

Reviews

McEldowney, Dennis. *A Press Achieved: the Emergence of Auckland University Press 1927-1972, with a Brief Epilogue to 1986 and a List of Auckland University College, University of Auckland and Auckland University Press Publications, 1927-2000.* Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001. ISBN 1 86940 239 1. \$34.95

Reviewer: Glenda Northey

With a list of pre-publication readers including Kenneth Cumberland, Jim Hollyman, Warwick Nicol, Keith Sorrenson, Elizabeth Caffin, Michael King and Keith Maslen, this book promises authority and accuracy. Dennis McEldowney is a renowned editor, author, reviewer and radio critic, who has published extensively during the last fifty years. His first book, *The World Regained*, was published in 1957 and gave an account of his medical adventures as a "blue baby."

His most recent publication, *A Press Achieved*, provides a brief examination of Auckland University politics during the sixties and seventies, and an in-depth history of the establishment of the Auckland University Press (AUP). It also documents the publications which emerged from it. The text is divided into two parts. McEldowney bases the first section, from 1927 to 1966, on historical research on the founding and early history of the Press until his appointment. The later section is a personal account of his years, from 1966 to 1972, as the editor of University Publications, and is written as a first-person narrative. McEldowney was the managing editor of AUP from 1972 - 1986.

Part One describes the University Press from its inception in 1883, with the printing of small publications and the occasional pamphlet. A publishing programme began in 1927 with the *Auckland University College Bulletin*, a series which continued

until the outbreak of the Second World War. When it resumed in 1947, larger monographs began to emerge.

The list of authors within the *Bulletin* reads like a New Zealand who's who of literary and academic writing, and includes Keith Sinclair, M.K. Joseph, Robert Chapman, E.M. Blaiklock, S. Musgrove, Muriel Lloyd Prichard, Judith Binney, Kendrick Smithyman and James Bertram, Jane Mander, Robin Hyde, Karl Stead, and Roderick Finlayson. There are autobiographies and biographies of people such as Frank Sargeson, Bob Lowry, Maurice Duggan, J.K. Baxter, and Keith Sinclair.

Part two is a autobiographical account of the progress of the AUP, the barriers to publication affecting some of the works and anecdotes about the authors whose work passed through McEldowney's hands. He describes his moments of concern over his editing skills, in particular an early decision-making attempt over Judith Binney's *The Legacy of Guilt*, where the "combination of first-time publisher with first-time author was not ideal, and this was shown most starkly in what became almost notorious about the book, the number and length of the footnotes ... I also learnt, too late, that there was another reason footnotes on the page should be avoided: the expense" (p.47).

McEldowney describes the rationale behind the establishment of *Next Week*, a weekly bulletin consisting of a day to day calendar of university events and departmental and administrative news and the daunting task of producing the *University of Auckland Gazette*. He says that by 1967 he was asking himself: "How long can I accept the responsibility for something so dull without trying to change it?" (p.67). and that, despite his attempts to make it livelier, there was no great change.

McEldowney's account of the publishing of the New Zealand Fiction series and other literary works contributes to the history of New Zealand literature and its beginnings as a subject approved for teaching in New

Zealand universities. He describes Kendrick Smithyman's submission of *Flying to Palmerston* from a "folder of poems, new and old, which he shuffled and reshuffled, added to and removed from." Smithyman's book sold extremely well and when McEldowney told him so, Smithyman's reply was "But I don't *want* to be a popular poet!" (p.62).

Throughout the text McEldowney acquaints the reader with the inner sanctum of university politics. The parts played by Keith Sinclair, Jim Hollyman, Kathleen Alison, Andrew Sharp, John Asher, Jack Northey, Eric McCormick, Keith Sorrenson and Warwick Nicol in the history of the University and the Press are revealed in the beautifully crafted narrative style for which McEldowney has long been admired.

Chapter nine describes the printing processes of books with the early hot metal and letterpress process monotype systems, and the laborious task of photosetting which was farmed out to small printing firms throughout New Zealand. The recognition of a fully-fledged university press came with the joint imprint Auckland University/Oxford University Press in 1970: a partnership with which McEldowney notes that he "became increasingly uncomfortable ... It seemed to compromise our identity ... It also began to seem anachronistic, an example of colonial cringe," and he states he was proud "to see the authority which the single imprint gained under my successor" (p.102).

The list of publications at the end of the volume provides a chronological list of Auckland University Press publications from 1927 to 2000, and this feature in itself makes the work a valuable bibliographic addition to New Zealand writing and a must for library collections on New Zealand history and writers.

Glenda Northey (g.northey@auckland.ac.nz) is Manager, Information and Resource Centre, Injury Prevention Research Centre, Faculty of Medicine, University of Auckland.