

# Correspondence

## New Zealand Literary History

I AM grateful for Professor Sinclair's lively review article under this heading in your last number, since it gives serious attention to critical studies that are often ignored, or very briefly reviewed, in this country. But may I take up a few points?

Oxford, classical studies, 'Home'. Keith Sinclair finds it 'extraordinary', 'quaint', 'surprising' that this cluster of associations, a kind of shorthand for 'the European cultural tradition', should still seem important for New Zealand writers in the 1930s and beyond; by implication, he suggests that a closer attention to Maori language, Polynesian mythology and the New Zealand vernacular might have been more rewarding. That they could help, I readily agree; but surely they could never replace the European cluster, as a primary source for writers of English?

Literary centres. Sinclair writes: 'Whereas Auckland was the literary centre of the early 1930s, and Christchurch...in the late 1930s and again immediately after the war, the chief centres thereafter were Auckland and Wellington. Bertram says that Wellington and Dunedin were "the most active literary centres" after the war. This seems to me quite wrong.' What Bertram wrote, in the passage referred to, was: 'If Auckland and Christchurch had been the most active literary centres in pre-war years, in the post-war period it was the turn of Wellington and Dunedin.' This view seems to me defensible. From 1945 Brasch and Baxter were active enough in Dunedin, and were soon to be joined by Ruth Dallas. Other 'significant writers' – M.H. Holcroft, E.S. Grenfell, Ruth France, besides Curnow and Glover – were still at large in the South Island. And should not 'Pelorus Press' here (p.72) read 'Pegasus Press'?

Homosexual attitudes. Of course these are likely to appear in writers, as in most of us at some stage of our development. But surely there are very few New Zealand writers whose *oeuvre* is consistently homosexual, as we recognize in Gide or Proust or Forster or Isherwood? I cannot accept Sinclair's claim that 'it is clearly true that...in New Zealand, there have long been numerous homosexual writers who review – and praise – one another, and act like a secret society', or his implication that *Landfall* under Brasch was somehow part of such a conspiracy. When I described Brasch as being 'like many artists, bisexual in his feelings' I was thinking of *The Estate*, directly addressed to Harry Scott; one could cite other poems of his, with as strong a current of personal feeling, addressed to women. 'Homosexual', especially when linked with such terms as 'prissiness' and 'preciousness', is a very misleading label to slap on a literary period or an editorial policy.

I cannot comment on the 'Catholic mafia' in New Zealand writing, though I suspect this – like Fairburn's 'green international' – of being another

literary hoax. When I suggested that an examination of the draft of Brasch's lyric 'Winter Anemones' (which the printer, or somebody, has turned into 'Ceremonies') 'might be as instructive to later students of poetic technique as reference to the manuscripts of Keats', I meant of course to make a purely technical point — that Keats and Brasch composed in the same way. Finally, I am sure Professor Sinclair will be delighted to learn that Vincent O'Sullivan has agreed to write a critical study of Maurice Duggan.

Wellington

JAMES BERTRAM

I SUPPOSE Keith Sinclair deserves credit for his efforts to liven up the rather arid subject of New Zealand literary history. His review article certainly confirms his reputation as the country's senior *enfant terrible*. I wonder, though, whether he hasn't gone a bit too far this time. The charges and innuendoes concerning Charles Brasch are unpleasantly reminiscent of those aimed at Colin Moyle — and Charles Brasch is less capable of replying than Colin Moyle. As for the moth-eaten myth of the Green International, it seems to me on a par with the Yellow Peril or, as I once remarked to Rex Fairburn, with the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

Auckland

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