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

Bullock, Owen Fred

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the poetry contained in anthologies published between the 1940s and 1980s in New Zealand and that of some later anthologies that retrospectively covered the same period. I wanted to find out what subject matter preoccupied poets during these times, to monitor changes in the content of that poetry and to observe what techniques were used and the evolution of styles. Complimentary to the study of the poetry is an evaluation of the intentions of the editors of the anthologies... Read more

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The study of poetry is and should be a complex and dynamic discussion. The study of well-being, likewise, should be deep and wide-ranging. This anthology elegantly gathers the seeds of those conversations together through its concise but fruitful introduction and well-appointed sections of poetry. In order to concentrate all this information in one place, the editors focus on the building blocks of the study of well-being and of poetry. The editors of this anthology turned to poetry because while “the literary canons plentifully offer poems about anguish, suffering, and despair… they also contain a treasure trove of verse about the good life, variously conceived. The global poetic tradition thus represents a rich source of wisdom on the subject of well-being.” New Zealanders have long been avid readers, but until the mid-20th century most of the literature they consumed was imported from Britain. Historian and poet Keith Sinclair identified the 1950s as the decade ‘when the New Zealand intellect and imagination came alive’. This flowering of creative and critical talent was not sudden, but the climax of a process that had begun at least two decades before. By the 1930s a new breed of New Zealand writers was emerging, assisted by the growth of universities and small publishing enterprises. A related viewpoint was that New Zealand poetry should move on from expressing alienation and isolation and develop a more confident vision of nationhood, inclusive of Māori. The haibun influences other new hybrid forms, which encompass found poetry and appropriate language in a way which is redolent of the times. We take from exhibitions, songs, film, poems, conversation. Poets eavesdrop; I do it on the bus. Resonator: Unearthing Poetry Research Statement: The poems in Resonator are a selection from the creative project of my PhD, ‘Understanding Poetry – How semiotic concepts can help reader and practitioner’. The poems respond to my research into syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations; ideas from Derrida, Barthes and Kristeva on the situating of poetics, and the works of the New Zealand poets I analyse. The experience of studying in Canberra stirs up memories and comparisons and ways of looking at the self.