

The Neglected Middle Distance: Towards a History of Trans Tasman Literary Relations

TERRY STURM

Prefatory Note. The following article was originally delivered as a public lecture at the University of Auckland. In some introductory remarks I spoke of contemporary economic and political developments in Trans Tasman relations as giving some urgency to the more specific literary and cultural questions raised in the lecture. I was also conscious — in thinking about the ways in which New Zealand and Australian literature might be related — of pressures from a very different quarter: the burgeoning academic industry in comparative Commonwealth literary studies. I remain obstinately sceptical about many of its tendencies, and the lecture was an implicit argument against at least one of them: the anti-historical tendency in comparative studies to treat authors and works, and the national traditions they belong to, as autonomous, self-contained totalities. What is attempted here is a mapping of the historical contours of Australian cultural influence on, and presence in, New Zealand literature: a continuous, shifting history *within* which any comparative literary analysis needs, in my view, to be situated.

THE TITLE OF THIS ESSAY is a phrase used by Allen Curnow in a longish review of twentieth-century Australian poetry which appeared in the second number of the New Zealand magazine *Landfall* in 1947.¹ Its implication was that New Zealanders had concerned themselves too little with understanding a neighbourly culture which occupied the “middle distance” of their outward perspective — too much, perhaps, with the Anglo-European and American horizons beyond. Until very recently, awareness of each other’s literature has been at an even lower ebb, perhaps,

than when Allen Curnow wrote. The serious authors most widely read in each other's country — Patrick White in New Zealand, for example, or Janet Frame in Australia — are read largely, I think, as a result of valuations conferred in the more distant Anglo-American "international" community, reinforced by international publication. Ironically, the availability of Australian books in New Zealand (and *vice versa*) is largely dependent on the decisions of British- or American-based publishing firms whose international marketing operations are large enough to include both Australia and New Zealand. Very few books of poetry, serious fiction, or drama published by local firms *within* each country are ever seen in the bookshops of the other.

One effect of these (and other) pressures is that there is no established discourse about Australian-New Zealand literary relations in the literary historiography or criticism of either country: no documentation of the extent or pattern of literary influence, interaction, conflict, movement into or out of each other's culture — let alone any theoretical effort to account for such relations, or for their absence. Within New Zealand, the main emphasis — in discussion of matters of literary influence, dependence, and adaptation — has always been on *Anglo-New Zealand* relations from the colonial period onwards, which as a result have been exceptionally fully documented. More recently, in the wake of developments in New Zealand poetry in the 1970's, questions about American influence have also begun to prompt discussion and debate (though an adequate history of these relations, which would need to begin in the colonial period — at least as early as the 1850's — has also yet to be traced). In what follows I offer some hypotheses about Transasman literary relations as they have affected New Zealand, together with some examples of the ways in which they might be tested, and of areas which need to be explored. What is involved, however, is not simply the filling in of a gap, the provision of information. Insofar as Australian cultural influence on New Zealand is significant, existing accounts (or explanations) of Anglo-American influence will be affected, and so too will existing versions of the internal development of New Zealand literature.

The argument falls into two parts. In the first, I suggest that

Australia's main cultural influence on New Zealand has always been expressed (and still is) through the forms and media of popular culture, and that this influence is much more extensive than is usually recognized (partly because High Cultural predispositions have excluded it from literary criticism's angle of vision). Its effect has not only been to transmit Australian values and attitudes, and reinforce stereotypical images and myths of Australian life, but also to mediate, in different ways, the values and practices of British and (increasingly, since the Second World War) American culture to New Zealand. The Americanization of New Zealand culture is nowhere as advanced as it is in Australia (a recent survey of Australian attitudes, announced in the news media, showed that Australians themselves felt, a little nostalgically, that New Zealanders were about twenty years behind them) — but much of what has occurred in New Zealand, as with British influence earlier, has occurred not simply through direct contact with the United States, but through and because of Australia.

The second part takes High Culture as its province. It looks briefly at the history of New Zealand involvement in Australasian poetry anthologies, and at a number of differing responses by New Zealand writers to the Australian presence in "the middle distance." My aim here, as in the discussion of Australian popular culture in New Zealand, is to suggest that these relations are also more extensive than they are usually acknowledged to be, and that the patterns they reveal raise questions about the conditions and problems of writing in New Zealand as significant as those customarily asked about New Zealand's relation to English or American traditions.

I

My first examples of Australian popular culture are the components of a personal image remembered from a New Zealand childhood in the 1940's and early 1950's. I think they would be fairly representative — at least for a boy — during that period, although they seem heterogeneous. There were encounters, at primary school and elsewhere, with the popular Australian tradi-

tion of songs and bush ballads dating from the 1890's — anonymous songs like "Click Go the Shears" as well as Banjo Paterson's "The Man from Snowy River," "The Man from Ironbark," and "Waltzing Matilda," which were absorbed alongside the British poems of Masfield, Newbolt, and Alfred Noyes. My first contact with the larrikin elements within that tradition — since I missed the popular vogue in New Zealand, in the 1920's and 1930's, for the "Sentimental Bloke" — was a comic strip called "Bluey and Curly," syndicated in the *Auckland Star*, which offered an appealing mixture of racy knockabout farce, horseplay, and mateship, presented in a recognizable Australian idiom and environment. There was also the field of popular magazine journalism, in which Australian enterprise — then as now — dominated the New Zealand market: providing a wide range of home-and family-centred journals like the *Australian Women's Weekly* and *New Idea*, alongside general interest magazines like *Australia Post*, *Pix*, and *People* with their glamourized and hedonistic images of Australian surf, sand, and turf, as well as glossier products like *Man* and motoring magazines, which catered for the escapist fantasies of a male readership.²

Most of these magazines were based on British or American models, whose general conventions, styles, and attitudes were thus transmitted to their New Zealand readership, alongside the more specifically Australian stereotypes and images they promoted. *Man*, for example, was originally modelled, in the 1930's, on the American magazine *Esquire*, and itself reflected a shift in popular cultural allegiances, within Australia, from Great Britain to the United States. Despite its early efforts to marry this American allegiance with an Australian identity — many of its 1930's contributors, like Ion Idriess, were regular writers for the *Sydney Bulletin* — its postwar history was one of increasing Americanization until its demise in the 1960's, when *Playboy* moved in and took over the market. At the other end of the scale, cartoons like "Saltbush Bill" in *Pix* (the title presumably based on Banjo Paterson's character of that name) offered farcical images derived from the earlier myth of outback Australia constructed as a literary tradition in the 1890's: comic swaggies and farmers, wearing grotesquely misshapen hats with corks

dangling, surrounded by swarms of malevolent flies; a climate of intolerable extremes of drought and flood, infested with talking snakes and goannas; farms going back to wrack and ruin, populated by mangy dogs, impoverished cattle, and decrepit horses; and finally the racist stereotype of the comic aborigine, depicted as cheerfully enjoying the squalor of humpy life and, in comparison with the perpetually discomforted Europeans, possessed of a childlike simplicity and guile.

New Zealand radio, in the 1940's and 1950's, also provided a significant outlet for Australian enterprise. One of New Zealand's most popular programmes in those years was an Australian family serial, which ran to several thousand episodes in Australia itself — a serialization based on fictional sketches which had originally appeared in the 1890's in the *Bulletin*, and been published as a book in 1899 entitled *On Our Selection*. Its author was Arthur Hoey Davis, his pen-name "Steele Rudd," and the title of the radio series was derived from its two main characters, "Dad and Dave." In fact Steele Rudd wrote numerous follow-up "Selection" volumes, and by 1940 *On Our Selection* alone was estimated to have sold a quarter of a million copies. In 1912 the first of a number of stage versions appeared, starring Bert Bailey as Dad Rudd, which successfully toured New Zealand. And Bailey eventually moved into Australian film, playing the role of Dad in a series of "Rudd" films made in the 1920's and 1930's which were also extremely popular in New Zealand. In Australia Hal Porter compared the growth of the "Dad and Dave" industry across these media to an amoeba, endlessly splitting and reproducing itself. For something like half a century (from the turn of the century into the 1950's) it provided generations of Australians and New Zealanders — through the successive media of fiction, the stage, film, and radio — with a stereotypical image of backblocks in Australia (the life of the small farmer-selector and his family) as the formative influence on the development of the Australian national character. Rudd's mode was a mixture of domestic comedy and farce, his basic aim a celebration of the "Aussie battler," the man whose moral fibre is moulded through a persistent struggle with vicissitude.

The humour and sentiment associated with the life of the small farmer-battler appealed strongly to New Zealanders, and suggests a certain affinity of experience and perception in this aspect of the myth. Steele Rudd was a very strong influence on the writing of Frank Anthony — the author of the “Me and Gus” stories, and of other novels of New Zealand rural life, set in Taranaki. Anthony’s work in New Zealand traces a similar path, across the media, to Steele Rudd’s in Australia, though on a smaller scale. Originally appearing as sketches in journalistic outlets — the *Auckland Weekly News* and the *Christchurch Weekly Press* — in the 1920’s, they eventually appeared in book form in the 1930’s, and in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s as a popular New Zealand radio series on the same lines as “Dad and Dave.” By the late 1950’s the book versions of the radio stories of “Me and Gus” had proved to be the most popular New Zealand fiction A. H. and A. W. Reed had published up to that time.

The examples I have given so far have drawn attention to comic strip journalism and cartoons, to the role of widely-read mass circulation Australian magazines, and to instances of popular Australian fiction and poetry which became part of a New Zealand folklore, reinforced through the mass media of the stage, film, and radio. An adequate account of such cultural relations would need to consider them as a continuous history going back to New Zealand’s beginning as a British colony, and also as a continually changing history. Australian components (as the example of Frank Anthony suggests) would form a significant part of a history of New Zealand popular culture also, alongside British and American elements — though such a history does not exist at present, partly because, as I suggested earlier, *a priori* assumptions about what constitutes “authentic” literature, literary merit, culturally significant utterance, have excluded such work from consideration. Yet a history of this sort would raise issues about cultural dependence and control, and about the assimilation, adaptation, and transformation of Australian influences, as important for New Zealand in the twentieth century as they were (in relation to, say, England) in nineteenth-century New Zealand poetry and fiction.

I offer two other instances, here, of the kind of writing which

needs to be considered in these larger perspectives. One is the sub-genre of popular fiction, children's fiction. In the period from the late nineteenth century into the 1940's, for example, the authors of Australian children's fiction, Ethel Turner and Mary Grant Bruce, were exceptionally widely read in New Zealand. Between them, in these years they wrote nearly eighty books, regularly churned out for the end-of-year school prize and Christmas markets, often in competition with each other. A recent study of these two authors by Brenda Niall (*Seven Little Billabongs*) — which unfortunately traces nothing of their New Zealand readership and influence — estimates that Mary Grant Bruce's Billabong books alone sold two million copies by the end of the 1940's, and Ethel Turner's sales were probably not a great deal fewer.³ The reception history of Turner's best-known book, *Seven Little Australians*, traces a similar pattern, of movement across the media, to that of Steele Rudd's fiction and C. J. Dennis's "Sentimental Bloke" and "Ginger Mick" poems. There was a film version of *Seven Little Australians* in 1939, and an even more popular recent television serialization. Like Steele Rudd, Ethel Turner's beginnings as a writer are closely linked with the *Bulletin* in the 1890's, and titles like *Seven Little Australians* and *The Little Larrikin* themselves suggest the connections her work was making with the larger 90's movement of nationalist ideas. By turning to the local scene — with local settings and characters and speech — both authors, despite the residual Victorian moralism of much of their writing, offered Australian children the kinds of pleasures of recognition and self-recognition which were also occurring in adult writing of the time. In New Zealand such books not only helped to shape children's attitudes to Australia and to their own country, but exercised a considerable influence on the writing of local figures like Isabel Maude Peacocke, a prolific author of children's fiction with New Zealand settings and characters.

My final example is in the field of popular theatre. The Bert Bailey productions of "On Our Selection" — and the various stage versions of *The Sentimental Bloke* (there was also a classic Australian film version made by Raymond Longford in 1919) — are only two examples, among many, in a long history of Aus-

tralian involvement with the New Zealand stage which goes back to the country's origins as a colonial settlement closely linked with Australia. The commercial idea of an *Australasian* touring circuit became common early on — especially after the discovery of gold in Australia in the early 1850's, and the opening up of a steamship route between San Francisco and Sydney which initiated the regular waves of touring companies and stars from Europe and the United States. New Zealand on its own would have provided no significant market for such large scale theatrical operations. Australia, however, did — and the inclusion of a brief circuit of New Zealand's main centres of population might be expected to add a little icing to the cake. (Often it did not: the surviving records of nineteenth-century overseas entrepreneurs offer conflicting accounts of the success or failure of the New Zealand segment of their Australasian tours.) The essential point here is that as far overseas (British and American) involvement in theatre in New Zealand was concerned, Australia played a crucial mediating role: what New Zealand received was dependent on a market provided primarily by Australia.⁴

Australian *enterprise* in New Zealand theatre effectively attached itself to these operations, on a smaller scale but for the same reasons. Often Australian actors and actresses were employed in the large European or American touring companies in minor or supporting roles. But independent enterprise, on a related pattern, initiated *from* Australia, also began fairly early. George Coppin, the colourful mid-century Australian "theatrical capitalist" who arrived in Sydney in the early 1840's and over the next thirty years developed an extensive main-city based Australian empire — which he eventually sold to the American immigrant-entrepreneur J. C. Williamson in the early 1880's — involved New Zealand in some of his enterprises. But it was the firm of J. C. Williamson itself which represented the main thrust of Australian investment in, and control of, New Zealand commercial theatre: a control lasting from the 1880's through to the 1960's. Its record, in sponsoring locally written drama in New Zealand, was if anything worse than its record in Australia.

Vaudeville and variety were other popular forms of dramatic entertainment initially established in New Zealand through the

Australian enterprise of figures like Harry Rickards; and their subsequent development in New Zealand (with the rapid growth of the Tivoli and Gaiety theatre circuits associated with the New Zealander John Fuller and the Australian Percy Dix) followed a competitive pattern similar to — and often in close relation with — Australian activity. Equally influential in New Zealand was the vigorous later-nineteenth-century tradition of Australian melodrama. In fact, one of the main figures associated with Australian melodrama, George Darrell, had initially been an emigrant to New Zealand; he subsequently moved to Australia (in the 1870's) where he set up a dramatic company, with himself as actor-author-manager, called the "Dramatic Company for the Production of Australian Plays" in 1877. Over the next two decades Darrell was the author or producer of at least forty local plays, which he described as "Anglo-Australian" melodramas (they were stylized action dramas offering robust images of colonial life within a framework of patriotic British attitudes and values), and he brought them regularly on tour to New Zealand, and elsewhere. Bland Holt, who was the author and producer of some of the most spectacular and meretricious stage effects associated with the dying stages of Australian melodrama at the turn of the century (anticipating stage melodrama's transformation into the superior technology of silent film), also began his career in New Zealand, coming from a family which had played an important part in establishing theatre in Dunedin. Like Darrell, he became an expatriate, establishing himself in Australia, from which he made regular New Zealand tours from the 1880's onwards. According to one account, he made nine such visits, with a repertory of thirty-nine different plays.

Nineteenth-century Australian theatrical enterprise in New Zealand, as all these examples suggest, established a pattern which continued into the twentieth century, and in fact expanded with the development, successively, of the new media of film, radio, and television, where its effects need to be seen not only as a history of particular dramatic products, programmes, and personalities, but of styles and techniques — the style and format of commercial radio, for example, or of television advertising. The questions this involvement raises are the same as for other forms

of Australian popular culture. How extensively have its products influenced New Zealand culture, reinforcing or shaping New Zealanders' perceptions of themselves and of their relations with the world outside? How valuable, or inhibiting, have the links been? And what is the appropriate response, now, to the continuing Australian expansion of its investment in the New Zealand market for popular culture?

II

Once we move away from the forms of popular culture, relationships between New Zealand and Australian literature become much more complex and problematic — as problematic, in terms of influences received, pressures resisted, audiences aimed at, and the general use made of Australia's literary presence in "the middle distance," as the relationships which exist at this level between New Zealand writing and English and American writing.

In the nineteenth century — and indeed well into the twentieth century — many New Zealand poets could happily accept the embrace of Australia, in anthologies of "Australasian" or more simply "Australian" poetry which included a few New Zealand poems, in terms which they saw as conferring a wider value and significance on their work. Attachment to Australia in this way reinforced a sense of colonial identity, with Australia again playing a mediating role in confirming the relationship between New Zealand and Great Britain. In the 1890's and early part of the twentieth century Australia (Sydney, in particular) could even function as a kind of mini-cultural mecca for New Zealand poets — equivalent to, if nowhere near as important as, London. At this period there was a considerable migration of authors across the Tasman — of whom Arthur H. Adams is probably the best known, though he deserves to be better known for his achievement as a dramatist than for his work as a poet and as a not particularly distinguished literary editor of the *Bulletin's* Red Page. There is also a considerable Australian influence on the subject matter and style of New Zealand poetry at this period. One-sixth of the poems in Alexander and Currie's anthology *New Zealand Verse* (1906) — thirty poems in all, written by

eleven poets — were acknowledged to the *Bulletin*, and the bush ballad style had local New Zealand imitators like David McKee Wright, who was also (like Adams) to become literary editor of the *Bulletin*'s Red Page. The connections were sufficiently strong, in fact, for Allen Curnow to remark, in the review referred to at the beginning of this essay,⁵ that the *Bulletin* had provided "something like a matriculation test for writers in a country it called *Maoriland*." There was also, in this period and later, considerable influence on New Zealand poetry from what Robert Chapman and Jonathan Bennett in their *Anthology of New Zealand Verse* (1956) called "the Australian vogue for Pans and dryads"⁶ — an Australian version of *fin de siècle* decadence in reaction against the bush ballad tradition, which did eventually lead to significant work from Hugh McCrae and Kenneth Slessor, but which A. R. D. Fairburn described as "a fake-pagan Australian art which left imitation goat-tracks all over New Zealand poetry."⁷

Both Allen Curnow and A. R. D. Fairburn are examples of poets who appear to have felt the Australian impingement on New Zealand literature as a pressure to be resisted in their art. There is not the slightest evidence to suggest that they saw Australian poetic practice as having any direct bearing on, or offering any positive model for, their practice as poets in New Zealand. There was the colonial hangover reinforced, in their view, by New Zealand's involvement in the Australasian anthologies as a kind of annex to Australia; and existing examples of Australian influence — imitation bush balladry and pans-and-dryads verse — had merely served to reproduce and intensify those failures of self-consciousness among New Zealand poets which marked the older colonial dependences on English poetry. Curnow's *Landfall* survey in 1947 represented a carrying-forward of these arguments and judgements into the contemporary scene. It is unsparingly critical of almost everything in the anthology it discusses (an anthology of *Modern Australian Poetry* by H. M. Green) except the verse of two older poets — Chris Brennan and Hugh McCrae. R. D. FitzGerald and Kenneth Slessor (the poets with the highest reputations in Australia at the time Curnow wrote) are dismissed, and so (though at less length) are

A. D. Hope, James McAuley, and Judith Wright. The general drift of his criticisms can be illustrated from his concluding sentences:

there is abundant invention without imaginative synthesis; abundant energy without understanding; ready versification without form; a verbal excitability constantly mistaking its object; everywhere a rawness of the intellect. Too much is written, not enough read.⁸

The rhetoric of that comment is vintage Curnow. But its main interest, here, is in the kind of myth of the Australian imagination which he constructs: it promotes an image of an art which lacks the classical virtues of discipline and restraint, order, and control. As an account of the particular poets he deals with, it is provocative and challengeable; but it also, in a curious way, connects them with their literary nationalist heritage. Nationalist critics like Vance Palmer and A. A. Phillips would have been delighted to accept the positive components of Curnow's image ("invention," "energy," "verbal excitability," even "intellectual rawness") as signs of a frontier vitality in Australian poetry, and not too unhappy that in the process certain classical values had been discarded. For Curnow, on the other hand, they seem to have represented fixations on an Australian past which could only constitute an irrelevance to the effort at modernization — drawing on modern impulses, beyond Australia, in Europe — which he saw New Zealand poetry as having engaged in since the 1930's.

The responses traced here were not, however, the only ones in the period after 1930. At the other end of the scale, for example, there is a continuing history of expatriatism by New Zealand writers to Australia. Douglas Stewart's literary editorship of the *Red Page* was a most distinguished one, and lasted for twenty years, from 1940 to 1960. Later names include Louis Johnson and, amongst a large number of younger New Zealand poets currently living and writing in Australia, Nigel Roberts. Fiction would provide, as expatriate authors of considerable achievement, Jean Devanney and Ruth Park. Writers like Eve Langley, William Hart-Smith, and Bruce Beaver, who lived and wrote in New Zealand for significant periods, share in the literary history

of both countries. The patterns of such movements and expatriations, their motivations and effects on the work of the authors concerned, ought to provide questions as potentially fruitful — in what they might tell us about the situation and conditions of art in New Zealand and Australia — as they have been felt to be when asked about expatriates to England, or elsewhere. The New Zealand traces in Douglas Stewart's work, for example — not only in the subject matter and themes of plays like *The Golden Lover* and *Fire on the Snow* and poems like "Rutherford," but also in the style of his approach to Australian landscape — have remained unexplored, as have the perspectives on Australia carefully built into New Zealand novels like Robin Hyde's *The Godwits Fly*.

And it is certainly the case that at least in some instances during the period there has been continued Australian influence on New Zealand writing. Frank Anthony's adaptations and transformations of elements in Steele Rudd's work, in constructing his Me and Gus "dinkum Kiwi" stereotypes, might be compared with Frank Sargeson's use of Lawson. A review which Sargeson wrote of a selection of writing from the Australian magazine *Overland* (in *Landfall*, in 1967) included the following comments:

My difficulties in writing a satisfactory note on this book are personal and special. Not long after I had learned to read I was preferring *Seven Little Australians* (Ethel Turner) to *Robin of the Round House* (Isabel Maude Peacocke — Isabel Cluett to Auckland newspaper readers). I preferred Australian films (Snowy Baker in *The Man from Snowy River*) to anything from America except Charlie Chaplin. Later on I discovered the sentimental bloke, Dad and Dave, and Bridgit McSweeney (by far my favourite in this genre was the last) . . . I thought *It's Never Too Late to Mend* (Charles Reade), *Geoffry Hamlyn* (Henry Kingsley), and *Robbery Under Arms* (Rolf Boldrewood) the very best books I had ever read (now looking down a list of fifteen other Boldrewood books, it piques me that I never discovered *Babes in the Bush* and *War to the Knife* — the latter subtitled *Tangata Maori* — they are titles I would have been right out after if I had known they existed). And it all led eventually to Henry Lawson (his prose), about whose greatness I was never in doubt.⁹

Apart from its interest in revealing the importance of Australian popular culture — of the kind mentioned in the first part of this essay — during Sargeson's childhood and adolescence, his comments also raise the question of the bearing Lawson's "greatness" might have had on his practice as an adult writer, since in the previous year (1966) *Landfall* had printed a warmly appreciative article by him on Henry Lawson.¹⁰ In Sargeson's work — especially in the style of his stories and in the images of New Zealand life which they construct — the general possibility of his transformation of Australian elements has been overlooked in favour of comparisons with American figures like Sherwood Anderson and Hemingway. Yet Sargeson's artful use, or invention, of a plain style, and of a particular type of innocent narrator, tentative and uncertain about the meaning of his experience, is much closer to Lawson's method in, say, the Joe Wilson stories than to anything in Hemingway.

In the first of the stories in which Sargeson attempted to construct a larger-scale narrative — the story "That Summer" — the narrator on several occasions refers affectionately to the "wrinkled old Aussie face" of his dying mate, Terry. Although it is not asserted in the story that Terry is an Australian, there are other elements which suggest that Sargeson is working in a more extended way with Lawson-derived Australian stereotypes: the theme of mateship and loyalty (especially, the testing of loyalty by focusing it on a dying mate); the "innocent" larrikinism of the narrator as he engages in various ruses involving petty theft, in order to support Terry through his illness; the element of conflict created by the lurking suspicion, which never consciously crosses the narrator's mind, that Terry is using and manipulating him, that Terry's loyalty is not something he could depend on, if the situation were reversed. What emerges, persistently, is an image of the narrator's essential aloneness — and fear of aloneness — as the driving motivation of his affectionate loyalty to his mate. Mateship functions, that is, not as a moral or political creed, nor as a way of identifying a particular national type, but as the expression of a deep personal fear and need.

This is precisely the image of Lawson himself which Sargeson's article on him constructs: carefully detaching from the national-

ist consciousness of his period, and presenting him as a figure writing primarily out of personal compulsions and needs. That image of Lawson has only relatively recently been constructed in Australia itself, in a sustained way, in an eloquent and moving book on him by the historian Manning Clark.¹¹ And Sargeson is perhaps the best example of a New Zealand writer who in thinking through his own relationship to Australian literature has been able to find a constructive *use* for it here, in New Zealand.

APPENDIX

A Note on the Australasian anthologies

The long history of Australian enterprise in the production of anthologies including both Australian and New Zealand verse begins in the later part of the nineteenth century, with the work of an indefatigable anthology-compiler and promoter of his own mediocre verse, Douglas B. W. Sladen. It ends, effectively, in 1950, with the final edition of Walter Murdoch's Oxford anthology, originally edited by him in 1918 as *The Oxford Book of Australasian Verse*. It was reprinted on numerous occasions, and in 1950 recast as *A Book of Australian and New Zealand Verse*, with the New Zealand contributions given a separate section for the first time, and edited by a New Zealander, Alan Mulgan. The appearance of separate Oxford anthologies, edited in New Zealand by Robert Chapman and Jonathan Bennett (1956) and in Australia by Judith Wright (1956), finally confirmed the demise of the old concept of an "Australasian" totality.

Sladen's main anthology first appeared in 1888, published in London by the Walter Scott Publishing Company and entitled *A Century of Australian Song*. It was a Centenary volume celebrating the founding of Australia in 1788, and included New Zealand verse under its general heading of "Australian Song"; and it was a much enlarged edition of a slightly earlier compilation, *Australian Ballads and Rhymes* (1888), which also included New Zealand poems, and which appeared in the "Canterbury Poets" series published by the same company in London — the series in which Alexander and Currie's *New Zealand Verse* appeared in 1906.

In addition to Sladen and Murdoch, the Sydney publishing house of Angus and Robertson got into the anthology business in the early 1900's, when Bertram Stevens edited *An Anthology of Australian Verse* (1906) — like Sladen, using the term "Australian" with disarming frankness to include New Zealand:

The Editor has endeavoured to make this selection representative of the best short poems written by Australians or inspired by Australian scenery and conditions of life — "Australian" in this connection being used to include New Zealand.

Reprinted several times, this book in 1909 became the basis of a much larger Angus and Robertson anthology, also edited by Stevens, entitled *The Golden Treasury of Australian Verse* — and this in turn went through numerous reprintings.

Finally, there was the later entry of the publishing firm of Collins, in 1927, with a compilation of Australian and New Zealand poems entitled *An Australasian Anthology*, edited by Percival Serle. A second edition appeared in 1929, and a third edition (with new Australian poems, but no additional New Zealand poems) in 1946.

The relative weighting given to New Zealand poetry in these anthologies — edited by Sladen, Stevens, Murdoch, and Serle — was remarkably consistent, across all of them, at about 17%-18% in terms of pages allotted. The number of New Zealand poets represented, with only a slight variation in Sladen's anthology, was also consistent, at fourteen.

(a) Sladen included 11 New Zealand poets and 67 Australian poets, and his New Zealand poets were allotted 85 pages compared with 422 pages for the Australians (or 17%). Sladen's New Zealand poets were relatively fewer (at 11) than those of the later anthologists, but he made up for this in the space which he allotted to Alfred Domett. Only 3 of the Australian poets exceeded the 25 pages given to Domett: Henry Kendall, James Brunton Stephens, and Sladen himself. For Sladen, Domett was "the New Zealand Lucretius," a figure who "towers over Antipodean poets in his achievements," and his "great *Ranolph and Amohia* is by far the principal achievement of Australasia in poetry." Thomas Bracken was the only other New Zealand poet given significant space (14 pages); together, Domett and Bracken made up nearly half the New Zealand contribution to the volume.

(b) Bertram Stevens in his 1906 anthology included 14 New Zealanders and 52 Australians: 50 pages of New Zealand verse (or 18%) compared with 231 pages for the Australians. For his revamped *Golden Treasury* in 1909, four New Zealanders were added (and two dropped) and six Australians were added: 62 pages compared with 286 (the same proportion of 18%). In 1906, the New Zealanders most strongly represented were, in order, Jesse Mackay, A. H. Adams and Mary Colebourne-Veel, and D. M. Ross. The *Golden Treasury* selection was a distinct improvement: Adams and Mackay remained at the top, followed by Blanche

Baughan and Will Lawson (new names), and W. P. Reeves and Hubert Church were also included.

(c) Walter Murdoch in his Oxford anthology (1924 edition) included 14 New Zealanders and 56 Australians, allotting 47 pages to the former (or 17%) and 233 pages to the latter. Adams (12 pages) came out well ahead of Baughan (7 pages), Mackay (6 pages) and Colebourne-Vel (5 pages). These four poets accounted for almost two-thirds of the New Zealand contribution: no other poet was allotted more than two poems.

(d) Percival Serle in his Collins anthology in 1927 included 14 New Zealanders and 56 Australians: 46 pages (or 19%) for the former and 204 pages for the latter. In the 1946 revised edition (which added Australian poems but not New Zealand poems) the proportions became: 14 New Zealanders and 78 Australians; 46 pages (or 16%) compared with 233 pages. Serle's main New Zealand contributors were Adams and Church (7 pages each), Mackay (6 pages), and Colebourne-Veel, Baughan, and Dora Wilcox (4 pages each).

Summary

<i>Anthologist</i>	<i>No. of NZ Poets</i>	<i>No. of Aust. Poets</i>	<i>No. of Pages NZ</i>	<i>No. of Pages Aust.</i>	<i>% NZ</i>
Sladen (1888)	11	67	85	422	17
Stevens (1906)	14	52	50	231	18
Murdoch (1924)	14	56	47	233	17
Serle (1927)	14	56	46	204	19

The proportions of Australian to New Zealand material throughout these anthologies are so constant that one suspects that either a strict equivalence of representation based on population numbers is being applied or that each editor is simply applying the same formula as his predecessors and competitors in the field. Given the constraints of space under which they were operating, the anthologists up to the 1920's do not seem to me to have treated New Zealand poets unfairly, nor to have substantially misrepresented what was actually being written. (The two main exceptions were the repeated over-valuing of Mary Colebourne-Veel, and the repeated omission of Reeves, whom Alexander and Currie had presented, alongside Domett and Adams, as one of the Big Three names in New Zealand poetry.)

Despite this, the sense of being dwarfed and patronized — incorporated — by a neighbouring culture is inescapable. From the 1920's on there is an increasing gap between the representation of New Zealand poetry in the anthologies, and the actual work being done. The absurdity is most apparent in the Murdoch and Serle anthologies of the mid- and later 1940's, which include none of the poets represented in Allen Curnow's *Caxton Book of New Zealand Verse* (1945), except Arnold Wall. Instead, the publishing houses of Oxford and Collins continued to offer post-World War II Australian readers a pre-World War I version of New Zealand poetry, with Adams, Church, Mackay, and Colebourne-Veel as its major poets. When Oxford finally arranged for Alan Mulgan to edit an updated New Zealand selection in 1950, Murdoch commented ill-humouredly in his Preface:

I was always aware that the New Zealand section of the book was entirely inadequate; and I am happy to have washed my hands of it.

For New Zealand poets like Allen Curnow and A. R. D. Fairburn, in the 1930's and 1940's, the post-20's history of the Australasian anthologies must simply have confirmed the need to go a separate road.

NOTES

- ¹ *Landfall* 2 (June 1947), 142-50.
- ² See Richard White, "The Importance of Being *Man*," in Peter Spearritt and David Walker (eds.), *Australian Popular Culture* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1979).
- ³ Brenda Niall, *Seven Little Billabongs* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1979).
- ⁴ See Peter Downes, *Shadows on the Stage: Theatre in New Zealand — The First 70 Years* (Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1975), p. 112 and *passim*.
- ⁵ *Landfall* 2 (June 1947), 142.
- ⁶ Robert Chapman and Jonathan Bennett (eds.), *An Anthology of New Zealand Verse* (London and Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. xxi.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ *Landfall* 2 (June 1947), 149.
- ⁹ *Landfall* 82 (June 1967), 206.
- ¹⁰ *Landfall* 78 (June 1966), 156-62.
- ¹¹ Manning Clark, *In Search of Henry Lawson* (Melbourne: MacMillan 1978).