The Village

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When I delivered the first draft of my 2011 book, *Dark Night: Walking with McCahon*, to my New Zealand publishers, there was no response. Nothing. Silence. Most alarming. It went on for four months until, under a pretext, I got in touch with them. The director immediately proposed a meeting and at that meeting the first material thing he said to me was that, if I wanted to, I could look elsewhere for someone to do the book. By this time I was feeling quite annoyed so I told him straight up that the first question any other New Zealand publisher would ask of me was, why didn't he want the book; so why was it? And then, after some prevarication, he told me.

The problem was that I had, in anticipation of possible simultaneous Australian and New Zealand publication, included a brief biography of Colin McCahon in the draft. It was about forty pages long and was meant to introduce the man and his work to a perhaps uninformed Australian audience: but the New Zealand publishers believed a local audience would find it both unnecessary and offensive. I would be trying to tell them things they already knew. By this time it was clear that trans-Tasman publication was not going to happen, so I excised the biography from the second draft, which was accepted, came out in due course and has done quite well—even in Australia, even without the explanatory biography. I guess the publishers were right after all.

However there were parts of that biography I regretted losing; and in particular the account I had written of Colin McCahon's first visit to Australia in 1951. It seemed somehow typical of the state of antipodean affairs that, through too great a familiarity on the one hand, and too little on the other, a story about mutual and beneficial contact between artists from the two countries should remain untold; and so, in this essay, I am taking the opportunity, at least in part, to tell it; and then to go on to make some further remarks about the relationship, in the arts and generally, between Australia and New Zealand. In the course of these my commentary will range across those areas where Australia and New Zealand have been most closely connected, that is to say the terrain not just of the literary and visual arts but also that of government and the shared military history of ANZAC.

First, then, an excerpt from that excised biography:

In 1951 poet and cultural impresario, the independently wealthy Charles Brasch, paid for Colin McCahon to take a six-week trip to Melbourne to look at the paintings in the National Gallery of Victoria. He sailed on the *Wanganella* to Sydney, spent a day or two there, and then went by train to Melbourne—in a letter to Brasch from 'somewhere north of Wagga Wagga' he wrote: 'it is all so magnificent. The vast tree-dotted landscape in such lovely colours. It feels so entirely unlike N.Z., in spite of its size so much more friendly' (Bloem & Browne 171).

McCahon was in Melbourne during July and August of that year. He found Australia to be 'a really foreign land . . . so much country which is beautiful, just so different to N.Z. So much more human & soft. Little or none of the N.Z. grandeur . . . The greens are quite unbelievable & the soil all light red. Trees everywhere but no undergrowth. Hill shapes very different from

ours too & the feeling of distance even in small areas of landscape enormous. The hills in the distance really blue becoming ink blue further away' (Bloem & Browne 170).

He was not so impressed by the paintings he saw: 'Am most disappointed by almost all the local painting. A lot more slickness than in N.Z. . . . A lot of modern art which is worthless—nothing more than just fashionable' (Simpson 3). Nor were the old masters the revelation that they might perhaps have been expected to be: 'The gallery in the end comes down to very few memorable pictures—the best the small Rembrandt self portrait, the Goya portrait & the El Greco portrait (which is the most interesting & best to learn from), the Cézanne in the second flight, a green Pissaro landscape, a large Turner landscape. The rest don't count in the end' (Simpson 4).

The most significant result of the Melbourne visit was not the art but an artist: an encounter with an older woman painter, Mary Cockburn Mercer, from whom McCahon took some lessons. 'Mary was old, she had attended the banquet for Rousseau in 1908. She had a broken leg and no money. She charged me three shillings an hour for 'tuition' for two hours in the afternoons—painting—and nothing at all for the mornings of looking—at the National Gallery—and nothing for the extra hours of conversation in the late afternoons. I was taught how to be a painter, and all the implications, the solitary confinement that makes a painter's life. I remember her with great affection and gratitude' (Bloem & Browne 170).

Mary Mercer was the third daughter of William Cockburn Mercer, a pioneer settler at Springwood, Wannon, in the Western District of Victoria. Born in Scotland in 1882 while her mother was on a visit there, she spent her childhood in Australia until taken to Italy as a teenager to complete her education. Aged 17, she ran away from London to Paris and began living a bohemian life in Montparnasse, where she knew artists Marc Chagall, Kees van Dongen, Marie Laurencin and Pablo Picasso. Some of the work she collected—Chagalls, van Dongens, Laurencins but no Picassos—remained in her collection until her death. She was 26 years old when the banquet for Rousseau was held.

After the war she worked as a studio assistant for French painter André Lhôte, translating his lectures on dynamic symmetry in synthetic cubist painting for English-speaking students. She built, with her then partner American artist Alexander Robinson, a large house at Cassis in the south of France and they went there to live in 1922. Here she painted oil and watercolour landscapes. Later in the 1920s Mercer took a woman lover, fellow Australian artist Janet Cumbrae Stewart, and the two women went to Capri where they rented a villa next door to Compton Mackenzie; they appear in his 1928 satirical novel *Extraordinary Women*, which is about the lesbian social set on Capri.

On a visit to the Canary Islands Mercer met and fell in love with a German photographer, the son of a wealthy industrialist. They moved to Spain together and became embroiled in the Spanish Civil War. When the photographer was forced to return to Germany for military service, Mercer left by ship for Tahiti where she lived for some months. There is a beautiful work, lilies before a window with the ocean outside and a map of Moorea on the wall, from this sojourn; it is in the Australian National Gallery in Canberra. Later, on an island off Guam, Mercer met and became friendly with the Scots-Australian painter Ian Fairweather.

In Melbourne in 1938 Mary Mercer rented a studio apartment at 539 Bourke Street, where she lived and held art classes. Here she was joined in 1939 by Janet Cumbrae Stewart and their relationship renewed. She exhibited during the war years with the Contemporary Art

Society, though her 'decadent' nudes were often hung behind the gallery doors: 'Their overt sexuality shows the influence of Laurencin and Man Ray's photographs of the famous model Kiki of Montparnasse,' one commentator wrote (Kerr).

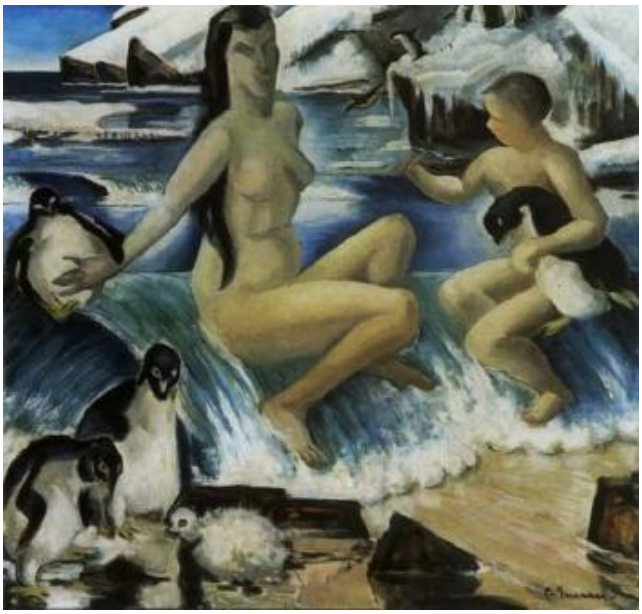


Fig. 1 *Birth of Venus (Study in Diagonals),* Mary Cockburn Mercer, 1941
Image courtesy Sotheby's Australia.

Along with Cumbrae Stewart and Fairweather, her friends in Melbourne included her neighbours in Bourke Street, painters David Strachan and Wolfgang Cardamatis, both gay men who had also spent time in Europe. A contemporary remembered her as 'an exciting and forceful woman who wore mannish tweed suits and talked of Europe' (Di Sciascio). Not long after she gave McCahon his lessons, in 1952, Mary Mercer returned to Cassis, where severe arthritis forced her to give up painting; she studied Russian instead. She spent the last ten years of her life in France, selling the Cassis villa and building a small house in the grounds of a convalescent home in Aubagne; and died there, aged eighty-one, in 1963.

In some accounts the meeting between McCahon and Mary Mercer is accidental, serendipitous but, as the following extract from Charles Brasch's *Journal* makes clear, this was not the case:

> Last evening at the McCahons Colin told me about his trip to Australia. Australian painting in general a disappointment; plenty of finish & slickness, but little sound honest serious painting. The exceptions he mentioned chiefly were William Frater & my cousin Lina Bryans (Teddy & Nina Hallenstein's daughter) in Melbourne, & Dobell & Margaret Preston & a Hungarian named Orban (though he hadn't seen much of their work) in Sydney.
>
> I had written to Lina (whom I'd not seen since 1923) asking her to help him, & he spent a lot of time with her; Colin was impressed with her painting . . . she's had a very varied love life, & now lives with an unfrocked Anglican clergyman on a large farm in the Dandenongs fifty miles from Melbourne. Lina, though she'd quarrelled with him, took Colin to see the Christensens. Colin liked Mrs C., but thought him a weak, hysterical, plaintive, tiresome parlour-communist, & said that he appeared to edit

> *Meanjin* as a spare time job, though he had a good office, with a secretary, at Melbourne University Press. He told Colin that *Meanjin* had no NZ subscribers now & begged him to try & find it a few.
>
> Lina Bryans also took him to meet an old English painter, Mary Mercer, who'd lived & worked in Paris & knew most of the great people there; Lina was having lessons from her, Colin was able to have a few also, & said he learned more from her in four half days than he'd ever learned before. (Brasch)

On his return from Australia McCahon concluded his series of figurative religious paintings with 1952's serene *Crucifixion* and then went to work on a painting initially called *Paddocks for Sheep*, based on aerial photographs of the Canterbury Plains; this he transformed into a breakthrough work, the cubistic *On Building Bridges: triptych,* also dated 1952. He spent most of the rest of the decade exploring the implications of the lessons in cubism he had from Mary Mercer; at least until his second overseas trip, to the United States in 1958, again re-oriented his painting.

There are several points of interest here: one is the odd parallelism between Charles Brasch, founder of the New Zealand literary periodical *Landfall*, and Clem Cristensen, founder of the Australian literary periodical *Meanjin*—both quasi-nationalist publications which are, in very different forms, still alive today; another is the intersection of a home-grown, rough-hewn, even awkward local painterly tradition with European modernist sophistication as filtered through the life and work of the bohemian Mary Mercer; a third, which I want to consider in more detail, is the role of Lina Bryans as a conduit for these encounters and experiences.

Lina Bryans, née Hallenstein, was, like Mary Mercer, born overseas—in Hamburg in 1909 while her family was holidaying in Europe. She was also, like Charles Brasch, independently wealthy, though she does not seem to have been quite as well off as he was. In the 1920s she married a Melbourne businessman by the name of Bryans, had a son with him, then left and raised the boy herself; an unusual thing to do in that time and place. Her son Edward was a theatre critic and musician who became a much-loved newsreader on ABC radio and television.

Bryans took up painting in the 1930s and was more or less self-taught; was unconventional, exhibited rarely, mostly at the yearly shows of the Contemporary Art Society, yet became well known both as a portrait painter and a landscapist; there are interesting resemblances between her landscapes and those McCahon painted in the early post-war years. She's better known now as a portraitist; many of her more than seventy extant portraits were of contemporary artists, writers and intellectuals so that there is a strong documentary aspect to her oeuvre. She was, again like Brasch, always a benefactor as well as a practitioner. In the early 1940s, for instance, she bought a former coach house, the Darebin Bridge Hotel, also known as The Pink Hotel, on the outskirts of Melbourne and there founded an informal artist's colony.

The great, and greatly eccentric, Ian Fairweather, whom Mercer had met off Guam, was resident in The Pink Hotel for some years during the war; and it's fair to say that much of his early work would have been lost if Bryans had not conserved both the painter and his paintings. She bought some directly off him and made sure others found a safe home. Fairweather, who was generally unsociable, even reclusive, after a year or so at the hotel retreated to his studio/bedroom next to the kitchen, from which he would hand out notes

through a hole in the brickwork, asking for someone, usually Bryans, to go and buy him cigarettes. She always went.

Bryans sold The Pink Hotel in 1948, the same year she held her first solo exhibition in Melbourne; it would be nearly twenty years before she had another. Characteristically, she considered herself still a learner and, also in 1948, took lessons from George Bell, then seventy years old. Bell, an academician and a war artist who, in the 1930s, re-invented himself as a proto-modernist, was the founding president, in 1938, of the Contemporary Art Society; just two years later the group split and Bell, leaving John Reed, of Heide, in charge of the CAS, formed the rival Melbourne Contemporary Artists. Bell resiled from the experiments of Nolan, Tucker and other neo-primitives of the time. He taught, one commentator remarked, 'French Post-Impressionism—but it was Cézanne via the New English Art Club.'

Bryans' lessons with Bell were followed, in 1951, by those she took from Mary Mercer. They must have gone well: Mercer, after returning to Cassis in France in 1952, asked Bryans to join her there. 'What painting to be done!' she wrote. 'Come if you have the courage' (Forwood 107). Bryans did go, via the United States, but found things rather different than she expected. Mercer was impoverished, living on sardines and cans of bully beef left behind after the war by American servicemen. The bath at Cassis was full of stones and the air 'fraught with tension'—it was perhaps sexual tension. Bryans did however, in Paris, meet her hero Picasso and obtained from him a piece of blank paper with his signature upon it. Then she returned to Melbourne.

Fig.2 *The End of the Road*, Lina Bryans, 1941-43.
Image courtesy AGNSW.

Here, later in the decade, in 1958, she hosted the other great New Zealand painter of the era, Toss Woollaston, on his visit to Melbourne, which Charles Brasch actively sponsored but did not actually pay for; it was funded via a grant. While in Melbourne Toss exhibited at the

Museum of Modern Art, founded and operated by John and Sunday Reed. There's a 1958 portrait of Toss by Lina, in which he looks like a more genial older brother of Colin McCahon and wears what might be called a cubist shirt. Charles Brasch bought this portrait and it's now in the Hocken Library in Dunedin. Lina Bryans in the 1960s, before ill health forced her to give up painting, also did, in pastels, a tender, psychologically acute, portrait of Charles Brasch; it too is now in New Zealand.

Woollaston and Bryans obviously got on a lot better together than she and McCahon had done. Woollaston was bi-sexual, open-minded, non-judgemental; quite unlike the dour and often obsessive McCahon. Murray Bail, the novelist, who is the authority on Ian Fairweather, and who once wanted to prepare a *catalogue raisonné* of Colin McCahon's work, recorded much later in a notebook Lina Bryans' comment that McCahon was the only person she did not warm to as a person. The cause of their 1951 quarrel is unknown but was probably due to a clash of personalities: the free-living bohemian Bryans and the frequently waspish and, in his son's words, 'ever more Calvinist,' McCahon (Bloem & Browne 31).

However, I don't wish to disinter old quarrels; rather, I'm looking for communalities. One is to be found in the family background of the cousins, Charles Brasch and Lina Bryans. They were both descended from a family of three brothers who emigrated to Australia from Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. The brothers Hallenstein, Michaelis, Isaac and Bendix, were born in Brunswick, Germany, in the 1820s or 30s, the sons of Helena Michaelis and her husband, Reuben Hallenstein, who owned a shoddy-mill near Hanover which manufactured cloth from rags. All three boys were sent, successively, to Manchester, where they learned English; and were also taught business methods by one of their mother's brothers, the operator of a shipping office.

Next the Hallenstein brothers, again in stages, travelled on to the goldfields in Australia, where they opened a store at Daylesford, Victoria. There an English woman with the evocative name of Mary Mountain, who had come to Australia to visit a seafaring brother, was employed by them as a housekeeper. All three men fell in love with her; in the event she chose the youngest, Bendix, and married him. The wedding took place at the family home in England.

In 1863 Bendix and Mary Hallenstein, with Bendix's brother Isaac and his new wife, went to New Zealand and opened a store in Invercargill; but Isaac's wife didn't like the climate and they soon returned to Melbourne. Bendix moved on to Queenstown, where he sold groceries, wines and spirits, drapery and ironmongery. He opened more stores on the Otago goldfields and also acted as an agent for sheep farmers, selling wool in Dunedin, Melbourne and London. He became a flour miller and a farmer too, and built a large homestead, calling the property Thurlby Domain after his wife's family home in England.

Because he had trouble obtaining men's clothes to sell, Bendix Hallenstein began to manufacture his own, opening a retail store in Dunedin's Octagon. By the turn of the twentieth century there were thirty-four Hallensteins shops throughout the country and they included the DIC (Drapery and Importing Company) store in Christchurch and another in Wellington. Hallensteins was a household name in my childhood, it was the place you went to buy men's or boys' clothes.

Meanwhile, back in Melbourne, Isaac, with another of their mother's brothers, his uncle Michaelis Moritz, in 1864 bought a tannery at Footscray that became the basis of a profitable

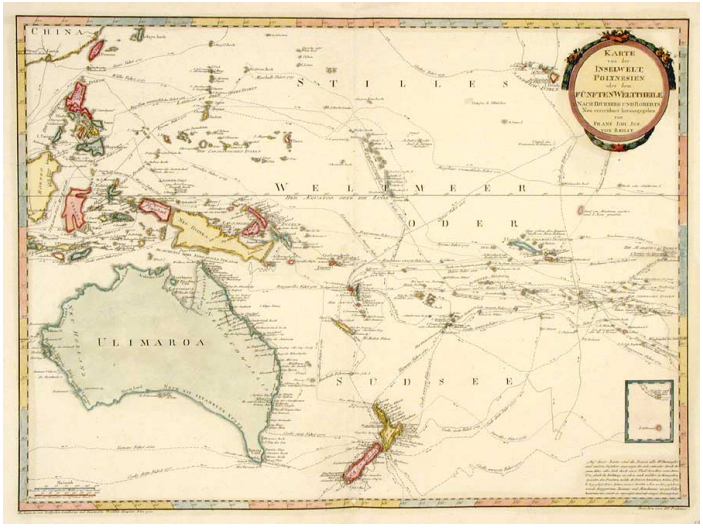
and long lasting leather goods business called Michaelis, Hallenstein & Co. In 1873 Isaac opened a London branch, in 1876 one in Sydney and in 1879 another in New Zealand. The firm won awards as far afield as Paris, Amsterdam and Calcutta. Among much else it was a pioneer of the Australian glue industry and also the first to establish gelatine processing in the antipodes.

Isaac Hallenstein was Lina Bryan's grand-father; while Bendix Hallenstein was Charles Brasch's great-grand-father. The Hallenstein extended family were part of what I'm calling the Village: a cosmopolitan community, with roots in old Europe, and in their case the Ashkenazi Jewish diaspora as well, which, transplanted to the antipodes, included as a matter of course both New Zealand and Australia in its ambit.

It's fascinating to see this mercantile family transform over just a couple generations into one whose preoccupations centre on the arts, whether literature or painting, whether as practitioners or patrons. It's also salutary to recall how, until quite recently, it was possible to see Australia and New Zealand, if not as one country, then as a shared field of enterprise: as if the Tasman were not a sea at all but a lake; with its western shore the south-east coast of Australia, where most people live, and its eastern the littoral that extends from North Cape all the way down to Fiordland.

In fact the history of the commonality of our two countries is long and various and, indeed, predates the formation proper of both nations. When Charles Brasch sailed for Australia in 1923, for instance, he went in 'a cool white ship with a yellow funnel' called the *Ulimaroa*. Strange word. It was recorded by both Banks and Cook on their first voyage to New Zealand in 1769 and Tupia, the Tahitian tohunga who travelled with them, knew it too; it was the Maori name of a distant country to the north and west of Aotearoa.

On a map published in Stockholm in 1780 and many times thereafter in northern and central Europe, Ulimaroa is the name given to Australia, suggesting Polynesians might have visited that country too, along with South America and virtually every other piece of land in the Pacific, including Antarctica; but their traditions said voyagers risked being killed upon landing at Ulimaroa so they did not stay; just as they did not remain in Peru because it was already inhabited by men.



http://www.australiaforeveryone.com.au/discovery/ulimaroa_1795.jpg

I should however record that recent research suggests the word should in fact be written *Rima Roa*, long arm, and may refer to New Caledonia (Geraghty & Tent); nevertheless Ulimaroa persists in Australia as the name of a railstop town in Queensland, several ships and a famous house in Melbourne.

The first European settlers in New Zealand, if they weren't sealers or whalers, were renegade Australians fleeing the convict system; while Maori, usually ship jumpers, started appearing in Sydney town and other Pacific seaboard cities from the late eighteenth century. The first missionaries to live in New Zealand also came from Australia and pre-eminent among them was Samuel Marsden, who is regarded very differently in his adopted home country from the way he is seen in New Zealand; the alternate views of this one man might stand as a kind of index of our misunderstandings of each other. In Australia he's not usually regarded, as he is in New Zealand, as a minister of grace or a messenger of god; rather, he's 'the flogging parson' and a type of the kind of person who uses an official position to wield political power and amass personal wealth.

Few people realise that the first of many Australian military forces to serve overseas did so in New Zealand: a British regiment, the 58th of Foot, aka the Black Cuffs, was despatched from Sydney to Auckland in 1845 to fight in Heke's War in the north; and 2,675 volunteers, mostly off the streets of Melbourne and Sydney, helped form the Waikato regiments that, often alongside Pakeha New Zealanders, fought the Kingite Maori in 1860s. Many of these proto-Anzacs objected to the British manner of fighting that war and were imprisoned for disobedience or worse; the better behaved received grants of land confiscated from Maori and stayed on.

Later in the century, when *The Bulletin* was a prime literary outlet for aspiring writers of verse and prose, so-called Maori-landers were as common in its pages as were their Australian contemporaries. One example is Lola Ridge, the poet, Irish-born, who lived and wrote in both countries before making a name for herself as an anarchist, a feminist, and a modernist in New York between the wars. Another of the Bulletin writers, Henry Lawson, first crossed the Tasman in 1894 and worked as telegraph linesman for half a year; some of his funniest stories, for instance *The Geological Spieler*, came out of that experience.

In 1897 Lawson travelled again to New Zealand and took a job as a teacher in the isolated settlement of Mangamaunu, north of Christchurch on the Kaikoura Coast of the South Island. He may have hoped that the experience would lead to a renewal of creative energies but in the event something like the opposite took place and, after six months, only halfway through his contract, thoroughly spooked, pursued by spectres of murder and revenge, he returned home. New Zealander Bill Pearson's book on this episode, *Henry Lawson among the Maoris,* published in Canberra in 1968, remains so obscure that even the Henry Lawson Centre at Gulgong doesn't have a copy; or it didn't in 2003.

When in the 1890s the Australian states decided to federate, New Zealand was invited to join; in fact she is second on the alphabetical list of eligible states, after New South Wales, and before Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia; and may still join if she so wishes. However unpopular that might now be, there was a fairly strong movement then to do so; George Grey in particular, who foresaw an empire in the Pacific, was an enthusiastic proponent.

In the early twentieth century the New Zealand Labour Party was formed in part by socialists fleeing Australia for one reason or another: Bill Parry, Bob Semple, Micky Savage, Paddy Webb. This is the origin of poet James K Baxter's ambiguously patriotic remark: 'I prefer this dark country I was born in, with its man-eating pigs and politicians imported from Australia' (Baxter). There hasn't been a lot of traffic the other way; with the notable exception of the Dannevirke-born, Waipukarau-raised, Lutheran bigot, Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

The ANZAC legend as one of the pivotal points of connection between the two nations is too well known to be rehearsed here but it is interesting to trace the movement of soldier-artists back and forth across the Tasman in the 1920s. Many of them, like the black and white artist Joe Lynch, worked for *Smith's Weekly*; as an earlier generation had worked for *The Bulletin*. Joe, who was Melbourne born but grew up in Auckland and served with the NZEF in the war, is memorialised in both countries, in radically different fashion. He was the model, sculpted by his brother Guy, for the soldier that stands at the War Memorial at Devonport in Auckland; another statue, again by Guy Lynch, in the Botanical Gardens in Sydney shows Joe as a laughing faun; and his accidental death by drowning in Sydney Harbour in 1927 provided the occasion for Australian poet Kenneth Slessor's great elegy, 'Five Bells.'

A number of distinguished Australian writers of the mid-twentieth century were of New Zealand origin although, in the nature of things, they tend not to be remembered as such. Douglas Stewart, for many years the poetry editor at Angus and Robertson, is one; he is better known in New Zealand as a trout fisherman. Ruth Park, the popular and accomplished novelist, and incidentally the writer of an excellent guide to Sydney, is another. Manly poet Bruce Beaver wrote memorably out of his experiences in New Zealand in the late 1950s and early 1960s but he's one of the few to have made the crossing in the other direction, as it were. While the remarkable Eve Langley remains all but forgotten in the popular mind in both countries, though she remains of interest to academics; which suggests, further, that scholarly interchange is commoner than artistic traffic across the Tasman.

Also in the 1950s, the decade in which McCahon and Woollaston travelled to Melbourne to widen their education as artists, Sidney Nolan's epochal suite of Ned Kelly paintings toured New Zealand; but I have never heard of anyone, artist or non-artist, who remembered seeing them. I do recall director and cinematographer Leon Narbey telling me that, at school in the Waikato sometime in the 1950s, he saw the 1946 film *Namatjira the Painter* which Charles Mountford and Lee Robinson made about the Aboriginal water colourist Albert Namatjira.

Of course McCahon and Woollaston didn't go to Melbourne to learn about Australian art but to see European work that wasn't available in New Zealand. Woollaston, for example, spent most of his time in the National Gallery of Victoria copying a work by Nicolas Poussin, *The Crossing of the Red Sea*; while McCahon's comments on his Australian contemporaries, quoted above, were characteristically disenchanted. Neither painter attempted Australian landscapes.

There were strenuous attempts in the counter-cultural 1960s and 70s to foster trans-Tasman links, especially among poets, but they don't seem to have led to much; some cross-publication in little magazines, a bit of visiting to and fro, more talk of solidarity than solidarity itself. Nigel Roberts, a New Zealander who moved to Australia in the 1960s, is well known there but obscure in his homeland; David Mitchell, another New Zealander who spent a lot of time in Australia, is unknown there but a significant figure in Aotearoa; a third of their cohort, Mark Young, a New Zealander who has lived and worked for more than thirty

years in Australia, manages to remain virtually anonymous in both countries but has a reputation in Finland. And amongst the avant poets of North America.

Those links between poets in the two countries have been re-forged, as it were, in the last decade, particularly via the agency of the New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre in Auckland, which has sponsored a number of trans-Tasman seminars; with events being staged in both countries. There's also some traffic between the International Institute of Modern Letters in Wellington and organisations and individuals in Australia; though I imagine there could be more.

One Australian who has had a wide and beneficial effect on both sides of the Tasman is John Maynard, a Victorian school teacher who became the first director of the Govett-Brewster Art gallery in New Plymouth, later worked at the Auckland City Art Gallery and went on to make a career, with his partner, New Zealander Bridget Ikin, as one of the most innovative of film producers in Australasia. Another is Fiona Hall who has worked and exhibited consistently in both countries and recently travelled, with eight New Zealand artists, to the Kermadec Islands in the Pacific, where she made, using Tongan tapa cloth and their associated vegetable dyes, a series of fascinating syncretic works.

I think this emphasizes the fact that trans-Tasman traffic has since the last war been busier in the visual arts, including film, than it is in literature. Certainly since, in the early 1950s Eric Westbrook, London-born, became Director of the Auckland City Art Gallery—and gave Colin McCahon a job there. Westbrook later moved to the directorship of the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne and was on hand to open Toss Woollaston's 1958 show at John Reed's gallery. Incidentally, when Kenneth Clark, a patron of Westbrook's, heard he was going to Auckland he said: 'You are making the worst mistake of your life. I wouldn't mind so much if you were going to Australia' (Jones).

The literary relationship between the two countries might be better expressed in a story involving Janet Frame and Patrick White. White in 1963 wrote Frame a fan letter, to which she took twenty-two years to reply. 'I was so much overwhelmed that I couldn't think how to answer it,' she wrote. 'It has now become part of my life.' Frame rang White when she was in Sydney during the filming of *An Angel at my Table* in 1985, but White declined to come to the phone. He said he was ill but according to his biographer, David Marr, that wasn't entirely true: 'He didn't want to disturb the very detailed fantasy he'd come to have of her . . . It was violation enough of that image that she had crossed the Tasman . . . The vision would have collapsed if she'd crossed the threshold and sat down to tea. He didn't want her to be ordinary' (King).

Another anecdote, this time from the 1990s, gives a different slant on trans-Tasman traffic in the literary arts. For the twentieth anniversary of the opening of the Sydney Opera House, in 1993, the powers that be decided to include in the festivities a poetry reading. For reasons that remain obscure, the three poets invited were all from the Pacific region. One of these, Hone Tuwhare, sounding worried, the day before the reading called Les Murray up on the telephone. 'Where's the Aussie poets, Les?' he asked. 'Have you fellahs blacked the Opera House?' When Les said no, it was just that no-one had thought to invite them, Hone personally asked Les to come along, which he did, so that there were *tangata whenua* for the *manuhiri* to respond to (Murray 76-7).

Perhaps it is, as Australian poet John Tranter said recently, a case of simultaneous difference and resemblance cancelling each other out. 'But if we are so alike,' he asked, 'why don't we influence each other more? Because we are so alike. Because we are so different' (Tranter). Raising two further questions: How are we alike? And how different? Well, we both find John Clark funny; and neither of us likes losing to the other in sport. It's curious, though, the way New Zealanders living in Australia have to infiltrate the polity, like secret agents, in a clandestine manner; while those Australians who bother to come to New Zealand often find themselves desiring, and lacking, any point of entry into the byzantine and arcane hierarchies of an island society.

I sometimes think of Australia and New Zealand as hemispheres of the same brain whose lateral connections have been severed, the way the corpus callosum used to be cut in those suffering from epileptic seizures. I once asked a neuro-surgeon about the effects of such severing and she told me of a patient she knew who could never get dressed unaided: while one hand was doing up the buttons, the other would be undoing them. This seems an apt enough image of trans-Tasman relations in the arts, though I suppose it does beg the question as to who among us buttons, and who unbuttons.

One interesting recent development has been in the work of painter Euan McLeod, who has over the last two decades constructed a series of works in which New Zealand and Australian landscapes are super-imposed one upon the other, not in any hierarchical manner, but as a complementaries in what might be called a psychic sense. This is most likely rooted in the artist's own experience but is profoundly moving for others, like myself, who have spent our lives trying to live in both places.

I sometimes say that I feel like a New Zealander in Australia; and like an Australian in New Zealand; and there's some truth in that. I have on occasion described myself as a schizoid antipodean; lately I've settled on quasi-aussie as an alternative designation. Like many of us, I have roots in both countries. My paternal grandfather was born in Melbourne but, after his mother died, and his father turned to drink, in his teens was shipped over to Auckland to live with his grown-up Methodist sisters in Herne Bay; and that connection might explain the way I felt instantly at home when I first came to Australia in 1981. This propensity to call Australia home has since faded; now I know the only place any of us can really be at home is in the world.

Why should any of this matter? I think it is for two reasons. One is that it's simply absurd that two such close neighbours should neglect or refuse the opportunities for communication and exchange that exist between us; to understand the complexities we both own and are held hostage by. The larger reason is that such communication, such exchange of complexities, must militate against the ugly, largely pernicious force of nationalism in both our countries.

Nationalism becomes divisive when it is driven to assert, not difference, but the primacy of one place over another. That's all very well when it comes to sport; but the arts are not about winning and losing but something completely different: which I would express as the attempt to increase our collective consciousness on this earth, in this universe. Consciousness, that is, of who we are, where we come from, where we are going; and, no less important, consciousness of those other entities that exist with or along side of us.

Such a task is in essence co-operative. Individual contributions may be, and sometimes are, made alone, but they are contributions to a collective wisdom, a collective intelligence. And

in this sphere, we all have something to offer each other. This sounds Jungian and perhaps is; which reminds me of Jung's idea, enormously suggestive, that a colonising people in time inherits the unconscious of those it has colonised (Fomison). In my view this is happening in both countries now; but that is too large a question to go in to here.

Last year, in July 2012, the first conference of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature to be held outside that country was staged, appropriately enough, in Wellington, New Zealand. There, it occurred to several people that the second A in ASAL could easily be changed to stand for Australasian or even Antipodean; as perhaps it will be. One of the founders of the ASAL, Barry Andrews, said that 'the way to counter the Cringe was . . . a positive stance, asserting all that is worthwhile in our rich culture' (cited in Headon). By the cringe he meant the manner in which Australians and New Zealanders of a certain ilk and era defer to international or metropolitan exemplars; that peculiar habit we have of self deprecation in the face of older societies.

However there are other sorts of cringe, and one is the way that New Zealanders, with their hick ways and assumed lack of sophistication, sometimes make Australians cringe; or, vice versa, the way the arrogance and the brash, if often brittle, self-confidence of Aussies causes Kiwis to cringe. And yet each also owns a complexity that the cringing attitude makes it impossible to see or experience. The way out of the cringe is, as Barry Andrews says, to assert all that is valuable in our rich—and I would add here the word *shared*—culture.

I'd like to end with two images. The first is one of desolation which nevertheless contains a task; the second enshrines a hope. Out in the Tasman Sea, rather closer to Australia than New Zealand, is a place called Middleton Reef: a rocky coral accretion around the top of a submerged volcanic cone and also the southern-most coral reef in the world. There are 80 or 90 ship wrecks on Middleton Reef, including that of the *Runic*, Belfast built in 1950, the then largest refrigerated ship on the seas. The *Runic* came to grief on the reef in 1961 and its rusty hulk sits strangely upon the water at high tide, as if it still has somewhere to go—remembering perhaps those cargos of butter or cheese or frozen lamb it was built to ship to Europe. At the low it rests like a prodigy broken on the rocks—a great, mysterious sign we have not yet found the way to construe.

The second image takes us back to Colin McCahon. He has had a lot of influence in Australia, especially among younger contemporaries; including such different artists as Imants Tiller, Gordon Bennet and the Jirrawun Girls. Art historian Rex Butler wrote a paper about this influence and delivered it at the City Gallery in Wellington as the Gordon H Brown lecture for 2009; I'm going to quote from Butler's conclusion. He is referring to the work of a young Brisbane artist called Scott Redford, who used one of McCahon's *Jet Out* drawings as a source for a work of his own.

Butler writes: 'And in between these two possibilities—between the island and the mainland, between New Zealand and Australia—is the flight. A cross, a bird, a jet plane, a painting poised mid-air not knowing whether it will land or crash: it is this impossible moment that every interpretation . . . must seek to capture' (Butler 44). I find it difficult to choose between the shipwreck and the flight; perhaps we need both

One is for those who wish to disinter, salvage, perhaps dive around, the wreck in an attempt at an understanding of the past of the buried, or drowned, village that is our common, trans-

Tasman, heritage. The other—a cross, a bird, a jet plane, a painting poised mid-air not knowing whether it will land or crash—is for the future.

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