where we pick up the traces." But the matter is by no means simple. How "local and special" (whatever the latter may mean)? Inside one's head, for example? Determined by the whole scope of one's education? By how widely one has

travelled? Of course twentieth-century poetry is related to "phenomena" (things), but even Ezra Pound was prepared to admit that there are subjective phenomena. In practice, Curnow appears to have lost the debate in that New Zealand poetry has become "increasingly heterogeneous." Or perhaps he won it, and a new phase is building on his established territory?

Some nine poets are represented here whose work came to notice after O'Sullivan's 1970 anthology. One is chiefly impressed, in fact thoroughly excited, by Wedde's "Pathway to the Sea," an extended display, despite metrical indebtedness to A. R. Ammons, of individual technical mastery.

IV

Finally, from Wedde as poet to Wedde as editor, with Harvey McQueen, of the new *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*.

The first forty or so of the book's 500-plus pages offer a critical historical overview, including a separate 10-page section on "The Maori Tradition." In scale, the introduction compares with either of Curnow's, but the approach is less assertive and more confident. A new feature is the presentation of Maori work on (more than) even terms. The first thirty pages of poems are from the traditional Maori and given in both Maori and English versions. Interwoven through the main text are perhaps another 80 pages of Maori. Thus, somewhere around a quarter of the text is Maori-related, giving the impression that Maori culture is more central to New Zealand life than it actually is.

Before turning to details of the Introduction, some figures are interesting. Curnow (1960) and Wedde-McQueen each gives approximately the same number of pages to the Bethell-to-Dallas period, but Wedde gives more to Robin Hyde, is able to provide a fair showing of Eileen Duggan, excludes entirely D'Arcy Cresswell and long-time expatriate Basil Dowling, and affords a little less space to Fairburn and Mason. Five Maori poets of the period are included. Wedde-McQueen's book is substantially longer than the Penguin Curnow. About half the extra space is given to Maoris, the other half to poets born in 1940 or later; the remainder is similar in its proportioning to Curnow.

Extensive Maori representation in Wedde-McQueen signals that New Zealand poetry is no longer a branch-plant of "Eng. Lit.," or for that matter European. Wedde, in his Introduction, shifts the burden of emphasis from location not to language but to the relation between the two. From the will-to-language New Zealand has moved, he feels, towards osmotic assumption of "the speech of the place." (Baysting had made a similar point, but somehow assumed that it explained away certain pseudo-American mannerisms.) Though it is important to him, Wedde does not insist on the indigenou, he takes it for granted. "What is called 'New Zealand poetry,'" he says, "is a process not a national condition," and this process is in the late stages of demotic development, i.e., finding its own natural speech. Wedde's crucial point seems to be that a place and its language create each other and neither can be willed into being by prescription or proscription.

Following, as have others elsewhere, signposts erected by Charles Olson, Wedde rejects emphasis on the "unhistoric" history of New Zealand in favour of the contactable geography and anthropology. He does not find it necessary to begin from an extended apologia for his country's colonial history. Abjuring comment on the willed and wishful verses of the nineteenth-century, he locates a few of the rare momentary glimpses of recognition, even including an anonymous pre-colonial ballad, "David Lowston," for its sense of the significance of arrival at a new place. Yet because he is not looking hard for "the regional thing," he discovers, for example, a more positive presence of Eileen Duggan, seeing beneath the obligatory decorums of her work (imposed perhaps by local misconception of "the New Zealand thing"?) a subversive unsettling of conventions. Where forty years ago Curnow spoke of Duggan's "sentimental posturing," Wedde speaks of her "intellectual confidence." More magnanimous than Curnow, Wedde is just as hard-headed about what he believes in. This is evident in his searching out of the willed core of Brasch's work (recently, with a different kind of justice up-valued by O'Sullivan). There's a tough elegance in Wedde's recognizing David Eggleton's "Painting Mount Taranaki" as an instance of the contemporary poem for which this "is no programme left" (i.e.,

it exists in and for itself. This is one general point which, if I read him correctly, Paterson was after.)

Like some earlier editors, but in more mannerly fashion, Wedde decided to exclude immigrants from his anthology. One cannot quarrel with this insofar as his book is "programmatic," especially as the main people in question have left New Zealand; but if the book is also intended as a "historical" reckoning then the omissions misrepresent what actually took place. Be that as it may, Wedde handles the issue with some grace.

Without superseding Curnow or Jackson-O'Sullivan altogether, the Wedde-McQueen book may be accepted as the standard accounting of New Zealand poetry in the mid-1980's. What does it give us? The first internationally significant presentation of Maori poetry; a fresh look at the "canonical" period which, with one or two modifications, tends to confirm the "classic" status of such poets as Bethell, Duggan, Mason, Fairburn, Hyde, Curnow, Glover, Baxter; an interesting new look at such poets as Smithyman, Stead, and Alistair Campbell; and a substantial appraisal of the current scene, which features David Mitchell, Bill Manhire, and Wedde himself.

Virtually no particular poems are discussed here for two reasons: first, one cannot give a sense of an anthology by singling out one or two poets or poems from it; second, my subject has been the "politics" of New Zealand poetry, the social and cultural presuppositions behind the work. As to the work itself: where eighty years ago was only a scattering of "gems" (most of them paste), at each stage since the 1920's one or more New Zealand poets have made poems which are good by any contemporary standards in (any variant of) the English language. Good, that is, simply as poems.

If I may end on a personal note, however: I have found it moving to return to the "landmark" poems of the 1930's and 1940's. For a "displaced person," it is not easy, or even welcome, to tune into the regionalist "land" mystique, and it is quite possible to read the literature which arises from it as a local variation. But one feels on one's pulse that the regional thing *was* at a certain stage "the real thing." The strength and wisdom of

Wedde's approach, both as poet and anthologist, are that he has incorporated it into a larger sense of New Zealand in the world.

NOTES

- 1 Eugene Kamenka, "Viewpoint: Culture and Australian Culture," *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 October 1983, p. 1099.
- 2 Australian argot for someone who stands out, an exception.
- 3 Herbert Lomas, "In an alien landscape," review of Rodney Hall, ed., *The Collins Book of Australian Poetry*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 October 1983, p. 1100.
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- 9 Alexander and Currie (1926), pp. 35, 112.
- 10 John Geraets, "The New Zealand Anthology—initiating an archaeology," *And/I*, 66-73.
- 11 Roger Horrocks, "The Invention of New Zealand," *And/I*, 10-30.
- 12 Alexander and Currie, p. 129.
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