

The Auckland University Press Anthology of New Zealand Literature

Edited by Jane Stafford and Mark Williams. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2012.

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This landmark publication is the first single-volume, multi-genre anthology of major New Zealand writing, spanning more than 200 years of New Zealand history and incorporating the work of some 200 individual authors. The anthology is structured chronologically and informed by 'neo-historicist' principles: the editors 'believe that literature is seen at its most interesting' when illuminated by 'a sense of historical and cultural context'.¹ To this end, the volume is divided into 11 sections, each of which is prefaced by a brief introductory essay offering salient details about the literary/cultural context informing the period in focus, but each section also includes thematic subheadings grouping particular authors and excerpts together on the basis of shared preoccupations. These allow the reader to trace, for example, the treatment of war, or the environment, or sexualities, across a broad sweep of New Zealand history. Most excerpted material is literary, but travel accounts, essays, public documents and letters are included in the service of the volume's intended status as 'a knife through time' (1).²

This mixing of genres is particularly evident in the first two sections (focused around the 'contact' era beginning with Cook's landfall in 1769, and the 'colonial' period of the 1820s-1860s), which feature travel accounts, journal entries, letters, and treaty documents alongside poetry and fiction excerpts. The editors include extracts from well-known 'canonical' works (such as F.E. Maning's *Old New Zealand* (1863)) alongside texts (such as H. Butler Stoney's *Taranaki: A Tale of the War* 1861) that have until relatively recently suffered from a 'critical eclipse' largely because they preceded the nationalist era of New Zealand writing, during and after which much nineteenth-century New Zealand literature was dismissed on the basis of its putative outmoded adherence to British literary/cultural models (3). The third section of the volume, 'Maoriland', traces the first steps towards this literary nationalism, documenting works (published mainly between 1890 and 1914) in which the indigenous culture of New Zealand, which was subjected to an ethnographic gaze in the earlier colonial phase, became 'absorbed and aestheticised' by writers attempting to 'fashion a writing that was distinctly of this place' (100). Many of the authors in this section (such as Jessie Mackay, Henry Lawson, A.A. Grace, Katherine Mansfield, Edith Searle Grossman, Blanche Baughan, William Satchell, and Apirana Ngata) are the focus of extended critical discussion in Stafford and Williams's monograph *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature, 1872-1914* (2006), which serves as an excellent companion to this section of the anthology.

Sections four and five cover the period from 1918 to 1940 and are divided into two 'opposing literary cultures': 'Between the Wars' covers the milieu of popular authors, literary women (such as Robin Hyde, Mansfield, Ursula Bethell and Jane Mander) and journalists; while 'Cultural Nationalism' centres on Curnow and fellow literary nationalists Charles Brasch, Denis Glover and Frank Sargeson, also registering the pessimism of the depression era (in the work of A.R.D. Fairburn, Douglas Stewart, John Mulgan and others). The dominance of white, male authors in this phase of New Zealand's literary history becomes attenuated in the 1950s literature explored in section six, which records the emergence of female poets such as Mary Stanley and Ruth Dallas, and of Maori/Pacific authors such as J.C. Sturm and Alistair Te Ariki Campbell. Unsurprisingly, a substantial cluster of excerpts exploring 'the moral plane of war' are also included in this part of the volume, and an extract from Bill Pearson's influential essay 'Fretful Sleepers: A Sketch of New Zealand Behaviour and Its Implications for the Artist' (1952) appears in a grouping focused around questions of national identity and culture.

The extracts in section seven, centring on the 1960s, are selected to suggest a transition from a conservative to a 'more openly radical' stance in New Zealand literature; this socio-political transition is accompanied by experiments with new literary modes and genres such as the gothic, the surreal, and magical realism. A range of material engaging with the new social milieu of urbanised Maori (who moved to the cities in large numbers following the second world war) appears here, both by Pakeha writers (such as Noel Hilliard and James K. Baxter), and by Maori authors such as Rowley Habib and Peter (Pita) Sharples. An engagement with Cold War politics is evident in antinuclear poems by Keith Sinclair and Hone Tuwhare, and a new frankness about sexuality emerges in poetry and prose by Fleur Adcock, Maurice Duggan and others.

The 1970s material in section eight registers an even more 'confident concerted presence' of Maori and women writers, selected to represent the emergence of explicit political agendas in response to 'changing roles and expectations'. A selection of poems by Rachel McAlpine, Lauris Edmond, Hilaire Kirkland, Jan Kemp and Fleur Adcock engage with contemporary gender/sexual politics, while Ruth Dallas's 'Pioneer Woman with Ferrets' reconsiders the backbreaking domestic milieu of Pakeha settler women from an implicitly second-wave feminist perspective. A subsection focused on the Maori Renaissance includes figureheads Witi Ihimaera, Patricia Grace, Hone Tuwhare and Apirana Taylor, and an excerpt from Albert Wendt's landmark novel *Sons for the Return Home* (1973) explores the alienation experienced by the Pacific Island immigrant communities that formed in New Zealand's urban centres during the post-war era. Alongside these explorations of racial and sexual politics is a range of writing selected for its aesthetic experimentation, emerging from 'a counter-culture dream world' of 'lyrical surrealism', 'subjective intensity' and linguistic play that signalled the belated engagement with international (post)modernism evident in New Zealand literature from the late 1960s onwards.

Section nine features material indexing the 'trauma and upheaval' of the 1980s, including the controversial Springbok rugby tour of 1981; mid-decade economic restructuring; and the stock market crash of 1989. The editors' note a shift in the preoccupations of women and Maori writers, who transition from the political imperatives of the 1970s into a more confident experimentalism rooted in the convergence with 'mainstream' literary culture. Notable in this section are two dramatic extracts, one from Maurice Shadbolt's Gallipoli drama *Once on Chunuk Bair* (1982) and the other from Greg McGee's *Foreskin's Lament* (1980/81), a prescient commentary on masculinity and rugby culture that emerged immediately prior to the furore over the Springbok tour. Drama specialists and enthusiasts may well be disappointed to discover that this genre is not as well-represented in other sections of the anthology: one might have expected some engagement with the work of Bruce Mason, Mervyn Thompson or Roger Hall, for example, or with a wider range of the many Maori, Pasifika and Asian dramatists to have emerged in recent decades (given that much of the most vibrant creative production within these communities falls within the fields of drama and the visual arts). The editors are right to claim that New Zealand has yet to experience the 'dramatic explosion of multicultural writing' witnessed in other settler colonies such as Australia and Canada (14), but a more explicit engagement with the histories and literary cultures of New Zealand's expanding Asian and Pacific Island immigrant communities would have better complemented the detailed and illuminating commentaries on Maori culture found throughout the volume. On the other hand, evidence of New Zealand's growing awareness of its location within international as well as local geopolitical networks is manifest in a range of material included here and in the final two sections of the anthology (entitled 'Cabin Fever: The Nineties' and 'How to Live Elsewhere'); these feature (inter alia) excerpts from Lloyd Jones's 2006 novel *Mr Pip* (a disturbingly visceral exploration of the Bougainville secessionist conflict of the late 1990s); Paula Morris's New York-based short story 'Like a Mexican' (2004/2008); and Alison Wong's *As the Earth Turns Silver* (2009), a novel focused on the persecuted Chinese immigrant communities that formed in New Zealand in the wake of the late-nineteenth-century gold rushes. Further, as Jane Stafford reveals, some notable omissions in the anthology are the result of problems negotiating

permissions: Vincent O’Sullivan, for example (an influential playwright whose work could have helped fill the drama lacuna mentioned above) declined to be included (as did Alan Duff), and the editors were unable to agree viable terms with the executors of Janet Frame’s estate.³

Established readers of New Zealand literature should find reading this anthology a stimulating experience, given that it combines canonical works with less familiar material, and appeals to established cultural memories as well as encouraging new angles of vision. Readers coming to New Zealand literature for the first time may find the section introductions and subheadings tantalisingly elliptical at times, and the lack of contextualising headnotes to accompany excerpts from longer works may prove disorienting on occasion, but given the sheer volume of primary material included in the anthology, such absences are entirely understandable (and the author biographies and bibliographies included at the end of the volume do help to offset them). Stafford’s and Williams’s volume is a major editorial achievement and a valuable resource for specialists and students alike.

¹ Jane Stafford, “‘The signs, the traces of my feeling’: Editing *The Auckland University Press Anthology of New Zealand Literature*”, *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 31, no. 2 (2013): 145-62, p. 155.

² ‘A knife through time’ is a formulation Stafford and Williams borrow from Maori poet Robert Sullivan’s poetry collection *Star Waka* (Auckland University Press, 1999), in order to convey the notion of ‘travers[ing] through the centuries’ (1).

³ Stafford, 2013, pp. 150, 154-5.