

**Gordon Challis 1932-2018:
Poise, Insight, Sly Humour**

Peter Bland

Gordon Challis arrived in Wellington in 1953 during a period of mass emigration from the UK and the chaos of post-war Europe. He studied at Victoria University and worked as a psychiatric social worker in Porirua. His first collection, *Buildings* (Caxton Press, 1963) introduced a new and original voice to New Zealand poetry. At a time when Curnow's myths of origin were still dominant, Gordon explored an inner psychology influenced by Kafka, Beckett, and modern Spanish poets such as Marachal. These were socially repressive times and Gordon understood first-hand the damage done by an exhausting concealment of human nature. He explored an inner world of repression in parallel to Baxter and Johnson's more external, suburban and public complaints. Early complex poems such as 'The Thermostatic Man' collapse somewhat under their own density and weight, but such relationship-centred lyrics as 'Thin Partition' and 'Three Things' gently and astutely explore the loneliness of the human condition.

After *Buildings* Gordon stopped writing for over 40 years, all his energies being given over to his intense work as a healer, but following his retirement he settled in Takaka in Golden Bay and began writing poetry again, with *The Other Side of the Brain* (2005), *Luck of the Bounce* (2008), and a final *Selected Poems* (2016), all published by Steele Roberts. These later poems are among his best. His tone is relaxed, engaging, and at times almost visionary. His surroundings engage him with their promise of belonging. In one poem he is "mistakenly kind to animals" when accidentally feeding the horses of the apocalypse. In another he gently but defiantly states, "We are those who travel/and will not be put down." The poise, insight, and sly humour of these later poems leaves us a lot to be grateful for.