

Carole Ferrier review of:

Helen Bones, *The Expatriate Myth: New Zealand Writers and the Colonial World*

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Since August 2016, and continuing until now, considerable consternation has pervaded both Houses of the Australian parliament in relation to Section 44 of the Australian Constitution—that specifies that one cannot run for election as a Member of the House of Representatives or a Senator if one has citizenship of two countries, or ‘dual nationality’. Over the past two years, this clause (designed at Federation to prevent any disloyalty in the event of a war breaking out between one’s two nationalities) has led to at least 15 members resigning from their seats—and more still nervously researching past antecedents—and having to be replaced, in some cases by a new self with the tie to the original country officially severed for ever. (This was an ironic event in that the successive resignations politically problematised Australia’s vaunted ‘successful multiculturalism’, and doubly ironic in that almost all of those concerned were ‘from’ white settler states or the Mother Country of the Commonwealth.)

Helen Bones’s discussion in *The Expatriate Myth* of the processes of the construction of a ‘national literature’ describes some similar anxieties about who could or should be considered a New Zealand author or creator of literature. Should this be on the basis of birthplace; or of continuing residence; or of the content or settings of their writing, it was asked. Bones contends, reasonably, that ‘Concentrating upon the writers’ nationality makes it impossible to create an accurate picture of the context within which they created literature’ (p. 72) and, accordingly, she comes up with a number of other angles to investigate.

One main theme, or trope, in the discussions is that of exile, or travel, to another place. In the period upon which the book focuses (1890–1945), the main countries to which these New Zealand writers voyaged were principally the United Kingdom (habitually, and popularly, designated as ‘Home’) and sometimes Canada or the United States. Particularly in the earlier years of the twentieth century, publishing and distribution of books and magazines was dominated by Britain—both physically (conservative author and printer Geoffrey de Montalk described New Zealand’s production values as those of ‘bandaged moas’ [p. 78]) and also in terms of ‘the networks of the colonial writing world’ (p. 73)—many of which, back then, orbited around the ‘colonial centre’, Britain or, mainly, London. (In the earlier

period, antipodean libraries—ranging from large institutional ones to those on sheep stations—along with numerous bookshops, were also very significant in the circulation of literature.) Bones quotes Lyons and Arnold's research on the 'closed market' that gave British publishers exclusive rights of distribution and copyright over 'an imperial cultural space ... shared [by Australians] with Canadians, South Africans, Indians, New Zealanders and other readers of the Empire' (p. 81). Australia/Australasia was the largest offshore market for British books, and this continued right up until the 1980s when British publishers obtained access to the American market. While there was often resistance to the term 'Australasia', since it might suggest a swallowing up of 'Maoriland' by Australia, there were benefits for the former in their proximity.

There had also been 'an earlier connectedness of Australasian literary worlds' (p. 57), Bones suggests, citing figures such as the Australian *Bulletin* containing 10 per cent New Zealand writing (1890–1900), or Jock Phillips's suggestion that the magazine's 'Australasian cultural world based in Sydney and Melbourne' appeared to have 'Queensland and New Zealand as its provinces' (p. 57).

At the turn of the century, newspapers were a quite substantial outlet for writers of stories in particular, but also essays and poems. For those such as the New Zealand popular novelist May Scott, who got to publish in 1957 the autobiographical narrative *The Unwritten Book*, 'the networks of the colonial writing world' (p. 73) could be investigated to market one's work. The *Manchester Guardian* accepted one of Scott's stories and proposed to take more. Eileen Duggan survived financially as a full-time poet by publishing her poems in newspapers and magazines in Ireland, the UK, Australia and America (p. 11), without needing to travel overseas to make contacts. Jane Mander lived in Paris for a time, but also sent articles to newspapers, including the Christchurch and Auckland *Sun*. In 1926, there were 61 daily newspapers in New Zealand; these were, Bones suggests, 'an important tool of colonial communication and dominance ... providing a sense of regional community but also maintaining ties to Home by reproducing information from Britain' (p. 31).

When they did travel to England, New Zealanders had a few advantages over many others—leaving aside the rather twee 1927 formulation in the *Christchurch Press* that New Zealand was the 'youngest of Britain's colonies' and, accordingly, 'a little dearer to the mother's heart', with its denizens able to feel at home, at Home (p. 168). New Zealand had an image of being socially progressive, especially in relation to being first to introduce national women's suffrage, in 1893 (p. 128). Bones quotes Raewyn Dalziel arguing that this 'was in one sense a conservative victory', since 'it did more to reinforce traditional gender roles than to extend the options available to women' (p. 128). The resistance to excessive alcohol consumption and domestic violence was, however, not merely moralistic, enshrining the tradition of women as guardians of the home and family; the vote was not merely a liberal reform irrelevant

to the working class. The analysis here would have benefited from some reference to texts such as, for example, Susan Magarey's *Passions of the First Wave Feminists*, John McCulloch's thesis on the suffragist Elizabeth Brentnall or accounts of women's struggles in the Australasian socialist press of the time. The New Zealand example and the subsequent achievement of (white) women's suffrage—serially, in various Australian states, and federally—gave great encouragement to British suffragettes (who achieved the vote for propertied women in 1918, extended to all women over 21 in 1928) and to other European campaigners. Leaders of the suffrage struggle in Britain were divided on class lines, with Sylvia and Adela Pankhurst breaking away from the nationalistic support for World War I adopted by Emmeline and Christabel, their mother and sister. Adela, indeed, participated in the beginnings of the Communist Party in Sydney—though she changed later to become a defender of Empire and militarism, and at rallies crossed swords with Jean Devanny, by then a leader of public agitation for the party. Bones's cultural history of the evolution of a (national) notion of New Zealand literature tends to marginalise the role of socialist ideas as they found expression in and through practices of the Left and the Communist Party (the latter, in its early days before the rise of Stalinism, had progressive positions on sexuality).

Going along with the received idea of a hegemony of puritan, petty bourgeois consciousness tends to reinforce it: Bones gives only a diffident defence of Jean Devanny, in relation to a review in 1930 by Isabel Maud Cluett (Peacocke) of one of her novels, '*Bushman Burke* may be said to be a riotous "saga of sex," and, though her stories all have a New Zealand background ... the dramas she unfolds have small relation to New Zealand life, its conditions and traditions' (p. 102). In response to the review's dismissive hostility, Bones comments, somewhat apologetically, 'it is possible that the themes Devanny addressed and their consequent association with New Zealand communities ... the reviewers found jarring' (p. 102). She does also mention that repressive societies can generate political and creative oppositional practices and responses, but writers who did engage in them hardly appear in her very short bibliography of 'Primary Sources: Novels, Poetry and Memoirs'. Kirstene Moffatt's bibliography, 'The Puritan Paradox' (that records material from 1860 to 1940) recognises the contradictory social effects of sexual repression, and provides critical summaries, in its second part, of works by writers who might be considered to challenge the puritan mindset.

Certainly, New Zealand was historically a very patriarchally oriented society, but recent readers may be more inclined to sympathise with Moffatt's 2012 enthusiasm for another Devanny novel, of which she produced a scholarly edition, *Lenore Divine* (1926), and her opinion that it is 'impossible to overestimate the radicalism of Devanny's fiction'. Bones's account underestimates the quality and influence of feminist creative and critical writing both in the period focused upon and later, and it could have given some space to critiques provided by those using feminist

methodologies from the 1960s, including, in New Zealand, Riemke Ensing, Aorewa McLeod, Heather Roberts, Rachel Barrowman, Mary Paul, Michelle Leggott and others, and the substantial writing of a number of critics in Australia. Bones does mention that, in relation to ‘Curnow’s brand of nationalism’, it was the case that ‘from the 1970s, feminist and Maori historians protested about their exclusion from this version of national identity’ (p. 187, n. 44), and that Patrick Evans noted in 1990 that women writers of earlier times had ‘seemed to melt away’ (p. 197, n. 90), for a while at least. Denis Glover had lamented earlier writing as ‘the daisied path of pallid good taste’ that inclined to a preference for ‘leisurely-whimsy, feminine mimsy’ writing, while Rex Fairburn, in a letter to Glover in 1934, expressed his hostility to ‘the Menstrual School of poetry’ (p. 55). Some women writers resorted to male pseudonyms; Edith Lyttleton wrote with unspecified gender as G. B. Lancaster, and ‘in reviews of her early books, about rough working life in New Zealand and Australia, words such as “virile,” “forcible,” “strong” and “masterful” occurred again and again’ (p. 160). More deliberate was Jessie Weston’s adoption of the pseudonym, ‘C. de Thierry’ for her writing on politics and for military magazines: ‘Only her editor knew she was a woman’ (p. 160).

Drawing upon the perspective of Patrick Brantlinger’s *Rule of Darkness*, Bones suggests that ‘adventurous narratives’ of the time ‘developed and perpetuated colonial attitudes towards the rest of the world’. These included the orientalist stereotype of the ‘colonial exotic’. There were various anxieties about the decline of the British empire, giving rise, according to Rob Dixon, to ‘tales of regenerative violence on the colonial frontier’ (p. 90). Bones comments that, during the period upon which she focuses, it appeared that ‘Maori writers in English numbered very few’ (p. 90). She also mentions that both Katharine Mansfield and Frances Hodgkins wore a tiki; that Mansfield wrote in her journal, in 1907, ‘give me the Maori or the tourist—but nothing between’ (p. 209, n. 5); and that Jessie Mackay referred to ‘unstoried waters’ (p. 105), to which Bones politely notes that ‘of course they were not unstoried’, this ‘Anglo-Colonia’ (p. 166) conceit ignores ‘centuries of Maori tradition’ (p. 105). The waters, indeed, had actually been storied in Māori culture since before the Battle of Hastings in Britain. And as for voyaging across the sea, Māori had visited Australia and Tahiti in the late eighteenth century and travelled from Aotearoa to Britain before the annexation by Britain in 1840. Moehanga of Ngāpuhi visited London in 1806 and was received at Court; Hongi Hika, the Ngāpuhi chief, travelled with a group to England in 1820; he had an audience with George III, worked on a Māori grammar in Cambridge, and returned with muskets from Sydney. By 1842, the Māori language could be heard on Sydney’s docks. So, could this literary history of Aotearoa New Zealand have been a bit more ‘bicultural’—even if it is the case that Māori people did not publish a large amount of ‘literature’ in the English language until the 1970s. Bones briefly references the politician and cultural historian and activist Apirana Ngata, who, Linda Tuhiwai Smith recalls, recorded ‘ancient Maori songs’ (including one about kumara) in the 1920s.

Bones's *The Expatriate Myth* investigates a rather narrow proposition about the New Zealand 'national literature' and its producers, but the book suggests lines of enquiry that can encourage and enrich readings of what is a substantially interesting and significant body of literature, and its distinctive context. It is rich in suggestive detail—despite what I said above about sometimes wishing for more. And, thank goodness, she chose a publisher that still allows its authors to use normal, precise and detailed endnotes, so that readers seeking to follow lines of investigation do not have to try to contact the author (hoping they are not dead or disappeared overseas!), in order to identify, locate or evaluate their sources.

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