

**TRADE AND TRUE: ANTHOLOGIES FIFTY YEARS AFTER DONALD ALLEN'S
*THE NEW AMERICAN POETRY***

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The flourishing of the anthology as poetry product in New Zealand in the past decade is beyond question as the list below attests:

Big Smoke: New Zealand Poems 1960 – 1975, eds. Alan Brunton, Murray Edmond, Michele Leggott (Auckland: Auckland UP, 2000)

Big Weather: Poems of Wellington, selected by Gregory O'Brien and Louise White (Wellington: Mallinson Rendel, 2000)

The Happy Warrior: An Anthology of Australian and New Zealand Military Poetry, selected and compiled by Paul Barrett (Warrant officer Class 2) and Kerry B. Collinson (Hartwell, Vic: Sid Harta, 2001)

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

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

Listening to the Rain: An Anthology of Christchurch Haiku and Haibun (Christchurch: The Small White Teapot Haiku Group, 2002)

Snapshots on the Journey: Through Death and Remembrance, selected by Rob McLeod (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2002)

Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English, eds. Albert Wendt, Reina Whaitiri and Robert Sullivan (Auckland: Auckland UP, 2003)

Spirit in a Strange Land: A Selection of New Zealand Spiritual Verse, eds. Paul Morris, Harry Ricketts and Mike Grimshaw (Auckland: Godwit, 2002)

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

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

Under Flagstaff: An Anthology of Dunedin Poets, selected by Robin Law and Heather Murray (Dunedin: Otago UP, 2004)

121 New Zealand Poems, chosen by Bill Manhire (Auckland: Godwit, 2005)

A Heady Brew: A Selection of Poems from Porirua's Poetry Café (Porirua: Inkweed, 2005)

Zemlia Morei: Antologia Poezii Novoi Zelandii [Land of Seas: An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry], eds. Evgeny Pavlov and Mark Williams (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2005)

Small Poems for Busy People: Love, Friendship, Tears, Laughter, Family (Auckland: Cumulus, 2005)

Classic New Zealand Poets in Performance, eds. Jack Ross and Jan Kemp (Auckland: Auckland UP, 2006)

Life's a Beach. Comp. Mary de Ruyter (Auckland: New Holland P, 2006)

Contemporary New Zealand Poets in Performance, eds. Jack Ross and Jan Kemp (Auckland: Auckland UP, 2007)

Dear To Me: 100 New Zealanders Write About Their Favourite Poems (Auckland: Random House, 2007)

Kaupapa: New Zealand Poets, World Issues, eds. Hinemoana Baker and Maria McMillan (Wellington: Te Whaanganui-a-Tara Development Resource Centre, 2007)

The Earth's Deep Breathing: Garden Poems by New Zealand Poets, ed. Harvey McQueen (Auckland: Godwit, 2007)

A Good Handful: Great New Zealand Poems About Sex, ed. Stu Bagby (Auckland, Auckland UP, 2008)

Before the Sirocco, ed. Joanna Preston (Wellington: New Zealand Poetry Society, 2008)

Just Another Fantastic Anthology: Auckland in Poetry, ed. Stu Bagby (Auckland: Antediluvian P, 2008)

Moonlight: New Zealand Poems on Death and Dying, ed. Andrew Johnston (Auckland: Godwit, 2008)

New New Zealand Poets in Performance, eds. Jack Ross and Jan Kemp (Auckland: Auckland UP, 2008)

Swings and Roundabouts: Poems on Parenthood, ed. Emma Neale (Auckland: Vintage Random House, 2008)

The Taste of Nashi: New Zealand Haiku, eds. Nola Borrell and Karen P. Butterworth (Wellington: Windrift, 2008)

A Day in History: Poems Celebrating the Election of Barack Hussein Obama to the U.S. Presidency, ed. L.E.Scott (Paekakakriki: Earl of Seacliff Art Workshop, 2009)

Our Own Kind: 100 New Zealand Poems About Animals, ed. Siobhan Harvey (Auckland: Godwit, 2009)

Twenty Contemporary New Zealand Poets, eds. Andrew Johnston and Robyn Marsack (Wellington: Victoria UP, 2009)

Voyagers: Science Fiction Poetry from New Zealand, eds. Mark Pirie and Tim Jones (Brisbane: Interactive P, 2009)

Wildes Licht: Poems/Gedichte aus Aotearoa/Neuseeland, ed. Dieter Riemenschneider (Christchurch: Tranzlit, 2010)

Even though the list contains inexplicably lean years such as 2003, for a small country with a small publishing industry where poetry sales are diminutive, this is something of a flood. And having found so many, I am sure I have not found them all. I have restricted the list to print anthologies and have not included on-line curations such as the New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre's *Fugacity '05*, or *Bluff '06*, or *Love, War and Last Things*, or *All Together Now*; nor such site specific gatherings as Paula Green's *Poetry on the Pavement* in Auckland or the Wellington Poet's Walk. I remain quizzical in face of this rain of anthologies falling dutifully on all aspects and landmarks of the beloved nation's culture, geography, history and peoples. There are many kinds of anthology here, but none of them could claim (nor, I suspect, would most want to claim) status as a "national" anthology. The Johnston and Marsack (2009) might surreptitiously assume a little of that guise, but, as Australian poet Laurie Duggan notes in his blog *Graveney Marsh*, that anthology is "a disappointment overall" which may be because "a perceived British readership has determined selection." Jump back to the 1980s and it was all about national anthologies: Fleur Adcock's 1982 Oxford *Contemporary New Zealand Poetry*, Mark Williams's 1987 Caxton *New Zealand Poetry 1972 – 1986*, and most significantly the Wedde, McQueen, Evans 1985 and 1989 Penguin anthologies, which are probably where and when the terms "national" and "definitive" began to leak buckets. Even more specialist anthologies from that time such as *The New Poets: Initiatives in New Zealand Poetry* (1987), *Yellow Pencils: Contemporary Poetry by New Zealand Women* (1988), and *Kiwi and Emu: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry by Australian and New Zealand Women* (1989) retained a national focus as the presence of New Zealand in each of their subtitles testifies.

Could this proliferation of anthologies be proof that during good economic years (the decade 2000 at least until near its end) poetry does well? Or might the list represent the end-product of a cultural nationalism which had its “high and serious” moment in the 1980s and is now in its senility? Must we be careful not to be cynical of this effulgence lest we bite the feeding hand of what Laura Riding and Robert Graves dubbed “the poetry-consuming public” (158) in *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* (1928)? Riding and Graves, with Modernist hauteur, set up an opposition between “trade” anthologies and “true” whereby “true” designates anthologies which carry out some literary task, such as a feat of rescue (lost poets recovered, new poets found), or a work of criticism or history by way of the choice and structure of a selection, or else the unravelling of an act of private taste via reading, the connoisseur’s recipe. For Riding and Graves the trade anthology “treats poetry as a commodity destined for instructional, narcotic, patriotic, religious, humorous and other household uses,” what they call “the modern publisher’s anthology” and which they label “the most offensive” (165). In our more-market, input/output, bean-counting era such idealistic strictures are laughable – or would be if it were not the case that they apply so chillingly to the list of New Zealand anthologies. I have extracted, from Riding and Graves, a list of “trade” anthologies from the 1920s and noted beside a number how well they match the New Zealand list ninety years on: *Flower Poems* [*Earth's Deep Breathing*], *Animal Poems* [*Our Own Kind*], *The Kiss in Poetry* [*A Good Handful*], *Poems of the Sea*, *A Homage to Lindbergh*, *Child Poems* [*Swings and Roundabouts*], *Songs of the Homeland*, *Book of the Tree*, *Book of the Inn*, *Anthology of Suppressed Poems* (could New Zealand manage one?), *Sonnets*, *Modern Triolets*, *Manchester Poets* [*Auckland Poets*, *Dunedin Poets*], *The Chicago Lyre* [*Wellington Poems*], *100 Best Lyrics* [*121 New Zealand Poems*], *Best Poems of Our Time*, *The Second 100 Best Poems* [*Classic, Contemporary and New New Zealand Poets*], *Vitamin E Poems*, *Poems of Television*, *Death-Ray Poems* (some of these 1920s English and American anthologies sound much more interesting than those in my list of recent New Zealand anthologies), *Ballads of the Brave*, *Bus-top Treasury*, *Poems for Convalescence* [*Poems on Death and Dying*], *Business Girl's Garland of Verse*, *Sacco-Vanzetti Anthology* (all gleaned from Riding and Graves, 165 – 167).

Riding and Graves acknowledge *The Golden Treasury*, selected by Francis Palgrave, is “the Dean of Anthologies,” noting that at the time of writing its “original liberalism [had] ossified beyond recognition” but describing it approvingly as “a usurping private anthology, very

conscientiously compiled" (174). For myself, at the age of 12, I opened my mother's school copy of Palgrave (St Columba School for Girls in Dunedin) and read with pure pleasure from "There was a time when meadow, grove and stream" right through to "Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears" (Palgrave, 309 - 314). Wikipedia's entry for *The Golden Treasury* highlights its essentially open form: "There is no definitive version of this popular classic." Like one of the Chinese Classics, with countless commentaries, additions and editions, it continues to mutate.

Riding and Graves published *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* 67 years after Palgrave's first edition. This was the period required for ossification beyond recognition. It is now, in 2010, 50 years since Donald Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry* first appeared. John Robert Colombo linked Palgrave and Allen in a brief *in memoriam* note for Allen at the time of his death in 2004: "Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* created conditions for the acceptance of lyrical poetry in English for about five generations. Allen did it for non-lyrical poetry for his generation and ours." Whether the poetry of Allen's anthology is non-lyrical is doubtful (Frank O'Hara described himself as "lyrical to a fault" (Allen, 270)); one can be on surer ground asserting that Allen's anthology is the book of American poetry to have most deeply influenced New Zealand poetry. *Big Smoke: New Zealand Poems 1960 - 1975* is an anthology created from the poetry which was to a large extent inspired by the Allen anthology: an anthology's anthology, a recovery of lost voices and an act of critical definition. *The New American Poetry* has neither ossified nor assumed a power to continually renew itself; in contrast to Palgrave, the attempt to update Allen (*The Postmoderns: The New American Poetry Revised*, eds. Donald Allen and George F. Butterick, New York: Grove P, 1982) had what Marjorie Perloff described as "something of a retro air" which meant that "the punch of the original *New American Poetry* was largely lost." Perloff sums up the difficulty for anthologists now trying to emulate that moment of "punch": ". . . it is no longer possible, as it was for Donald Allen, to present readers with an anthology of *the* or even *a* New American Poetry."

Allen's anthology seems to be stuck in the shape it was born in and to belong forever in the moment of its birth. That was, from the start, a powerful form, as Richard Kostelanetz summed up: "One of the few anthologies that collected disparate materials into a persuasively coherent presentation, making visible what was previously invisible, creating taste instead of sweeping up enthusiasms" (Memoirs). Truly, in Riding and Graves's terms, a *true* anthology.

Its impact is noted by Virginia Gow in her essay on Robert Creeley in this issue of *Ka Mate Ka Ora* when she quotes from Bill Manhire: "In New Zealand and Australia poets seem to compete as to who was first to read it [the Allen anthology]" (Gow, 27). Peter Coyote evokes the American counterpart of this enthusiastic up-take: "We tore that book apart, reading everything, dog-eared the pages, sharing quotes, and inhaling the words . . ." (Memoirs). To fulfil Manhire's claim I should stake my own encounter: for my 17th birthday, in 1966, I was given a copy purchased at Paul's Book Arcade by my best friend, Scott Thornbury - he wrote on the card, "mon semblable, mon frère," nurturing our Baudelairean fantasy - and I was able to experience a second Palgrave moment and an exciting shift in how the world might be perceived over the summer of 1966 - 67 as I read the poetry of the Black Mountaineers, the Beats, The New Yorkians, the San Franciscans and the others: "the light seems to be eternal/ and joy seems to be inexorable" (Frank O'Hara, "Poem," 268 in Allen).

Allen's brief "Preface" to the anthology is a masterpiece of definition. Perloff is both impressed with and complains about this "Preface": "Allen felt little compunction (or inclination) to theorize as to the nature of the New American Poetry" and she adds, "Note the paucity of explanation" (Perloff). But I would argue that Allen is both bold and succinct and he does have a theory, namely, that for once in its life American exceptionalism is true:

As it [the New American Poetry] has emerged in Berkeley and San Francisco, Boston, Black Mountain, and New York City, it has shown one common characteristic: a total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse. Following the practice and precepts of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, it has built on their achievements, and gone on to evolve new conceptions of the poem. These poets have already created their own tradition, their own press, and their public. They are our avant-garde, the true continuers of the modern movement in American poetry. Through their work many are closely allied to modern jazz and abstract expressionist painting, today recognized throughout the world to be America's greatest achievements in contemporary culture. This anthology makes the same claim for the new American poetry, now becoming the dominant movement in the second phase of our twentieth-century literature and already exerting strong influence abroad.

American poetry, of the kind contained in the anthology, is seen to be assuming a mantle of leadership on a more than national scale. This poetry shares common cause and practice with other aspects of American cultural leadership, modern jazz and abstract expressionist painting, twin pillars upholding the banner of an indigenous American avant-garde after the Second World War. Scott and I, in 1966, in Hamilton, New Zealand, used to pore over a book by Michel Seuphor called *Abstract Painting: from Kandinsky to the Present* and try to paint

our own Pollocks and de Koonings; while engaged in looking at the book we played Ahmad Jamahl at The Persching playing his composition "Poinsettia." We did not need to stitch up the joins between our reading and our looking and our listening because Donald Allen had already done it. In their turn these cultural successes can be seen to rest on the European triumph of the Marshall Plan and the internal gift of the GI Bill. Frank O'Hara's faux-Noh play "Try!Try!" can be read as a footnote on the GI Bill. O'Hara served in the Pacific as a sonar-man and his subsequent tertiary education at Harvard and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor (there was nothing naïve in O'Hara's learning despite poses the poems sometimes strike) was made possible from the assistance offered veterans through the GI Bill. In the play (there are two radically different versions, the 1951 Cambridge, Massachusetts version and the 1953 New York version) GI Jack returns from the Pacific war where he has been killed, so effectively he returns as a ghost in the best Noh tradition, to find his pre-war Violet shackled up with John: "I've come a long way for your sake,/ my back all decorated like this/ and my feet covered with mold" (O'Hara, 41). John confronts him with the new, post-war world: "Do you think everything can stay the same,/ like a photograph? What for?" (O'Hara, 48). But John also proposes, with some sneering irony, a date between the men in a world where men of their kind, of no consequence, will stock the bookshops' shelves in the new world: "Let's have lunch together after you've found/ yourself a job. I'm writing a novel your firm/ may find itself interested in" (O'Hara, 47). Donald Allen, at Grove Press, was definitely interested.

When Barack Obama was asked if he believed in American exceptionalism, he replied that he did - and added that the Brits believed in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believed in Greek exceptionalism. That's pretty much how it stands now with exceptionalism - it's not very exceptional. But that post-war period from 1945 - 1960, the new poetry from which Allen's anthology gathers together, was an exceptional moment. Stalin could never have agreed to accept help under the Marshall plan, simply because of the undermining effect that would have had on his status in the world; but the "if" of "if he had" is one of the significant "ifs" of the twentieth century. As it was, the Cold War came about instead, and the question of Russian exceptionalism versus American exceptionalism ("We will bury you," Khrushchev promised) sustained a state of suspended indecision until 1989. What seemed to be decided then, 20 years ago, as the Berlin Wall fell, is now, as the economy of the Marshall plan struggles for air, a seeming illusion of *that* time. Frank O'Hara, a Russophile, deep admirer of Rachmaninov and Mayakovsky, celebrated, in a poem which Allen anthologised,

Khrushchev's arrival in New York in 1959 to speak at the UN, where he would remove his shoe and smash his watch with it while pounding the podium and promising our imminent burial, one of the Cold War's classic moments. In "Poem" O'Hara describes Khrushchev as the perfect addition to the world of New York which already has "everything" ("except politesse"):

Khrushchev is coming on the right day!
the cool graced light
is pushed off the enormous glass piers by hard wind
and everything is tossing, hurrying on up
this country
has everything but *politesse*, a Puerto Rican cab driver says

(O'Hara, "Poem" in Allen, 267.)

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