

'Culture-organising'

Joe Heenan & the beginnings of state patronage of the arts

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Joseph William Allan Heenan was Under-secretary for Internal Affairs from 1935 until 1949, and in this capacity was the imaginative and the administrative power behind a large part of the first Labour government's cultural achievement. That achievement included the Centennial cultural programme, the establishment of the National Film Unit, the National Orchestra, the State Literary Fund, a Cultural Fund, and nearly a National Theatre, all in the space of 10 years. This flurry of institution-building set the state at the core of the infrastructure of post-war cultural development, a position which would be consolidated with the formation of the Arts Advisory Council in 1960, and the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council in 1963. It was a product in part of the socialist programme of the first Labour government and the cultural interests of the Labour leadership. It also coincided with the self-styled literary renaissance of the 1930s and 1940s, which was accompanied by a good deal of earnest theorising about the nature of national culture: not just what it was but how to foster or even create it. In the same period Australian writers 'were still debating the direction the Australian novel should take and the next step for Australian theatre, as if writing was a matter of state like opening up the hinterland or damming the Snowy River'.¹

This paper is a character study of Joe Heenan, who has the perhaps dubious distinction of being New Zealand's first art bureaucrat. Heenan was one of a small group of very talented and influential public administrators of this era, including C.E. Beeby as Director-general of Education, and the mercurial James Shelley in charge of broadcasting. He sought to make his department into 'the cultural hub of the government wheel'.² And in doing so he dispensed state patronage in ways that sometimes seem rather like personal patronage; patronage which some saw as inspired and a few recognised as dangerous, undemocratic and even, in the view of his fiercest critic, A.R.D. Fairburn, 'immoral'.

THE OMNIBUS DEPARTMENT

Oliver Duff in his Centennial survey *New Zealand Now* made his ideal public servant a thinly-disguised portrait of Heenan. That Heenan was indeed remarkable as a



public servant is attested to by the personal affection he inspired in those who worked with him. He was widely known for his enthusiasm, his 'ribald chuckle', his Irish temperament and his 'shock of snow-white hair'.³ 'I think of him', Janet Paul, who worked in the Historical Branch in the 1940s, later wrote, 'with layers of cigarette ash in the folds of his waistcoat bawling out to Goldie for that goddam file and then his mild drawl, "Hello dearie, come in, and have a cup of tea" ...'.⁴

Heenan was born at Greymouth in 1888; his mother was a schoolteacher, his father a boot-maker and keen amateur sportsman. He came to Wellington at the age of four where he lived, across the harbour at Eastbourne, for the rest of his life. In 1906, while studying part-time for a law degree at Victoria College, he found a job as a temporary junior clerk in what was then the Colonial Secretary's Department. This began a nearly 44-year career in the public service, 28 of which he spent in Internal Affairs, the rest (between 1920 and 1935) in the Crown Law Office. At the end of his career he reflected, without irony: 'I truly have been one of the lucky ones of this world, for, from the time I was only twenty-four years old, I have lived and worked in almost daily contact with Ministers of the Crown.'⁵

Above: Joseph William Allan Heenan (1888-1951).

Photograph: John Pascoe, Alexander Turnbull Library.

'The omnibus department', as Heenan called Internal Affairs,⁶ was the ideal place for someone with his magnetic instincts and wide-ranging interests. Among its responsibilities were physical welfare and recreation, and gaming and racing; one of Heenan's life passions was sport. He was involved in the administration of boxing, athletics, softball, rugby and racing, wrote a sports column for the *Dominion* and the *New Zealand Free Lance*, and was a recognised authority on racehorse breeding. Anecdotes tell of him interrupting departmental meetings to consult over the telephone about bloodlines, and according to one story he permanently alienated G.H. Scholefield, the very proper Parliamentary librarian, who came across him in the General Assembly Library one day wearing his cloth cap and reading the racing pages in the day's paper.

Heenan's interests also encompassed conservation, gardening and numismatics, and he had a brief career in local body politics, as a member of the Eastbourne Borough Council in 1916-18. However, he later turned down invitations to stand for Parliament for the Labour Party. Politically he was an old-fashioned Liberal rather than a socialist, but in any case was too busy to go into politics. But his other great passion in life, alongside sport, was literature. He was very widely read, with a weakness for Georgian verse, and was something of a connoisseur of fine printing. He was an occasional poet and in earlier days contributed on literary topics to the *Sydney Bulletin*. His interest in New Zealand literature found its peak in his enthusiasm for H. Guthrie-Smith's *Tutira*, which he regarded as 'New Zealand's greatest book'.⁷ Guthrie-Smith became a personal friend and Heenan his biggest fan, once describing passages in Guthrie-Smith's Centennial survey *The Changing Land* as 'the most moving bits of prose ever written in New Zealand'.⁷ In the late 1930s Heenan became a member of the recently formed New Zealand centre of the international writers' organisation, PEN. Since one was invited to join on the basis of works published, Heenan probably regarded his as an honorary membership. He once confessed that the help he sought to give to writers and to New Zealand literature generally perhaps 'has arisen in some small way from a sense of my own shortcomings as a writer. In my younger days I did not lack the ambition, but I soon realised that I would get more satisfaction out of the writings of others than attempting to do anything myself'.⁹

The secret of Heenan's success as an administrator lay not only in his 'extensive and peculiar knowledge' but also in his legendary memory. He was also able to recognise talent in others and 'knew how to give his subordinates their heads'.¹⁰ When once complimented on this he explained with a sporting analogy: 'I do not think that I am entitled to any praise for that. It just happens to be part of my nature ... I have always loved to see the good man or the good horse triumph'.¹¹ He had a knack of getting on with people on a personal level, and he was expert at

managing people at the professional level: 'To watch him manoeuvre a minister into place, or conciliate a furious functionary ... was an education in the art of management'.¹²

Most important in this sphere were his relationships with his political masters. His minister, Bill Parry, fully supported Heenan in all his projects, but was himself more of a hunting-and-fishing person and left the initiatives in the cultural area to his Under-secretary.¹³ In the Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, Heenan found not only political support but a like mind. On his retirement he wrote to Fraser: 'I have been privileged to have in you a friend interested alike in the same things as I, and in my doing of them ... It has been our [i.e. New Zealand's] good fortune to have over us one who is a believer in something more than purely economic man'.¹⁴ Their dealings were often conducted informally: they always had a cup of tea in Heenan's office after Executive Council meetings on Wednesdays. They had known each other since 1918, and in the field of cultural patronage they complemented each other well. They shared a love of books, but Fraser had a keener interest in theatre and music. Heenan, on the other hand, once admitted that he was 'more or less allergic to stage productions', and he was not very knowledgeable about music or art.¹⁵ So although he played a role in the abortive National Theatre negotiations, this was more Fraser's project than Heenan's. To Walter Nash, another fellow bibliophile, Heenan was not so close but nonetheless he found he could get what he wanted, and at the end of his career he thanked Nash for his 'generous attitude as Minister of Finance towards the expenditure of large sums of public money'. The secret of dealing with Nash, he revealed to a friend, was this: 'Don't be a piker with him: go for a fiver and it will take you months to get it, but he is always sympathetic to an appeal for thousands'.¹⁶

CENTENNIAL SURVEY

The first act of cultural patronage by the Labour government was the granting of pensions to ageing writers. When James Cowan learned in May 1936 that he had been awarded an annuity of £100 he wrote thanking Heenan, but Heenan demurred. The campaign to get Cowan on the Civil List had begun before either Labour or he were in office, when a deputation from PEN, supported by sympathetic Labour MPs (including Fraser) unsuccessfully waited on the previous Minister of Finance. They found Nash more supportive when they tried again in January 1936. Cowan and Jessie Mackay were granted pensions in 1936, as subsequently were Eileen Duggan and William Satchell, and at Fraser's instigation Cowan's widow was given a special pension after the writer's death in 1943.

The hand of Heenan was, however, very much in evidence in the Centennial celebrations in 1940. He was largely responsible for making this occasion of national chest-beating into a significant cultural event. Heenan was executive

officer in charge of the whole Centennial operation, and despite the toll it took on his health – he collapsed with ‘nervous strain’ in 1939 and was in hospital for the first few months of 1940, missing the keynote Waitangi re-enactment – he regarded it as the highlight of his career (indeed, as ‘one of the most efficient and enlightened administrative achievements in the country’s history’).¹⁷ Officially, the Centennial was about honouring the pioneers, celebrating a century of material progress and government, and about fostering ‘a proper national pride’ in time of war. On the cultural side it was presented both as an ‘opportunity for a national stocktaking on cultural standards’ and as a means of ‘soulful uplift’ in wartime.¹⁸ Heenan was fully in accord with these official Centennial sentiments, but he also seized on it as an opportunity to pursue some longer-ranging and more imaginative projects.

The historical publications programme was Heenan’s special Centennial interest, and his brainchild.¹⁹ The eighteen-member National Historical Committee, which was charged with the task of ‘present[ing] a hundred years of strenuous history as a coherent progression’, was apparently not quite what he had first had in mind: it consisted of twelve historians, three politicians and three public servants, himself included. This was despite his warning to Parry that there should not be too many historical scholars on it because of ‘the personal touchiness of many of them’.²⁰ The comment typifies Heenan’s wary attitude towards professional interests and his desire to keep them at arm’s length. His choice of John A. Lee to chair the committee because of Lee’s populist view of history was overruled.

Naturally the committee’s wish list was more imaginative and extensive than time, resources and political sensitivities in the end allowed. At one point they were considering up to twenty 70,000-word historical surveys. Suggested subjects included fashion, caricature, corporate life, the co-operative movement, state trading and marketing, political theory, town planning and domestic architecture. Heenan’s own suggestions included surveys of New Zealand expatriates and foreigners in New Zealand, the English language in New Zealand, and commemorative stamps; he also wanted a full historical survey of sport but this was relegated to the slighter pictorial series, although he did get to write the racing volume himself. The committee discussed ideas for a revised national bibliography (perhaps assisted by a Carnegie Corporation grant), an encyclopaedia, volumes of historical records, a readers’ guide to New Zealand books, a Centennial calendar, competitions for an historical novel and a Centennial ode, restoration of historic buildings, a chair in New Zealand history, or perhaps a lectureship in Māori language, a bureau of historical

information, and a fund for the endowment of historical research ... J.C. Beaglehole later expressed the sense of excitement and possibility, of creating something new, which inspired Internal Affairs’ Centennial Branch: ‘We played a good deal with words like “indigenous” and “authentic” – even, I fear, with “autochthonous”. We considered the blank spaces in our knowledge, the personal hiatuses, the need for biographies and autobiographies, we planned for the future – planned archives, books, collections of documents.’²¹

After six months of negotiation Heenan presented to Cabinet in December 1937 the committee’s final recommendations: for twelve 30,000-word historical surveys, 30 pictorial surveys, an historical atlas, a dictionary of New Zealand biography and a literary competition, total cost £40,000. It may be tempting to see this period – and the Centennial in particular – as a golden era of government funding for bright ideas, but User Pays was alive and well in 1937. The Treasury protested that the atlas was far too extravagant (at £8000) and that the surveys should be published only on a cost-recovery basis, and wouldn’t even consider a dictionary until more figures were provided. Heenan was outraged, composing a fierce memo which questioned not only Treasury’s profit-and-loss philosophy but whether it had any right to interfere with his department at all. This evidently did the trick, for six weeks later Cabinet approved the recommendations in full.

The Centennial surveys were the genesis of Heenan’s ambition to see the Department of Internal Affairs at the cutting edge of the New Zealand publishing industry. He was determined that they should be not only scholarly, popular and affordable, but be ‘a Centennial memorial to the printing trade of New Zealand’.²² His apparent disrespect for the historical profession did not prevent him from developing a very fruitful collaboration here with J.C. Beaglehole, whom he came to regard as ‘one of the greatest men New Zealand has produced in all matters relating to typography and book production’.²³ Beaglehole was appointed a part-time research advisor to the Alexander Turnbull Library in June 1938, but was soon drawn into the Centennial enterprise – reluctantly, for he then ‘regarded the whole thing as indulgence in a series of fatuities, all of them depraved, from which a sensible person ought to be exempt’.²⁴ Heenan won him over by placing him in charge of the design of the Centennial books, and had the Centennial Branch build up a library on typography.²⁵

The Centennial publications were printed by Whitcombe and Tombs (the historical surveys) and Wilson and Horton (the pictorials). It is true that the Government Printing Office was too busy to cope with the job but also that Heenan did not hold its work in very high regard; a few



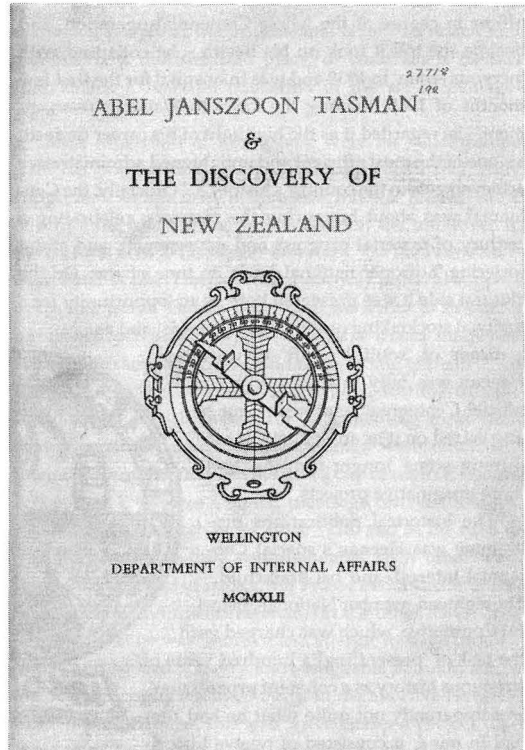
years later he was to complain that the 'tragedy of New Zealand printing today is the imperviousness of the Government Printer to outside suggestions'.²⁶ He was justifiably proud of the result. Reviewers unanimously remarked on the high standard of design and production both of the historical surveys, which bore the Beaglehole stamp of sober, tasteful design ('without extravagance and without meanness', as Beaglehole himself put it), and of the pictorial surveys, the printing of which used new photolithographic technology and was said to be the largest printing contract ever offered in New Zealand. Fraser congratulated the Centennial Branch: 'You have not only recorded history, but, as far as New Zealand printing is concerned, you have made history.'²⁷ Heenan himself – who had a tendency to enthusiastic overstatement – thought the historical surveys were 'undoubtedly the finest bits of book production ever to have gone out of New Zealand, and as such will be collectors' pieces'.²⁸

THE BEAGLEHOLE BOYS

Heenan had always taken a long term view of the Centennial investment in the arts, and having set up a little publishing unit in his department, he thought he would keep it. In February 1941 he recommended to Parry that the Centennial Branch be permanently established as the Historical Branch, with Beaglehole in charge. The research staff of the Branch were to spend most of their time working on the ill-fated historical atlas (until it was abandoned in 1954),²⁹ and generally acting as a 'clearing-house for historical information'; but Beaglehole especially was also engaged on various pieces of book production – on books published either by or with the assistance of the Department.

The Branch's own publications included a handbook for American servicemen, *Meet New Zealand*, and Ernst Plischke's *Design and Living*. Their triumph was the 1942 Tasman Tercentenary booklet containing Allen Curnow's 'Landfall in Unknown Seas'. When Heenan asked Beaglehole for his thoughts on a commemorative booklet for this occasion it was Beaglehole who suggested commissioning Curnow to write a poem – a very rare instance of the state commissioning creative literature – and he told Heenan that he had 'one or two fancy ideas floating around in my mind, involving a severely limited edition on Dutch hand-made paper'.³⁰ This proved too expensive, and only a portion of the print run of 1000 was on hand-made paper and leather-bound. The booklet was not printed for sale but the Department received so many inquiries from people wanting to buy it that Heenan suggested they make a donation to the local patriotic organisation instead.

Other publishing ventures, however, were not so successful. From the late 1930s, largely as an effect of the Centennial, Internal Affairs was regularly approached by hopeful or would-be authors wanting assistance to get their work published – by, for example, a man who had compiled a map of all New Zealand shipwrecks,



including the *Endeavour*. 'We informed him', reported a member of the Branch, 'that the *Endeavour* had not been wrecked, and I believe he is still working away at his map; no doubt he will soon be back with a few more wrecks dotted in, and a stronger plea for some recognition'.³¹ Where grants were made they were only small – for expenditure of up to £250 Heenan needed to get approval only from his minister, not from Cabinet – but they were not always good precedents for the expanding role of the state as a patron of scholarship.

In 1942, for example, Heenan found £100 for Sidney Baker, a New Zealand journalist working in Sydney, to compile 'A Dictionary of the Australasian Language: Australian and New Zealand contributions to colloquial and unconventional English'. Heenan was interested in the study of language and corresponded on the subject with the American critic and linguist H.L. Mencken, to whom he had sent a copy of Baker's previous book on New Zealand slang. The big dictionary, which Baker grandly described as 'the greatest single contribution to Australasiana ever made', never appeared. When he confessed to Heenan in 1945 that he now realised he needed at least £10,000 and ten years to finish it (after all, the Oxford English Dictionary had cost £500,000), Heenan told him to 'keep up the good work', and that he was

Above: The Tasman Tercentenary booklet, Heenan and Beaglehole's finest collaboration. Alexander Turnbull Library.

sorry he had only been able to make a token grant.³²

It was not only Heenan's enthusiasm that could lead the Department astray. When 74-year-old W.K. Howitt of Taranaki asked for some money to help publish his reminiscences of pioneering life, entitled 'A Pioneer Looks Back', Heenan recommended to Parry that a grant of £50 could be made 'by way of a gesture to an old citizen', but Parry became enthusiastic and gave him £100. Encouraged, Howitt continued to write long, barely legible letters to the Department over the next six years, recounting his life story in each one, requesting a grant for a second volume of memoirs to be called 'A Pioneer Looks Back Again', and finally suggesting that Parry recommend him for an MBE.³³

The Gael Fares Forth, a history of the Nova Scotian settlement at Waipu, by N.R. McKenzie, was another unhappy experience. The book had first been published in London in 1935 and in 1940 the author approached Heenan for a subsidy for a second edition. Beaglehole told Heenan that 'the republication of this book fills me with dismay'. However, the Prime Minister was a friend of the author (Fraser had a family connection with the Highland migration to Nova Scotia) and insisted that 'the most generous assistance should be offered'. Cabinet approved a subsidy of up to £450, half to be recouped from sales. The final bill came to £550. Fortunately, contrary to Beaglehole's fears, the book did sell and was out of print by 1942.³⁴

'BACKING HORSES OFF THE COURSE'

Beaglehole had suggested to Heenan shortly after he joined the Department that a fund and a system be established for granting publication subsidies, and he had set out three conditions on which such patronage must be based: that it must be public; that grants must be made on the advice of a 'competent person or committee'; and that that committee must have read the work in question.³⁵ Heenan, however, preferred to work unencumbered by such formal structures, seeking advice from a few trusted advisers and making recommendations to his minister himself. He had promised Parry a memo on the question of government publications two years earlier, but never wrote it.

In the area of creative writing Heenan operated even further outside the bureaucratic context. In a letter to Allen Curnow in 1943 he expressed the generous impulse which motivated his efforts to support New Zealand literature. Apologising for his inability to appreciate some recent sonnets by Curnow, he explained: 'Quite frankly, my poetical taste dates. In the most impressionable period of my life I was so fervently a Georgian as to leave me rather cold to poetical developments in the past ten or fifteen years. That, no doubt, is my fault and my misfortune, but it does not blind me to the necessity of giving every encouragement within my power, both officially and personally, to New Zealand poets in particular who have left me far behind along the cultural road.'³⁶ It was not Allen Curnow but Frank Sargeson who was the chief beneficiary of this be-

nevolence; and it was Denis Glover to whom Heenan went for advice. Glover referred to himself and Sargeson as 'two of [Heenan's] Bright Boys'.³⁷

Heenan and Glover of course shared an interest in printing, and appear to have already been acquainted when Glover interceded with Heenan on Sargeson's behalf in 1940. Sargeson had just come out of hospital and was told he was ineligible for a sickness benefit. While a subscription was quietly being organised by McCormick and Beaglehole, Sargeson outlined his situation in a 'window-dressing' letter addressed to Glover but intended for Heenan's consumption (and which he later described as 'a thoroughly dirty piece of work really').³⁸ Heenan promptly arranged for an emergency benefit. This, however, was only a temporary solution. When, in 1947, Sargeson was in danger of losing his invalid's pension altogether Heenan arranged for it to be replaced by a 'literary pension'. This was paid out of the Internal Affairs rather than Social Security vote, was larger, tax free and permanent. He also assisted Sargeson out of his housing crisis, after a health inspector had condemned Sargeson's bach. Heenan arranged for part of the new pension to be capitalised into a grant for a new house, and personally interviewed the managers of the State Advances Corporation and the Auckland Savings Bank who had declined Sargeson's application for a loan. In the course of all this Heenan visited the writer in Auckland; Sargeson sent the Under-secretary copies of his books and a photograph of the new house when it was finally completed in 1949. Details of the funding arrangements were worked out in conversation between the two, a situation which was later to cause Sargeson problems when Social Security insisted on taxing his pension and he had no documentation to prove that it was meant to be tax free: he had only had Heenan's word.

Heenan also assisted Sargeson with some publishing ventures. One was a selection of Katherine Mansfield stories which Sargeson was editing and Glover was to publish. Heenan offered them £300 but the project never got off the ground. More interestingly, he subsidised the publication of Greville Texidor's *These Dark Glasses*, also a Sargeson/Glover project, with £100. Mansfield was an obvious case for state literary assistance (and indeed one of the first major Literary Fund grants was for a Mansfield project), but Texidor's novel, while one of the more interesting pieces of fiction published in New Zealand in the 1940s, was in no other sense a New Zealand novel. For Glover himself, meanwhile, Heenan made representations in several quarters to help the Caxton Press get a building permit to expand its plant. When Glover once commented in passing on his interest in publishing local history Heenan immediately wrote back: 'Is it finance? ... Pop in and see me ...'.³⁹ He consulted Glover about other people he might help – young writers like John Reece Cole, whom Glover advised against. He was keen to help A.R.D. Fairburn but despite both Glover's and Sargeson's representations Fairburn refused

to be a party to what he called Heenan's 'culture racket'. He told Charles Brasch: 'The notion of having Heenan ... acting as a secret arbiter of letters – backing horses off the course, so to speak – doesn't appeal to me much.'⁴⁰ Glover had no such qualms: 'I am prepared to trust Joe', he wrote to Sargeson. 'He is not a man to make conditions, and he helps even where he does not understand.'⁴¹

THE CULTURAL FUND

When Heenan acted in this area the distinction between personal and official forms of patronage becomes somewhat blurred. The pension he arranged for Sargeson was a singular event. There was no precedent for it; the civil list pensions given in the 1930s were really compassionate or honorary awards, granted to writers who were at the end of their careers, in poor health or financial difficulty. Sargeson was an active, albeit poor, writer, at the crest of his career. Jessie Mackay on receiving her pension had hoped that the government 'might even desire to extend this amazing generosity on behalf of young and vigorous writers', but Sargeson's was the only one.⁴² It could probably only have been devised at this time by someone with Heenan's personal enthusiasm for literature, his imaginative approach to the spending of government funds, his dislike for the constraints of advisory committees and other bureaucratic obstructions, and with the ear of his minister, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance.

Sargeson's pension was paid out of the Cultural and Recreational Trust Fund Account, and the existence of this fund was, along with the Centennial publications, Heenan's major and enduring piece of cultural patronage. In May 1946 he had proposed to Parry and Fraser the creation of three Special Funds: one (of £15,000) to assist young New Zealanders to pursue artistic studies abroad; a £20,000 cultural and general art fund, for publications, grants to cultural organisations and the like; and a physical welfare and recreation fund. The money was to come from surplus Art Union profits, which had accumulated to the amount of £80,000. It would be 'a shocking waste', Heenan told the ministers, if this was used for general welfare or simply to increase existing grants; he had a better idea. The trustees of the Special Funds (which were later combined to form a single Cultural Fund) were the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Prime Minister, acting on the recommendation of the Department of Internal Affairs (in other words, Heenan). In practice there was only ever one formal, minuted meeting of the trustees. There were two characteristically Heenan features about this scheme: it was secret, and there was no formal advisory or consultative structure. As Heenan explained to Fraser and Parry: 'You, as trustees, would be able to exercise your judgment unfettered by outside pressure.'⁴³

Heenan told Parry that he had been eyeing up the surplus art union funds for some years, but his invention of the Cultural Fund at this particular time must also be seen

as his response to the mounting campaign for a literary fund, a development of which he was wary. In 1937 PEN had applied to Parry for an annual grant of £1000 to support 'a scheme for the development of reading and writing of New Zealand literature', but was refused.⁴⁴ Heenan was interested, however, and in 1939 sought information about Australia's revamped Commonwealth Literary Fund. Three years later he stated: 'Nothing would please me more, personally, than to have on the vote of our Department an item which would roughly be the equivalent of the Commonwealth Literary Fund ... but obviously under present wartime conditions, it is impracticable.'⁴⁵ In late 1944 PEN presented a more detailed proposal for a fund to be administered by a committee consisting of three PEN members and a representative each of the government, the university senate and the Supreme Court. Heenan, however, successfully persuaded Parry that New Zealand literature was better served by the status quo.

As PEN pursued the matter, Heenan continued to stall. In a personal letter in March 1945 J.H.E. Schroder, editor of the *Christchurch Press* (and later a member of the first Literary Fund committee), implored Heenan: 'I ask you, for the fifth time, on my bended knees, to give me your views about ... the possible development of something like the Commonwealth Literary Fund.'⁴⁶ The matter was raised in Parliament that year, and John A. Lee approached Parry and Nash with his own suggestions for how the government could support a writer and publisher like himself. PEN renewed its effort in October 1945, but Fraser was about to depart overseas and their proposal languished on Parry's desk for several months. It was when they approached Fraser directly in April 1946 that Heenan presented his plan for the Special Funds.

Heenan's hesitancy in supporting the PEN literary fund proposal stemmed partly from the thought of having to appoint a committee to administer it. He commented to Schroder: 'New Zealand has so many mutually intolerant cliques, each of which claims in all fields of art to have the monopoly of knowledge and taste.' The essence of it was that in his opinion he was (he continued to Schroder) 'achieving the same object by having the matter more or less in my own hands here at Internal Affairs.'⁴⁷ He envisaged a much larger role for his department in the field of literary patronage than simply doing the bookwork for a committee of PEN members. So did Beaglehole. When Heenan consulted Beaglehole about PEN and his own ideas for literary funding, Beaglehole responded with an excited memo: 'the provision of this fund is one of the intellectually most exciting things ever to have happened in New Zealand. If it remains in existence permanently it offers endless prospect of interesting and useful experiment in all the "things of the mind".'⁴⁸ He hoped for government subsidies for publishers to buy new typefaces and develop new printing methods; among the projects Heenan had in mind was an annual prize for typography; and they jointly recommended

to Fraser that the government buy a bookbinding plant (the Prime Minister, however, informed them that this was going beyond the limits of government's responsibility to literature).

In proposing the Special Funds Heenan made it clear that this was to be regarded independently of any grant that might be made for PEN's literary fund. He reiterated this in his memo to Treasury in July 1946, six weeks after his Special Funds had been approved, when he recommended the establishment of a Literary Fund 'as a public gesture'. In fact the £2000 annual grant he recommended, and Cabinet approved, was more than the £1200 PEN had asked

for; and it was substantially more than the £500 Treasury thought sufficient. When the Literary Fund's first advisory committee was appointed in 1947 he reassured Denis Glover: 'In no way will their operations affect ours from our special funds.'⁴⁹

END OF AN ERA

The history of the Literary Fund is another story. Suffice it to say here that Heenan was right about the difficulty of designing a committee acceptable both to the government and to the various factions of the literary community. He himself served briefly on the committee after his retirement from the public service; however, its minutes give no indication of his playing an influential role. He formally retired from Internal Affairs in 1949, but he had effectively handed over to his successor the previous year when he was appointed manager of the 1949 Royal Tour. His two-month visit to England via the United States on tour business was his first trip overseas, and he was especially pleased to be able to meet people in the publishing world, some of whom he had corresponded with for years. Fraser had been trying to find an appropriate junket for Heenan for some time, and the Royal Tour was to have been the culmination of his career; but Heenan confessed to being deeply relieved when it was aborted at the last minute. The apogee of his career was instead the knighthood he received in the 1949 Queen's Birthday honours.⁵⁰

His retirement coincided neatly with the fall of the Labour government, and with this the Heenan regime came to an end. Yet in some respects Heenan's patronage system would not have survived as he had designed it, with or without him. His desire to keep the existence of the Cul-



Above: Joe Heenan with Eleanor Roosevelt, visiting a hostel for women munition workers in 1943. Photograph: John Pascoe, Alexander Turnbull Library.

tural Fund secret was at the very least naive. He said this was to protect the Department from being inundated with applications, but of course word got around. Secrecy fuelled suspicion about who was getting how much and why, and resentment from those who thought they should be consulted. In November 1949 the first public statement about Cultural Fund bursaries was released, and it described the existing system as 'exploratory' (which was not what Heenan or Fraser had understood). By November 1950 a system of selection committees and an annual application round had been put in place, and the number of bursaries reduced and fixed. Heenan himself had acknowledged criticism that some grants may have been 'too easily given', but told Fraser that he thought it was better to err on the side of generosity.⁵¹

These changes also reflected a different political climate, with a National government in power which was more interested in saving money than in giving it away. In the 1950s the Cultural Fund reserves were allowed to run down and the Literary Fund's grant was cut. When he retired Heenan felt confident of his successor (A.G. Harper), and that 'as long as the P.M. and Nash are in office, such things will always get a good run'; but, as he had observed back in 1940: 'The re-acquisition of a true-blue farmers' Government would, I fear, write finis to this particular chapter.'⁵² It also brought to an end a very cosy, and for the arts very fruitful, relationship between Heenan and Fraser, bureaucrat and politician.

Developments within the cultural world itself would also have overtaken Heenan. In the 1950s the New Zealand Players, the New Zealand Ballet Company and the New Zealand Opera Company were established. The New Zealand Drama Council had been formed in 1945, the Federation of Film Societies in 1947 and the Federation of Chamber Music Societies in 1950. The first full-time, professional art gallery director was appointed at the Auckland City Art

Gallery in 1952. Although the idea of some kind of government-funded arts council had been around at least since 1945 (when Heenan found it 'impracticable'), mounting and competing pressure from these cultural interests, both amateur and professional, put the establishment of an arts council on the agenda in the late 1950s.

Joe Heenan – 'that passionately informal, that impulsive, generous, quick-tempered, wise, imaginative, romantic, pig-headed, enthusiastic, hard-boiled, sentimental, glib, sceptical, prejudiced and tolerant man', as J.C. Beaglehole, his close collaborator in many cultural projects, would remember him – died just two years into retirement, in October 1951.⁵³ His essentially autocratic style would not have functioned so easily within the increasingly mature and complex cultural infrastructure of the 1950s.

NOTES

The term 'culture-organising' in the title of this paper is borrowed from Heenan's arch-enemy A.R.D. Fairburn.

- 1 D. Marr, *Patrick White: a life*, Cape, London, 1991.
- 2 Heenan to W.B. Sutch, 10 Apr. 1945, Heenan Papers, MS Papers 113:224, ATL.
- 3 A.D. McElwain, 'Books by the people for the people', *Melbourne Herald*, 29 July 1944.
- 4 Paul to J.C. Beaglehole, 11 Oct. 1951, *Landfall*, 185 (Apr. 1993), p.29.
- 5 Heenan to P. Fraser, 31 May 1949, Heenan Papers, MS Papers 1132:74.
- 6 Briefing paper for W.E. Parry, 1935, MS Papers 1132:316.
- 7 This was the title of the talk he gave at the first New Zealand Authors' Week, held in 1936 under the auspices of PEN.
- 8 Guthrie-Smith for his part credited Heenan's enthusiasm with inspiring him to revise *Tutira* for a third edition, while Heenan also persuaded the Treasury that it was a matter of 'national importance' that they find some sterling funds for the author to send the revised manuscript to his British publisher.
- 9 Heenan to D.O.W. Hall, 4 July 1949, MS Papers 1132:361.
- 10 J.C. Beaglehole, 'The New Zealand scholar', in P. Munz (ed.), *The Feel of Truth*, Reed, Wellington, 1969, p.245.
- 11 Heenan to D.O.W. Hall, 4 July 1949.
- 12 Beaglehole (1964), p.245.
- 13 Parry's great enthusiasm was physical welfare, for which he had, in Heenan's words, 'an almost religious zeal'. He is credited with establishing the members' gym underneath Parliament. Heenan to Parry, 31 May 1949, MS Papers 1132:179.
- 14 Heenan to Fraser, 31 May 1949.
- 15 Heenan to Denis Glover, 17 July 1946, MS Papers 1132:82.
- 16 Heenan to Nash, 4 July 1949, Heenan to C.V. Smith, 8 July 1949, MS Papers 1132:361.
- 17 Heenan to L.C. Webb, 13 July 1940, MS Papers 1132:250.
- 18 *NZ Centennial News*, No. 11 (30 Sept. 1939), pp.2-3; No.14 (15 Aug. 1940), p.1.
- 19 Although Heenan publicly credited his minister with the idea, Parry's particular Centennial enthusiasms were tree planting and historical pageantry.
- 20 *NZ Centennial News*, No.2 (15 Sept. 1938), p.14; Heenan to Parry, 29 June 1936, IA 1 62/7, NA.
- 21 Beaglehole (1969), p.247.
- 22 Heenan to Parry, 4 Feb. 1941, MS Papers 1132:296.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 Beaglehole (1969), p.245.

- 25 In fact Heenan had first had in mind for this job Arnold Goodwin, director of design at Elam School of Art, who was not available.
- 26 Heenan to R.M. Campbell, 13 Feb. 1945, MS Papers 1132:30.
- 27 Fraser to Parry, 11 Oct. 1939, MS Papers 1132:295.
- 28 Heenan to W. Jordan, 23 Apr. 1940, MS Papers 1132:116.
- 29 At this point some of the Branch staff were transferred to the flourishing War History Branch of the Department, which would in turn metamorphose into the Historical Publications Branch in 1963, and subsequently be renamed the Historical Branch.
- 30 Beaglehole to Heenan, 13 Apr. 1942, IA 1, 158/292/1, NA.
- 31 M.S. Nestor to A.W. Mulligan, 24 Sept. 1939, IA 1, 126/8/39, NA.
- 32 IA 1, 126/8/48, NA.
- 33 IA 1, 126/8/56, NA.
- 34 IA 1, 126/8/45, NA. This was one of the few publishing grants to rate a mention in the Department's printed annual reports but there was no acknowledgement of State assistance in the book itself.
- 35 Beaglehole to Heenan, 15 Sept. 1938, IA 1, 126/8/33, NA.
- 36 Heenan to Allen Curnow, 14 June 1943, IA 1, 158/292/3, NA.
- 37 Glover to Frank Sargeson, 18 Feb. 1948, Sargeson Papers, MS Papers 432:166, ATL.
- 38 Sargeson to Glover, nd [1940s], Glover Papers, MS Papers 418, ATL.
- 39 Heenan to Glover, 17 July 1946, MS Papers 1132:82.
- 40 Fairburn to Eric McCormick, Oct. 1951, to Charles Brasch, 4 Dec. 1947, in L. Edmond (ed.), *The Letters of A.R.D. Fairburn*, OUP, Auckland, 1981, pp.199, 177.
- 41 Glover to Sargeson, 10 Feb. 1948, MS Papers 432:166.
- 42 Jessie Mackay to G.H. Scholefield, 15 Mar. 1937, MS Papers 212:C2B, ATL. John A. Lee would claim that Fraser offered him a literary pension after his ousting from politics, but, to quote Lee, 'I couldn't take anything from Peter and throw bricks through his window' (Lee to A.E. Mulgan, 15 Oct. [1952], MS Papers 224:5, ATL). However, this story may deserve no more credence than Lee's claim to have been personally responsible for the creation of the Literary Fund.
- 43 Heenan to Fraser and Parry, 3 May 1846, IA 57/1; IA 1, 55/75, NA.
- 44 P.A. Lawlor to Parry, 18 Mar. 1937, IA 86/4, NA. The request was perhaps turned down because Heenan and Parry lacked faith in their business ability. They had received £100 from the Department for the inaugural Authors' Week the previous year but Heenan then had to give them another £200 to clear their debts, a grant which he instructed them to keep secret.
- 45 Heenan to W. Downie Stewart, 16 Feb. 1942, IA 1, 126/8/50, NA.
- 46 J.H.E. Schroder to Heenan, 3 July 1945, MS Papers 1132:206.
- 47 Heenan to Schroder, 13 July 1945, MS Papers 1132:206.
- 48 Beaglehole to Heenan, 29 Apr. 1946, IA 57/1, NA.
- 49 Heenan to Treasury secretary, 15 July 1946, IA 86/1, NA; Heenan to Glover, 26 Sept. 1947, MS Papers 1132:82.
- 50 Fraser was also intending to appoint him to the Legislative Council.
- 51 Heenan, memo for Fraser, 31 May 1949, MS Papers 1132:74. A bonding system was also considered: concern had been expressed in the media about whether the country shouldn't be getting something back for its investment, as many students weren't coming home again. But Heenan had specifically stated that the bursars should be under no obligation to return: 'The Government's attitude being that if New Zealand can give to the world an artist worthwhile, that will be something worth achieving.' Heenan to director, Trinity College, London, 13 Jan. 1947, IA 1, 158/521, NA.
- 52 Heenan to Glover, 3 Dec. 1948, MS Papers 1132:82; Heenan to L.C. Webb, 23 July 1940, MS Papers 1132:250.
- 53 Beaglehole (1969), p.245.