

Allen Curnow, he would raise his hands to heaven and exclaim through tears of hilarity, "Christ have mercy on us!" a prayer which I like to think of as not going unheeded for we continued to regale each other with stories and laugh. As I drove him to the airport a few days later he proposed a visit for me to New Zealand to give a lecture on Graham Greene (featured in a chapter of *The Growth of English Fiction* which he had just read) in "all the universities." I protested that I would not have time, thinking that since there were 300 universities in Tokyo alone, New Zealand would have at least that number. "There are only five," he said, so, a few months later, I took off for Wellington.

I ended up giving the lecture only at Victoria University of Wellington but in my thoroughly enjoyable five weeks in the country, I visited all the campuses. I met Glover, Vincent O'Sullivan, Curnow, Karl Stead and Kendrick Smithyman. I heard much more about Baxter, whose biography Frank was in the middle of and the country remains unique in my memory as the one land in my travels about which I have exclusively positive memories. What particularly struck me about the country was the fact (explained to me by a geology professor at one of the universities) that it had been up and down in the ocean five times in its geological history. Nobody is native; the Māori came from Polynesia and the Pākehā with Captain Cook. I wrote about this when I drove around the South Island in a yellow mini similar to the one driven in the 1980 Kiwi film hit *Goodbye Pork Pie*:

OFF HAAST PASS

"No one has ever been here before,"
Was the thought I had as I descended
From the car, "no one in geological
Time." No country I have been in has
given
Me this gift and accompanied by
Human hospitality of these hills.

I wrote other things, a study, with
photographs of Katherine Mansfield
which was published in a Japanese

review when I returned, a piece called 'The Pursuit of Petrol' which Vincent O'Sullivan published in the *Listener* (27 October 1979, page 66) along with a poem (1 September 1979, page 8) from my first book (*Evolution - A Japanese Journal*) entitled 'Letters' which an English critic had the grace to describe as "a poem perfect in conception and execution". Here it is:

There are two of all of us.
Today I received two letters,
One to each of me.
The first was signed with "love"
The second mine "sincerely."

Friends who sign with love;
Who would be without them?
Banks which plead sincerity;
What would we do without them?

When we put pen to paper
To send our love and amity,
To which of him to whom we send:
Him with love or his sincerely,
Can we be sure our note will end?

On my return from the South Island, I spent time in Wellington with Denis Glover, to whom I instantly warmed. He was a force of nature, a booming laugh, a great bright alcoholically-reddened nose like Mr. Punch and an irresistible cheerful manner. I recall a visit to the bank with him and, on being asked by a timid young lady bank clerk how he would like his cash, he boomed in reply, "Any way at all, my dear. It all goes down the drain." I have come to see that as an absolutely accurate assessment of the meaning of money.

On another occasion when Denis had cajoled my services to drive him to the Alexander Turnbull Library, I drove to his home. Denis lived in a curiously-designed house that had a bathroom on one side of the living room and a bedroom on the other. As I arrived (early, or maybe Denis was late) his wife Lyn hurried into the garden to meet me. I later realised it was to forestall me from bumping into a semi-clad poet on the way from bathroom to bedroom. Denis, to whom embarrassment was unknown, knew what Lyn was up to and

bellowed from inside the house, "Let the bloody man come in if he's here!" Moments later, I sat with a cup of tea in the living room, the bathroom door opened and there was the great poet in his skivvies, giving me the naval salute to his Russian Commander's hat (a gift from the Soviets). I wish I had had a camera!

After this, I went north to Auckland, met Stead and Curnow, who confessed to "borrowing" his neighbor Karl's "New Statesman" from time to time, spent a quiet afternoon with Kendrick Smithyman, a great contrast to the more extroverted bards and flew back to Tokyo to my teaching with very positive memories.

Michael Duffett was born in war-time London, educated at Cambridge, and has been a poet and professor all over the world. He is currently Associate Professor of English at San Joaquin Delta College in California.



Michael Duffett by Debra Duffett

Poetry by Eileen Van Trigt

This issue we feature some poems by Eileen Van Trigt of Greytown. Eileen's poems were recently discovered by PANZA member Mark Pirie.

Eileen has a talent for succinct description and evocative imagery, and also a sly sense of humour, and well developed satirical skill. These poems form a selection from her work up till 1995.

The following biography is given by the author:

“Born in England, Eileen has been writing all her life – poems, sketches, pieces for radio, music and drama reviews. Living in the Wairarapa for 50 years, she is much influenced by the natural attributes of the region. Eileen has published three slim volumes – one of animal stories, a book of sporty limericks, and *Beneath the Oak Trees*, poems relating to the Wairarapa region. She was also a contributor to the anthology *Five Poets* (South Wairarapa Poets’ Corner), with Helen Jacobs and John Horrocks, published in 1993. Eileen founded this group.”

Poems by Eileen Van Trigt

DAY LILIES

I saw them this morning
Scarlet, tiger-dappled
Opened by stealth
In the dawn’s
Early glow.
They will have their
Brief moment.
No time to fade and
Decay as other blooms
Lingering on the stem.
In with a blaze of glory
Shining all day long.
Out with petals furled
Against black night.

SPRING

Oak trees covering their nakedness
With the palest of green frills.
Warming earth pushing up bulbs
To burst into daffodil yellow
And jonquil orange and white.
Cherry and peach blossom
Waxy magnolias
Pressing their pinks and whites
Against a blue sky.
Shadowy hills, half hidden now
By leaf-clad trees
Whose winter boughs
Had lengthened the view.

So many birds; intent on
Perpetuating the species
Performing their courtship rituals
On a green lawn
Beaks carry stick and straw
Fashioning nests in thorny hedges.
Soft-eyed calves and
Frisky lambs soak up sun in lush
paddocks.
Honey bees drunk on nectar drone in the
garden
The whole of Nature
Opens up to the sun.

GOLD AND SILVER

The day was hot
As only a Wairarapa
Summer’s day
Can be.
After noon it was prudent
To seek shade
From the sun’s blistering
Rays.
When the earth cooled
And evening came
We emerged from the house
Now too warm
And felt the soft air
Caress both cheek and limb.
Sunset had left a golden glow
To walk in.
On the country road
We stood wordless
Before the black mountain ranges
Close enough it seemed
To touch.
Trees etched
Their lacy silhouettes
Against the radiant sky
Presently a sickle moon
And attendant first stars
Chased away the gold
Bathing all in silver.

OAK TREES

June in England
This year Spring came late.
Native oaks in palest green
An abundance of them
In public gardens, road
And lake sides
Spreading in field and
Meadow.

Under the summer sun
Leaves darkened, became full
A canopy of English oaks
Under a northern sky.

Three months on and
Returned from north to south
A row of exotic oaks
Looked in my upstairs window
Wearing the same pale garb
Those distant oaks had worn.

Now, in December
Full-leaved and dark
They have taken the canopy
From their northern sisters
Leaving them stark
And shivering
In the cold English air.

WAIRARAPA

Tararua backdrop
Presently snowcapped
Holdsworth and Mitre
Presiding over all.
Waiohine, Waingawa
Smaller tributaries
Pouring into Ruamahunga
Shining waters
In this fertile vale.
Lush paddocks
Sheep and cattle-filled
Dairy cows
Producing creamy milk
Native bush and
Introduced exotics
Gracing parks and
Quarter-acre plots.
Swamp, home to duck and
Blue and red pukeko
Ocean beaches
Wild with seabirds’ cries.

(From *Beneath the Oak Trees*, 1991)

OLD PHOTOS (CIRCA 1902)

Nautical connections
On both sides
A smooth-faced young A.B.
Rests a nonchalant arm
On the studio pillar
The other on his hip
Unsmiling.

Equally serious
Is the face of the
Youthful "Zeeman"
His hand rests on a
Model sailing ship
Perhaps the type
That rode the high seas
And confronted the A.B.'s ancestors
At a time when Holland
And England
Strove for naval supremacy.

Now, they share a photo frame
United in that land sought
By Cook and Tasman
Through a latter-day
Anglo-Dutch
Connection.

A.B. = *Able seaman.*

(From *Five Poets*, 1993)

YACHT RACING

Den Connor sailed hard to catch up,
But turned to his crew and said "Yup,
Now make no mistake,
Kiwis Coutts and Peter Blake,
Have pinched the America's Cup."

CRICKET

While seeking lost balls in a thicket,
A batsman kissed Emily Bricket.
His ardour aflame,
She cried, "I know your game
And believe me young man, it's not
cricket."

TENNIS

A sporty young fellow called Will
Played tennis with consummate skill
But cried "Heavens above!
What's this scoring with love?
Why can't I just say "Forty Nil?"

(From *Sportin' Life*, c1995)

In Memoriam: Ruth Gilbert 1917-2016



Ruth Gilbert. Published in the *New Zealand Free Lance*, 23/6/1948, when she won the 1948 Jessie Mackay (no relation) Memorial prize with a set of three poems entitled 'Lazarus'.
Alexander Turnbull Library

PANZA acknowledges the death of one of New Zealand poetry's major poets, Ruth Gilbert (real name Florence Ruth Mackay).
Ruth Gilbert was awarded the distinction of receiving the ONZM (New Zealand Order of Merit) for "services to poetry" in 2002.
Gilbert was well-known in her writing life and was widely anthologised in major New Zealand anthologies. She was educated at Hamilton High School and graduated at the Otago School of Physiotherapy in 1938. Chief among her works is *The Luthier* sequence first published by Reed in 1966, a remarkable work detailing the musical appreciation in her family between the poet and her father, a maker of violins. The sequence shared the Jessie Mackay Memorial Prize for 1968 with James K Baxter. Three times Gilbert won the award.
Her other works such as her *Lazarus* sequence from *Lazarus and Other Poems* (1949) were widely acclaimed in New Zealand poetry circles. She also wrote poetry on her experiences in New York and Western Samoa.

Gilbert's poetry dates from 1938 and as recently as 2009, 71 years later, was still being featured in PANZA member Mark Pirie's journal *broadsheet*, issue no. 4, with a drawing of Ruth in Western Samoa by Dr Michael O'Leary. O'Leary has written vividly of her in his doctoral thesis on New Zealand women's writing 1945-70. As a poet, Ruth stayed true to her lyrical and musical impulse for rhyme despite Modernist trends in New Zealand poetry since the 1960s, and was an early feminist poet.
Gilbert published a number of volumes, including her *Selected Poems, 1941-1998* from Niel Wright's Original Books in 2008. Wright did much to publicise and keep in print Gilbert's work in the past two decades.
Among the positions she held are: President of PEN (the Writers' Union); President of the New Zealand Women Writer's Society; and a member of the New Zealand Literary Fund Committee. Gilbert was 99 at the time of her death. PANZA extends their deepest sympathy to her family and friends at this time.



Ruth Gilbert in Samoa, drawing by Michael O'Leary

Editor's Note: In honour of Ruth Gilbert's contribution to New Zealand poetry, we would like to reproduce here Niel Wright's excellent critical article on Gilbert's *The Luthier*.

RUTH GILBERT'S *THE LUTHIER* by Niel Wright

1
I first got to know Ruth Gilbert in person about 1965 at the motion of J H E Schroder. By then most of the short poems that were published with *The Luthier* in 1966 had already been written. While Ruth may seem a very self-possessed and tradition centred poet, in fact she has always been responsive to the times and in contact with the literary climate about her. She has always participated in the literary organisations, been a president of PEN, judged prizes, and sat on committees. *The Luthier* volume of 1966 reflects its times. The shorter poems have the quality noticeable in our poetry say from 1957 to 1967: a tendency to short direct poems that are perhaps a little spare. My own poetry of that time shows a good deal of this. But interestingly the same qualities can be seen in Baxter's poetry from 1960 on as presented in his *Collected Poems*. Brasch also at least in the 1960s cultivated the same spare approach. For whatever reason, it was in the air. My own practice had no influence in this regard on Ruth, I am sure. But we were on a similar wavelength; I was able to admire then, as I do now, her short poems in this vein. Ruth has been rather severe on them in her later *Collected Poems* (1984), omitting a substantial proportion of them, not altogether justifiably. *The Luthier* volume of 1966 sold reasonably well, I gather, but perhaps did not win a wholesale approval as Ruth might have wished. It was not going against the grain at the time; but it may still have tended to give Ruth a staid and passé complexion towards the late 1960s, when the literary climate and scene in this country made its most profound change of character for 20 years. Ruth responded to this change to a degree and in a way that surprised most readers and myself. I will discuss these changes hereafter. But these developments did tend to overshadow *The Luthier* volume; so that instead of consolidating Ruth's stature and popularity as a poet, perhaps that volume rather fell into the shade, and

gave the impression that Ruth would be less marketable in the 1970s. It was in other words a book that published work of the decade 1956-1966 when that decade was about to seem outdated. *The Luthier* volume rather caught the tide on the turn, and so in my opinion failed to receive its due. For myself I was very pleased with it at the time. I have commented individually on every poem in it in my critical study on Ruth. As a collection, it was Ruth's best to that date. Its merits lay across its contents: on the one hand these shorter poems to which I allude, on the other hand 'The Luthier' sequence. I wish to emphasise that the book had merit in both areas. The shorter poems loomed larger than in Ruth's earlier two books, since sequences whether longer or shorter have continuously predominated in her work. These shorter poems, at least 25 of which were not organised in sequences but stand alone, really need to be valued for their own sake. I don't know how they got written over that decade. At the time Ruth had a growing family; perhaps lacked the time or energy for longer efforts. Also, *The Listener* would have been a primary outlet; perhaps the form suited that medium. But of that 25 poems Ruth does not reprint nine in her *Collected Poems*. In a poet who habitually writes sequences, such self-standing pieces have a value simply by being rarities. The short poems like these are a very special genre, to be relished for their own inherent features. I have said enough. When I got to know Ruth in 1965 'The Luthier' sequence had not been written, or begun. I am particularly proud to think that I may have given just a little fillip to its composition. At the time I was quite alone in this country in wishing to write poems in sequences on the epic scale. But it was a wish rather an actuality, because the first six books of *The Alexandrians* (my epic poem now complete at Book 120) were not obviously sequences; but my theoretical comments advocated the longer, sequential poetical work in preference to short self-standing pieces. I remember Ruth saying at the time, or some time thereafter, that Denis Glover pooh-poohed the concept of the longer

poem: it was not an age for epic, he said. Of course, he went on to make increasing use of sequences himself, particularly in his last volume *Towards Banks Peninsula*. Of course Ruth had previously written sequences of poems. So any stimulus from me merely led her back to her own practice. I had no doubt from the first that 'The Luthier' sequence was and would remain Ruth's masterpiece. It has been very cordially received by readers and reviewers. It amazed Schroder; trying to read it in public he almost broke down with a display of emotion not anticipated from a not very emotional man. Of course he had very deep and very strong emotions, well buried, but this poem tapped them. I am not going to go through a list of admirers of 'The Luthier' sequence, though it would be lengthy and impressive.

'The Luthier' is the sequence that any knowledgeable reader would single out as Ruth's outstanding example. But after saying all this it remains that the sequence has rarely if ever been given its due as a remarkable, brilliant, totally successful work, quite unique, quite extraordinary in every regard. It is my ideal of what poetry should be. I consider that not enough fuss has been made of it to date. This is a pity because lacking this broad whole-hearted enthusiasm among readers for the genre, Ruth has only written one other in the same mode, 'The Lovely Acres'. Finding it insuperable to get 'The Lovely Acres' into print in its entirety, she afterwards turned to more succinct, punchy sequences in 'Too Many Storeys High'. She got a good reception with these punchier sequences; but it was at the expense of discontinuing a mode that is higher, and grander and more difficult in the literary scale. Had this country had an audience that supported the poet on this higher level of performance, Ruth might have produced a greater volume in the mode. It is a mode which calls for detail, discursive treatment, elaborate presentation of the topic, not just overall, but in the individual sections. But after two such performances, Ruth turned to the opposite kind of sequence: one aiming for brevity, epigrammatic presentation, allusive even cryptic

snapshots. There is no doubt that this later approach was well received, made a good impression, appealed to the taste of the audience, brought Ruth her greatest recognition in the 20 years (1966-1986), but a great artist should still be supported in painting in oil on large canvasses. Still we do have 'The Luthier' sequence, perfect in its way, and 'The Lovely Acres', even more impressive in parts.

2

'The Luthier' sequence is about a child observing their father making a violin. It is of course autobiographical: Ruth is the child, her father the violinmaker. The details of the setting match those in other poems about Ruth's childhood, particularly 'The Lovely Acres'. 'The Luthier' is quite thorough on the technicalities of violin making: this detail is not just drawn from memory, but Ruth at the time of composition consulted an old violinmaker around Wellington – possibly the one who used to have a shop on Bowen Street. 'The Luthier' at no time claims to be more than an account of violin making. But the poem has two additional dimensions, one explicit, the other implicit. The explicit one is the relationship of music, indeed art generally to the natural world. The object in the natural world can be made into the artefact which embodies or expresses beauty: '...mere wood shall sing.'

But it requires craftsmanship to execute the job specification: 'Given: A log of Wood; Make: A Fiddle' with success. The children as observers learn this lesson. For the father craft activity is a compulsion given the opportunity: 'what sculptor's fingers rest / Who sees his marble mute and beckoning?' It is exactness that creates beauty: 'in exactness lies / That lovely tone by which a wood will sing / And, lacking which, all song, all music dies.' This is a generality that holds true for all art. The craftsman has a sylvan workshop. It is close to trees. The workshop is frequented by bees, birds, children, and overhung with ferns. The workshop is full of tools. What the craftsman with his tools seeks to reveal and construct exists in the wood or is exemplified in the

natural world: 'the secret grain'; the ponga frond is 'The perfect Scroll'; a tui shows 'how a note should sound.' The objects and qualities of the natural world in turn are characterised by other objects. A sound has 'Something of honey in it – yes, and sun.' They are also compared to powerful biblical symbols. So the maple back of the violin is 'The fabled water an angel stirred.' This is by no means an obvious use of the Bible symbol. The angel stirring the water is here made the likeness of the maple back of the violin giving rise to music. By implication the production of music; any art from the natural world is an intervention of the divine.

This I most devoutly believe. Even if nothing more is under consideration than the natural grain of the maple, the same point is implied. What Ruth is doing in both these cases is continually reinforcing the natural object or artefact by association with other natural objects or biblical images. The artwork, the art performance in the same way are enclosed in a natural environment ('one moonlit night' amid 'the silence of the trees') that surrounds them with further associations of delight and beauty. The children similarly are equated to fantails observing the manufacture. 'Three fantails ... inquisitive as children.'

Of course 'The silver scraper flashing in your hand' is 'Caught by the sun.' 'Summer, cicadas, and you, working there' make 'in memory a timeless place.' Naturally 'the glue' is 'Like amber honey.' The section called 'Into the Trees' has the most intensive evocation of trees, particularly the trees of Ruth's neighbourhood as a child: 'Fern-shadows ... tall magnolia flowers.' The manufacture occurs in the natural world: 'the shadows gather ... The shavings glimmer.' The result of work adds interest to the evening. Work is seen here as an attractive activity in the natural world. The middle sections of 'The Luthier' are devoted to the craft activities: bending the ribs, gluing, seasoning, varnishing. To the child observing, the lesson that craft and meticulous work are necessary to success is well taken.

The implicit dimension is located in the confusion of persons. In 'The Workshop' the father's remarks are given in quotation marks. But the last seven lines are unquoted. They may be taken most naturally as the father's words. But are they not rather the poet's? In 'Moulding the Sides', the phrase 'in the craft I chose' is not quoted as if spoken by the father; they might be the poet's self-reference. This confusion of persons implies that the craft of the poet, Ruth, is comparable to that of her father as violinmaker; that Ruth in 'The Luthier' is describing not just her father's art-working, but her own.

In the last section called 'He Plays', the violin maker speaks of himself: 'I knew, I knew,' 'I come at last,' but addresses his violin in 'when the years have mellowed you' and 'May other hands hold you as lovingly...'

But I find it inescapable that we are required to equate the violin and the daughter, Ruth the poet. The poet is mellowed by the years, evokes the memories of the past, is held by other hands as lovingly as father held daughter, and 'sweet-tongued, bird-throated' sings. But Ruth only says this by an inescapable implication. In 'The Glue' the question is asked: 'Do you remember / As now I do...' Later in the poem the violin maker is addressed as You: 'You laugh and say' etc.

One supposes that 'The Luthier' is an elegy in part in memory of the poet's father a good few years following his death. I don't know whether this is so in fact. But Ruth at this point is addressing someone as if still alive. There are many references to the violinmaker as You, but these are in a context of historical recollection. 'Do you remember,' however, is in a different time frame. For one thing, it implies that the poet is so borne back by memory as to be back in the past narrated. Or for another it implies that the violin maker and the poet are together once again in a timeless world. This timeless world has arisen out of the preoccupation with the work. Work occurs in the sempiternal world. It becomes the totally shared experience of craftspeople.

The episode of the rib bending (in 'Moulding the Sides') also carries the

Rachel Bush (1941-2016)

New Zealand poet and teacher Rachel Bush died in March this year.

Rachel was born in Christchurch on Boxing Day 1941, and grew up in Hawera. Until her retirement in 2003, she taught at Nelson College for Girls. She made her name as a young woman in the 1960s, when her fiction was published in Faber's 1967 *Introduction 3*, and published fiction in the *New Zealand Listener*, as well as co-editing *Province: New Nelson Writing* (1987), but did not publish in book form till her 50s.

Rachel's first collection, *The Hungry Woman*, was based on her student work for the first Master's in creative writing intake at Victoria University of Wellington in 1996. This programme grew to become its own institute known as the IIML.

Rachel Bush, widely published in journals, published several books of poetry, including *All patients report here*; her last collection *Thought Horses* (VUP) was launched after her death on 19 April at Vic Books.

She featured in several New Zealand poetry anthologies, including *Big Weather* and *121 New Zealand Poems*. Her poem 'Voyagers' was the title poem for the Vogel-award winning anthology *Voyagers: Science Fiction Poetry From New Zealand*, edited by Mark Pirie and Tim Jones and published in Australia, 2009.

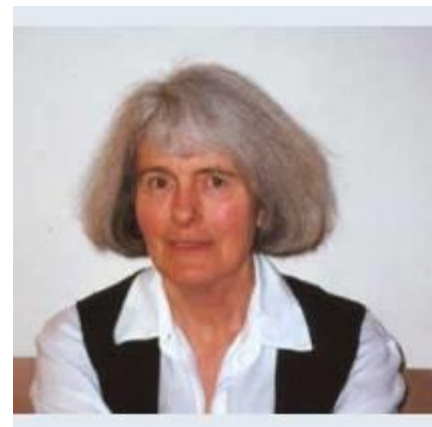


Photo: New Zealand Book Council

association of Jehovah making woman out of the rib of Adam. The father in making the violin by bending ribs is by association making a woman. So far as Ruth identifies her father's violin making with her own development by example and tuition as a poet she is the woman made in this way by her father's work. Ruth doesn't say this in as many words but the implication cannot be escaped.

The violinmaker has told his children that 'Wood ... is a living thing' which absorbs its surroundings. This may well be a scientific truth. For Ruth it is a poetic truth that wood has special qualities. The varnishes applied to wood for Ruth as for many others have names 'steeped in beauty.' The varnish improves the wood artefact in various ways, heightens the tone, preserves the wood, beautifies. In doing so, the varnish produces the results, as it is supposed to contain the qualities, of magic/science.

At the end of the sequence, the violinmaker, referring to his death, says, 'When, to these same trees, / Familiar, strong, / I come at last / (O Night, be deep, be long)' etc. Here again the wood has profound significance. It is the concept of death into life in the natural world that we have seen elsewhere. When work on the violin is finished, the father walks in the silence of the trees. He does so 'fiddle under arm' – he is not playing, 'light bow swinging' – he is not bowing. This jaunty movement expresses what? The poet tells her father he is here going to or in 'The shining instant in your *Book of Hours*.' A *Book of Hours* is a missal, prayer book, book of devotions. 'The shining instant' is what? For Ruth 'shining' often connotes terror. Ruth's language here is hardly transparent; it asks us to make the transition into myth. Indeed the violinmaker is like Moses at Sinai, entering the presence the divine. So in the next section, in this instant, the violin addresses the 'Master of Music,' that the violin maker may be rewarded with the music he dreamed of. The Master of Music is not described as God/Jehovah. Is he Pan? In the *Book of Hours* of the violin maker the devotions are addressed by the artefact not to a

specifically religious deity, but to a Master of Music, whoever that may be. In the last section of 'The Luthier', the violinmaker considers lifting his 'bow / In the final Evensong' at death, again a *Book of Hours* image.

'The Luthier' is a sequence that seems on the surface very simple. Those complications which enter into it are themselves simple. But the range of implications that arise seems to me elaborate, intense and rich. I want to add one further turn, though I do not suggest it should be emphasised. 'The Luthier' suggests that Ruth recognises a debt to her father for making her an artist. All the narrative specifies her father. But of course Schroder has some claim for fostering Ruth's development as a poet. Does then 'The Luthier' cryptically commemorate Schroder's role in Ruth's life? I'm sure it does. The emotion the poem occasioned in Schroder bears this out. Schroder himself saw himself as creating the artefact that gave rise to beauty – not in fact, but in intention. Schroder was the poet's father manqué all his life, for Robin Hyde as well as for Ruth. What Ruth's own father, the violinmaker, achieved in fact, Schroder desired to achieve. He certainly had some contributing role in Ruth's case. In passing, my own anticipatory elegy on Schroder, written in 1967 characteristically takes the form of an adaptation of the late Latin pastoral-funeral poem on Meliboeus by Nemesianus.

Niel Wright, a Wellington poet, publisher and critic, is a co-founder of the Poetry Archive of New Zealand Aotearoa.

Editor's Note: Ruth Gilbert's comments on this essay: "*The Luthier* sold its 750 Edition. It received the Jessie Mackay Award with James K Baxter's volume, *Pig Island Letters*. Not just my father's craft and mine – all creative work – music, painting, sculpture etc."

Comment on James K Baxter's *Complete Prose*

ON J E WEIR'S JAMES K BAXTER, COMPLETE PROSE by F W N (Niel) Wright

A few months ago I realised that there was no point in publishing further commentary [by myself] on the New Zealand poet A R D Fairburn, because he had dropped out of public consciousness altogether by 2015. And this is true for all his contemporaries younger and older.

It is possible that a book of James K Baxter's *Complete Prose* (as Weir words his title) could lead to some sort of revival of interest in that period of New Zealand culture.

The great value of Weir's work would be that he has brought back to current attention the names of the dead and forgotten in 20th century New Zealand culture so far as Baxter picked up on such people as in fact he must have done given his contacts and outlets. However making use of Weir's edition poses difficulties. The publicity associated with the book of Baxter's *Complete Prose* is hopelessly uninformative. There is no editorial or publisher's statement [included with the volumes] as to what the contents cover. See John Newton's review in *New Zealand Books*, issue 112, Summer 2015.

Weir's collection of Baxter's *Complete Prose* is in 4 Volumes with all editorial information and annotation to be found in the 4th Volume, so that to make sense of Baxter's text it is necessary to have the 4th Volume open beside Baxter's text in question.

After an examination of the 4 Volumes I give the following suggestion to making use of the book.

In Volume 4 Weir includes his Short Biographies of the better known New Zealand literary figures who were Baxter's contemporaries or of interest to them.

There is also an index including names of such contemporaries and others, with references that are only broadly

classified, so that in each case the reference has to be followed up to provide scale or bearings of the treatment on show.

My name 'F W N Wright' appears in the index. Weir makes clear that Baxter's items are in chronological order. When you follow up the index the reference to myself dates from 1955. However a review by Baxter of a book of my poems appeared in the *New Zealand Listener*, 4 November 1966, under the heading 'A COMPANY OF POETS'. The case is that Weir's book gives Baxter's prose items by chronological date, but reference to Volume 1 for the date 4 November 1966 finds no review (under the title 'A Company of Poets'), though such a title is used for a 1960 item by Baxter. So this may be inadvertence, or it may be policy, since the full column review in which I appeared on 4 November 1966 also covered four notable overseas poets and the book of my poems was published in the USA.

I may be one of the few people still alive with reviews or mentions by Baxter and if I am one of the few it is a long shot coincidence that I note an omission in my case. So how many omissions will come to light for the dead or forgotten, bearing in mind that most people prior to 2000 have in fact dropped out of academic or public attention?

So I am led to ask how many other reviews by Baxter have been omitted, just this one, or others, if so what was the basis of selection? It is not obvious to me Weir makes clear what 'complete' covers, all or just all he could find, published or unpublished, with apologies for any inadvertent omissions.

Editor's Note: Niel Wright's book in question is *The Imaginings of the Heart*, published by The Chiron Press, Lawrence, Kansas - hand-set and finely printed. Baxter's review is in the 1995 microfiche Index to the *New Zealand Listener* 1939-1987 at the National Library of New Zealand. As recently as 2010, a quote from Baxter's review appeared on the back cover of Niel Wright's *The Pop Artist's Garland: Selected Poems 1952-2009* (HeadworX,

Wellington). It's worth including here the publisher's online information (found at the National Library of New Zealand catalogue): "James K. Baxter was a great twentieth-century poet. He once declared, 'In contradiction . . . I was born.' Sometimes at odds with God, often at odds with conventional society, he was, at the same time, a profoundly religious man and a fearless social critic who insisted that love and compassion were the only cure for society's ills. His *Complete Prose* chronicles his life and times, his preferences and prejudices, his crises and turbulent occasions. Its contents are remarkable for their range, coherence and passionate integrity. This four-volume set contains over a million words, in the form of reviews, essays, lectures, journal articles, drafts and rough notes, meditations, fables, stories, a short novel, interviews, letters to the editor, correspondence with friends and critics, and diary entries, covering Baxter's entire career, from his first draft of 'Before Sunrise' as a teenager in 1942 to his 'Confession to the Lord Christ' shortly before his death in 1972. Edited with scrupulous care by John Weir, Baxter's friend and the foremost scholar of his work, it also includes an extensive introduction, notes and references, a glossary of Māori words and phrases, biographies of key people, an index and a bibliography. The *Complete Prose* is a testament to Baxter's huge contribution to New Zealand literature, culture and society."

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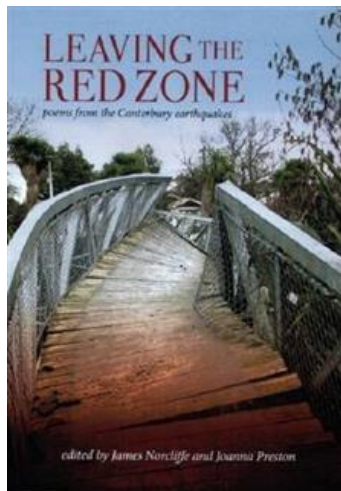
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