



Bill Pearson (1922-2002)

William Harrison (Bill) Pearson, (1922-2002), was a novelist, short story writer, essayist and critic. He was born in Greymouth and attended Grey Main and then Greymouth Technical High School (1934-1938). He had such fond memories of the latter, and of two inspirational teachers in Snowy Hutton and Ted Kehoe, that he requested that some of his ashes be scattered on the school grounds.

Pearson served in World War II, later completing a PhD at King's College London in 1952. After his return to New Zealand, he spent most of his adult life living in Auckland where he lectured in English at the University (1954-1987).

While living in London, Pearson wrote his famous essay, "Fretful Sleepers: a Sketch of New Zealand Behaviour and its Implications for the Artist", published in the literary magazine *Landfall* in 1952. In hindsight, this famous and long-lived critique of puritan conformity can be seen as the protestations of a necessarily secretive gay man, who suppressed his artistic instincts, unable to create a homosexual protagonist in his major - and only - novel *Coal Flat*. Set in Blackball, the novel created a local sensation on publication in 1963: just who were these characters based on, Coasters wanted to know?

As a university lecturer, Pearson befriended Maori students on campus, and helped many; he is remembered as a pioneering figure in New Zealand literary studies, and is one of Greymouth's most illustrious sons.

