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From the Editor

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FROM THE EDITOR

“Substances by Which We Sense Ourselves”

NICHOLAS BIRNS

For years, this journal and organization hesitated to include New Zealand in our coverage. Most of the founders of AAALS had been drawn to Australia out of a specific Australian set of literary interests or personal connections, and even those that read more broadly in what is now called “global Anglophone” literature emphasized, say, South Asia over New Zealand. Moreover, understanding New Zealand means understanding Māori writers and to specifically engage with Polynesian languages and cultures, and this linguistic aptitude—not relevant to Australia in the same way with Aboriginal languages being so many and so different from each other—is, most likely, another element that scared off scholars.

A few years ago, gladly, we finally made the move. But what then? Are we simply now monitoring a parallel stream of literary production? There are writers who have shared both contexts: Eve Langley, Ruth Park, Henry Lawson, Ronald Hugh Morrieson, Jean Devanny, Douglas Stewart. But this list merely sets off the many Australians and New Zealanders who have not gone to the other Antipodean country, who instead have sought out London or New York or Paris or even, as the experiences of George Johnston remind us, Hydra in Greece.

Australians and New Zealanders rightfully resent the tendency of outsiders to see them as two peas in a pod, to ignore the vastly different landscapes, Indigenous histories, immigration patterns, and political cultures of the two Anglophone nations. A person once asked me if one could take a ferry from Australia to New Zealand—totally ignorant of the distance across the Tasman Strait, which would make such a ride far longer than say Newcastle to Bergen in Europe. New Zealand and Australia are not just like two adjoining US states in the Pacific—although if one looks at the enormous differences between adjacent US states such as New Hampshire and Vermont, Nevada and Utah, Arizona and New Mexico, even here the peas-in-a-pod generalization would fail.

And yet Australianists and New Zealanders are going to have to get used to outsiders making these connections, even if they are judged misprisions or follies. Part of globalization is misunderstanding; just as misunderstanding, as Freud and Marx

taught us, operates in the area of sex and economics, so, if we are to take the global seriously as an affective state, misunderstanding must be quasi-constitutive there. In this light, we should look for the genuine commonalities between Australia and New Zealand rather than reinforce existing distinctions.

It is here that I find the poetry and prose of Stephen Oliver so valuable. A “transtasman”—all lowercase—poet born in New Zealand, resident in Australia for many years, and now returned to New Zealand, Oliver has been a mainstay of the *Antipodes* creative nonfiction section for many years. His winsome, rueful, self-effacing, and above all inventive essays manifest at once an acrid irony toward all overweening aspirations and yet still cherish a hope for personal and even social transformation. The current issue of the New Zealand poetry journal *broadsheet* contains a feature, edited by the veteran New Zealand poet and anthologist Mark Pirie, on Oliver’s work, including tributes by fellow poets as well as selections from Oliver’s own verse:

In the fossil record is found no remnant
Of the body’s soft tissues, these things melt
Away, substances by which we sense
Ourselves; petrified bone and the catacombs
that riddle bone remain. The rest melted
Away.

Oliver has juxtaposed hard and soft, the adamant and the emollient, superbly in his career. *Broadsheet* can be ordered by writing to: The Editor, Flat 4c/19 Castle-ville Terrace, Thorndon, Wellington 6011, New Zealand; or going to <http://broadsheetnz.wordpress.com>. *Antipodes* is truly grateful to Stephen Oliver for how his transtasman (again, lowercase) exactions have broadened our literary field.