

NOTED

# Fix the system before it's too late

*The Broken Estate: Journalism and Democracy in a Post-Truth World*, by Mel Bunce. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2019. 224 pages. ISBN 9780947518356

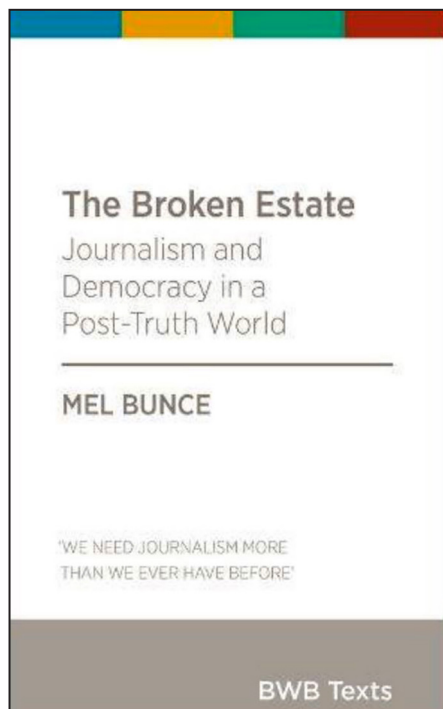
NEW ZEALAND has probably the worst television systems of any OECD nation, media ownership so concentrated that there is only one truly independent newspaper left, plummeting readership levels and almost insuperable economic challenges.

And yet, as London-based New Zealand journalist-turned academic Mel Bunce observes, there has never been a time when the country most needed a functioning, independent media system that people could trust.

In this slim, but powerful volume, she outlines what is wrong with New Zealand's media and ways that it might be fixed.

The challenges are huge: Māori and Pasifika remain woefully under-represented in newsrooms, female journalists and commentators face sexual harassment and newspapers chase clickbait while television stations think that the *Kardashians* is a documentary.

Most of the problems the New Zealand media faces seem to have been caused by government neglect, good old Kiwi management (an inability for



managers to see beyond the end of their nose or to think beyond lunchtime) and a disengaged public.

In economic terms, direct government funding is one way forward and Bunce notes that the New Zealand government has started a small pilot project to fund local reporting that would promote democracy through coverage of local courts and council meetings.

Educating the public in how to use the media properly is another priority. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began we have seen how many people prefer to read conspiracy theories rather than cope with reality. As President Trump's every utterance has demonstrated, this is enormously dangerous.

We must, however, be cheered by the fact that despite these calamities,

there is some extremely good journalism being produced here, whether it is long form reporting by people like Nicky Hager, good local affairs coverage by the country's surviving weeklies, the presence of Māori Television and the survival of *Tagata Pasifika*.

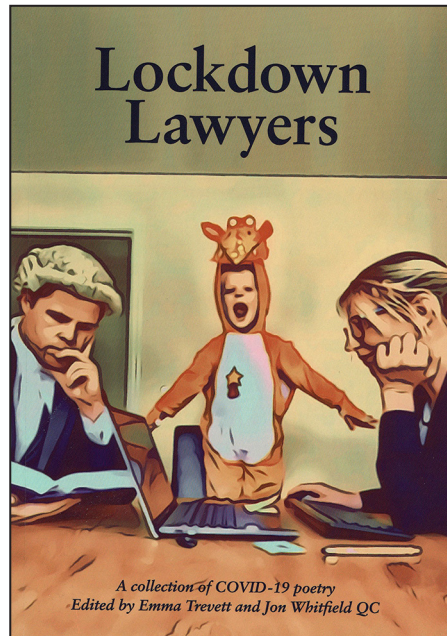
Bunce's analysis of the malaise in the New Zealand media is accurate and the solutions she offers timely. In a time of crisis it is more important than ever to fix New Zealand's media system before it is too late. — *PHILIP CASS is reviews editor of Pacific Journalism Review.*

## Lockdown sanity and survival in the age of Zoom

***Lockdown Lawyers – A Collection of COVID-19 Poetry***, by Emma Trevett and Jon Whitfield QC (eds). London, UK: Legal Action Group, 2020. 96 pages. ISBN 9781913648008

I ACCEPTED the invitation from my son in law (a barrister in London) to contribute to this anthology, with an antipodean poem I had written reflecting on COVID-19 and ANZAC day 'They shall grow. . .' When the anthology, commissioned as a fundraiser for a particularly vulnerable group during the pandemic, came out, I was simultaneously delighted, honoured, enlightened, angered, saddened, and then amused by the whimsy of some of the poems in the collection.

I grew up in an immigrant family in New Zealand and I lived with their English experiences and memories of the blitz in London. So the distance,



and yet closeness, of my daughter and her London family, in the plague-like years revisited of COVID-19, resonated strangely. With my own research focusing on software and global virtual teams, the ubiquity of Zoom and the 'near yet far' ersatz experience of 'connecting' online in a time of uncertainty and anxiety had a poignant aspect.

Particular poems speak to us of these distant connections, such as one from a lawyer's small London flat pining for the luxury of a bookcase to furnish the backdrop of a Zoom meeting. There is also one about a lawyer in (virtual) court having a client defended over Skype, sent down for a first offence and then closing the laptop to forget about it.

To gain a window into the lives of a group of legal aid lawyers and their families in a time of COVID-19 and how