

# The Prior-Brasch Landfall Letters (1946-1958)

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## Abstract

This article discusses 30 letters between Arthur Prior and Charles Brasch, the editor of *Landfall*, over the period 1946-1958. The letters contain new and important information on Prior's view on logic and philosophy, what he was reading at this time, his reflections on Popper and C.S. Lewis, his contributions to *Landfall*, and his preference for the Polish notation. They also provide insight as to how Prior's writings, ideas and suggestions for *Landfall*, including that *Landfall* regularly discuss philosophy, were received and responded to by Brasch.

**Keywords:** A.N. Prior; Charles Brasch; *Landfall* journal; Public intellectual; Presbyterianism; Philosophy in New Zealand and Australia; Polish Notation.

"...fundamentally I think of Philosophy, including Logic, as part of the 'Humanities'. (That's one reason why I like to see it in *Landfall*!)"<sup>1</sup>

## 1 Preface

The New Zealand literary journal *Landfall* was established in 1947 by Charles Brasch who edited, and largely funded from his private income, the journal until 1966. *Landfall*, which continues to the present day, now being published by Otago University Press<sup>2</sup>, is of interest to Prior

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to Brasch, Letter 20.

<sup>2</sup> The Landfall archive provides on-line, searchable access to all issues from 1947-1986: <https://www.landfallarchive.org/omeka/>

scholars as Arthur Prior was involved in helping establish the journal and contributed a number of important articles and reviews. These are discussed in “The Public Prior: A.N. Prior as (relocated 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> century) Public Intellectual 1945-1952.” (Grimshaw 2020). This paper on the Prior-Brasch letters is a companion piece, that introduces and discusses a body of correspondence between Prior and Brasch<sup>3</sup>. These 30 letters expand and the deepen our understanding of the New Zealand intellectual and cultural milieu that Prior moved and worked within. They contain new and important information on Prior’s view on logic and philosophy, what he was reading at this time, his reflections on Popper and C.S. Lewis, his contributions to *Landfall*, and his preference for the Polish notation. They also provide insight as to how Prior’s writings, ideas and suggestions for *Landfall*, including that *Landfall* regularly discuss philosophy, were received and responded to by Brasch.

## A brief note on the letters.

The 30 letters that comprise this corpus of correspondence were collected by Martin Prior from the Charles Brasch literary and personal papers collection in the Hocken Library, Dunedin. They cover the years 1946-1952, followed by a further three letters in 1958. Because the letters are conversational, alongside the 26 letters from Prior, the correspondence includes 4 letters to Prior from Brasch [letters 7, 27, 28, 30]; yet it is also clear in many of Prior’s letters that he is replying to uncollected correspondence from Brasch regarding both the establishment and form of *Landfall*, and also Prior’s contributions to the journal, as well as more general discussion of Prior’s family and life. As such, these existing, collected letters also provide material that is often of more interest and value to a biographer of Prior than to a reader interested in the thought of Arthur Prior. Therefore, the following discussion of the letters involves a mix of precis, descriptive contextualization and, where considered appropriate, either full transcription or selected quotation.

To aid the reader I have added a subtitle to each letter. For example, a central group of letters focus on Prior’s ‘Disruption’ article and are so subtitled. Similarly, Prior’s discussion on the AAP Congress in Sydney.

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<sup>3</sup> The letters are to be found at <https://popper-prior.nz/prior-correspondence>.

As will be clear, the order of the letters uploaded onto the website is not in fact the order in which they were written. In this article I have endeavored to reorder them.

Other letters cover a mix of topics, and I have included the main subject matter in their subtitle. Because the main focus is on what Prior wrote for, suggested writing, or thought of, *Landfall*, these letters do not have the range of discussion that Prior expressed in his letters to Ursula Bethell (Grimshaw 2018) or what exists in his letters to Mary Prior, or to other philosophers.

That said, these 'Landfall' letters demonstrate a particular context and, I would argue, an evolution in Prior's thought and self-conception. They track a public intellectual and philosopher enroute to becoming a new type of logician. They reiterate that Prior's life and thought after 1952 took on a new, far more singular academic focus and expression due to his discovery of Polish notation. Therefore, when the letters become more explicitly philosophical or throw greater light on Prior and his thought, a full transcription – of either a section or of the complete letter – is provided.

It is also important to remember Prior's letters commonly involve sections crossed out and reordered and reworked, words changed and also, a postscript discussion. This reminds us, in the age of the immediacy of the email, that the letter often involved an engagement over a period of time, both in its writing but also between drafting and sending. The letter was often revised and amended, and the postscript is often a fascinating insight into 'a mind at work' as it can demonstrate how a review of a letter can stimulate further thoughts in its writer – as well as reminding us that there is often what can be termed a contemplative gap or time between drafting a letter and it finally being sent.

Finally, as is clear, I have added sometimes extensive footnote discussion that provides further context and information.

## **Introduction: *Landfall*, Brasch and Prior**

Both Prior and Brasch (1909-1973) were part of poet Ursula Bethell's 'young men' (see Grimshaw 2018); a wide-ranging collection of writers, thinkers, and artists with intersecting interests in literature, religion and philosophy that she corresponded with and supported. While Prior and Brasch had many friends, acquaintances and interests in common, it was Bethell who put them in contact. For while Prior was part of Bethell's network from the early 1930s, Brasch did not meet Bethell until 1938 when he returned to New Zealand.

Brasch had left New Zealand to study at St John's College, Oxford in 1927. Unsure what he wanted to do, except write poetry, he took a third-class degree in Modern History. After a brief return to Dunedin and then following a time of European travel Brasch then spent three years working on archaeological digs in Egypt. He then taught 'problem children' at the Abbey school in Suffolk before again returning to New Zealand, and his family home in Dunedin. Arthur and Clare Prior had meanwhile left for Europe and Britain, so they did not meet Brasch. But Brasch and Prior's worlds began to intersect more closely, with Brasch meeting and befriending many of those who had become part of the cultural, philosophical, artistic and political circle that Arthur and Clare had amassed in Dunedin before their departure for England, in particular Rodney Kennedy, Toss Woolaston, John Summers and perhaps most importantly, Colin McCahon. Outside of this 1930s Dunedin circle, others also came to play a similar connecting role between Brasch and Prior, most importantly Harry Scott and Ron O'Reilly. Therefore, Bethell's circle became part of the circles of both Prior and Brasch, with Brasch noting Prior was one of Bethell's friends he met "with or through her." (Brasch 1980, p.302) Another important connection became the extended family link, with Prior's younger half-brother Ian Prior marrying Brasch's cousin, Elespie Forsyth in 1946. Many of these names circulate within these letters as Prior and Brasch discuss various contributions, ideas, and friends in common.

It is also useful to consider the intersection of Prior's and Brasch's interests; these involved not only the important role of a journal of ideas, literature and culture in New Zealand life, and issues of philosophy, but also issues of religion and literature. Presbyterian minister and Old Testament Scholar Maurice Andrew recalls in his memoir some classes given in the English department at Otago university by Brasch in 1951: "Mr Brasch's lectures on the period 1780 to 1840 started with a comprehensive view, establishing connections between literature, history and philosophy, continental as well as English...Nor did he forget the religious dimension." (Andrew p.138) From this it is obvious how much Prior and Brasch had in common and *Landfall* was their meeting place.

While both had written for – and read – the political and literary journal *Tomorrow* in the 1930s, they also both had first-hand experience and awareness of what British cultural and literary periodicals (and life) could offer. This informed the significant roles Prior and Brasch came to play in the period of Cultural Nationalism that significantly changed and affected New Zealand culture and identity between the mid-1930s and

the late 1950s. Brasch via his poetry, his establishment and editing of *Landfall* and his role as literary and cultural patron; Prior in a less obvious way via his intellectual journalism (both religious and philosophical) and, more explicitly from the mid-1940s, via his central role in creating a New Zealand intellectual culture and expectation in the University for the humanities via his philosophical work. Both saw a central role – and need – for ideas to be expressed, discussed and debated in New Zealand life; such ideas were centrally literary, artistic, religious and philosophical. Similarly, while both Prior and Brasch could be said to be journalistically inclined and of somewhat a journalistic temper, neither became journalists; rather they became men of ideas and letters – something which Prior undertook alongside his philosophical work over the time of these letters, but which he gave up as he not only became aware of the limits of such work in New Zealand, he also had discovered the exciting, life-changing possibilities and opportunities of Polish notation.

It is also interesting and informative to read and consider these letters alongside both Brasch's memoir *Indirections* (that covers 1909-1947) and especially, the second volume of Charles Brasch's journals that cover the years 1945-1957. (Brasch 2017). From these texts we can gain a sense of the milieu that the *Landfall* correspondence occurred within and spoke to, as well as an awareness of the broad variety of Brasch's intellectual interests and reading. It is clear that Brasch and Prior had intellectual and cultural interests in common, whether religious, philosophical or literary. In fact, it would seem that it was only Prior's turn to Polish notation that occasioned his retreat from contributing to *Landfall*. The friendship however, continued.

Born into a wealthy Jewish family in Dunedin, Brasch summed up the sense of his life prior to establishing *Landfall* in 1947 as "Indirections", the title of his memoir of those years. After spending the war in England, first as a firewatcher and then from working in intelligence at Bletchley Park<sup>4</sup> and then back in London for the Foreign Office in the Italian section, Brasch returned to New Zealand at the age of 36, arriving in Wellington

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<sup>4</sup> It was here that Brasch records that an Australian "later in the war showed me copies of a new Brisbane quarterly *Meanjin Papers*" (Brasch 1980, p.372). That Brasch records this is significant, because it expands the range of influence for *Landfall* from *Horizon*, *The Criterion* and the *Dublin Review*.

Brasch also observes of Bletchley Park: "The administration seemed to be modelled on that of Kafka's Castle". (Brasch 1980, p.374)

on 6 February 1946<sup>5</sup> unsure of what he was now going to do, except reacquaint himself with New Zealand and its cultural and intellectual possibilities. In *Indirections* he notes:

“Within a few weeks I had met or met again half of the most active and fertile minds in the country, and began to have an inkling of what was stirring in this tiny community and how it thought and felt.”

(Brasch1980, p.407)

He undertook such a cultural reconnaissance because he did have in mind – and in initial planning – a literary magazine to be edited by him (with the support of poet and printer Denis Glover) and underwritten by private means via the family money of the Hallenstein and Fels families.

In *Indirections* Brasch describes the initial idea that he and Glover developed in wartime England:

“What we had in mind was something that properly speaking did not start with us: we simply responded to the need for it; something would continue after us for as long as it fulfilled the country’s need. It would have to be a journal both literary and general. Its standards would not be set by definitions but by the general idea behind its choice of material, by good writing (of course), and by the quality of its book reviews; poems and stories would be read in the light of its reviews and literary criticism.”

(Brasch 1980, pp. 389-90)

It is clear why Prior, as an established reviewer – and a more than aspiring writer, was drawn to what became *Landfall*.

In reading the second volume of Brasch’s journals, covering the period 1945-1957<sup>6</sup>, we can gain additional insights into these letters between

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<sup>5</sup> In *Indirections* he notes: “Within a few weeks I had met or met again half of the most active and fertile minds in the country, and began to have an inkling of what was stirring in this tiny community and how it thought and felt.” (Brasch1980, p.407)

<sup>6</sup> From the estimated 325,000 words transcribed in his journals for this period, the editor Peter Simpson selected over 180,000. (Brasch 2017, p41). This suggests there may be far more discussion with and of Prior and philosophical topics and ideas than was selected for this volume.

Prior and Brasch, including the wider context. As mentioned, because Brasch had been out of New Zealand for almost 20 years, when he returned in 1946 he had to set about establishing new friendships and connections; in part to ensure what became *Landfall* was a success, but also to reposition himself in the small tight-knit New Zealand cultural, intellectual and artistic society. Prior had also returned to New Zealand; first after the years in Britain with Clare, and then, after his time in the war. He was newly re-married and with a family, while from 1945 he had a new job in a new city (Christchurch) and was, it can be suggested, likewise looking for new purpose, activities and connections.

On his arrival in Wellington in February 1946 Brasch lunched with Ian Prior, the fiancé of his cousin Elespie and it can be suggested that the connection with Arthur was also discussed<sup>7</sup>. (Brasch 2017, 9 February 1946) On March 14 1946, Brasch attended the wedding of Ian and Elespie at Knox Church, Dunedin, with the reception for “about a hundred people” held at Manomo<sup>8</sup>, the home of Willi Fels<sup>9</sup>, the maternal grandfather of both Charles and Elespie. If Arthur and Mary did attend this wedding there is no indication that they met Brasch, as it is not until July 19, 1946, at a dress rehearsal of Ngaio Marsh’s production of *Macbeth* for the Canterbury College Drama Society that Brasch records meeting Arthur and Mary, along with the New Zealand composer Douglas Lilburn. (Brasch 2017, p.117) This is one of a number of indications that Arthur and Mary were, from 1946 -1953, part of what literary and cultural historian Peter Simpson has described and documented as “Bloomsbury South”<sup>10</sup>; Arthur had, via Ursula Bethell (and *Tomorrow*), earlier been on the outer orbit of this circle from Dunedin in the 1930s. It is also clear from the journals that while Brasch was involved in discussion as to what became *Landfall*, even in May 1946 he was not clear he was suitable for the role of editor: “I would like to edit it but doubt my capacity, because of my very insufficient knowledge, my limited interests, laziness, impatience, lack of energy & ideas; in my

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<sup>7</sup> The interactions of the Prior family with the wider family of Brasch are detailed in Ian Prior’s memoir (2006). Interestingly, although they had many artist friends in common, and both were friends of Brasch, Arthur plays a very sidelined role in this memoir. In volumes 2 and 3 of his Journals, Brasch often records visits to and with Elespie and Ian Prior.

<sup>8</sup> Now a New Zealand heritage listed house: <https://www.heritage.org.nz/list-details/5189/Listing>

<sup>9</sup> See: <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3f2/fels-willi>

<sup>10</sup> See: <https://aucklanduniversitypress.co.nz/bloomsbury-south/> and <https://www.pantograph-punch.com/posts/bloomsbury-south>

favour are, time, some critical sense ( but far from enough) & a certain conscientiousness.”(Brasch 2017, p.108)<sup>11</sup> Therefore both Brasch and Prior were at new, post-war junctures of their lives. Both were looking for new connections, interests and purpose.

Brasch became a regular visitor to Christchurch as he undertook the discussion and planning for *Landfall*, as well as participating in the cultural life of the city. The friendship between the Priors and Brasch obviously quickly developed over this time, as Arthur was brought into the conversation regarding *Landfall*<sup>12</sup>. Brasch settled on an intention that *Landfall* would be a journal of primarily New Zealand content in writing, and if possible, subject matter and that contributors would be paid. This means we know what Prior would receive for his writing: “2 guineas for a story, article, group of poems or long poems, 1 guinea for reviews.” (Brasch 2017, p.128) At this stage (October 1946) there was no decision on payment for commentaries.<sup>13</sup>

*Landfall* was launched on March 23 1947, with over 300 copies sent out to subscribers and about a further hundred to bookshops.( Brasch 2017, p.155) This was, by today’s standards a small run, but we need to remember that in a small, tight-knit but dispersed community, copies were lent around between individuals and groups, and copies in libraries were read by multiple readers. However, by March 1948 the regular print run per issue of *Landfall* was between 1100-1200 copies (Brasch 2017, p.176). This, alongside Prior’s writing for *Student*, the *Outlook* and the *Listener* meant his writing and thought, to the end of 1952 reached a significant audience within New Zealand – and certainly an intellectually influential one. (Grimshaw 2020)

We also get an understanding from Brasch’s journal that while Prior was a friend, there was, at least in the early years, a limit as to what they would discuss. For example, in June 1947 Brasch notes there is

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<sup>11</sup> Brasch records this on May 11, having discussed all of this on a visit to John and Rita Harris in Dunedin. John Harris, as university librarian and political radical, was a friend of Arthur and Clare in Dunedin in the 1930s.

<sup>12</sup> Even in October 1946 V Brasch was undecided as to its name. Denis Glover was in favour of *Tuatara* (the ancient New Zealand lizard) (Brasch 2017, p.125).

<sup>13</sup> Brasch is up in Christchurch from October 23 1946, a week before the first letter in this collection. He had come up a number of times previously; this visit was focused on what would become *Landfall* and so it is not surprising that the first letter in this collection discusses what was to be *Landfall*. (Brasch 2017, p.128). A guinea was one pound and 1 shilling; the cost of each issue of *Landfall* was, at this stage calculated to be £5.

no one amongst his friends in New Zealand “whose deepest concern is with the inner life” (Brasch 2017, p.160) and in fact at this stage, with the noting of the possible future exception of Harry Scott, no one with whom Brasch “should care to discuss the subject.”

(Brasch 2017, p.160)

Also, given the discussion that occurs in these letters regarding the work of artist Colin McCahon, it is useful to learn that when Brasch stayed in Christchurch with Harry Scott at Dorset Street, McCahon also stored a large number of his paintings there. (Brasch 2017, pp.177-179) As Scott, Prior and Brasch were all friends – and friends of McCahon – Prior would have visited Scott and Brasch ( it was close to C.U.C) in that flat full of McCahon’s paintings (as well as visiting McCahon when he lived in Christchurch); therefore their discussion of McCahon’s art was based on regular, very close encounter and engagement with them in daily life.

We also learn that in these early years *Landfall* struggled to find a consistent readership because, as the manager of Progressive Books in Auckland remarked to Brasch in September 1948: “...people found it rather heavy going” – or, at least do so in Auckland.

(Brasch 2017, p.187). In fact, there is also constant mention in his journals of the struggles to ensure *Landfall* is printed – whether to do with issues at Caxton press, or funding, consistent sales, or the quality of submissions. Yet there was strong and growing support for *Landfall* by the *Press* newspaper in Christchurch where, in particular, volume 4 receives a strong endorsement:

“The fourth issue of *Landfall* (Caxton Press) deserves something like a cheer. This is a brave as well as a necessary enterprise.” [And] “*Landfall* began soberly, though not at all unadventurously and has gone from strength to strength; and the end of its first year is an occasion to say that, to all appearances, it has fully established itself. It has never looked like becoming either the hoarding of some group of aesthetic or social ideologists or a weathercock, answering the wind now of this commotion and now of that; and it has never looked as if it were headed the other way, to dullness, whether the sort that betrays complacency or the sort that betrays exhaustion.

*Landfall* promises a long and vigorous life and is to be wished the fulfilment of the Promise.”<sup>14</sup>

As part of his visit to Auckland in September 1948 Brasch met with various writers and contributors to *Landfall*. Of particular interest is Brasch’s meeting (September 23, 1948) with the New Zealand writer Frank Sargeson<sup>15</sup>, who is not universally supportive of *Landfall* and its contents and is, we learn “critical of Arthur Prior’s reviews (of which Davin had approved).” (Brasch 2017, p189). Brasch had just met Dan Davin that morning, who was visiting New Zealand from Oxford where he worked at the Clarendon Press. Given Davin was a friend and supporter of Prior’s since Otago University in the 1930s it is not surprising that he approved of Prior’s reviews. What is more interesting is Brasch felt this difference of opinion was worth recording.

I would suggest that this difference of opinion represents a number of issues that Prior faced in his time in New Zealand: the anti-intellectualism of New Zealand society – including from within the literary community; the divide between those who were very New Zealand focused such as Sargeson and those such as Prior who looked more internationally as well; and the on-going North-South divide (that is, between the South Island and North Island) in literary and cultural matters. Prior was also a philosopher writing for a literary journal, he was not a literary academic in the way the historians Keith Sinclair<sup>16</sup> and W.H. Oliver<sup>17</sup> were also published poets. While Prior had written – like Sargeson and Brasch – for *Tomorrow* in the 1930s, he had done so under a

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<sup>14</sup> “N.Z. Quarterly”, *Press*, Volume LXXXIV, Issue 25412, 7 February 1948, p.3.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19480207.2.25.3>

<sup>15</sup> Frank Sargeson (1903-1982), at this stage the leading living New Zealand short story writer (and often viewed as second only to Katherine Mansfield). Also, a novelist and critic, he lived a bohemian life on Auckland’s North Shore. Sargeson made great use of New Zealand conversational style, idioms and language, enabling New Zealand literature to ‘hear itself’.

<sup>16</sup> Keith Sinclair (1922-1993) Historian and poet who did much to establish the study of New Zealand history with his groundbreaking “A History of New Zealand” in 1959. He wrote regularly for *Landfall* as poet and commentator, while also dismissive of much of what was termed ‘the South Island Myth’ of the cultural nationalism that gave rise to *Landfall* from the 1930s and 1940s.

<sup>17</sup> W.H. Oliver (1925-2015), historian, poet and also co-founder and editor (1959-1963) of the political and social comment journal *Comment*. He was general editor the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* 1983-1990. He wrote his own history of New Zealand (*Story of New Zealand*) in 1960 and also wrote and commented regularly for *Landfall*.

nom de plume. He was therefore in many ways a literary and cultural outsider in post-war New Zealand and while Brasch and Davin (when visiting) vouched for him, he was unknown in literary and cultural Auckland.

While there are not many direct references to Prior in the journals, there is an expansive understanding of the wider New Zealand literary and cultural life that Prior was part of. Like many in the university, Prior straddled the academic and the cultural life of both Christchurch and New Zealand and this is, I believe, how we need to read his *Landfall* letters to Brasch. They are one side of Prior's life and interests but also reveal, over the correspondence, an understanding that his cultural life became overtaken by his academic life when, in particular, he discovered Polish notation. It is therefore an interesting counter-factual exercise to consider what would have happened if Prior had not discovered Polish notation? He would have remained a philosopher; but would he have continued to participate in *Landfall* and wider New Zealand cultural life? Would he have remained a New Zealand-located logician? Would he have had a greater influence on Colin McCahon by staying here? Would he have perhaps attempted to set up a more regular discussion of philosophy from within New Zealand – as he suggests Brasch undertakes in *Landfall*?

Therefore, these letters reveal both an evolution and a refocusing in Prior's thought and interests. At various times he takes on almost an editorial assistant role, suggesting reviewers and possibilities to Brasch. This is also the end-years of what we can term 'Prior the aspirant journalist and journal editor'; while now employed as a philosopher he is not yet, it seems, fully engaged in philosophy as a philosopher. By that I mean he is both a philosopher and a public intellectual, something which we also see in his ongoing engagement with *Student*, the *Outlook* and *Landfall* at this time – and his writing and reviewing for the *Listener*. But from 1953 he fully becomes 'Prior the philosopher' and this is because he discovers a new focus whereby all his intellectual energy can be fully engaged.

## The Letters

### Letter 1: 1/11/4618 : Popper, C.S. Lewis and Collingwood

The letters begin soon after the Priors have recently relocated to Flat 5, 8 Macmillan Avenue<sup>19</sup> and are all looking forward to Brasch's visit<sup>20</sup> later that month. Discussion was already underway regarding what would become *Landfall* as Brasch has asked Prior how he would like to sign his contributions and he replies he usually does so "Yankee-fashion" as "Arthur N. Prior."

Prior states he is planning to write a piece on Karl Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* (Prior 1947a) which "is much talked about here & at Otago." It appears Brasch had originally suggested Prior write 1000 words on it as Prior states he believes this is "a little short" and in turn suggests he writes a 2000-word review article "with a worked-out criticism of a couple of his central positions as well as a brief summary of the position itself."

Prior suggests that he "could treat in the same fashion" C.S. Lewis' "Abolition of Man" (Prior 1947b) as like Popper's text, this is a "philosophical work of wider interest". Brasch had asked Prior if he is aware of "Collingwood's Idea of History", which he is not. But he does have Collingwood's *Autobiography* – and in parentheses states "I presume it's R.G. Collingwood". R.G. Collingwood's *The Idea of History* had just been posthumously published in 1946. The C.U.C. library had at least two copies of the first edition (and they are still on the shelves today) and it can be presumed highly likely Prior read this text after Brasch's query – and especially so given he already owned Collingwood's autobiography. This had been published in 1939 and we can presume Prior got his copy while in England.

Prior then wonders if, in the journal what will become *Landfall*, Brasch is "having any space for discussion? – all these birds rather provoke it." If this is to be the case, then this would "demand of your disputants a rather difficult but not impossible combination of brevity and substance."

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<sup>18</sup> A two-page handwritten letter on CUC letterhead

<sup>19</sup> This is within a very large house up on the Cashmere hills in Christchurch. See: <https://popper-prior.nz/items/show/90>. The house is still standing and currently undergoing slow renovation. Prior's flat is on the top floor and looks southwest over Christchurch and the Canterbury plains.

<sup>20</sup> Brasch usually stayed in the central city about 6-7km away from Macmillan Avenue and usually took the tram up Hackthorne road on the other end of Macmillan Avenue about 500m from where the Priors lived.

In his letters Prior often made use of vernacular terms and slang, something which Brasch rarely if ever did. Brasch did end up having a Reviews section in *Landfall* that did follow this prescription set down by Prior – but it is impossible to know how influential this comment of Prior's was.

## **Letter 2: 23/11/46<sup>21</sup> : Landfall printing.**

Most of this letter details the impact of Mary's miscarriage, including having her parents<sup>22</sup> to stay in the flat. However, we also learn of Prior's role as go-between for Brasch, because he has been asked to make contact with Caxton Press<sup>23</sup> in Christchurch, who are to be the printers of what becomes *Landfall*. Prior, who has no phone in his flat has left the number of a neighbouring flat with them – and that he is "most likely to be in during the mornings."

## **Letter 3: 8/12/46<sup>24</sup>: Popper and C.S. Lewis**

Prior has been working on "my C.S. Lewis thing & the Popper thing" which suggests he is at this stage unsure as to what final form they will take. His piece on Lewis is enclosed with the letter and Prior states he is "far more satisfied [with it] than anything I have been hitherto been able to produce on Popper." This is a telling admission, because with his discussion of Popper he is moving from the focus of much of his previous

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<sup>21</sup> Written on crossed out CUC letterhead; Flat 5 \* Macmillan Avenue, Christchurch S.I. [the S.I is for South Island, which seems rather unnecessary as Brasch is a South Islander.]

<sup>22</sup> Rev. Frank Wilkinson (1891-1965) and Helen Wilkinson (1890-1960). Helen Wilkinson was the daughter of the noted Presbyterian Minister Andrew Cameron (1865-1925) who was not only Moderator of the General Assembly (1912) but also served as Vice-Chancellor and then Chancellor of Otago university; as well as secretary and then convener of the theological committee of the Presbyterian church.

The Wilkinsons had served in the Canton Villages mission in China 1920-1927 (where Mary was born); on return to New Zealand, after serving in Wadestown parish, Wellington 1928-1935, Frank Wilkinson was minister at Trinity Presbyterian church, Timaru 1935 -1946, retiring due to ill health

<sup>23</sup> Caxton Press was started by printer and poet Denis Glover in Christchurch in 1935. It developed out of the Caxton Club of student writers and printers at Canterbury University College. Caxton was the printer of *Landfall* 1947-1992. Brasch had been published in the Caxton Club anthology *New Poems* (July 1934). Caxton also published Ursula Bethell's *Time and Place* (1936) and *Day and Night: Poems 1924-1934* (1939).

<sup>24</sup> On CUC letterhead with a date added. There are 3 small annotations in Brasch's handwriting at the top of the page: 'answered 11.12', "Yes. Queries about the Lewis review"; "Popper for next number, please."

writing on religion, theology and philosophy (which enables him to engage more easily with Lewis) into the field of political philosophy. Prior suggests Brasch publish his Lewis piece in the first issue<sup>25</sup> and so give him time to have “assimilated him [ Popper] better”. Prior is also concerned to emphasise that while he “could write something ‘popular’” about Popper it would not be of the standard he feels Brasch’s [as yet unnamed] quarterly “ought to have.” Prior notes that in his piece on Lewis “I mention that the most adequate answer to him is one suggested by a recent article of John Findlay”<sup>26</sup> – an inclusion Prior describes as being “of local colour”.

#### **Letter 4: 27/9/1947<sup>27</sup>: *The Moral Sense* review and New Zealand philosophy**

In this letter, Prior discusses his forthcoming review in *Landfall* of D. Daiches Raphael’s *The Moral Sense* (Prior 1947c), one he is “glad” that Brasch found “satisfactory” as Prior “had to burn a little midnight oil over it”. Prior actually read the copy of the book sent to his colleague, Ivan Sutherland, “on appro”<sup>28</sup> by Whitcombes<sup>29</sup> which “is now being bought by the College Library; so I would be glad to have the review copy.”<sup>30</sup>

Prior and Brasch had obviously already discussed the influence of philosophers in New Zealand, with Prior stating he’s not sure whether he agrees with what Brasch suggests. Prior then suggests he “also thought you [Brasch] underestimated the importance of the published work that has already come from philosophers in New Zealand (especially Findlay)”. Prior’s response is clear in the published review article (Prior 1947c), because he begins by claiming work by both Findlay

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<sup>25</sup> As noted, it appeared in the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue.

<sup>26</sup> J.N. Findlay, “Morality by Convention”, *Mind* April 1944. Written while Findlay was at Otago, Findlay was now teaching in South Africa at Grahamstown university in the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

<sup>27</sup> A two-page handwritten letter on CUC letterhead. At top of p.1 Brasch has annotated “answered 30.9”

<sup>28</sup> “On appro” is slang for ‘on approval’, i.e. to consider whether to purchase or not. In New Zealand it was usually items of clothing taken home “on appro”.

<sup>29</sup> As a combined, publisher, printer and bookseller Whitcombe and Tombs had a major influence upon and share of the New Zealand book trade at this time. It was from their bookselling arm that this review copy was made available.

<sup>30</sup> This is the copy still held in the UC Library. It has some sporadic underlining and annotations, but these do not seem to be aligned to Prior’s review.

and Popper “as a New Zealand product” – which *The Moral Sense* is not.<sup>31</sup> Prior does argue:

“...we need to take notice of what is written by those who are exerting whatever influence philosophers do exert in this country, even if it was written before they were subjected to the counter-influences, if any, which emanate from our people and our soil.”  
(Prior, 1947c. p.314)

Discussion had also apparently occurred over the use of terms in the review as Prior gives a fascinating insight into his approach to writing, stating:

“I do not like ‘character’ as a description of conscientiousness, & would have used ‘quality’ if it had not come so soon after the phrase ‘meagre quantum’ which I do not quite like to drop, as it takes off the Utilitarian’s’ arithmetical treatment of morality. I thought of ‘trait’ but the rhythm seemed wrong somehow, and I was inclined to think the same about the simple “meagre quantum of ‘agreeableness’ which it might possess.”

Prior is unsure what to do and suggests that Brasch decides what is best. In the end, in the published piece, Brasch has opted for “the meagre quantum of ‘agreeableness’ which that quality might possess” (Prior 1947c, p.318) - a clear case of how an editor and a writer can work together; with editorial decision determining the final production. Prior is also concerned “to convey somehow the idea that the work could have been made more entertaining without diminishing its merits as a piece of scholarship”, but his suggestion of adding such a statement as a conclusion to the article did not eventuate in the final, published piece.

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<sup>31</sup> As the preface states: “This book consists of the major part of a thesis, written between 1938 and 1940, for the degree of D.Phil in the university of Oxford” while the original thesis “included chapters on three other British moralists of the eighteenth century.” (Raphael 1947) Raphael enjoyed New Zealand but only stayed for three years as his wife was unhappy here because her father Rabbi Salis Daiches of Edinburgh was unwell. Raphael had to repay the fare to Otago University so as to be able to leave (what was meant to be a 5 year appointment) to take up a post at University of Glasgow. [https://philosophynow.org/issues/112/DD\\_Raphael](https://philosophynow.org/issues/112/DD_Raphael) and <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-jewish-chronicle/20160311/282286729369373>

## The Disruption letters

Letters 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 discuss Prior's 'Disruption' article (Prior 1948). Letter 7 is from Brasch to Prior and, given its content, a full transcription is included.

### Letter 5: 29/12/47<sup>32</sup> and Letter 6: 29/12/47<sup>33</sup>: The Disruption article

These two letters cover the draft of the Disruption article (Prior 1948), sent while the Priors are staying with Mary's parents at 7 Bidwell Street Timaru<sup>34</sup>, "until a day or two after January 5"[1948]. Prior was obviously working on the Disruption article while on this family holiday over the Christmas-New Year period.

The second letter, written on the same day as he sent off the draft of the Disruption article, arises because Prior has had second thoughts and requests Brasch "return the ms. As rapidly as you can – if possible" as he wishes to add "500 or more words to it." The reason for these additions is that Prior "has been glancing at John Collie's<sup>35</sup> official history of the Presbyterian church<sup>36</sup>" (Collie 1948) that has just been published, and

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<sup>32</sup> A short cover letter for a draft of the Disruption article (Prior 1948), written on CUC letterhead which is crossed out and in its place is 7 Bidwell Street Timaru

<sup>33</sup> A two-page handwritten letter on crossed out CUC letterhead, replaced with 7 Bidwell Street Timaru. Brasch has annotated "answered 31.2"

<sup>34</sup> The large, 5-bedroom house, built in 1920 in the Timaru suburb of Seaview, is still standing. Because of ill health in the family, the Wilkinsons did not live for long in the Trinity manse in Russell Square, in 1940 purchasing a house nearby in Bidwell Street where Mary and her siblings grew up. Wilkinson, due to his own ill health, resigned from being the minister of Trinity on May 11, 1946; shifting in 1950 to Highgate in Dunedin. My thanks to archivist Andrew Smith of the PCANZ archives, Dunedin for tracking this detail down for me.

<sup>35</sup> Rev. John Collie (1872-1947) Presbyterian minister and professor of New Testament studies, Knox Theological Hall 1931-1937. Collie was the first New Zealand-born professor to hold any Chair in Knox theological hall. He would have taught and known Prior. While a New Testament professor, he seems to have been more focused on NZ church history, writing a biography of the noted Presbyterian minister Rutherford Waddell, a history of the Tainui parish in Southland in 1939, and the Synod history referred to. In his history of Knox Theological Hall, Ian Breward notes that, in the 1930s when Fred Robertson (a friend of Prior) led a reading group which read the first volume of Barth's *Dogmatics* and Maurice's *Kingdom of God* (Prior was obviously a member as these were central books for him) one student was shocked to discover that Collie, as New Testament professor, had never heard of Rudolph Bultmann when he raised the question of issues in Bultmann's *Jesus and the word* with him. (Breward, p.49.)

<sup>36</sup> Collie died 30 July 1947, before the book was published and as an introduction to the book notes, while much of it was ready for the printer, some chapters required additional editing and in some cases, writing from notes. The chapters on the

which Prior has obviously come across via his father-in-law. For Prior, “it puts in mind some further elucidatory things that ought to be said.” Prior apologises for the “hasty to-&-fro” of the manuscript but states “I am really keen on the job now, & want to produce something really worthwhile.”

Prior then provides a fascinating insight into his way of working and thinking that helps us understand why – up to the mid 1950s – his focus seems quite diverse:

“I’m coming to the reluctant conclusion that there is something ‘temperamental’ about the way I work. – The trouble is that my mind runs in 3 channels that are not very closely interrelated – Logic, Ethics & Ecclesiology – & when I’m on one track I find it a little difficult to hop over to another. But having finished the job in Logic<sup>37</sup> that I had got on to as soon as paper-marking ended, I have got embedded in this Disruption business.”

#### **Letter 7: 30.12.47 [letter from Brasch to Prior]<sup>38</sup>: Disruption**

This is a hand-written two-page letter from Brasch to Prior setting out [Brasch’s editorial suggestions. I have included it as a full transcript as it enables us to understand how Brasch read the draft ms of “Disruption” and the suggestions he made.

Dear Arthur,

Many thanks for the Draft. It seems a very clear account of the Disruption; much of it new to me so that I lack knowledge to quarrel with you on matters of interpretation. You will see that I have pencilled a few notes.

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Scottish church situation, the Disruption and the early days of the Otago colony were all written by Collie and it is these that Prior would have drawn upon; while in his preface Collie notes the sources he has drawn upon for each section.

<sup>37</sup> This must be the ms for *Logic and the Basis of Ethics* (1949) as there are no other works on Logic in any Prior bibliography at this time.

<sup>38</sup> Page two of the letter is written around a crossed out, printed version of Brasch’s poem “Great Sea. Kona Coast of Hawaii” that he wrote in 1939 and which was included in Allen Curnow Curnow’s 1945 anthology *A Book of New Zealand Verse*. It is of note that while the poem is crossed through, his name underneath is not, and left instead as a form of signature.

My one fault is whether your opening paragraph may not lead a certain no. of reader to think, 'Oh, this is going to be for Presbyterians only', & to leave it unread; wh. wd. be a great pity. What I think you might do is to say that Otago was a church settlement & that its character & history (not to say its religious atmosphere) cannot be understood without some knowledge of the Free Church, & that this in turn goes far back into Scottish (& English) history. This should make clear that the subject is by no means one of interest to Presbyterians only.<sup>39</sup>

Your opening sentence, too, begs the question: what is the past & present religious atmosphere of Otago? I think you should, if you refer to it thus, describe it – quite briefly perhaps – & also mention what its place is in the life of Otago in the past & today<sup>40</sup>; similarly I think your conclusion sh. be a little broader, placing the Church in its context. It doesn't exist in a vacuum; history is concerned (partly) with the relationship of institutions to the societies in wh. thy live.<sup>41</sup> One can't indeed understand the institutions without thus relating them. And you've got to woo your readers a little to a [analysis esp.]???<sup>42</sup> like this. If it is presented to them in isolation they may sheer off as from a 'special subject'; if in its context they will probably read guff<sup>43</sup> with interest. – Apologies if I seem to lecture. I hope it makes sense to you. This is the only good account of the origin of the Disruption and it will be excellent to have it be read. Hocken for example does not really make clear what it was all about.<sup>44</sup> But I think your title is rather inadequate. I suggest something fuller & less ambiguous: The Disruption (then subtitle) the Free Church & the Otago Settlement, or the origins of the Free Church. Something of this kind, at least<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> It is clear from the published article that Prior took this advice on board, as he interweaves such history throughout his discussion. (Prior 1948).

<sup>40</sup> Prior takes some of this onboard as can be seen in his opening paragraphs. (Prior 1948)

<sup>41</sup> Prior does this- in both paragraph two- talking of the concept of denominationalism in New Zealand – and in his conclusion with his discussion of Church reunion.

<sup>42</sup> Unclear in original, but could be 'analysis esp(ecially)'.

<sup>43</sup> Guff is slang for something foolish or ridiculous. Brasch is not calling Prior's article 'guff' but emphasizing the need to woo the reader and what contextualization enables.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Morland Hocken, *Contributions to the Early History of New Zealand: Settlement of Otago* London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company 1898.

<sup>45</sup> Prior does not take up these suggestions regarding the title, sticking with 'Disruption'.

**Letter 8: 5/1/47 [This actually has to be January 1948 given the content refers to Landfall vol.1 no.4 1947] Disruption, continued**

Enclosed with this letter, Prior is sending Brasch his revised 'Disruption' essay; there were still further revisions to occur before it was to be finally published in 1948 (Prior 1948). When it does appear, it is as lead article. In his 'Notes' for that volume, Brasch discusses the establishment of the Otago settlement in 1848 and states:

"Many influences have gone to form the Otago of today. Mr Prior contributes to this issue a study of certain events and ideas which had a large part in forming the impulse towards the original settlement and in determining its character. Until 1861 Dunedin was intensely Scottish, and if Cargill had had his way would have remained jealously Free Church; but in the undeveloped state of the province any settlers of good character were welcome, and the influx of newcomers which the gold rush brought soon swept away all attempts to restrict its development."<sup>46</sup>

(Brasch 1948 p.6)

Prior's current version is "a little under 4250 words" and he does not think he "can deal with the subject adequately in anything less." Brasch had suggested changes to the first and last paragraphs and Prior has done so, just not as suggested. This includes Prior removing the final paragraph about the Church of Otago. The article now concludes with Prior making a call for church re-union, a constant theme of his theological thought from the 1930s-1950s. He has also removed his "opening reference to 'the past and present religious atmosphere of Otago'" and now instead opens with stating "just exactly what I am doing, & why I think it worth doing; with a wee bit at the end about what I am not doing, though it would be worth doing by a person capable of it." That is, Prior now situates and explains the Disruption as the "disintegration of a National Church" which was influenced by "the decay of an idea" and that "was partly due to factors of a political economic character" that he does not discuss. (Prior 1948, p.9) That idea

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<sup>46</sup> On p.6 of this letter there are Brasch's notations to himself as to what editorial changes he will make to this article. His final point is: "refer to this in Notes as 'a study of certain events & ideas wh. had a large part in determining the character of the Otago settlement.'" As is clear, he revised and expanded on this in the final version.

is “the view that the Church is the bearer of ‘means of grace’ to all within its reach, rather than a carefully sifted collection of converted persons.” (Prior 1948, p.9) Or, as he states in Letter 9 :

“I have written about the Disruption as an illustration of ‘disruption’ in a wider sense – I have tried to give a picture of a national Church’s disintegration, & of the part played in that disintegration by the decay of an idea (namely the territorial principle.)”

This aligns with Prior’s constant lobbying, from the 1930s through to the 1950s, for a National Church of New Zealand; or, at the very least, the church union of all the protestant churches. He is therefore using the opportunity afforded by *Landfall* to argue theologically for church union to a new audience.

What Prior cannot do, because of “his lack of equipment for it” is to “write about New Zealand Church History, either in isolation or relation to its wider environment”. This is a telling admission by Prior. We do know that since (at least) December 1939 he has been involved in writing “a large book on ‘The Theology of the Church of Scotland’” (Grimshaw 2018, p.213)<sup>47</sup>, yet this focus has effectively limited his knowledge of what happened here in New Zealand. Prior may be (variously) a religious journalist and public intellectual, a theological philosopher – and philosophical theologian – and a logician, even a historian of Scots theology, but he is very aware that he actually knows very little of the religious and Church history of his native land. In response he has “cut out everything” from his article that may suggest he is attempting to write about New Zealand church history.

Prior also hopes and believes this article will be “a bit less difficult reading than some of the reviews” he has undertaken for Brasch. In particular, he singles out “the Raphael thing” (Prior 1947c) which looking again at he feels he might have “compressed it too much” making it “hard-going”. He does qualify this by stating his father-in-law “thought it clear, & he is quite frank about my stuff”. Prior then includes an aside that his father in law “is pro-Free Church”<sup>48</sup> and that recently the

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<sup>47</sup> This handwritten ms was partly destroyed by fire in 1949; the ms remained in Prior’s archives and can be now accessed in the Virtual Lab for Prior Studies via <https://priorstudies.org/>

<sup>48</sup> Frank Wilkinson had studied at New College Edinburgh in 1919 following serving in the war in the New Zealand expeditionary force 1916-19. New College was

Presbyterian church has been undergoing the 1843 conflict “in miniature” and in “less violent fashion”. Prior is here referring to the proposals for church union between the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches. While the basis for this had been formally approved at the October 1946 Presbyterian General Assembly, there was division as to whether congregations should be able to vote on it, with the majority decision made for such a vote to occur. As an active Presbyterian, Prior will have voted and, given his support for Church re-union, voted in favour.

It's clear that Prior's father-in-law has closely read that latest issue of *Landfall* (which it is can be assumed Prior brought with him to Timaru to show his “Raphael” review essay) as Prior notes his attention was drawn “to the strikingly large proportion of contributions to no.4 which had death, in one way or another, for their theme.”<sup>49</sup>

Prior then undertakes one of his typical extended postscripts. In this he states he is in “no doubt” as to “the importance of the Disruption article in its own field”, noting:

“...it is something I have been wanting to do for a long time”. [It also] “has a certain quite unimportant local originality in being, so far as I know, the first writing on the Disruption by a New Zealand Presbyterian which doesn't uphold the Free Church point of view. (not that there are no others amongst us who would defend the Establishment if they did write about it).”

This is a fascinating statement for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is clear from this that Prior considers himself- and is happy to be identified as - ‘a New Zealand Presbyterian’. Clearly his period of atheism (1942) is over. Secondly, his interest in the Disruption is longstanding, but he has lacked the outlet in which to publish. He is aware he is not writing New

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established in 1846 as the college of the Free Church of Scotland. Wilkinson completed his theological education in Dunedin at Knox theological hall 1919-1920.  
<sup>49</sup> By my count, these include: W.H. Oliver's poem ‘Death And The Maiden’; Bill Pearson's short story of NZ troops in Italy in the war “Social Catharsis”; two of McCahon's paintings; two poems by Basil Dowling, “Something More” and “Digging”; D.R. Adsett's short story “Daphne” and the review essay of Dan Davin's novel of WW2, “For the Rest of our Lives”. Prior was not only a friend of Dowling, McCahon and Davin but also friends with other contributors, T.H. Scott, (who he refers to in the letter as “Scotty”), J.G.A. Pocock, Rodney Kennedy, John Summers and Lawrence Baigent. *Landfall* was the representation of a small, interconnected literary and cultural circle and Prior was deeply connected into it.

Zealand Church history, but neither is he writing academic church history. There is as yet no *Journal of New Zealand History*<sup>50</sup>. What *Landfall* provides is an outlet, similar to those Prior encountered and wrote for while overseas, which offers a place for the informed, intelligent essay. What I believe Prior is saying to Brasch is that without *Landfall*, his essay would most probably never have been written.

Prior also states that the whole article is a description of “the ‘transformation of Presbyterian claims’” and this is something “no other ecclesiastical historian has noticed, or at events defined.” Again, his self-definition is telling, not only is he a New Zealand Presbyterian, he is also writing as an ‘ecclesiastical historian’ and as a student “of interdenominational relations”. Therefore, while Prior is professionally employed as a philosopher, at this time he sees himself and his interests as more than just or singularly philosophical.

As this postscript makes clear, Prior is also interested in the question of church union and the importance of “mutual ‘recognition’” to achieve this. But as he observes, as set out in his ‘Disruption’ article he is the only person to have noted “this subtle change in the nature of ‘recognition’ demanded.” If this could occur, then Presbyterian- Anglican relations would improve but, as that “is a matter for Presbyterians rather than for *Landfall*’s readers generally”, he has not mentioned this in his article. Yet, we must note, he felt it would be of interest to write of this to Brasch. Why? Because Brasch is more than ‘just’ an editor to Prior, he is a friend and an intellectual sounding board because he is of similar wide-ranging interests to Prior. Who else could he discuss such things with at this time? Brasch and *Landfall* are therefore a crucial part of Prior’s intellectual world at this time

### **Letter 9: 9/1/47<sup>51</sup> [as this follows the previous letter this again has to actually be 1948]: Disruption**

This continues discussion on Prior’s forthcoming ‘Disruption’ article. Prior explains that what he means by “a Church ‘practically disestablishing itself’” is that this occurs when a Church takes actions that mean “the State is certain to follow with disestablishment” and that his

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<sup>50</sup> This was not established until 1967 and continues to the present day.

<sup>51</sup> A three-page handwritten letter on CUC Letterhead. Brasch has added a handwritten annotation at the top of the page that seems to state that it was answered 11.1 and has ‘practically’ followed by, it seems, ‘over vigorous’. This refers to a point Prior makes in the letter.

use of 'practically' aligns with that of (church historian) Carnegie Simpson<sup>52</sup>. Prior feels unable to add anything more about the New Zealand Presbyterian Church, for while as a Church member he notes "Present-day Presbyterians still tell the story of the Disruption for the Free-Church angle" this doesn't mean it would be easy "to say how many of them would have 'gone out' if they had found themselves "in the actual position of Chalmers & co." That is, Prior feels his fellow New Zealand Presbyterians are more comfortable with a history of Disruption than they would be if asked to make a similar decision today.

He then uses a very interesting phrase "...we still have to learn the grammar of territorialism" to describe what the New Zealand Presbyterian Church has to undertake – and this is due to more than the "the Free Church heritage". This is Prior alluding again to his ongoing focus on the issues of church union, which he sees being as much a matter of developing (and being able to communicate) a common language of national church identity as it is of individual church histories and politics.

Prior then endorses Brasch referring to 'Disruption' in his 'Notes', as "you can draw inferences of local interest from my material which I could not confidentially draw myself." This is a curious and telling admission. Prior recognizes that he is a thinker *from* New Zealand, he is not a thinker *about* New Zealand; that is, he has limited knowledge of the history and context of New Zealand, in part because of his years spent in Europe and then away at war. But we also need to recognize there was very little academic study of– or engagement with– 'New Zealand', outside a geological, biological and geographical focus, well into the late 1950s or early 1960s. As Beaglehole would note, Prior soon demonstrated that academic thinking could be done *from* New Zealand (Grimshaw 2022) – it is just that this was not *about* New Zealand.

This ends the letters focussed on the Disruption article. It is clear this article gave Prior more difficulties than anything else he wrote for *Landfall*. It was not the fact that he was dealing with ecclesiastical history – for he was steeped in English and Scots ecclesiastical history – but rather he was having to deal with New Zealand ecclesiastical history. Up to this point his thinking and writing had, whether in theology or philosophy, been international in focus. That is Prior wrote and thought about what

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<sup>52</sup> Patrick Carnegie Simpson (1865-1947), Scottish presbyterian clergyman and church historian, Chair of Church History, Westminster College, Cambridge 1911- 1937. Prior is most probably referring to Carnegie Simpson's *The Church and The State* (1929).

was in circulation throughout the western world. While he was a New Zealander, he did not have to write or think about what this meant in the way the Disruption article forced him to. Therefore, as these letters to Brasch make clear, while he is committed to undertaking philosophy from New Zealand, this is philosophy *from a place*, not philosophy *that engages with a place*. Yet, if he had done so, he would not have discovered Polish notation and developed tense logic.

Having completed his Disruption article, Prior then focusses more generally on what he considers the possibilities for *Landfall*, whether in content or contributors.

### **Letter 10: 23/1/48<sup>53</sup>: Language use, Carritt, Rex and Barth**

In what is very much a chatty 'catch-up' letter, Prior first discusses "the 5 possible translations" Brasch suggests ("almost', 'in a practical manner', 'for all practical purposes', 'in practice', 'actually') to replace the word 'practically' in a sentence. Prior wonders if 'in effect;' would do as it is 'the most accurate translation of all, since what I mean is that the Church did not do what would have had disestablishment as the effect of its actions.' This was obviously acceptable to Brasch as the printed article has "So the church did not in effect disestablish itself, there was only in 1843, another secession."<sup>54</sup>

Prior also notes Oxford [University Press] has just published "Carritt on 'Ethical and Political Theory'"<sup>55</sup>, as he had seen Raphael's advance copy when Prior met him in October. He wonders if *Landfall* might review it and suggests Raphael or, if he won't, then Tom McPherson<sup>56</sup> – "or perhaps better still, it might be worth having it reviewed by some person who is interested in Ethics but has a quite un-Carrittish type of mind, like J. Summers<sup>57</sup>". Prior, on reviewing his letter, later asterisks this

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<sup>53</sup> A three-page handwritten letter on CUC letterhead.

<sup>54</sup> This can be read at the top of p.16 in the printed article (Prior 1948)

<sup>55</sup> E.F. Carritt, *Ethical and Political Thinking* (OUP 1947). [at least 3 copies of this book were soon held in the CUC library]

<sup>56</sup> Thomas McPherson, born in Dunedin 1925, had had just completed his MA in philosophy at Otago with a thesis on the philosophy of Bishop Butler. He did his DPhil at University College, Oxford on God's existence and then taught philosophy at Bangor and Cardiff universities.

<sup>57</sup> John Summers (1916-1993), poet and bookseller and *landfall* contributor. A childhood friend of Clare Prior, Summers knew Arthur from December 1936. Prior introduced him to Bethell and she took him up as one of her 'literary [and religious] young men'. Friend also, of Brasch – via Bethell, Summers was also a friend and early champion of Colin McCahon.

suggestion and annotates down the left hand side of the page “ ‘though perhaps after all, the best man to do it would be Phillips<sup>58</sup>.” Prior obviously failed to convince Brasch of the merits of either the book or the possible reviewers as no review of Carritt appeared in *Landfall*.

Prior’s third point is to draw Brasch’s attention to:

“...a tutor at the theological hall by the name of Helmuth [sic. Helmut] Rex (formerly Rehbein) who is capable of good things, & who may be less busy now than he has been for many years past, & might do something for you.<sup>59</sup> He’s a refugee, and did an MA thesis on Kierkegaard<sup>60</sup> last year.”

Prior would have come across Rex via his connections to Philosophy at Otago as well as via the Presbyterian church. This is another example of how intertwined the worlds of philosophy and theology were at this time in New Zealand, especially in the Presbyterian Church. (see Grimshaw 2023b)

Helmut Rex (1913-1967) was a German theologian, historian and philosopher. Born Helmut Rehbein, he changed his surname to Rex in 1946 to assist integration into New Zealand. A pastor in the confessing church in Germany, he and his wife Renate (who had a Jewish mother) were political refugees to New Zealand, sponsored by the Presbyterian Church, arriving in 1939. A Christian existentialist, Rex was influenced by Kierkegaard and Bultmann, the novelist Herman Hesse and, deeply, by Sartre. He lectured at Knox on the history of ideas and then in Church History and English Biblical exegesis. G.A.F., Knight recalled: “I urged him to see himself as a missionary of western culture to benighted New Zealand” (Knight, p.71). At this time Rex was just completing a MA in philosophy under Findlay, then Raphael, having completed a BA in 1945.

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<sup>58</sup> Neville Philips (1916-2001), Historian and later Vice Chancellor and rector of University of Canterbury (1966-1977). Philips taught at Canterbury from 1946 and was a friend of Prior. Philips had a particular interest in the history and politics of 18<sup>th</sup> century England.

<sup>59</sup> Rex did indeed write for *Landfall*:

“In defence of the individual” [an inaugural lecture delivered at the Theological Hall, Knox College, Dunedin March 1949] *Landfall* vol.3.no. 2 1949 pp 111-123; ‘Existential freedom’ *Landfall* vol. 5 no. 3 1951, pp 209-215 [a discussion of the contribution of Sartre to European thought]; “Review of Christianity in the Roman Empire: Six Lectures, by Harold Mattingly,” *Landfall* vol. 19, no.2, 1956, pp167-68; and, “Review of Problems of Religious Knowledge, by Peter Munz,” *Landfall* vol. 14, no.3 1960, pp. 296-300.

<sup>60</sup> “The Individual in Søren Kierkegaard’s aesthetical writings”, 1947, MA.

Breward notes that Rex, during his study and tutoring (in Church History and English Biblical Exegesis) was “working so late that sometimes he drowsed off in the chapel.” (Breward, p.54) While copies of Rex’s Tübingen PhD are held in the Otago University library, his MA is held in the Auckland University library.

Prior’s final point is to inform Brasch that he’s “just got a copy of the first part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> volume of Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics.” The issue (“great misfortune”) is that it is in German because not only otherwise would “it be a fascinating thing for J. Summers to write about” but also because of Prior’s own very limited German reading issues: “my own reading of German is at the rate of 3 sentences a day, but I get glimmerings of his drift, and have read some reviews of the thing.” It is interesting to read this, because a decade earlier, in a letter to his cousin Hugh in March 1938, written from France, Prior notes he is learning German so as to be able to read “such things” as “the organ of the German friendship league.”<sup>61</sup> This later confession puts an entirely new perspective on Prior’s substantial engagement with Barth in the 1930s and early 1940s. We are led to ask how much if this was due to reading Barth in the original and how much of it was a response to Barth read in translation? Furthermore, is this why Prior’s ‘book about Barth’ was not accepted in 1938 by the SCM Press<sup>62</sup>?

As these letters demonstrate, there was a small but significant intellectual community in New Zealand at this time that Prior and Brasch were both part of. While, as we shall see, there was a very limited audience for ‘symbolic philosophy’ there was a wider interest in what can be termed more general or applied philosophical questions and thinking. That is, ‘thinking philosophically’ about art, literature, society, religion and politics. This can be seen in the pages of *Landfall*, but also in the types of discussions and reviews that occurred in the *Listener* and *Here & Now* and the presbyterian *Outlook*, previously in *Tomorrow* and the *New Zealand Journal of Theology*, and often overlooked, in the various university college student newspapers and the SCM *Open Windows* and *Student* magazines. Many arts students would undertake some philosophy as part of their degree (in part because there were far fewer subjects to choose from) and this meant there was probably a wider societal interest in and influence of philosophy in these postwar years than today. It is this mood and interest that Prior is determined to expand

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<sup>61</sup> See Grimshaw (2018) Letter 26: 17/3/38 p. 149.

<sup>62</sup> See Grimshaw (2018) Letter 28: 2/6/38 p.158.

in *Landfall*, and is also why whether in Dunedin in the 1930s or now in the 1940s and 1950s in Christchurch, he held regular philosophical discussion evenings and encouraged writing that discussed and applied philosophical ideas and texts.

In the following letter Prior alerts Brasch to one such discussion that appeared in the journal of the New Zealand Library School. The post-war decades were a time when many small journals or magazines were established as part of a sense of optimism, possibility and hope. The aim was to create a new cultural and intellectual climate. While most only lasted a few issues, or occurred sporadically over a few years, they do provide a fascinating insight into intellectual and cultural tenor of the times.

### **Letter 11: 10/2/48<sup>63</sup> Kafka**

With this letter Prior has enclosed an offprint (O'Reilly 1946) by Ron O'Reilly, "done some time ago for 'Colophon', the library school thing."<sup>64</sup> O'Reilly, a friend of Prior, "is now Librarianising in the Hutt"<sup>65</sup> and had been at Library School with Basil Dowling, a mutual friend of Prior and Brasch. Prior describes the offprint as:

"...an application of Wittgenstein's philosophical method to the study of F. Kafka, & in my opinion very good. I think Ron has an original and important contribution to make to the understanding of Kafka, & you might find it worthwhile to push him to do it for *Landfall*."

As well as this article, O'Reilly also wrote, also for *Colophon* vol, 2 (1946), "The Aphorisms of Kafka" (pp.65-68). It may be this article that Prior refers to, but I would suggest it is probably the first article as that seems more suited to a *Landfall* readership. In his PS for this letter Prior asks for the off-print to be returned.

Ron O'Reilly (1914-1982) was a friend of Prior's from the 1930s in Dunedin and he soon became a friend of Brash and a regular contributor

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<sup>63</sup> A handwritten two-page (just) letter: one page of text plus a brief postscript on CUC letterhead. Brasch has annotated 'answered 2.1.'

<sup>64</sup> *Colophon* was a cyclostyled magazine, edited by O' Reilly that ran for two volumes in 1946. After a hiatus it was revived by later intakes at Library School and ran sporadically for a number of years.

<sup>65</sup> The Hutt Valley, north of Wellington.

to Landfall<sup>66</sup>. who had undertaken a MA in philosophy at Otago (1941) and then taught there for 4 years before attending Library school. After organizing the Country Library Service (1947-1951) he was Christchurch city librarian 1951-1968. He also undertook regular philosophical discussions with Prior in the Christchurch philosophical society (which from 1952 became the Canterbury branch of the Royal Society of New Zealand) and also with Colin McCahon, both of whom he knew from Dunedin in the 1930s<sup>67</sup>. While both O'Reilly and McCahon knew Arthur (and Clare) they seem to have met independently of Arthur, in 1938.

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<sup>66</sup> While O'Reilly did not write on Kafka for Landfall, he was soon writing on the artist M.T. (Toss) Woollaston (who was a friend of Prior's from 1930s Dunedin) [Landfall 2.3 September 1948. pp208-213], accompanying 4 artworks by Woollaston. This is also the volume in which Mary Prior has a letter published, arguing that a review of the long poem 'Christopher Columbus' by William Hart-Smith, has misunderstood what is intended: "Like all others whose minds have worked similarly (such as Melville, Dostoyevsky and Kafka, to mention some of the more notable, he has built a microcosm – a universe of discourse – which is at once simplified (those things irrelevant to his metaphysical preoccupations are removed) and yet provides a very rich language in which to embody his ideas." (Landfall 2.3 September 1948 p.240) O'Reilly was also later (1951) included in those asked what books they had read and found most interesting in the past year. O'Reilly's list includes Kafka's *In the penal colony* and Prior's *Logic and the Basis of Ethics* which he describes as: "This is, as far as I know, the first professional philosophical work by a New Zealander: Intellectually a most exciting event." And then, in periodicals, he states: "read what is not too technical in Mind and Philosophy (what a number of New Zealanders, or those who have taught in N.Z. making these pages recently). Landfall vol 4 no 5 1950 p.351.

<sup>67</sup> A friend and supporter of McCahon, O'Reilly was appointed director of the Govett-Brewster art gallery, New Plymouth in 1975. In the letters between McCahon and O'Reilly (Simpson 2024) there are a number of references to both Arthur and Mary Prior, as well as many of Brasch and Landfall. Of particular note is an aside comment made by McCahon in December 1948: "No Arthur would not appreciate Communist circles. He would feel swamped." (Simpson 2024, p.98). This can be understood in the context of Arthur's pre-war involvement in left-wing political and social circles, especially via Clare Prior (nee Hunter). We know that by 1946 he had, via Lex Miler's book on *The Christian Significance of Marxism* been released from "a kind of inward bondage" to Marxist economics, despite having found Marxist philosophy "abominable." [Letter to Lex Miller 26/3/46: Arthur Prior to Lex Miller (10 pages handwritten) [incomplete] Source: Stanford University Archives: Miller papers (sc495 box 1 folder 1). It is also of note that the NZ SIS had a brief file on Prior (1961/62), to do with "Unsubstantiated report that Professor Prior was believed to have been a member of "C.P." [Communist Party] at the time he married Clare." This was made available to me after an OIA request to the SIS in 2022. Why Prior was subject to an InterOffice Memo at this time was not provided. The letter from the SIS stated "we note that Arthur Prior was not under investigation by the NZSIS." That does not, of course, rule out interest from the UK. The NZSIS also provided a clipping it held on the report in the Dominion 24 March

## Letter 12: 31/3/49<sup>68</sup> Prior's reading list

This letter is written after the fire at 8 MacMillan Avenue<sup>69</sup> and notes that

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1970 that Clare and Norman Brailsford were leaving for the Soviet Union via a Russian Freighter from the North Island east coast port of Napier. Both had been working for the *Soviet News* newspaper in Wellington. The NZSIS also noted they held a newspaper clipping from the *Evening Post* newspaper( Wellington ) from 12 May 1964 "Review sought for Art Examination" that mentions Clare Brailsford. Obviously it was Clare who was of interest to the Intelligence agencies.

<sup>68</sup> A two-page, handwritten letter on lined paper, no letterhead. Prior has written Canterbury College, Christchurch. Brasch has annotated at top left, Hume's Dialogues on Natural Religion and Carritt Ethical and Political Thinking, both with a tick next to them

<sup>69</sup> Prior wrote of the fire and its impact in a letter to Raphael 12/4/49 ( in Prior letters in Popper Prior website) It has been transcribed by P.J. Smith (2023) and included in his MA thesis *Arthur Prior in the 1940s: letters and un-published works of Prior 1946-1949*.

The following is taken from the transcription in the thesis (Smith 2023, pp.34-35):

We are at the moment in the process of recovering our wits after a fire in which we lost a great deal, about a fortnight ago. It broke out in the middle of the night, in the flat immediately below our own, & in the room beneath our own main living-room, which, beside containing all my books, separated our youngster's bedrooms from our own. We were wakened in time for me to whip through & get him, the room being full of smoke but with no actual flames in it; & after that I got a case of theological books by the door & pulled it out on to a landing. But my larger case, with philosophical books in it, was over on the other side, so I left it. The room caught fire a minute or two later, & the brigade was not in time to prevent it from falling – floor & roof & all its contents – into the room below; where most of my books now are, charred leaves sat in rubble. The books I had pulled on to the landing were alright in the morning, save for dirt & damp – the firemen used that landing as a sort of headquarters – but these, though valuable, were only theological (that, no doubt, is a sad way to speak of the Queen of the Sciences! Looking back now, I think I could have saved some of the others by going through & throwing them over a veranda & clambering out that way myself; & it would have been worth doing; but I was not to know that then, & we had a narrow enough shave as it was. However, no one in any of the flats was injured; & Martin, I think, not even in mind – he found it all very interesting & exciting. – Everyone has been very good to us since. The council has found temporary accommodation both for us & for the people who were below us, who were also connected with the college. Students have been extraordinarily decent. One M.A. student of last year presented me with a few Ethics books, including Smith's *Moral Sentiments*, & Raphael's *Moral Sense*. And we're slowly – even rapidly or rather rapidly – stocking up again, & making ourselves comfortable, & duly learned, as before. Nothing to do with my book was lost – a couple of typed copies, indeed, went up, but I had another; & the proofs were all read & posted back by the time the fire occurred.

because Harry Scott<sup>70</sup>, his colleague and a mutual friend, has written to Brasch about the fire “there’s no need to say much more about it.”

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<sup>70</sup> Harry Scott (1918-1960) trained as a teacher, then was pacifist in WW2( where he met Rodney Kennedy, friend of Prior, Brasch and McCahon). Post -war, while teaching in the Department of Rural Sociology and Economics at Lincoln Agricultural College, he undertook a MA in Philosophy and Psychology at Canterbury University College under Ivan Sutherland. In February 1949 he was appointed assistant lecturer in the C.U.C department of Philosophy and Psychology. He had been introduced to Brasch in April 1947 via Rodney Kennedy and Brasch records his attraction: “ ... a typically open fresh out of doors young New Zealander, yet is keenly interested in ideas & has read widely ( perhaps not systematically) & so passes so naturally from one world to the other – or makes the two one.” ( Brasch 2017, p.157) and from 1948 they shared a flat ( Flat 1, Dorset Street) in Christchurch when Brasch visited for *Landfall*. Scott had, until November 1947 been in a flat in the same large house as the Priors at 8 Macmillan Avenue in Cashmere but had to leave there and moved to Dorset Street. The flat was also “scarcely 200 yards from the Caxton Press” where *Landfall* as printed (Brasch 2017, p.165) Brasch became very attached to Scott. It was Arthur Prior who took Scott to meet the Bennett family in 1947, where Harry met Margaret Bennett (sister of Prior’s student, Jonathan Bennett). They married in 1950. In February 1950, in their new house, the Priors hosted a pre-wedding party for Harry and Margaret. Colin McCahon was in attendance and stated to O’ Reilly that the Prior’s new house “is magnificent”(Simpson 2024, p.119). Scott then undertook PhD study at McGill University in Canada, and then returned to C.U.C. to teach Psychology. In fact, by 1952 he was teaching logic, ethics, morals and politics, experimental psychology, general psychology, and the history of psychology. (Scott, J. p.164) Scott was a regular contributor to *Landfall* until his untimely death, mountaineering. For a memorable social and intellectual history and biography of Scott, see the book by his son Jonathan Scott (1997).

Also, from the same letter to Raphael (from the transcription in the Smith 2023 thesis –where Harry is called ‘Henry’) we learn:

Your Price (my review copy) was among the books I lost in the fire. But I am getting another copy, which has a curious history. – When I knew that the thing was appearing, I ordered a copy at a local booksellers. And then the Listener sent me a copy to review. So I went round to cancel my order at the booksellers, but it was too late, & my copy arrived here shortly afterwards. However, I was able to talk the new junior lecturer here, Henry Scott, into buying it. – Then came the fire; & Scott told me in confidence that the M.A. class wanted to present me with a book, & he had come to sound me about what I would like. Being short of cash, his own preference was that the class should buy his copy of Raphael’s Price from him & present it to me, & he wanted to know if I’d be keen to have that. I told him I would; & he accordingly told the class today that he had discretely ascertained that there was nothing I would like better than Raphael’s Price, & that by a stroke of luck he happened to have a copy that he was willing to make available. One of them asked him, “but what will you do when you want to read Price?” He replied, “I’ll borrow Mr. Prior’s!” – Having told you of this sordid transaction, I should add that Henry has been a tower of strength to us since the fire – we stayed with him while we were looking for somewhere to move into, he lent me his suit, he took my lectures for me; in short, there’s nothing he didn’t do. (p.37)

Prior, having lost a number of books in the fire has already via Scott's letter to Brasch, asked Brasch "to look out for books for him in Dunedin" that he can't find in Christchurch ( "I did a rapid run of the bookshops here today") and now asks Brasch if he can also possibly obtain the following,

In the Everyman's version:

Augustine's Confessions

Augustine's City of God (2 vols)[ticked by Brasch]

Selections from Aquinas [ticked by Brasch]

Selections from Leibniz

Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra

Mill's Utilitarianism etc

Prior states he doesn't mind having Augustine's confession in a version other than Everyman "provided that it contains Chapters 11-13 (the philosophical chapters –many editions stop at Ch. 10, including one that John Summers<sup>71</sup> very kindly made a present of to me yesterday. So please don't let him know that I've asked you to look for another – it was very kind of him and he gave me a Florio's Montaigne<sup>72</sup> along with it)."

Prior notes he has also written to Dick White (the director of Newbold's book shop in Dunedin<sup>73</sup>) about gaining second-hand books, while also stating he has been unable to replace his "Nonesuch edition of Lewis Carroll's work" and in his ps. remarking "among the things that went, was 'the Desire & Pursuit of the Whole.'"<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Summers' bookshop was in operation 1958-1983., at various locations. First in Chancery Lane, then for a long time in Manchester Street and the finally, on Tuam Street. For an overview upon his retirement, see:  
[https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19830316.2.74.1?end\\_date=31-12-1983&items\\_per\\_page=10&page=5&query=summers+bookshop&snippet=true&sort\\_by=byDA&start\\_date=01-01-1955](https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19830316.2.74.1?end_date=31-12-1983&items_per_page=10&page=5&query=summers+bookshop&snippet=true&sort_by=byDA&start_date=01-01-1955)

<sup>72</sup> A translation of Montaigne's essays, into English, by John Florio, first published in 1603.

<sup>73</sup> Newbold's book shop (275 George Street) was at that stage the largest secondhand bookshop in New Zealand. See: <https://www.odt.co.nz/lifestyle/magazine/storied-bookshop>

Prior made great use of Newbold's when he lived in Dunedin.

<sup>74</sup> Frederick Rolfe (Baron Corvo), *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole: a romance of modern Venice*. Written in 1904, its homoeroticism meant an incomplete (bowdlerized) version was published in 1934 [a full version was not published until 1961]. It is interesting that Prior mentions this to Brasch, as they obviously shared an interest in the text- and Brasch probably owned a copy.

**Letter 13 7/4/49<sup>75</sup>: on philosophy – and *Landfall*'s review of *Logic and the Basis of Ethics***

This letter is focused on two discussions of philosophical matters. Firstly, Prior informs Brasch that "Father Johnson, of whom I have spoken to you, is giving a series of lectures at College on scholastic philosophy."<sup>76</sup> Prior, in what is indicative of his sardonic humour, states he has attended the first two but:

"I don't know whether I ought to attend any more – the morning after the first one, our flat went up in flames; and the morning after the second, I was put to bed of a stone in the kidney. Father Johnson, however, wrote me a very nice note about the fire..." .

Prior's actual concern is that while Johnson "lectures clearly & can hold the attention of his hearers" he is not, to Prior's mind "very profound, & has to be corrected on points of detail". For example, Prior comments on the number of circular definitions given regarding the term "cause'-and how if, as Johnson stated, "such terms are not strictly definable" then this should have been stated at the beginning of the talk. While his interactions with Johnson are friendly, he thinks Johnson's work is "not of *Landfall* calibre" and this means he "still can't think of any better reviewer for Prior than Harold Miller".

This is interesting on two fronts; firstly, that Prior is invested in maintaining the quality of *Landfall* and is prepared to act a quality-control/ intellectual merit gatekeeper for the journal. Secondly, Brasch has obviously asked Prior who he thinks might be able to review *Logic and the Basic of Ethics*. Prior's suggestion of Harold Miller, (VUW librarian) was not taken up – either by Brasch or by Miller; instead the book was reviewed by Anglican cleric and philosopher Selwyn Grave. Interestingly, Grave had reviewed earlier for *Landfall* and was a fellow Otago philosophy graduate, with an interest in Scottish theology<sup>77</sup> – yet

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<sup>75</sup> A three-page handwritten letter, written from the Prior's new address 28 Gloucester Street Christchurch. Just a block over from Canterbury University College, this is now the site of the Gloucester apartments

<sup>76</sup> While no record occurs in the local *Press* newspaper of these, the following year, on 22 April 1950 appeared a small advertisement that Rev. Father Johnson SJ MA will be giving lectures at CUC from April 24 on scholastic philosophy.

<sup>77</sup> Selwyn Grave (1916- 2002), first class hons in philosophy at Otago and winner of the James Clark prize 1939. He converted to Anglicanism and trained for the Anglican priesthood; then he converted to Roman Catholicism and was also appointed to a lectureship in philosophy at University of Western Australia, where

at this time Prior felt no need to put his name forward. However, this was soon to change, as is seen in letter 16.

### **Letter 14 21/4/49<sup>78</sup>: More on Prior's books**

One of the advantages of engaging with such letters as these is that they grant us insight not only into Prior's life but also in what he was thinking – and in this case reading. The letter begins with Prior settling his account with Brasch for the book purchases.

Prior notes he has now found elsewhere Mill's Utilitarianism and Augustine's Confessions and that "thanks to help such as yours, my small library is really growing quite rapidly and will suffer another big enlargement when the books that Harry [Scott] dug out for me at Newbold's arrive". Prior then asks if Brasch could also help "by digging out one or two other books" which had been noticed by Scott, but he wasn't sure if Prior had wanted them. Prior says he can even provide Brasch with "an idea where the books in question are located", which is necessary as Newbold's is currently understaffed, giving directions to a collection of books from Bohn's Library<sup>79</sup> on the second floor. From this, Prior requests "the Reliques of a Father Prout<sup>80</sup>" as an act of homage "to the judgement of Harry Scott"; and then stresses that facing these "(at least I think this is where they are) is a tier of shelves of philosophical & psychological books" and from these Prior requests the following:

Browns' lectures on Philosophy

"a rather well-presented copy of the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of Whately's  
Elements of Logic"

"A 50pp. pamphlet by Crawford on The Relation of Inference to  
Fact in Mills' Logic (Chicago Philosophical Studies)"

"Two Volumes of Sir William Hamilton's Lectures, on Metaphysics"

He then asks Brasch to hunt down further texts and provides a diagram.

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he was Professor 1961-1981. His books included *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense* (1960) and a history of philosophy in Australia

<sup>78</sup> A three-page handwritten letter on CUC letterhead

<sup>79</sup> Books published from 1846 by British publisher Henry George Bohn (1796-1884); Bohn's Library eventually encompassed 766 volumes across a range of subjects.

<sup>80</sup> Irish priest and humorist Francis Sylvester Mahoney (1804-1866).

“So much for the 1<sup>st</sup>. floor, now up the rickety stairs to the top. Harry has described some shelves on this floor that are unfamiliar to me, & must

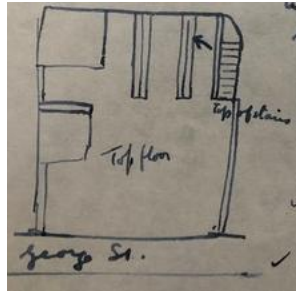


Figure 1: Prior's map of where to find the books in Newbold's bookshop.

be new. And he tells me that at the point marked by the arrow in the diagram, more or less, one may find a translation of Grotius on The Truth of the Christian Religion & Locke's Commonplace Book. Please add these to the pile.”

He then adds:

“...a more complicated request...but only if you have the time. I have often noticed, on that top floor, copies of a book labelled Bibliotheca Sacra<sup>81</sup>. Its contents didn't look very inviting, so I've not examined it closely, & don't know whether the title is that of a periodical [ it is], a single volume, or a collection of volumes, but have an idea it's the last – I think it may be a 2,3 or 4 -volume theological anthology. Anyway, I have just learnt that a translation of Anselm's Proslogion & debate with Gaunilo, is to be found in 'Bibliotheca Sacra (1851)' (that's the reference)<sup>82</sup>.”

<sup>81</sup> It is in fact a periodical published first at Union theological seminary in 1843, then by Andover theological seminary in 1844, then by Oberlin College in 1884, then Xenia seminary in 1922. Since 1934 it has been published by Dallas theological seminary

<sup>82</sup> Rev. J.S. Maginnis, “Translations From Anselm”, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 8 No.31 (1851): 529-553.

Maginnis was professor of Biblical theology at University of Rochester, New York. Prior would be interested in this article because, as Maginnis notes as translator, this is the only translation of this document into English – and the only other one is into French. The article can be accessed via: [https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

Prior wants it in whatever format or edition it comes in.

### **Letter 15 30/4/49<sup>83</sup>: Theology and philosophy**

Prior begins this letter by thanking Brasch for the books from Newbolds, as they had recently arrived. He then asks is it is possible for him to review for *Landfall* George Knight's *From Moses to Paul* <sup>84</sup>. That Prior wished to review such a book signals his still strong interest in theology and his ongoing participation in the Presbyterian church.

Prior has received a letter from Raphael (now teaching Philosophy at University of Glasgow) and in reporting this, makes a very interesting comment: "it's very pleasant now to be able to write to him & hear from him without the background of tension about examining etc." It would seem the philosophical community at Otago at this time, without perhaps the moderating hand of John Findlay, was not as cohesive as it could have been.

With Raphael's departure the chair of philosophy at Otago is now open and Prior has decided to apply for it. He has "been very busy writing away for testimonials. Having been encouraged to do so by everyone I've asked about it, I've written to Ryle & asked him, not for a testimonial, but to comment on my work if called upon to do so (they want names of these 'referees', as well as testimonials." Prior was unsuccessful in his application to Otago, it going, after what Charles Pigden has called an interregnum<sup>85</sup>, to John Passmore.

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<sup>83</sup> A 1-page handwritten letter on CUC letterhead: Brasch has annotated that he replied 18.5

<sup>84</sup> George A.F. Knight, *From Moses to Paul: A. Christological Study in the Light of our Hebraic Heritage*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1949. [There was no review of the book in *Landfall*.]

Knight (1909-2002) was Professor of Old Testament Studies at Knox Theological Hall 1947-1959.

Knight's book was, he states, 'a answer' to Joseph Klausner's *From Jesus to Paul* (1942).

The subtitle of Knight's book was 'A Christological Study in the Light of our Hebraic Heritage'. In his memoir, Knight describes his book: "I scoured the law, the prophets, the Wisdom literature, the Targums, and the Talmud to show how we can understand both the person and the mission of Jesus in terms of Hebraic thinking alone." (Knight p.62).

<sup>85</sup> Charles Pigden, 'Philosophical History: The Otago Department': <https://www.otago.ac.nz/philosophy/dept/history.html#interregnum>

## Letter 16: 14/5/49<sup>86</sup>: A suggestion of a reviewer for *Logic and The Basis of Ethics*

[The contents of this letter are such that it is reproduced in full.]

Dear Charles,

I am writing to you to raise once again that absurd matter of the reviewing of my book<sup>87</sup> in *Landfall*. If you haven't already asked Miller<sup>88</sup> to do it, I'd like you to reconsider the possibility of giving the job to Selwyn Grave. He was down here recently<sup>89</sup>, & in for a brief visit. My estimate of his capacities remains much as it was – a very high one indeed, with an element of doubt about his producing quite the best thing for *Landfall*, arising out of the slight disappointment which his last review<sup>90</sup> for you gave me. He could, I think, do a much better review than Miller; but with that element of uncertainty. (he wouldn't hesitate to criticize me if he thought it necessary, & almost certainly would think it necessary at some points). What has made me want to raise his name again is a fuller knowledge of his personal situation. What he has told me was in complete confidence, but I am telling you as you may be able to help him a little. He is discontented with his present position at St. John's (he naturally, of course, doesn't want this known), & would like to take up lecturing in Philosophy again if the opportunity arose. I don't know whether it is likely to arise in this country in the near future<sup>91</sup> ( that may depend in part upon what comes of my own little dreams<sup>92</sup>), but if & when it does arise, it will help him to have a good record of publications of a philosophical sort behind him<sup>93</sup>; & a review in *Landfall* would at least be an item for him – his having done it, in short, would help him more than their having done it would help either Miller or Raphael.

I don't know to what extent you allow considerations of that sort to weigh with you; my own feeling, for what it's worth, is that they should

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<sup>86</sup> A four-page handwritten letter on CUC letterhead; Brasch has annotated that he replied.

<sup>87</sup> *Logic and the Basis of Ethics*.

<sup>88</sup> Harold Miller.

<sup>89</sup> Grave was currently at St John's theological college in Auckland

<sup>90</sup> S. A. Grave, "Review of *Natural Law: A Christian Reconsideration*, Ed. by A. R. Vidler and W. A. Whitehouse," *Landfall* vol.1 no.2 1947, pp 150-155.

<sup>91</sup> Grave took up a position at University of Western Australia.

<sup>92</sup> That is, to be offered the position at Otago university

<sup>93</sup> It is interesting to note that review essays were considered at this time, to be intellectually – and academically-valued undertakings and could be used to support job applications.

be given some weight when the man also has the capacity to produce something really good. – Regarding Raphael, if you still have him in mind for the job, my fear of his treating me unfairly is quite dispelled<sup>94</sup> – we are on very cordial terms now – but I remain doubtful as to whether he would produce quite the best possible thing for your public. I think, though, that you could get something good from either Raphael or Miller or Grave, & would myself be interested to see the judgment of any of them ( I think I shall have Raphael’s anyway, when the book comes out, whether he reviews it for you or not – he will certainly write to me about it<sup>95</sup>); but after seeing Grave, I feel that his personal claims are the strongest of these. I did not mention this matter to him, of course, or tell him that I was going to write to you about it – in fact, the thought of doing so only occurred to me today – I merely advised him in general terms to publish as much as he could. He told me he had just submitted something about Aristotelian aesthetics to the Australasian Journal of Philosophy<sup>96</sup>; I hope it gets in. I suggested that he try writing for Mind<sup>97</sup>; as Ryle seems quite sympathetic to Antipodean writers. (Apart from my stuff<sup>98</sup> , he’s been having reviews in by Passmore of Sydney – Passmore reviewed Raphael’s Price<sup>99</sup> for him).

I followed your advice by the way (it was seconded by Neville Phillips) & asked Ryle for his assistance in connection with the Otago chair. A brief note in reply from him arrived today; it was very nice, & he has consented to my handing in his name as a referee.

Yours sincerely,  
Arthur N. Prior

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<sup>94</sup> There had obviously been some earlier tension between the two, based in part it would seem over examining

<sup>95</sup> There was correspondence- see letters in virtual lab for Prior studies and in Bodleian <https://archives.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/2862>

<sup>96</sup> This would be: S. A. Grace, “Aristotelian philosophy and functional design”, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* vol28, 1 1950, pp.29-42.

<sup>97</sup> Grave published: ‘On Evil and Omnipotence’ , *Mind* vol 65 issue 1 1956, p. 259-262

<sup>98</sup> Prior had published three articles in *Mind*: ‘Facts, propositions and entailment’. *Mind*, vol. 57 (1948), pp. 62 – 68; ‘Determinables, Determinates and Determinants’, *Mind*, Volume LVIII, Issue 229, January 1949, Pages 1–20: and ‘Determinables, Determinates and Determinants (II)’, *Mind*, Volume LVIII, Issue 230, April 1949, pp.178–194.

Prior’s *Logic and the Basis of Ethics* by reviewed in *Mind*, Volume LIX, Issue 235, July 1950, pp.392–395.

<sup>99</sup> Passmore reviewed Raphael’s (ed.) *A Review of the principal questions in Morals*. By Richard Price in *Mind*, Vol. LVIII issue 230 April 1949, pp.263-264

P.S. A note has just come from the Clarendon Press, saying that they hope to publish my book in June, probably at 8/6 net<sup>100</sup>.

Grave did, of course, write the review (Grave 1950). He calls it a “sharp, exciting book”; notes how Prior is positioning his argument in part versus Findlay; states that he (Grave) does not agree with Prior regarding Cudworth, Butler and Moore, but he is sure that “Prior is right in maintaining that philosophers have often tried to deduce ethical positions from positive or natural ones.” Grave then concludes:

“The great value of Mr Prior's book is that it cannot fail to make it harder to fall into the kind of fallacies which the history of ethics shows to have a perennial fascination. It has, incidentally, a domestic interest for New Zealanders. Two of the nine studies are devoted to a criticism of the opinions of the distinguished philosophers Dr Popper and Dr Findlay who a few years ago taught in this country, and there are several references to another distinguished philosopher, Dr Raphael, who was Dr Findlay's successor at Otago, and the book itself, I should say, is the most important contribution to philosophy yet made by a New Zealander.”

(Grave 1950, p.262).

#### **Letter 17: 1/10/1950<sup>101</sup>: a note on the Munz discussion**

This brief note from Prior is him sending “his reply to Peter”, a copy which he has also sent on to him “(by air)”. This refers to the ongoing correspondence, in the pages of *Landfall* between historian Peter Munz and Prior. (see Grimshaw 2023a) This letter is Prior's reply to Munz, published in *Landfall*, Volume Four, No. 4, 1950, (pp.369-70), and is followed immediately by Munz's reply, (pp.371 -72).

This follows their already disputatious correspondence in *Landfall*, Volume Four, No. 3, 1950, wherein Prior has entered into Munz's discussion of Badian and McPherson in the June 1950 *Landfall* following their critique of Munz's 1949 *Landfall* article “Proust and Philosophy”, and when Munz in turn replies to him. (see Grimshaw 2023a). While Prior

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<sup>100</sup> On the UK national archives calculator this was £13.26 in 2017

<sup>101</sup> A brief one-page handwritten letter, on hole punched paper with C.U.C handwritten above date

apologizes for not getting his reply sent earlier due to “end of term stuff” he is also very pleased to find he’s “not had to alter the first draft once.” It is clear Brasch then concludes the debate, because it is obvious that Munz and Prior could have continued an increasingly personalized back and forth argument concerning philosophy and the value of clear communication of complex and abstract ideas. That Munz had been a student of both Popper and Wittgenstein added to the debate.

### **Letter 18; 6/10/51<sup>102</sup> a shift in Prior’s focus?**

This letter is Prior apologizing to Brasch that he hadn’t replied “more promptly”, because he has been ill, to Brasch’s request that he write a “This Quarter” article for *Landfall*. “This Quarter” was a series of commentaries inaugurated in 1951 by *Landfall* to allow writers to reflect on issues and events that had caught their attention over the previous few months. Prior’s contribution (Prior 1952) focussed on the AAP congress in Sydney 1951.

In the letter Prior states he will attempt something for Brasch and hopes he hadn’t been asked “because Hector Munro<sup>103</sup> did such an excellent ones, & Hector is a philosopher, & I am a philosopher, ergo etc.” Munro had reviewed for *Landfall* since 1947 and continued to contribute until 1958, even while teaching philosophy in Sydney. His “This Quarter” included philosophical quandaries as to what to fill in regarding ‘religious beliefs’ in the census; national character and tea drinking and literature; meanings of materialism; and the 1951 waterfront strike<sup>104</sup>.

Prior then comments that it was not only illness that had caused his reticence: “I seem to find it more and more difficult to turn my hand to anything that could be remotely classified as ‘topical’, & hope you won’t expect anything I write to be very much that”; adding in a post-script, “with a little luck, I might be able to incorporate some examination Howlers.” Prior’s point signals a very significant change in his thinking as he becomes more focused on philosophical matters rather than, as in the past, a mix of theological, public intellectual and philosophical ones.

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<sup>102</sup> A one-page handwritten letter on CUC letterhead. Brasch has annotated at top left “literal topicality of no importance”.

<sup>103</sup> Hector Munro 1911-2001, New Zealand born philosopher who entered academia by a circuitous route post-war, having also been a journalist and librarian  
<https://humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/AAH-Obit-Monro-2001.pdf>

<sup>104</sup> D. H. Monro, “This Quarter,” *Landfall* vol 5 no 2 1951 pp.122-126.

It also helps explain why, at the end of 1951 he also gave up his column, under the pen-name “Naphtali” in the presbyterian *Outlook* magazine (Grimshaw 2024). The more he immersed himself in philosophical thought and teaching, the less topical became his writing and his focus. For someone who once sought to become a religious journalist this was a significant shift in focus.

### **Letter 19: 2/1/52<sup>105</sup> Landfall and Philosophy**

This letter begins with Prior delivering his “This Quarter” article (Prior 1952) and apologizing for it being hand-written (as his usual typists are away<sup>106</sup>). He emphasizes that “the request on p.7 for amateur work on the paradoxes is seriously intended, & should anything come in, I’d like to have the opportunity of commentating on it.” Nothing appears to have arisen and so his request goes unanswered; this will in turn add to Brasch’s later comment that there is a very limited public audience for philosophical discussion in New Zealand.

Prior then turns to discuss a philosophical possibility for *Landfall* that is worth quoting in detail.

“I would also like to suggest that you run a ‘Philosophical Commentary’ in each issue. There are plenty of people here who could take turns at doing it – Passmore, Hughes, myself; Hector when he’s back; Anschutz<sup>107</sup> when he’s back; young Jon Bennett<sup>108</sup> would do a good one; Selwyn Grave; Ron O’Reilly; Archdeacon Whitehead<sup>109</sup>; Holcroft<sup>110</sup> has ideas on the subject, phoney it is true,

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<sup>105</sup> A two-page handwritten letter on CUC letterhead

<sup>106</sup> It would appear that at this stage all of Prior’s work was handwritten and he did no typing up of his articles and writing himself.

<sup>107</sup> Richard Anschutz, professor of philosophy 1956-61 at University of Auckland, on philosophy staff from 1928.

<sup>108</sup> Jonathan Bennett (1930-2024); at this time completing his MA in philosophy under Prior.

<sup>109</sup> L.G. Whitehead (1885-1961) Anglican priest; Archdeacon of Dunedin 1934-1950 and Warden of Selwyn College, Otago University 1919-195). He held a MA in philosophy from the University of New Zealand and gave many philosophical talks in Dunedin that Prior attended in the 1930s.

<sup>110</sup> M.H. Holcroft (1902 -1993). Journalist and writer and editor of NZ *Listener* 1949-1967. He also wrote 3 long essays on New Zealand life, culture and thought which included his own philosophizing: *The Deepening Steam* (1940); *The Waiting Hills* (1943); and *Encircling Seas* (1946). It is possible that Prior’s criticism of Holcroft led to Brasch publishing an essay of critical discussion of Holcrofts’ work: D.M. Anderson, “Mr Holcroft’s Islands”, *Landfall*, 1952; n.6. vol.1: pp.5-20.

but to be heard. There is plenty of more or less local interest to write about – people’s books coming out (Passmore on Cudworth & later on Hume<sup>111</sup>; Anschutz on Mill<sup>112</sup>); articles in the Australasian journal & further afield (Hector has something in the latest Philosophy on ‘Green & the Culture-Pattern’<sup>113</sup>; Passmore in a recent Mind on ‘The Dreariness of Aesthetics’<sup>114</sup>); congresses (there’s always the one in Australia in August, & it’s possible there’ll be one in N.Z. next February); & more informal matters. I’m convinced that the subject can be written about so as to be ‘understandable of the people’, though of course not without work. (The enclosed is in a way a try-out in that respect). And I’m sure there are plenty of people who would be interested; people who have a general sort of interest in philosophy but don’t know what is going on. How about It? – I’m prepared to do as many of them myself as you ask me to. (My book<sup>115</sup> is finished now, though not all the typing; & I’m quite keen to go back for a while to periodical work).”

It is interesting that, despite this plea and offer to contribute, Brasch did not take up Prior’s suggestion. It is not that Brasch was uninterested in Philosophy, his journals and his memoir *Indirections* make it clear that he was widely, if not deeply, read and interested in philosophy and philosophical issues and questions. However, a ‘philosophy’ keyword search of the *Landfall* archive data base reveals a limited number explicitly philosophical articles – and even Prior’s own venture via his ‘This Quarter’ discussing of the AAP elicited only a very focused, limited correspondence and was not repeated.

However, one outcome of Prior’s suggestion could very likely be Jonathan Bennet’s report, under “Commentaries”, of the 1953

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Daiches Raphael had undertaken an earlier, philosophical criticism in his review of Holdcroft’s *Encircling Seas* in *Landfall* vol.1 no.1 1947 pp.56-63.

<sup>111</sup> John Passmore’s books on *Ralph Cudworth* (CUP 1951) and *Hume’s intentions* (CUP 1952)

<sup>112</sup> R.P. Anschutz, *The philosophy of J.S. Mill* (Clarendon Press, 1953).

<sup>113</sup> D.H. Monro, ‘Green, Rousseau, and the Culture Pattern’, *Philosophy* v.26 no.99 1951, pp. 347 - 357

<sup>114</sup> J. A. Passmore , “‘The Dreariness of Aesthetics” *Mind*, vol. LX, issue 239, 1951, pp. 318–335.

<sup>115</sup> *The Craft of Formal Logic*, finally published, as a shorter text more focused on modern logic , as *Formal Logic* in 1952. The original ms runs to 772 typewritten pages.

philosophical congress held in Christchurch in May 1953<sup>116</sup>. Bennett reports on the success of the Congress, how it was enjoyed by all participants and an overview of what each contributor discussed. (Bennett 1953) Yet even Bennet's further contributions to *Landfall* were in line with his literary interests than his philosophical ones.

It would appear Prior's stated keenness to return to periodical work was encountering very limited opportunities in New Zealand to do so compared to what he experienced in Britain in the 1930s. For while there was *Landfall*, the presbyterian *Outlook* and the *Listener* to write for (Grimshaw 2020), there was not anything approaching what *Tomorrow* had offered in the 1930s (Grimshaw, 2023a) nor the *New Zealand of Theology* (Grimshaw 2023b). Finally, as any investigation of his bibliography demonstrates, 1952 really begins his engaged venture into and towards what became tense-logic. A number of questions arise:

Would the chance to undertake more public intellectual/ journalistic philosophy have limited his turn, first to Polish notation and then into tense logic? If he had managed to retain his Christian belief would he have been satisfied to continue more of his public intellectual role and writing? Or, was his chance to attend the AAP in Sydney the real turning point in his philosophical life and thought?

The AAP Sydney congress provided an up-front, in-person experience of what was possible both for him as a philosopher and of being part of a philosophical community. I would suggest that it had the same impact as his chance to attend in 1938 the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress of Calvinism, held in Edinburgh. That is, it opened up a new world of possibility that, at the same time, reaffirmed for him that he had made the right decision as to what to focus on and aim for in his thinking and life. If the Calvinist Congress reaffirmed his desire to become a religious journalist, the 1952 AAP affirmed the shift to becoming Prior the academic philosopher. The difference being that while he suffered a crisis of (Calvinist) faith in 1942, he never did so regarding Polish Notation and tense logic.

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<sup>116</sup> To view the article outlining the programme, as reported in the local *Press* (Christchurch) see: [https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19530515.2.6?end\\_date=31-12-1953&items\\_per\\_page=10&page=8&phrase=2&query=philosophy+&snippet=true&sort\\_by=byDA&start\\_date=01-01-1953](https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19530515.2.6?end_date=31-12-1953&items_per_page=10&page=8&phrase=2&query=philosophy+&snippet=true&sort_by=byDA&start_date=01-01-1953) and for the photograph in the *Press* of the seven professors attending see: <https://popper-prior.nz/items/show/27>

### **Letter: 20 10/1/52<sup>117</sup>: the AAP Congress**

This letter is primarily concerned with Prior's forthcoming "This Quarter" article on the AAP Congress in Sydney. The letter discusses various editing suggestions made by Brasch, including replacing 'Hector' [Munro] with 'D.H.' This is followed by a response to the use of the word "Australasian", which Prior states he uses in relation to the organization [Prior uses the term 'semi-quotationally'] not in the manner of being 'adopted' as has been suggested by Brasch. Prior then concludes by stating he should have included both Peter Munz and Tom Macpherson in "the list of possible philosophical commentators".

### **Letter 21: 20/1/52<sup>118</sup>: On philosophy and place; and on Polish notation.**

The "This Quarter" article – and it can be suggested – his experience at the Sydney AAP congress forced Prior to consider what it meant to undertake Philosophy not just from New Zealand, but also from Canterbury; especially when he has discovered and started teaching Polish notation.

*[The content of this letter is such that it requires to be transcribed in full].*

Dear Charles,

Thank you for your reply to my last – I too would bridle a being called an 'Australasian'. But not, I think, at being called an 'Australasian philosopher', though I think this description would have something vaguely comical about it. (How else, though, could one classify Passmore? Or Selwyn Grave?).

This apparent inconsistency is probably connected with the fact that whereas in poetry or painting, for example, there are differences between Australians & New Zealanders which are due to their being that, I doubt if there are any such differences in philosophy. The only thing that's

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<sup>117</sup> A two-page handwritten letter on CUC letterhead; however this letterhead has been crossed out and replaced with a handwritten address 49 Shannon street Alexandra.

Brach has hand annotated at top left that he acknowledged this on 16.1.52 and "won't alter Australasian if you're satisfied with it."

<sup>118</sup> A three-page handwritten letter on CUC letterhead. Prior has annotated with an arrow pointing to a brown stain on the right hand top corner "Apologies for this – tea – kids – semi-camping"

anything like that is perhaps that Australians are in general more aware of what New Zealanders are doing in philosophy than New Zealanders are of what Australians are doing. But that's a second-order sort of difference (though I suspect that precisely that difference may be observable in other fields too \*) [then as an aside along left hand margin: \* Mary says this is not the case in literature – she has found Australians reasonably ignorant of what we are doing here ]; there's no such thing as a New Zealand philosophy or Australian philosophy; for that matter there's no such thing as an Australasian philosophy; though there's a Sydney philosophy & something like a Melbourne philosophy. There are also Otago, Canterbury, Victoria and Auckland philosophies, but rather less so now than in the days when Findlay was at Otago, Popper here, & Hunter at V.U.C. In one respect there has been a certain amount of continuity here at Canterbury, as I followed Popper in being more interested in formal logic than (probably) anyone else in the country ( or in 'Australasia'!) . But with me it's not only a different sort of logic but a different sort of interest; & I don't share Popper's notion that it's more important than anything else in the world that philosophers should get together with scientists. I enjoy the odd talk to the scientists, but fundamentally I think of Philosophy, including Logic, as part of the 'Humanities'. (That's one reason why I like to see it in Landfall!) I remember Popper once ticking me off over this very point. (That & getting drunk are the two things he has against me.)

Possibly a time will come when you can tell from a philosopher's way of writing that he's a New Zealander; but I don't know whether I'd find this a pleasing development or the opposite, & in any case that time is certainly not yet. Nor is there anything like that with Australians, though you can tell if a man's teamed with the Sydney bunch or not. (Even about that, though, see the Smart incident in 'This Quarter'). – I sometimes thinking that living here has something to do with a certain indifference to time in my own work – for me it feels as much like a piece of antiquarian research to find out what G. Ryle thinks on a certain subject as to find out what Aristotle thought about it, & conversely, it's as little a piece of mere antiquarianism to find out what Aristotle thought as to find out what Ryle thinks. But I'm pretty sure that's much more a matter of how my own private & personal mind ticks than a matter of my

geographical location. Other New Zealanders, e.g. Henry Hudson<sup>119</sup>, aren't like that a bit. There is something, though, of the same indifference to the philosophical fashion in Hector, so perhaps it is a bit local. – Not that we are mere old fogeys, Hector & me; indeed, I am right now basking in the peculiar pleasure one gets from finding oneself accidentally ahead of one's contemporaries. I have been obstinately using with my Logic classes a Polish symbolism which I have never heard of anyone else using in an English-speaking univeisty.\* [\*Except Dublin, where the inventor of the symbolism now resides]<sup>120</sup> ( they always use the Russellian, but I use the other because I'm convinced it's better); & now Oxford has brought out its first book with any quantity of logical symbolism in it<sup>121</sup>, & the symbolism's the Polish, so I don't doubt that what Canterbury is doing today the world will be doing tomorrow, in this matter at least.

I don't think I've mentioned before – I didn't know it for certain till just before coming away – that the son of Anderson of Sydney<sup>122</sup> will be assisting me at C.U.C. this year. I've no idea what he's like as a writer.

Yours sincerely

Arthur N. Prior

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<sup>119</sup> Henry Hudson won a Nuffield scholarship in 1949 to study at Oxford university, he was at that time senior lecturer in philosophy at Victoria University College, Wellington.

<sup>120</sup> This insert written along left hand side of letter. Jan Łukasiewicz (1878-1956) relocated to Dublin from Germany in 1946.

<sup>121</sup> Jan Łukasiewicz, Jan (1951). *Aristotle's Syllogistic from the Standpoint of Modern Formal Logic*. Oxford University Press. The Canterbury University Library only holds the 2nd edition from 1957. It may have held the first edition and then removed it when one of the regular 21<sup>st</sup> Century holdings down-sizings occurred.

<sup>122</sup> This is (Alexander) Sandy Anderson (1923-1996) who was in 1954 to take up a position in philosophy at Newcastle university which he held until his retirement in 1988. Anderson was the son of John Anderson (1893-1962), Challis Professor of Philosophy, University of Sydney (1927 - 1958). Ron O'Reilly, writing an introduction to a survey exhibition of McCahon's works in 1972 includes Sandy Anderson among those (including Mary and Arthur Prior) who held many conversational evenings in Christchurch at this time that both McCahon and O'Reilly attended. Of philosophical note is the aside that O'Reilly notes John Anderson's "theory of aesthetics interested Colin." (In Simpson 2024, p.507) [orig. O'Reilly's introduction to 'Colin McCahon: a survey (Auckland Art Gallery 1972').]

## Letter 22: 30/1/52<sup>123</sup>: the AAP Congress

In this letter, Prior informs Brasch, noting it “is probably too late” for the “This Quarter” article that he “has some photographs of people at the congress at Sydney”: [John] Anderson; “the three main Melbourne worthies Falk<sup>124</sup>, Gasking<sup>125</sup> and Jackson<sup>126</sup>; and “one of Alan Stout<sup>127</sup> & Jack Smart<sup>128</sup> together in which Alan’s resemblance to D. Glover<sup>129</sup> is easy to pick”, which were taken on “an ordinary box brownie” - which means Brasch “will know the size” (and as a side annotation Prior includes the type of film: V620. While Prior has the photographs, the negatives “are with John Mackie in Sydney” which he could access if Brasch wanted them.

Prior then lists other photographs: Falk, John Passmore, John Mackie, Jack Small, Leonard Russell, Gaius Mackintosh, and one of Prior with Percy Partridge, who is described as a “student of Anderson’s now Prof. of Social Philosophy at National University, Canberra.”

It is unclear whether it was because it was ‘too late’ or that Brasch felt there would be need for or perhaps no interest in such photographs, but none accompanied the article.

Once Prior’s “This Quarter” article was published he became involved in a brief exchange of correspondence in the Letters pages of *Landfall* with the poet and public intellectual A.R.D. Fairburn regarding making statements with abstract subjects. Fairburn wrote a letter concerned with how words are used precisely or imprecisely. Prior’s response is to describe Fairburn as an Aristotelian, yet points out a Platonist counterargument. Fairburn then replies conceding that he is not a philosopher, but he also states verbal abstractions risk giving rise to confusion. [see Grimshaw 2020] Brasch obviously raised a number of points regarding Priors’ reply to Fairburn that upset Prior, and so in Letter 24 he sets out his defence of philosophy in strong terms.

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<sup>123</sup> A one-page handwritten letter on CUC letterhead, in top left corner Brasch has annotated that he replied on the same day.

<sup>124</sup> W. David Falk (1906-1991).

<sup>125</sup> Douglas Gasking (1911-1994).

<sup>126</sup> Allan Cameron Jackson (1911-1990).

<sup>127</sup> Alan Stout (1900-1983) philosopher at Sydney University.

<sup>128</sup> J.J.C. Smart (1920-2012), at this time at Adelaide University.

<sup>129</sup> Denis Glover, poet, printer and collaborator on *Landfall*.

### **Letter 23: 12/6/52<sup>130</sup>: *Landfall* and philosophical debate**

In this brief letter, Brasch is thanked for forwarding to Prior Fairburn's letter arising from Prior's "This Quarter" article, which Prior is now returning to Brasch with his reply. Both of these were then published in *Landfall* (see Grimshaw 2020).

### **Letter 24: 25/6/52<sup>131</sup>: on philosophy**

This letter begins with Prior stating he has also enclosed "a typed & abridged version of my reply to Fairburn". It is clear that (in a missing letter) Brasch has raised some points of concern for Prior because he then sets out his disagreements with Brasch's views on philosophy. Such is their nature it is worth transcribing these in full:

I have not adopted your suggestion of "saying (if such is the case) that there's no meeting ground, & so rounding things off". I have not done this (a) because it would have made my letter longer, & (b) because I see no reason to suppose that 'such is the case'. Mr.F.<sup>132</sup>, if I have not misunderstood him (though I very well may have – his style, if I may say so, is appalling), has put up a position to which I am very much attracted, & which would solve the paradox if it were not attended with difficulties of its own. I have drawn attention to these last, & for aught I know Mr.F., or some other hunter in the 'philosophical pack' to which you vaguely refer, may have solution for them.

I cannot express too forcibly my disapproval of your apparent eagerness to believe that philosophical discussion can lead nowhere, that philosophy is not a subject in which there is common work to be done but a collection of vast vague viewpoints which in the nature of things can only boom past one another so that the only thing for a rational man to do is find some decent way of shutting them up. What do you take us for? – And does this astonishing, and shocking, not to say shameful note of yours express an attitude to literature generally? Is any discussion of anything \* [\*apart for, cookery recipes]<sup>133</sup> really possible, on your view of the matter? I cannot really believe that you are so un-18<sup>th</sup>-century, if I may so put it, as you appear to be; I can but charitably suppose that the words 'Platonist' & 'Aristotelian' brought into your mind, by a process of

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<sup>130</sup> A short, handwritten note on CUC letterhead

<sup>131</sup> A two-page handwritten letter on CUC letterhead

<sup>132</sup> That is, Fairburn.

<sup>133</sup> Asterixed insert along left-hand-side of page

free association, Coleridge's ridiculous remark about these being mental quirks with which we are just born (not argued into or out of), & that, swallowing this whole, you have brooded yourself into an alarm which prevents you from really seeing what you are reading. – It is not clear to who are these philosophical wolves you so fear; but should it be Ron O'Reilly, Hector Munro, Peter Munz, Tom McPherson & Uncle John Passmore & all<sup>134</sup>, you should surely count it a gift from heaven if they did 'take up the cry'.

Yrs. Excessively severely

Arthur.

The experience of trying to use the "This Quarter" article to use *Landfall* to create philosophical discussion in New Zealand seems to have spurred Prior into one last attempt to write what can be termed 'public philosophy' – that is, 'accessible' philosophical discussion of interest for the readers of *Landfall*. While this proved unsuccessful for the reasons Brasch sets out in Letter 27, it did lay the foundations for a later 'academic philosophy' paper by Prior.

## **Letter 25: 13/11/52<sup>135</sup>The Logic of Obligation (and a Colin McCahon painting)**

In this letter Prior discusses an article "The Logic of Obligation" that he seems to have been writing for *Landfall*, but unable to complete – a topic he finds "painful" to discuss alongside celebrating his promotion to Professor. This results in a typically Priorian aside: "(Ought professors, I wonder, to Kill Two Birds with One Stone, [that is link pleasure and painful news together], or should they splash their higher pay putting all the Pleasure into one letter & all the Business into another?)".

Prior couldn't get the ending of the article to his liking so he is going to get it typed as is and send it, asking if either Brasch or Rodney Kennedy have any suggestions, "(if you find the rest of it useable)". Prior then states that he "is glad to hear you're using, if not my article, at least our McCahon picture, in Landfall" and wonders if he can "for some suitable

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<sup>134</sup> "Uncle John Passmore and all' is an allusion to the popular phrase 'Uncle Tom Copley and all' which arises from the Devon Folk song 'Widdecombe Fair' and was published in a book of West Country songs from 1890.

<sup>135</sup> A two-page handwritten letter on CUC letterhead

not-too-large sum” get either some offprints of it, or some prints of the photo.

This is a reference to John Summer’s review of the Group Show of Christchurch artists (Summers 1953). The Prior’s painting was, in the end, not used in the illustrations of the Group show, but it is singled out in Summer’s review:

“ ‘Landscape’, on the other hand, saw Mr McCahon at his best. Here a magnificent stretch of plain is divided into paddocks, each of which is distinguished from the other after the manner of a painting by Paul Klee but without that almost niggling quality which prevents me from ranking the latter as any other than a great minor painter”.

(Summers 1953, p.59)

This painting (now known as *Canterbury Plains* [1951] and donated to the Christchurch Art Gallery in 2018 by Martin Prior<sup>136</sup>) is most probably that which McCahon wrote about to Brasch in September 1950:

“Have started a landscape (Heathcote) & am finding it most difficult having developed a feeling for landscape & people – landscape without, seems without a heart. But good discipline for the head”.

(Simpson 2019, pp.161, 163; (full page image of painting on p 162).

Brasch had apparently been suggesting that McCahon include more detail in his paintings – something he attempted in this painting, as he wrote to Ron O’Reilly ( Simpson 2024 p.123)

The Priors purchased the painting, which then raised the issue of how to transport it. As McCahon later wrote in 1977 (March 2) to Wellington art dealer Peter McLeavey:

“Arthur Prior & I on bicycles so lugged between us from Barbour street to the back of Heathcote where they lived – the landscape is

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<sup>136</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/christchurch-life/art-and-stage/101920102/colin-mccahon-painting-donated-to-christchurch>

It appears that Prior hung this landscape in his University office: <https://art-newzealand.com/8-mccahontg/> [Art New Zealand Issue 8 November/December/January 1977-78]

To see the painting: <https://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001674>

from a hill south of the Prior Christchurch home & looking north. They were very good friends. Mary was writing a huge analysis of Moby Dick. Caselberg<sup>137</sup> was in the group & O'Reilly & miles of students. Arthur introduced me to new thinking about infinity. I reeled home on my bike under a huge starry Canterbury sky." (Simpson 2019 p.163)

In that letter, and reproduced in Simpson (2019), is McCahon's sketch of how he and Prior carried the painting home (p.163) :

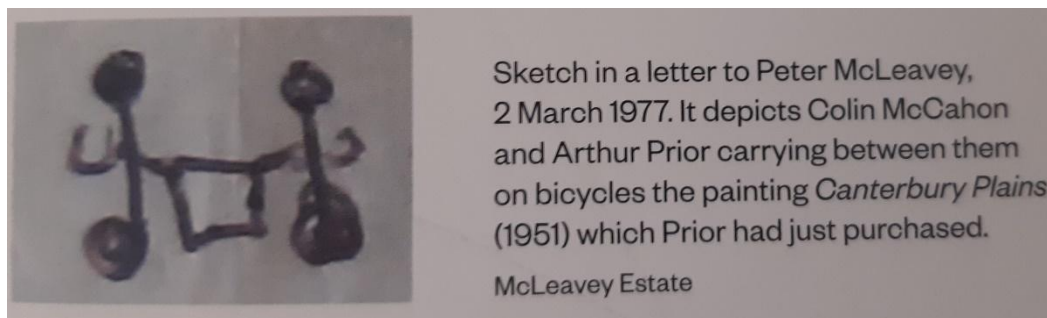


Figure 2: McCahon's sketch of him and Prior transporting the McCahon painting by bicycle.

## Letter 26: 21/11/52<sup>138</sup>: The Logic of Obligation

[This letter is reproduced in full. Prior would publish a version of the article in 1956 in *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* under the title "A note on the logic of obligation". (source: <https://popper-prior.nz/items/show/360>) However, it is clear upon viewing this 1956 article<sup>139</sup> that it differs substantially from what was offered to *Landfall*.]

Dear Charles,

I enclose herewith my piece on the "The Logic of Obligation." I mentioned to you at the Group Show<sup>140</sup> that this sort of stuff has already been tried out on Chemistry students here, & I gather from George

<sup>137</sup> John Caselberg (1924-2007), writer and poet, collaborated with McCahon on a number of projects. He married the daughter of painter Toss Woolaston and was also a close friend of Brasch and contributor to *Landfall*.

<sup>138</sup> A one-page handwritten letter on CUC letterhead

<sup>139</sup> See: [https://www.persee.fr/doc/phlou\\_0035-3841\\_1956\\_num\\_54\\_41\\_4861](https://www.persee.fr/doc/phlou_0035-3841_1956_num_54_41_4861)

<sup>140</sup> The art exhibition by the Christchurch Group artists. The catalogue can be viewed: <https://christchurchcitylibraries.com/Heritage/Publications/Art/TheGroup/pdfs/1952.pdf> The catalogue includes reference the Prior's McCahon landscape, and in the list of Friends of the Group are Brasch, O'Reilly and "Mrs. A. Prior."

Hughes<sup>141</sup> at Victoria that he has been introducing non-philosophers to it there.

If your aesthetic objection to arrows is beyond cure, they can be replaced by the abbreviation “imp.”, thus:–

OA imp.MA

In that case it could be said in introducing the symbolism that Dr. von Wright<sup>142</sup> uses an arrow to express the implication of one prop. by another, but in compliance with editorial conceptions of elegance, we shall here use “imp.”

Candidly, my own preference is for arrows. In my view a good & clear logical symbolism not only is not ugly but is one of the most beautiful things in the world, & for von Wright’s purposes ( & some others) the arrow is very clear & suitable, though for other purposes again, & especially for the symbolizing of proofs , the best is a Polish symbolism which has in its formulae nothing but letters ( not even brackets); though my experience is that beginners & outsiders find the Polish stuff difficult to follow.

Now the thing’s typed the ending looks better than I thought, but you could if you liked insert between the 4<sup>th</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> lines from the bottom of p.7.

(Perhaps Mr Fairburn could exercise his wit upon it.)

Am inclined to be agin this, though.

Yours

Arthur

### **Letter 27: 27/12/52<sup>143</sup>: The Logic of Obligation**

A brief response to the “The Logic of Obligation’; from Brasch [reproduced in full]

Dear Arthur,

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<sup>141</sup> George Hughes (1918 -1991) Irish-born philosopher; the first Chair in Philosophy at Victoria University of Wellington 1951-1984. As a logician, he had much to do with – and was influenced by – Prior.

<sup>142</sup> Prior is here referring to the deontic logic proposed by Georg Henrik von Wright in “Deontic Logic” *Mind*, 60(237): 1–15 (1951).

<sup>143</sup> A short typewritten, unsigned note from Brasch, typed as reply on the back of Prior’s letter.

I've read this with interest, and thought about it, and it doesn't seem to me that it's quite Landfall's meat. I agree entirely with your remarks about 'academic'<sup>144</sup>, but this I am sure would appeal to so few of Landfall's readers that I don't feel justified in printing it; and you could find a place where it would be more appreciated. I'm sorry and I return it with many thanks.

This exchange marks a significant point in Prior's thought and writing. His move into formal logic and, as noted, Polish notation, limited what he could write, philosophically or societally, for a non-academic audience. 1952 had seen his final attempt to write philosophically, for a public, non-academic audience in New Zealand, which had only resulted in his brief exchange with Fairburn in the pages of *Landfall*. But as Brasch emphasized, there was a very limited audience in New Zealand for discussion of symbolic logic. As such, 1952 is the watershed moment for Prior's philosophical career. Any residual belief that he could combine philosophy with more general public intellectual writing – whether in *Landfall* or the *Listener* or the presbyterian *Outlook* was dashed on the rock of Polish notation. It is from 1953 that Prior, finally, focusses on becoming an academic philosopher. (Grimshaw 2020)

There is then a gap of almost six years in the recorded correspondence to do with *Landfall* between Prior and Brasch. Yet, despite, as noted, Prior's increasingly singular focus on philosophy he obviously maintained an interest in – and discussion of – wider societal issues as this letter from Brasch makes clear. The context for this was a statement made by Prior, on immigration, in his role as president of the Canterbury Council for Civil Liberties (15 June 1957).<sup>145</sup> Prior had been involved its establishment in 1954, along with his C.U.C colleague, economist and socialist Wolfgang Rosenberg.

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<sup>144</sup> Obviously, this refers some comment made by Prior in the submitted article. There is no carry-over of this to the revised, final article published in 1956.

<sup>145</sup> See: "Immigration Act Criticised", *Press* 15 June 1957, p.12.

[https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19570615.2.95?end\\_date=31-12-1958&items\\_per\\_page=10&query=Prior+immigration&snippet=true&sort\\_by=byDA&start\\_date=01-01-1956&type=ARTICLE](https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19570615.2.95?end_date=31-12-1958&items_per_page=10&query=Prior+immigration&snippet=true&sort_by=byDA&start_date=01-01-1956&type=ARTICLE)

And the reply of the Minister of Immigration, *Press* 4 July 1957 p19

[https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19570704.2.212?end\\_date=31-12-1958&items\\_per\\_page=10&query=civil+liberties+immigration&snippet=true&start\\_date=01-01-1953&type=ARTICLE](https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19570704.2.212?end_date=31-12-1958&items_per_page=10&query=civil+liberties+immigration&snippet=true&start_date=01-01-1953&type=ARTICLE)

## Letter 28: 5/6/58<sup>146</sup>: Immigration policy

[from Brasch, reproduced in full]

Dear Arthur,

I have been looking for someone to enquire into our immigration policy<sup>147</sup>. I sounded Keith Sinclair, who once wrote a very trenchant review for *Here & Now*<sup>148</sup> of R.A. Lochore's *From Europe to N.Z.*<sup>149</sup>, but he, though interested, wasn't able to undertake it. Since then I heard of your interest in immigration, and I wonder if you would be prepared to make a survey of the matter? Among the questions to be asked, I assume, are, Why do we admit at present only Dutch, Germans, Danes and a few other Europeans but no Latins at all? Should we admit Asians? What should we do about Samoans and other Polynesians who might conceivably become a problem here as West Indians are in England?<sup>150</sup>

I shall be very glad if you are interested and have time to enquire.

Yours sincerely

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<sup>146</sup> A one-page typewritten unsigned letter from Brasch, with the address 58a Herriot Row, Dunedin (the cottage where Brasch lived until his death in 1973)

<sup>147</sup> The article ("A case for Immigration", *Landfall* 14.4 December 1960 pp.377-389) was finally written by A.R. Entwisle who worked in the Adult Education department of Otago university and went on to contribute a number of articles to *Landfall*.

<sup>148</sup> *Here & Now* was a left-wing monthly magazine of cultural, literary and social comment published in Auckland (October 1949-November 1957).

<sup>149</sup> R.A. Lochore. *From Europe to New Zealand : an account of our continental European settlers* (Wellington [N.Z.] : A.H. & A.W. Reed, in conjunction with the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, 1951.) This included such statements as "We must make new Britishers: by procreation, and by assimilation; by making suitable aliens into vectors of the British way of life." (p.89).

Lochore (1903-1991) was a public servant and diplomat. He was a very forceful and influential advocate for not only a white New Zealand immigration policy, but a more so a Northern European one, opposing southern European and Asian migration. He was suspected of being a Nazi sympathizer following his time studying in Germany in the 1930s.

<sup>150</sup> A reference to the Notting Hill riots, September 1958.

### **Letter 29: 7/6/58<sup>151</sup>: Immigration policy**

In this short note, Prior says he is too busy but suggests Shirley Smith<sup>152</sup>, the wife of Bill Sutch<sup>153</sup>, as she “prepared a lengthy memo a while ago for Civil Liberties about existing immigration policy”.

### **Letter: 30 9/9/58<sup>154</sup>**

This, the final letter in this collection, is a brief reply to Brasch’s congratulations on Prior’s appointment to the second chair in Philosophy at Manchester university.

## **Conclusion**

The value of these *Landfall* letters is they provide a new way to track the changes in Prior’s thought, focus, interests and intellectual development. Over the course of the letters ‘Prior the public intellectual’ transitions into ‘Prior the logician’. In the post-war years *Landfall* first offered possibilities, but then frustration for Prior as he became aware there was very limited appetite or indeed interest in questions of philosophy – or more particularly, abstract and symbolic philosophy – even amongst what could be termed the cultural elite. Yet as is clear from these letters, Charles Brasch offered a valuable friendship and role as sounding-board for Prior’s writing and thinking as someone who understood what literary cultural journals offered elsewhere, even if such offerings were severely limited in New Zealand. While philosophy was for Prior part of the humanities, and therefore deserved a place in a New Zealand cultural journal, it seems that logic was often, a step – and a demand – intellectually too far for the readers of *Landfall*. Yet perhaps in the end it was the limitations of *Landfall* that enabled (and perhaps drove) Prior to fully commit to logic?

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<sup>151</sup> A one-page handwritten letter under a handwritten heading, Phil. Dept. Univ. of Canterbury, Church.

<sup>152</sup> Shirley Smith (1916-2007) prominent lawyer and human rights campaigner, married economist William (Bill) Sutch 1944.

<sup>153</sup> William (Bill) Sutch (1907-1975) leading New Zealand economist, public intellectual and diplomat Accused of spying for the KGB, (and long suspected of communist sympathies), he was tried, but was acquitted and died (of ill health) soon after. There is on-going dispute and speculation as to the nature of his activities and involvement.

<sup>154</sup> A one-page handwritten letter on CUC letterhead.

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