

INTRODUCTION

Whetu Moana, which we published in 2003, was the first anthology of Polynesian poetry in English edited by Polynesians and is now in its third imprint. In 2004 it won the Montana New Zealand Book Award for Reference and Anthology. *Whetu Moana* is now used as a text in many universities and high schools throughout the world.

Whetu Moana speaks with many voices and reflects the great mana'o / tūmanako / hopes / aspirations of our people who read and write poetry. We hope *Mauri Ola* does that too. We attribute the success of the first anthology to many factors and with *Mauri Ola* we hope to build on and reinforce those.

First, the anthologies serve a desire by Polynesians to share our struggles and achievements, our individual and collective everyday lives. In contrast to disempowering narratives of history and politics, they are a forum that bring our many voices together. In that sense, both *Whetu Moana* and *Mauri Ola* are collections from vulnerable yet enduring communities. Secondly, the poets, firmly rooted in the Pacific, are spread across Polynesia and the world. The poems discuss colonialism, sexism, jealousy, love of family, and respect for culture, elders and the past; they sit within a world view that does not exclusively consider human beings to be the most important species. Thirdly, the poets employ an astonishing

range of Englishes and pidgins that have developed within the region, expressing the plurality of cultures, a wide range of voices, linguistic diversity, attitudes and approaches within Polynesia, which is a part of the much larger region now called Oceania. Additionally, the poetry is complexly informed by the poetic, artistic traditions and innovations of Polynesians encountering local and global art developments, and influencing and being influenced by universal resistance movements.

We cautiously use the term Polynesia, aware of its tainted history. We reclaim it as a term that invites discussion of commonalities and differences among ourselves and with other distinct groups within Oceania. For example, Polynesia is traditionally connected to Melanesia and Micronesia through ancestral and more recent family ties. As we said in the introduction to *Whetu Moana*, we take pleasure in noting and celebrating our differences both inside and outside the region. In this regard, we are delighted to see that Emelihter Kihleng and Dr Evelyn Flores are co-editing a forthcoming anthology of Micronesian writing. Other oceanic anthologies edited by indigenous writers which fall outside the scope of this collection include the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Aboriginal Writing*, edited by Anita Heiss and Peter Minter,

Vārua Tupu: New Writing from French Polynesia, edited by Kareva Mateatea-Allain, Frank Stewart and Alexander Dale Mawyer, and the Papua New Guinea journal *Savannah Flames* edited by Steven Winduo. The Pasifika Poetry website (www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/pasifika), a growing resource maintained by Dr Selina Marsh, contains texts and video interviews and readings by Fijian, Solomon Islands and Ni-Vanuatu poets, as well as Polynesians. The anthologies *Lali* and *Nuanua*, edited by Albert Wendt, survey Micronesian and Melanesian writing as well.

When the idea of a second anthology was suggested, we were tempted merely to revise or update *Whetu Moana*, but because so much new poetry has been written and published since its completion, we decided to compile a completely new collection. The term ‘mauri ola’, or ‘mauri ora’, is found in most Polynesian cultures. In combining the Māori ‘mauri’ and the word ‘ola’, common in many Polynesian languages, the new pan-Polynesian title makes the anthology more inclusive of all our peoples. Mauri or maui is the location of the emotions, usually the centre of the person: the moa (Sāmoan), the nā’au (Hawaiian), the ngākau (Māori). Ora or ola is life, to be alive. Together, mauri ola is the life force that runs through all things, gives them mana and holds them alive and together. Language is at the heart of every culture: it is what binds, defines and expresses the mind, heart, spirit and body of that culture, and it also reflects cultural changes and new directions. For us, poetry is the mauri ola of language: Tihei mauri ora! Look, we are still alive, we are still here! Despite the radical changes we have suffered, and are still undergoing, we are vibrantly alive and well and continue to define, to determine and to create ourselves and our destinies.

The poetry in this anthology expresses that loudly and proudly.

As in *Whetu Moana*, we restricted the selection to poetry written in English because within Polynesia there are more than sixteen indigenous languages, plus French, English, Portuguese, Spanish, Hindi, Japanese and others. This meant we were unable to include the many significant French-language poets from French Polynesia. It was also difficult to select from the large and varied body of poems we received – we could have filled many anthologies. As we note in *Whetu Moana*, English is now an important regional language of communication throughout Polynesia and the wider Pacific. Each Polynesian country has indigenised English and produced its own version of it: there are now many Englishes in our region, and many pidgins. In *Mauri Ola* we have attempted to arrive at a selection of poetry that reflects that linguistic truth.

The poets in the anthology come from many different island nations and languages that make up Polynesia. Some have chosen to use words and phrases in their own languages, which they feel is the best, and perhaps the only, way to express their feelings and ideas. Colonised peoples around the world are reconnecting with their native languages and those poets fortunate enough to have the knowledge take great pride in using them. Many of our languages are in danger of becoming extinct and we feel it is important to encourage their use. There is a select glossary giving meanings for the indigenous words and terms used in this anthology.

We have selected work by poets of a broad range of ages, from a pioneer generation of poets such as Hone Tuwhare, Alistair Te Ariki Campbell, J. C. Sturm, Arapera Hineira Kaa Blank, Bub Bridger

and Rore Hapipi, to those who are still in their twenties, such as Chelsea Mana’olana Duarte, Kiri Piahana-Wong, Christy Passion, Sage U’ilani Takehiro, Tiare Picard, Kai Gaspar, Blaine Tolentino and Brandy Nālani McDougall. Sadly, many of our beloved pioneers have passed away over the last few years: Hone Tuwhare, Alistair Te Ariki Campbell, Arapera Blank and Jacquie Sturm. We dedicate this anthology to them, acknowledging their indefatigable struggle against racism and colonialism and to have our literature recognised nationally and internationally. We are greatly indebted to them, and thank them for the marvellous poetry they have bequeathed us. Much of the poetry in *Mauri Ola* reflects the influence of their work and example. From them, we have selected poems published in their latter years. Special mention should be made of the Hawaiian poet Wayne Kaumualii Westlake, who died tragically in 1984 at the age of 37. From his university days to his death he wrote many poems, very few of which were published. The first book of his work, *Westlake*, was published in 2009, and reveals an astounding range of poetry, from dada-influenced concrete poems to those in Pidgin. Our selection of his work in this anthology tries to reflect that richness.

As in *Whetu Moana* we have organised the poets in alphabetical order rather than by country or seniority. This makes it easier for readers to find specific poets

and doesn’t privilege any one group or individual. Though we have not reprinted poems published in *Whetu Moana*, many of the poets from that book appear again here. Some, such as Karlo Mila, Selina Tusitala Marsh, Serie Barford, Hinemoana Baker and Tusiata Avia, have published full collections of their own since *Whetu Moana*. We regret that there are omissions in *Mauri Ola* as, despite our best efforts, we were unable to elicit work from some important poets. But we are excited and thrilled by the many new and compelling poets who did send us their work. Some have never published before and we are privileged to bring their poetry to the reading public. Unfortunately, we were not able to use all the poetry submitted or include every poet.

We would like to express our thanks to the many people who have helped put this collection together, especially to Sam Elworthy, Anna Hodge, Vani Sripathy and Katrina Duncan of Auckland University Press, who worked with such good grace and patience. Our gratitude and respect also goes out to all those poets and their descendants who trusted us with their work.

Ia manuia le tapua’iga
He whakaaro pai ki ngā tāngata katoa

*Albert Wendt, Reina Whaitiri
and Robert Sullivan
June 2010*

ALBERT WENDT

Albert Wendt is of the āiga Sa-Maualai'vao of Malie, the āiga Sa-Su'ā of Lefaga, the āiga Sa-Malietoā of Sapapaali'i, and the āiga Sa-Pātū and Sa-Asi of Vaiala and Moata'a, Sāmoa. Novelist, poet, short-story writer, playwright and academic, he has been an influential figure in the developments that have shaped New Zealand and Pacific literature since the 1970s. He is the author of seven novels, four books of short stories, four collections of poetry, three plays, a history of the early years of the Mau movement in Sāmoa, seminal essays and articles on Pacific writing and art, and the editor of four major anthologies of Pacific writing. His work has been translated into many languages and is taught around the world. He is now emeritus professor at the University of Auckland. He and his partner, Reina Whaitiri, have eight mokopuna.

The Ko'olau

1.

Since we moved into Mānoa I've not wanted to escape
the Ko'olau at the head of the valley
They rise as high as atua as profound as their bodies
They've been here since Pele fished these fecund islands
out of Her fire and gifted them the songs
of birth and lamentation

Every day I stand on our front veranda
and on acid-free paper try and catch their constant changing
as the sun tattoos its face across their backs

Some mornings they turn into tongue-
less mist my pencil can't voice or map
Some afternoons they swallow the dark rain
and dare me to record that on the page

What happens to them on a still and cloudless day?
Will I be able to sight Pele Who made them?
If I reach up into the sky's head will I be able
to pull out the Ko'olau's incendiary genealogy?

At night when I'm not alert they grow long limbs
and crawl down the slopes of my dreams and out
over the front veranda to the frightened stars

Yesterday Noel our neighbour's nine-
year-old son came for the third day
and watched me drawing the Ko'olau
Don't you get bored doing *that*? he asked
Not if your life depended on it! I replied
And realised I meant it

2.

There are other mountains in my life:

Vaea who turned to weeping stone as he waited
for his beloved Apaula to return and who now props
up the fading legend of Stevenson to his 'wide and starry sky'
and reality-TV tourists hunting for treasure islands

Mauga-o-Fetu near the Fafā at Tufutafoe
at the end of the world where meticulous priests gathered
to unravel sunsets and the flights of stars that determine
our paths to Pulo'utu or into the unexplored
geography of the agaga

Taranaki Who witnessed Te Whiti's fearless stand at Parihaka
against the settlers' avaricious laws and guns
Who watched them being evicted and driven eventually
from their succulent lands but not from the defiant struggle
their descendants continue today forever until victory

3.

The Ko'olau watched the first people settle in the valley
The Kanaka Maoli planted their ancestor the Kalo
in the mud of the stream and swamps
and later in the terraced lo'i they constructed
Their ancestor fed on the valley's black blood
They fed on the ancestor
and flourished for generations

Recently their heiau on the western slopes was restored
The restorers tried to trace the peoples' descendants in the valley
They found none to bless the heiau's re-opening
On a Saturday morning as immaculate as Pele's mana
we stood in the heiau in their welcoming presence that stretched
across the valley and up into their mountains
where their kapa-wrapped bones are hidden

4.

The Ko'olau has seen it all
I too will go eventually
with my mountains wrapped up
in acid-free drawings that sing
of these glorious mountains
and the first Kanaka Maoli who named
and loved them forever

In Her Wake

I walk in her wake almost every morning and afternoon
along the Mānoa Valley
from home and back after work
In her slipstream shielded from the wind and the future
I walk in her perfume that changes from day to day
in the mornings with our backs to the Ko'olau
in the afternoons heading into the last light as it slithers
across the range into the west

She struts at a pace my bad left knee
and inclination won't allow me to keep up with
And when I complain she says You just hate a woman
walking ahead of you
No I hate talking to the back of your head

I'm the Atua of Thunder she reminds me
when my pretensions as a Sāmoan aristocrat get out of hand
So kill my enemies for me I demand
Okay I'll send storms and lightning
to drown and cinderise them
Do it now I beg

I can't I've got too much breeding to act like that
(How do you cure contradictions like hers?)

She loves Bob Dylan the Prophet of Bourgeois Doom
And this morning I swam in his lyrics as she marched ahead singing:
Sweet Melinda the peasants call her the goddess of gloom
She speaks good English
And she invites you up into her room
And you're so kind
And careful not to go to her too soon
And she steals your voice
And leaves you howling at the moon . . .

Yes for over a year I've cruised in her perfumed slipstream
utterly protected from threats
She'll take the first shot or hit in an ambush
And if a car or bike runs headlong into us
my Atua of Thunder with the aristocratic breeding
will sacrifice her body to save me

By the way she nearly always wears her favourite red sandals
as she like *Star Trek* forges boldly ahead singing Dylan songs
and me wanting to howl at the Hawaiian moon

She Dreams

Nearly always she remembers her dreams vividly
At breakfast this morning she recalled how she was flying
through a noiseless storm across the Straits for Ruapuke and her father
who was sitting on his grave in their whānau urupā wearing a cloak of raindrops
and she looked down and back at her paddling feet
and saw she wasn't wearing her favourite red sandals
She stopped in mid-flight in mid-storm and called Alapati get me my saviours!
Woke and didn't understand why she'd called them that

It's been about thirteen years and that makes you the man
I've stayed the longest with she declared unexpectedly
as we cleared the breakfast dishes
To her such declarations are so obvious and like raindrops
you can flick easily off a duck's back
but for me it will stay a nit burrowing permanently into my skin
I won't understand why