

Foreign Correspondences

by William Mills

A Jug of Wine, A New Zealand Trout



With Missouri frozen solid for two February weeks in a row, naturally one's thoughts turn to the Southern Hemisphere. There were some hot spots in our beloved country even this winter—Miz Hillary was testifying before a federal grand jury, the Rose Law Firm was smoking, and Mr. Starr was building a few fires of his own.

Nearer to home, though, my friend Woody Cozad had been elected to head the Republican Party here in Missouri, and I felt with the state in such capable hands I could surely go south to the land of the Kiwis and startle a few trout. And as always, do a recon for places to relocate when the hate speech toward white males becomes intolerable.

Auckland, on North Island, spreads out around a couple of harbors and its excellent seafood is well known. I hopped in a rental car and headed down to the wharf, suddenly realizing the whole country was driving on the wrong side of the road. The car company had no automatic transmissions and so on the trip downtown, my right and left frontal lobes were stumbling over each other to change sides. After the appropriate aggressive movements, the Kiwis graciously gave way. For lunch I had a half dozen Bluff oysters and then their rock lobster, which Kiwis insist on calling "crayfish," and as my family in Louisiana would insist, misspelling in the bargain, knowing full well it's "crawfish." I must say, though, I would like to see the Cajun's face who pulled one of these big babies into his pirogue.

After taking a round trip on the Devonport commuter ferry to get a view of the city skyline and the many sailboats in Waitemata Harbor, I walked the downtown streets, coming upon a shop that

specialized in things Scotch. The population of New Zealand is overwhelmingly of British ancestry, and a large number of these are Scotch. Straightaway I began looking for the tartan of the Munro clan, my own on my mother's side, and found it. One can buy tartan in several places in New Zealand, especially Dunedin.

As a Kiwi remarked to me, New Zealand is a "wee country," with just under three and a half million people. Seventy percent of these live on North Island, and of these, eight to nine hundred thousand live in Auckland. Although it may be a "wee country," in the last two world wars (as James Michener has observed), "Among the allies, she had the highest percentage of men in arms—much higher than the United States—the greatest percentage overseas, and the largest percentage killed." Between the two wars, New Zealand tracked along with many other countries in its fascination with socialism, and conjunctive with this fascination occurred the attendant power that accretes to a government caught up in the necessities of war. And, lo, in the late 30's, the welfare state came to the Kiwis. Like some of the other "victors," New Zealand's socialists took a couple of decades to shred the economy and Brazilianize the NZ dollar.

But, then, an anomalous thing happened on the way to the bottom. As a former cabinet member told me in Auckland, the Labour Party (!), not the National Party, took up stringent reforms from 1984 to 1989. In 1985 there were 88,000 civil servants (I know, I know, would that we had so few), and today there are 35,000. Ah, that our Democrats could be injected with this tonic. Furthermore, the country gave up on the unskilled being led by the unqualified, i.e., state-ownership of business, and the government began to return such things as railroads and insurance to those who either knew how to run them or were replaced by those who could.

In earlier times, 85 percent of exports went to England, with all the accompanying transportation costs, and now only 6.1 percent goes there. Tourists in 1985 numbered 750,000, and in 1996 the Kiwis are shooting for 1.3 million. Getting courage from their Labour colleagues, members of the National Party who

came to power in 1990 managed to put a leash on the labor unions. Now the NZ dollar is strong, rising just a tad during my visit. As a matter of fact, this same former cabinet member confided that Labour could probably have stayed in power, but the prime minister fell in love with his speechwriter, and she started running the country (get me the White House on the phone, I think I have an idea).

Traditionally, the government has been controlled by the party that won the most seats in Parliament. What could result from this system, and what has resulted, was a party that might barely get more seats than the others but controlled the government, displeasing a very large share of the electorate. With this weak mandate, the government often had a difficult time putting its own programs through. Growing discontent with the status quo led to a referendum on a plan called MMP (Mixed Member Proportion). New Zealanders have told me that perhaps a majority of the voters did not really understand what MMP meant (certainly not its consequences), but the referendum passed as a part of a "throw the rascals out" reaction. MMP passed by 52 percent against 48 percent. One change would be to expand the number of members of Parliament from 99 to 120. Of the 120, 60 will be elected in the traditional way, from their constituencies. The other 60 MP's will be elected from party lists. Each voter has two votes: one for his constituent MP and one for his party list. Thus, should the New Zealand Alliance poll 20 percent of the vote, while it might theoretically gain no constituent MP's, it would have 20 percent of the pool of party list MP's, or at least 12 MP's.

On the face of it, MMP sounds more "democratic," but at least two results are now apparent. Voters may well vote for their local constituent ("he's a good old joe"), but may vote another party's list. (Though the parliamentary system is not like our own, such a vote might be like a Democrat voting for Reagan but otherwise voting a straight Democratic list). A second result will lead to dirtier politics. Smoke-filled room deal-cutting is almost a certainty now.

Concluding that I did not have the time to include in my travels the much

recommended Bay of Islands region several hours north of Auckland, I headed south along the main Highway 1, through Hamilton and on to the largest lake in New Zealand and the center of North Island, Lake Taupo. On the way I observed what was to be confirmed everywhere I went in the country, that Kiwis are consummate stock raisers and farmers. Like their ancestors from Britain, they keep their fence rows, paddocks, and farmhouse yards tidy and trim. This is true of farms far from towns so there is no question of gentrification by city wage earners. These are working farms.

Approaching Taupo, I passed the Wairakai Geothermal Project, which has tapped the clouds of steam from underground shafts, and which drives electric generators. I also stopped off at Huka Falls, and from the footbridge over the Waikato River felt its booming power. The next morning I was snapped to consciousness by the "varoom" of a new red Ferrari that had parked in the courtyard of the motel. A teenaged boy and his girlfriend off for an early start over the curvy mountain roads.

Not making connections with a fly-fishing guide, I engaged a charter boat for some trolling after rainbows. This would not normally have been my choice of fishing, but the scenery was great, and my guide, Gus Te Moana, the only Maori among the many guides on the lake, was the perfect companion. After either retirement from one job in industry, or downsizing (I never asked), he had started his own charter boat service. In his late 50's or early 60's, deeply tanned and silver headed, he explained the three most common kinds of trolling on the lake: harling, lead-lining, and down-rigging. In England, harling is trailing a fly behind a boat for salmon while it's being rowed back and forth between river banks, but as near as I could gather, what it meant on Taupo is surface trolling with a fly tied about a foot from the back lure. In lead-lining, the lure is tied to from six to 12 feet of nylon line, which is in turn tied to lead line, whose weight takes it down perhaps 25 feet.

We would use the down-rigging method. After we reached the best fishing grounds, Gus tied lures on the two lines, then further down, attached round, ten-pound lead weights which were dropped to 113 feet, carefully measured out by small electric winches that I

noticed had been made in Canada. The rods were then laid out almost horizontal in outrigger fashion. The depth was determined by water temperature, and during these warm days, the rainbows were most comfortable quite deep. We got comfortable ourselves and, as fishermen are wont to do, sat back in our fishing chairs and talked about worldly matters, all this with Mt. Ruapehu, the tallest mountain on North Island (an active volcano) in the background.

I brought up the New Zealand First political party, which is headed by Winston Peters, a Maori. I didn't know anything about him and merely remarked that I had been told he was quite a handsome man, whereupon Gus broke out in a long laughing spell, gasping, "Yes, yes, a very handsome man." I think Gus meant something much more than this, but I didn't pursue the matter. A little later we were enjoying high talk about the advantages of traveling to other places, noting the different ways people solve the problems of living and Gus said, "Yes, yes, seeing other members of the family." About that time, world talk was stopped in its tracks as a six-pound rainbow hit the lure and the focus of my attention was much reduced.

I gave my trout to the owner of the motel and the next morning drove south along Highway 5 to Napier. Luckily I had filled up the car with gas before I left because the drive was through sparsely inhabited mountainous terrain. The road was through the Waipunga River valley and periodically the road crossed the river itself. Besides the Waipunga Falls, the river itself screams "Trout!"

Some say the attraction of Napier is the architecture in the Art Deco style that was introduced following the earthquake of 1931 that devastated the town, but for me it was the wine region of Hawke Bay. The top three wine regions in New Zealand are Henderson Valley (northwest of Auckland), Hawke Bay on the east coast of North Island, and Marlborough on the northeast of South Island (which includes Blenheim).

These days New Zealanders are taking their wine-making very seriously and are justifiably becoming world famous. Wine-making took its first steps in the early and middle parts of the 19th century, but the industry really took off in the 1960's. While there are certainly good reds, for example Corbans' Merlot from the Marlborough region, the Chardonnays and Sauvignon Blancs steal the

spotlight. Of the ten top-rated wines available in the United States as listed by *Wine Spectator* in 1994, nine were whites, almost all Chardonnays, four of which came from Hawke Bay and four from the Marlborough region. Using 1993 figures, which do not reflect the vigorous growth of the last three years, of the four and a half million cases of wine produced, three and a half million were consumed locally, and of the million exported, only 19,000 cases (2 percent) made it to the United States.

There is something gratifying about driving along roads bordered by vineyards, whether in Italy, Yugoslavia, Chile, or the Republic of Georgia. I know there have been interesting, certainly powerful, societies which did not have vineyards, but I would not prefer to live in them. It's one reason I become more comfortable year after year as my own Missouri wine region continues to grow and improve. One of the felicities for the wine lover meandering about Hawke Bay is to come serendipitously upon a vineyard and winery that produces splendid wine which can be had only by coming there. This happened to me while I was looking for a place to have lunch south of Napier. I came upon Crab Farm Winery which also served a ploughman's lunch. A pleasant young woman suggested the '94 Chardonnay with my potato roasty topped with mounds of bacon and avocado. The wine was full-bodied, fruity, and reflected its aging in French oak. The winery was only 16 years old. The land of the vineyard had come into the family in the 19th century as a payment of debt. The owners discovered the "farm" was just mudflats and tidal water, covered with crabs. Then the 1931 earthquake raised the land above sea level. Toward the end of my lunch the young woman remarked that she was going to the Olympics in Atlanta this summer. I asked, "As a participant?" "No," she replied, "I'm going with a group from New Zealand to tell the people there about Jesus Christ." I told her I thought Atlanta could surely use her. An hour later, feeling much relaxed and wanting to avoid taking a mid-day nap, I flung myself into Hawke Bay, bracing against the rough, cold surf of the South Pacific.

There's lots of good fishing on North Island, but South Island was beckoning. From windy Wellington, the capital, I took a light plane across Cook Strait for Picton. Likely the descriptive "windy"

gets its name from the big time air currents funneled through the strait, but of course Parliament is there, too. At the landing approach, we hit the deepest air pocket I've ever experienced.

I had hoped to rent a car here, but the Blenheim Wine Festival was going on and there was not a car to be had. I took the bus to Christchurch hoping for better luck and was stalled on the narrow highway for two hours while firemen and helicopter crews cut four young people out of their cars after a head-on collision. Had we been a minute or two earlier, my own story could have been quite different. As it was, we continued along the beautiful coast road, the grass along the hill slopes now golden instead of the green of North Island, and sometimes came upon seals sunning on the rocks.

Christchurch is very British, especially the older part, and the punters were out on the River Avon as it wound through the Botanic Garden. Not far away in the park was another wine festival (I told you the Kiwis take their wine seriously). I had trout on my mind, however, and quickly motored south, crossing the Rakaia and the Rangitata rivers, all noted for trout and salmon, and finally turning toward the Southern Alps, following the Waitaki. I was looking for an American I never found, in Omarama, but luckily fell into superb company and magnificent trout streams. This was the Mackenzie country of South Canterbury.

Roger Webb, my guide, was about 30 and the complete outdoorsman. He had almost quit guiding fishermen because of a back injury, but a local girl told me he knew the place like the back of his hand. He had worked for some years on the big sheep stations, a lot of the time building those long fences that seem to go on forever, disappearing over mountains. Much of the time now he works at taxidermy, his shop full of boar, red stag, whitetail deer, chamois, and tahr. These species have all been brought into New Zealand, the red stag, for example, from selected herds in Scotland and Germany, the tahr from the Himalayas. Without predators, species like the deer have multiplied so rapidly that they're considered pests and there is open season.

The rainbows and browns were introduced only 100 years ago from California, and did they ever find a home! They have proliferated because of New Zealand's clear, unpolluted cold streams.

My favorite stream while staying in Omarama was the Ahuriri River that ran close to town. It originated high in the mountains and flowed through huge sheep stations in a magnificent valley. The country reminds me of the parts of Wyoming north of where Chilton Williamson hangs out and has been known to wet a fly himself. All around Mackenzie country, the brown trout is king, though there are rainbows. My tops was four pounds, but there are lots bigger ones around. In some ways they're harder to catch because the water is so clear and they can see further. Roger was an expert stalker. He spied a huge brown from a high bridge, and after first offering it to me, he scampered down the difficult rock incline, flipped a dry fly under a mess of overhanging limbs and nailed him.

One of Roger's previous occupations was as rabbitier, which brings up one of New Zealand's unfortunate introductions. It probably sounded like a good idea at the time, but it has proved devastating. With no real predators, rabbits reach such colossal numbers they literally leave the ground bare. I wouldn't have believed it until I saw for myself, and I was assured I had not seen the really bad areas. Rabbits can simply ruin a farm and a farmer. Often, it's a catch-22 situation. With no grass the farmer is ruined, yet on the other hand his farm may be marginal enough that the cost of killing the rabbits ruins him. Roger shot them from a three-wheeler or a motorcycle and had to quit because the rough ride hurt his back too much. I asked him the most he had killed in a day, and he replied that with a partner, 332. That's at a NZ dollar a rabbit. The other method is poison. Molasses and oats are put out twice, and on the third application the mix contains a poison called 1080. This is not cheap either. 1080's approval by the government may be removed (due to poisonous residues) in the future, and currently that leaves the gun or trying to fence them out. I offered to send the Kiwis a sack of bobcats, but they said they were not sure that wouldn't be worse than the rabbits.

Roger took me to visit Ribbon Wood, a 35,000-acre sheep station not far from Omarama run by Colin and Gwenda McKay. Roger had worked for the McKays at one time, and when we first arrived we saw their son and daughter, about 19 and 20, worming a group of sheep as it was pushed through the corral

alleyway. They gave us directions to their dad, who was on his way to fix a paddock gate. While he worked and talked about Ribbon Wood, the rabbit problem came up and he estimated that he spent annually about \$10,000 (NZ) trying to control them. Later while we visited some Douglas Fir plots planted by him with government assistance, he discussed the current low wool prices. Wool, like so many of New Zealand's products, depends upon factors and conditions outside the country and largely beyond its control. One such condition was a long mild winter in Europe. Wool clothing was not as much in demand. He said the sheep farmer had to be more diversified and flexible than before in order to survive. Focusing on a single breed, one bred mainly for the carcass, for example, makes one more vulnerable. In addition, cattle raising can be added to the mix for more protection.

The sheep station began in the flat of a valley, but went right over the mountains. A lot of fencing, a lot of hard work. Sheep farming (with of course cattle) is deeply entwined with New Zealand's history, its image of itself. But like animal husbandry in the United States, it is being battered by many forces. Farm labor has been driven out or drawn to the cities, and young potential farmers do not have capital for a start. In the magazine the *New Zealand Farmer* someone was mourning this way of life and comparing it unfavorably with the "tatty international culture" represented by the opening of a Las Vegas-style casino in Auckland and all that came with it. Before I came to New Zealand, someone had described the country like the States in the 1950's. A kind of innocence and purity, a slower pace. All that sounded good to me. It is with some regret that I foresee what is likely coming. Increasing homogenization of their distinctive culture by the "tatty" New World Order and what we would call the Streisandization of rural life where the more numerous high-rise urbanites bully their scarcer rural citizens, fouling the landscape with their tony jackboots while visiting. After all, the left is the offspring of the festering city.

For the time being, though, New Zealand is a natural paradise. It's no place for any of you Euro- or Anglo-phobes, but if you'd like to see how another group of immigrants made it in style outside of the damp, cold motherland, come ahead. If you're looking

about for a place to emigrate, get a copy of NZ's Self-Assessment Guide for residency. Acceptance for residency is based on a points system which considers education (12 years of schooling equals two points, for example, postgraduate degree, 15), work experience, age, and other settlement factors. One must have at least 21 points under what is termed the General Category. There is also a Business Category requiring an investment of between \$500,000 to \$750,000 (NZ). And you must be able to read and converse in English. Obviously we in the United States could learn something about immigration from New Zealand. Do people slip through the cracks? Yes, but nothing like through the sieve we insist on calling our national borders. With any place in New Zealand never more than 70 miles from the sea and clear mountain streams abounding, the country should certainly be on your list for a winter visit or for the bigger step of emigration.

William Mills is a novelist and poet whose latest work of fiction is Properties of Blood (University of Arkansas Press).

Letter From New York City

by *Nicholas Stix*

Crime Stories



According to former New York Police Commissioner William Bratton, New York City is safer than it has been in years. And if you believe that, I've got a great deal for you, on a slightly used bridge.

Last December, the NYPD announced that violent felonies had dropped 17.2 percent for the previous 12 months, their biggest drop in 23 years. Murder, robbery, and assault went down 26 percent, 18 percent, and 10 percent, respectively, while rape somehow went down only five percent. (Clouding the issue even more, Board of Education spokeswoman Lena Kim told me last February 21 that city schools had recorded a 16 percent *increase* in violent crime during the 1994-95 school year.)

Last December also saw two massacres. Telling the black customers of a Jewish-owned, Harlem clothing store under "boycott" to leave, Roland Smith (a/k/a Abubunde Mulocko) then set a blaze which killed seven employees and himself. That the dead were all "persons of color," while three survivors whom Smith/Mulocko had shot were white, outraged his conspiracy-sniffing supporters. And in a botched robbery of a North Bronx shoe store, drug dealer Michael Vernon shot five people to death. (Citing "confidentiality," the Housing Authority covered up much of Vernon's violent past. Despite Vernon's remorseless confession to the massacre, and to having killed two cabbies in 1990 and 1993, Bronx District Attorney Robert Johnson immediately decided *against* seeking the death penalty; it was Johnson's refusal to seek the death penalty in the March shooting of a white police officer by a Dominican thug that led Governor Pataki to remove the D.A., a controversial act that will doubtless end up in court.) More typically, last September 22 in Lower Manhattan, a Mutt-and-Jeff team of "Crooklyn boys" tried to mug me, the only white on a full A train. "Manhattan makes it, Crooklyn takes it."

All of the above assailants were black men.

Things weren't always so bad. While visiting my sister during the small hours on Manhattan's Lower East Side in the late 1970's, nobody even looked at me funny. In 1990, an octogenarian lawyer told me of the long, romantic walks he and his wife had taken from Manhattan to Brooklyn on Depression-era Saturday nights, without being accosted.

Today, some prosperous New Yorkers hand over their money on the street to black males on demand, as a black man did in Brooklyn's affluent Park Slope area last January 20, without being touched or even threatened. The declarations of middle-class mugging victims—"Thank God, I'm alive." "They can take my money"—are music to any potential robber's ears. Well, they can't have mine.

When black pundits and politicians are not affirming images of violent "black males," they are accusing whites of racism for believing them. In fact, most middle-class blacks are also terrified of young black males. Educated civilians and journalists of all colors reflexively note the "rule" about not looking "anyone" (i.e., black males) in the

eye. However, the times that I have gotten hurt—all since 1991—were almost always when I *did not* stare down a criminal. (Subway muggers will rarely undertake anything without first landing a sucker punch, or otherwise getting the drop on a mark.) Playing on white fears, even black male noncombatants harass whites. Calling their bluff enrages them, whereupon they hope aloud for assistance from real "mopes" (cop talk for criminals).

Strangers bond or split over crime stories. Arresting two would-be robbers while off-duty in Brooklyn, a white cop saw his attackers cop pleas to misdemeanors and do two days of community service. A black mother from Far Rockaway complains that the police refused to arrest the 17-year-old black girl who had slashed her daughter's chest. Working-class, black female "subway buddies" tell of unreported muggings. Yet middle-class black women I meet deny they are in any danger, and defend the black men who routinely attack black women as the victims of racist police.

Expressing upper-middle-class whites' desperate hope for appeasement, the *New York Times* portrayed Smith/Mulocko as a man of principle, the Harlem Massacre as born of economics, not racism, and has misreported stories, in its search for violent crimes it could attribute to whites.

Often marked by "shank"-scarred faces and arms, and sporting jailhouse muscles, the black, and increasingly American-born "New Yorican" and "Dominicanyork" criminals in question were usually raised by mothers who neither wed nor worked. Of 7.5-8 million New Yorkers, 1.4 million are on the dole, including 300,000 whom democratic socialist Mayor David N. Dinkins (1990-1994) moved onto generous, federally funded "supplemental security income," in cooking the books for the 1993 election.

Seeking to lure business back to the city, Mayor Dinkins' police commissioners, Lee Brown and Raymond Kelly, began reporting crime "creatively," even by New York standards. Liberal Republican Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's former commissioner, William Bratton, has evidently continued this practice. Last October 11, the *Daily News* published a memo by Deputy Inspector Anthony Kissik, commander of The Bronx' 50th Precinct, which merely formalized the city's unwritten policy of "defining down" many