



*The Oracle of Alexandria /
El Oráculo de Alejandría* by
Ron Riddell, translations
by Carlos Bedoya Correa
and Saray Torres de
Riddell. Medellín,
Colombia: Endymion,
2009. RRP NZ \$20.

ISBN: 978-958-8466-05-7. Reviewed by Cy Mathews.

Ron Riddell's collection *The Oracle of Alexandria*, while spreading its nets further afield subject-wise, is more formally conservative than O'Connor book. New Zealand born Riddell has a close cultural connection with Latin American; *The Oracle of Alexandria*, published in Columbia, is bilingual, Riddell's original English language poems accompanied by Spanish translations. I feel unqualified to judge the impact of Latin American literature on Riddell's writing, other than to say that the South American surrealism that so influenced 1970's Deep Image poets such as Robert Bly and James Wright does not seem to have been an influence. Riddell tends instead towards a brand of lyrical romanticism that doesn't, alas, always do justice to his subject matter. 'Dreaming of Bali,' for example, in lamenting the

2002 bombings, contrasts these tragic events against a Bali seemingly drawn (dreamed?) from the pages of a travel brochure:

*I'm dreaming of Bali:
of gamelan, kites, the sea
of terraced hillsides, paddy fields
of Bali before the bombings.*

Riddell also favours loosely structured rhyme schemes, but is at his best when using more subtly cadenced free verse, as in 'Among Kauris':

*Among kauris I come
to the hallowed spot
of burned-red clay -
hear the giants growing
breathing scented air
of seasoned sap
and summer resin*

This poem also stands out for its focus on concrete particulars, subject matter that Riddell deals with more powerfully, I think, than dreams or abstractions. When tempered with whimsy, his treatment of such detail can be quite exquisite, and *The Oracle of Alexandria* is dappled with many such luminous moments.