

Correspondence

SO FAR I have not seen *The Letters of A. R. D. Fairburn*, and the notice in your October 1982 issue (pp. 176-8) hardly encourages me to seek out a copy. However, if I may, I should like to comment on a couple of points raised by the reviewer. He says Fairburn was in some ways 'rather a snob' and mentions his 'hobnobbing' with actors. I suppose he was a bit snobbish like most aspiring New Zealanders born in the early years of the present century. That is, he was a colonial, uneasily poised between the 'mother country' and the place of his birth and upbringing. He used to insist on pronouncing Marlborough, the South Island province, in the English manner. And I, personally, found his derogatory references to grocers and plumbers both snobbish and offensive; but that might have been because I was the son of a shopkeeper. As for the actors, the local intelligentsia quite understandably hobnobbed—or wanted to hobnob—with Scarlett O'Hara and Heathcliff (was it?) and Saint Joan when they miraculously descended on Auckland during the dreary post-war years. I would call that fairly harmless celebrity-hunting rather than snobbery. Fairburn might have been charged with that much graver breach of egalitarian principles had he accepted an invitation to board the royal yacht—which he could have done for all I know.

In the next paragraph the reviewer in his own person asserts—without citing evidence—that the 'New Zealand literary world did have a certain homosexual ambience' (presumably during Fairburn's career). Now it happened that throughout those years I had quite extensive dealings with our 'literary world', to use a portentous phrase for the relatively few producers of books and periodicals up and down the country. Not to be exhaustive, they included such firms as Whitcombe and Tombs, Wilson and Horton, Pauls, Reeds, the Caxton Press, successive editors of *Here and Now*, the *Listener*, and *Landfall*, together with poets, novelists, anthologists, journalists, etc. In the course of my business and professional association with these people it never occurred to me to probe into their sexual habits which I believed—and continue to believe—were their own affair. Nor was I conscious of a homosexual—or any other—'ambience' enveloping their persons. True, there was a widespread boozey *bonhomie*, a continuation, I would guess, of wartime habits. But it was by no means universal, and (to savour a final whiff from that malodorous dead herring, the Green International) I doubt whether it had much influence on editorial or publishing decisions.

By way of postscript I must mention one hitherto neglected aspect of our literary life in the fifties and sixties, frolicsome femineity, recalled by Fleur Adcock in *The Summer Book* (Wellington, 1982), pp.129-33. Not one explicit reference to that most tedious of topics, homosexuality, and 'Rex' Fairburn gets four elegiac words.

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