

broadsheet

new new zealand poetry

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Editor: Mark Pirie

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Interview with Harvey McQueen
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Michael O'Leary's extracts from
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Please Note: At this stage no
submissions will be read. The poems
included are solicited by the editor.
All submissions will be returned. Thank you.

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Preface

Harvey McQueen is widely known on the New Zealand literary scene as one of our finest anthologists. Since the 1970s he has made his mark on the English school curriculum with a number of enterprising anthologies for schools. He was among the first to promote New Zealand writers in the classroom. His 1974 *Ten Modern New Zealand Poets* (with Lois Cox) is perhaps the finest example of this. After, he went on to edit successful anthologies for Penguin (with Ian Wedde). Then, in the 1990s, his anthology of early settler verse appeared. It's an excellent anthology, the only contemporary anthology of colonial verse. He has followed this up with a further solo anthology of garden poems, *The Earth's Deep Breathing* (2007) – and one final anthology, *These I Have Loved*, is due later this year.

Yet Harvey's work as an anthologist may have overshadowed his value as a poet. He has published seven volumes of poems (included in *Pingandy* (1999) is a notable bureaucratic sequence on the Beehive) and he continues to maintain a high quality in his recent collections, *Recessional* (2004) and *Goya Rules* (2010). These two books have increased his standing as a poet. His voice both domestic and (at times) bureaucratic is highly original in the context of New Zealand poetry. Gardening, his main love, recurs in his poetry as it also does in the work of Ursula Bethell.

For all this, Harvey has not featured previously in a poetry magazine and I decided to give him a feature in *broadsheet* as further recognition of his lifetime achievement in local literature. Included with a selection of Harvey's new, unpublished poems is an interview, which covers much of his writing life.

As well, I've invited some of Harvey's friends to appear alongside him. I am grateful to Fiona Kidman, Ian Wedde, Diana Bridge, Paul Hill and Michael O'Leary for their contributions to this issue. (Harvey has also been one of the prime depositors to Michael O'Leary's newly formed Poetry Archive of New Zealand Aotearoa (<http://poetryarchivenz.wordpress.com>). Harvey's comprehensive collection of New Zealand poetry has been a boost to the Archive in its initial stages of development.)

Now entering its third year of publication, *broadsheet* continues to open up its pages to new faces. I'm pleased to welcome Jessica Le Bas, Ron Riddell and Anna Rugis. Margaret Borshevsky's well-turned translations of Russian poet Anna Akhmatova also appear in *broadsheet* for the first time.

Mark Pirie

Wellington, May 2010

Anna Akhmatova

Between two souls lies a magic line,
Not to be crossed by love or passion –
Even when the lips fuse in the stillness of the night,
And love fills the heart so much that it hurts.

Friendship is powerless, and so are the years
Of happiness, of that wonderful accord
When the soul feels so free that it flees
Carnal desire and languor.

Those who press toward that line are mad,
Those who reach it are overcome with grief.
Now you know why, under your hand,
My heartbeat does not quicken.

1915

xxx

Your mind is twisted by your own pride,
And thus you will never see the truth.
You say Petersburg is just a mirage
And my people's faith a castle in the sky.

You say my country has sunk in sin,
I say: your land goes against God's will.
Although my people are not free from guilt,
All may yet be put right and redeemed.

You live among streams and flowerbeds.
Why knock on the door of this unhappy sinner?
I know your grievous disease:
You are afraid of death, yet seek it still.

1916

Poems translated by Margaret Borshevsky

DUKE

John Wayne came to Papatoetoe
regularly on Saturday afternoons
at the Central fleapit in St George St
then the Otara after it was built

whoever his enemies were
we were on his side
even after he slowed down
and had to grope for his six-shooter

we liked the way he went to work
like our dads in the same clothes
the way like them he took
a while to get his words out

a small and distant outpost
of the Hollywood empire
yet if you were to ask Duke
wherever he is in Horse Heaven

he'd remember the place
and say with impeccable courtesy
some of the women were beautiful
and the ice cream was great

MAJESTY

in London
thinking of Ranana
on the Whanganui River
where the road is sealed
for roughly 400 metres
in case the Queen comes to visit

here the street was paved
with gutta-percha
to silence carriage wheels
outside the Diogenes Club

though neither man saw it
this really is the core of the Empire
whose tremors and fearful gusts
sent my great great grandfather
an Anthony like me
to Madras then Onehunga
in the nineteenth century
and my father to Egypt in the twentieth
fateful destinations
*

swinging London
an historical
photograph in the *Times*
of people waiting outside
Pentonville prison
for news that Roger Casement
had been hanged
*

the Gents in modern London
seem to follow the guidelines
of the Suppression of Homosexuality
Act (which doesn't work)

most slavishly at Selfridges
where men are made to queue
for cubicles that permit
not the slightest sideways glance

Harrods with its widely advertised
streaked marble and plated fittings
and squirming attendant
was almost matey by comparison

and I forgot to notice
if the water in the handbasins
went down the plughole the opposite way
as it's supposed to do

*

at the mouth
of Earl's Court station
the amplified voice
advises of an incident
and to clear the area immediately

sirens banked traffic
ambulances police motorcycles
people swearing on cellphones
about being late
others asking what's up

and most memorably
a white custodial services van
and the sound of someone
banging ceaselessly with his hands
on its inside walls

*

in Brompton Cemetery
admirals and generals lie
with their battles recorded on their graves

or they are put up in roofed tombs
the size and shape
of garden sheds

as autumn leaves clear
the evergreen cedars char the ground
with shadows deeper than smoke

and this is a curiously cheering place
where no one seems to mind
or be afraid of being dead

and sentences of memory
for crows to read and squirrels to climb
are thickened over with moss

*

in the absence of the true Queen
laid to rest more than a century
beside her Consort
the city itself is the monarch
whom all attend

IN THE SUPPLEMENTARY GARDEN

1

In the Supplementary Garden, light spills down
on an excess of contrast, leaves are every shape in the pack,
their greens spiked here and there with ox-blood, amethyst
and a radiant shade of lime. Barks are crazy-paved
or smooth as parquet. There are no rules –

except for spontaneity. With each twist of the path, we fall
as though into a new movement, and yet throughout
a garden that has charmed the eye of generations,
one mode prevails, illusion. Distant gazebo and pavilion
roofs are transformed into fans. Above our heads

a prow of shadowed wood is breasting the pale wave of the sky –
see that and, like the Immortals, you could soar anywhere.
Each tree and upright stone set at the water's edge
has grown a shimmering twin. We watch each pair
break into halves – and instantly re-form into

a glimmering whole in a wondrous conversion of things.

2

Slabs of rock, their faces ground and grooved as any sage
nearing the end of his journey, have made an amphitheatre
of the pool. Plants coat its rocky lip; they trail over it
like children's hands that reach for water, stopping
just short of the surface. A mat of lotuses that lies

as languorous as a woman on her side is starting its slow
slide into openwork. As smoothly as a corps de ballet
flowers glide apart – they’d have us think forever.
We want it to go on, this sunlit comedy, knowing that it can’t,
that the curtain must come down on all performance.

The afternoon has deepened, burnished as though by elegy.
A last butterfly of light plays on the pavilion floor, coaxing
its worn diagonals into harmony with the pleated lines
of the roof. It is that numinous, if unattested, time when patterns
of earth and sky combine, when black and white draw close

and then entwine, enacting the same spiral of conjunction
figured on a symbol from who knows how old a past.
It would take words as hand-picked and as artless as the trees
in this old garden to convey the presence of that fullness
in this fading. Nearer still to evening, you find a way to tell me:

it’s acceptable – it may be better, even – that it doesn’t last.

Author’s Note: In 1979, before it had been restored, I visited The Humble
Administrator’s Garden in Suzhou, of which the Supplementary Garden
forms part. Coming across photographs of it 30 years later in Maggie
Keswick’s influential introduction in English, *The Chinese Garden*,
became the catalyst to writing. I offer the poem that resulted to Harvey,
a maker of both actual and literary gardens.

ON MAKARA HILL ...

On Makara hill, the wind
sings in the struts
of a radio mast.
Beauty is not only visual;
this ugly construct makes
a sad and lovely music
to draw me on and up
through low cloud.
A dog, grey-white in
the white-grey mist
runs on ahead then
returns, disappearing and reappearing,
the epitome of young
joy in movement.
I plod behind, thankful that
this ageing body
can still bring me
here to the peace of emptiness.
Around me gorse
and barberry build
piles of scented gold.
The wind gusts
and clouds part.
A profligate sun showers
more gold on the grey
waters of the Strait and,
with alchemist fingers, turns
distant snow-capped peaks
to heaps of silver.
Such riches Midas never had.

SO FAR, FOR NOW

Hokianga's shy hills, the poet
wrote and Cilla you got it right:
a skein of sand, a sleeve of trees
above the water beneath the dunes
a girl bringing a fish and chip
or two, her cigarette, and
a stab of gold in her nose
a baby under the black
dress, the hills diminishing
into the collapsed world
of evening. O you know
that you are going, that
you have already gone
far along the journey
when you sit here just the two
of you at a rough
wooden table in this
dusk light, eating with slow
care, not talking about anything
much, having said enough
sometimes more than enough
for as long as you can remember
not needing to say it all again.
In the morning
there is mist, the hills
have taken fright.

Author's Note: Cilla McQueen wrote 'Hokianga Poem'.

Jessica Le Bas

HIS WAY BY MOONLIGHT

for Peter

Our brother was an oneironaut
taking off at a moment's notice
for one dream world or another.
Sometimes mid-sentence he would
wander, and we'd find him later
in the next room, perched like a bird
on the windowsill, or outside in a treetop
crouching, with his nose raised
sniffing, for a change of air, waiting
for an updraft, the uptake – to take off.
An eminent oneirologist was called
to put our minds to rest. While resting
we dreamed of our brother in another world
navigating his way by moonlight.

AN UNEXPECTED TUI

To my knowledge
I have never heard
a nightingale

As a boy
on the Okuti farm
moreporks mourned nightly

Last night
in the darkened city
an unexpected tui sang

clear & loud in moonlight.
Keats keep your nightingale
amidst the alien corn

for I've heard a tui
toll midnight
in the hills of home.

THE NATURE OF THINGS

(for Jenny)

Loss is loss, futile
to call it anything
other. New age
twittering doesn't
work. 28 years old
my niece moves round
the house with grace
& confidence, marvels
at a frail, old neighbour
who, heyday, modelled
for a well-known artist
more mobile than I am.
Hitler's men stole many
Treasures, some lost, but
the Ghent altarpiece was
regained. Time, as well
as war, takes its toll. Most
of us decline with little solace
except this absurd life-spirit
which finds strange satisfaction
recognising the vitality of youth.

WINTER OLYMPICS

Not a maple in sight; when she
sold us the place Elizabeth asked

if she could dig up a cherished camellia.
While we believed it was too big to survive

the strain, we said 'Sure'. Behind
the hole it left was a cowering wintersweet.

Leslie gave a white abutilon cutting
to fill the gap. Stasis did not prevail.

The flame lit, competitively the two plants
bolted for the space of sky, a trajectory

of green-power. Nature's not into charity.
The surrounding tall trees presented a challenge.

After two years, the abutilon now has a three
foot stem before four leggy branches, huge leaves

& only five flowers, graceful as dance skaters
on ice. Revitalised the wintersweet jostles like

an overbearing ice hockey jock. There is only
room for one on the central podium. My money's

on the abutilon, but there are further
complications in our small coppice corner

for at their feet there's this cheeky indigenous
intruder, a red stemmed, peppery-leaved matipo.

UNEXPECTED GLEE

Every now and then, unexpected
glee, a new author stumbles into
view, opening up new vistas

like an astronomer glimpsing
a new comet snaking across dark
skies. All's relative but the words

across light years have, greater
by their surprise, an appeal, all part
of the miracle we title existence.

JUST SO: A LOVE POEM OF SORTS

Even though awkward
I freely opened once
my arms to you. I still
long to do so but it's
not the troubled, grinding
heart that fails, rather
inadequate & reluctant
muscles. You are as
ever the fresh aroma
of nectarines sunshine
picked. A full moon rises
& calm is the night.

PERFECTION

Flesh in transient
time I watch mixed
petunias open to
bounty, a sort of
satisfaction while
headlines shriek
'looters rule rubble
graveyards'. A large
bumble bee seeks
pollen as it fumbles
through the flowers.
Perfection, brief
but enough amidst
consistent turmoil.

W A I O U R U

Mataroa jigger garage sits alone,
the train crosses an old steel-framed girdered bridge
Church spires reach skyward
plunging into tunnelled darkness,
ferns and Blackberry grab at the carriage.
Hihitahi, a one house town,
and a beautiful, fast-flowing river.
Down brown valleys where no roads roam
Suddenly bursting onto the plain where the army lives.
The Army Museum stands grey
fortress-like, both in design and in intent.
No soldier-boy waiting to catch a ride today.
A tee-pee tent is the only colourful event.
An American tourist wanders
around the carriage with a digital camera
and a string of trashy medals

D A R G A V I L L E

Whilst staying at this Kumara Junction North
I asked a woman is this the end of the line
She answered she didn't know, for what it's worth
If it was the beginning, the middle or the end

I questioned her further then, persisting, asking
Who was Darga, the progenitor of the town
She answered, for what it's worth, he was a king
King Kumara was his local name, and last seen

He was jiggering away from Dargaritaville down the track
Beginning, end or middle don't matter, he never came back

THE WALK

For Harvey

1

Spring in Bolton Street
brings out the Sunday strollers.
Families & pets arrive to
soak up the weekend weather.

It's still, gloriously fine, the first
for a while, after a seemingly
harsh & wet winter. Ahead,
the cemetery & its memories loom.

2

Choosing directions,
I take the Memorial Trail,
the dregs of teen parties:
broken glass & tagging

mark the way. This is
my history I think as a
child's factory toy (abandoned)
hugs the bridge's handrail.

3

Soon I pass the mass grave:
a block of lawn and terraces
to mark the settlers who died
(their names listed in the chapel).

In the 1960s '3700 graves'
were reinterred here, dug up
and deposited, to make way
for the motorway extension.

4

Further, there's even a slice of
literary history: KM's baby
sister is buried here, along
with Samuel Parnell

the carpenter who while
building a store insisted on
an '8 hour working day'.
So the timesheet was born.

5

On the map: the Lower Trail
and the Upper Trail bridge
the graves of Jewish, Anglican,
Maori and 'Public' alike.

Dividing themselves
in groups, they lie together.
The Roman Catholics
though lie further up the hill

in Kelburn. As with Paris,
I think of those less fortunate
unable to afford a headstone.
Yet some of the graves now

appear in ruin. Their stone
scripts barely legible. But
one in Chinese still stands out.
The lines deft with artistry.

6

Near the top is “Harry” Holland,
the former Labour Leader, his
grave opened by PM Savage in
1937, and of course, the main

one: Seddon, near the Observatory.
This former storekeeper & gold
miner headed the first Government
in the world to give women the vote.

7

So, I have passed through
my history, and I’m reminded too
of the land. These windswept
hills once clad solely in manuka

now under care have become
a haven for roses. Further on
tulips are waiting to bud
& bloom while daffodils

blaze their goldenness & sun-
bathers bask in rays. They return
me back to current time, where
music blares across the path.

8

Their legacies remain here
it's true, and what will it be
like in 50 years' time? And
what will remain for the living

then, as they make their way
with their pets & children
& walk these same paths, these
Gardens, one fine spring day.

**MY MOTHER'S LAST VIEW
OF RUAPEHU**

"What's that mountain?"

"Ruapehu."

"Beautiful, isn't it?"

"Yes. It is."

Beyond a fringe of pines
it appears again.
I would point it out
but we're out of range
you're looking ahead, crying

*"What have I done
to deserve all this?"*

You're looking ahead
at a leaf dancing down
hovering just above the ground
a midsummer leaf
already rust-yellow.

"Beautiful, isn't it?"

Yes. It is.

Turangi, 2007

SONG AND DANCE

bat love songs sung at night
with rhythm and repetition
like all love songs
must be slowed down
to be heard by humans

break down a dance sequence
into individual limbs movements
and string them on a backbone
these must be sped up
to be understood as beauty

you can stop-frame photograph
a cricket jumping at a glass door
speed that up and you'll wonder if
you saw anything at all

before recording
we sang our songs
danced our dances
as if Olympus was our front lawn
and Valhalla the parlour
as if we had invented love and ecstasy
as afternoon diversions

out of the smoke in the mirror
some man with free time
imagined the world into fragments
reboxed it and put it on hold
while he lunched and napped
and dreamed bare branches dancing
and bats singing love songs
in absolute darkness

**BEHIND THE SCENES IN THE
LOST AND FOUND AT THE
BRITISH MUSEUM**

Why can't these people be more careful?
How tricky can it be to keep track of your possessions?
If I didn't know better, I'd think they bought just to lose.
I never misplaced a thing. I am the perfect warden. A keeper,
of sorts.

To the left of that stack over there to the right -
somebody's red mittens, somebody else's red shoes.
Rarely do I give them what they ask for,
even if what they think is lost has been found.

I rummage in piles. I take my time.
I return to the counter empty-handed.
"Sorry," I say. "Don't have nothing for you."
I hold out my hands, palms upwards. A universe of vacancy.

Their faces hold worlds of disappointment. I pretend that I
care.
I never let on that something isn't right.

The beehive glass of the Great Court lets in far too much light.

THE FIX-IT MAN

I am the fix-it man.

I am your remedy – I will bring you back from the dead.
I will ease your pain, set you on your feet again.

I speak in clichés, it's true. I could be the death or the birth of
you.

I can get you in the door, pick you up off the floor –
O there's nothing I couldn't do for you.

I could put you in jail or grant you release – is your jigsaw
missing sky?

I shall find the absent piece.

All the king's horses and all the king's men –
I succeeded where they failed, which is to say,
I'm the guy who put what's-his-face back together again.

I have quite a reputation.

Unformed universes revolve in the palm of my hand.

HARRY MARTENS

It's time to find work for the word
'paltry', Harry, though I know

even before I've started that
this urge will take me places

I shouldn't go, where
my worst nature will prevail

and what I say I'll regret later.
On the other hand,

why regret what we say
in anger, or irritation, or

just ennui – itself a paltry emotion.
Any way I look at it, our feelings

reach down into a *terroir* the way
the vine does that then

swells the grapes that make
the wine we drink, which makes us happy

or sad, or sentimental, or
sometimes fanged with rage.

That deep rooted taste of where
anger comes from was what

Mahmoud Darwish knew how to write
and how to broadcast on the radio

to the early morning coffee shops
at the bus terminal in Amman, where

breakfasters wiped tears away
with the ends of their *keffirs*.

The rage he uttered came from
somewhere in the stony ground

like that around the makeshift homes
at Baqa'a where, in spring,

I saw the freezing hills covered all over
by ranunculus, anemone, and iris,

whose corms lay underground
during the baking heat of summer

and pushed their tough flowerstalks
out as the snow melted after winter.

This rage of colour
was beautiful, and that's why

the bus driver wept, turned
the volume of his radio up,

and floored the accelerator
as we outpaced our dust cloud

on the road to Baqa'a – and that's why
his passengers wept, hearing the poet's

beautiful rage spring from the ground
where it had seemed nothing could grow

whether the ground was hot or cold.
Another poet wrote, 'Subject matter,

how I hate it,' and I know what
he meant, that paltry

stuff that grows anywhere
without ardour or effort.

**AN INTERVIEW WITH HARVEY
McQUEEN: POET, EDUCATIONALIST
AND ANTHOLOGIST**

Harvey McQueen was born in Little River, Banks Peninsula, in 1934 and educated at Akaroa District High School, Christchurch Boys' High School and Canterbury University. Co-editor of The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse, he has also published seven volumes of poetry. In 2002 he was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to education and literature. He lives in the Wellington suburb of Karori with his wife, writer Anne Else. His autobiography this piece of earth, a life in my new zealand garden was published by Awa Press in 2004. In 2007 he edited an anthology of New Zealand garden poems, The Earth's Deep Breathing (Godwit/Random House). A new anthology, These I Have Loved, is forthcoming later this year.

The interview was conducted through email by Mark Pirie.

Abbreviations used: M: Mark Pirie; H: Harvey McQueen.

M: When did you first start writing?

H: I wrote my first poem almost by accident though the process had been gestating some time. Although I'm a history graduate, as a secondary teacher I switched to English as my subject. I loved teaching literature. I have a deep affection for Ruth Dallas's poem 'Milking Before Dawn' for as a rookie teacher at Morrinsville College in the Waikato, I had trouble establishing rapport with a low ability fourth form English class. Many students came from dairy farms, often, share-milker's children who'd worked in the shed before catching the bus to school. I handed out copies of the poem and had hardly finished reading it aloud when a boy said 'it's just like it is, sir. People in the city don't know what they're missing.' A gusher from the first well – a teacher's satisfaction. Would that all lessons went as well. That one shaped an interest as well as a career.

At my next school, Thames High School, each winter term had a week set aside for creative writing. I brainstormed ideas with a class for poems before I set them to work before sitting down at the desk and pulling up a pile of marking. A boy in the front row said 'Aren't you going to write a poem yourself, sir'. Censoring a smart alec teacher retort I said 'Why not?' and so I wrote a poem about my students at their task, 'Heads Down'. At the end there was a chorus of 'Pretty good, sir.' I thought so myself, so I sent it off to Lauris Edmond then editing the *PPTA Journal*. She published it. The class was chuffed and so was I.

M: Working in education, first as a teacher, then later as a schools inspector, you have always been involved with getting poetry into schools and have edited anthologies for the classroom. Did this experience hasten your own learning of poetry forms in the '70s and the new directions of the American poets?

H: I became an advocate of teaching New Zealand poetry because of my own experience. I found students responded well to our own poets – Dallas, Baxter, Glover, Tuwhare, etc. Not that it is an either/or; rather it is a both/and, Curnow and Keats, Bornholdt and Emily Dickinson. Long before I began writing, however, I'd been reading and exploring poetry, very widely. Auden was a particular favourite but I'd stumbled upon contemporary American poets and found them exciting. As my own poems began to be accepted by the literary magazines I began a helpful correspondence with Alistair Paterson editor of *Climate*. When I shifted to Wellington I had discussions with him and was influenced by his ideas about 'open form'. He introduced me to the works of Olson and Creeley which led me to experiment with different forms. I think now I wasted too much time worrying about 'open form'.

M: How did you become involved with *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* project?

H: I had edited two anthologies of New Zealand verse for schools. *Ten Modern New Zealand Poets* (with Lois Cox) in particular proved very popular, indeed had a wider audience. On that basis

Penguin approached me about working with Ian Wedde to co-edit the Penguin. I jumped at the opportunity.

M: Ian Wedde is highly regarded for his Introduction to the book and has always been a dynamic figure in New Zealand literature, what was it like working with him? Were you agreeable in your selections for the book? Were there any poets you thought more highly of or preferred to include over Wedde's selections?

H: I enjoyed working with Ian, it was a very rewarding partnership. I believe our decision to include Maori was not only timely but correct. We had long discussions, read everything separately that we could find, prepared shortlists and then negotiated. It was remarkable how much our selections coincided. An example, we were both surprised to find a mutual admiration for the poems of Charles Spear. There were disagreements, but we talked through these, compromised and made choices. We have not revealed the nature of these and I do not intend to now. It was an anthology of which I am very proud – a best-seller.

M: In the 80s, you noted in your Preface to *Pingandy* (1999) that you started reading Charles Bukowski's personalised writing and that Lou Johnson had told you 'Write about yourself and the surrounding scene'. This advice seems to have been heeded as since the publication of your collection *Oasis Motel* (1986), it could be said you have pursued this, and created your own distinct voice in New Zealand poetry. Would you say this was a fair comment on your poetry development in the '80s?

H: Yes, fair comment! Experience, maturity and confidence all helped. Lauris Edmond and Louis Johnson were sort of mentors and living in Wellington meant more literary discussions. I've never tried to be distinctive but I have tried to find my own voice. That took time and the exploration of blind cul-de-sacs.

M: In *Pingandy*, the opening sequence 'Beehive' stems from your time as an education aide to David Lange? You are one of the few poets to have written bureaucratic sequences. Comment on this time, and how you came to write about that experience in Beehive. Were you sympathetic to Lange's situation in the Labour Government of that period?

H: It was my good fortune to be an education aide to David Lange for 18 months. He was unique, quirky, brilliant, infuriating, very kind and staunch. I was surprised how isolated he was which mainly arose from his political inexperience. I kept a diary during this period which formed the basis of my book *The Ninth Floor* and the poetry sequence 'Beehive'. I confess to being disappointed at the lack of response to 'Beehive'. It is a personal record of the period in which loyalty and anger jostled with long hours, hard work, tension and frustration as the PM battled his own cabinet and caucus. I suspect the sequence did not meet the concepts the literati have about political life.

M: After *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1985) was completed, you had researched and found enough material of early settler verse in New Zealand to compile your own anthology. The anthology remains our only contemporary collection of early settler verse. When you compiled *The New Place* (1993), what were some of the more interesting poems and poets you discovered? Is there still a lot of early New Zealand verse undiscovered?

H: Ian and I both hoped to find a forgotten early poet or poem. I'm pretty sure they don't exist. We spent quite a lot of time searching. That research made me aware of the need for an anthology representing the variety and nature of our early settlers' poetry. It is easy to be scornful of writing from the 19th century. My history training enabled me to see it in context and I saw those poets as fellow beings living in an era of British colonial settlement but with the same human emotions and feelings. They are not ancient dusty dead writers. I do confess I found Domett wooden. But there was some good stuff written later on – Blanche Baughan, Arthur Adams, Jessie Mackay, Will Lawson and David McKee Wright spring to mind. A surprise was Frank Morton. His poems, though sentimental, were strikingly different and for the period remarkably sexual. A real Aussie larrikin, he enjoyed baiting (in his words) 'prudes', and wanted an end to 'wowsers'.

M: In 2004, in time for your 70th birthday, you released a very well received collection, *Recessional*. You were very pleased with the collection at the time. It is notable that you wrote a majority of the poems after your retirement. Did your retirement from office situations free up your voice, e.g. the sequence ‘The Week the Office Ended’? It seems you became more honest and had more freedom to state what you thought about politics and things going on in the world. Is this a fair comment on that book?

H: To an extent it’s fair comment. But life is not as cut and dry as we would make it. Most of the poems were written while I was still at work. As a senior public servant I was conscious I should not write things too censorious of my masters but as a citizen of the world I had the right to make comment about events and trends. For example, I marched against the Springbok tour, but I did not demonstrate. And paradoxically while private life gave me more time, it also decreased the sources of stimulation. I also had two further stints back at work as a chief executive. Since my final retirement in 2002 I’ve been able to concentrate on just being a writer. I have few regrets about my career as a teacher and public servant but I acknowledge it was at the expense of a more creative and contemplative life. That was my choice.

M: Recently you edited an anthology of garden poems, *The Earth’s Deep Breathing* (2007). This lavishly produced collection sold very well with the gardening community. I have always felt that you have been one of our most prominent garden poets, along with Ursula Bethell. Is gardening a common focus in your work and did it drive you to compile the book and seek out other garden poets?

H: I grew up in a farming community in which every able-bodied person gardened. It just seemed the natural thing to do and all my adult life I’ve followed suit. Several years ago I began two books – one was a memoir based around events from a year working in my Wellington garden, the other an anthology of garden poems to accompany it. Along the way the production of the two books got separated. They are both out there now, which greatly pleases me. Their titles are revealing, *this piece of earth*

and *The Earth's Deep Breathing*. The word 'earth' is the link. I am a son of the soil. Bethell is one of my favourite Kiwi poets. Her work is unique.

M: Your new book, *Goya Rules*, pursues similar territory to *Recessional* in its honest and challenging look at humanity and history. Like *Recessional*, it has a curmudgeon style about it, particularly in dealing with the direction the world has been moving in since the terror attacks of 9/11 and the 'wars' in Afghanistan and Iraq. Is it a conscious focus of yours to expose the juxtapositions of contemporary world events and locate them against historic events?

H: Over the years I've learnt that not only do I perceive the world metaphorically, I also exist on a much larger and greater stage than the small spot I stroll around. That stage is not just space, it's also time. And of course there are other inhabitants, heaps of them, all beavering away at their own interests. There is a twofold basis for most of my poems – either an attempt to explain myself to myself or an endeavour to make sense of the stage in which I move. Of course the two strands merge and mingle. If others are interested in what I've created that's a bonus. There is another dimension, word-crafting is fun but more than that, it's become in my case an urge. Being the sort of human I am means there are causes and ideals. Near the end of *Stoat Spring* I describe a Christmas office party: 'A colleague slaps gin into a glass/ states he 'couldn't give a damn'./ I do, stoat./ I do.'

M: You are currently working on a new anthology, a personal selection of New Zealand poems you've always admired. Tell us about this project, why you were interested in doing it, and how it's put together?

H: Ever since I read Wavell's *Other Men's Flowers* I've wanted to do my own anthology. It's nearly ready. Admired is the wrong word, Mark, loved would be better. Love can be for a bad poem as much as a good one for it is an unruly emotion. Not that there are many bad poems in the collection, for it represents a life-time of reading and thinking about poetry. I'm very excited about it. It will be my last anthology.

Notes on Contributors

ANNA AKHMATOVA (1889-1966) is one of Russia's most widely translated and best-known writers of the 20th century.

TONY BEYER is currently living in New Plymouth. The poems included were written on a recent visit to the UK.

MARGARET BORSHEVSKY is a Wellington translator of Russian verse. Some of her translations of Osip Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova have been published by Pemmican Press, Wellington.

DIANA BRIDGE's latest collection of poems, *aloe & other poems*, was published by AUP last year.

PAUL HILL is a Wellington poet.

FIONA KIDMAN (DNZM) is a distinguished New Zealand writer. Random House has just published a new collection of her poetry, *Where your left hand rests*.

JESSICA LE BAS's first collection of poetry, *incognito*, won the NZSA Jessie Mackay Best First Book Award for Poetry. Her second collection, *Walking to Africa*, was published by AUP in 2009.

HARVEY McQUEEN (ONZM) is a Wellington poet, book reviewer, educationalist and anthologist. His recent books are the collection *Goya Rules* (HeadworX, 2010) and the anthology, *These I Have Loved*, to be published later this year.

MICHAEL O'LEARY is a Paekakariki publisher, poet, novelist, performer, book reviewer, graphic artist and bookseller. He recently formed the Poetry Archive of New Zealand Aotearoa.

MARK PIRIE is a Wellington publisher, anthologist, critic and writer. He has recently edited *The Pop Artist's Garland: Selected Poems 1952-2009*, a selection of Niel Wright's work spanning six decades.

RON RIDDELL is a widely published poet internationally with many books to his credit, including two novels. He participates in an *Arts for Peace* programme in Colombia, with his wife Saray Torres.

ANNA RUGIS's poems have been included in various magazines. She also writes songs and musicals with environmental themes for kids: www.enviromusic.co.nz A former backup singer for Van Morrison, Cat Stevens, The Kinks, Cliff Richard, the Peddlars and others, she has recorded 9 CDs of original music.

LAURA SOLOMON is a fiction writer and poet. Her novel *An Imitation of Life* was published by Solidus in 2009 and her novel *Instant Messages* is to be published by Proverse Publishing in 2010.

IAN WEDDE is a Wellington writer, anthologist, and critic. With Harvey McQueen, he edited the best-selling anthology *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*. His most recent book is *Good Business* (AUP, 2009).