



Poetry

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46

featuring the poetry of
Courtney Sina Meredith

comment by Mark Pirie

review by Nicholas Reid

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Poetry NZ 46

Nicholas Reid

Guest Editor

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Editorial

The recent publication of Jane Stafford's and Mark Williams's *The Auckland University Press Anthology of New Zealand Literature* raises all those questions that anthologies always raise.

Even if it weighs in at nearly 1150 large pages of small print; even if it requires considerable muscle-power to heave onto one's lap; there is no way that this, or any other anthology, can be truly comprehensive. Controversially, the Stafford/Williams volume, intended as a survey of New Zealand prose and poetry since earliest Pakeha settlement, omits a number of familiar names. Whether for copyright reasons, or for reasons of the editors' taste, there is no Janet Frame, no Vincent O'Sullivan, no Alistair Paterson, no Richard Reeve. Then there is that matter of agenda. No matter how capacious it may be, any anthology is at some level a matter of personal choice. Not only are the editors guided by their taste, but they are implicitly making a statement about what is, and what is not, noteworthy in the national canon. To some extent, indeed, to compile an anthology is to define what the canon is.

And here some alarm bells must ring, especially in the matter of poetry. Enthusiasts, editors and poets themselves read poetry in magazines, chap-books and those slim volumes in which most poetry is first published. But the wider poetry-reading public (students, school-teachers and more casual visitors to poetry) tend to encounter the beast mainly in anthologies. If it is not in the anthologies, then ipso facto it does not exist. And one anthology will inevitably be influenced by those that have gone before. The anthologists' exclusions and omissions become virtually irrevocable.

This is not to condemn anthologisation. Much less it is to make a jab at one particular anthology. It is simply to note what defining power anthologists have. Who can deny that, for a couple of generations at least, Allen Curnow's 1945 *Book of New Zealand Verse* defined what New Zealand poetry was? Among other things, it helped promote the myth that there was little of merit before R.A.K. Mason and the poets of the 1930s.

In this issue of *Poetry New Zealand*, Mark Pirie offers a stimulating look at some earlier New Zealand poets whose work, thanks to Curnow et al, was overlooked, ignored, mislaid or otherwise lost to view. Pirie nowhere suggests that some towering literary figure has been buried. But his diligent research does show that, from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was much New Zealand poetry of merit that rewards a new hearing.

The challenge to anthologists' verdicts is an ongoing project.

Nicholas Reid

Courtney Sina Meredith

PNZ 46's featured poet is of Samoan heritage and grew up in Glen Innes, Auckland. At the age of 26, she has established herself as an important new voice of what she calls 'Urbanesia'—the Polynesian culture of the modern city. Courtney Sina Meredith has taught free writing workshops for youth, and says that 'in 2008 and 2009 I won every major poetry slam in Auckland and judged some the following year'. She co-edited *Spectrum 5* at the University of Auckland and graduated with a degree in English and Political Studies in 2010. Her first play, *Rushing Dolls*, won the Aotearoa Pasifika Playmarket competition and was later anthologised. In 2011 she was writer in residence at Bleibtreu Berlin. She toured Indonesia for Forum Penyair in April 2012 and was a featured writer at the Frankfurt Bookfair in October 2012. Her first collection of poetry, *Brown Girls in Bright Red Lipstick* (Beatnik Publishing), was launched in 2012.

Of the genesis of her earliest poetry, Meredith says: 'I remember writing my first poem. I was four or five years old, it was something about stars. Everybody else could see the beauty in sparkling elsewhere, what a star shone to evoke. I looked into the dark and saw something quite different. To me stars were a suspended inferno. I could not entirely comprehend how my family, our neighbours and the children I played with, could go about their daily lives with little fires above us. The day sky was even worse, hanging muted blue, puffs of grey-white water. People had accepted the scientific terms for what could only be (to my young mind) magic. That is how I began my lifelong affair with the page, a grid, a field, a stage to work through my thoughts and transmit a different truth out of my head and into the world.'

Of her formal schooling in poetry, she learnt that 'every object had the privilege of transformation through poetry—myself included'; and that 'I set my metaphorical sails towards building literature that I believed could empower my own community.'

In her present development as a poet, she notes: 'What interests me as a young writer, in this literary moment, is the adaptability of what art can seek to achieve—beyond beauty.' But she cautions: 'I believe that the relationship between a piece of art and its creator is sacred, and something that audiences, readers and so on, cannot always hope to covet or partake in. I feel very lucky that the relationship I have with my poetry, as though every poem were its own person, is a connection that has grown to embrace and empower others.'

The poems presented in this issue of *Poetry New Zealand* do not form a sequence, but do express Meredith's concerns with culture, the meetings of cultures, dislocation and mystery—in both the religious and secular senses.

Homeland

You get back everybody says *oh you're back!* You are back but everything has moved.

You are an old woman you are a concrete crow you are a set of lilac limbs.

Everybody says *tell me about somewhere?* You are the plentiful remains of war fought towns.

You get to sleep one night and then the next. Everybody thinks you dream in foreign prose.

Everybody knows you are back. Everybody sees your body in the city in the arms of friends.

You are a silver canal you are a young rose you are a path grown men skate.

Everybody stands in front of you like a mirror. They do their hair in your face *so good you're back!*

You are certain in the seeing of what appears whole. You are a nought you are a track you are a bone.

You are waiting to come home. You are waiting to come home. You are waiting to come home.

I watch your hair passing mountains

I watch the colours fade

houses cut into rock
the animals there know home
waters dead in thicket

you are a bird
I keep you sung
in my rib cage.

Why do you get all Waikato blue?
Why do you burn our churches?

One day I will take you
back to where I came from

lay down cliff
northern star: purple Cortina

emerald yonder
bull rush lilies.

Do you remember
what it was? Shiny fracture

small unread. Platinum
sun crossed grass.

I don't remember
how this room came to be

whose hands under your soft neck
believe it rests inside.

Mile End

We go past some houses in the night
it's a blue night no rain houses sway
past the train it's a clear night

one stood footballer
covered in the field around the corner
eyeballs me

Piccadilly
open night. Allow the light
should light arrive.

Kings Cross pancreas
acute
boy spit
part word anthem:
step out with me Lucy?

He calls it the perfect storm. Imagine the world in 80 years.
Please ask questions. Peter mentions a problem
do you want to know what the challenge is? Polish beauty
asleep on the table beside me
eats her chestnut curls.

I pour a little orange
do my best to believe
in Matt with his lazy tongue
circling wide oyster
aue he can't flick it fast enough! Contraception is not un-islamic.
A woman controls her own body
these days.

Rhythm method. Pull out.

Petrarch in Apia

Posted close by a pale battalion
noticed the fuchsia hibiscus blossom
noticed its quiet gospel too wholesome
for the motorbike eulogies of men.
Some pulled mermaids from Vailima in sin
gave them children that looked just like dolphins
others fought ghouls with God and oestrogen
heimat grey framed the shifting dunes and gin
now an army of angels lies buried
where fair Lords and time's law meet the skyline
turning in such grainy constellations
that even reason can't find the felled seeds.
You hunch your bones, give Jesus' clock a shine
with those blue eyes searching for a station.

On losing

The sea is in the sky
jets sing out white-wash

boys point devise soda bombs
unlike their makers humbled in libraries

I want to view you side on
enslave the evening light

astute by daily death no longer proud
as you and I contend

just where our child-lives sit
under fields face planted no longer beautiful.

Identity is a dangerous God

How can we eliminate the blood letting—
do we want to? Bearded omen lashing
cream. Isn't the Oxford sun non-human?

Identity is a dangerous God.

Brian will resurrect his significance
Brian will rescue his poignance
Brian will overcome Nabokov for Popper
Brian will get to the heart of it.

Scientific laws are permanently changing. There is no certain knowledge.
You cannot recapture the past. Old boy
looks to the moon
ages me consistently. Science is not a new God
throws me under melting willow
I expect to end there
recounting my white swan.

Red spire

Under the bridge
vintage roses bloom
plush maroon

exhausted air
satchel shoulders
rain impending
ghost clung brick

and the truckers
dark eyed
back into the street

and the women
brunette channels
mistaken for empire.

I do not want to know the genetics of summer
or where else in the world young girls church hang themselves.
Death is a faraway rain
settling open mouths. A dead man in the earth is laid
down to blossom
ripened grain.

Atamu

We go to Twenty Three for coffee
everybody looks
up. Yes
this is Adam
he used to walk into the lounge and call me Ugly
or try his best to hoist me
like the last scene of Dirty Dancing.
Adam
has his own children
I want to feed him
Grandma's roast
volcano cake. Raw fish.
He takes my little brother to the dairy
gets him a chocolate
answers question after question.
Adam knew
everything when I was a girl.
He used to twirl me in the St Paul hall
let me sip his beer
my aunty threw a hair brush at him
he laughed
the plastic split on his ribs.
He used to clean Uncle Eugene's house
the yard and the kitchen.
His mum would yell at the court
he could shoot with his eyes closed.
Adam
fell asleep next to his daughter
watching Mao's last dancer on Sky last night.
He said he wants to see it another time. Adam
I cried when I saw that movie
the boy took so long to come home
in the end
home had to come
to him.

Tower Hamlets

We are away from our lovers
We are away from our anchors
We are un-moored ocean moons

Muslim men come by us touch us
fascinated by our life-like rust

doubled over laughing
something about gone power
the sound of marching water:
inside us all.

Chip packet pavement
fire limb set
claiming tar
no it's not red
black star ignites the dawn.

lelusaIema

Elijah plants a tree, thinks he sees mum
his dead mum moving like seaweed in bloom
in front of his house there a palm-like tomb
is open for all hands and wings to come
praise his mother in tapa, like a nun.
She has no children no burgeoning swoon
of flies and men to brush like morning dew
from shoots too small underfoot where blood runs.
Lately the sun has set the garden pink
when he pulls in from work with his girlfriend
the backyard dirt feels like grains of concrete
no water, beer, or piss the soil will drink.
They make love in the kitchen and deaden
his mother's voice, so drowned by lives complete.

Commonly misspelt words

Allowed disappeared holidays stopped
awhile doesn't hopped straight
believe dollars hospital they're
breakfast don't instead threw
brought everybody lightening tomorrow
cannon everyday luckily video
can't everywhere nearly wasn't
caught excited police watch
centre favourite present weren't
chocolate field probably we're
clothes friends quiet whole
couldn't front scared won't
didn't grabbed second you're
different having someone.

Machen Saya

Light everywhere
no sign of where the beams
collect. Thought everywhere
no sign of the mind. Beautiful.
You are
round coin
white lustrous metal. Lined with
orange
imagined
bird men they
stare into the distance. I sit by
your ocean watch
land move inside the water watch
bird men launch. I am
no body
here. Flesh everywhere
no sign of the bones
inside. Night everywhere
no sign of the star. Peaceful.
You are
wrought iron
silver puddling molten. Lined with
black
nostalgic
fish men they
stare into the distance. I dive in
your mountain watch
water move inside the land watch
fish men fly. I am
every body
here.

Part

Son hitting
morning hills
pail beaten still.

Testified river, slew
dew mist.

Beholden water, coarse
jewel lit.

Gossamer
human

twine.

A bridge
A bouquet
A bounty

assigned
dusky cosmos.

Silvertip

Adaptation of a wolf
in first person
surrender moonshine
come matted
alpha midnight.

Second person
clasped nostalgia
directing itself
blue eyed
hive or tree.

Transposing the wolf
into a credible opus
note the rise in strings
on the tanning of a wolf hide
defrosted silver fur.

There is no eye of Christ
to bear the wolf as hawk
or Buddha would denote
a soft childhood narrator
whose voice lulls.

I remember

Paul and Dan and Campbell
who grew into his nose
and the open silver hoop
no net on a slight lean
by the barren dental clinic
where I used to smoke.
I remember Adam always
had new clothes.
He used to put his shoes
up high around his room.
He used to order in
basketball gear from around the world.
Or it was made for him.
I could not be kind or pretty
enough to escape
spirits and boys.
I cannot remember
what I wanted
as a girl I never
really saw beyond that initial water
sparkle. Never
contemplated
getting in imagined
white dresses.
I just went on
one moment
into another
until I was sitting on your bed
attempting to remove myself.
You are on the corner
not moving looking into a suitcase.
Wet golden hair

on a slight lean
in new clothes
I am the barren word clinic
up in smoke.
I run into Paul and Dan and Campbell
some nights at Ponsonby Food Hall.
Adam has beautiful children
I see him in them
I never see him. I can remember
what I wanted when I met you
a square of sparkle ocean
somewhere to escape
boys and spirits. I am in
a white dress.

Blue-crowned lorikeet

has no wrongs she
eats the lung of the niu she
nests in the holes of trees
orange bill yellow eye
purple thigh opaque abdomen
red throat she only exists
in the mind of a little rain
cannot reference an indeterminate
change no she inhabits heat
it has always been, the flowering
point of yonder. She eats
nectar pollen small eyes
including wild hibiscus. She
came to me when I was within reach
most stay tame most stay tame!

Corner

'I didn't say that
it's not sexy. The first thing I said in German was
I am feeling hot, and do you take drugs?

they took me at night break
angry at the system
angry at the egg white sky
wheaten neck of lion (mane)
rock gone orange
grass gone brown

can you score me some Persian elixir?

they know everything
angry at female math
angry at the undone town
moulting in the square
feather spindrif't

Mecca

Supper on Durham
talking backstroke
getting further spot on the pounamu horizon
a mate told me how to detail oblivion
it depends if you are sitting or standing
it depends on the height of the ship getting further
gold hair in your eyes Mayfair Kuwait a chopper
first thing in the morning
my brother got a bite on the hand (dog) *your family sounds*
like a film set! So far
it took three of us and two trolleys to feed the family a curry goes far
 a coleslaw stretches
his living room is painted by the blood of history (dye-fig/ insatiable
bark)

during the voyages of migration
nobody could harpoon
the horizon

she was a woman
heard laughing always
in the next room under water
mountain side she was
never where you were.

Aso fanau

Some family friends gave me an authorised portrait of Mandela for my birthday.

A girl made me a necklace. I kept it for a long time.
I think I still have it. I can't find my passport.

I had a high tea. My cousin came late with a stir-fry.
My present is under her bed. A drawing. She says it has to be perfect.

I grew by accident. One moment I was wordless
the next I was toasting myself under a washing line.

I made a big curry for all of my friends.
One of them gave me Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair.

My cousin went to see another friend at a bar. A guy asked them for a threesome. They said no.

I read about Nelson when everybody left.

Household Gods

Household Gods have gotten hold of the remote
we are forced to watch Survivor
with the volume as high as the ear will go.

Unlike general Gods
drag racing down our street
the art of defining a centipede
from a bag of wheat is like
advising revolution
where flesh is weak.

There is no cure
but aromatic flowers high in a tree
you need a limber boy
to pick them with his teeth.

There is no remorse
but the juice of immature fruit
ground with beetle wings and breast milk.

When prayers fail
so too does the body.

If the Lord is angry
ankles of a deaf women straighten
she is drowned with description
that won't translate.

The capital God believes
tears from a pilgrim—
languid grief
can steer the soul to self.

A post-apocalyptic Hillbilly in long white socks is the new face of Punk Rock

his phone alarm plays with her ideas like a burglary
the mega-monster city's stared back unblinking one fast time
when they talked about the bold days they could've been candles

(and she writes this across the farmland of America for him
pastures seeded in patterns approximating plans
then one day he reads pages made from those harvests)

his volatile beverages set to disturb her certainties
literature presented them each their rights and better hearts
transplanted to replace the frozen and shattered organs of childhood

she wrapped him with infinity signs to last with insistence
dipped into shadows while brimmed with seeing
old-fashioned talk gave them roses and empty bird cages

her face broke into bones and torn photos when the plane lifted off
pieces landing as a weight of sunshine upon his ever after
this prize hold a self-defense mechanism like smiling

he'd asserted, 'we write tragedies best' through the rime of two margaritas
her voice high, 'I can be funny too'—in the Mexican café all eyes
draped in their latest disguise to truthfully represent the moment

'fashion is the armour to survive everyday life' says the NY Times'
Bill Cunningham feathers kept to fluff judgements with preening
the scorned children of unimaginative but well-meaning shopkeepers

the bravest thing human beings ever do is to dare to cleanly reach out
with love—even more so in any time of war or narrowing of knitting
nonsense and yarns her sometime refuge—the story remains uncast off

while the action of allowing oneself to be either accepted or rejected is
continuous

Ruth Arnison

My neighbour

for Jan

1.

She's been hospital cleaning for 33 years,
'doing' the ward rounds daily.

Patients talk to her; she has safe ears, is
distant from negative sentences.

She charts the conversations away from
illness. This is New Zealand,

they're bound to have friends of friends
of friends in common.

2.

She reckons she'd rather see vomit any day
than be in that *hoicker* ward.

It's not their conversations but the other
things they divulge.

Early on she asked to be moved down to
surgical. She says,

when you've got a belly full of stitches,
there's not a lot you want to bring up.

3.

This morning she had a terminal clean.
After all those years she's got a bit

of a nose for death, but this one surprised
her. Over the last few weeks

she'd learnt all about his family in between
floor moppings, toilet flushings, and

rubbish bag disposal. Today she had to
clean away all trace of him.

4.

My neighbour's in hospital. She had a funny
turn at work and they whipped her

downstairs and then upstairs before she'd time
to wash her mop.

This is not her ward. She's not a patient person.
She wants to go home, now.

5.

Her window seat is missing her. She warms it
in the winter afternoons

while neighbourhood watching. Most days I
take my hot drink over, catch up

on the day's events, the comings and goings,
the ups and downs.

6.

A 7am light shines from her kitchen window.
Last night she was discharged.

This morning she's back on the ward. A bit
of a turn won't keep her away.

Her floor will need a thorough going over, the
relief staff aren't so particular.

7.

Neighbourly for 25 years we're now aging
towards gray.

We've moved on from toddler 'n teenager
talk through the fence. Now,

our separate houses are conversation empty.
Today I suggested we go out

for a walk. Our *getting up from the chair* knee
creaks were a joint discussion.

Southern Comfort

With Meri reporting all ferries to Stewart Island
cancelled, snow to sea level, and wind gusts
up to 130k, southern bodies are

stocking up, before tying down ports, aluminium,
and fleets. Disentangling the Sat Nav trolley,
he links it to the shopping list.

He has no patience with spontaneous aisle ducking,
or random purchases. I flounder in his wake,
before drifting to the magazines,

doldrums descending after flipping through pages
of manicured shipshape homes. Trolley
chock full he berths alongside,

apologising for his slow progress. But I've found
Cilla in my bag, homed in on *Timepiece*,
the wait is of no consequence.

White smoke

(written the day that the Fukushima nuclear disaster began)

Fukushima plant is leaking coolant—
white smoke—burning concrete—the reactor
may be melting—fallout map—‘set back the
industry for decades’—hydrogen sparked
HWUMPH explosion—Fukushima plant ‘the
next Chernobyl’—scientists declare quakes
‘Unrelated’ as tectonic plates as
Japanese authorities distribute
iodine to counter thyroid damage—
Quake, tsunami, radiation, fallout . . .
Yes the gang’s all here—O gods, pluck out Man’s
technocratic, cybernetic hubris!
Smash Man back into the stone age! Save Man . . . !

Men prove themselves unworthy to wield stars.

Oneiric

Catwalk dangling from a rippling blackness
by a metal chain . . . with men in hardhats,
six or more of them, unable to stand
straight & sliding into one another,
just like helicopters moving girders
into place so swiftly that the girder
tilts & rocks . . . towed by obsidian flat
ovoid rippling oil-slick stormy blackness.

22nd February 2011

I'd just finished lunch; placed my bowl on the table
The room, building and land resonate in a demonic dance
The bowl forced to shimmy across the table, with increasing rhythm
Into survival mode, we all take cover yet don't comprehend the response
Before our eyes, intensive shaking drops panels from the ceiling
Partitions fall,
Women cry for their young,
A deep cry, riddled from the putrid gut of fear
Absence of control flickers in men's eyes
Fear hammering away at sanity
Will the building hold? Will it collapse?
When the terror of shaking halts
We leave
Unknown then, but for the last time
Outside away from falling things
I hug my colleague
Tell her we're going to be okay, that it's going to be fine
Barely spoken words, and I realise they're empty
Empty and false, for I don't know
And it wasn't okay
Our lives had irrevocably changed
And we were about to find out
That day, tainted black with blood
The land never stopped moving
We never saw town again
Our innocence broke, and I guess my lunch bowl as well

Love and gardening

Love, we will one day
plant a garden together
around a house
we will not have to move from
because the rent went up
or the landlord wanted to sell.

You will dig holes
for the magnolia saplings
the apple tree
the lemons
a row of feijoa.

I will plant my hydrangeas
the red lilies I have been tending
in pots for years.
There will be marigolds
for the spell you made
growing over our footprints.

I would like there to be freesias
so we know it is spring
and jonquils
so we know it is nearly coming
and there must be a rose bush
so we can take time there
and violets in all the shady places
because these are the flowers of sadness
and even sadness will have its space
and sunflowers in the corner for sue
behind a vegetable patch
and my grandmother's orchids.

You will plant the golden queen peach tree
for the end of summer
and the magnolia will flower in winter
when it's cold.

Bread

I am watching
the youngest brother
leaving home.

The mother delivers him
pilgrimage style
to his new temporary nest
and lingers
not knowing that mothers
have arms longer than their bodies.

These are attachments
which survive all distance
and damaged nerves.

How necessary the departure is
to prove them
to make them rise
to teach us how we need them
and how we don't.

Finally, I have noticed how a koru
looks like a question mark
unwinding.

Grand prize

Invariably,
I award my own rendition of a grand prize,
Whenever I go to the Missouri Botanical Garden,
Which I do, with a reverence bordering on spiritual fervor,
At least every few weeks, month in, month out.

Today, with exhilaration and just a hint of nervousness,
For wanting to assign my best subjective criteria
To the worthiest of exemplary contestants,
I finally settle on the common hyacinth,
With its palette of purples, reds, pinks, whites, yellows, blues.

Selecting a winner, from among all the entries,
Is far from a pedestrian task; indeed, it's daunting.
Creeping junipers, rhododendrons,
Daffodils, tulips, bluebells, pansies, and phloxes
Offer a formidable array of spring blooms to judge.

Even the dazzling, immaculate fruit trees—
Cherry blossoms, redbuds, quinces, and crab apples,
With their ballerina petals pirouetting through the air—
Lose out to the hyacinth's spikes of basal-whorl flowers.
They'll keep the ribbon . . . at least until the next competition.

Tableau

As I sit cross-legged, relaxed, contemplative,
On this grassy green knoll,
Overlooking the Japanese Garden's placid lake,
Rimmed by indigenous trees
Alluring, for their contorted and curiously leaning shapes,

I see a pair of mallards plying the water, nonchalantly,
Ignoring myriad visitors—
Grandparents, moms, dads, kids, in family groups—
Come to spend the afternoon
Basking in the perfectly natural artificiality of this refuge.

One of the ducks, lackluster brown, flutters its wings,
Leaps up, in a huff, onto the shore of the largest island,
Even as her brightly colored mate continues on,
Carefully calculating the distance its webbed feet weave,
Then reverses heading, returns, emerges on the islet.

Perhaps we're watching each other, possibly not.
Ten minutes later, they plop into the water,
Paddle toward me, as if my gaze were attracting them.
And again, they gather themselves up, in a flutter,
Leap onto this grassy bank, thirty feet below me.

I'm not conversant enough with Eastern thought—
Ancient and modern philosophy, poetry, calligraphy,
The subtle scrollwork of master painters—
To interpret, from this harmonious tableau,
Anything more transcendent than the tableau itself.

to do

I

stop trying to be perfect, after all
the petals are ragged when you look close
centre-lit, edges fade to brown
energy changes time, each
situation; moods, sound waves, particles of dust
minerals in air—if I could see
it all I wouldn't be able to, that's why
the microscopic stays—this
coming together and withdrawal, like an estuary
the one where we live & how
desolate it felt walking there, an open space
'empty' to the mind, yet eyes perceive
two canada geese
holes and mud prints, small
rivers running by, a kingfisher towards
the head, a shag flying low, its
size & feathers.

everyone
asks a lot, you have to learn to say no
but you like to please, so what
what they think, in the spring, come winter it's
a different story, 'hello, I'm Jake, commander
of the star ship', 'what federation are you
from?', 'that's it', he says, 'Phrom, I'm from
Phrom'

take things in steps, it's the only
way to get done, don't sacrifice
quality for quantity, don't get stuck with
nothing either, done nor begun or be a
bum, you can quote or para-croak but in
the end, you have to be who you were
born to be, back there is behind you

II

I've done the next step, we don't say taken because we're colloquial, who we are, here, where we are, what she taught more than anything else: don't apologise for who you are

this could be a stanza

but not on its own

come back

alright

I will, unwinding, looking at self in the mirror, it never goes, but at least the mirror tilts away from you, to show the rest of the room, field outside, portion of the tree

overascending the murk

start

again, ready for tomorrow, the work you didn't do today, there will be no more warnings or interruptions, just line by line, day by day, until it's all

On Great South Road

On Monday he walked along Great South Road in a greasy jersey with the arse out of his jeans—bought a flat white from the Samoan pastor's daughter with the Mona Lisa smile; one sugar and his loyalty card will soon runneth over.

At home an old lawyer hangs in the wardrobe fifty ties like funeral wreaths around his neck, dust gathering on the sensible black-lace shoes. Dead from a lack of wills, a hanging testament to the power of legal bullshit over many years,

another judicious body stuffed with legal aid, garnished with injunctions; both on notice and ex parte, all seasoned with a dash of precedent slowly rotting in a middle class encumbrance, wearing a tracking home detention bracelet.

On the third day they probated him on a pyre of incorporeal hereditaments—no remainders and a few old promissory notes for extra fuel, watched by a small army of Christy Moore's well-mannered fools chanting the Judicature Act.

Up above Themis of the Supreme Court watched her broken scales stained with a white residue, a slipped blindfold exposing one glittering eye—some bastard's escaped the fold, she screamed as a wet tsunami of long briefs clattered down.

You can't say he wasn't warned of the dangers
old Merv did his best—I've seen them, he said,
the early retirees, they're like an army of ghosts
all dressed as tramps in latest Warehouse chic—
heading to the bar at the RSA before 12 noon.

Merv laughed as he threw back more heart pills
checked his blood pressure and swore loudly—
work's good for you, he exclaimed, I'm 70
and bloody broke, the overdraft is killing me—
go and write short stories if you really must.

Now, tired eyes daily accost an empty sunrise,
freedom stretches like elastic over a Gobi desert
of nothingness—where nomads drive battered utes
and tomorrow a thin shade will be seen again,
looking for a coffee fix on Great South Road.

Virility

It's hard to work around the house
she said,
with a virile plumber leaking—
underfoot

even a woman of mature age
she said,
can find pipe repairs fascinating—
alluring

his taps are of shining chrome
she said
his u-bends are simply a dream—
imagine

he's fixing the wastemaster
she said
and as for the swimming pool—
emptied

he's more than just a plumber
she said,
he's made me completely—
leakless.

Venus

It has to be kind of lonely being a god,
isolation is part of the deal.
Mortals think we spend our days drinking mead,
eating honey but
too much jealousy abounds and
you are not irreplaceable.

It has to be kind of lonely when you burn
your men to a sizzle,
they can't stay in the kitchen
in spite of their ardour,
too much heat.

Looking out over man's foibles and mishaps,
you can't decide whether they are sheep or ants.
Zeus riles them up once in a while
and sometimes one will surprise you
looping out of the ordinary
until you find he/she has an immortal parent.
Birth always tells.

It has to be kind of lonely
knowing tomorrow is forever.

Demeter

You know that sometimes kin bones catch
in the throat like hair,
that mothers and daughters strive for
dominance, upstage each other.
That as soon as the girl can
slip on your dresses, shoes, creams,
lust after the father figure,
steal your identity,
she too will be a Queen bee.
But he who takes a daughter
from the mother's breast too soon,
throws a long shadow over the sun and
scrapes the moisture from earth's mixing bowl.

May his testicles shrivel accordingly.

Homage to Francesco Petrarca

Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono . . .

And you who, on hearing these scattered resonances,
may feel distressed or lose your peace of mind,
listen to them as though they were rain on the roof
or birds' shrieks over the river.

There is no honour higher than belonging to earth's
sounds, her complex signals like a layer
of high-voltage storm clouds, her profoundest meanings
like quietly working humus.

Translated from the Russian by Anne Stevenson with the author

The time of year

Slipping on sodden leaves like ice,
together we'll keep balance; let the bunched
berries of the rowan alone be shaken
by the wet blustering wind.

It's the time of year disturbs us;
the change torments us in this land of wandering
from footpath shiver to highway shudder,
from life's horizons to a vault of sky.

Translated from the Russian by Anne Stevenson with the author

One who walks into an autumn garden

One who walks into an autumn garden
from a house that is not his own
feels the pain—from the familiarity of it all—widen,
as if his crisscrossed life had already driven him

to the wings, while before him
on the stage in the shifting light and shadow
the action is taking place
which is perfectly clear to the audience.

Translated from the Russian by Anne Stevenson with the author

Blizzard

1.

These stones in the wall, warm to the hand
Only yesterday, now welcome the blizzard,
Absorb the wind's animal howl,
Generously open to it every crevice.

I will adjust my breath to the wind
Until we are in tune: let its spontaneous element
Here and now for an instant embrace
With its whole force my whole being.

2.

Frost outside, the same as yesterday,
The soil's a ringing vowel, the horizon's
Immortal syllable blows in on the wind: quick,
Let's open the window in time to see

Kay and Gerda. The cold wants to come in
With its wordless language—let's open
All the ways to the night, and, caught in a fatal
Childhood game, flash a light.

3.
Here children play
at chestnut noon
while parents watch, and here
in stripes across the window ledge
rush shadows of clouds
speeding through the toughened sky;
there's no one
moving lightly at the window,
grass has grown over the floor-boards,
earth's centrifugal
warmth is chilled by snow,
all's been pierced through
by the rain and wind,
we let our syncopated breath
escape into the cold
kilometres where the stones
and roots and the full-
breasted hills
and the dark itself
which has coagulated into nervous
forms and funereal contours,
receive the crunching
focus of waking life
in a dream that keeps
hounding your soul
out there on its precipice
in the vastness of the universe.

Translated from the Russian by Anne Stevenson with the author

James Fagan

On walking to school

A kid wandered along the road, wearing a uniform that had long, uneven, bunched-up socks.

A crook feeling packed his stomach as he mulled over the new school day and undone homework that lay squashed in his bag with collections of plastic-wrapped food.

He looked at the school farther up the hill, close to the principal's small home. Both looked misplaced, as though they were floating delicately in light haze.

He approached a small, tattered bridge that had a few boards missing. A 'slow down' sign needed to be replaced as it hung precariously on the first left pillar. Its printing was faded and almost indistinguishable.

As he walked three metres onto the bridge, he caused loose boards on the bridge deck to make small, bouncy movements. Then, he stopped when flax leaves moved down on the creek bank.

On walking to the bridge edge, the boy noticed splinters on the grayed hand rail that seemed like dust or insect barbs. Each looked as though they were able to hook and hold small passing things.

In the water, large creek stones lay submerged, looking like tubby cats.

A small plane did an early morning flight, powdering its load further to the west. Suddenly it tilted its right wing and began turning to make another approach, but started jolting in the wind. It then became obscured behind pine trees that cast shadows forward to the ground, looking as though each had toppled there because of bleak cheerlessness.

Farther off, a farm dog offered an unwanted commotion, causing four ducks to fly off from the flax bushes, each looking confused as they flew apart, before coming together to fly as a group.

Sparrows flitted their way in the opposite direction, but without warning descended to the ground.

Then, with eyes peering forward and a few hands waving, a large car approached. It drove up the small rise to the slowdown sign. The middle aged driver had her hair styled, almost prim and proper. It was freshly dyed and brightly coloured.

Sue Fitchett

periphery / peripheral & the slow forgetting

1. *Melbourne July 2011; Carlton Garden's 'Periphery' walk*

I carry a ghostly shimmer in my eye's corner from that place to this
Shimmer over things & places songs & talk
That shimmer caught in the turning
head falling like *dark material* ash with beads of light
There they are just there
They are grit & they are tears
shimmer is not heavy what is gone past is
Heavy names bear down on me the ones we will never
See again the ancestors bearing their stories
The lost birds only outlines outer surfaces remain
& their names
borne there to here
all the Moa that lived
Huia huia huia
Haast's eagle
South Island & North Island Piopio
Diefenbach's rail
these names fly round my head New Zealand coot
Tyree's penguin
the whekau which laughs no more
& so on & so on & so on
a rosary
revolving in the eye's corner
just within hearing
an inference
thin as
air & memory

2. Auckland August 2011; Peripheral & the slow forgetting

shimmer in my eye's corner
things
caught in the turning

dark ash
just there
grit tears
gone past

bear

lost birds

here
Moa
Huia

island & island
rail
head
New Zealand

laughs no more
& so on
a rosary
eye
hearing

air

A point of view

As the sea on those rocks the light crashes into
and a blue that no binoculars or telescope can fix
still less a paintbox—blank white stippled watercolour paper
(a sighing of trees, suddenly
felled)
not a sound now across this endless midday
but who to hear, anyway?
that perfect light pinned to the kitchen wall
and glanced at now and then
on a dark winter morning sky spitting again in the westerly
the way the sea arched against your thoughts
or was it just the absence of sound
I could hear
the light crashing on the rocks
but saw no sound from the cloudless skies
which had stretched for day after
day after day through the end of the year
and on into another new year summer
summer after summer.
SO: to impose the story—any story—on a scene like this.
Take a landscape / seascape / cloudscape to task.
Ask it questions. People it with problems.
Tease its described features—seaswell, tree,
dune, hill, birdcall, chimney stack, cloud, telegraph wire—
into a pattern. Force a plot onto the picture.
Prise apart the prose from the poem and the poetry
from the science: be EXACT (but leave room
for another question too) list all the usual FAQs, and nag
until something gets done. Don't stop
until enough is far too much. Don't be satisfied
until every premise has been dismantled.
Keep asking 'Why?'

and what if
 or if the sky suddenly open to your
full gaze and questionings
 blue as it ever was and would be forever?
So savour the sea salt, the grass,
 the full moonlight silvering the water
between here and our island.
 This summer will be different!
No phrase will be neat, no sentence
 will end where it should . . .
(not so much the view itself as its absence . . .

Francis

All that about the pasta sauce
wasn't a lie, just a way
to introduce you to her: eighty-six

and bustling about the kitchen,
or the garden; wherever there is food.
She did cook a lot but she wasn't

the type to launch full scale
into grand sagas. She would make a point
if a point had to be made. For example

she would say, *He was good to me
his whole life*. Whereupon we would
follow her down this narrow street

in Italy, or possibly Poland.
Flowers hanging in bundles like that.
The conversations overheard

from balconies—mostly the usual
gossip fluttering its buoyant currency:
love (again) and money and family.

The street would come to an end.
It might join another street, or finish
as a cul-de-sac. Sometimes there were barricades,

and men in uniform. Nothing
was allowed to pass. In the silence
we paid our respects.

Then she brought us back
to the kitchen (the aroma of herbs)
and served us lunch.

An unravelling

I Anzac Day

First, the hymns of remembrance,
then steadying myself by watching the sparkling water,
fear in my heart of what you might do in your first hours
home alone.

Churchill, fighting his 'Black Dog',
you, fighting your 'Black Cloud',
both lives circumscribed by
power and control.

Churchill, Gallipoli his great mistake,
you, ending life's mistakes.
You 'called the shots'
so alone.

II The Last Post

*Those who served, were wounded/were undone. **
Te ika a Maui, by Alistair Paterson.

You served,
thought of others before yourself,
affirming and encouraging to the last.

You were wounded,
ridiculed, misunderstood.
By some who served themselves, outcast.

You curled in on yourself, again and again,
a tight ball. Then your soul leapt free.
You were undone.

III Speaking to myself

You must feel as if you have lost part of yourself

Michael Gifkins **

Losing part of myself
is like losing part of my brain.
I must absorb the strike,
acknowledge the cut and the pain,
steady myself through all the aftershocks.

Letting go is not
lessening her, or the loss.

I need to grow new neurones,
new dendrites threading out in new directions,

new pathways,
new perceptions,
new meanings,
restoring and enriching.

IV The brain

The brain is wider than the sky.

Emily Dickinson***

The brain has no limits,
goes beyond the boundaries
of fact and fiction.

It tells its stories,
sings its songs and mines its memories
in endless meanings.

* Alistair Paterson read his poem on July 7 2012, on the celebration of the new UK Poetry Archive.

** Personal communication from Michael Gifkins on telling him that my twin sister had taken her own life.

*** Emily Dickinson, *Complete Poems*, 126.

Nurses wear quiet shoes, walk fast, talk loud

It's a normal old day. It is autumn. It is beautiful. It is thin and clear. It is a walker's day. They just took blood from your chest.

To feel, 'normal', I comment on your nails, 'Deep crimson, very autumnal.' 'One of the nurses painted them,' you explain, 'something to do with dark colours, U.V. damage. I wouldn't have black. I can't stand black.'

I nod and say 'oh' and then nothing.

You settle back into looking out of the window. It's a good view from here. I can see the Newcall tower a few blocks away and think of Anna back at work, working her through the lunch rush. I start to tell you how things are going at the restaurant but you look so tired. I didn't think. You are probably trying to stay awake on my account. I make my excuses and leave for the restroom.

When I get back you're asleep. Your lunch is cooling, untouched, on a tray beside you. Little wisps of steam are snaking up from a centre-hole in the plate cover. They look very beautiful in this stark place. You told me you look forward to meal times because they are the only thing that gives your day shape. You look very thin.

My mum and dad and John arrive. We speak in whispers, an unnerving family catch-up surrounded by white elephants and nurses. The nurses speak in a jovial fashion. The elephants do nothing but grow. A doctor arrives to wake you for a procedure. You smile weakly, as do I. I excuse myself. It is the last time I will see you.

Robert K. Johnson

At age fifty-three

or forty-two or whenever,
the steady stride of our days
is jolted to a pause
by headlines that expose
our favorite grade-school teacher's

sexual molestings—or by
the phoned news that last night
a close friend left our party
and, using a plastic bag,
killed himself—or by

our happening on our spouse's
and a neighbor's notes that tell
of their passionate motel trysts—
and in that pause,
which will never end, we can

no longer fail to see
that every day from our birth
to death we are twelve-year-olds
watching a fast-paced movie
we only half understand.

Quality farm equipment (since 1837)

John Deere's restless mind
and blacksmith skill
made the first self-scouring steel plough;
strong, practical, efficient
—it reflected the character of its maker.

As the years passed,
from other restless, searching minds
steeped in John Deere tradition
have come better ploughs,
of many types, sizes, variations:
high-speed, light-draft, moldboard ploughs;
tough, durable disk ploughs;
drawn, pick-up, semi-integral,
two-way ploughs;

all with the same honest quality that marked the first John Deere plough.

Inventive genius, dedication to quality,
the urge to fill agriculture's changing needs
dominate today's worldwide John Deere organisation.

The character, the man, still guides the restless
mind of John Deere, the company,
better tools for every crop
every soil,
every climate,
every farmer.

Where I come from

row me to the mouth
of the mountain river

where the ancestors descended
to our valley and settled

row me like there is no tomorrow
with oars of the finest wood

I will be good, sit in the middle,
keeping balance, hands gripping boat sides

row me as you would row
your lover on a peaceful Sunday

row me like there was no yesterday
until we get a grasp on things

After their grown family

leaves on Christmas night,
the cold hunts them to bed.
They lie together;
different dreams;

and in the morning
climb out respective
sides of their bed
to face one another
day of loneliness.

Untitled

He's out there again,
cutting gorse all day, bleeding, refusing, unheeding
of the time of day. Working the merciless land, hand in hand with
his blunt axe. But he can't cut through the sky
or cut a hole deep enough in the heart of the earth to
slide through.

He's like a figure from a Thomas Hardy novel,
jammed in between indifferent
earth and sky. Made to wander up and down
hills, days, rivers, singing
in his head a slow chorus
of thought as steady as his newly oiled tractor.

Days go by, weeks hurtle into years. He's out there
still, his untamed beard running
down his weathered chin. He's just an outline now,
cutting a track through gorse toward sea, watching leaves
fall through ailing light. Watching the white sheep
pour over green crested hills, toward the
far away sea.

At the pub he drinks alone, except for his slow, weathered thoughts.
He speaks with them patiently. Converses with them in bed. He never
learned the fickle art of love. He's married the land. He'll be buried
in the stoic heart of this hill. He'll never find a way out of here, out of this
still tethered earth.

His bones will scatter like evening light across from where
he kneeled down to touch the river. When he dies
they won't prise his soul away. The sky will laugh. The light
will stagger drunkenly across the land. The sheep will sleep and nuzzle
the grass he tilled with his long slow hands.

Carolyn McCurdie

January begins

For New Year I wish you
Janus, the god who looks forward
and back, till his pupils dilate, intoxication
of distance. On your calendar it's his month.
Here is the photo he hangs on your wall:
salt caravans in Niger,
from a paraglider, so high that camels
seem strung as if notes on scribbled staves of song.
On the horizon, a thin sprinkle like fire-blackened grain:
another caravan. One way with millet to trade, the return journey
with salt. They follow the line of the sand dunes, begin
in autumn, stop
before summer rains.
Those little blips are human beings, commas, apostrophes, keeping the line.

My wish for you: Janus, the god of transition. Here, in the last
islands of human arrival, the ancient
journeys belong to birds. When autumn comes, you'll stand
on the beach to watch
shearwaters, day after day, low to the ocean, wings tipping the spray
and the rocks of the headlands.
They loop the Pacific, come back in spring.

The birds, the camels, doodle, meander,
embellish the lines on the mental map.

Janus, the god who lays out
mental maps. With a thumb nail he flattens
the folds. The paraglider delights him, the long
view, the old is the new. He sings its audacity.
When you first learned to balance, unsteady, surprised,
this was the song that he gave you.

Since then, self-mutilation
of bumper-to-bumper, the queues in the customs hall.
Still he sings it, insists, on your calendar,
through the letters of your name, till you play it in your finger bones
like crystals of sunlight
that quiver down dunes, till you push out from the beach, dance it
in the arches of your feet as they brace
on wet slanted wood, on the slow-rising heft
of water. As they take one step.

Around and around it comes back. Can you hear it
that song? Yes. The intoxication
of song.
After rain, and when the wind shifts to nor' west.

I wish this for you: Janus, who unlocks
the doors and tells you, the world, the wide shining world
is open. Go through.

Of waxwings and dayflies

Tokyo: unbeautiful
but alive—and monstrously,
cancerously growing. Elsewhere,
Metropolis X—equally
unbeautiful—is visibly dying,
its rot a way of life. That will be
Tokyo's future, too. For the moment
the mood is boom. Official
and mercantile circles are euphoric.
Elsewhere and within,
all's unease and sickening—
prosperity's waged debasement.

§

*We don't know who we are
since the war. The break
with the old culture
has left us adrift. Yet we
are still a family.*

§

Three concepts to consider—
coming out of Egypt,
the **Ouroboros** hastens dawn
and precedes ego. It is
an Ophidian exemplar
of circular logic. **Ensō** (円相)
one could render as a circle:
expression of the moment
(the moment's self-expression)—

absolute enlightenment
and denial of perfection
(Lucent used it for its logo,
which was jokingly referred to as
The Coffee Cup Ring).
For **Tsuchinoko** (ツチノコ)—if
translated literally—read *Hammer's*
Spawn: a venomous cryptid
speaking only lies
and feeding on itself.

§

Anyhow, his vision was one of totality.

§

Perhaps it was, in fact
—that is to say,
in substance and *in situ*—
a joke;
or: perhaps it was all *meant*
as a joke.

§

And nothing, I know, is quite as tedious
as having a joke explained to you.

§

The antepenultimate;
the penultimate;
and, in turn, the ultimate:
in view of him,

in *light* of him,
all interchangeable,
each equally worthless
(cf. Paul Klee's *Angelus
Novus*; take especial note
of its point of view).

§

Footprints on a white silky beach—
blue sea full of sharks, blue sky
flagged with clouds like egret plumes.
Nearby, the gray-violet pyramid
of a temple gradually dissolves
as the sea with each century rises.

§

La beauté c'est la mort.

§

Tested muscle tautens
beneath injurious skin;
injurious skin dimples
beneath cold steel;
cold steel warms
beneath urgent blood—
it warms to no end,
to no end but its own.

§

1970: encapsulated in
an F 104, our subject catapults into temperate skies
(there being many skies
you see)—and . . . BOOM!
Barriers break wide open:
exhilarating, suffocating speed
—of sound—; and then suspension,
as if at some still point
somewhere, at last,
in the universe. Hovering,
transfixed, unmoved,
all but absorbed into a vision
of endless white cloud,
eternal whiteness in everlasting
blueness: a giant serpent
coiled around the earth,
swallowing its own tail,
vanquishing all polarities,
making nothing matter
anymore.

§

The Emperor is not *necessarily* flesh
and blood: he is our vital essence.
And I shall perform kaishakunin
on his behalf—
courtesy demands it of me!

§

... committed *seppuku*
... in the office of Japan's commanding general:
his head was then hacked from his body
by an aide

We'd read the bloody details with wonder.

§

Self-denial + euphoria = synthesis
(an equation reason can't refute).

§

In the foreground,
the body of a man, headless,
buffed, rough hewn, flesh stopped
and open-ended, tied-up
and unknotted. The angle
of the body indicates
its final point of divestment.
Coolly, reader becomes
coroner: speculate sagely
on the length of time
this man's been dead, his cause
of death. See his muscles laid bare,
his integuments flaunted,
his innards laid out (who do you think
you are? Are you an auditor
or a voyeur?)—and never mind
the other body.

§

A further selection:

Arishima/'23/Noose

Akutagawa/'27/Barbital

Dazai/'48/Drowning

Hara/'51/Atomic Bomb

Kawabata/'72/Gas

—et al/circa/etc . . .

§

O Shintaro, my brother, have we been waiting
for the dawn

that never comes?

§

LA BEAUTÉ C'EST LA MORT!

§

*Long ago engraved in stone,
lost in the shifting sand,
in the midst of a crumbling world,
behold the vision of one flower.*

Don MacLennan

Talking the Planck in the parlour

It's a Pictish design I explained to the tattooist
A salvo proffered to deflect any derision aimed at my advancing years
He was scaling the motif to snugly fit my forearm
Links to the Kingdom of Alba invoked this cutaneous ritual
intended to flaunt an indelible connection
An imperative before my allotted three score and ten

As the machine buzzed we chatted
of rock art and painted bodies
of classic motorcycles
BSA Goldflashes
Vincent Black Shadows
Ariel Square Fours
We banked steeply veering onto
the duality of photons and protons
Max Planck's quantum physics
Contemplated the existence
or non-existence of Schrödinger's cat

This erudite man had hidden depths
as unfathomable as his pictorial arms
His incarnation into a tattoo parlour
as weird as a quark

Exposure

Before the ridge
they rested against

the trunks of totara
on the eastern flank.

Single-file, bodies
swaying under

grey rumps of packs,
instruments safely

sheathed, the compass
pointing west.

Past the tree line
into the brittle

alpine terrain
and relentless wind

remembering
not to look up

when the thwack
of the chopper

sounded. By the time
they arrived

polyprop tops
were stuck with sweat.

The conductor shed his
and was lashed

by the whip of
snow-crossed air.

Perched on the
outcrop he raised

his baton. They
formed a semi-circle

finding footholds on
uneven rock.

Songs of violins
flew as the camera

swooped. Through
the lens they were stark:

black coat tails, black dress
against the brindled earth.

Sounding

Vast cold fathoms
I would die of pain within them
Only dry and warm above I live

Deck-safe, I lower a net
Trawl deep within the murk
Raise silver meat to sell, so live a day

Fresh blood dwells wriggling there
Hot red amidst chill green
As I, air-dry, bring liquid clearness to my lips and drink

No woman dares to join me here
This rocking liquid world beneath my feet
The wooden planks my true unyielding friends

The seaweed smell
Chapped hands in heavy leather gloves
Knife dangling from my belt

Oh no, no woman joins me here.

Judy Garland, Bob Hope and Over The Rainbow

The tin canister
from an attic to a
garage sell had no label,
no title. 'Five dollars,'
he said, adding, 'you take

your chances, five.'
That night I placed the
film through the movie
projector, 1950ish model.
I turned on the thin

gray light toward the screen
in the shadowy dark haunting.
And, ever lasting lives came
back as if they
really had never departed.

It was Bob, in
dialogue with a young
Garland, but grown up.
With passion she sang
the lovely song, the

song that out lived her.
Then she rushed off stage.
The way they commonly
would in those days of WW2.
And the old film ran out.

The slapping flapping
noise it made I didn't want.
Years later I sold it
in a garage sell. 'Five
dollars,' I said, while adding—

New mattress

Along the river runs a tall bush,
I don't know its name. An oxbow
lies nearby and a hut on stilts—
a hide for bird watchers or a
look-out for hunters—stands over
the cut-off like a father watching
the midwife, her scissors at rest.

Meanwhile, in the distance,
sparrows are cramped in
the rafters of thatched roofs.
My new mattress is stuffed
with them, the bores of
memory foam a perfect
fit for their uplong beaks.

It has moved on the river bed—
a body print deposited then
washed along—the silt and the
salt quieten the thud, I belong.

Poem with guesthouse and view

I stayed one night in a Portobello guesthouse
where the stairs were hard but the bed was soft.
A part of town ringed with red post boxes
and tickled by the wind off the Firth of Forth.

In the morning I watched the sun rise, vein
by vein, through the leaves of a bunch of ruby red
chard, arranged in a vase on the windowsill.
Beautiful, the delta of red and the delicate
green, and the sun in flood across the sheets.

Last night I'd watched it set between the legs
of a man, jogging in a kilt along the beach,
his footprints blushing in the wet sand
behind him, fading as they filled with salt water,
erased by a tide in perfect working order.

Die believing

I was at the crucifixion of Jesus.

if you were a kid at my Sunday school—
you were taken to see the whole thing.

there was no thought about trying to stop it.
you just watched the Romans go into action;
considered their propaganda:

here is a guy who is promising too much,
getting a little too famous.

people were arguing about the reasons
& it was hard to tell how many people truly cared.
mass protest? hardly.

there were many trying to stand up and be the way—
speechmakers, weird witchdoctor types . . .

we heard the stories about what he'd done—the fish; the money;
how the mud people were going to get everything.

I never saw anything first-hand.

people were often put to death back then—in public.
you had to toe the line & know your place.
normal life—with severe penalties.

& this new 'immortality cult'
was scary:

messing with the old gods;
messing with the meaning of death.
surely, you were just born lucky & wealthy—or you weren't?
what was this thing about *choosing* eternal life?

today, such a death would still be a damn good watch
& religion
is still a confounding, risky business.

Breathing trick

the siege engine will carry us thru, like all those before.
it was built in God's own auto shop / breaks the speed of light.

where we're going, fear is surely a mere hat—blown from a head;
human philosophy a shit argument.

anger? only a worm under a hot blue sky—
while these auras of inevitability will soon be glowing
like Hiroshima!

when that last coffee is finished, we'll leave the others
slumped with burden, or happy as hell—
still gasping.

the sparrows are coming with us because every
cliché is about to die.

beauty will break apart completely;
inquiry will not exist.

we are going thru the wall of time.

Prelude

I

The koru unfurls,
loosening a careful hold
and the sequence starts anew:
bumblebees clamber on stamen,
pistil; branch split by shoot
as red leaf breaks from
green, unconscious of days
fog-filled at noon.

II

Out past the pillars,
we must name the waves
and patterns that bind them;
helmsman to surf is
gannet-led, longship
by light when maps cannot doubt
a knowing ear to wind,
prow pulled to sun.

The pier

These days are of sand: hot
to feet exploring past nets
and bodies, then fickle support
between sea and smoke mushrooming
high over blackened hills.

The only road resembles
a rampart, pulls to close
at cheer-led dead ends,
runs back to a witness in wood
tied to summer's passing.

Busy with laughter, beer
in hand, too late we lament
this final sunset, already
spread on cloud base and wave,
soon banished by flood-lit night.

hand-me-down-women

after Lloyd Jones's *hand me down world*

we eat, sleep
defy death in
different
countries

the same
clutter clogs
our throats
pulls us under

the same
dazzling light
dances, delights
blinds us

to traps
the rich and
famous set
to buy a baby

a handsome man
sweet-talks
a second-hand
woman

gets her pregnant
makes promises
pays for her
delivery

lulls her with
a piece of paper
presents her baby
to his wife

we swim seas
do anything
do everything
to retrieve

a story for
another day
our beginnings

private sorrows

with the dawn coming
over the high hills
they watch the light bloom
hear the breeze twist
through the bushes

the sound of their voices
is music above the earth
spinning with the sun

her long neck curves
lips quiver
he holds his breath

conceals his thoughts
behind bent words
the shores of her strawberry mouth
turn her life into chaos

the next morning
she sees a blinding
blueprint of a desert
deprived of love

Temple in the city

We walk past maybe three hundred advertisements, eighty cars and one hundred scooters, everything alive.

A few doors after the coffee roaster comes the temple, on the second floor. There is a cabinet to hold the shoes.

How many statues in one room. Golds and maroons. Sewn clouds. Flowers of lotus. Soft mats below the window. And along one wall, a digital surround system humming forth.

For ten years, she has come here. I also come and receive the blessing. I kneel, bow, though I want to keep my eyes at his eyes. He sprinkles holy rice in our hair, touches our heads three or four times, prays, chants, speaks, sings. Rings a bell which sounds a line through the body.

He says before we are generous, we must be calm. And ask ourselves if we are able, willing. He says to be kind with one another. Joyful. Maybe we can reach great perfection.

We can give a tsa, a little golden statue. There are fifteen kinds, and there will be one and a half million inside a statue he is making. He says Buddha lives in statues and scriptures. One is the other.

Later, we see his attendant again. He has eaten his lunch in a box and watches television. A lower bliss.

Loose change

I saw a woman come into view
walking as if her shadow
was more real than her body,
the space she stepped through
more substantial
than her displacement of air.

Her hair curtained her face
and hung heavy from her head,
draping itself on her shoulders
like a hem on the floor.
Her clothes were the flotsam
of disguise and necessity.

She passed close to the parked cars
and the parking meters,
hugging the kerbside,
putting her fingers in the money slots,
feeling for loose coins.
At first as she moved

this looked almost like hope,
a belief in present change,
but when I watched again
the backward fall of her arm
and the forward line of her body
made it seem like despair.

Tutaekuri

Tutaekuri dog shit river
so beautiful today
from the wharenuī

a gleaming dagger
pointed at the heart
of Ravensdown fertiliser.

Polluted? No doubt, but
there are rainbow trout
living in that stream—
I've seen them

and skylarks springing
from my padding feet
going down to the car park.

These are the compromises
made by every species
to survive in the universe—

live by making a living
make babies and make way.

Brushstrokes

Lying alone in bed
in my separate house
I re-create you from
brush strokes of paint
laid down in my head.

Crimson with some
dark blue notes for
your head hair after
monthly sessions with
the colourist and cutter

light brown for the
pubic hair that gives
us so much pleasure,
clear lacquer for your
shaved armpits singing

'I'm a girl' but your
body escapes me.
The brush strokes are like
fingers stroking at your
secrets that remain secrets.

. . . for Saturday

(for Stephen)

when did you
become your original
name and dislike camping
the sand flies and the lack of

comfort?

to lie down for hours on
the cold

chill
like opened clam-shells this spill of grasses
diced

and to live one's hand
(dealt as so?)
and dream dimensionally
of clouds that are not as they seem
see

and to watch
over the fields from up Mangakawa reserve
as if they need watching over
those returned soldiers at their stay

and hope they do
and to learn the basics of
kite flying 101 and how once
young generations flew brown paper bag planes
strung their umber up into blue

we consume
where once we were consumed
especially kindly by clouds happily

and thank you
thank you
thank
you . . .

T.A.B.

Gambling is not on
said my barber

Keep clear of it
the odd church says

'Don't do it' echoes
on my head.

The rottenest luck
of all
was Scott's Antarctic.

Lured to a point
of fluff
without a dog
to tow them home.

The assistant manager
yelled at him
and the real one
told him off and out
the poor little man
asking for a dollar.

I thought of oats
for horses
and the man
who could never
come back again

He was a Captain
of horses
in the wrong place.

Her father

Imagine that.
Hiding away in New Zealand,
barely residential Ellerslie
not far from the Lady's Mile,
his house behind the race course
next to the bridge,
rail line behind,
near the station for a quick getaway.

Carves votive shrines
and bird houses
sobbing to himself
quietly crying in his shed.
Drinks Advocaat.

When drunk driving home
from dinner in Parnell
everyone called the Witches' House
2 conical towers,
turrets,
2 old women,
aunts,
he sings the old rousing drinking songs.

The old Nazi, puffy red cheeks,
remembers Jews
screaming like geese
as the bullets strike.

AfterWW2
through Vatican ratlines
—good Catholic he was—
fast out of Lithuania
off to Argentina hidden on a cargo boat.

But the business failed,
in a factory store room
put his gun to his head.

The aunts called him across the Pacific
to pretty daughters in national dress
at all the festivals,
his wife keeping house for the nuns.

He could be so quiet and still
as to be absent from the room.
Funny enough, he was a people person:
he wanted to be popular.
We had that in common.

First memory (consciousness)

Patsy Cline sings 'Crazy'
on the radio.

The blue curtain
moves
back and forth
my teeth connect
a shiny slickness
the lead paint
of my yellow cot.

Outside
cicadas and humming bees.
My mother cooking
bangs pots and pans.

In the wind
the blue curtain.

Who's thawed the peanut-eyed snowman?

Paper, pastels, slate and chalk;
May hay and August corn;
sweat, soap and talcum powder;
carrot and potato soup—
odors from the age of daydream,
as neat as four decades ago.

Almost all the rest has disappeared,
gone blank and mute within the tangle,
except for a trickle of blood below the knee
and savage screams across the schoolyard.
Where is the mighty, stately elm
that used to tower at the center of our realm?
The iron roundabout? The secret hideaway?
Who's thawed the peanut-eyed snowman?
What's become of his straw hat and besom?
How weird I have to travel over a thousand miles
to investigate the matter, to feel at ease,
free and brave enough to take such backward leaps!
Most times they bring along sedate, thin sorrow;
now and then unexplainable release;
long-awaited-for disruption, smooth disorientation.

One of the remotest goes like this:
say, do, kiss, letter or will?
A kiss on her freckled cheek, without a word,
I would have liked my sole reply to be—
say, however, is just what I would always say.
Remember seems my only choice today.

Mare Nostrum

The sun still rises from the Dardanelles,
draws an arc to Africa
and sets upon the Pillars of Hercules,
while the eagle has ceased to sweep the surge,
does not fly from end to end anymore.

Sunken down the shoals
off the French Riviera,
hulks of warships act as treasure chests
to the thrill of blue-eyed divers
from outside the acknowledged world.

Someplace around Byzantium,
forlorn in the dark of a crypt
under layers of later erections,
the gold insignia Odoacer shipped to Zeno
await retrieval and upholding.

Looked-after by zealous Italic sitters,
ebony-skinned children
of well-to-do Germanic families
gather colored pebbles on the shingles
of Capri's exclusive inlets.

On the sand of deserted beaches
along the Gulf of Taranto,
captive in the spirals of fossilized shells,
the trumpet of Hannibal's exhausted elephants
reechoes through the millennia.

Reading Our Heritage:

Some early New Zealand poets of value

Comment by Mark Pirie

I

The recent publicity surrounding the October 2012 Frankfurt Book Fair included a website (the governmental 'NZ @ Frankfurt') with a brief literary history of New Zealand. It contained the following:

We are travellers, pioneers, lovers of the land and sea and we live in a multi-cultural society that is forging new paths embracing all these aspects.

If there was a starting point at which New Zealand literature began to flourish, it was the 1930s. New publishing enterprises were established and blossomed, writers—loosening the chains that bound most to the Motherland of Great Britain—found validity in expressing themselves in a 'New Zealand voice'.

Before that, however, was Katherine Mansfield.

Born Katherine Beauchamp, it was she who laid the foundations for a new New Zealand literature to evolve. Her short life ended in 1923 at the age of 34 but she remains revered. She penned short stories that included New Zealand places and experiences, wanting, she wrote, 'To make my own country leap in the eyes of the Old World'.

This idea that there was nothing of interest in New Zealand writing before the 1930s except Mansfield is a common one, and sadly misleading.

The 'nothing before the '30s myth' appears often in New Zealand anthologies of poetry from Allen Curnow onwards. Our literary historians have done no better than our anthologists, e.g. *99 Ways into New Zealand Poetry* or the *Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English* 'Poetry' chapters. They seem to have missed early New Zealand writers of value and perhaps have never read or known of them.

What we have now in the early 21st century is a non-literate culture. By 'non-literate', I mean that for years national histories and anthologies have appeared in New Zealand without full knowledge of the texts or poets actually there. Because of this, we have yet to produce a historical anthology of our best poetry, and our knowledge of our heritage has diminished from the actions of our anthologists like Curnow and academics or literary critics such as E H McCormick, however well intentioned they may have been. Alexander and Currie's 1906 *New Zealand Verse* remains one of our best representative selections.

For years, I (like a number of others) admired Curnow's introduction and selection in his *Caxton Book of New Zealand Verse 1923–45* but after reading the texts actually available in this time period I've realised how limited the selection has become. Curnow's later poetry, as Robert Creeley once said in conversation with Alistair Paterson, is 'plainly remarkable' and some of his earlier verse and sonnets. Yet I don't think this praise for his poetry still applies to his anthology selections.

Recent academics and writers have made a start on coming to terms with our early writers and poets, e.g. Wattie and Robinson's sound *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, the New Zealand Electronic Text Centre's work on William Golder and its digitisation of early texts, Manhire's *100 New Zealand Poems* (1994), Stephanie de Montalk's biography of Potocki de Montalk, K R Howe's edition of Edward Tregear, Stafford and Williams's *Maoriland*, McQueen's anthology of early poetry *The New Place* (1993), Leggott's work on Robin Hyde and her role with the New Zealand electronic poetry centre (nzepec), Whiteford's edition of Eileen Duggan, Michael O'Leary's recent thesis on national women's writing 1945–1970, and Niel Wright and Rowan Gibbs who've been publishing works on early New Zealand authors since the 1980s. There have also been posthumous collections of poetry published by families of early authors (Jean Bartlett's *My Simple Life: Selected Poems 1930–1990* (2012)) as well as international digitisation of early New Zealand texts published overseas or selections of early New Zealand poetry made for websites like the University of Toronto's RPO (Representative Poetry Online).

Papers Past (the new digital archive of New Zealand's heritage newspapers) must take most of the kudos for letting us search and find early poets and authors that for years have remained hidden or—if they did find book publication—stored in the National Library of New Zealand.

Since 2010, I have actually sat down to read all the New Zealand poetry books and online newspapers back to the 19th century that we independently hold in the Poetry Archive of New Zealand Aotearoa as well as in the Turnbull Library in Wellington and on Papers Past. Most of these writers have not been 'lost' and are present in J C Andersen's excellent bibliography, *Author's Week 1936*. I have made a start on this huge task as I believe each generation needs to re-read their literary heritage but there are still more poets to look at.

This article then is to give a different picture to our national anthologies and literary histories by introducing some of our neglected and forgotten poets all deserving of a place in our literary history, and perhaps remind readers and fellow poets of their value.

II Early Women Poets

As Michael O'Leary's recent PhD thesis (published as *Wednesday's Women*, 2012) makes clear, women were certainly under-represented after the 1930s and until the '70s. From what I've read online in Papers Past newspapers 1890–1940s this was most likely not the case in regards to their treatment by male editors Siegfried Eichelbaum, F A De la Mare, J H E Schroder, Noel Hoggard, C A Marris, J C Andersen, Ernest Currie, Walter Alexander, Quentin Pope and journalist Pat Lawlor. J C Reid too in his survey of early New Zealand writing writes at some length on Eileen Duggan's work. Camaraderie (for the most part) between men and women prevailed through these years, including support for our women Suffragists and the beginnings of the New Zealand Women Writers' and Artists' Society in the '30s (Lawlor was a patron and Marris a guest speaker). This is particularly noticeable with The Spike group at Victoria College (1902–15) and Schroder and Marris's newspaper editing at *The Sun* and Marris's *Evening Post* 'Postscripts' column, which were very inclusive of women poets.

There were a number of competent women poets writing between 1870 and 1950. Not many receive attention in official histories. A list of those not normally written up in the *New Zealand Oxford History* or *Companion* (and not in *The New Place*) would include: Marie R Randle (whose book foreword was written by Pember Reeves), M A J Wall, Patricia Mary Buckley, Margaret A Sinclair (aka Roslyn), Ivy Gibbs, Esma North, Mary E Heath, Kathleen Hawkins and Marjory L Nicholls. There are valuable qualities in these poets. Dame Ngaio Marsh bibliographer Rowan Gibbs has done substantial work on Wall and Randle in 2012, as well as sportsman and poet W W Robinson. I've only seen a handful of poems by Buckley and Heath and no book publication by them. Nicholls, however, would be the standout among them, along with Ivy Gibbs. A notable underrated woman editor of the period is Helen Longford, who edited *A Gift Book of New Zealand Verse* in 1931 (under the pseudonym John O'Dreams), the *New Zealand Mercury* as well as the poetry page of the *New Zealand Radio Record*.

Ivy Gibbs (1886?–1966) is a poet who I've spent much time tracing and archiving in small booklets recently. Details about her life are still unclear, and she has kept her biographical details well hidden. What we do know is that she came to New Zealand from Australia. She was possibly born in the UK. Widely published in Australian newspapers and journals like *The Bulletin*, *The Aussie*, *The Triad* and the *Australian Woman's Mirror* she kept up her publishing in New Zealand mainly through the *New Zealand Mercury* edited by Longford in the 1930s and later the *New*

Zealand Herald in Auckland. She was for a time on the committee of the New Zealand Women Writers' and Artists' Society. Pat Lawlor was a friend of hers and wrote of her in the book column for *New Zealand Railways Magazine*. His copy of her book *The Day is in a Pensive Mood* (Ilfracombe, UK, 1949) is in the Hocken Library, Dunedin.

Gibbs was an innovative enthusiast for jazz music, borrowing the rhythms and diction (in some cases) from the Black American Ragtime music and poets of the Harlem Renaissance. She was also a gipsy and wanderer, and never married. At her best, she achieves a highly musical and memorable form of Romantic and Georgian lyric poetry that could easily be set to popular music.

Patricia Mary Buckley (b. 1912) is an interesting case. I wouldn't say she was a great poet but seems to be in her youth an effective one and among the first women to use more Modernist practices. I've only seen several poems by her in the *New Zealand Mercury*, which also printed a number of women's prose poems along the lines of Mansfield's earlier vignettes. Buckley went to St Mary's and Wellington East Girls' College and attended Victoria University College in Wellington. Her poems seem quite powerful and as good as a lot of the feminist writing of the 1970s. I don't know what became of her after the 1930s. Her name may have changed through marriage and she may have left the country before the Second World War started. Here is one of her early '30s experimental *Mercury* pieces as a young woman:

ESCAPE

Beneath the white skull of the day
I woke,
Knew once again
Four narrow walls stretched to a prison mile,
Minute pandemonium of sounds
Together vast as silence.
Love
Brushed by the dark wing of sleep
Turned to regret.
I sought unfettered peace,
Some desert place at noon,
Barbed cactus plants that tear the quivering heat,
Silence that beats in tumult
Where space crowds down.

Marjory L Nicholls (1890–1930) was a widely respected figure, a gifted orator, elocution teacher and art and literature lecturer (a member of The Spike group) esteemed by men and women in her day and by poets of the calibre of Eileen Duggan. She was widely travelled (England, France, Ceylon, India, America and Australia) and the daughter of a prominent Wellington actor, H E Nicholls. She married John Hannah in Ceylon and later appeared in print with her married name Mrs Marjory L Hannah. Her death from a bus stop accident in 1930 cut short a major talent.

This seems to be the case from what I've seen in Niel Wright's archival edition of the two volume *Complete Poems of M L Nicholls* (assembled from her three published collections in 2009). Wright has gathered pages of material on her suggesting a future biography. A selection of her poetry is online at RPO (Representative Poetry Online). I'll end with her haunting lyrical poem 'The Homely Ghost':

THE HOMELY GHOST

I shall come back
Very quietly, very softly,
A little brown shadow.

I shall not come
When the moon is white like a bone,
And the house-dogs howl.
Not on a dark night
With uneasy winds,
When the ivy scratches the window,
And the paper stirs on the wall.

I shall come back
In the Autumn,
In the early twilight.
I shall wear a russet cloak
And have a basket on my arm
With red apples and brown nuts in it,
And golden honey-comb.

I shall watch the children playing
And they will not be afraid.
The old woman will just walk past and nod;
Walk past, and into the beech-wood

With its coppery leaves on the ground,
And down by the pond, and the fields
With their big yellow ricks.

I shall pass the cottage-windows—
Those with red curtains and glinting with firelight.
I shall watch the blue smoke from the chimneys
And think of the groups around the fire.
Will any be thinking of me?
I don't mind—
I am just a little brown shadow, flitting past.

Must I leave it?
Cold and alone, must I go
Through the wilds beyond Earth
To the courts where the white angels stand
August, majestic?

Be certain, I shall come back.

III Early Men Poets

As with the women poets the rise of Modernism and modern poetry forms does seem to have excluded a number of our male poets, writing in a more Romantic, Victorian or Georgian vein. There are certainly more fine poets than our literary histories and anthologies would lead us to believe. A list of the male poets of value between 1870 and 1950 (not in *The New Place*) would include O E Hugo, Richard A Singer, Henry Manning Moore (aka Autolykus), Rev. J H Haslam, John MacLennan, G P Williams, C W Grace (the subject of a recent book by Niel Wright), Robert J Pope, John Barr (a Wellington writer who moved to Australia), Erik de Mauny, Ronald B Castle, George E Dewar, S G August, Arnold Cork, Siegfried Eichelbaum (a comic verse writer), C R Allen, Ernest L Eyre, H W Gretton, G Flavell, Seaforth Mackenzie, Potocki de Montalk (who moved to Europe), and Rex Hunter. The editors Schroder, Quentin Pope, Hoggard and Marris and journalist Lawlor also wrote verses. The full extent we are yet to see or discover.

I'll now go over some of the higher performers briefly. Rev. J H Haslam (1874–1969) was a Methodist Church Minister stationed across the country in diverse locations. He began writing verse at an early age, joined the Wesleyan Literary and Debating Society in the early 1890s and studied at Auckland University College. His only book of verse *Scenes in Southland*

(London, 1926) is now available from the British Library as a download on Apple iTunes. His edition of Rev. G S Harper's gold-digging diaries in Westland is a heritage text.

Haslam is chiefly a sonneteer. As such, he is an inspired one. His verses show technical flair, energy and a wide reading knowledge. Admittedly, he has a predilection for spiritual cant at times but he achieves a universal quality in his personal sonnets relating to a death of a close friend:

AWARUA BAY

To B.

Whene'er I view from out your bridal home
The wide expanse of Awarua Bay,
I think of my departed friend, and say:
This view he loved, here from the ocean foam
Upon the beach below, unto the Dome
Among the distant hills, with all the play
Of light and shade revealed throughout the day,
When all is clear as far as eye can roam.

I love it, too, the stretch of water wide
That shimmers in the light of sun and moon,
And varies with the movement of the tide;
But most, the soft light of late afternoon
Upon those far-off hills when purple-dyed,
Like that we watched together once in June.

Robert J Pope (1865–1949) was a well-known club cricketer and primary schoolmaster and teacher in Hawke's Bay, Levin, Wairapapa and Wellington. He was well known for his school song 'New Zealand, My Homeland' selected by E Douglas Tayler for *The Dominion Song Book* (1930; 1948) for use in New Zealand schools. Pope was largely a parodist and a gifted writer of witty political and sporting verse, publishing mainly in the *New Zealand Free Lance* and the *Evening Post*. However, he did write some fine Romantic lyrics during his Maoriland period, collected in *Some New Zealand Lyrics* (1928). Pope wrote till the 1940s and emerged a more modern writer in his popular satires of Wellington city-life and was a precursor to the 'Wellington group' of poets in the 1950s. I've just finished editing a scholarly restoration of his poetry: *King Willow: Selected Poems* (HeadworX, 2012).

Rex Hunter (1888–1960) is an odd one out. The *Oxford Companion* has a good piece on him by Roger Robinson and Harvey McQueen. He was writing in a more modern and Modernist manner to most of the list given above. He moved to the States, becoming a successful journalist, where he befriended Carl Sandburg in Chicago initially, wrote and had several one-act plays performed, then moved to New York where he briefly married the South Carolina poet Gamel Woolsey. The two did acting together at Woodstock in the early 1920s. He was later a next-door neighbour to the great American poet e. e. cummings.

A product of the decadent jazz age in America like Dorothy Parker, Hunter's poetry has a dark quality to it, showing the influence of Baudelaire, Swinburne and American poets. His epic autobiographical book poem, *The Saga of Sinclair* (1927) is admirable for its time, as are many of his shorter lyrics in *Call out of darkness* (1946), effectively his selected poems. He also wrote an entertaining satire on the Greenwich Village scene, the novel *Porlock* (1940) introduced by UK writer John Cowper Powys.

G Flavell (1913–1994) might be the most amazing find from this early period yet. Four of his sonnets appeared in *A Gift Book of New Zealand Verse* in 1931, after which he appears to be the student who finished his medical studies in Dunedin and moved to London becoming a well respected cardiovascular surgeon there and the author of the text *The Oesophagus* (London, 1963). He did keep up his literary interest there (we don't know if he kept writing and publishing in journals), and went to meetings of the Johnson Society. I'll end with his fine Georgian sonnet 'New Zealand', probably written as a teenager at Waitaki or Otago Boys' when visiting England on a holiday trip:

NEW ZEALAND

I've been in England when glad April's there,
And walked in chequered fields gold-pied with flowers,
And gazed at dusty relics—castle towers
That moulder in dead grandeur everywhere;
I've seen Egyptian tombs, with treasures rare,
Which in forgotten days had been the dowers
Of poor dead queens. I've passed long, magic hours
In distant lands, immeasurably fair;

But though my feet have wandered, my heart stayed
Enchanted by each green New Zealand hill,
And lingered there in every fern-bower'd glade;
For, in my youth, I heard a tui thrill,
And watched the sunset on the mountains fade
To silent evening, and the land grow still.

IV Epilogue

This article (although not comprehensive) at least offers a start on this burgeoning field of study in our literature. For instance, I haven't mentioned Karl Wolfskehl's poetry in German or the Māori poetry and songs (Mōteatea), the pre-European oral poetry of the country. Vaughan Rapatahana addresses this in *Landfall* 223 (May 2012), and his article is an excellent addition to our understanding in this area. Michael O'Leary's book *Wednesday's Women* also identifies some of the early women poets/songwriters like Maewa Kaihau and Tuini Ngawai.

Another thing to consider is that if all these poets missed between 1870 and 1950 are still to receive their dues, there will doubtless be more poets missed in any given period. We can't be sure our anthologies or histories are accurate for any time period. This would call into question the new AUP *Anthology of New Zealand Literature* or the recent IIML series *Best New Zealand Poems* (2002-) and its subsequent anthology—a nod to Marris's effort in the 1930s and 1940s or an attempt to emulate the more recent *Best American Poems* series. Either way, I've never felt a title like 'Best' poems is a wise move; there could well be better poems if a search was made in the future, as was the case with Marris's series.

Recent indications of further study by the *Journal of New Zealand Literature* and the University of Otago and digitisation of early authors' texts by the New Zealand Electronic Text Centre and various libraries worldwide, along with RPO and the nzepc's online texts, suggest my work with the Poetry Archive of New Zealand Aotearoa (PANZA) is not unique. The National Library of New Zealand also continues to add more newspapers to Papers Past so there could be more early authors to uncover there in the future. This is great to see. The more people who take an interest in our early writers and texts the better it is for us as a nation in the long-term in restoring and revising the past.

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At the White Coast

Janet Charman

Auckland, Auckland University Press, 2012, \$24.99

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Reviewed by Nicholas Reid

So here we are in New Zealand, miles from anywhere, not in narrow seas and with distance looking our way, constantly biting our nails over our identity, wondering how Pasifika we are or how Palagi, how Maori or how Pakeha and how soon we'll be Asian. (*Look at the faces in Queen Street! I thought I was in Shanghai!*). But at least we know we are somehow New Zealanders. Unique. With our own identity, however it may be defined. Not Brits, but Kiwis.

Except that we're lying to ourselves. For in our deepest hearts we know we come from Elsewhere, and are still umbilically attached thereto. Elsewhere is Britain. Or England. Or London. This psychic fact is now being acknowledged a little more openly than 'twas in the gone days of literary 'nationalism'. (See Felicity Barnes's historical thesis *New Zealand's London*, Auckland University Press, 2012). When 20-somethings take their compulsory OE, they may visit more unexpected places en route, but London is still the magnet.

What a tedious long prologue this is to a consideration of these poems! But a necessary prologue nevertheless. The 55 poems of Janet Charman's *At the White Coast* chart her own London OE 30-plus years ago, and therefore at once paint scenes familiar to generations of her compatriots. In the opening, eponymous poem *the ferry stops/ at the white/ coast/ ribbon cliffs/ secure the island*. So our first stop is iconic Dover where there were once bluebirds over. Thereafter there are evocations of carrying packs; youngsters roughing it; sleeping in dormitories and using communal kitchens where there is a 'beardie' (*talk to him/ of anything . . . but all his roads/ choke in Tolkien*); buying an *astronomical theatre ticket*; finding digs; hitch-hiking and being picked up by inappropriate truck-drivers; side-trips to Ireland, to Germany, to Paris.

But above all there is London. Presumptuous to assume that these poems are all autobiographical. Doubtless the volume is multi-vocal and some of the first-person voices are not the poet's own. For all that, the core of *At the White Coast* appears to be Charman's youthful experience working for Social Welfare in London. We get what are apparently the 'cases' she and her colleagues encountered: old beneficiaries who are involved in the sex

industry; illegal immigrants and psychiatric cases; elderly people being moved to new quarters; sad or resigned people. The youthful Charman sometimes chokes on the meanness of her work and on how coldly clients have to be handled. But she still does the work. She also (in the poem 'a key swan') meets the rough edge of English industrial action.

And back at the office they have a 'team lunch' where *an older woman at a corner desk/ works every hour that can be broken open/ and since she's all tied up in her respect/ for the psychotherapeutic conventions of Freudian intervention/ finds herself/ because it would be ridiculous not to/ sharing with me her secret recipe for trifle / homemade custard . . .* The volume's saddest case, for sure.

Beyond the reportage, Charman does a nice line in irony. See the self-deprecation in the poems 'i must get out' and 'i took my cold to work'. See the sequence of eight shorties called 'eight walkouts', presumably being eight things which the poet can do without, including inappropriate sexual comments and trendy theatre productions.

But the greatest irony of all is her discovery, in a most paradoxical way, of those very English phenomena, class feeling and snobbery. The poem 'in the study group' presents a gathering of ardent feminist and Marxist literary women in which, it transpires, some of the most ardent are also living comfortably off daddy's or hubby's earnings and trust funds. Ah yes! Vocal social radicalism often bears little relation to its proponents' actual lives.

There are also ghosts stalking this volume. The ghosts of Charman's English forebears and especially her grandmothers, whose English work experiences (so different and yet so similar) are occasionally compared with the poet's own. As an echo chamber *At the White Coast* has depth and resonance and bounces off more than the 1970s or 1980s.

Any misgivings about this resonant, evocative, vivid and often feeling collection? A few. As in her previous volumes, Charman is no fan of capital letters. One standard literary guide says this is part of the 'democratisation' of her style. Is it? In an age when your word processor will automatically print 'I' as the first-person singular, Charman's choice of 'i' looks more like affectation than democracy. Let me sniff, too, at some of the lineation, not always justified by sound, by sense, by any other criteria.

But enough of this whingeing. *At the White Coast* is an excellent epitome of a New Zealander's English OE. I doubt that she will be the last to do her English OE in poetry. There'll be new words over the white cliffs of Dover tomorrow. Just you wait and see.

Books and magazines in brief

this hill, all it's about is lifting to a higher level

Vaughan Gunson (Steele Roberts publishers; 64pp, \$19.99).

At first glance you might think Vaughan Gunson is a minimalist. The language is pared-back and the imagery largely of everyday (Northland) things. But in *this hill, all it's about is lifting to a higher level*, Gunson moves far beyond the literal statement. He knows that there is a world of yearning behind the physical data that the eye picks up. In the poem 'Parisian backstreets are not here', a local street becomes the literary Left Bank of a student's dreams. Poems such as 'dialectics' and 'a right lineage' posit the heroism in everyday things like looking after children. Adults are privy to things—such as mortality—that literal-minded children cannot see. And if there is horseplay on the street in the poem 'our holy house', there is also the repeated assertion of the importance and dignity of poetry itself. The poem 'at work' confesses *I don't live on a family estate near Boston/ or get regular payments from a trust*, but in such circumstances the poet is even more committed to a regular schedule of writing. This is an accessible, unpretentious and humane collection drawing on a distinctively New Zealand scene.

The Truth Garden

Emma Neale (Otago University Press, 64pp, [hardback] \$30).

Life is not always serene, even for a mother in settled circumstances with children to love. In Emma Neale's latest collection, the eponymous phrase 'the Truth Garden' comes from the poem 'Rootstock', and refers to the one straggly, unkempt garden in a too-tidy street of over-manicured lawns. But the unkempt garden is the only one that makes the scene interesting. Here is a rule of poetry as of life. Serenity in itself is not very dramatic. The rough edges and uncertainties are what keep us reading.

Emma Neale can certainly be dramatic. The poem 'Seismograph' concerns an all-out adult tantrum and break-down, in very forgivable circumstances. It is violent enough to be cathartic. But the great themes of *The Truth Garden* are domesticity, motherhood, and the tensions and hidden shoals of marriage or of any close relationship. Parents are scared that they will miss baby's cry amid the other noises of suburb. A 6-year-old boy puzzles over the human body and its big meaning as he watches his mother dress. In 'Fidelity Sestina' a couple speculate uneasily on having affairs. The 'solution' the end of poem offers is a little incongruous

after the uncomfortable issues the poem raises. Even when Neale is not addressing overtly the domestic scene, her poems wind back to mothering images. Watch from a beach as a windsurfer rides rough seas ('Open Air Theatre') and you worry about the children. See a duck with a line of ducklings that diminishes daily ('Brood') and you want to shield the children from the fact of mortality.

Neale is skilled in a variety of versification, and also essays the odd prose poem (the list of 'Girls' High'; and 'Toothed Moon'). There is an extraordinary warmth and intimacy to these sympathetic poems, often centred on a full knowledge that all stages of life are provisional. Winner of the 2011 Kathleen Grattan Award for Poetry.

Breakfast with Epiphanies

Owen Bullock (Ocean Books, 84pp, \$19:95).

Breakfast with Epiphanies is Owen Bullock's second collection of haiku. It contains 79 haiku. But what are haiku? I always believed haiku had the strict structure of 5-7-5 syllables. This appears not to be Bullock's definition. In *Breakfast with Epiphanies*, haiku are pithy and sometimes paradoxical images, of one or two or three lines. They can be ironic, symbolic and sometimes purely descriptive.

The one that opens this collection is among the best: *a bee/ through all these grasses/ to the thistle flower*. The mind of the reader fills this out to comprehend the complexity and miracle of the bee's journey. There is room for literary allusion. The haiku *a man/ drunk on poetry/ looks at the thistle* is presumably taking a sidelong glance at Hugh MacDiarmid. There is the one-line psychological symbolism of: *seagulls inland your stormy life*. And there is literal instruction: *first light/ I have to let go/ of yesterday*. One cannot read this book without noting that these pithy statements are principally grounds for reflection.

Fucking Poets

John Gallas (Cold Hub Press, Lyttelton [three chapbooks, 30pp each], no price given).

I salute with unfeigned pleasure the three chapbooks that constitute John Gallas's *Fucking Poets*. Subtitled 'Thirty Poems of Merry Obscenity', they consist of verse soliloquies by the sexual partners of thirty poets, from Edmund Spenser to Thom Gunn, either in the act of copulation or just post-copulation. As all the poets are male, most of the speakers are female, though a few homosexual poets are represented (Edward

Fitzgerald, A.E. Housman, Wilfred Owen, James Elroy Flecker et al) so a few of the speakers are male.

The shade of the censorious nudges my elbow. It does not say that this enterprise is obscene, rude and immoral. The censorious no longer use such terms, for fear of ridicule. Rather the shade insists this is a retro enterprise smacking of the old 'bookman' and male chauvinist. But to the shade I say 'Avaunt and quit my sight!' and return to enjoying these chapbooks in the cheerful spirit in which they are intended, which certainly does no violence to the autonomy and dignity of women. *Fucking Poets* incidentally displays much real erudition on John Gallas's part and a sure understanding of what concerned the poets who are depicted. I delighted to learn that Matthew Arnold's *member was beautiful as alabaster./ Corinthian in its order, I should say,/ planted in curls.* I must confess, though, there is the ghost of Rambling Sid Rumpo when Layamon *winds up his wodger; and throngs him in thrustly.*

Voicetracks: Poems 2002–2012

Jan Kemp (Puriri Press, Auckland, 72pp, \$30).

I frankly and freely confess that I do not know where I am with the poems of (German-resident New Zealander) Jan Kemp. This collection, handsomely produced and illustrated with six colour photographs, draws heavily on Kemp's European wanderings and cultural experience. Although the tone is often quizzical and pensive, the first section is mainly a celebration of eccentric creative effort. Poems about Goethe in Italy query how much we can assume his sojourn there was as artists have depicted it. 'At port Lligat' depicts Salvador Dali living with Gala and turning landscape into surrealist dreams . . . but another poem asks whether Dali later got past it. In Menton, the poet wonders how much Katherine Mansfield was aware that her writing would establish a whole mental mythology for New Zealanders.

In Germany, however, Kemp's preoccupations change and she takes an ironic look at how politicians once carved up the map of Europe at Potsdam. A visit to a former Nazi prison can't help but be an elegy for those judicially murdered there.

Later, there is a section on personal themes of love and affection, with more playful and experimental typography.

The volume is appropriately named. This is a work of voicetracks, not of one single voicetrack because the poet's tone, style and perspective change considerably as one would expect in works written over a decade.

Notes on contributors

Raewyn Alexander (Auckland) is an editor and writer of fiction and poetry whose work has frequently appeared in *PNZ*.

Ruth Arnison (Dunedin) has had her poems published widely. She edits the quarterly *Poems in the Waiting Room*.

Trent Appleman (Christchurch), born in America, has previously contributed to *PNZ*.

Narissa Armstrong (Christchurch) makes her first appearance in this issue.

Miriam Barr (Auckland) is one of the organizers of Poetry Live events and has been widely published.

Louis Daniel Brodsky (USA) is a distinguished and much-published American poet. Some of his many volumes have appeared in both English and French.

Owen Bullock (Katikati) has frequently appeared in *PNZ*. He guest-edited *PNZ* 45 and his collection *the sky isn't big enough* was reviewed in *PNZ* 43.

Terry Carson (Auckland) is a lawyer by training. He writes fiction and makes his first appearance in this issue of *PNZ*.

Sue Clennell (Australia) is a widely-published poet who makes her fourth appearance in this issue of *PNZ*.

Eugene Dubnov (Israel) was born in Riga and educated in Russia, Israel and England, where he has held many academic posts. He is a very widely published poet and playwright in both the Russian and English languages.

James Fagan (Palmerston North) enjoys presenting his poetry in schools. He has appeared a number of times in *PNZ*.

Sue Fitchett (Waiheke Island) is a conservationist, former psychotherapist and long-time contributor to *PNZ*.

Charles Hadfield (Auckland) is a frequent contributor to *PNZ*. He has lived and worked in many countries, and has had three collections published by Salzburg University Press.

Trevor Hayes (Wellington) works as a landscape gardener and has published poetry in many leading New Zealand journals including *PNZ*.

Dorothy Howie (Auckland) divides her time between academic institutions in New Zealand and England. She writes books on the teaching of thinking, and has contributed to many poetry journals.

Hayden Hyams (Auckland) is making his fifth appearance in *PNZ* in this issue.

Robert K. Johnson (USA) is a retired professor of English at Suffolk University, Boston, Massachusetts. He has recently had published *Choir of Day—New and Selected Poems*.

Noel King (Ireland), resident of Tralee, appears for the third time in *PNZ* in this issue. Frequently concerned with bucolic themes, he has been published extensively in international poetry journals and he edits Doghouse Books.

Henry Ludbrook (Nelson) makes his first appearance in *PNZ* in this issue.

Carolyn McCurdie (Dunedin) makes her second appearance in this issue of *PNZ*.

Robert McLean (Lyttleton) was the featured poet in *PNZ* 40. His poems have appeared in more than 90 magazines in New Zealand and elsewhere.

Don Macleannan (Nelson) makes his first appearance in this issue of *PNZ*.

Janet Newman (Levin), an honours student at Massey University, has appeared three time previously in *PNZ* and has been widely published in other New Zealand poetry journals.

Lance Nizami (USA) lives and works in California and makes his first appearance in this issue of *PNZ*.

Stanley M. Noah (USA), since graduating from the University of Texas in Dallas, has been widely published in American poetry reviews.

Jane North (UK) is a writer and English teacher based in Vicenza, Italy.

Mark Pirie (NZ) is a prominent poet and an important New Zealand editor and publisher.

Joanna Preston (Canterbury) is a poet, editor and freelance creative writing teacher. Her first collection was *The Summer King*.

Jeremy Roberts (Auckland) is a widely-published poet who is particularly concerned with poetry as performance and who regularly MCs Auckland's 'Poetry Live' events.

Aaron Robertson (Hikurangi) is a poet and musician who makes his first *PNZ* appearance in this issue.

Ila Selwyn (Auckland), originally from Winnipeg, is a much-published poet who organizes West Auckland's 'Rhythm and Verse' events.

Madeleine Slavick (Carterton) is a much-published poet and photographer whose most recent book, *Fifty Stories Fifty Images*, is an exploration of Hong Kong.

Ginny Sullivan (Greytown) has been widely published in New Zealand, Irish and American poetry journals and has appeared previously in *PNZ*.

Bill Sutton (Napier) has worked as a scientist, politician and policy analyst. His poems have appeared in *PNZ* and *Takahe*.

Aysha Vitapa-Aspinall (Auckland), a graduate in psychology, works in mental health. She makes her first *PNZ* appearance in this issue.

Roland Vogt (Wellington) is a retired civil servant.

Jack Walsh (Australia) has never been published before and makes his first appearance in this issue of *PNZ*.

Alessio Zanelli (Italy) has had his poetry published in journals in many countries. English is his second language and his writing preference.