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**Challenging Discourses  
in  
Allen Curnow's oeuvre**

A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

Allen Curnow has been publishing poetry for more than six decades. His critical writings span about half a century, and as an anthologist he influenced the post-World War II generation of New Zealand poets and readers. Less well known today is his early verse, often published under the pseudonym Julian, his social satire, published under the *nom de guerre* Whim Wham, and his drama.

In this thesis I read examples from Curnow's oeuvre from a dialogic perspective. The Bakhtin school's dialogism allows a reading that differs from earlier appraisals of Curnow's work in that it highlights the conflicts of ideologies which reside in the texts. The Bakhtinian carnivalesque, also used in this study, allows for a new interpretation of the function of subversion in what many have viewed as a relatively conventional poet's work. Previous readings have tended to employ traditional critical theories and are predominantly historical. They also largely omit what I believe to be important sections of Curnow's oeuvre: the Julian poems, works by Whim Wham and the plays.

In Chapter One I outline the theoretical context of dialogism and the carnivalesque in which I have placed this study. Chapter Two looks at Curnow's juvenilia and examples from the verse he published as Julian, much of which has remained unexplored. In Chapter Three I discuss Curnow's poetry collections that he published during the 1930s, and Chapter Four looks at his poetry published between 1941 and 1962. In Chapter Five I examine examples from Curnow's more recent poetry, published since 1972. Chapter Six discusses Curnow's social satire, the Whim Wham verse, and represents the first critical study of these works. Chapter Seven deals with Curnow's published plays, which have also mostly escaped critical appraisal, and have been performed only rarely on stage. In Chapter Eight I provide a dialogic reading of Curnow's own literary critical writings. I conclude my study with three appendices: an index to Curnow's contributions to the 1930s periodical *Tomorrow*, a checklist to Whim Wham, and an index to Whim Wham's contributions to the *New Zealand Listener*.

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