A New Zealand Quarterly


In his introduction to the present issue, called “The Function of Criticism,” the editor shows an acute, and very welcome, awareness of judgements getting clouded, within the New Zealand context, by quite the wrong kind of motivation—something approaching an incestuous jealousy. There is, both in Smart’s thinking and in that of several of his contributors, a move away from insularity. I do not imagine that Landfall will become quite as ‘international’ in its approach as Pacific Quarterly. Nor is this necessary. What is wanted is not another journal that merely happens to be based in the Pacific which prints material by, for, and about literary people all over the world, but one that, while primarily catering for New Zealand culture, does so in the awareness that this can only happen with due, and explicit, awareness of what happens abroad. Without such awareness, one ends up with things valued merely because they emanate from a specific place, or by defending them as valuable within that context even if of very limited worth beyond—in which case one is indulging in the ‘double standard’ that Cherry Hankin writes so well about here in an important essay. The present risk, for New Zealand, lies perhaps not so much in this ‘double standard’ as in either a strident nationalism or an equally strident internationalism which rejects things because they come from N.Z.

It is indeed difficult to come to a balanced assessment about these matters, yet that is what must constantly be attempted. As Hankin shows, the attempt is accompanied by growing pains and many imperfect insights along the way. One of the reasons why New Zealanders seem to me to be often mistaken about their place in the world is that they are not, as New Zealand critics have been so fond of maintaining, essentially people with a realistic view. On the contrary, it is often a quite markedly romantic one, sometimes exhibiting an unrealistic fear of utter failure, but more often an over-optimistic appraisal of national worth. William Dean writes well about this kind of romanticism in Australasian fiction, and I think he is to be congratulated for offering a far from representative opinion. Still, one is struck by the general preoccupation with these matters in the discursive pieces in this issue of Landfall, and probably others are moving in Dean’s direction. Hankin says that “realistic fiction in New Zealand ... has become ossified: it does not represent the variety of character-types, of life styles or of mental attitudes which now exists in our society.” If that is true, so-called N.Z. ‘realistic fiction’ just is no longer ‘realistic’—if ever it was, which I doubt.

I have concentrated on some very general questions which one should, I think, be asking oneself about any New-Zealand-based quarterly today. And it is obvious that I find that this issue of Landfall is concerning itself with these questions, steering some sort of middle course between the very apparent ‘internationalism’ of Pacific Quarterly and the no less conspicuous ‘nationalism’ of Islands. Landfall may in fact show a more searching courage. There is no suggestion in this issue that answers have already been given, or even that any of the contributors (including the editor) actually see themselves as adopting a stance between the various poles that I have been talking about; they do have views, certainly, but these seem promisingly free from being mere reactions.
I have been concentrating unfairly on the critical writings in this issue. An enormous number of poems is presented also, on which it is impossible to comment in any detail now. But I do find myself wondering why I found most of the poems, though very competent, rather less exciting than most of the prose, which includes an excellent short story by Kathleen Crayford. At some future stage, I hope to come to a fuller appreciation of current poetry in N.Z. magazines, and may then decide whether my reactions are unduly subjective or not. Meanwhile, there is no doubt that *Landfall* is offering some of the best and most interesting prose from and concerning N.Z. today, and I am not proposing that the poems are unrepresentative. As a showcase for what is being achieved in N.Z. writing, *Landfall* deserves attention.

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**PACIFIC QUARTERLY (MOANA)**

This journal is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual revision of *New Quarterly Cave*, and concerns itself with all forms of artistic endeavour emanating from the Pacific region.

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