

Out of the shadow of war: The German connection with New Zealand in the 20th century

James N. Bade (ed), Oxford University Press, 1998, pp.viii + 288, \$39.95

THIS BOOK IS A SUCCESSOR to *The German connection: New Zealand and German-speaking Europe in the 19th century* (1993). Taken together, the two efficiently deliver a considerable body of information about an important group of people who have had a major impact upon cultural development in the 20th century. The key word is 'connection'; within those perhaps over-generous limits anything and anybody that links the two ends of the spectrum (one cannot say 'countries') can find a place, from Felix von Luckner to Wolfgang Rosenberg. So wide has the net been cast that the reader may be a little surprised at not finding an essay on the German connection as mediated by Samoa and exemplified in the names of Albert Wendt and Josh Kronfeld.

The book's 36 chapters are organised into four sections, dealing with war, the arts, academic life, business and professions, and (less satisfactorily) 'the present day'. There are some general surveys, relating to war and the arts and a rather haphazard group in the closing section. In the first section three historical essays are contrib-

uted by Ian McGibbon, Jean King and Ann Beaglehole, which make some of the briefer essays on specific individuals and themes which



*Ex-patriot German poet Karl Wolfskehl at his home in Mount Eden, Auckland, c1940.
Photo: Maja Blumenfeld Family Collection.*

follow seem rather slight. Most chapters are brief biographical studies, and in these lies the real value of the book.

Given that, it may seem churlish to complain about a book which offers so much enjoyable reading about familiar and unfamiliar people. However, this enjoyment is qualified (for at least this reader) by an uncertainty as to the focus of the book. No attempt is made to offer an analysis setting out the variety of influences, traditions, experiences and characteristics included in the 'Germanness' which shapes the book.

The previous volume had 'German-speaking Europe' in its title and

this phrase is repeated here by the editor, not in his introduction but later in the book. It is obviously not a simple concept. Leonard Bell, in a wide ranging and informative essay on the arts, notes that 'the term German-speaking does not entail or imply any necessary uniformity or homogeneity' – but he does not continue with some account of what it does entail or imply. He includes a number of Austrians, two Czechs and one Swiss. This inclusiveness, if editorially applied, might have led to a larger place than three passing mentions for the bi-lingual Czech, Fred Turnovsky.

While not too much should be made of the uncertainty exhibited here as to the nature and dimensions of Germanness, this quasi-ethnic distinction points to a major and

somewhat ambiguous characteristic of the book, one which is both an enlargement and a limitation. If the net had not been cast so widely there would not be so much variety to enjoy. But at the same time, the absence of discussion about intra-German distinctions leaves one a little uncertain as to what it is that one is enjoying. Take, for a further example, the question of Jewishness; perhaps a majority, and certainly a major group, of the people discussed here are Jews, but this distinguishing characteristic is as little discussed as the differences between Germans and Austrians.

Such matters are approached all

too briefly in the early part of Leonard Bell's essay. Quite possibly, given space and encouragement, he could have written an overall interpretative essay which would have given a context for these diverse phenomena. Surely one could expect something of that kind from a book emerging from a university department (and, at that, a *German* department) and published by a venerable university press.

But, not to end too negatively, the book has a great value as a portrait gallery of a group of people who for the most part would not have been New Zealanders except for the less admirable characteristics of 'Germanness' which drove them to this country, to our great gain. Readers should compile their own roll-call of culture-heroes – mine would include, not in any special order, Paul Hoffmann, Karl Popper,

Peter Munz, Ernst Plischke, Erich Geiringer, Maria Dronke, Frank Hofmann, Peter Jacoby, Wolfgang Rosenberg (whose father-in-law, Siegfried Eichelbaum, could have had more than a mere mention) and – though not finding a place here – the political scientist Helmut Pappé, the administrator Paul Heller, and the historian Herbert Roth. ✉
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BOOK REVIEW

by John R. Martin

New Zealand Politics and Social Patterns: Selected works by Robert Chapman

Elizabeth McLeay (ed), Victoria University Press, 1999

Obsolescence is perhaps more marked due to their political-science focus, which pays little or no attention to perennially important ideological, cultural, or historical factors (apart from one or two tentative references to Tocqueville), while stressing many inevitably ephemeral elements such as opinion polls, manifestos, elections and administrative minutiae.

THUS ROBERT TOMBS IN THE *Times Literary Supplement* ('The Unhealed Fracture', 25 April 1997, p. 7) reviewing several books about Chirac's ascendancy to the French presidency. His opinion provided some warning lights before I began reading Elizabeth McLeay's collection of writings selected from Robert Chapman's four decades of commentary on the New Zealand scene. After all, Chapman was for most of his academic career (from 1964 to 1988) a

Professor of Political Studies at Auckland University; he had pioneered election studies and political polling in this country. How would his detailed observations on the 'ephemera' of elections as far back as 1928 stand up in the ahistorical 1990s? Indeed (although this is a question presumably implicitly answered by the publisher), was there an audience for this work?

The short answer to these questions is 'yes' and 'there ought to be'.

New Zealand Politics and Social Patterns is a rich work: rich in the diversity of topics covered; rich in insights; rich in language. This is not a book to be digested at one sitting. You may wish to set aside the time to get inside one of the three Parts into which the editor has divided the collection: Part One – Society and Politics; Part Two – Town, City and Country; and Part Three – Governing Democratically. Or, as I did, you

may want to take the essays one at a time (especially if your memory extends back to particular elections) and call back the associations of now-forgotten, but at the time critical, political events.

The first article 'Fiction and the Social Pattern: Some Implications of Recent New Zealand Writing' is an extended version of an address to a Students Association Congress in 1952 and first published in *Landfall*. It serves to remind us of Chapman's literary contribution as a poet, editor (the 1956 *Oxford Anthology of New Zealand Verse*) and critic. I cannot comment on the impact of this review piece when it appeared, nor on the assessment nearly fifty years later of Chapman's judgments. Elizabeth McLeay tells us that it is 'widely regarded as a seminal work on New Zealand literature and society'. Certainly, the discussion of 'elements in the national scene' provides a wealth of intriguing observation both historical and contemporary about New Zealand society.

For the historian Part Two is the