Introduction

Mark Williams

Katherine Mansfield describes New Zealand as 'a little land with no history' in a poem that Allen Curnow included in his 1960 *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*.[1] 'To Stanlislaw Wyspianski' (1910)[2] is addressed to a dead Polish patriot and contrasts the heroic scale of his art with the crude wrestling of New Zealand settlers with the soil. But Mansfield does acknowledge that the country is 'making its own history, slowly and clumsily'.[3] For Curnow also, the nation is made slowly, but by way of difficult confrontations *with* its history. History in a settler nation is a continual disappointment for Curnow and Mansfield, but for Curnow, by hard imaginative effort on the part of readers as well as writers, it might yet become an instrument of making both a nation and a literature capable, in a phrase that echoes through this book, of 'standing upright here'.[4]

This volume begins not with writing that demands a strenuous exercise of reading, like Curnow's great history poems of the 1940s, but with exploration narratives, poetry by Englishwomen who would never set foot here, ethnographical observations by travellers, and ballads by semi-literate whalers – the pre-history of New Zealand literature. Such writing, discussed by Ingrid Horrocks in her chapter opening Part I, was not written for a New Zealand reader. The term *New Zealander* in the late eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century referred not to Europeans but to Māori. Yet Māori rapidly became readers as well as producers of text. The view from the boat rather than the beach has traditionally governed description of early contact between Europeans and 'New Zealanders', an arrogance of the eye that Hamish Clayton unsettles in his 2010 novel *Wulf*. Yet from the shore as well as the ship this contact, or arrival, was seen as potential advantage as well as threat. Māori engaged rapidly with the technological, trading, military, and (more sceptically[5]) the theological opportunities afforded by whalers, settlers, soldiers, missionaries – and the books they carried with them. As Arini Loader shows, closely examining Hakaria Kiharoa's 1850s textualising of a Māori poem,

such recordings continue rather than merely preserve a literature that reaches back long before the arrival of script. Māori were also providing material by way of Governor George Grey's enormously popular collections of the myths and legends that would be made into wistful poems by late-colonial writers and playfully rewritten by postcolonial ones.[6] At the same time, unacknowledged by a settler culture that saw this material as nostalgic salvage from a noble past, Kiharoa's careful work prepared for Apirana Ngata's heroic collecting of traditional songs and for the flowering of Māori writing from the mid-twentieth century.

Māori in the colonial period, casually described as a 'dying race', were in fact working towards their own Indigenous modernity, participating in print culture, commerce, agriculture, and tourism. Colonial New Zealand, for its part, was not merely the far-flung instrument of European modernity but also had a role in its making in the metropolitan centre. Simon During places Samuel Butler's responses both to his farming experience in Canterbury and to Māori in the context of the fashioning of modern consciousness in Europe. Bridget Orr considers Katherine Mansfield as a colonial *and* a modernist, the two epithets mutually informing rather than opposing each other. Nor were the writers of Maoriland, as Jane Stafford shows, unable to see outside the colonial frame. In the writing of Maoriland she finds 'a tentative literary nationalism within Empire'. That nationalism was, moreover, connected to 'wider global literary networks'; in other words, literary settlers were looking sideways within the English-speaking world rather than simply back to the British centre, adapting as well as imitating the texts that circulated there while cautiously testing the affiliations of both nation and empire.

Curnow's famous lines in 'The Unhistoric Story' (1941) describing the New Zealand story as 'something different, something / Nobody counted on' do not indicate firmly when the moment of discovering a national distinctiveness might occur.[7] Cagey about identifying the secure achievement of national consciousness, Curnow is nevertheless keen to locate the beginnings of serious effort towards its accomplishment near to the present, downgrading in his anthologies not only colonial verse but also its Georgian extension in the 1939 collection *Kowhai Gold*, where Mansfield is well represented.[8] Histories of settler literatures tend to choose, or invent, their beginnings, rather than simply discovering them. The problem for the generation of the 1930s was only partly what they saw as the premature and unearned nationalism of the late-colonial generation, known as 'Maoriland'. Also worrisome to these literary modernisers was

the preeminence of Victorianism in the colony's establishment and in the settler outlook. The inescapability of Victorianism, as Horrocks observes, troubled E. H. McCormick who lamented in the country's first serious national literary history, *Letters and Art in New Zealand* (1940), that New Zealand and its literature began 'with the Victorianism of the nineteenth century' rather than with an older English tradition or Māori literature. Along with the first generation of English and American modernists, the cultural nationalists sought to relegate the Victorian cosiness between writer and reader in favour of a more taxing exercise of reading. In this book the 'uniquely Victorian' character of the colony is not offered as a counterfoundation to cultural nationalism,[9] but is acknowledged as an inescapable part of the country's literary heritage that should be seen complexly. As Stafford observes, late-colonial writing is deeply worked into Victorian literature, as one would expect, but not blinded thereby to the particularities of the new place.

The question, perhaps, for a settler society seeking a postcolonial identity is not so much that put by Northrop Frye in his Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada* – 'Where is here?' – as 'when do we decide that we started?'[10] Aotearoa-New Zealand's beginnings include romantic and rationalist writing, late-eighteenth-century salon poetry along with the early transactions between European voyagers and Māori who had been in the land for at least five hundred years. For Māori the arrival of Cook's *Endeavour* in 1769 evoked earlier Pacific homes, voyages, and connections in the person of the navigator and translator, Tupaia, who accompanied the ship from Tahiti. The point, then, is not to fix on one desirable beginning but to entertain multiple beginnings. Reaching back before the Victorians *and* the moderns, we open ourselves to various kinds of origin that usher us into a world of water as well as land, not settled, still in flux, and indicative of possibilities that might have led to quite different New Zealands.

Alice Te Punga Somerville protests against a commonly encountered view that Māori literature began in 1973 with Witi Ihimaera's novel *Tangi*, pointing to the flowering of Māori writing in the 1950s and 1960s in the journal *Te Ao Hou* and before that to a history stretching back through centuries of Polynesian dispersion. Pākehā literature also has been subject to foreshortening. New Zealand literature proper did not commence in the 1930s with Frank Sargeson, Denis Glover, A. R. D. Fairburn, Charles Brasch, and Curnow, any more than it did, as Victorian commentators held, with Alfred Domett's 1872 cross-cultural romance *Ranolf*

and Amohia,[11] which these 'cultural nationalists' dispatched with arresting trenchancy. If the writing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been seen, largely unfairly, as one in which writers retreated from reality into fairyland fantasy, the cultural nationalist period considered in Part II has been seen – heroically but prescriptively – as a stern correction towards the 'real'. Such narratives misrepresent not only the colonial writers but also the cultural nationalists. The latter, rather than being concentrated around a unified agenda, are presented here as part of a broad pattern of cultural self-invention over three decades marked by internal difference and responsiveness to international literary models and movements. Alex Calder and Stuart Murray follow the complexities and ambivalences in the conception and practice of the nationalism that governs fiction and poetry in the period. They continue also the broadening understanding of cultural nationalism from its association with an elite of male poets and injunctions from on high about how literature should be written if a national tradition was to be soundly forged. Nikki Hessell shows us Robin Hyde 'in dialogue' with the cultural nationalists yet shaping the nationalist project in her own literary terms and reconfiguring the vexed relations between journalism, literature, and gender that are deeply connected in her work rather than at odds, as the male writers of the day held (even though Curnow had worked in the 1940s as a journalist for *The Press*, the Christchurch newspaper where Samuel Butler had published philosophical ripostes to Charles Darwin in the 1860s). Hessell refutes that easy dismissal of the journalistic as sub- or anti-literary, which allowed Curnow and Glover to dispatch not only older male writers of the day – Alan Mulgan and J. H. E. Schroder – but also the truly *literary* innovator, Hyde.

Chris Hilliard looks at the establishment by writers, as well as the state, of the institutions of cultural nationalism, the international contexts as well as the local imperatives of the literary-cultural positions and politics of the 1930s and 1940s. Philip Steer traces ecological consciousness in New Zealand literature, not in our own more sympathetic time, but from the colonial diarist Lady Barker and the novelist William Satchell, to the icon of literary nationalism, Frank Sargeson, pointing to an 'environmental awareness that permeates mainstream cultural nationalist writing precisely through its constant highlighting of ecological absence'.

Cultural nationalism has attracted the most, and the most serious, critical attention of any period. Much of that attention has been 'critical' in the sense of finding fault, not with the value of the literature it produced but with the prescriptions handed down about how local literature should

be written, especially those embodied in Curnow's combative anthology introductions. Resistance to cultural nationalism throws up its own heroes and venues in the 1950s. But cultural nationalism also questions its own certainties about nation, history, and even gender, with Sargeson, the major practitioner of its clipped masculine style, teasing his readers with queer subterranean whisperings in his narratives of blokey affection.

Cultural nationalism is an equivalent of the American Renaissance or the *Bulletin* school in Australia at the end of the nineteenth century, not in scale but in kind. It is a moment of concerted literary assertion and confidence, and it produces defining works that remain in the national imaginary. It is not expansive as in the United States or pessimistically existential as in Australian bush writing but more constrained, more confined. Nevertheless, on that tighter canvas Sargeson worked a subversive pattern of reader invitation and misdirection while Curnow memorably framed questions about literature, value, and nation that still resonate. Such intense cultural movements do not last; their energies lapse and disperse. But they mark a moment of discovery of identity, even if that identity is already being subverted from within. The features they fix in the national imagination as 'characteristic' are challenged, and thus provide material for critical debate for decades, and no doubt centuries, to come.

In Part III various forms of opposition to the power of cultural nationalism emerge in the early 1950s with the 'Wellington Group' – notably, Louis Johnson, Alistair Campbell, Peter Bland, and James K. Baxter – and close the second decade with an irruption of literary energy centred on the little magazine *Freed*. The Wellington poets turn from lonely farms and ocean voyages to the ordinary life of the times, the woes of marriage and mortgages. They do so characteristically not in celebration but in a mood of aversion to the fallen world of the suburbs, registered in Baxter's 1960 satire 'The Ballad of Calvary Street', where the transcendental, although its visible signs remain remindingly on the walls, has been abandoned for a fretful negation of the spirit in a world without connection, aspiration, or beauty. The arrival of *Freed* in 1969 signalled a new, younger generation – Alan Brunton, David Mitchell, Murray Edmond, and Ian Wedde – turning away from the rigours of Curnow's nationalism without embracing the prophetic stance Baxter cultivated in the late 1960s. Their writing registers the attraction of more adventurous forms of rebellion against Puritanism than those – chiefly alcohol and adultery – of the mid-twentieth century and abjures the lugubrious Baxterian religious outlook.

Scottish poet Alan Riach, himself a noted New Zealand poet and critic in the 1980s and 1990s, surveys the variegated poetic landscape of the two decades through its major figures, finding some out of time, then looks to a mode of writing both more intellectual and more anarchistic in the *Freed* poets. Also transformative was the journal *Te Ao Hou*, founded in 1952, which provided a welcoming venue for modern Māori writers such as Hone Tuwhare, J. C. Sturm, and Witi Ihimaera. As Te Punga Somerville argues, *Te Ao Hou*, fostered by a settler state eager to usher Māori people into a 'new world' of modernity, also reinvigorated the 'old world' from which they were supposed to have departed.

Cultural nationalism, which generated rich texts for close analysis and strong positions for literary debate, becomes the source of a developing critical opposition from the 1950s. Baxter emerges at the 1951 Writers' Conference at Canterbury University as a brilliant nonprofessional critic, redefining the role of the writer in society in language charged with romantic and prophetic enthusiasm. *Landfall* was associated with cultural nationalism from its founding in Christchurch in 1947. But under editor Charles Brasch, it provided a venue to develop a critical language not wholly defined by cultural nationalist assumptions. Still fustily captive to the left discourse of the 1930s, Canterbury University professor Winston Rhodes solemnly unpicks the relation of Sargeson's narrative method to the 'moral climate'.[12] A more up-to-date sociology is applied by Auckland University's Robert Chapman in his 1953 essay, 'Fiction and the Social Pattern', analysing the relations between a constraining national culture and local literary practice.[13] Produced while writing his PhD in London, Bill Pearson's seminal essay 'Fretful Sleepers' (1952) anatomises with unflinching precision the meanness and small-mindedness of Pākehā culture.[14]

Invoking Chapman's and Pearson's influential essays, Timothy Jones finds a less prescribed mainstream literature than that carrying out Chapman's invitation to diagnose and thereby expose the Puritan-soaked 'social pattern'. Jones recasts the insistence on literary critique of an affluent and conformist society in terms of the generic ambivalence of a period full of 'heroic delinquency' and gothic subversions – the absent 'ghosts and unseen presences' of Mansfield's 'To Stanislaw Wyspianski' busily at work. He also observes, in contrast to the poetry, avoidance by the fiction writers of the common world of 'Nappy Valley', much condemned but rarely visited.

Janet Frame is a notable exception here, her early fiction dealing with this world with its cultural aspiration, pseudo-art-consciousness, and snobbery; economic advantage and existential desolation; and mistaking

of material excess for richness. Frame's writing moves in this period from the poetic intensity with which social inanition and cruelty is registered in the early fiction to more complex and self-conscious narratives in which language becomes increasingly the subject and the characters move through baffling refractions of identity. Meanwhile, the author disappears from public view as her iconic presence increases. Reading Frame has been a contested ground since Patrick Evans drew life and text closer than the author could tolerate in the 1970s. Here Belgian scholar, Marc Delrez, returns to the history of reading Frame, rehearsing the myths to recover a more 'complex narrative'. Frame's work will continue to accommodate her biographical sleuths, academic exegetes, and those seeking a good read.

Mark Houlahan observes the beginning of 'the major phase of playmaking in New Zealand' with Bruce Mason's 'lushly romanticised' Auckland in *The End of the Golden Weather*, first performed in 1960. Before Mason, he notes a tradition of playwriting going back to 1895 and *The Land of the Moa* that has been treated elsewhere.[15] Nevertheless, he does single out a new national seriousness in Curnow's purpose to 'place New Zealand at the centre' of his 1949 play, *The Axe*.[16] Curnow aimed to countermand that 'provincial cold-shudder' at the thought of national insignificance,[17] but Mason's iconic and seminal play ushered New Zealand drama out of its gentility and Englishness towards a bicultural nationalism and an indigenous theatre attracting large audiences. Mason is crucial to the receptivity of local theatre to biculturalism, Pasifika, and the arrival of a multiculturalism over the next half-century.

The 1950s and much of the 1960s have no defining name or familiar set of preoccupations such as cultural nationalism. They seem an intermediate period, recovering from one moment of intensity and generating the next, more radical movement, at their close. Yet the period produced texts now returning to new attention, like David Ballantyne's *Sydney Bridge Upside Down* (1968). Timothy Jones reminds us also of the almost forgotten Graham Billing's *The Slipway* (1974), with its disintegrating narrator, who might have wandered down under from Malcolm Lowry's alcohol-saturated novel, *Under the Volcano* (1947). The lasting legacy of the 1950s and 1960s may come to be found less in the struggle with a culture too narrow for its artists than in the subversive and various literary ways in which the burdensome responsibility of social antagonism was enacted, or resisted.

The 1970s and 1980s, covered in Part IV, record an accelerating ungathering of the national meanings derived both from the settler inheritance

and from cultural nationalism. From 1975, as the economy stagnates, Prime Minister Robert Muldoon becomes more aggressively conservative and race relations more divisive. At the same time there is a dramatic rise in Māori political activism seeking tino rangitiratanga, or sovereignty. Cultural autonomy becomes a literary measure of purpose and value with the consolidation of the Māori Renaissance. In Pākehā writing, alternative culture takes a broader hold as ethical consciousness finds new places – notably ecological – to inhabit. The turn of the decade saw opposition to Muldoon's caricatured return to the values of an earlier generation (loyalty to England, economic arrogance, intolerance of opposing views, a mixture of racial animosity and sentimentality) flare in widespread protest about racial policy. This was followed from 1983 by exuberant economic reform then extravagant bust to close a decade that richly earns Auden's epithets for 1930s Europe, 'low' and 'dishonest'.[18]

For all their atmosphere of deepening political and economic gloom, the 1970s are marked by social renovations we are still coming to terms with: the Māori Renaissance; the end of anxiety about the Puritan legacy; the move away from the rural myth of New Zealand identity (although not the full embrace of urbanity); the emergence of Pasifika writers complicating the social pattern and pointing to a multicultural proliferation in the new century; and an alternative culture drawing inspiration from the American model as well as local traditions of pacifism and resistance. Alternative energies from the close of the 1960s find a broader, less apocalyptic stance towards society than that of Baxter. The mainstream is redefined around writers unbothered by cultural nationalism or the obligation to critique a stifling social normality. In the short story, Owen Marshall, the defining master of the genre following Sargeson, transports the Sargesonian taste for proletarian gothic into suburban interiors. The 1970s is also a decade of modernism that attaches New Zealand writing, not for the first time, to international English writing, American as well as British, as Curnow in poetry and Frame in fiction deepen and extend the formal and linguistic resources of New Zealand literature.

In Curnow's great volumes, *An Incorrigible Music* (1979) and *You Will Know When You Get There* (1982), the struggle with nation is scarcely discernable in poems that shift focus from the very local to the international, all the while intensifying the linguistic stress of registering subjectivity in time and place. Ian Wedde's *Symmes Hole* (1986) – a Pynchonesque counterhistory of the nineteenth-century Pacific – updates the Curnowian preoccupation with exploration, early contact, and how we got from there to the compromised present, by connecting the nineteenth-century

whaling industry to McDonalds. With Harvey McQueen, Wedde edited the 1985 *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, looking back to the poetry of the contact period as well as the longer history of Māori writing and revising the aesthetic and temporal priorities of Curnow's 1960 Penguin anthology.[19] The ghost of an ancient literary antagonism reappears when C. K. Stead, vigorously contesting the new Penguin's 'inclusions' in a *Landfall* review, accuses the editors of announcing national 'difference' by way of ethnic 'decoration'; that is, the anthology offers 'New Zealand poetry with Maori in its hair'.[20] But the insult has lost the force of Curnow's tart dismissals of Maoriland and *Kowhai Gold*. Stead's judgement presupposes a timeless standard of aesthetic value that might be applied objectively to the competing styles, communities, and periods of 'New Zealand literature' rather than arguing for an aesthetic of place, as Curnow does.

Ghosts remained, while new defining movements struggled to emerge. As Harry Ricketts and I show, the 1970s was dominated by Baxter – his cultural legacy as much as his poetry – and by Curnow, making more private his poetic while extending its impact as major contemporary poetry. Lydia Wevers picks up the long relation between the short story and the novel at the point when the novel, with the publication of Keri Hulme's *the bone people* in 1983, seems triumphant. Until the 1980s the story was the quintessential New Zealand fiction mode. Short stories are common in the colonial period mainly for local readers; but in the early 1900s A. A. Grace's Māori stories became popular internationally because of their engagingly exotic content rather than any formal merit. The crucial transformation of the short story as an artistic form is affected by Sargeson's reduction of his ambition to become a modern novelist by adopting and adapting a form whose concentration allowed him to produce lasting and powerful evocations of a limited and, as he saw it, damaging society. Sargeson begat his own 'sons' and continued with formal modifications through the postwar period, opening his fictional method to a richer and more modernist style. Wevers notes Michael Morrissey's renovation of the tradition in his 1985 anthology, *The New Fiction*, as the vehicle of local postmodernism. Still, as she also shows, the postmodern short story did not simply supplant the realistic style with its deeply subversive modes of social critique, major practitioners like Marshall and Vincent O'Sullivan continuing to expand the possibilities of the tradition.

The short story is also central to the development of modern Māori literature since World War II. J. C. Sturm, and a number of new writers

who would go on to roles in politics and public life, published stories in *Te Ao Hou*. The first excited noticing of Maori fiction as a 'breakthrough' in New Zealand writing comes, as Melissa Kennedy observes, in the early 1970s with stories by Patricia Grace and Witi Ihimaera, the latter's *Pounamu Pounamu* (1973) expressing the pastoral mode of the Māori Renaissance, a mode Ihimaera would turn from by the end of the decade. In drama, David O'Donnell finds the realisation of Bruce Mason's 'vision for New Zealand playwriting', with Greg McGee and Roger Hall achieving – not quite simultaneously – critical and box-office success. Nationalism in this period becomes both more visceral, as in Maurice Shadbolt's *Once on Chunuk Bair* (1982), and more self-critical, as in O'Sullivan's *Shuriken* (1983). Drama in the 1970s and 1980s is successful in New Zealand and, increasingly, overseas as a modern New Zealand–flavoured theatre, open to Māori participation and renovation, reflects broader patterns of social experience.

In spite of the occasional negative outburst, such as Stead's 1985 attack on Keri Hulme's right to receive an award for Māori writing,[21] Kennedy notes that Pākehā critical writing on the Māori Renaissance has tended to be 'cautious'. Biculturalism's assumption that the two cultures are equal but separate produced a kind of standing apart, at times a standoff. Yet, in literature, as in historical writing, areas of overlap not unlike what Ingrid Horrocks, citing Tony Ballantyne, refers to as 'entanglement' between Māori and Pākehā also occur. In Anne Kennedy's 'Whenua (1)' the transactions of culture and economic being – real estate complicated by the burying of a whenua (placenta) in the yard – are unremarkably part of an everyday that knits the parties who met with apprehension and curiosity more than two centuries earlier:

> They were trying to sell the house but nobody
> wanted to buy it. The father said, It's the whenua
> it's keeping us here. They looked out at the little pot
> growing in the yard, and the baby in her highchair
> with her baby's heart-melting disregard
>
> for past tense. In the end they went for urban iwi
> Waipareira Trust kind of thing. Friday afternoon
> drove the earthernware pot and the children
> out to the West Coast, Karekare, staggered
> down, down to the waterfall and its lovely pool.[22]

The period covered in Part V has been seen in terms of Mansfield's description of New Zealand as a 'floating' literary subject – one she will bring to