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All contributions and content enquiries:

Women's Studies Journal
Phyllis Herda
Department of Women's Studies
University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland

All subscription and advertising enquiries:

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Editorial

AOREWA McLEOD, November 1998

The *Women's Studies Journal* put out its first issue in 1984. In fourteen years there have been almost no articles on New Zealand women's writing, with the exception of a centennial Katherine Mansfield issue in 1988. Yet Women's Studies in the States grew out of English Departments. Many of the early and groundbreaking feminist academics, such as Germaine Greer and Kate Millett, came from a literary criticism background.

Most of the articles in the fourteen years of the *Women's Studies Journal* have come from a sociological/human sciences background. When I asked colleagues and graduate students in literature, none had heard of the *Journal*. I hope that this issue will suggest to feminist literary scholars that the *Women's Studies Journal* is a medium through which they might reach a wide range of feminist readers. There is still a great deal of work to be done on New Zealand's forgotten women writers, and on New Zealand's literary history from a feminist perspective. Four of the articles in this issue are by graduate students and I hope that their presence might encourage other students to use the *Journal* to share their research rather than leave it to languish unread on library shelves.

Briar Wood's article on the poetry of Tongan poet Konai Helu Thaman places this poet's work in the wider context of readings of the diversity of Pacific Islands literature in English. This important article discusses how Pacific Island literature can be read by outsiders. Albert Wendt writes: 'This article contributes a lot to our attempts to "evolve", develop Pacific ways of reading our literature. She also tries to "indigenise" outside literary theories.'

Tracey Slaughter's 'The Per/son Authorised: Married Women's Autobiography and the Death of the Author, 1882 and 1992' compares two autobiographical texts – Ellen Ellis's 1982 novel *Everything Is Possible to Will* and Lauris Edmond's 1989-1992 trilogy *Hot October, Bonfires in the Rain*, and *The Quick World* – and shows how analysis of literary texts can be as revelatory as sociological surveys. Although written a century apart, the two texts have striking similarities that show how little the institution of marriage has changed

between first- and second-wave feminism.

My own paper discusses the silencing of many earlier New Zealand women writers and asks what it was about New Zealand culture that was so detrimental to creative women.

Jane Maloney begins by quoting the opening lines from Robin Hyde's important but as yet unpublished 'The Book of Nadath' (1937):

> The words of Nadath, the false prophet, written in the year 1937, in a house that stands on a bay of New Zealand – a house of wood, iron and glass, and with the sea outside.

Her discussion of this long poem, which is 'thematically central to an understanding of Robin Hyde', focuses on the section titled 'The House of Woman' and on Hyde the feminist.

Janet Charman's 'My Ursula Bethell' is a unique piece for this journal in that here one of New Zealand's best known mid-career poets writes of her response to an earlier New Zealand woman poet. Charman records her personal voyage of discovery through Bethell's poetry to her conclusion that Bethell's lack of recognition is due to critical ambivalence regarding her lesbian identity.

Larissa Marno's 'Gender Imbalance in the New Zealand Feature Film Industry' points out that the output of New Zealand films 1992-97 has been dominated by male film makers. By comparing what has happened in Australia, with the Australian Film Commission, etc., with the New Zealand Film Commission, Creative New Zealand, etc., she concludes – read on!

I included **Marion Doherty's** piece on two South African novelists despite the fact that this journal is about New Zealand women. Her discussion of displacement and attempts to form national rootedness through a construction of the 'native' seemed to me exciting and intriguing in terms of New Zealand non-Maori talking about their identity. I imagine Doherty's ideas on 'the construction of the native' and the 'codification of the other' could lead to further discussion.

The collective based at Auckland University has completed three years of editing the *Women's Studies Journal*, which is looking for a new home. For the first time ever we have two offers: one from a group at Waikato University and one from a national networked collective.

Heka He Va`a Mei Popo:
Sitting on a Rotten Branch of the Breadfruit Tree: Reading the Poetry of Konai Helu Thaman

BRIAR WOOD

> *It is these very tensions, and not their absence, and not any possibility of resolving them, which makes me believe that the woman poet is now an emblematic figure in poetry, much as the modernist or romantic poets were in their time.*[1]

> For me the *post* in post-colonial does not just mean *after*; it also means *around*, *through*, *out of*, *alongside*, and *against* ...'[2]

> ... I believe that we in the Pacific ought to devise our own ways and means of judging and evaluating the worthwhileness of Pacific writing, a body of literature that is culturally rooted, meaningful and relevant for *our* particular contexts.[3]

The tensions to which the Irish poet Eavan Boland refers concern the entry of women as subjects into an English language poetic tradition that has predominantly, at least in the recent past, cast them as passive objects rather than writers and active practitioners of the art of poetry. Boland's discussion of her own set of specifically Irish cultural co-ordinates and the development of her career as writer is explored in terms of its difficulties and frustrations, but it also operates as a record of the achievements of a woman poet who succeeds in recording significant aspects of lives, times and social histories. The comment that the woman poet is an emblematic figure in the late twentieth century is, I think, very suggestive, since it enables the reader to make connections across cultures based on women's shared experience of female roles, yet remains open to interpretations that take into account cultural contrast and difference.

This reading of Tongan poet Konai Helu Thaman's poetry proceeds in the understanding that her writing has already been, and will continue to be interpreted in many ways. The essay has been developed in relationship to pedagogical concerns about readings of Pacific literature which raise cultural, national, linguistic, personal

and theoretical issues both in the Pacific and for those from geographical areas outside it. As the production of Pacific literature continues to grow, more and more readers and students from outside the region will develop a relationship with it. The purpose of this paper is to inquire into how this might proceed in terms of reading Konai Helu Thaman's poems, to identify some of the issues that emerge in reading the literature for outsiders and to raise questions for future reference.

Konai Helu Thaman has published four collections of poetry: *You, the Choice of My Parents* (1974), *Langakali* (1981), *Hingano* (1987), and *Kakala* (1993). Her identity as poet has been constructed from childhood, adolescence and various periods of residence in Tonga and Fiji, continued education in New Zealand, where she gained a Bachelor of Arts in Geography and the USA where she studied for her Masters Degree, as well as on-going international and inter-Pacific travel. A speaker and teacher in the Tongan language and in English language studies, she is involved in developing and strengthening Tongan language and cultural studies in the Kingdom of Tonga. At the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, where she currently works, Konai Helu Thaman holds a Chair in Pacific Education and Culture and the UNESCO Chair in Teacher Education and Culture, and is Head of the School of Humanities.

Her writing was developed during the 'first' or 'new wave' of Pacific writing in English in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although there were significant publications before this period, the post-independence era was a period of growth and expansion in literary production. The poet herself has described it as 'the golden age of Pacific writing'.[4] The early poetry explores post-colonial ambivalence and postmodern irony in some detail. *You the Choice of My Parents* was immediately recognised as an important first collection. It contains short and carefully observed, sometimes satirical poems that comment on the social situation of Pacific Islanders both at home and abroad. Thaman has described the collection as 'not so much a protest collection as a lament about loss and misunderstanding. In terms of these moods, I would say that later collections weren't much different.'[5] The collections certainly mourn loss in a variety of forms: the loss of human potential through colonialism, sexism and undemocratic political events, failures in communication, the loss of customary ways of human life through geographical change and human

intervention, and the losses that inevitably accompany life in terms of change, decay and death. The tone can be melancholic in the sense that loss involves an understanding of the uniqueness and irreplaceability of time and place, but the psychic work of the poems can also be read as an attempt to symbolise the gains as well as the losses of cultural and historical change. In one of the volcanic images typical of the metaphorical word/landscapes of Pacific literature, the poet describes '. . . KAO erupting in my head'. [6]

Though never directly colonised, the Kingdom of Tonga has been affected by the ripples of colonial activity in the Pacific. Thaman describes her own formal secondary education as a colonial influenced one. She has spoken about the exclusion of local culture and the rote learning of selected British writing as the legacy of a colonial system. Yet she has also differentiated her own attitudes from those writers in the Pacific who grew up in cultures that had been directly colonised. There can be no easy fit between the varying, context-based status of Tongan women and the global generalisations that sometimes necessarily accompany feminist literary analysis. The history of Konai Helu Thaman's kaainga (extended family) linked Tonga, Fiji and the Solomon Islands,where her grandparents were missionaries. Raised and influenced by a number of female relatives, she claims 'They were very strong personalities and even though Tonga was and still is a patriarchal society it never occurred to me that there was anything the boys could do that I couldn't do.'[7] A period in America, with its more informal attitude to language and literature encouraged her to develop her own poetry and her feminist beliefs have sprung from her experiences rather than from external or academic sources. It may be that the poet's appeal across Pacific cultures can be attributed to some extent to this combination of her national heritage of Tongan independence, the Pan-Pacific emphasis on Fijian internationalism and the global confidence imparted by some identification with the United States of America. Later works, while retaining an international perspective to some degree, continue to explore a specificity and pluralism located in Pacific cultures.

Pacific Literature and Pacific Ways

The diversity of Pacific literatures in English, their comparative newness and their basis in non-English language cultures means that they cannot be assumed to sit within the boundaries of contemporary

post-colonial literary theories, since so many of the latter have been developed with very little reference to the Pacific. It is my view that the continuing growth of Pacific literature, with its strong history of resistance to colonisation, emphasis on the preservation of indigenous languages and distance from colonial metropolitan centres will necessitate further shifts in theories of the post-colonial.

Chinua Achebe's essay 'The Novelist as Teacher' [8] located in the newness of African fiction in English draws a contrast between the role of the writer as social critic in European tradition and the uncertain relationship between writers and readers in African communities. The status of Pacific writers varies across time and location but it is arguable that this has been a source of strength since the idea of the literary is not contained and separated off in quite the same institutionalised ways that it has been in European culture. Though her medium is poetry rather than fiction, there is some compatibility in the development of Thaman's writing with Achebe's view that the socially active writer can encourage the young to value local culture in her own approach to her work. Proceeds from her poetry collections go back to the press in order to support less marketable publications about Pacific issues. In describing her literary development the poet emphasises the extent to which her composition of poetry in English developed out of the need to make an English language curriculum more accessible and acceptable to Tongan language students. This experience of the need to explain, communicate and find a middle way could also be understood in a wider sense as the on-going practice of the University of the South Pacific, where students from a wide range of cultural and language backgrounds meet, mix and work together.

Robert Kiste has written that '. . . for the indigenous people themselves, the very notion of a "Pacific region" and the identity of "Pacific Islander" have only become meaningful since World War Two.'[9] Though the terminology is new, an understanding of the long-standing cross cultural connections between what are, at this point in time, called 'Pacific' islands must surely precede Kiste's estimate. Epeli Hau`ofa has argued the case for the existence in the South Pacific of '. . . a single regional economy . . . the privileged groups of which share a single dominant culture with increasingly marginalised local sub-cultures shared by the poorer classes.'[10] At once decolonising and drawn unavoidably into an economic system dominated by

multinationals and military power, the Pacific, according to Hau`ofa, is 'a sub-group of the global unit'. He describes intellectual groups in which most established writers participate, as 'the intellectual arm of the ruling classes'.

Increasingly, he argues, these ruling classes are culturally homogeneous and 'they speak the same language, which is English' with variations on local languages modified through colonial contact. Ron Crocombe describes a generalised representative of this group as 'The Pan-Pacific Person'.[11] Characterised by a childhood on a home island, followed by life abroad, inter-ethnic descent and marriage and multicultural schooling, the Pan-Pacific person moves between worlds and is frequently involved in interaction with the world of international capitalism. While a description of Thaman's career fits this profile in some ways, it would be a mistake to underestimate the importance of a continuing relation to Tongan culture and society or to assume that status is determined predominantly by international standards. In Pacific cultures, status can be context based – altering from one district or one event to another. Further, Hooper and Huntsman point out that:

> The *matai* system of Western Samoa, the monarchy and nobles of Tonga and the Fijian chiefly system are all modified traditional hierarchies. They maintain a fundamental relevance for contemporary political life in the countries concerned, and the ideologies supporting them have persistence and power, as much 'for the people' as for 'the chiefs'.[12]

Thaman describes her Tongan roots as a source of support and strength as a woman. Yet for a woman poet, some sections of the poetry seem to suggest that the path to continuing publication has not been an easy one. The speaker in the poem 'Langakali', for example, is described as

> A commoner with no soul I journeyed
> In the grey hair of the sky,
> But I heard the song of the sea,
> Made my heart strong
> That I could still find a place. [13]

The search for a 'place' both for and in the space of the literary in the Pacific situates the implied speaker as poet between sea and sky, and therefore perhaps identified with the land, though 'Langakali'

laments the losses that have taken place in the homeland.

Epeli Hau`fa's most recent discussion 'The Ocean in Us' takes account of the importance of the 'traditional' or custom based power structures. Through fiction, satire and critical writing he has analysed some of the problems of the 'shallow ideology'[14] of the Pacific Way. He also describes the influence of neo-Marxism on the 1980s as one which tended to suppress discussion of national and regional difference within the Pacific. Hau`ofa outlines a description of the 'new Oceania' for 'emerging generations' which celebrates diversity, emphasises both local and diasporic connections, yet is largely 'independent of the Pacific Islands world of diplomacy and neocolonial dependency'. This description perhaps owes something to Wendt's feminised view of Oceania, though Wendt himself seems now to work within a more neutral use of the term Pacific.

My reading of Thaman's poetry situates it between the global and the local, and this 'in-betweenness' makes it difficult to posit a gendered reading of the poetry, which represents a fusion of diverse influences in a way that foregrounds difficulties and differences rather than attempting to erase or marginalise them, at the same time as it makes cross cultural connections. By focusing on disjunctive moments in time and space Thaman's poetry can open onto what Homi Bhabha and Frederic Jameson have described as a 'third space'. Bhabha describes this as the space of the synthesis of the new:

> The non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space – a third space – where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences.[15]

He argues that the importance of recognising contemporary societies as culturally mixed lies in the fact that it is the 'third space which enables other positions to emerge'.[16] Bhabha's sense of the post-colonial as a challenge to 'a consensual and collusive "liberal" sense of cultural community'[17] and involving 'cultural translation', split subjectivity and the metaphor of migration is relevant to a historicizing reading of Thaman's poetry.

Reading the literature of the Pacific can, in turn, problematise and redirect international and metropolitan-based criticism. Many of the future interpretations of Thaman's work may come from Pacific languages and they will be alert to interpretations I cannot approach.

This paper is limited by my position as an outsider in relation to Tongan language and culture. The existence of a Pacific-based critical tradition which, in a number of ways, is already engaged with the generalised insights of internationalist theory, is one possible way to approach reading the poems. For Albert Wendt, in his influential essay of 1976 'Towards a New Oceania',[18] Pacific cultures , both pre- and post-papalagi, had long been mobile and mixed. Vilsoni Hereniko finds a correspondence between Rotuman, other Pacific groups and post-colonial representations of historical periods in his categorisation of the contemporary as ao fo`ou ta – a 'new time' – in which Pacific cultural identities are 'negotiable'.[19]

The combinatory apect of the 'third space' can be compared with, though not collapsed into, what Albert Wendt described in an interview as the Samoan concept of 'va' or

> ... the space that relates all things ... the *va* between you and me is our relationship – a space, but also our relationship as human beings, an emotional relationship. And we must cherish and nourish and nurture that *va*. The concept of *va* is also related to outer space; our name for outer space is Va-nimo-nimo, 'the space that appears and disappears' – and gives meaning to all of us as individuals.[20]

Given this 'in-between space', what readings can be produced about what the poems have to say about structures of identity, language and history?

Tongan Language Traditions

Questions about how Konai Helu Thaman's English language work is suffused with the sounds, vocabulary and values of Tongan language culture and other Pacific cultures must surface for readers of the poetry. Futa Helu has worked through a comparison of some of the classificatory modes of Tongan and European poetry. He describes such a procedure as both convenient for the purposes of making connections and 'misleading' because 'the characteristics of Tongan poetry are essentially different from those of English poetry.'[21] The first important difference is that poetry in Tongan was and remains intertwined with the composition of dance and music – a combination called faiva. 'For the Tongan *punake* or poet', Helu argues, 'poetry is a rhymed composition which can be set to one or some of the set melodic patterns.' European poetry privileges rheto-

ric over rhythm, while Tongan poetry places equal importance on 'rhyme, rhythm and melody'. A second crucial difference is that Tongan poetry is 'essentially social poetry or collective lyricism' and is closer to the tightly structured poetry of the Metaphysical or Augustan poets than the Romantics. Helu regrets the encroachment of what is described as a 'sentimentality' in Tongan poetry, signified in the increasing use of private imagery and symbolism, which, the essay claims, can be traced to the influence of pop music and cinematic musicals.

While Pacific Island poetry written in English may take on new forms and references, shaped by both popular and literary influences, it can retain functional and even formal links with Tongan language poetry. Futa Helu also argues that Tongan poetry can be divided into ancient and modern. Examples of ancient varieties being fakatangi, a chanted short ballad and the tangi, which is likened to an elegy or lament over the death of a loved one, while modern poetry includes the hiva kakala or love lyric. In some instances – such as the haiku-like 'Wishful Thinking' section in *Kakala* – the poet has deliberately imitated the short form of some Tongan language poems. In other poems, the form varies but it may share some functional similarities with Tongan language genres. Helu asserts that classical Tongan poetry has a pervading melancholic mood – expressed as 'a brooding, depressed and dull state' and 'a sense of universal sadness and rejection which is in reality an assertion of power and joy'.[22] The dominant mood of Konai Helu Thaman's poetry could be described in similar terms.

Thaman has described the poem 'Langakali' as being like a fakatangi or lament.[23] It is an address to a tree (or a flower) – a tree from which fragrant flowers were plucked that has now become rare in Tonga. The langakali is called upon to testify to and confirm that changes have taken place – oral traditions are being lost, plastic flowers replace live ones. 'Hangale flowers, we'll pick no more – /Government houses have killed them all.'[24] Written after a long period abroad in pursuit of higher education and during pregnancy, the poem can also be read as a subtle meditation on maternal melancholy, the loss and separation that unavoidably accompany the birth and development of a child.

Collocott describes a 'very large class of poems' called laumatanga, which celebrate 'the scenic beauties and interesting localities

of Tonga'.[25] 'Langakali' can be connected to the function of traditions of laum-atanga and tangilaulau, in the sense that it is about place, but laments the loss of the distinctive beauty of the site. With its cataloguing of grievances, the poem could also be said to be like a healing chant, composed to express and expel unhappiness and anxiety. Tonga has a long history of herbal medicine, which the poem describes as threatened, so it is an ironic reflection on and an indictment of modern medicine that the hospital (Vaiola – also the name of a sacred lake and the site where Konai Helu Thaman attended creative writing classes) should also be the site of pollution. Perhaps this can be recognised as a metaphor for the way in which the disruption of cultural boundaries involves a disordering of the natural world.

While the implied speaker in 'Langakali' is a traveller between worlds who still has roots in Tonga, other poems, such as those directed to young people or children, can be seen to be like love songs, educational rhymes and lullabies. A poem 'For Batiri' forsees separation between mother and child. The pain of this parting, however, is modified in the understanding that the child's name 'Batiri' is a Fijian word for 'a coastline of mangroves and ... the end of the reef' suggesting growth and an ability to flourish in a borderline, perhaps migrant existence, between sea and land.[26]

Konai Helu Thaman's most recent collection is entitled *Kakala*, an obvious reference to the hiva kakala or love songs. Some of the poems suggest the lyrical subject matter of romantic love songs, others have more ironic or less personal concerns. The glossary defines kakala as 'Tongan sacred or fragrant plants used in garlands and to scent coconut oil; commonly referred to in Tongan legends, dance and poetry, as a symbol of resepect and love.'[27] Like the kakala the poems and poetry collections are a weaving together of a variety of disparate elements which partake in a celebration of life, culture and aesthetic pleasure. Futa Helu has distinguished the kakala from that archetype of European flora, the rose, arguing that kakala is more than a sweet-smelling flower or perfume: 'a kakala is a flower, leaf, twig or fruit that has the sanction of ages.'[28] Kakala came from Pulotu, 'the mythical abode of the dead and gods in Polynesian mythologies'. Poets too are called 'pulotu' in Tongan and their skills are highly respected. Poets who compose in all three arts – ta`anga (poetry), hiva (music) and haka (dance) – are known as 'punake' and in Ancient Tonga constituted one of the professional classes. They were considered to occupy rank inherently

by virtue of their profession. Some commentators claim that from the evidence of oral culture, Pulotu is Fiji; whatever the case it retains the sense that the poet is situated between worlds or cultures and that a Pan Pacific reading of cultural connections is supported by custom-based narratives or legends.

Kakala can be located in the myths and legends or talanoa tupu'a of oral literature, some of which link the world of maama – man's world – to Pulotu. Futa Helu tells the tale of how heilala (the most sacred of Tongan plants [*Garcinia sessilis*]) was brought into the human world by a beautiful woman whom a toutai or royal fisherman, Ikatafoli, caught on his hook. He let her off the hook but she swam after him and travelled to his village Nukuleka where he received a summons from the Tu`i Tonga (King of Tonga) to weave garlands for a festival. The woman returned from Pulotu the next day carrying a branch of heilala from which she made a garland to present to the King. The title *Kakala*, refers, then, to the collection itself as being like a garland – a collection of words and lines tightly woven into patterns. This garland, 'the tui-tu`u (to string while walking)' might also be interpreted as referring to the art of composition in the garland/poetry as one that involves mobility.

Like plants and flowers in Tongan culture, these poems have a healing as well as a celebratory and aesthetic function. They can represent the orderliness of class structure by reference to tradition-sanctioned narratives of origin and descent. They may also be read as documents that register disturbances in the order of social strutures such as rank, gender and class. Aletta Biersack has argued that unlike the status conferred by blood inheritance, which is fixed, the kakala in Tongan culture signify titles and status conferred by a process of social selection or choice.[29] The garland of poetry, therefore, does not have to be inherited by blood – it may be conferred on one who, at a particular historical moment, enacts the role of poet. According to Kaeppler, in Tongan-language poetry '... sweet smelling flowers refer metaphorically to chiefs or to a beloved, and references to a mixture of sweet smelling flowers refers to a mixing of genealogical lines.'[30] It is possible to read Thaman's use of kakala as metaphor or heliaki for an acceptance of a democratic mixing of genealogical lines, but since mixing may be customary within ranks rather than across them, these questions need to be more fully addressed than is possible in this context.

Konai Helu Thaman's writing is influenced by the role of the poet in earlier Tongan society and the effect of Tongan poetry forms. It is also informed by the characteristic formal aesthetic features of Tongan art and culture. Adrienne Kaeppler has described a number of distinguishing concepts that are used in assessing the way aesthetic judgement operates in Tongan culture. These are faiva, heliaki, faka`apa`apa and a concept she finds no single Tongan word for – of the integral association of verbal and visual modes.[31] While Kaeppler's work has focused on dance forms, she has argued, as has Futa Helu, that dance and poetry are closely intertwined in customary Tongan culture.

Faka`apa`apa refers to respect or humility and artistic creation is intended to evoke māfana or joy that derives from an appreciation and understanding of the skill of the performer. 'Letter To the Colonel', from the *Kakala* collection, for example, maintains the formal language of respect while questioning the role and the actions of a leading political figure in the South Pacific. Another letter poem in *Kakala* (letters signifying a written form moving between the public and the private) 'Letter To Feifafa' refers to the narrative about the sacrifice of Kava`onau, from whose body kava and sugar cane grew. Based on talanoa tupu`a, or originary myth which informs the construction of Tongan social order and gendering, the poem is sympathetically addressed to a picture of the mother of Kava`onau, Feifafa, describing the pain of losing her daughter.

tear-stained tapa
soaked in blood
continue to flow
from the over-filled kava bowl
of our rulers
their quick acceptance
of your sacrifice
still bleeds
at the cutting edge
of time [32]

The poem can be interpreted as a tribute to maternal devotion, the generosity of the people and the sacrifices of the ancestors. However, poised as it is on the 'cutting edge', it can also be read as a critique of the excessive demands placed on some sections of society

in order to support others. The conclusion insists:

i have been thinking
over what you did
that dark day long ago
i still don't believe
that a king was worth it!

The poem seems open to a feminist interpretation through the interest in the inter-generational perpetuation of gender-specific roles as well as the direct questioning of the value of female sacrifice. Elizabeth Bott's psychoanalytic interpretation of the kava ceremony, for example, in which she links the `Aho`eitu myth with the Kava`onau narrative and suggests that the chewing and pounding of the roots can be read as a controlled expression of rivalry, envy and its alleviation, may apply to gendered relations. [33]

Despite, or perhaps because of, the seriousness of the questions they pose and the weight of tradition, Konai Helu Thaman's poems are often respectfully dedicated and some are read on ceremonial occasions such as '*Heilala*", thus retaining a performative dimension. This poem, as the poet has explained, was written for the launching of a project on adult literacy and its delivery, as well as its reference to this bright red and most sacred of flowers, might be said to have inspired māfana. It emerged as a response to William Wordsworth's poem about daffodils, a text often read as an example of the imposition of colonial education yet ambiguously evoking the metaphor of migrancy: 'I wandered lonely as a cloud.'

Heliaki, which Kaeppler calls 'the most important aesthetic principle' that 'pervades Tongan life', has been variously translated as 'indirectness', 'hidden meaning', 'allusiveness', 'round aboutness'.[34] Konai Helu Thaman has confirmed that 'subtlety or heliaki is also a very important feature of Tonga poetry and I try to utilise that too in my writing.' [35] The reference to the iron wood tree or toa in 'You, the Choice of My Parents', is an example of heliaki.

I love as a mere act of duty
My soul is far away
Clinging to that familiar ironwood tree
That heralds strangers
To the land of my ancestors.

I will bear you a son
To prolong your family tree
And fill the gaps in your genealogy.
But when my duties are fulfilled
My spirit will return to the land of my birth
Where you will find me no more
Except for the weeping willows along the shore.[36]

The toa appears in the variously repeated originary narrative or tala tupu'a about the first Tu`i Tonga `Aho`eitu, (Son of Tongaloa and Va`epopua, the first king of Tonga) positioned as an intermediary symbol between heaven and earth. Tangaloa, the father, climbs down the tree to conduct his affair with an earthly woman and his son scales the tree in the reverse direction in order to discover his divine heritage. The tree is generally held to represent strength and bravery – a combination of the human and the supernatural – and the reference to it in the poem can be understood to signify the strength of the speaker's attachment to customary Tongan culture and values. It may also be read as a signifier of the courage it requires for the poet to speak out in a public role. The totemic significance of trees enables Thaman to refer to the weeping willow as a signifier of European or imported femininity, frailty and perhaps death, which functions as counterpoint to the toa – a strong, indigenous tree, symbolizing a connection to eternal life.

Sitting on a Rotten Branch of the Breadfruit Tree

Taking a long range historical view of Anglo/American poetry, Cora Kaplan's 1976 essay 'Language and Gender' argued that 'Poetry is a privileged metalanguage in western patriarchal culture' and that 'Oddly we still seem to expect poetry to produce universal meanings.'[37] She concludes that women's poetry oscillates between two poles – one, the field of language to which women as speakers, writers and readers have access and two, a cultural context which erects barriers against women's entry into a 'high' symbolic language regarded in patriarchal terms as a public male sphere. Women's poetry, then, has often been articulate about a struggle to enter a field of high culture which, in terms of Western patriarchal culture such as, for example, Wordsworth's Romanticism, has been predicated precisely on the exclusion of the majority of women. Kaplan argues that adolescence, in patriarchal Western culture, has been the crucial

moment when women experience particular taboos about their ability to enter public life. Considered in this way, it is possible to understand why the interpretation of 'coming of age' has been such disputed interdisciplinary and cross-cultural ground in the representation of the Pacific and why some of Konai Helu Thaman's poems are so specifically aimed at urging young women to resist the sexism in educational institutions ('School For Boys', 'Teen Letter'[38]).

'You the Choice of My Parents' was published in *Mana* in 1973. It was the title poem of her first collection (1970), and was subsequently anthologised in *Lali* (1980), then included in *Hingano*, the collected poems of 1987. The speaker in 'You the Choice of My Parents' is not autobiographical, but might be described, rather, as a set of signifiers constructed to give voice to an imagined woman of the Pacific in the process of questioning the roles that marriage and consumerism play in her life.

> I wrote the poem while in the U.S. and although it was originally inspired by the breakdown of a cousin's marriage, the search for and glorification of freedom in that country inspired me to explore the concept further. The persona of You the Choice may be from any social class though arranged marriages more typify the upper classes in Tonga. It's interesting that the poem has a special appeal to many Indian students in Fiji, particularly girls.[39]

Arranged marriage in Tongan culture, according to some interpretations – such as Biersack and Kaeppler's[40] – carried an element of choice for the girl; the subject matter of the poem becomes an exploration of the question of how much power a girl has to make a choice within structures that define and confine her. Marriage as an exchange of women has been posited – and refuted – as a significantly unifying feature of many human societies. To the extent that what Adrienne Rich called 'compulsory heterosexuality'[41] exists in all cultures, the overt subject matter of the poem can appeal across cultural, religious, class and ethnic groupings. It situates the persona of the speaker at a crossroad of debates over the question of how colonial structures and trade interlock with gender and power relations.

Thaman's original chosen title 'Wife's Lament' was altered in the editorial process, opening out the address and appeal of the poem in gender terms. It isn't until the eighth line and its reference to 'my

prince' that the speaker's gender becomes significant and by this time, readers of both genders may have been caught up by the rhetoric of the poem. In the speaker's slowness to assign gender, there may be some reflection of the fact here that the word 'ia' from the Tongan language, is translated as 'he, she, him, her, it'. Unlike the English language, the Tongan does not distinguish gender in the third person pronoun.

The title 'You the Choice of My Parents' can be read as representing a subject split by the desire of its parents for an other or more complete image of herself – or perhaps by an internalisation of what she imagines to be the desire of her parents. Parents here are representives of an earlier order than the subject and they desire the material benefits of Western culture. Their desire is both the same as and different from the speaker's own; this complex of desires of, for and to be separate from the parents, like her own desire, alienates the implied speaker in a cross-generational drama of family romance, from a coherent fantasy of self.

The reference to the young man – or the 'you' as 'my prince' – situates the poem in terms of a discourse of fantasy and romantic love, cut across by class structures. The movement of desire that takes place across this close circuit of familial ties and obligations is signified in the way the title foregrounds the pronoun structures of the poem and emphasises the interdependence of first and second person pronouns in the construction of the 'other', and third person. The poem represents a speaker in the process of fantasizing an other, the grounds on which a discourse about the self have become possible. Questions remain about how engendered power relations enter the equation, since the poem eventually distinguishes that the signified of the 'I' is a woman, and the signified of the 'you' a man. How is it possible to unpack the assumption that linguistic terms such as 'my prince' carry with them the structures of an already established power difference? The 'I' here attempts to measure the extent of its subordination to a self, alienated, through the 'choice of the parents' – or exercise of power and structures that pre-exist the speaker – personified in the 'you'.

How, then, does this gendering map out across the racialised histories of colonialism? The subject of the poem may be read as one that is operating in a field of language where the customary structures of rank and gender of Tongan culture have been disrupted by

the terms of European culture, and none of the previously established orders – the abandoned altar where the priest no longer officiates, the prince driving his second-hand car – offer a virgin or original identity. The terms referring to religion are Europeanised ones, though they could be interpreted as referring to a Europeanised view of religions 'other' than the Christian faith. Religious discourse too, in this model, has multiple origins

The choice of the implied speaker in 'You the Choice of My Parents' may be read as ironic, as not really being a choice at all – equated with the choice of the consumer in a world of monopolies and global capitalism. On the other hand, parenting, as against capitalism and its spurious choices, has an arbitrariness about it. The parents – and it is important they are plural – though they are not differentiated, cannot offer a singular model of identity. In recognising the fragmentary structuring of identity, Thaman's poems allow multiple and even contradictory voices to speak about conditions of existence in the Pacific.

In the 1970s this was asserted in the context of a post-colonial cultural legacy passed on to Pacific writers in English, which is the site of many ambivalences. Colonial ideologies and histories in the poetic heritage offered Pacific people both inclusion and exclusion. European tropes and concepts such as the depiction of the Pacific as a blank expanse or the compliancy and availability of Pacific Island women ranged from denigration to idealisation. Some of the many tasks for Pacific writers in English have been focused on deconstructing such stereotypes while inserting more acceptable and varied representations of Pacific life and culture into English-language traditions. The relationship of people to the natural world continues to be crucial in the poetry of Pacific writers, intervening and rewriting as it does, reductively Eurocentric concepts that indigenous peoples were objects rather than subjects in scientific experimentation and observation. Pacific writers represent Pacific peoples as both defenders, utilisers and sometimes despoilers of their natural environment.

Helen Carr, publishing over a decade later than Kaplan, could challenge the idea that poetry is still a genre dominated by men. She argues that although a sense of exclusion from the high literary culture undoubtably remains for women, it is only part of an equation in which 'Ever since the Romantics', poetry has been connected to a femininity linked with 'the contemplative, the personal, the dreamer,

the emotions'.[42] Thaman's writing mobilises a language about emotion – the 'Wishful Thinking' section in *Kakala,* for example – both directly ('like rain pounding on the roof/of my mother's house/sadness in suva') and through figures of speech ('this won't help the hurt i know/but i'll try weaving/the basket a bit more finely'). Although it has been argued that language privileges the masculine, which is equated with the sphere of the public, Carr argues that the association of poetry with a private world has been a contributing factor in encouraging women to write it.

The *Kakala* poems offer the reader an exploration of the connections between that concept of a 'masculine' public role and a 'feminine' other to that public space and events within it – and in the process, undermine such distinctions between 'masculine' and 'feminine', public and private. The critique of those who do work in public life in earlier poems such as 'Uncivil Servants' and 'My Blood' is made by a speaker who understands the multiple ironies of complicity – 'Many of my friends/Are civil servants.... Yet if I tell them what I think/I may go to hell or even lose my scholarship!'[43] It is another twist in the interpretive chain that the poetic form enables the speaker to make private thoughts public, and that the development of skills in this art of poetic public speaking in turn promotes access for a woman poet, however difficult or limited, to the male-dominated public world.

Carr, in contrast with Futa Helu, argues that the lyrics of pop songs, in which there is so little critical interest, form 'a part of the complex of representations in which young women come to understand themselves'.[44] She argues that in the eighties many women were writing and reading lyric poetry for a wide variety of reasons. In Konai Helu Thaman's poetry the loss of natural resources – strongly felt – is weighed up against the gains of global technological development. The poem 'The Cinema',[45] for example, which opens with a Polynesian term for Hollywood – '*Holiutu*' – gestures towards the way film and language culture is transformed in the process of reception. In Tongan language holi has been translated as 'demanding, to desire' and utu as 'reap' – so it may be that the act of translation also becomes a gloss or commentary on the way cinematic language evokes difference and desire. The poem draws attention to the role of film as a communal event and a discourse in which the watching children will insert themselves by dreaming under their 'soft tattered tapa'. While the opening lines open up an image of 'half-naked' but

'innocent' children who will be exposed to screen violence, the poem can be read as an assertion of the way in which children from the Pacific are able to absorb and re-imagine images from a cinematic field dominated by images of Anglo-American ways of life. Their tapa may be tattered but they function as a protective cover, shielding the young from direct exposure to the damaging images of 'Western' cinema, signified by the Western genre with its narratives about colonisation and the imposition of European laws on indigenous people.

Thaman's poem also remarks on the degree of audience participation and response among the Pacific Island viewers, literally looked down on by the European audience who 'sit upstairs/Drinking cokes, frowning at/The ignorant natives ...'. The poem suggests that it is the cinematic images that most impress the Pacific Island audience, although the on-screen representations of sexuality, in contrast to stereotypical European notions of a 'natural' sexuality amongst Pacific people, embarrass them. 'Words ...' the poems asks – '... what do they mean?' – suggesting perhaps both language barriers for people whose first langage is not English and the ability of the audience to interpret images separately from the dialogue and sound track, i.e. to bring to the images their own interpretations and meanings. Konai Helu Thaman's poem, in contrast to Futa Helu's rejection of internationally distributed popular cultural forms such as cinema, represents an acknowledgement that they are already an on-going part of Pacific cultural life.

Carr refuses the concept of a singular monolithic tradition of women's poetry because there is so much variety in women's writing. However, in her discussion of the groundswell of poetry written and performed by women in the context of feminism, she draws on readings of Native American poetry to indicate similarities in the function of poetry that cross, in some form, cultural and historical boundaries. On the grounds of anthropological work, which she concedes is problematic in the extent to which it is invested with Euro-American interpretations, Carr discusses the way poetry in a variety of Native American cultures was produced and performed. Poetry, she argues, according to the testimony available in the field of Native American culture, functioned in four fundamental ways, all of which I think are pertinent to a reading of Thaman's poetry.

Firstly, Carr's suggestion that a 'complex imbrication of individual desire with a very specific traditional discourse'[46] applies to

Thaman's poetry since it works with the mixed economy of Tongan language forms and symbols and a Euro-American literary heritage. I have not spent a lot of time exploring the personal context of Thaman's poetry, but it would seem, for a reader of the poems that they are invested with personal desire. The dedications suggest a context of close and intimate relationships, though it is not necessary for the reader to decode them as references in order to enjoy or produce an interpretation of the poems. Secondly, liminal or threshhold states such as illness or grief, or moving between adolescence, adulthood and maturity are frequently invoked by the poems. Thirdly, the forms of the poetry transform a relationship between a linguistic pattern and emotion; so, for example, the short three-lined form of the 'Wishful Thinking' section of *Kakala* contains and controls powerful, sometimes contradictory emotions. Fourth, there is something of the role of the shaman, 'the voyager and cartographer of the descent into the depths and re-emergence, whose map provides a cure' in Konai Helu Thaman's persona as poet. Thaman's poetry performs, though with many differences because of the contemporary context, some of the functions of shamanic poetry, such as a healing mode of expressivity which can be linked to psychoanalysis, and the recitation of genealogy and historical narratives.

Conclusion

The title of this paper is intended to echo a statement made by Konai Helu Thaman in her opening remarks to a Pacific Writers Workshop in 1984. Her comments emphasise the uncertainties that accompany the production and performance of poetry, and I wanted to extend them to the acts of reading and interpreting.

> As I was listening to Albert read his poetry, he happened to be reading to you a poem I think called 'Breadfruit'. Well, we have a Tongan proverb that translates – it's like sitting on a rotten breadfruit branch – and when Marjorie was talking I felt like sitting on a rotten breadfruit branch ... which means someone who feels very apprehensive about things to come ... because talking about my writing as Pio Manoa once put it, it's like exposing yourself and that's not a very enjoyable thing to do, certainly not for me.[47]

Thaman's reference to the Tongan proverb describes the task of the poet as transmitter and translator of cultures. On the occasion of

this speech, she went on to discuss the importance of her role as teacher, the question of the relationship between public and private selves, the need to encourage young writers, and the issue of coercion/choice in connection with writing in English.

Public performance frequently involves nervous tension, but what is at stake in this tension goes well beyond the significance of the moment of one speech or reading. I want to finish by referring back to Konai Helu Thaman's brave admission of the anxiety she experienced (then) in talking about her poetry. The proverb is cited in the title because I think the act of reading and interpretation, to use an organic metaphor, must flower, bear fruit and give way to new readings. The robustness of the poems will, I believe, sustain many more interpretations.

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Briar Wood was born in Taumarunui in 1958 and grew up in Mangere, Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand. She attended the University of Auckland and now works as a lecturer in London in the United Kingdom.

NOTES

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[14] Epeli Hau`ofa, 'The Ocean in Us', *Dreadlocks in Oceania*, Vol. 1. (Department of Literature and Language, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1997).

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[16] 'The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha', in Jonathan Rutherford (ed), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1990) p. 211.

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[21] Futa Helu, *Faikava*, No.1 (Nuku'alofa, 1978) pp. 21-25.

[22] Helu (1978) p. 24.

[23] Konai Helu Thaman, 'Of Daffodils and Heilala' (1997) p. 13.

[24] Konai Helu Thaman, *Langakali*, p. 13.

[25] E.E.V. Collocott, *Tales and Poems of Tonga*, Bulletin 46 (Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu, 1928) p. 103.

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The Per/son Authorised:
Married Women's Autobiography and the Death of the Author, 1882 & 1992

TRACEY SLAUGHTER

> Violate the sanctity of the domestic circle, make woman the creature of man's convenience, not at all entitled to his consideration ...? Men should have thought of what they were doing when they framed such legislation; the day is coming when they themselves and their names will be overwhelmed ... *(Ellen Ellis, 1802)*[1]

> So like him, and so cruelly unlike, this
> pale thing dressed up in the grey suit,
> white shirt, dark tie he always chose for
> funerals – presumptuous facsimile, no more;
> I hate its spurious command, its way of
> claiming, hour by wordless hour, to be
> the version authorised, the only one extant. *(Lauris Edmond, 1992)*[2]

Written over the body of the husband, Lauris Edmond's 'Subliminal' (quoted in the latter of the above) takes its place in a formal procession of poems which mourn the passing of a family partnership. When Trevor Edmond died in 1991, however, the marriage had long lain in state, and the poetic eulogies which form the 'Subliminal' sequence are an attempt to conjugate not only the divisions of a family *death* but of a family *life* scripted by the *narrative* positions of 'The wife' and 'The husband'.[3] Richly modelled with remorse and patterned with a retrospective desire to balance the family equation, the poem is more than mere widowed reminiscence – it is a poem which participates in the contractual wrangle of marital narratives that form the Edmond family autobiography. For 'Subliminal' takes saddened and precise measurements of a marital estrangement where *memory* itself is the subject of custodial conflict, where 'The wife' and 'The husband' battle for identity, for authority, for autobiographical rights. Despite its poised and conciliatory movements toward the resolution of marital discord ('Now I can/touch his cold unnatural skin quite easily./It's not so very different from my own'[4]), 'Sublimi-

nal' remains stalled in the structural incommensurability of 'The husband' and 'The wife', irrepealable and opposing positions in a familial stalemate expressed in *textual* deadlock. Phrases of literary threat such as 'presumptuous facsimile ... the version authorised, the only one extant' show the poem's language arrested by the ongoing litigation of autobiographical truth which defines the Edmond marriage. Whilst formally reflecting on the dissonance between the preserved corpse and the lost 'partner', the poem lapses quickly into the dialogue of narrative dispute, where husband and wife compete for authorial parentage of historical truth. 'A sort of rage possesses me,'[5] Edmond writes, ostensibly a rage produced by the false and coercive definition of death. But Edmond's anger also speaks to her fear of the *husband's* final edition, in a textual economy of marital relations/ a marital economy of textual relations which permits the husband a monopoly on selfhood, authorship and autobiographical truth.

If Trevor Edmond's death has made the definitive arrangements of selfhood and history, the poet's list of her husband's habiliments – the lineaments of power suggested in the dressing of the headmasterly suit – invests the body with a posthumous *authority.* This is the body, however, 'over' which the *wife's* second volume of autobiography was published, Lauris Edmond's *Bonfires in the Rain,* appearing in 1991 dedicated to 'Trevor, who died as this book was going to press.'[6] Reference to Trevor Edmond features also in the 'Author's Note', where the writer records her gratitude to the husband 'who has made the telling of my story easier by allowing me to tell so much of his own.'[7] Edmond's careful prefacing of her authorial self composes a complex defence of both the veracity and relativity of her self-text. When Volume One of the Autobiography, *Hot October*, was printed it received the equivocal cover-note of 'an autobiographical story', a subtitle which the *Bonfires* preface revokes:

> 'An Autobiographical Story' ... was a way of saying that it was my version only of people and events in the story, and would differ from the view of other participants. Unfortunately most readers took it to mean that I had made up the narrative – that it was what is known as autobiographical fiction. With this second volume I have decided to be more explicit. This account of my life in the years from 1946 to 1975 is as true as I can make it. In other words it is again my version of events and my interpretation of their significance. Others would tell the story differently. This is always true of autobiography, but since this one has

> elements of family history – a family I share with my children and their father – it is fair, I think, to emphasise the personal and individual nature of the opinions and evaluations I express.
>
> Having said that, I wish to acknowledge with my warmest thanks the family help I have had in reconstructing parts of our common past. All my adult children who live in New Zealand have read the manuscript and made useful comments.[8]

Here the female autobiographer constructs a textual space of both truth and subjectivity, a place shaped to the relative demands of the family, its individual histories and shared narratives. This authorial statement moreover records the textual interchange and communal reconstruction of a family unit generous in its editorial approval of the mother's auto/biographical story. Edmond's definition of clement and helpful conditions for maternal publication seems watertight – but the oversight of masculine appraisal and ratification, signified by the death of the father and the absence of the son (who is one of the adult children not residing in New Zealand), causes a collapse in this domestic autobiographical agreement. For if Edmond's authorial note attempts to draft an arrangement for the family autobiography, an overruling state of marital law is soon declared whereby the exclusive rights to identity and its textualisation are attached to the paternal 'side' of the family. Edmond's treaty of separate yet connected family recountings is subsumed under the government of a nuptial contract where 'personal and individual' truths are reserved for the only family member defined as an individual person – the husband. And it is, significantly, the body of the husband – that figure which 'Subliminal' ascribes with threatening textual agency even as it inscribes its 'decomposition' – that incites this punitive narrative exchange.

'Your death is my correction,' writes Lauris Edmond in 'One to One,' another muted discussion of marital alienation which seeks to reticulate the sundered versions of the marital story: 'It's all one now ... /The truth we now would/both agree is instantaneous and cannot be revoked.'[9] But the poet's articulation of a belated and reparative love, written as it is over 'the ugly truth'[10] of the husband's body, fails to reconvene the tolerant plurality of her ideal autobiographical family. The 'better selves' of wife and husband which the poems strive to recollect in mournful co-mmemorative resolution, are indeed 'lost

irretrievably' as 'The wife'[11] fears. The narrative operations of a retributive marital contract refuse the revisionary widow a rebate on her autobiographical account: Lauris Edmond's place as authorial mourner is indeed to be 'corrected,' as the son assumes the father's place in the family autobiography. For the publication of Martin Edmond's *The Autobiography of My Father* in 1992, coincident with the release of *The Quick World*, the mother's third volume of autobiography, gives remembrance to the inarticulate yet textually menacing form of the deceased father whom we see in the 'Subliminal' poems. This paternal autobiography is, like 'Subliminal,' an eloquent movement in the mourning discourse which meditates Trevor Edmond's decline and death, but it is also an attempt to intercept and abridge the maternal version of the family narrative. For Martin Edmond the body of the 'Subliminal' contemplation connotes the 'death of the author', and *The Autobiography of My Father* seeks to restore the head(master) of the household to his rightful office as editor of family facts.

Martin Edmond's rescriptive entrance into the family's autobiographical debate holds uncanny resemblance to another incidence of the son's reprisal against the maternal version of events. In 1882, a century prior to Lauris Edmond's personal trilogy, Ellen Ellis published *Everything is Possible to Will*, an autobiographical text which also engages with the disputed marital possessions of self and truth. Written in the third person, *Everything is Possible to Will* is apparently open to similar generic misrepresentations as Lauris Edmond's 'autobiographical story' *Hot October*. In Ellis's 'autobiographical fiction', the 'I' is replaced by 'Zee', an exemplary heroine redirected through a parallel pilgrimage to the author. Although less a corporeal personage than a statuesque projection of Ellis's political agenda, Zee's ornate sensibilities are stylistic applications of Victoriana, which do not substantially exaggerate Ellis's life-story. Indeed the 'novel' has been directly sourced to Ellis's personal diaries, political exercises and letters,[12] the sole variation between many passages from these texts and the 'autobiography' being the (im)personal transmutations from 'I' to Zee. Ellis's voice is present, then, not in the substitute cipher of Zee but in the didactic definition of the retrospective narrator. The transfer of personal history to the generic figure of Zee does not discount *Everything is Possible* from autobiographical status, but rather stresses that necessary split between the remembered

self and the remembering subject. If the injured and insubstantial Zee remains almost selflessly impossible to connect to the 'will' of Ellis's title, the instructive purpose of the text relies on this distinction between the evils of feminine self-sacrifice as represented by Zee, and the force of female will embodied by the narrator. And just as Edmond defended her 'autobiographical story' as personal truth, Ellen Ellis voices repeated vindications of her text's historical reality.

As with Edmond's authorial notes, Ellis's preface forms an insistent testimony to autobiographical truth. Yet Ellis also manipulates a similarly 'fictive' (or, at best, temporarily true) stance to Edmond in her mention of the husband's verification of her revelatory marital text:

> Fiction is crowded with startling incidents; real life is grandly uneventful, and life, ennobled by suffering, is lived at such a cost to all that is unlovely in character, as to become sacred history to those who have not lost faith in a late repentance ... To such the present narrative will have a sacredness as deep as sin and sorrow unfeigned can make it ... Hence a husband and wife ... seek to make their bitter experience useful to their fellows.[13]

Here, more explicit than Lauris Edmond's listing of Trevor Edmond's 'allowances', we have the husband's humbled cognovit, a happy marital licensing of the wife's authorial person. But in Ellen Ellis's case, as in Lauris Edmond's, the son's reply raises serious doubts as to the husband's amenability to public exposure at his wife's authorial hand. For if Martin Edmond's paternal autobiography attempts the defeasance of a matriculated truth, William Ellis's response displays an equal aversion to a maternal translation of events. Buying almost the entire body of his mother's text, William Ellis consigned his stock of her-story to matricidal flames, in a similar undertaking to conserve the paternal body as 'the version authorised, the only one extant'.

If the narrative government of matrimonial truth remains, as the poem suggests, at a 'Subliminal' level in the autobiography of Lauris Edmond, the machinery of marital authority is investigated at length in *Everything is Possible to Will*. Although written a century apart, the two texts share a marital apparatus which exhibits little evolution in the space between First and Second Wave feminism, and the older

text may serve as a diagnostic tool for the matrimonial malaise of the more recent. It is perhaps this common body of matrimony that produces the striking similarities between the autobiographies of Ellen Ellis and Lauris Edmond. For the two texts have remarkable points of jointure in synoptic shape, thematic concern and 'public' reception. In many particulars the texts of Ellen Ellis and Lauris Edmond intersect – both women lose a child, both lose a brother-in-law/brother, both find love (although not each of them consummate it) outside the bonds of marriage. But the principal contour of life-text which features in both Ellis and Edmond's writing is the pattern of marital crisis induced by the head of the household's alcoholic abuses. In the case of *Everything is Possible*, the husband is unmasked, in melodramatic fashion, as a longstanding and despotic alcoholic shortly after the marital contract is signed, and the term of the union becomes one long gothic sentence of sacrifice to Zee. In Edmond's autobiographical series, the husband's descent is more gradually marked by the modern psychological components of depression, middle-age crisis and professional over-extension. Although the later of the two autobiographies, Edmond's text remains reticent in respect of the husband's alcoholic dependency, preferring to stress the medical determinants of her spouse's breakdown. Nevertheless, the figures of Wrax and Trevor Edmond share many characteristics as typical productions of the masterful position of husband – and their 'decline into darkness' is suggestively concurrent with the wife's survival strategy of crafting an autobiographical self.

In both Ellis and Edmond's texts the wife designs a personal path through the territory of marital discord, avoiding her dutiful, unified submergence with the degenerating husband. This protective plan for the self's detraction from the sinking figure of the husband, is plotted in both texts, through the avenue of female education and the inscription of an authorial identity able to resist the erosive dominance of the husband. Although Ellis's autobiographical heroine never leaves her husband, her successful extrication of a female selfhood from the despoiling sovereignty of Wrax, is initialled by her decision to cease her wifely task of concealing his abuses. Indeed by the book's end, the husband's humbled restoration to the path of virtue represents a triumphant rearrangement of empowered identity in the 'Ellis' household, a victory for Zee veiled with acknowledgments to the redeeming Saviour. Lauris Edmond, by contrast, does initiate a sepa-

ration from the declining male self, but her removal from the domestic unit takes place only in stages, struggling with fated permutations of shared parental life. The divorce of the redefined female self from the dissolution of marital unity is finally achieved, however, by both Ellis and Edmond, whose autobiographical signatures seem to release a 'subliminal' death warrant upon the coalescent body of marriage. It is the body of the coactive marital state that Edmond and Ellis both declare themselves against; it is the body of the husband, however, that follows their autobiographical retrieval. Edmond's husband dies during the production of her second volume of self-text; Ellis's spouse dies a year after the publication of *Everything is Possible to Will*. And both sons connect their father's demise with the mother's construction of a textual selfhood, responding to the matriarchal revision of life-silence as an autobiographical act of violence against the rightful author of marital identity.

If the revised identity of the autobiographical wife is responsible for the discursive expiry of her spouse, however, the texts of both Ellis and Edmond expose this subjective exchange as an underside of a matrimonial machine that conventionally narrativises the husband's life by erasing the wife's. For the wife to publish a text which attaches to herself the rights to identity, story and authority is an infringement of 'the masculine position and functions',[14] an invasion of the narrative space of 'The husband' that is seen to cause a discursive crisis in marital subjectivity.[15] In the case of both Ellis and Edmond the female autobiography seems to do more than retrospectively record the decline of the marriage's male partner – the textual self-delineation of the wife is seen to coincide with, antagonise, and even to cause, the subjective descent of the husband. And it is this occupation of the masculine office of family 'master-mind' which calls into action the son's demand for textual restitution – 'And yet it seems so very strange,' writes Martin Edmond to his father, 'the way your fall and her rise coincide exactly':

> As the power that had been yours flowed away from you, it seemed to feed directly into the current of her life. As your strength, your self-confidence and your optimism waned, hers increased. You could plot it on a graph.[16]

A parallel diagram of marital relations is traced in Ellis's plotting of her autobiographical emancipation, which depicts 'a hus-

band and wife ... the one rushing down to ruin, the other struggling through mental darkness to daybreak.'[17] Ellis's autobiographical treatise finds the current state of matrimony to be an abominable misrepresentation of 'identity' – 'In truth,' Ellis declares, 'the existing social relations between the sexes are as monstrous as if their interests were antagonistic, not identical.'[18] The blessed institutionalisation of 'identical' destinies on the premise that the wife is individually erased, is responsible for a mathematics of marital enmity which leaves 'each sex ... a standing problem to the other, and virtually as wide apart as are the poles; with an estrangement painful to contemplate.' This matrimonial stand-off will remain in force 'so long as the law declares her non-entity' – when the union may be compacted by two equal and free agents, 'man and woman shall rise and fall together.'[19]

The corresponding marital graphics of Edmond and Ellis's autobiographies argue for the bankruptcy of the matrimonial economy, which collapses individual coordinates in a weighted competition for self-definition. The conventional correlation of husband to wife is clearly not 'One-to-one',[20] but, as Ellis and Edmond point out, this matrimonial equation can operate *against* the husband's agency when the family narrative falls into feminine hands. Yet both Ellis and Edmond lament the fatal government of 'the graph' and depict its structure as administered not so much by determinative individuals, as by the external law of the marital narrative. In *Everything is Possible to Will* it is the structural arrangement of husband and wife at the 'poles' of selfishness and self-abnegation which is seen to produce the destructive map of the marital hierarchy, 'placing the husband, by virtue of his sex, at the top of the social ladder, thus stultifying his desire for improvement to his own degradation and his wife's humiliation.'[21] It is the correlative roles of master and slave which engender the misshapen marital characters of Ellis's text:

> And the secret ... lay in the fact that Zee had become his property, his slave, by marriage. Wrax would have been a devoted husband – an immeasurably better and happier man, and Zee a by no means worse woman, had she been free – free as Wrax was free. He would then have respected in her what he valued above all things in himself, the *subtle potency of recognised being* – the all of dignity comprehended in the words *personal liberty*; but having become a wife, she was comparatively worthless.[22]

In Lauris Edmond's autobiography also, the 'better selves' of both male and female marital players are often seen as dictated victims of the diametric positions of husband and wife: 'Perhaps ... we had both been betrayed by the old conventions, Trevor into a kind of authority he didn't like or want, I into a humility that didn't fit my inclinations.'[23] As with Ellis's hymeneal horror-story, Edmond's autobiographical map of 'the mean little territory our marriage has become'[24] finds wife and husband in distinctly antagonistic and socially circumscribed quarters: 'The division of our occupations into those proper for a man and a woman had been even sharper than I'd thought, more mutually exclusive.'[25] The marriage is often personified as a third obsolete but despotic person, sutured together from the remains of lapsed individuals who nevertheless cling to the skeletal habits it upholds:

> ... we both felt ... a kind of panic at the prospect of finally being cut off from the 'Lauris-and-Trevor' we'd always been, though God knows that whole was by now the merest skin, seeds and flesh having been long ago scraped out and devoured ... It was a kind of paralysis, as though marriage itself, terminally ill, had finally entered a coma.[26]

This sad autopsy of the undead marriage does not dispel the competitive spirit of the matrimonial organism, however, as there remains only one self to be salvaged from the marital ruin. 'Was this a dreadful kind of power game, the only one left to us?' muses Edmond as she struggles to subtract herself from the implacable graph of 'the old marital forces that had locked us so tightly together and damaged us both'.[27] The operation of the graph, however, denies a mutual degeneration or revival – the written reanimation of the wife's autobiographical self comes at the cost of the husband's 'downward course'.[28]

If the husband's deterioration is seen in Ellis and Edmond's texts to be associated with the writing wife's self-definition, this is but a fatal commutation of the traditional conditions of marital selfhood which both women depict as arranging the artificial death of the feminine subject. The most fundamental premise of the matrimonial narrative which the female autobiographer contravenes is, of course, the state of coverture. By virtue of coverture, the marriage contract creates 'one financial, legal, and social entity, of which the husband [is] the complete master';[29] the married woman, considered to be 'covered' by both the protection and power of her husband, has her 'non-

entity ... established by law.'[30] Deriving from biblical precedents which place the husband at the head of a domestic dictatorship, the 'infamous law' of coverture 'regards the wife as the property of the husband', suspending the recognised being of the wife, 'enforcing unconditional submission to man's will on woman,' and ensuring that 'that degraded thing, a wife ... could hold nothing, absolutely nothing in her own name.'[31] Clearly that text defined by the self-presentation of a cognisable subject, is placed beyond the jurisdiction of the unrepresentable wife; the autobiographical non-existence shaped for the sheltered spouse is not, however, where the narrative negation of coverture ends. For the covered wife is expected to perform a covert office in married society – that of covering her husband's public dysfunction and private abuse, through the selfless preservation of matrimonial secrecy.[32]

It is the wife's concealing office of 'silent endurance' that receives Ellen Ellis's most vehement dissertation in *Everything is Possible to Will*. Upon entrance into 'legal thraldom', Zee discovers the popular policy of wifely non-disclosure, and sets about obediently practising this treacherous re-definition of domestic truth:

> ... the too popular peace-at-any-price domestic creed she adopted under inward protest, made her life one long base lie. She must steep her soul in sin to conceal the sins of her husband, and eat her words, lest she wound the vanity and self-love of the man whom she, in her ignorance, promised to 'love, honor, and obey', yet found it impossible to do any.[33]

Here, the feminine process of dissembling domestic truths and absorbing the stains of the husband's dissolution, is directly opposed to the expository female autobiography. Indeed the covering artifice of 'the Griselda type'[34] of wife is perceived as publishing an evil inversion of autobiography, manufacturing a false family narrative or masculine life-story premised upon the li/ability of the wife.

In the autobiography's preface, Ellis presents her marital document as a joint decision to publish exemplary experience. Her skilful production of the humble husband as co-signatory to his own exposure, does not, however, provide 'cover' for Ellis's textual reversal of the terms of coverture. Ellis's individual display of marital dysfunction is an annulment of her wifely duty as composer of concordant domestic appearances:

> For, oh! when the sinner is your husband, you are in a sense linked with him in his degradation, and you go backwards to cover him with a mantle all of shame and pain. Still – you cover him.[35]

Ellis's covering reference to the husband in her prefatory defence does, however, demonstrate the necessary double exposure of the marital autobiography – a point of jointure which Ellis exploits to the letter of marital law. For if, as Ellen Ellis laments, the female self is dissolved as entitled entity by the covert workings of the nuptial contract, then the married autobiographer is not available for discreet, or discrete, self-narration – the autobiographical wife cannot help but implicate the spouse, without whom she has no proper self nor written definition. In Ellis's formulation then, the assimilation of the wedded feminine identity becomes an underhanded means of entitling the espoused author to expose the evils of her 'other self'. Ellis does not approve of the combative construction of marital selfhood, but nevertheless she manipulates its abusive terms of textual engagement.

In taking issue with the doctrine of coverture, Ellis must also dismantle its religious justification, which locates a spiritual superiority in the wife's sacrificial silence. Under the guise of Christly self-renunciation the figure of the wife is loaded with crosses, supporting the surfeit of her husband's sin in order to preserve his earthly reputation as well as his immortal soul. This 'false theology', Ellis contends, installs a vision of the feminine scapegoat at a level of biblical voyeurism which is erroneous and obscene:

> A long-suffering woman is a phaenomenon [*sic*] men cannot understand; they like to contemplate her, so she is impaled on the horns of society's altar, a pretty spectacle for men to gape at ... Nevertheless her right to consideration will be disavowed so long as it is believed that her social degradation is her moral elevation, that her finer qualities ripen only in her humiliation, that the lower she lies the more lustrous are her virtues ... Much needless torture of body and mind is endured by women for Christ's sake, they fancy; but he has taught that no wrong which can be righted, come whence it may, is to be tamely submitted to ... Never until the veil is taken off all hearts will it be known how much the world owes women, how much of evil she has concealed with ill-judged clemency and disastrous consequences – concealment precious at any price to cowardly conventionalism.[36]

Ellis, however, locates an expedient twist in the tale of spiritual coverture. If *Everything is Possible* aims to pervert the wedded feminine self for autobiographical purposes, 'it attempts likewise to work out the meaning of vicarious suffering'[37] to support the wife's textual confession. If the wife is appointed as marital 'scapegoat', doomed to extinguish the sins of her husband, then she *must* perform that most sacred office in absolving her overburdened soul – she must follow the commandment to make free and full *confession*. If she is to safeguard resurrection on behalf of her transgressive spouse, then it stands to religious reason that she must also take up the cross of *relating* his crimes. Ellis therefore transforms woman's autobiographical exposure, into her most selfless commission in serving her master's soul. To facilitate her husband's sin by continuing to offer narrative insurance is only to dig him a firmer foundation in hell. To operate, by contrast, as accomplice to his confession, is to effect the simultaneous emancipation of the husband's soul and his earthly victims:

> Silent suffering! what recks the drunkard of it? ... by playing into his hands it screens him from observation, and helps him to trample out the life of his victim by slow degrees, than whom no other beast of burden whom he dare to maltreat is so completely under his thumb as the wife ...[38]

Ellis's doctrine of 'substitutionary' confession is borne out by the redemption of Wrax, which follows Zee's resolution to refuse the sinner shelter. Whilst 'silly Zee purposed hiding his sins ... by shielding him from remark', no gesture toward amendment is made by the happily dissolute Wrax, who 'scrupled not to cast the whole weight of his wrongdoing upon his wife.'[39] Once Zee has 'taken her first bold and unquestionably right step'[40] and allied herself with the aggressive confession of truth, Wrax is brought to repentance by his wife's righteous testimony. 'Still,' counsels Ellis, 'vicarious suffering has its limits, and is of value only as its precious lessons are turned to good account.'[41] Here, the wife's autobiographical narrative, of more redemptive worth than the concealing tale of coverture, is clearly depicted as a didactic tool of selflessly 'good account'.

Far from attempting to 'ruin him with a tale-telling',[42] Ellis's treatise of autobiographical redemption argues that the wife's text may prove to be a truthful tonic for the husband's spiritual well-be-

ing. Whether Ellis employs this transfiguring concept as a convenient cover for her own text, or whether she is firmly convinced of the sacred transference of the female autobiography, the idealistic exchange she conceives is never completed. For rather than ensuring the husband's enlightenment the process of 'writ[ing] him down guilty'[43] is seen to have fatal implications for the male subject. Whilst Ellen Ellis closes her autobiography on a 'husband and wife in exceptionally happy circumstances',[44] Lauris Edmond's trilogy continues past the autobiographical excision of the shared self, into the post-publication state of marital identity. And what the female autobiography is seen to effect is not the radiant augmentation of the male partner, but the gradual attrition of 'the masculine position' in life, in family, and in narrative.

In contrast to *Everything is Possible to Will*, where the spectre of marital tyranny appears upon the signing of the gothic document, the decay of the Edmond marriage is an 'infinitely slow, infinitely contradictory moving apart' which exposes 'old deep wounds in the body of the family'.[45] The ornate horrors, inflexible morals and political monologues of Ellis may be muted by modernity in the Edmond autobiography, but there remains an Ellisian miasma of intangible terror surrounding the figure of marriage. For although not minutely exhumed in Edmond, as it is in Ellis, coverture is exposed 'far deeper in the very bones of the shared body of marriage'[46] than the modern incarnation of matrimony would admit. Despite the one hundred year gap between the narratives, then, Ellis's political anatomy of marriage proves an incisive tool for the Edmond marital autopsy.

By the time that Lauris Edmond is entering matrimonial identity, coverture no longer legislates the entire erasure of the espoused feminine self. Yet the erasing spirit that inhabits 'the enclosing marital shell'[47] is palpable still in the shadowy sensations of invisibility and compelled performance which taint even the early passage of married love. Upon approaching the day of betrothal, Edmond is struck by a sudden desire to 'escape from this inexorable propulsion' into conjugal life, gripped by a gothic prescience of some unnameable ill awaiting her married self.[48] Reaching the threshold of her *Hot October*, the adolescent Edmond experiences, like Ellis's heroine, the insubstantial vertigo of a maiden at 'the end of the first stage of life's journey'. Zee, however, is possessed of a more political divination of the potential peril of 'the irrevocable "I will"'.[49]

> ... the vital question opened a yawning chasm at her feet, from which she shrank back appalled. The risk was great, and great the stake ... Only to the highest type of men, of whom Wrax was not, is the wife dearer than the bride ... Too often the wife, in common with other treasures, loses value in possession.[50]

If Zee 'at least tremblingly realis[es] her position'[51] the young Edmond appears partly to revel in being swept forward with the glamorous coercion of a heroine. Her wedding day slips past in spellbinding compulsion, 'a play, designed by the cast with myself in the central role',[52] and the illusory 'centrality' Edmond enjoys carries through into the theatrical blocking of the honeymoon stage, where 'I acted as one self while another stood by ... impressed by every performance of the young married couple, most of all by my own part in it.'[53] The matrimonial script which Edmond rehearses with such novice enthusiasm is, however, slowly disclosed to cast her in a narrowing wifely role. The initiate mystique of this early stage of marital relations is translated into the stoical administration of the maternal stage – yet a tightening awareness of her refined wifely function produces subtextual symptoms of marital disease:

> The process began in a strange sickness ... I had a choking sensation, a sense of suffocating constriction as though I had too tight a collar round my throat; I developed an anxious habit of loosening something that wasn't there ... Naturally restless and excitable, I had been threatened with obliteration by the force of my devouring days, and now had to devise a weapon of self-protection. I tried to practise calmness. I succeeded, too, with my new accomplishment ... I did not for some years realise how superficial this managerial equilibrium really was, nor how damaging, in that it induced a kind of internal paralysis from which eventually I must consciously recover.[54]

The 'apparently unruffled style' which the efficient matron distils from the enamoured maiden is but a costume change in a series of capable performances which Edmond increasingly feels to conceal a personal vacuum. The 'other self' which the honeymooner imagined as standing by in satisfied contemplation of married entertainment, is now seen as a stifled figure struggling to disengage herself from the competent marital decoy. The separation of the 'real' self from the performing one is no longer experienced as a temporary diversion in a charming playhouse drama, but as a permanent,

suppressive requirement of a marital system which depends on the supporting role of the wife.

At this stage of the marital game indeed, Edmond begins to feel that the role constructed for the wife equates to little more than family backdrop, a 'meretricious prop'[55] in the marital world which remains the *husband's* stage. As the marriage progresses and six children are produced, the roles of wife and husband become entrenched in territories of mutual exclusion but not, Edmond realises, of mutual import. If marriage 'was beginning to look like a trial by absence',[56] the absence denoted is not only that of the remote professional husband, but that of the 'professional wife' whose facilitating function, Edmond discovers, is to operate as invisible hostess to the social distinction of her executive spouse. And as with the organised absence of Ellis's covered wife, the duties of the modern cipher include the anti-autobiographical office of editing domestic appearances by the discreet disposal of memory. To be a wife is to cultivate a 'conventional evasiveness'[57] and to expunge from the household narrative any record that may hinder the husband's success. Just as Ellis's covering wife is 'occupied in wiping off old scores,'[58] so Edmond's married professional is 'dedicated to a helpful smoothness in social affairs, believing that heavy drinking, quarrelsomeness, betrayal, a thousand small cruelties would all disappear if you resolutely failed to see them.'[59]

Increasingly, as the husband approaches the institutional summit of his teaching career, Edmond becomes cognisant of the machinations of the marital graph, which premises the husband's appointment as headmaster on the housewife's smooth demotion to selfless offsider. The 'constructive mechanism'[60] of coverture is sensed beneath the edifice of modern marriage, and the wife's consent to the voiceless fulfilment of 'the support and scapegoat role'[61] is revealed as crucial to the informal patriarchy of the teaching establishment. Lauris Edmond's recognition of the connection between master and wife appears initially as an extension of 'the wretched secondary school promotion system', an 'institution of success for some linked to the failure of others'.[62] But Edmond's examination stalls before the more disturbing conclusion that the masculine principality which requires her nonentity is primarily a state of marital identity and not academic enterprise:

> The tension in our family comes from the fact that Trevor and I compete ... Is it years of teaching, bloody teaching, that's done this to him? He's acted for so long on the principle that to be good and successful you have to get rid of the opposition – and now that's me. *I'm necessary, as a failure, for him to succeed.* What an awful statement – I hope it isn't true, yet I believe it is.[63] [TS's italics]

Lauris Edmond's unwilling analysis of the marital exchange rate provides an educative graph of the contraindication of wifely selfhood. The central revelation of Lauris Edmond's autobiography, however, uncovers an extant female identity at the very stage when her husband's success demands the cover of her selflessness. During the annual camping holiday, the laws that govern the family organism are exposed in a moment of suspended animation, the happy tableau of father and children becoming an unexpected X-ray of the structural invisibility of the wifely self:

> One afternoon I sat in the tent alone and watched the family out on the grass ... and as I watched a kind of somersault took place in my mind. The figures moving about on the green background suddenly changed, took on a new angle, almost a new dimension. I saw them as I never had before – they were my dearest people in all the world, almost everything I thought and did was directed towards their welfare, their happiness and fulfilment. And I saw with blinding clarity that not one of them thought there was a single thing to be done for me, in my turn. I didn't *have* a turn. I didn't exist, except as I helped them to exist. Without them I was nothing, and so they perceived me – theirs, useful, indeed necessary, loved, of course, depended upon; but as a person with possible separate requirements of my own, not there. And nobody, not even I, thought this unbalanced or wrong. I shook all over, that moment in a hot afternoon, I was so struck by the momentousness of the discovery.[64]

In Edmond's revelation of her cohesive absence as shapeless maternal environment, her very recognition of her non-existence signals the incipient outlines of a resurgent self. Thus, although Edmond describes her discovery as 'hardly recognisable as a major event' and limits its implications 'only to me',[65] the removal of her non-self as a set of assisting conditions to identity necessarily evokes aftershocks in the foundation of the Edmond family. This is, indeed, the point in the Edmond autobiography when the crucial incursion between the

competing selves of wife and husband occurs – the point where the fatal calculus of the matrimonial graph is catalysed into open reversionary action. Yet it is also, significantly, the point at which Edmond applies a sly, or unconscious, achronology in the telling of her personal tale. Edmond's existential Second Wave vision occurs in the summer preceding her husband's professional crisis and personal breakdown; in her autobiography, despite a quick acknowledgment of tampered chronology ('The summer before ... something else had occurred ...'[66]), the camp epiphany occurs a chapter *after* Trevor Edmond's first attack of depression. Rather than expose her marital enlightenment as the point of intersection of the antithetic destinies of husband and wife – the site where her passage into selfhood incites the husband's subjective demise – Edmond antedates the husband's crisis to antidote the causative climb of the wife. Perhaps in an effort to preempt the family backlash, perhaps in an attempt to assuage personal guilt, Edmond refuses to explicitly face the spectacle of coverture's inversion. If Ellis goes to elaborate spiritual lengths to argue her autobiography's resurrecting effect on the spouse, Edmond is likewise anxious to overlook the ligature of her self-discovery and her husband's disappearance.

In both Ellis and Edmond, then, it is the graphic action of marriage itself that animates one party by disabling the other – when the conventional tenets of coverture are turned inside out, the parasitic quality of the husband's self-definition is seen to leave him open to the defection of the selfless hostess. As Ellis aggressively edifies and Edmond edgily descries, a man operating with the psychic maintenance of the incorporated wife is not necessarily the enduring individual. 'Bolstered up in the belief insensibly fostered by social, educational, and political advantages, that marriage entitles a man to do as he likes, even though he likes to do wrong,' the masculine character relies on the noisy impersonation of command, to the detriment of cultivating real moral virtues – and thus, Ellis warns, 'husbands too often deteriorate grievously.'[67]

Indeed, the figure of the husband in both Edmond and Ellis, is a locus of outwardly manifest success and public popularity, plagued by a 'vague undefined *want*' which slowly undermines the appearance of selfhood. In *Everything is Possible*, the affianced Zee seldom succeeds in either quieting or isolating 'inward misgivings' as to Wrax's character, an intuitive register of the 'hollow ring'[68] which

haunts her marital contract. Once marriage has effectively removed the escape clause, Zee realises the breach between her husband's external semblance and his inward insolvency: '... all was hollow and unsound – a fine house without a head – a head and no head.'[69] The appearance of 'a head', Zee finds however, is more vehemently insisted upon the more 'unmanly' its wearer be. Wrax's appropriation of a wife, to conceal the vacuum which lies beneath his social conviviality, proves the undoing of his powerful performance – for in resting on her feminine propensity to clean up after his disreputable indulgences, Wrax entirely relinquishes his self-control. When Zee cannot possibly absorb the evidence of Wrax's dissipation, he lays the blame for his damaged reputation on her deliberate neglect of her covering function:

> '... the fates were in league against him. He was a much-abused, greatly-wronged man – the victim of a conspiracy, everyone, even his wife, being bent on making him a beggar,' and much to the same purpose. His spite against his own family amounted to insanity ... To his wild invectives against alleged injustice sustained at their hands, Zee listened quietly ... She knew he was fighting his own shadow – an ugly one, truly ... yet was he the more wretched of the two, for how could he face an angry world if he trembled before his wife?[70]

In the shadow-boxing pattern of Wrax's attacks on his wife, we have a clue to the self-doubt which stimulates him to such vituperative insistence on his authority. It is his own recognition of his unstable character which incites him to such tyrannous measures to enforce the appearance of his will:

> Wrax, moreover, continually outraged his wife's sense of right and justice, by pitting her legal bondage against his freedom, before their children too, saying: '... Who are you? You've got no voice; you are nobody. I bought you; you are only a part of my goods and chattels.'[71]

Wrax's aggressive attempts to maintain self-definition through the degradation of the wife, correspond with the home assault of Lauris Edmond's husband, who also lays the responsibility for his public humiliation on the private disobedience of his wife. Trevor Edmond's headmasterly rages, which sickly mimic the despotism he has failed to implement at school and home, and, like Wrax's, recruit the children in ugly demonstrations of paternal absolutism, throw up

half-truths as to the marital roots of his decaying identity:

> ... the man who came home in the evening was angry, peremptory, abusive ... scoffing at what I produced as opinions, even turning to Frances and Martin with a condescending smile as though I was too stupid to be answered at all ... in his mind I had become the real problem because I failed to provide the relief other headmasters could expect from their wives; instead, I thought about myself.[72]

In the sense that marital selfhood has left his significance dependent upon the insignificance of the wife, Trevor Edmond is right – the wife's delineation of her individuality does effect his deposition. In the 'draft summary' written by Trevor Edmond whilst he was hospitalised for depression, he himself recognised the 'symbiotic attachment' that conventional marital selfhood had fostered in him:

> When my wife emerged from domesticity and began to live her own life, although I helped and encouraged her to do this I was not prepared for the results. Her refusal to be a 'wife' in the former ('old-fashioned') sense has entirely upset my pattern of living and I have been most resentful about it. As my wife grew in confidence ... she began more and more to become an independent person which, emotionally anyway, I refused to accept. There were long and bitter rows about this and I began to drink heavily and to become most abusive of her when I had been drinking ... I was brought up to believe that a wife was at home and that children (and wives) kept the rules of home made mainly by father. There is no doubt that, although I reject this 'intellectually', I wanted it emotionally – to be ministered to and looked after and supported – as I see most of my contemporaries are – they boast of it ... I think I really want my wife to be at home to minister and support me and that I operated and still could operate in this way. I see that under this 'set-up' I placed everything on being the breadwinner, identified myself in my job as Headmaster and thought this was enough. My wife refused to accept it and I was left adrift because I had placed so much dependency on her.[73]

The delegation of husband and wife to public and private spheres not only leaves the husband alienated from the human minutiae and familial intimacy of domestic life, it also mediates his professional achievement through the subsidising, silent function of the wife. Should she misdeal in her patient maintenance of the husband's self, he is rendered disabled in both interconnected spheres:

> While all this important political and educational activity went on, the private person just withered away. Disappeared. Was left in the care of 'my wife'. When she, too, stopped caring for it, you were left, as you say, adrift. You looked around for your self and it wasn't there anymore. As you correctly predicted, you lost both job and family. Only the private person was left. And this was, or had become, a cypher. You didn't know who you were anymore.[74]

Here Martin Edmond's dissection of the circumstances of his father's demise seems to strike at the heart of the graph of singular marital selfhood, which leaves the husband in mute decay once the wife has determined a separate direction. Yet in the son's examination of 'a wife who was no longer a wife and who refused to be a mother either'[75] there is more than an echo of resentment towards the woman whose defection ushered in his father's decline. Despite Lauris Edmond's considerable 'caretaking' in the crafting of a rather taciturn marital story, the family backlash is clearly represented in Martin Edmond's autobiographical reprisal:

> In the loneliness and sickness and alcoholism of your later years, I used to wonder what had happened to that brown-eyed handsome man. I used to ask myself if things might have been different if you married someone else, someone 'conventional', someone without ambitions of her own. Someone who would have loved you and brought up your children and kept your home warm and safe and comfortable for you to come back to. If such a person ever existed. It was more or less what you wanted ... You with your bewilderment in the face of the failure of the most honest, simple-minded and hopelessly naive expectation of professional achievement married to domestic bliss. Because you wanted it. Because it was your right. Because that's what people did.[76]

Here, as elsewhere in Martin Edmond's text, a unilateral condemnation of the maternal self is softened somewhat with the acknowledgment of the ingenuous traditional needs of the husband. The son seems able to distinguish the fatal interchange between husband and wife as a symptom of the antagonistic typography of marriage. Yet this conceals only thinly the lingering conviction of the mother's culpability. After locating 'the graph' of their intersecting climb and fall, the son suggests that this 'bizarre reprise of ... married life' might be due to an exploitative conspiracy on the part of the mother, rather than an external movement of the marital narrative:

> Does it mean anything at all, beyond the simple fact that it happened? If it is true that her allegiance made you strong, what does that mean about the strength she found during your decline? Why did you go on living together for nearly ten years when the marriage was so obviously over? Was that because she needed your economic support to continue to build her career? Or was she paying you back for the humiliation she felt she had suffered at your hands all through the fifties and the sixties, when you wore the smiling public face of success and she was stuck at home with six kids and all her frustrated ambitions?[77]

If the son discovers that the father's distinction is dependent upon the subjugation of the wife, he clearly desires that the wife go on making the necessary adjustment to silence; if the husband 'could still operate' according to 'the pattern' of marital ministration, then the son seems prepared to sacrifice his mother to maintain the masculinist mechanics of the graph: 'I mean, if it was a maternal embrace you wanted, why should you not have had it?'[78]

Martin Edmond reads his father's self-explication as a document signed under therapeutic duress, an automatised admission of guilt imposed by a rigid behavioural analysis: 'It reads like a confession from one of the show trials from the 1930's.'[79] Certainly there is an empty ring to much of Trevor Edmond's introspective summation – he has, as he identifies, drawn an *intellectual* map of his marital dilemma, which he cannot yet assimilate into his *emotional* being. Similarly, although Martin makes repeated efforts 'to be fair to my mother', he has only judicious instants of calculating his parents' long-division figure as intellectual exercises, before the emotional weight of blame once again unbalances the equation. Martin Edmond's antonymic description of parental character, hers as 'convoluted and driven and interior,' his as 'simple, upright and straightforward';[80] his hierarchical reading of the household's conversion into maternal upstairs and paternal basement;[81] his pin-pointing of his mother's sexual impropriety as implicated in his father's demise – all suggest an inability to absolve the maternal autobiographer for remembering herself.

Indeed, it is the *textual* nature of the maternal restoration to selfhood that seems to evoke much of the reprehensive force of the father/son biography. The 'Subliminal' sense of the mother's autobiography as published over the paternal body is re-proved in *The Autobiography of My Father*. In the preface to *Bonfires in the Rain* Lauris Edmond mentions that her husband has died during the printing of

this second volume; when her third volume, *The Quick World*, relates the family enmity surrounding Trevor Edmond's death, no mention is made of this macabre place of the publication of the second volume, or of the husband's reception of the first. But in Martin Edmond's account of his last communication with his father, the maternal version of events is retrospectively connected to the final erosion of paternal authority. In the son's trail of evidence, the wife's textualisation of her life predates the husband's death with particular menace. Discussing Lauris Edmond's first volume of autobiography, which Trevor Edmond has just finished reading for the first time, father and son share their anxious censure of the wife and mother's errata – and the fear that her entrance into signified selfhood has fatally altered the patrilineal administration of family facts. The issue that has upset the husband is his wife's misrepresentation of 'the circumstances' surrounding a friend's death: 'That bothered you, because all she needed to have done was to check with you and you would have told her. And there it was, wrong and in print, for all time.'[82] The son, although he ostensibly tries to 'smooth it over', concurs with this position of the paternal figure as appointed editor of family truths. Martin Edmond has already defined his father's place as sovereign source of memory in the family narrative:

> You recalled taking me as a boy to the Waitomo Caves. I couldn't remember anything about it and still can't. You told me all the family news, how everyone was, you kept tabs on that and I always rang you to catch up because I knew I'd get an honest account of what was really happening. Even though you'd been estranged for twenty years and separated for ten, I could still find out from you how my mother was, which saved me having to ring her too.[83]

Clearly then, although the mother is not fit to pass on family minutes, the father is fully authorised to dictate family memory on behalf of other members who remain preferably voiceless. When Martin Edmond's authorial 'Note' acknowledges the inaccuracies of his father's recall, explaining his decision not to correct paternal errata, his rationale may appear to resemble the mother's prefatory statements on the subjective quality of truth. On reflection it seems, however, to confirm the father's place as final focus of family reality – whereas the mother's untruths are execrated as 'wrong and in print for all time', the father's are simply let stand. If Martin Edmond's text attempts to decipher the generic disproportions of autobiogra-

phy, the selectivity of human remembrance and the false foreclosure of death, the father is seemingly installed in a space beyond multangular and mutable memory, beyond editorial reproach. The paternal narrative is a 'vast storehouse of memories' which, in implicit contrast to the narrow and inconstant structure of the maternal version, has potent properties of psychic insurance for the son. When Martin Edmond laments the erosion of the headmaster's position as mythical monitor of self and memory for generations of students, he also glimpses his own dependence on the father's authorial security:

> Only you knew who they all were. Like the father of a family much larger than our nuclear one, it was as if your attention was some kind of talisman, some guarantee of safety, some assurance of the essential, intentional rightness of the lives they were trying to lead. And although I say that your concern was for the many lives you had nurtured, the tears I am pushing back as I write are really for myself. You. Gone. Who always looked after me, watched over me.[84]

Despite the premeditated post-modernity of Martin Edmond's study of memory the Author is still alive and male. The son's text remains arrested by an Oresteian logic that demands the psychic indemnity of the father as author, origin and safehold of family signs, stories and selves.

The defensive details of Martin Edmond's reaction to the maternal version may flesh out the earlier incidence of the son's patrimonial backhand which occurs on publication of Ellen Ellis's *Everything is Possible to Will*: 'For by the image of my cause I see/The portraiture of his.'[85] With the absence of any formal review, the violence of the son's recorded reception of his mother's autobiographical novel stands as indicative indictment by the masculine audience Ellis so rightly feared. Few particulars are known of William Ellis's motivation for the editorial conflagration he executed upon his mother's text – it is perhaps coincidental, but nevertheless evocative, that the circumstances of the son's autobiographical bonfire are reported in Ellen Ellis's entry in *The Book of New Zealand Women* in similar order to Martin Edmond's report on his father's textual death:

> ... William, upset at the supposed portrayal of his father as the alcoholic husband of the heroine, bought up and burnt as many copies as possible. (Ellis's husband died a year later, in 1883.) The novel is directly autobiographical.[86]

Of course, no direct causal relationship between the maternal autobiography, the paternal death and the son's response is here defined – but the alignment of these items produces similar disquieting connotations of the husband's symbolic decease to those circulating in Martin Edmond's narrative. What does seem irrefutable is the principal placement of the paternal figure in the son's conceptualisation of selfhood – a discursive position which both Ellen Ellis and Lauris Edmond seem to have underrated when gauging the family reaction to their autobiographical exposure. In *Everything is Possible to Will*, William Ellis appears as Rex, 'His mother's boy to the centre of his soul,'[87] a child rocked in an almost paradisal affection with his protective mother. His 'finely-strung nature' recoils with 'loathing from being known as his father's son,' and 'Having everything to fear and nothing to hope from his father,'[88] he rejects his patriarchal allegiances in favour of a fortified identification with the injured Zee. Although Zee 'trembled lest the father insensibly lead the son astray, by insinuating doubts calculated to undermine' her moral inculcation, she nevertheless insists on concealing the full extent of the father's trespasses:

> ... hence it would be hard for Rex to steer clear of rocks and quicksands in choosing between father and mother as to whose principles of action he should adopt, especially as Zee had from his earliest years instilled in him a child-like reverence for his father, that would preclude the possibility of his seeing him as he really was.[89]

Still Zee/Ellis appears to be satisfied that the son perceives the social injustice of 'one man having it in his power thus to blast their prospects,'[90] relying on his continuing affiliation as victim, not perpetrator, of this oppressive order. Although she acknowledges the danger of male offspring mimicking the tyranny witnessed in the father, she remains convinced that her influence exceeds the successive evils of this taxonomy:

> Children are quick to see that might means right in the domestic economy; that the mother is a slave, and the mannishness of the father repeating itself in the little four-year-old, he will be found snubbing his mother with an insufferable audacity, encouraged too often by the father.[91]

Ellen Ellis's confidence in her son's dissociation from patriarchal abuses proves unsubstantiated, however – in William Ellis's act of disposing of her story he demonstrates the undissolved potency of

paternal significance in the son's identity. In Lauris Edmond's perspective on her developing son, a similarly powerful 'natural authority' is perceived in transfer between father and heir. In a long line of female children, Martin Edmond's arrival is greeted by the father with an 'extra dash of male posturing' which surprises the mother who 'had no idea he so distinguished between fatherhood of daughters and sons.'[92] The gendered affinity which is fostered between the two males 'on our own ... in a world of women'[93] is a happy, harmless companionship – which nevertheless contains, for the observing mother, the seeds of an hierarchical initiation:

> I wondered if a family full of impressionable females – not to mention the one man who was so struck by the recreation of maleness in his son – had taught him that he had some natural authority over us ... His days became slightly separated from ours. The girls, it seemed, played at home, 'here'; Martin and other boys played away, 'there', wherever that was.[94]

It is this playful patrolling of the 'natural' boundaries of family authority which evolves into the heir's attempt to resecure discursive patrimony – initially through repatriating the mother back into marital order ('Martin told me, with a despairing peremptoriness ... that I *had* to go back to loving my husband, his father'[95]) and then through the posthumous exercise of the father's authority by proxy. In Martin Edmond's reconstruction the Edmond family saga becomes an autobiographical custody battle where members align themselves antagonistically with either maternal or paternal 'sides' – a 'generative hostility'[96] between competitive parental versions which the autobiographies of Lauris Edmond sadly acknowledge even as they seek a treaty of relative coexistence. In *The Autobiography of My Father* the debate over literary parentage centers around the suppressed poetic output of the patriarch, surviving elegies of masculine companionship left to the son to recompose paternal memory. If the son recovers a 'secret occupation' of introspection and poetry from amongst the paternal memorabilia he seeks to restore to autobiographical esteem, it is disclosed in the father's final interview that, like the marriage, the paternal poems were objects of a certain social order deposed by the mutinous musings of the wife:

> *In those early days were you and Lauris both writing poems together?*
> No, she despised my poems.

> *Was she writing her own at that time*?
> No, she did later.
> *But she didn't think yours were any good? ... And you've come to agree with her?*
> [LAUGHS] I think they were of a period of time when things were right for them, but they don't last. I think at the time it wasn't bad. That's how people felt, how I felt. But it wasn't, it wasn't well done.[97]

In this statement of textual resignation Trevor Edmond expresses similar misgivings about his poetic powers as he exhibited towards his matrimonial command – as with the marital capitulation, the son remains unsatisfied with this paternal recantation of authority. Yet in the very act of re-collecting displanted pater-biographical rights, the son's restatement of family accounts has the paradoxical effect of compounding the femini sation of the father. Unable to accept the mother as the family autobiographer, the son's text rewrites the feminist narrative of the woman lost to self and writing in the wifely role, and instead defines the father as sadly overmastered narrator of the 'honest account', of authorial notes and scant poetry scratched in domestic decline and left to the posthumous suture of the son. Moreover the legatee's desire to regender autobiography – re-membering generative truth after the mother's authorial castration – uncovers instead a lineage of maternal memoirists who call into question the identity of their confidante sons. For in attempting to reinscribe the line of paterfamilial narrative, the son's account of poetic parentage re-places his father in a literary matrix where memory and its transmission are disturbingly maternal pastimes. Although Martin Edmond claims to appreciate 'the side of your nature that I like to think came from your mother ... The side that was in a very deep sense, poetic,'[98] his reclamation of paternal memory is jeopardised by this very association. The self-reflexive fragments and filial interviews which survive the father, offer the son not reconstructive tissue for his authorial salvage but a further history of masculinity disfigured by feminine discourse. The ancestral dis-position of autocratic husband and 'autobiographical' wife is disclosed as pathological context of Trevor Edmond's own problems with authority – if recollections of the father 'aren't very pleasant'[99] the affiliation of memory is inestimably affected by the mother's inappropriate confidence in the son. 'Going back into my family history,' Trevor Edmond finds a domineering father and a discursive mother whose involvement of the son in a

secret narrative of marital grievances causes a misalliance of memories, a 'mother-identification'[100] which renders the heir ambivalent toward his own succession to masculine authority. It is this troublesome receptivity to the mother's side of the story, linked as it is to the father's subjective disabilities with power, which causes Martin Edmond to speculate on the 'psychologically female'[101] component of his father's make-up, a feminisation of memory which troubles the son's own aim of dislocating the mother's place as executrix of family authority.

Nevertheless, these last auto/biographical interviews with the father expose a sequence of sons concerned with the psychic installation of paternal authority, sons moreover, whose moments of consort with the memory of mother produce crises of discursive identification:

> In one of our last conversations you said it was your own father's death you never got over. You said that, although you hated him, as long as he was alive you felt that you would be all right ... I think you felt you had to learn, somehow, to stand in your father's shoes ... You had to try and you had to fail.[102]

The symbolic necessity of this paternal stronghold as subject of the family narrative, renders the son unable to admit the mother's inverted history, a text received as an autobiographical deposition of the author. If the married woman's autobiography induces an ugly consummation of the marital misproportion of selves, the son corrects the mother's text as a treasonable misrepresentation of events. Yet as in the case of that most vengeful of literary heirs, driven mad with the mother's implication in his imperial demise, the restoration of the paternal story is troubled by the feminisation of introspection and the intertissued history of marital subjectivity: 'Father and mother is man and wife; man and wife is one flesh; and so, my mother.'[103]

Tracey Slaughter is a PhD student in the English Department of Auckland University. She is currently working on a thesis on women's autobiography in New Zealand, from which this article is adapted. Her poetry has been published in JAAM, Takahe and Poetry NZ.

NOTES

[1] Ellen Ellis, *Everything Is Possible To Will* (London, 1882).

[2] Lauris Edmond's 'Subliminal' appeared in her third volume of autobiography, *The Quick World* (Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1992) pp. 206-207. It was later included as the title poem in the 'Subliminal' sequence of *A Matter of Timing* (Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1996) p. 23.

[3] 'The wife' and 'The husband' are two titles which feature in the 'Subliminal' section of *A Matter of Timing*, pp. 24-25.

[4] Lauris Edmond, 'Subliminal,' *A Matter of Timing*, p. 23.

[5] ibid., p. 23.

[6] Lauris Edmond, *Bonfires in the Rain: Autobiography Volume II* (Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1991) p. vii.

[7] ibid., p. viii.

[8] ibid.

[9] Lauris Edmond, 'One to one,' *A Matter of Timing*, p. 29.

[10] Lauris Edmond, 'Good behaviour,' *A Matter of Timing*, p. 30.

[11] Lauris Edmond, 'The Wife,' *A Matter of Timing*, p. 24.

[12] Vera Colebrook, *Ellen: A Biography* (Arlen House: The Women's Press, Dublin, 1980).

[13] Ellen Ellis, *Everything Is Possible*, p. iii..

[14] ibid., p. iv.

[15] It is significant that beneath the modern economy of the terms 'marriage' and 'marital' lies the Latin root which directly articulates marital identity to the male: 'Marital, ... [L. *maritalus*, from *maritus*, a husband, from *mas*, *maris*, a male. MASCULINE.] Pertaining to a husband.' (Richard Ferrar Patterson and John Dougall (eds), *Virtue's English Dictionary* (Virtue and Company, London and Dublin, 1952) p. 530.)

[16] Martin Edmond, *The Autobiography of My Father* (Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1992) pp. 157-158.

[17] Ellis, p. iii.

[18] ibid., p. 37.

[19] ibid., pp. 72-73.

[20] Lauris Edmond, 'One to one,' *A Matter of Timing*, p. 29.

[21] Ellis, p. 87.

[22] ibid., p. 63.

[23] Lauris Edmond, *Bonfires in the Rain*, p. 205.

[24] ibid., p. 212

[25] Lauris Edmond, *The Quick World*, p. 177.

[26] ibid., p. 95.

[27] ibid., pp. 55 & 52-53.

[28] Ellis, p. 201.

[29] Judith Elphick Malone, 'What's Wrong with Emma? The Feminist Debate in Colonial Auckland', in Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald and Margaret Tennant (eds), *Women in History: Essays on European Women in New Zealand* (Allen and Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, Wellington, 1986) p. 76.

[30] Ellis, p. 186.
[31] ibid., pp. 205, 219 & 141.
[32] In 1898 the New Zealand National Council of Women called for the abolition of 'Coverture both as to person and property, and all the incidents thereof, as known and established by law in the Colony of New Zealand ... and all laws and customs in force, in the said colony, relating to coverture.' (Margaret Sievwright, 'The Economic Independence of Married Women', in Charlotte Macdonald [ed], *The Vote, the Pill and the Demon Drink: A History of Feminist Writing in New Zealand, 1869-1993* [Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1993] pp. 59-62). Many of the 'serious evils' documented in this draft bill for the 'equalisation' of husband and wife have seen gradual legal redress. It is interesting to note, however, that one remaining 'consequence' of coverture relates to the presentation and publication of 'matrimonial secrets'.
[33] Ellis., pp. 74-75.
[34] ibid., p. 147.
[35] ibid., p. 65.
[36] ibid., pp. 122-123.
[37] ibid., p. 72.
[38] ibid., p. 71.
[39] ibid., pp. 79 & 81.
[40] ibid., p. 204.
[41] ibid., p. 215.
[42] ibid., p. 92.
[43] ibid., p. 42.
[44] ibid., p. 225.
[45] Lauris Edmond, *The Quick World*, pp. 177 & 181.
[46] Lauris Edmond, *Bonfires in the Rain*, p. 204.
[47] ibid., p. 23.
[48] Lauris Edmond, *Hot October: An Autobiographical Story* (Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1991) p. 23.
[49] Ellis, p. 49.
[50] ibid., pp. 46-47.
[51] ibid., p. 49.
[52] Lauris Edmond, *Hot October*, p. 235.
[53] Lauris Edmond, *Bonfires in the Rain*, p. 4.
[54] ibid., p. 154.
[55] Ellis, p. 129.
[56] Lauris Edmond, *Bonfires in the Rain*, p. 121.
[57] Lauris Edmond, *The Quick World*, p. 91.
[58] Ellis, p. 182.
[59] Lauris Edmond, *The Quick World*, p. 91.
[60] ibid., p. 189.
[61] Lauris Edmond, *Bonfires in the Rain*, p. 226.
[62] ibid., pp. 175 & 173.
[63] ibid., pp. 217-218.

[64] ibid., p. 178-179.
[65] ibid., p. 178.
[66] ibid., p. 178.
[67] Ellis, p. 52.
[68] ibid., p. 42.
[69] ibid., p. 69.
[70] ibid., p. 97.
[71] ibid., p. 150.
[72] Lauris Edmond, *Bonfires in the Rain*, p. 203.
[73] Trevor Edmond, 'Draft Summary', in Martin Edmond, *The Autobiography of My Father*, pp. 131-133.
[74] Martin Edmond, *The Autobiography of My Father*, pp. 154-155.
[75] ibid., p. 159.
[76] ibid., pp. 29-30.
[77] ibid., p. 158.
[78] ibid., p. 152.
[79] ibid., p. 152.
[80] ibid., p. 29.
[81] ibid., p. 158.
[82] ibid., p. 13.
[83] ibid., p. 13.
[84] ibid., p. 11.
[85] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* V.2., T.J. Spencer (ed), (Penguin, London, 1980) p. 191.
[86] Aorewa McLeod, 'Ellen Ellis', in Charlotte Macdonald, Merimeri Penfold and Bridget Williams (eds), *The Book of New Zealand Women: Ko Kui Ma Te Kaupapa* (Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1992) p. 208.
[87] Ellis, p. 206.
[88] ibid., p. 202.
[89] ibid., p. 200.
[90] ibid., p. 202.
[91] ibid., p. 72.
[92] Lauris Edmond, *Bonfires in the Rain*, p. 103.
[93] Martin Edmond, p. 175.
[94] Lauris Edmond, *Bonfires in the Rain*, p. 147.
[95] ibid., p. 227.
[96] Martin Edmond, p. 20.
[97] ibid., p. 90.
[98] ibid., p. 107.
[99] ibid., p. 43.
[100] ibid., p. 132.
[101] ibid., p. 154.
[102] ibid., pp. 155-156.
[103] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* IV.3., p. 158.

A Home in This World:
Why New Zealand Women Stopped Writing

AOREWA MCLEOD

Edith Searle Grossmann (1863-1931), Jane Mander (1877-1949) and Margaret Escott (1908-1977) all considered writing to be their profession, yet despite initial successful careers as novelists they all stopped writing. Edith Searle Grossmann died in 1931 and the last of her five novels was published in 1910. Twenty-one years of silence. Jane Mander died in 1949 and her last novel was published in 1928. Twenty-one years of silence. Margaret Escott died in 1977, and her last novel was published in 1936. Forty-one years of silence. In this article I discuss the concept of home and why being at home in New Zealand was antithetical to women's involvement in cultural production.

Martin and Mohanty, in 'Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to do with It?' write:

> We are interested in the configuration of home, identity and community; specifically, in the power and appeal of 'home' as a concept and desire.[1]

For colonial settler-women novelists in New Zealand, home as a concept and a desire was complex, fraught and ultimately inhibitory. Before the advent of indigenous women's writing and of feminism, both in the seventies, Pakeha women novelists had struggled and largely failed to produce a voice that came from their geographical home. Women who stayed home, like Edith Searle Grossmann, or who returned home, like Jane Mander and Margaret Escott, were unable to write. Expatriatism seemed the only solution. The best known women writers from settler colonial societies are expatriates – South Africa's Doris Lessing, Australia's Christina Stead, New Zealand's Katherine Mansfield, all of whom did their writing away from their birthplace.

In 1937 one of New Zealand's better known women writers, Robin Hyde, in an autobiographical piece not published in her lifetime, but published in 1984 as *A Home in this World*, wrote:

> I know what I am looking for. It is a home in this world. I don't mean four walls and a roof on top, though even these I have never had, the

> attic in the asylum and the stilt-legged Maori cabin where I spent three weeks at Whangaparaoa constituting the nearest approach to habitations. As often as not, though, four walls and a roof get in the way, are the very point where one is fatally sidetracked from ever having a home in this world ... we need our homes in this world, without them we have no power to create an order.[2]

The two homes in this world she refers to – the attic in the asylum and the Maori cabin – are the two sites where she was able to write compulsively and prolifically, protected from the demands of being an unwed mother trying to earn her living as a journalist. Hyde went to the Avondale Mental Asylum after a breakdown (the same institution where New Zealand's best known author, Janet Frame, and lesser-known author Eve Langley, spent years). Here the doctor gave Hyde an attic room and encouraged her to write. In two years she produced four novels. The Maori cabin on a remote beachfront up North is where she wrote her best poetry. As the madwoman in the attic and from the location of the indigenous other; as an outsider to the dominant culture and its social expectations, she was able to find a voice.

Her statement of her desire plays on two opposed concepts of home. The literal home where 'one is fatally sidetracked' is the trap for woman – the homemaker. But home is also the place which gives the power to create. Like Woolf's 'a room of one's own' it is the space which is free of the demands of family and society and yet where one feels one belongs. Behind this 1937 opposition of literal home and literary home lies another concept of home – home as England. Hyde's best known novel, *The Godwits Fly,* an autobiographical fiction of growing up in Wellington, having an illegitimate child and becoming a reporter, uses the image of the godwit – the stormy petrel, the migratory bird which flies from New Zealand to Siberia – as a metaphor for the New Zealander's migration back to England. When Edward Said, in 'The Methodology of Imperialism', wrote of '"home" being a word with extremely potent resonances',[3] he was referring to the 'socio-cultural vision of the empire'; home as the metropolitan centre. When Pakeha New Zealanders a generation ago spoke of 'Home', they meant the home-country, England. As Said wrote, 'In British culture one may discover a consistency of concern in Spenser, Shakespeare, Defoe and Austen that fixes socially desirable, empowered space in metropolitan England.'[4] Opposed to 'Home' was New

Zealand, the peripheral geographical location where Hyde was born and grew up – a location that for New Zealanders was both geographically and culturally at the extreme edge. For most settler colonial writers their home offered neither the intellectual milieu nor the receptive audience that they imagined the 'Home' construct, the metropolitan centre would.

Jane Mander, whose *Story of a New Zealand River* is now recognised as a classic of New Zealand's emergent nationalist fiction, wrote in 1932 of what she described as 'the Stagnation of New Zealand Society':

> For people who deviate from the level mentality, there is no escape within New Zealand, no centre where they may be spiritually free and again when we ask what it is that arouses enthusiasm in this country, the answer seems to be that for women it is cake-baking and for men chest-development.[5]

New Zealand's settler society, unlike that of Australia or the States, was almost entirely composed of English and Scots stock and was largely working-class and lower middle-class. Olive Schreiner's comment on her return to South Africa from England in 1889:

> Fancy a whole nation of lower middle class people ... Fancy a whole nation of lower middle class philistines, without an aristocracy of blood or intellect [6]

resembles those of Mander over forty years later about New Zealand. Schreiner, born in South Africa, had left for England aged twenty-six in 1881 with the manuscripts of three novels. *The Story of an African Farm* was published in 1885 and was acclaimed not just as the first South African novel, but as a very influential feminist novel. The other two novels were never finished. She died thirty-seven years later, having written one other book – *Women & Economics*. Her biographers, First & Scott, see her silence as an extreme example of writer's block, due, they feel, to her distinctive psychological and physiological make-up. But the phenomenon of a settler female novelist who publishes and is successful and then has difficulty continuing is a common one in New Zealand. Male writers of the same period kept writing till incapacitated or dead, often despite less auspicious beginnings.

Women's life trajectories have often affected their careers. In 1978 Tillie Olsen in *Silences* wrote of the silences in women's literary pro-

duction imposed by the needs of others, by the need to care for a house, a family. Even today first collections by New Zealand women poets appear on an average ten years later than those of men, and the male poet's output almost always exceeds that of the female poet. Robin Hyde, in *A Home in this World*, wrote:

> I had a past moderately scarlet, but not cut-throat (by cut-throat I mean either mercenary or vindictive). It lacked, I am afraid, in any real sense of humour, and I took my sins with diabolical seriousness ... 'I must confess ... hold this baby.' Squalling sin dumped, wet-napkined, on the knee of surprised young man.... It seems to me now that I am caught in the hinge of a slowly-opening door, between one age and another. Between the tradition of respectability, which was very strong in my household and had cut me off from all real family love the moment I infringed it and the new age, foretold by Neitzsche and some others.[7]

Hyde had two illegitimate births, the first stillborn, in the thirties in lower middle-class, monocultural, small town New Zealand. Each time she had to leave home to hide her pregnancy; the first baby was born in Sydney, the second in Picton. While colonial male writers complained, as did Schreiner and Mander, of the lack of intellectual stimuli and audience, Hyde's 'squalling sin' incarnates the dilemma of a sexually active heterosexual woman in such a society. In 1939 Hyde who had fostered her child out left New Zealand and went to London, the metropolitan centre, and there killed herself, aged thirty-three. As Woolf said of her imagined Judith Shakespeare who never wrote a word, 'Who shall measure the heat and violence of a poet's heart, caught and trapped in a woman's body.'[8] Having children and caring for them, having husbands and caring for them has often affected women's literary production, but there's something more going on in the silencing of settler women's narratives.

Of the three writers Grossmann, Mander and Escott, Edith Searle Grossmann was the only one who married, or as far as we know, had a sexual relationship with a man. Grossmann had one child, and separated early from her husband. Her first three novels (1890, 1893, and 1907) are expressions of the New Zealand feminism of the period. I'd argue that when the active and vocal movement of the nineties collapsed, the beliefs that informed and drove these novels lost their audience. In 1907 Grossmann published *Hermione: A Knight of the*

Holy Ghost. On the title page of the second edition is written in bold print **A Novel of the Woman Movement**. Not the Women's Movement, because, like most of her suffragist sisters, she believed in the homogeneity of women as a group, and in international, global feminism. She believed that women have a shared status worldwide based on their experience of oppression as victims of patriarchy. Hermione, the battered wife of a wealthy Australian squatter, when comparing herself to the wife of a Corfu peasant replies to the comment that 'Your marriage was exceptional. You must not draw conclusions from it':

> It is much commoner than you think; but the shame is thrown on the woman and she is taught to hide what she suffers. The essence of my trouble is common, is usual. In some shape or form that claim to dominate my will and to subdue my nature would have been made, and I should have revolted.[9]

Hermione was the second novel in a sequence, the first of which, telling of the youthful Hermione's marriage and ending with her leaving was titled *In Revolt* (1894). The preface to the first edition of *Hermione* states, '[t]he following narrative is based on a story from the past, before the Woman Movement had raised the condition of women; and it is produced now in view of a strong reactionary tendency towards resubjection.'

This is 1907; just sixteen years after women got the vote in New Zealand. In 1905, twelve years after women got the vote, the New Zealand National Organisation of Women, set up in the euphoria of suffrage, collapsed through lack of support. The narrator of *Hermione* writes:

> The modern woman has entered into the heritage they won, but she is supremely thankless to her benefactors. It is the old story of pioneers of a great social innovation.[10]

Grossmann was forty-four when she published this, her fourth novel. She had lived through the first woman movement and had been involved in the Christchurch Women's Suffrage group that had been instrumental in New Zealand being the first country to give women the vote in 1893.

Her character Hermione, after a short successful career as an actress, seeks out a group of Women's Rightists in New England and

together they set up an apartment in New York. They study the feminist theorists:

> She had collected a library of books and pamphlets on the woman movement, from Mary Wollstonecraft down to her own time. Hermione spent hour after hour in the homely room that had once been a minister's study, devouring all the mental nourishment she could find ... At that period such names as those of Dr Elizabeth Blackwell, Mary Livermore, Susan B. Anthony and the other suffrage leaders thrilled the hearts of women like Hermione. They were the heroines and pioneers of a great social revolution. It is time that this movement was rescued from the derision and the abuse with which its enemies tried to overwhelm it, and that men showed themselves magnanimous enough to rank it with such changes as the downfall of monarchal absolutism, the abolition of slavery, the reformation of religion, and the rise of humanitarianism.[11]

Hermione returns to her home, Melbourne (where Grossmann was born and lived until being brought to New Zealand aged fifteen) and sets up a woman's commune:

> Hermione in America was rather a learner than a teacher of new doctrines. In a new country, like Australia, every individual effort so she reasoned, would count for so much more.[12]

But the geographical location that is her literal home is, as Hyde said, the place where she is fatally sidetracked. Martin & Mohanty write that 'being home refers to the place where one lives with familiar, safe, protected boundaries; "not being home" is a matter of realising that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance.'[13]

Hermione's home has for her a specific history of male oppression and her resistance to it, which she has ignored to her peril. Her petition for divorce is refused, her property becomes her husband's, the commune disintegrates and she ends up killing herself rather than return to her husband. Hermione's ideological home was global feminism, as the novel was a novel of the Woman Movement, but it is no protection against the politics of the colonial and the family home. Grossmann writes a novel expounding the beliefs and values of the Woman Movement which she fears is facing 'a strong reactionary tendency to resubjection', and has her heroine kill herself rather than face resubjection. Drusilla Modjeska, writing in *Exiles at Home,* about Australian women writers between the wars, claims that, 'the thirties

were years of crisis in feminism, and the implications of this crisis were profound.'[14] But in New Zealand, as Grossmann's 1908 comments about resubjection suggests, the crisis may have come earlier.

Grossmann published one more novel, *The Heart of the Bush,* in 1910. Unlike *Hermione*, which has been forgotten, *The Heart of the Bush* has been republished and is referred to in histories of New Zealand literature as one of the earliest novels of emergent nationalism. Its delicately fragile and cultured English-educated heroine marries a ruggedly handsome uncultured New Zealand farmer and they work through their differences to a happy-ever-after ending on a sheep station. In a scene which stays in the mind of those few who read it today, the hero, on their honeymoon trip in the Southern Alps, goes off to climb a mountain 'because it is there'. She stays behind in the tent but on a stroll falls into a crevasse and has to cling there till his return. The hero clasps her to his manly chest amidst the majestic bush as she murmurs fondly, 'my barbarian'. In *Hermione* sexuality was oppression and the family home was oppression.

The Heart of the Bush fits Benedict Anderson's now classic description of nationalism as 'an imagined political community' in both conforming to and helping create New Zealand's image of itself as rugged and natural, with clearly defined male and female roles. *The Heart of the Bush* is located in the backblocks, not in cities as was *Hermione*. It's a disconcerting novel after the intellectual feminism of Hermione. What happened? I'd suggest it's the disillusionment of a feminist who had written New Zealand's only great feminist novel but whose feminist audience had vanished. She tried writing a popular romance and then lapsed into silence until her death twenty-one years later.

It's ten years after *The Heart of the Bush* before another novel was published by a New Zealand woman. In 1920 this silence was broken by Jane Mander's first novel. Its title, *The Story of a New Zealand River*, echoes Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, published thirty-seven years earlier. The novel is the story of a mother and daughter in a remote timber-milling settlement. The daughter grows up to be the new colonial woman – intellectually, physically and sexually liberated, as compared with her puritanical and reserved English mother. As early as 1867, in the pamphlet 'An Appeal to the Men of New Zealand', suffragist Mary Muller as justification for New Zealand women being given the vote had cited New Zealnd

women's greater mental and physical autonomy compared with their more sheltered English counterparts:

> ... our women are brave and strong, with an amount of self-reliance and freedom from conventionalities eminently calculated to form a great nation.[15]

Yet Mander, in her later journalism, seems to have felt, like Grossmann, that this New Zealand woman, if she had indeed existed, was a creature of the past. In an article 'No Flappers in New Zealand' written for an American audience Mander says:

> Have we the flapper? alas! no. I say alas for I really regard the flapper as a promising experiment. She might rouse New Zealand from the pleasant average prosperity into which it has progressed ... I doubt if the New Zealand girl today is in revolt against anything. She ought to be ... She ought to be raising her voice against comfort, against the soporific influence of insular smugness.... then, and this may surprise the many men and women in America who worked for suffrage and quoted New Zealand as a land of equality for men and women, we have no feminist movement in New Zealand and I never met there a feminist labelled as such in all my life, I never heard feminism discussed until I came to New York.[16]

Mander was seventeen when New Zealand women got the vote in 1893 and these later comments about the absence of feminism and the 'insular smugness' of the New Zealand society she remembers, suggest why she found it impossible to write creatively in New Zealand. Mander grew up in small timber-milling towns, worked as a teacher and journalist and in 1912, aged thirty-five, left for New York, entering the Columbia School of Journalism. The first three of Mander's novels were written in New York, the last three in London, where she moved in 1923, supporting herself by journalism. In eight years she wrote and published six novels. Like most colonial novels of the time they were published in Britain as the small and conservative New Zealand readership was not the major audience for novels written by New Zealanders or about New Zealand. Mander's novels were not well received in New Zealand. After attacks on her as a 'sex-novelist' in New Zealand newspapers, she wrote, 'I really cannot understand why some of them call me sex-obsessed. Am I being compared out there with the publications of the Religious Tract Society?'[17]

In 1932, aged fifty-five, she returned to New Zealand. In a 1924

article for a New Zealand newspaper, 'On Making Good: Colonials in London', she'd admitted, 'I have written 3 novels, and am today hundreds of pounds in debt.'[18] and she returned to what she expected to be the economic security that would enable her to continue writing. In a letter from the ship on her trip home she wrote:

> My book is held up for revision and I'm already well into another which will have to be finished fast. My family is very keen for me to go on writing and I'm promised absolute peace for work and I shall have enough to live on from my father and I hope to produce a decent book presently.[19]

Neither of the books she refers to here were published and there are no surviving manuscripts. Her father, a well-off businessman and member of parliament gave her no money. Instead she reviewed books, fifteen a month, for pocket money. The housekeeper was let go and Mander took over the running of the household and became the primary caregiver for her father until his death in 1942, ten years after her return. In 1934, two years after her return, she wrote:

> I have done nothing this summer and feel ready to smash something. I have had a round of relatives; and fruit preserving, now happily over and I'm off up North for a week or so to get restored. When I get back I shall get into something original. My sense of futility is at times suicidal.[20]

In 1932 in Australia, Miles Franklin, author of the 1901 bestseller *My Brilliant Career*, wrote:

> The trouble with Australia is that we are fast becoming a nation of charwomen. I'm too busy doing chores myself to write anymore.

Her friend Katharine Prichard in 1940 in Sydney wrote:

> Sometimes I'm sure I work harder than anybody in the world. And at so many different kinds of jobs. Keeping house for my beautiful son who is now grown up, cooking and sweeping, washing, mending etc and somewhere in between I've got to find time to do the writing that earns my living.[21]

The settler woman writer was aware that a basic difference between her life and that of an equivalent middle-class woman in England was the absence of servants. Working-class girls who were brought out as servants were snapped up as wives in the women-

hungry colonies. In 1905 Edith Searle Grossmann had written an obituary for Helen McMillan Brown, who had been her mentor and friend and the second 'lady' graduate in the British Empire – a woman who became the headmistress of a large girl's school. In her account of her friend's life she focused on the conflict between career and domestic duties:

> She wished to prove that a woman could have an independent career and yet perform all the duties of wife, mother and mistress ... her well ordered household, where nothing seemed awry, her carefully tended children were all silent but unanswerable witness to a woman managing a home and a profession at the same time ...

Grossmann ends admitting that:

> the strain must have been severe. Gradually the home duties demanded more and more of her time and strength. She began to be troubled with sleeplessness and in 1894 her husband persuaded her to resign. The rest of her life was devoted to him and her little girls ... Perhaps the task she set herself was not to be accomplished under the conditions of colonial life ... the double life had proved too much for her ... But the full solution lies in the hands of the new generation.[22]

The 'double life' is a problem that still hasn't been solved, but like Australians Franklin and Prichard, Grossmann saw the problem as being a peculiarly colonial one.

Mander, as well as being trapped by her family's expectations that the unmarried daughter be the homemaker and caregiver, found the cultural and social milieu stultifying. Writing of London she said:

> The mental horizons are immeasurably wider than they are in New Zealand or Australia. There is food for the spirit there, there is mental stimulation and toleration from the herd taboos.[23]

Mander destroyed all her papers before she died, but there's evidence in her journalism which suggests she moved in a lesbian milieu, a milieu that would have been an impossibility in New Zealand before the seventies.

> Then I knew Willa Cather for years when we lived near each other in New York's Greenwich Village – she lives with a woman friend and never visits, never answers an invitation to anything ... we had something of a little set of our own in Greenwich Village.[24]

She writes of getting to know Radclyffe Hall and the Sackville Wests, and in a slip which shows she at least knows the sapphic gossip, she writes 'Violet Sackville West is the heroine of Virginia Woolf's unusual novel *Orlando*.'[25]

In Auckland, where Mander lived, the literary scene was small and by the late thirties and forties was dominated by men who were hostile to women writers whom they saw as having monopolised and feminised the earlier literary scene. Mander was well known as an elder woman of letters. She helped promising young male writers like Sargeson financially and with gardening work. But there was no supportive network of women writers. In Australia, by contrast, which also had a larger population and more diverse ethnic mix, there was a close-knit and supportive group of women writers – the 'exiles at home' Modjeska refers to in her book of that name. As well, several of these women belonged to the Australian Communist Party. Jean Devanny who began her writing career in New Zealand and continued to write prolifically after migrating to Australia and while bringing up children, was active in the party and close to other women writers. But even though Australian women between the wars did continue to write, Modjeska comments:

> For all their ability and talent, the history of their lives, their work, their struggles is often ambiguous, contradictory, ruptured. There are the silences and the silencing, self-imposed and culturally determined.[26]

The best known of them, Henry Handel Richardson and Christina Stead, left and wrote overseas. Richardson lived in London, Stead in London, New York, Paris. New Zealand's most famous writer, Katharine Mansfield, did all her writing in England and France, just as New Zealand's best known painter, Frances Hodgkins, spent her long and prolific painting life based in England.

On her return to New Zealand Mander lived in Auckland, the same city as another novelist, Margaret Escott, but as far as can be ascertained they never met. Escott, thirty years younger than Mander, is known in New Zealand for one novel, *Showdown*. She came to New Zealand from London with her parents and brothers in 1926 when she was eighteen and went back to London in 1928. In 1934 when she was twenty-six she published her first novel and decided to make writing her career, giving up her job in the Times Book Club: 'I had seven years of 9-6, and it's time to prove I can write'.[27]

Her second novel appeared a year later in 1935, and the third, *Showdown*, in 1936. The first two are set in London, the third in Auckland and the Waikato countryside. It was republished in 1973 as part of a New Zealand fiction series as a New Zealand classic.

Escott returned to New Zealand in 1937 with three novels published in three years and good reviews. In 1939 she wrote in a letter:

> I cannot write. Perhaps it will soon come back, but I haven't done anything really sure for two years.[28]

Like Mander she became her family's caregiver. She lived next door to her parents, living off their Old Age pensions until she got one of her own. They lived till 1962 when she was fifty-five. She was active in local theatre, had lots of women friends, some of whom she had sexual relations with, and she lived on into an era when it was possible to be acknowledged as an 'out' lesbian. As far as we know she had no contact with the network of male writers, who lived, as she did, on the then bohemian North Shore of Auckland and the best known of whom, Frank Sargeson, was homosexual. She drowned herself, in 1977, aged sixty-nine. A small collection of poems was published after her death.

Her last novel, *Showdown,* published forty-one years before her death, is a first-person story told by a Waikato farmer, David, of his love affair and marriage with a cultured upper-class English woman. It ends with the marriage's dissolution and her return to London. Stylish and economical in its writing, it's a sensitive and evocative account of sexual tension and relationship dynamics. Talking of Escott's lesbianism when interviewed for an entry on Escott in *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, several of her friends commented that she had said she was David and that it was her affair she was writing about. In her only novel set in New Zealand, and the best of three fine novels, Escott has to dress herself in the drag of a comparatively uncultivated male farmer – the quintessential 'good Kiwi bloke'. When Escott returned in 1937 to the country where her brother had become a farmer she found herself unable to write again.

Marriage and children, in a colonial settler society were the expected, indeed the prescribed destiny for women. Unmarried daughters looked after their parents. Lesbians tended to leave home and migrate to the anonymity and greater tolerance of large cities. As Mander wrote, 'London is one of the few places in the world where

you can be as eccentric as you please and go unremarked.'[29]

For a lesbian, as Escott certainly was, and Mander probably was, New Zealand, even its largest city, Auckland, could not provide a home. London in the 1920s and '30s was not just the metropolitan centre of the Empire, of the Home-country, the home of Shakespeare and Dickens, it was also where Radclyffe Hall published *The Well of Loneliness,* where Radclyffe Hall and Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville West and Gluck and others could lead lesbian and bisexual lives. England is where Frances Hodgkins was encouraged by a network of lesbian couples who bought her paintings and supported her in becoming a modernist and innovative painter. It's where Katharine Mansfield could lead a bisexual life. As Said says, '"Home' is a word with extremely potent resonances.'

Zachary Leader, in a book on writer's block, concludes:

> Blocked writers fail to negotiate rival or opposing claims ... Writing asks of writers, even those who feel most alienated, that they be at home in this world, by which is meant using and shaping it as well as recognising its otherness and integrity.[30]

Despite all the reasons so far suggested for the silencing of these novelists – social, economic, sexual – there's another reason why New Zealand women may have felt ill at ease writing about being women in New Zealand.

Settler societies are based on an unacknowledged rival or opposing claim – an unacknowledged otherness. Our geographical home is not an empty country, but someone else's home which we, to make our home, have taken from them. All of these writers, situated in a country where the presence of the indigenous other was inescapable, were unable to write about them. Hyde's ability to write in a stilt-legged Maori cabin is outstanding amidst the silence of the other women writers. Reading Grossmann, Mander and Escott from the post-colonial perspective of the 1990s, the Maori, the indigenous other, is everywhere absent. This absence is a striking characteristic of many colonial women's texts and confirms Gayatri Spivak's suggestion that the articulation of the female subject within the emerging norm of feminist individualism during the age of imperialism necessarily excluded the native female.[31] In Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm* the African is marginalised and stereotyped and there are no African women.

It is, I think, significant that the first New Zealand woman to reverse the trend of early success followed by silence – Sylvia Ashton-Warner who published her first novel, *Spinster*, in 1958 when she was fifty – sets it in a Maori school, and it's the story of a teacher who tries to find a way of locating herself in the margins with her Maori pupils. Ashton-Warner followed this novel with five others, the last published when she was sixty-two. Jenny Sharpe, in *Allegories of Empire*, writes:

> The contradictions to white femininity are more evident in a colonial context where the middle-class English woman, oscillating between a dominant position of race and a subordinate one of gender, has a restricted access to colonial authority.[32]

She's talking of the colonial woman in India, but it's equally true of the colonial woman in a settler society. Staying at home and attempting to articulate a female colonial identity resulted in silence. Expatriatism meant that the colonial woman writer didn't have to confront what she was not writing about, what she could not write about – her complicity in the dominant position of race.

Aorewa McLeod is a senior lecturer in the English Department at Auckland University.

NOTES

APL = Auckland Public Library

1 Martin and Mohanty, p. 191.
2 Hyde, *A Home in This World*, p. 10.
3 Said, *The Methodology of Imperialism*, p. 30.
4 ibid.
5 Mander, 'New Zealand Novels', Box 1, Folder 2, NZMS 535, APL.
6 Schreiner, quoted in First and Scott, p. 193.
7 Hyde, p. 28.
8 Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 62.
9 *Hermione*, p. 66.
10 *Hermione*, p. 127.
11 *Hermione*, p. 125.
12 *Hermione*, p. 184.
13 Martin and Mohanty, p. 191.
14 Modjeska, *Exiles at Home*, p. 2.
15 Muller, quoted in *The Book of New Zealand Women*, p. 462.
16 Mander, 'No Flappers in New Zealand', NZMS 535, APL.

[17] Mander, quoted in Turner, *Jane Mander*, p. 134.
[18] Mander, 'On Making Good: Colonials in London', Newspaper article in *The Sun* (Christchurch) 4/12/1924, NZMS 535, APL.
[19] Mander, Letter to Monte Holcroft from the *Rangatiki* 'in the Pacific' 1932, NZMS 535, Auckland Public Library.
[20] Mander, Letter to Monte Holcroft 1934, NZMS 535, APL.
[21] Quoted in Ferrier, *As Good as a Laugh with You*, p. 62.
[22] Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, pp. 52-53.
[23] Mander, 'On Making Good', 4/12/24.
[24] Mander, Box 2, Folder 16, NZMS 535, APL.
[25] Mander, Box 2, Folder 16, NZMS 535, APL (thanks to Sue Carter).
[26] Modjeska, p. 3.
[27] Escott, unpublished letter to brother, undated.
[28] Escott, unpublished letter to brother, 20 July 1939.
[29] Mander, 'On Making Good', 4/12/24, Box 1, Folder 1, NZMS 535, APL.
[30] Leader, *Writer's Block*, p. 251.
[31] Spivak, 'Three women's texts and a critique of Imperialism', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No.1 (1985) pp. 243-246.
[32] Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire*, p. 12.

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Robin Hyde's "The House of Woman" in 'The Book of Nadath'

JANE MALONEY

> The words of Nadath, the false prophet, written in the year 1937, in a house that stands on a bay of New Zealand: a house of wood, iron and glass, and with the sea outside. ('Nadath', p. 1)

These opening lines of 'The Book of Nadath' by Robin Hyde draw readers to it as they combine to give it both specificity of time and place and mystery in the shape of an oddly named figure with a paradoxical role. Nadath is the central figure of this long prose-poem, written in verse form that bears a similarity to the Bible and is divided into thirteen discrete sections.[1] Hyde described it to her friend John Schroder as:

> An odd little affair called 'The Book of Nadath', which occurs in verses like The Scriptures only of course much more elevated.[2]

Both in form and content 'The Book of Nadath' contains many references to the Bible and religion, and parallels can be found with books of the Old Testament. 'The Book of Nehemiah', for example, contains the same number of sections as 'The Book of Nadath' and, as with other books of the Bible, opens with a similar phrase *The words of Nehemiah*, followed by a description of who Nehemiah was and when the words were spoken.

Stylistically and thematically there are parallels that can be drawn with almost any section of the Bible as both texts deal with approaches to remedying a fallen world. The prophet figure is an obvious link between the Bible and 'The Book of Nadath' but, unlike a biblical prophet, Nadath is not a fixed figure in the text, often representing different races and articulating the concerns of a number of different groups. The text itself shifts in both location and time, including scenes from pre-European New Zealand, ancient Greece and Egypt, and contemporary (1937) India and Russia. In a section named 'Master of the Wheels', the figure of Hone Heke walks across the killing fields of World War One Flanders, attempting to discover justification for the slaughter. This overlaying of cultures, religions and characters gives 'The Book of Nadath' a palimpsestic quality that leaves

shadows and traces of something 'other'.

Unlike an epic poem, 'The Book of Nadath' is not an adventure or a story, and it has little sense of time. Contrary to our expectations of the words of a prophet, 'truth' is rarely mentioned and, unlike other prophets or heroes, Nadath does not overtly seek to discover or convey it. 'The Book of Nadath' presents a series of encounters, stories and songs that reveal both the state of the world as Hyde saw it in the 1930s and a glimmer of hope that individuals have the opportunity and the power to change it. It is through Nadath's interaction and discussion with those he meets that Hyde reveals her message to the reader – the improbability of and the necessity for change. If a prophet is one through whom a divinity speaks then we may attribute Nadath's falseness to the fact that Hyde did not take herself as seriously as some have suggested.[3] Despite possible assumptions about the gender of a biblical style prophet, Nadath's gender is unclear for much of the poem, but Hyde refers to Nadath as 'he' in the section "The House of Woman", which is discussed below.[4]

While the poem remained unpublished it was seldom mentioned in biographical or literary discussions of Hyde's work, despite being both so (physically) large and thematically central to an understanding of Robin Hyde the writer.[5] Hyde, in a letter to her friend John Schroder, says that she likes 'The Book of Nadath' but is 'shy of its oddity & very doubtful as to who the devil would publish it.'[6] She was right to be doubtful as 'The Book of Nadath' has had to wait over sixty years to find a publisher. The planned publication of 'The Book of Nadath' by Auckland University Press in late 1998 may lead to a new understanding of what constitutes the body of Hyde's work and possibly change perceptions of both her chosen genres and her concerns.[7]

In each section of the poem there is a central theme or metaphor through which Hyde engages Nadath and the reader. Although the opening sentence catches the eye and the attention of the reader it is the sentence that follows that reveals the complexity of Hyde's emotional and intellectual expression throughout the poem:

> When a sick man's reason leaves him, then his dreams and visions go in and out, mingling with the people who enter his room: and who shall say which of them has substance? ('Nadath', p. 1)

'The Book of Nadath' contains many voices, none of which could be said to be clearly Hyde's but there is, without doubt, a strong presence of her contained in the opening lines. One can, for example, read into the above quote (the second line of the poem) Hyde's experience as a voluntary patient at Grey Lodge, the annexe of Avondale Mental Hospital, its question opening up the possibility of challenging the authority that allocates the label of madness and the conflicting 'realities' of the 'sick man' and 'the people who enter his room'. The effect of the juxtaposition of the opening lines contains something familiar in Hyde's writing: the comfort, beauty and hope of the house and the bay alongside the sickness and despair that, nevertheless, contain dreams and visions of considerable substance.

Beyond the constraints of a publishable text, 'The Book of Nadath' was Hyde's 'opportunity to address some pressing issues of recent times by way of their sinister repetitions in history'.[8] In doing so she exposes the relationship between fear and power that results in the oppression of individuals, groups, races and countries. She feared that, taken to its extreme, it was a relationship that might well result in another war. The possibility she suggests for the future is founded on freedom and equality, and on empowering individuals to live with integrity and to treat each other (individually and collectively) with respect.

'The Book Of Nadath' was ostensibly written in 1937 'in a house that stands on a bay of New Zealand',[9] but, in the absence of a full biography of Robin Hyde, attempts to be more specific about date and place produce a chronological dilemma. Gillian Boddy tells us in *Disputed Ground* that 'For a time in March [1937] she stayed in a small bach in the Waitakere Ranges, where she wrote *A Home In This World*.'[10] This is after she had 'traveled north to stay on the shore of Whangaroa Harbour, where she completed the last draft of *The Godwits Fly* and a number of poems.'[11] Boddy also tells us that '[she] returned to the Grey Lodge briefly in April, then moved into [D'Arcy] Cresswell's vacated bach in Elsie Stronach's garden, at 7/6 a week. From there she moved to Prospect Terrace in Milford.'[12] The locations seem indisputable but, by their choice of title, Boddy and Matthews warn us that facts about Hyde may always lead us to 'Disputed Ground'.[13] Hyde's son, Derek Challis, in his introduction to *A Home In This World*, charts a similar sequence of events:

> After her return from Dunedin she was again given leave, this time to visit friends at Totara North, and it was here, living in a 'stilt-legged' Maori whare on the northern shore of Whangaroa Harbour that *The Godwits Fly* was finally finished.... In April 1937 Robin Hyde departed abruptly and without the usual discharge procedures from the Grey Lodge. [...] A Home In This World was written at this time, while she was staying as a guest in one of the small bush baches attached to the old Waiatarua Boarding House.[14]

So was 'The Book of Nadath' one of the number of poems she wrote at Whangaroa and was Hyde in the Waitakeres writing *A Home In This World* in March before her 'brief visit' to the Grey Lodge or in April after her abrupt departure?[15] The silence surrounding the existence of 'The Book of Nadath' in both of these accounts (Derek Challis certainly and Boddy and Matthews probably knew of it) makes it more difficult to place. In a further disruption of the picture Lydia Wevers locates all of Hyde's writing in 1937 in Milford:

> During 1937 she made a long trip from one end of New Zealand to the other, and then retired to a small bach at Milford near Auckland where she completed The Godwits Fly [...] and wrote a sequel to Passport to Hell called Nor the Years Condemn. She also wrote much poetry, beginning there [...] what is her best known and most successful long sequence of poems 'Houses by the Sea' ...[16]

Wevers locates Hyde's journey around New Zealand in 1937 rather than 1936 and, although again there is no mention here of 'The Book of Nadath,' this description of 1937 would suggest that it was written, along with everything else, in Milford.

In a letter to John Schroder in September 1937, Hyde says, 'I finished "The Godwits Fly" at Whangaroa, came down, wrote in one bach here an odd little affair called "The Book of Nadath".'[17] From this letter it would seem that 'The Book of Nadath' was written in the bach at Waiatarua, but it is hard to be sure how accurate she was being in her comment and which of the remaining three baches is the 'one bach' she mentions.

Placing 'The Book of Nadath' either in time or in the sequence of baches in which it could have been written, locates it alongside other writing of that year, especially *A Home in This World*, 'Houses by the Sea', and *Nor the Years Condemn*. In addition, when 'The Book of Nadath' is placed in the context of Hyde's journalism of

1937 and her letters to Lee and Schroder one can see that it is the form of the text that is unique rather than its sentiment. If one compares it with Hyde's other works it seems that, even if it was first committed to paper in the Waitakeres, 'The Book of Nadath' was the culmination of earlier thoughts and contemplations. It is possible that the difficulty we have in locating the text along this biographical trail is one that Hyde intended. She intentionally dislocates time and place in 'The Book of Nadath' and was, as she describes in *A Home in This World*, adept at the necessary fictions surrounding her identity as an unmarried mother: 'There was only one thing to do – lie and lie again. [...] I might even have been honest [..]. But, caught in the door, can you [...] dare to be honest with anyone?'[18]

Hyde had intended to write a poem of epic scope in June 1935 but the need to make money forced her to change that poem into a play, *Chariot Wheels*, 'with a longish poetic chorus' – 'The Victory Hymn'.[19] Gloria Rawlinson, in her introduction to *Houses by the Sea and the Later Poems of Robin Hyde*, says that Hyde 'gave much time and thought to a long prose-poem "The Book of Nadath".'[20] In her discussion of its relationship to 'The Victory Hymn', Michele Leggott suggests:

> [it] is interesting to speculate that the epic poem [Hyde] did not write in 1935 after completing *Passport to Hell* and the first version of *The Godwits Fly* eventuated early in 1937 as 'The Book of Nadath'.[21]

If Hyde had planned to write the poem that became 'The Book of Nadath' for some time why did it take until 1937 for it to eventuate and why was it possible then? One answer may be that in 1935 Hyde was financially and emotionally vulnerable and an epic prose-poem would, as she suggested to Schroder, have proved difficult to publish. Leggott also suggests that by 1937 Hyde had the writing experience and maturity that she may have lacked in 1935. Perhaps, as Boddy and Matthews conclude, it was the combination of people, places and security she experienced in 1936 that gave Hyde the strength to draw on for the writing of 'The Book of Nadath':

> She returned in January 1936 to Grey Lodge. For her it had become a haven, not just because it provided financial security and protection from the threatening demands of the outside world, but more significantly because of her faith in [Dr] Tothill.[22]

It could be argued that Robin Hyde has contributed as much to the literature of New Zealand as Virginia Woolf has to that of England. The periods of their writing overlapped as did some of their concerns, problems and ideals. Both women killed themselves after struggling with a lifetime of mental illness. They shared a frustration that the position of a woman writer in the early twentieth century continued to prove so difficult.[23] In her essay *A Room Of One's Own*, Woolf addressed the major problem that faced Hyde for most of her adult writing life: 'a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.'[24] Woolf was lucky enough not to have to struggle for either money or a room of her own as, thanks to an inheritance from her aunt, she was able to live from private means. Woolf's circumstances do not detract, though, from the message that has remained an important contribution to contemporary feminist thought. In presenting a partial account of 'The Book of Nadath' through a discussion of "The House of Woman", I hope to show that, just as Woolf felt, in 1929, women needed a room and, in 1938 in *Three Guineas*, a house of their own, Hyde, in 1937, felt it crucial that the house of woman be built. That Woolf's house of woman would be 'a house that stands in a narrow street where omnibuses pass and the street hawkers cry their wares',[25] and Hyde's would be a simple bach on the coast of New Zealand, allows for both an alliance of women across nations and the specificity of the New Zealand reader.

Not a Feminist But ...

> Woman *is* a backward nation – or species, or gender, whichever you please, for reasons mainly economic and sentimental. I don't care how many brilliant exceptions you may point to, how many women have succeeded 'in spite of everything': while the conditions of one sort of individual, and the limitations she is asked, or forced to accept, are less than the best this individual is capable of taking and using if given the chance, into the backward class she goes, and stops there until by pluck, luck or good management she can wriggle out.[26]

In 'The Book of Nadath' Hyde explores both the subjugation and the strength of women in the section titled "The House of Woman". This is one of the few sections of the poem in which Nadath embarks on a quest; as he goes in search of help to build the house of woman. Before the quest begins Hyde tells us that this house must be built because woman's independence, the precursor to 'coming into her own',

is threatened by the social positions she is forced to occupy:

> In her father's house she is a daughter: in her husband's house she is a child: and at last in her son's house she is his mother, who has grown old. ("House of Woman", p. 38)

Of these Hyde sees marriage as the point at which a woman loses her chance of freedom and independence, her sense of herself:

> For after this day, she is wedded to custom, and to the sad inner knowledge of women, and is no more her own. ("House of Woman", p. 39)

And if she does not fulfil any of the roles that 'give pleasure and comfort to men', society will not endorse her choice, it will be that 'she shall be left desolate. There is no place for her in the world.'[27] The 'tradition of respectability' that Hyde wrote of in *A Home in This World* had had very real consequences for her. It had caused much of the suffering that had sent her over the edge of the wharf, in an attempted suicide, and into the Grey Lodge, a suffering shared by many women:

> To minimise my own agony would be to slander and make a joke of thousands upon thousands of women and girls who have shut themselves up in iron cages, thrown themselves into rivers [...] and also to lie about the education we received in our childhood and girlhood. No mercy, only a thin soupy trickle of 'charity' was ever preached to us.[28]

Hyde is scathing about a society that considers itself above those that carry on such 'primitive' customs as foot-binding whilst what it binds a woman to socially is no less barbaric:

> In the East was the binding of feet, that she should not walk again. But in the West was bound and holden more than her feet.
> Even her heart, her dignity and her grace, lest she should move alone. ("House of Woman", p. 39)

The house of Nadath's quest must be built to give woman a place of her own, a home in this world. Whilst Nadath seeks help to build the house, Hyde reminds us of the physical and possibly sexual freedom the house represents:

> And the sunlight let down white hair, like a woman that is alone, and joys because of her aloneness. She lets down her hair, and walks gravely on the moss, or suddenly dances with none to see her, or runs forth and takes the sea between her two hands. ("House of Woman", p. 40)

Nadath appeals to the men in the cities to help him, explaining that it may be in their interest to create this haven. "The House of Woman" is not a vision of a separatist community, but a metaphoric position of strength where men may be woman's guests and 'win to safety therein'. But the men laugh at him and tell him that woman is obliged to them for her beauty. Having first objectified her, they have raped and pillaged the world to maintain her as this object:

> And the men of the cities laughed and answered Nadath, we have given indeed. What beast has so fair a skin as woman?
>
> Have we not combed the jungle, and brought back the plumes of the bird of paradise, the osprey and the aigret?
>
> [...] Have we not clad her in cruelty, and given also the orchid with its strange colours and an odour as of sleep?
>
> [...] Answer then, prophet who speaks for woman, what beast has so fair a skin? ("House of Woman", p. 42)

This echoes the sentiment Hyde wrote in *A Home in This World*:

> [...] I will carry my skinned knuckles and sometimes abject countenance through life, and so will a good many other women. If another generation is allowed to do the same thing, I say, more fools men: for a woman can be a pretty thing when she is happy, and a soul, like a cloth, becomes heavy to carry when it is sodden through with tears.[29]

Nadath has little more success with the women 'who worked in the house and the fields',[30] despite the fact that he is offering them 'a fair house, and your own, and in it you may live'. Some agree to help but with little conviction, others explain that they have all they want, 'my father, my husband and my son [...] and a place where I may lay my head'.[31] Hyde's frustration with these women is understandable as she had none of the comfort and security they find it so hard to forego; her family did not understand or support her need to be independent, she had had children by two men who were not, and would not ever be, in a position to be her husband (although it seems she would not have wanted them to be), and her surviving son was fostered out and her contact with him erratic.[32] This frustration reveals itself as Nadath blames the women for colluding in their oppression and leaving him to build the house of woman himself:

> Yet you may be satisfied, women of the houses and fields. For what beast has so fair a skin?

> And for you that are not fair, where is the equal of your obedience and devotion?
>
> Oh slaves, is it out of the loins of slaves that the new world can be born? ("House of Woman", p. 45)

Through Nadath Hyde illustrates how she feels that women's oppression has turned them into lifeless bodies carried by men:

> Nadath said to the women, Look, and against the skies was shown a vision, the shape of a man who sought to climb a hill. But it was labour in vain.
>
> Slowly he climbed and heavily, and his eyes were the eyes of one bewildered. And the body of a woman was hung about his neck. Her hands touched the ground and her head fell back.
>
> There were pearls in her ears and about her throat, but her eyes and her lips were senseless, vapid as if she slept.
>
> Nadath said, He climbs heavily, burdened with what he has slain. ("House of Woman", p. 44)

For optimism Hyde looks to the future and relocates the oppression she details in *A Home in This World* in a universal context; she also builds from it a glimpse of hope. Her desire to create a place of equality for women in society was an individual rather than a collective feminist consciousness. Although, at this point in the text, Nadath is 'desolate in his secret heart, because none would give to the house', at the moment of his despair, 'a voice spoke to Nadath and said gently, "The house is built."'[33] For it to represent the autonomy she desired, perhaps the house can only be built by woman. The narrative of 'The Book of Nadath' takes the reader between countries and cultures but "The House of Woman" relocates it in the place of the opening line of the poem – a New Zealand bach containing the figure of a woman, possibly Hyde herself:

> And Nadath looked over a level stretch of waters, and saw the house of woman. It was little and old, and its wooden walls were set down on the edge of the sands. And the woman stood in her door. ("House of Woman", p. 46)

The house of woman is not a utopian haven, safe from the world, and here, as elsewhere, there is a force that threatens stability and peace, a force that Hyde describes as 'the sands of forgetting':

> And the sands mounted above the yellow flowers and swept into her

house, as if they would bury it deep. There was the sand of forgetting about her threshold. But as she stood she swept it out.

Her eyes looked over the seas for a sail that would come. Sometimes the sand mounted to her knees, sometimes it was a thin film, and Nadath saw her bare feet. But the woman in her house was not afraid. Her lips smiled, and Nadath said, The loneliness is gone out of the world. Fear is struck dead at its heart. ("House of Woman", pp. 46–47)

At the end of his quest, faced with defeat, Nadath discovers that the reasons behind the women's apathy are the very social conditions that necessitate the building of the house. He is helpless to overcome the impasse caused by this paradox and incapable of building the house himself. Hyde's presence in this section, as a woman whispers in Nadath's ear and appears in the doorway of the house, is her most obvious appearance anywhere in the text. She seems to be clear on a point echoed in contemporary feminist debates – that the emancipation of women cannot be brought about by men.

But Hyde did not consider herself a feminist. She did not form alliances with groups and held her opinions as a result of her own experience of marginalisation, an experience that did not result in the formation of bonds but in alienation. In building the house of woman herself, Hyde's statement is not only that Nadath, as a man, cannot build it, but a statement about the power, rights and responsibilities of the individual. Her philosophy was a simple one – that every individual must be given the best conditions in which to live and they, in turn, must take and use them for good. Having built her own house, Hyde will try to keep back the sands, the threat of war, with her two hands, so that she and the yellow flowers can keep their heads above the surface:

I want a sort of natural order and containment, a centre of equipoise, an idea – not a cell into which one can retreat, but a place from which one can advance: a place from which I can stretch out giant shadowy hands, and make a road between obscure villages in China, teach the Arab and Jew how to live together in Palestine, tidy up the shack dwellings and shack destinies of our own thin Maoris in the north.[34]

I have two arguments against war: they are my two hands. While I can use them to build, I am pledged against destruction – [35]

Jane Maloney is a PhD student and part-time tutor in the English Department, University of Auckland. Her doctoral research examines selected works by Robin Hyde and Frank Sargeson as expressions of problematic identities.

NOTES

ATL = Alexander Turnbull Library, APL = Auckland Public Library

[1] There are four known sets of material concerned with the establishment of a text for 'The Book of Nadath'. All references in this article are to a manuscript of 89 pages, numbered in sections contained in the collection of Auckland University MSS and Archives. This is a fair copy of the poem, though the arrangement of its thirteen sections is not necessarily Hyde's after the eighth section.

[2] Letter to J.H.E. Schroder, MS Papers Folder 7, 2 September, 1937, ATL.

[3] Hyde mentions in her journal of 1935 that she was given the nickname of 'Mrs God' by Henry Buchanan, one of her doctors at Grey Lodge.

[4] "House of Woman", p. 38.

[5] For analysis of the themes contained in 'The Book of Nadath' with reference to other works by Hyde see Maloney, Jane, 'Another Story: Locating Robin Hyde's "The Book of Nadath"', MPhil Thesis, Auckland University, 1996.

[6] Letter to J.H.E. Schroder, MS Papers Folder 7/ B, 2 September 1937, ATL.

[7] Efforts have been made by Michele Leggott during recent years towards the publication of a collected works of Hyde's poetry. The Marsden Fund has now awarded a grant for this work.

[8] Michele Leggott, Essay on 'The Victory Hymn', p. 16.

[9] 'The Book of Nadath', Holograph, 1937. Iris Wilkinson Papers B-13, Auckland University, 'Nadath', p. 1 (all quotes from 'The Book of Nadath' are referenced by an abbreviation of the section title and the page number within the section.)

[10] Boddy, Gillian, 'The Life of Robin Hyde', in Gillian Boddy and Jacqueline J. Matthews, *Disputed Ground* (Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1991) p. 62.

[11] Ibid., p. 61.

[12] Ibid., p. 62 (NB: references to 'the Grey Lodge' and 'Grey Lodge' have been reproduced as the original. My own use omits the article as per address Hyde used on letters to John A. Lee.)

[13] The book's title is from Charles Brasch's poem 'In memory of Robin Hyde 1906–39', *Charles Brasch, Collected Poems* (Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1984) pp. 35-36.

[14] *A Home in This World* (Longman Paul, Auckland, 1984) pp. xvii–xviii.

[15] Boddy and Matthews seem to have relied on Hyde's letters to John A. Lee for

their information. Caution is required here as some of the dates have been added to the letters by Gloria Rawlinson. In addition, my source of these letters is their transcription by Bridgid Shadbolt (Shadbolt, Brigid, 'Commonplaces: The Letters of Robin Hyde & John A. Lee 1935-1939', MA thesis, Auckland University, 1994.) Derek Challis may have other letters that have led him to suggest that she left the Grey Lodge in April.

[16] Wevers, Lydia (ed), *Robin Hyde: Selected Poems* (Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1984) introduction, p. xi.

[17] Letter to J.H.E. Schroder, MS Papers Folder 7, 2 September 1937, ATL. Schroder seems to be the only person she told so explicitly about 'The Book of Nadath'.

[18] *A Home in This World*, p. 52.

[19] The play *Chariot Wheels* remains unpublished but the poem, 'The Victory Hymn,' that occurred at the end of the play was published in *Houses by the Sea and the Later Poems of Robin Hyde* (ed) Gloria Rawlinson (Christchurch, Caxton Press, 1952) and as a monograph by The Holloway Press in 1995: 'The Victory Hymn', with introduction and essay by Michele Leggott (Holloway Press, Auckland, 1995).

[20] Gloria Rawlinson, Introduction to *Houses by the Sea and the Later Poems of Robin Hyde* (ed) Gloria Rawlinson (Christchurch, Caxton Press, 1952) p. 19.

[21] Michele Leggott, Essay on 'The Victory Hymn', p. 37.

[22] Gillian Boddy, 'The Life of Robin Hyde', in Gillian Boddy and Jacqueline Matthews, *Disputed Ground*, p. 60. Both Hyde and later commentators have linked the need for financial security to the supposed or adopted madness of some women writers:

'"... perhaps I came to this asylum of yours not because I was mad, but because I needed madness if I were to survive ..." [*A Home in This World*, p. 94]. Janet Frame has written something frighteningly similar and both seem to be talking of economic a well as psychological survival.' *Nor the Years Condemn* (University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 1995) Commentary by Phillida Bunkle, Linda Hardy, Jacqueline Matthews, p. 274.

[23] Woolf was fifty-nine when she died, and Hyde thirty-three. There has always been some doubt as to Hyde's intention to die; her overdose in a London flat in 1939 was one of many attempts and was felt by some of her friends to be an accidental death.

[24] Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One's Own* (The Hogarth Press, London, 1929; Penguin Books, London, 1993) p.3.

[25] Woolf, Virginia, *Three Guineas* (The Hogarth Press, London, 1938; Penguin Books, London, 1993) p. 208.

[26] Hyde, Robin, 'Woman Today', *Tomorrow*, 14 April (1937), quoted in Gillian Boddy and Jacqueline Matthews, *Disputed Ground*, p. 196.

[27] 'Nadath', "House of Woman", p. 39.

[28] *A Home in This World*, p. 29.
[29] *A Home in This World*, p.29.
[30] It seems that Hyde may be making an unfair distinction here by implicating only domestic and rural female labour in their own oppression.
[31] 'Nadath', 'House of Woman', p. 43.
[32] Although Hyde may have seen a lot of Derek between his fifth birthday and her departure for England, a little over two years later, in January 1938, she says in *A Home in This World* (p. 99) that she didn't see him at all between his second and fifth birthday.
[33] 'Nadath', "House of Woman", p. 46.
[34] *A Home in This World*, p. 10.
[35] Journal, 29 July.

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My Ursula Bethell

JANET CHARMAN

James K. Baxter and Katherine Mansfield are national icons. Their names are widely recognised in this country even by people who are unfamiliar with their work. Hardly any of us recognise the name Ursula Bethell. Yet she is a writer whose sophisticated construction of 'New Zealand' identity equals that of Baxter and Mansfield's. This essay is an attempt to suggest some of the reasons why mainstream recognition of Bethell's importance to New Zealand literature has been slow in coming. I believe Bethell's cultural obscurity is due to critical ambivalence regarding her lesbian identity. An ambivalence which has translated into partial appraisals of her poetry.

I first encountered Bethell's writing in an edition of her collected poems edited by Vincent O'Sullivan and published by Victoria University Press in 1985. The cover blurb of this book notes that until the appearance of this collection '[Bethell's] poetry has been unavailable for many years.'[1]

O'Sullivan's introduction characterised Bethell as an Anglican devotional poet whose mature work is unconsciously influenced by the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins.[2] This estimation rather crushed my impulse to claim Bethell as an early feminist role model. Nevertheless I found the simplicity and elegance of the 'garden' poems a revelation and was intrigued by the relationship between the women who figure in them. I put the book aside.

Prowling in the library last year I chanced across Monte Holcroft's monograph on Bethell's life and work. When I read it I found myself taken aback by the facts he records about a visit to her home. I was disappointed. This was not the place I imagined after reading the garden poems. Not in the least.

Holcroft says Bethell lived in Westenra Terrace, 'a short street near the tram terminus and an easy walk from the parish church'.[3] Her house was a bungalow she'd had built on a section in a, 'somewhat exclusive suburb', a few miles from the square.[4]

I looked again at the poems in *From a Garden in the Antipodes*. It was at first hard to see why I should have felt so cheated. After all,

the narrator of the poems includes references to the local surroundings, there is a garage, a neighbour's dog, the postman's whistle. Yet for me, the cumulative effect of the work had overwhelmed these details. I realised that I thought of Bethell's home, some fifty-two years after her death, as the ruin depicted in her poem 'Time'.

> Till at last the loiterer by the gate will wonder
> At the old, old cottage, the old wooden cottage,
> And say, 'One might build here, the view is glorious;
> This must have been a pretty garden once.[5]

On my next trip South I was planning to walk the sheep paths of the Port Hills and track down the site from an ordinance map. It was to be a literary wilderness pilgrimage. Now I read that all the sites which had been contrasted so disingenuously with 'the neatest apartment in Knightsbridge'[6] – the rock wall, 'reserved for lizards',[7] the parched green peas,[8] the drying green, the herbaceous border, the heath corner, 'the rose engarissoned footpath',[9] the apple tree – were in fact closer to the 'shrubs, suburbs, damp villas, desert isles and detective stories',[10] Bethell disparaged, and in whose precincts I, and most New Zealanders, all still live. Bethell's poetry had evoked for me 'a deep glade of Eden a booth of green boughs',[11] but her writing life was spent in a purpose-built bungalow.

Holcroft says she called her house *Rise Cottage*, because she 'valued accuracy' and she was ironically contrasting her bungalow with the stately home her family was linked to in England.[12] But this masks the fashionability of her place. 'Cashmere Bungalows' were a modern architectural import.[13] Whatever was thought of her home overseas, calling her brand new bungalow a 'cottage' blurred its high status here. This renaming also blurred Bethell's personal status. Did it help her gain the friendship of people of 'all sorts and classes and countries' for which she was known?[14]

Bethell was raised in New Zealand. She was both a product of our cultural myths and a contributor to them. As much as anything it's her 'can do', egalitarian self-esteem that makes her work attractive to us. Of her *Antipodes* poems H.C.D. Somerset said in his *Landfall* memorial to Bethell that from the first, 'They were understood. They were felt.'[15] Her collection is most often read as having literary qualities that are as refreshingly unassuming as the cottage and garden in which she locates them. They're usually referred to as the

'garden' poems.[16] Not only because *Antipodes* is a bit of a mouthful but because readers consider themselves to be on first-name terms with Bethell's material.

This impression of 'naturalness' is best epitomised in the often quoted remark of D'Arcy Cresswell that 'New Zealand wasn't truly discovered, in fact, till Ursula Bethell, 'very earnestly digging', raised her head to look at the mountains. Almost everyone had been blind before.'[17] However appealing it is, I think this *natural* view of Bethell's writing has prevented a critical consideration of some key issues in her work. I, for one, was rather taken in by it.

Actually Cresswell's views of Bethell are much more complex than is suggested by this decontextualised quote. Several paragraphs on in his anxious essay he signals his awareness of paradoxes in Bethell's life and writing, (and perhaps in his own) in this description of Effie Pollen:

> I don't believe I ever saw her. I think she was short and dark, a bit grey. I'm not sure. Women are hard to see, they disappear so into their clothes. *Perhaps it's as well.*[18]

Today, however, in the light of changed times and styles, there is no good reason why Ursula Bethell and her writing should remain *hard to see.*

Bethell's *Antipodes* garden exists independent of economics. In it there is no raising of crops or selling of produce. Vegetables have their place but the gardener would 'rather buy them in a shop'.[19] Plantings are made for reasons of aesthetics or nostalgia. However, nostalgia is always the subject of ambivalent critique. For example, homesickness for 'loved and lost London' is deflated with a shudder in the last line of the poem 'Mail', where the final image is the 'ceaseless distant scream of captive seals'.[20] Bethell could have lived anywhere. She chose to live here. Regent's Park is a nice place to visit but you wouldn't want to get locked in it.

Significantly the geography of the *Antipodes* garden defies any attempt at a literal mapping. Where we reach the boundaries of the section, Bethell's poems don't climb down into suburbia, they leap off the mountainside into the Pacific Ocean. Calling a truce in her battle against garden pests the narrator says:

> ... Let me sit down upon this bench,
> and lift my eyes beyond the confines of this strife!

How peaceful sleeps the great Pacific to the eastward;
Mile upon mile unbroken rests the open plain;[21]

Even the great Pacific can be comfortably settled into the Antipodes garden. This is a place where the characters' needs are abundantly met. An idyllic site where the material and the spiritual are on common ground.

'Primavera' is the most 'homesick' for England poem Bethell includes in her collection. A lament that here in New Zealand 'Coomb, coppice, spinney, aye, and primrose wood,/ [are] Not understood, dale and meadow, not understood.'[22] However, this sense of loss is complex and qualified.

The narrator looks towards her spiritual destiny for consolation. She suggests that comfort comes from accepting the transience of earthly life and having faith that primroses aplenty 'adorn the groves where immortal choirs sing'.[23]

In making this assertion Bethell's poem does not renounce the 'primrose path'.[24] Her primroses overrule the tradition that a Christian must relinquish pleasure and punish the flesh. 'You should not be here, primroses, yet must I have you here' she says.[25]

The poem shifts languages in its fifth stanza to intensify the sense of a foreigner's pining for home: '*In patria,* primroses, *in patria* - do you hear?' The shift to italics signals another voice. But it also voices a subtext. '*La patrie – la patrie c'est le pays du desir–*'[26] Using the french 'desir' lets me read the phrase into English as literally *my home is the land of desire*. Only after this reading do I translate the phrase to mean *my home – land of my longing*.

Bethell thus marries the principle of *eros*, present in her sensual catalogue of English trees and weather, 'your tender fragrance so fresh in the mist, in the rain'[27] to an endnote focused on a route *to divine agape*. In the process the *Antipodes* garden functions not as a second rate destination, but rather as a staging post on the way to the hereafter.

A staging post from which the writing celebrates leisure and pleasure for their own sake as inalienable human rites. Here play is not a diversion from learning, but rather in the sense that today's early childhood educators use the word; this is 'play' as a profoundly serious form of honest labour. It's in the fantastic unqualified *uselessness* of the poems, then, that some of their continuing appeal must lie.

The *Antipodes* garden exists for the pleasure it gives to the cou-

ple who tend it. Their relationship with the land mirrors their relationship with each other. This is the poem 'Discipline':

> I said; I will go into the garden and consider roses;
> I will observe the deployment of their petals,
> And compare one variety with another.
> But I was made to sit down and scrape potatoes.
>
> The morning's rosebuds passed by unattended,
> While I sat bound to monotonous kitchen industry.
> Howbeit the heart of my consort was exhilarated,
> And for virtuous renunciation I recieved praise.
>
> The taste of the potatoes was satisfactory
> With a sprig of fresh mint, dairy butter, and very young green peas.[28]

There is no breadwinner. There are no dependents. The sole reason for the partnership is the pleasure the couple have in each other's company. There is no place for the exchange of money for services. Yet her contemporary Monte Holcroft considered this last to be the original basis of Ursula Bethell's relationship with her 'companion' Effie Pollen.

> 'Effie was Ursula's 'companion'. A word used often in the poems; and although Ursula intended it to mean 'friend', it may have had a narrower meaning at the beginning of their relationship. In those days an unmarried woman with a small private income would sometimes live with another woman (usually a widow) to keep her company, and perform light duties, in return for accommodation. It was a genteel arrangement, giving mutual security.[29]

Holcroft's remarks are carefully judged. He tries so hard not to write condescendingly of Bethell, her work, or her relationship. Nevertheless this passage is representative of his monograph in highlighting in a variety of ways, the anxiety and hostility his culture directs towards women whose relationships fall outside the patriarchal norms. He goes on to quote from an anguished letter Bethell sent him when Effie Pollen died: 'a complete shattering of my life; from her I have had love, tenderness, and understanding for thirty years, and close and happy companionship (in spite of inevitable superficial differences) in this house for ten years. I shall not want another home on this planet.' He immediately feels obliged to mediate these

revelations. Here's how he continues:

> A few weeks later she wrote to me again. I doubt if she thought for a moment that her relationship with Effie might be misunderstood; and I am certain she would not have cared if it had been: she was secure in herself and had a large toleration of frailty. But I thought two statements in her letter were significant. Her feelings for Miss Pollen, she wrote, had been 'prevailingly maternal'. And she added: 'They are mistaken who think that such relationships are only known when physically based.'[30]

It's a passage marked by ambivalence. Holcroft seems caught between a desire to honour the integrity of Bethell and Pollen's relationship whilst reconstructing that relationship for readers who might view his revelations with prejudice and bigotry.

The Edenic world of the *Antipodes* poems exists, then, in a fictional realm. Bethel never went public with her relationship any more than she 'paraded' her actual garden.[31] That's because either must seem an anti-climax after the visionary rendering we find in her writing.

The *Antipodes* poems question not only the dominant economic and sexual imperatives of their times but also many political orthodoxies. This challenge is encoded in the seemingly deferential otherness of their title. 'From a Garden in the Antipodes' is an Australasian location opposed to a European one, antipodes in its sense of being geographically foot to foot. This is colony versus empire. Yet on entering what reader and narrator agree is 'opposite' space, we find Bethell's poems don't admit their 'otherness'.

'Won't you greet a friend from home half a world away?', was how the publisher put it in 1929 in an English advertisement for the collection.[32] There is no admission here of cultural, or for that matter sexual, cringe. *The Lack.* What lack?

'I have a thirty foot hose,' the narrator remarks in one poem.[33] Tellingly, by the end of 'Elect', even this seemingly indispensible irrigation system is irrelevant because the pilgrim rose is surviving quite well up by the front gate all on its own.

This refusal of *otherness* is not a reading that recommends itself to patriarchy any more than it appealed to the heart of empire. *Poems from a Garden in the Antipodes* languished in the marketplace and in 1934 Bethell repurchased her unsold books to save them from remaindering.[34]

Today the original pseudonymously authored edition is out of print. And reading the *Collected* work of Ursula Bethell obscures the narrative effect of the non gender captured name *Evelyn Hayes* under which the *Antipodes* poems were originally published. This name denoted the author of the poems as either male or female. It gave Bethell the opportunity to inhabit a subversive range of textual positions from within a first person narrative.

Blurring the architectural provenance of her home had helped her to make social contacts beyond those prescribed by class boundaries. Blurring their precise personal status permitted Bethell to achieve and maintain the unorthodox friendship she had with Effie Pollen, the woman who shared her life at *Rise Cottage* throughout her productive writing years. Blurring her identity as an author permitted her to inscribe the relationship with Pollen as a marriage in her *Antipodes* poems. And because that makes the relationship *the love that dare not speak its name*, Bethell is obliged to publish her poems pseudonymously.

In 1895, the year Bethell turned twenty-one, Oscar Wilde was sentenced to two years with hard labour for homosexual practices.[35] Understandably, even thirty-four years later, in New Zealand, Bethell sidesteps any hint of 'daring' as she details the ordinary intimacy of spouse with same sex spouse.

Helen Simpson, who wrote the introductory note to the first collected poems, has this to say about their authorship:

> For private and personal reasons which seemed to her sufficient, Miss Bethell insisted on the use of a pseudonym ... and Evelyn she felt provided a further cloak in the ambiguity of its gender ... Long before her death Miss Bethell had given up her desire to pseudonymity.[36]

Yet a first person narrator is not 'gender ambiguous' to their reader. Readers come to any work with assumptions about women and men. As a narrative proceeds readers test their assumptions against the text. Where ambiguity exists, as in the form in which the *Antipodes* poems were originally published, the readers determine and if necessary redetermine, the narrator's gender. They base their decisions on what the narrator says and does and on their beliefs about masculinity and femininity. They can't help themselves because they live in a world where gender constructs identity. Until they decide which gender a person performs, they can't think what that person means.

In New Zealand where there was an early revelation of Evelyn Hayes as a *woman* writer, paradoxically this knowledge has not prevented a long silence on the sexual politics which underpin Bethell's writing. Anne Else's 1985 *Landfall* article about the treatment of women poets in *Landfall* is the only critical instance I have found which notes Bethell's identity as lesbian. Presumably one reason for this reticence is a desire to protect Bethell's reputation from any perceived slur of sexual deviance. Another has been a critical inability to find a bridge between her devout Christianity and her invidious position in a faith which suppresses homosexuality. Yet for whatever reasons, to analyse these poems without an awareness of, in particular, their first person narrator's sensitivity to gender determination, is to miss many of Bethell's subtleties.

Bethell blurs role boundaries starting with the 'foreword' poem in the *Antipodes* collection. The narrator tells us that the volume is addressed to a friend who lives in a far off country. 'I have told you, Ruth, in plain words/ The pleasures of my occupation.' The poem invokes '... the rhythms of the stout spade/ The lawnmower and the constant hoe'. A manly, a husbandly opening. But these unforgiving agricultural labours are contrasted with a wish to produce something sweeter. And in words that are decidedly wifely: 'I would that it had been given me/ To be the maker of a small melody/ Fit to be chanted by one of Eve's daughters/ Throwing her first seed into a rough furrow.'[37] If it's disconcerting it's a taste of what's to come.

The poems are recounted by someone who refers to themselves as a 'gardener', a 'Horticulturalist', and they oppose their narration with someone they refer to as their 'companion', 'coadjutor', 'consort', 'a housewife'.

So why, if the reader very understandably concludes that the narrator is a man, is the book addressed to *another* woman? Is this old friend Ruth an old flame of the narrator's? What does the narrator's *current* 'consort' think of this dedication?

The narrator and their companion seem to be an unusually compatible couple. There is possessiveness, but without jealousy. They have separate spheres but no rigid role boundaries. In 'Grace', the narrator introduces their nurturing companion with the words, 'I have a little raven'. Then goes on, in an image of loquacious virility, to describe themselves as, 'a hungry old sinner'.[38] It's a masculine persona reinforced seven poems later in 'Sinensis' which starts tangen-

tially: 'A friend said, "You must be dull sometimes/ Away up there on that hill."' And the reply is insistently masculinised by 'the Horticulturalist' in these terms:

> When he is not labouring in physical toil,
> Or attempting to alleviate ever recurring hunger and thirst
> He is working out a succession of vegetables, ...
> Or, after an unfortunate disappointment
> Seeking the consolations of Philosophy.
> He has never accomplished when the sun goes down
> More than a small portion of what he had intended to do.[39]

If the pronouns aren't enough, the appetites, the physical work, the high culture theorising, all these are stereotypically masculine. And the narrator's masculinity is never directly contradicted anywhere else.

Yet isn't there a suggestion of the feminine in 'Glory', where the gardener, resting on a bench to watch the sunset, writes of the soul, as 'she'? Perhaps the spiritual element is being feminised here, in the same way that inspiration for a man is feminised in the muse? Perhaps not. In the poem's second to last stanza

> ... Then was revealed in a dim turquoise interstice,
> A very young, remote, and slender, but outshining,
> But all predominant moon.[40]

Suggestively, at this point in the text a trio of characteristics is present that Bridie Lonie identifies as the three painting 'habits' in the art of Francis Hodgkins.

> These then are the three habits: a use of symbols associated with femininity, connections between the colour blue and the female body, and a central dissolution of space.[41]

Can we identify these *habits* elsewhere in Bethell's poems? If on account of their presence here the reader thinks that this narrator must be a woman after all, suddenly disruptive, Bethell incorporates two 'buts' in these lines. They break into the rhythm of the poem just at the point when the sunset storm they're part of appears to be all but over.

In the final stanza of the poem the narrator rejects 'petulant questions' that presume what the admission of femininity might imply,

with the words: 'In such an hour the soul finds an appeasement/ Not justified by reasons of common sense.'[42] If the narrator is acknowledging here that she is a woman, what sense, common or otherwise, are we invited to make now of the narrator's relationship with the 'little raven'?

Can girls do anything? In the *Antipodes* garden it seems so. Elsewhere, in New Zealand literary circles, for example, there have always been certain limits.

Vincent O'Sullivan notes that 'in a small community there was no secret as to who the author [of these volumes] was.'[43] So readers who could think what is meant by the masculinity, then femininity, of the narrator Evelyn Hayes, could also consider the unthinkable 'other' construction that might be put on the life and work of Ursula Bethell the well-to-do Anglican spinster. No one openly challenged her.

As her correspondence makes clear, at the point of publication Bethell was amenable to editors and friends suggesting titles or correcting grammatical 'errors' in her poems. This tolerence of interference becomes explicable if one considers that these comments about layout and punctuation, restricted as they were to minor critical assertions, offered Bethell an implicit affirmation of the legitimacy of her larger creative project. Equally, had Bethell imposed her will on the final details of her books' production this would have made uncomfortably permeable the barrier she kept between the narration of her poems and herself as their author. A barrier which she was obliged to maintain in order to be able to write as she liked.

In allowing her poems into public view at all, the risk of identification as a lesbian was always a possibility. Every critic who writes about Ursula Bethell has had to negotiate the currents in her work that take us from the thinkable to the unthinkable, from the spoken to the unspoken. How we address these matters reveals as much about us as it does about her.

Bethell's companion, Effie Henrietta Dorothea Pollen, died suddenly in 1934. *Time and Place*, Bethell's second collection, appeared two years later. In it the writer of *Time and Place* is identified only as 'the Author of *Poems From a Garden in the Antipodes*'. The dedication is to 'the dear memory of E.H.D.P. without whom these had not been written'.[44] Particular, but still, necessarily, entirely gender obscure.

Bethel was devastated by Effie Pollen's death, yet the expression

of her grief had to be carefully judged. This need for calculation could explain the sense of guilt which Bethell expresses in some of her letters written at this time.

The links between the women had been pervasive in Bethell's writing and the work in *Time and Place* is no exception. In Bethell's dedication it becomes noticeable that the first two of Effie Pollen's four initials mimic the shortened form of Evelyn Hayes that Bethell adopted for poems that appeared in the Christchurch *Press*. There she was published as 'E.H.'.[45]

This second collection is about half the size of the *Antipodes* work. There are vistas and storms, drives, crops and seasons, travellers and forests. The poems reveal a landscape with a more distant horizon than the first book.

Bethell critics think that most of these sixteen poems were written before Pollen's death.[46] This makes Bethell's tight editing of the *Antipodes* collection even more remarkable. Yet *Time and Place* is not simply a compilation of work that didn't fit into *Antipodes*. It has a formal shape of its own. The book is arranged in four sections. In each a season of the year is personified as a woman. For example, 'Spring Storm' has *Primavera* not just on a primrose path to heaven; now she roves the 'wide lowlands over'. In the second to last stanza of the poem:

> She arose; with a hand twist wrung out her tresses,
> Her long yellow tresses; flung naked her young limbs,
> Her willowy, white limbs, merrily running
> And tripping light;
> Her burnished hair, tossing, dressed and undressed her.[47]

The image is a sensual one. Eros embodied in the landscape. It is as if the central figures from Botticelli's paintings of 'The Birth of Venus' and 'Spring', were alternated in a dance across the plain.[48] Dressed and undressed. Tressed and untressed.

In the next season, 'November', 'young summer green wreathed earth prepares/ Her year long increment, and fills her wealthy stores'.[49]

In 'Autumn Afternoon', 'It seemed as if Autumn, red-cloaked for her journey/ Autumn, kind Autumn, had paused for a while'.[50]

Last come the four winter poems. It's this section that addresses the impact on the writer's life of Effie Pollen's completely unexpected death.

In 'Warning of Winter', Eros is literally banished. She appears in

Bethell's handwriting in the manuscript copy of the poem, where the title is recorded as 'Eros Agape', and in this way in two lines in the body of the text:

> Go with Eros to darkness
> Descends his flowered pathway,[51]

By the time this poem reaches typescript, however, the snow has come down on it. The title 'Eros-Agape' has turned into 'Warning of Winter' and the ambiguous 'Go with Eros to darkness,' has become the unequivocal 'Alas, alas to darkness/ Descends his flowered pathway'.[52]

The next poem in the collection, 'Weathered Rocks' , at first seems unremittingly bleak. Here the origin point of poetry - a volcano - is exhausted. The narrator stands desolate in an arid landscape among 'twisted brambles from invisible crevasses.'[53]

The first line of the next stanza reads: 'Rock, thorn, cryptogram, each has significance'. The word 'cryptogram' is a puzzle. Up till now the narrator has been detailing the landscape where boulders are 'encrusted with ... lichens' and only 'lissom tussock' grows. Where does a 'cryptogram' fit in on the volcanic plateau? *Webster* says it is 'A piece of writing in secret characters. Something written in cypher.' One reading is that it's the 'Tattoo'd and stained, silvered, denigrated' marking on the boulders. However, just above my dictionary's definition of 'cryptogram' I notice an almost identical word:

> **cryp.to.gam**, krip~ to. gam, n. [Fr. *cryptogame* = N.L. *cryptogamus*, cryptogamous, < Gr. *Kryptos* -, hidden and *gamos* - marriage.] *Bot.* any of the *Cryptogamia*, an old primary division of plants comprising those without stamens and pistils, and therefore without flowers and seeds, as the ferns, mosses and thallophytes; a plant without a true seed.[54]

When Bethell revised 'Warning of Winter', possibly after Effie Pollen's death, did she also make changes to 'Weathered Rocks'? 'Cryptogam' would aptly complete her catalogue of the environment. And its derivation gives it an additional dimension particularly relevant to the hidden aspect of Bethell's relationship with Effie Pollen. I called the Macmillan Brown Library. They don't have a manuscript copy of 'Weathered Rocks', only a typescript. It shows the published word 'cryptogram'.

Whatever a mansucript copy of the poem might tell us about its composition, in 'Weathered Rocks' Bethell is clearly alerting the

reader to the transforming subtleties of poetic language. The opening lines of ' Weathered Rocks' read: 'Poetry is a music made of images/ Worded one in the similitude of another.'[55]

And whether or not Bethell wrote 'Weathered Rocks' before Effie Pollen's death, here her winter placement of it allows it to function both as a lament for Effie Pollen's passing and a piece of advocacy for those whose creativity is threatened by a life lived on the margins.

Ursula Bethell wasn't prepared to be 'out' in her day – hence the cryptogram. But in this poem I think she looks forward to a time when the issue of her hidden relationship could be raised legitimately. A time when the background of her poems would be properly recognised as part of the whole context of her writing.

The intensity of the grief Bethell suffered at Effie Pollen's death may have meant she needed to put maximum authorial distance between herself and the material she published which referred to it. Anonymity meant she could avoid explaining or, even more important, explaining away, any transgressive elements in her poems.

Every year, for six years, on the anniversary of Effie Pollens death, Bethell composed a memorial poem. These poems were not published till after Bethell's own death.

They are eloquent testimony to both her sense of loss and the love she had experienced. The poems are carefully worded and formally constructed. They balance Bethell's painful struggle for Christian acceptance against her desire to rekindle past happiness. 'You left me, darling, desolate – might it not be to find,/ to accomplish in my solitude some unfinished work,/ To glean some stormy harvest that remains?'[56] But renewed feelings of grief cut through Bethell's considered attempts at acceptance. The last memorial poem, 'Spring 1940', ends with the line, 'I cannot bear the pain.'[57]

In her letters to people with whom she discusses her memorial poems for Effie Pollen, Bethell suggests that it's important she keep this work private.[58] Bethell knows that a woman is forbidden to mourn for another woman as if they had been spouses. Yet she is able to protect herself from the humiliation of denying the profound significance of the loss of her relationship with Pollen by reframing her circumspection in religious terms. Thus her muted response becomes, not an act of denial of Pollen; rather it's a denial of the power of death. Bethell is able to see herself as both a true lover and a true knight of Christ.

In the collection she published after *Time and Place* she still believes it necessary to hide her identity. This, her third and final book, is titled *Day and Night*: *Poems 1924-1934*. It identifies the writer as 'the author of *Time and Place*'.[59] Anonymity is certainly intended to protect Bethell's privacy but it also means she can publish on questions of religion and philosophy without facing mysogynist accusations that she is getting above her station.

According to L.G.Whitehead, Ursula Bethell supported the ordination of women.

> It was her sense of mission that made her so strong an advocate of the idea of women priests. She felt that the male sex had enjoyed their entrenched position in this matter and ought to be deprived of an assumed monopoly as soon as possible.[60]

Holcroft refers to the work here which meditates on mortality and sacrifice, as Bethell's 'night pieces'.[61] I think that we also see her in her *Knight* of Christ persona. This is writing in quest of the Holy Grail. I don't think it eluded her. Rather, she remained – as Malory's Lancelot did – in and of the world with the one she loved, for as long as that was to be physically possible.

Like her two previous collections *Day and Night* was composed of work written during Effie Pollen's lifetime. It was published by Caxton in 1939, six years before Bethell died on the 15th January 1945.[62]

Was Bethell right to assume a lack of respect for her work and attacks on her dignity? Hostility towards her is apparent in at least some of the writing which emerged after her death. For example, there are ambivalent references to Bethell's domestic arrangements in Toss Woollaston's Autobiography of 1980, *Sage Tea*. He makes a point of letting us know twice in the space of six pages that the women at Rise Cottage had separate bedrooms.[63] And in several vividly told incidents he ridicules Bethell's attempts to both acknowledge yet circumvent social convention. Once he knocked very early at her front door on a Saturday morning and 'cramming her hat on' she pretended to be going out so as not to have to entertain an uninvited caller. In another incident she can't bring herself to point out to him a favourable review of her collection in the morning paper. When she thinks he must have found the piece for himself, Woollaston says she asks him, 'with a strange sort of brightness, what I thought of it.'[64]

Woollaston records these events to establish Bethell's peculiar-

ity, which he links to her problematic identity as a woman who doesn't fit his idea of the approved gender role boundaries:

> I had been working alone for perhaps twenty minutes when the back door opened and Miss Bethell appeared clad in a linen jacket and something like riding breeches, with a hatchet in her hand to help me with the work.[65]

We don't, of course, need to hear what Woollaston wore to chop up a tree. A man is his work, not what he wears for it. Bethell is a wealthy, formidably intelligent, independent writer. Although Woollaston is grateful for financial patronage, these slippages in his text reveal that as a man he finds his professional beholdeness to 'Miss' Bethell inappropriate.

Today Bethell is entitled to recognition as a lesbian. She constructed a satisfactory path through the homophobia of her own time. I think we can dispense with condescending examples of writing about Bethell in ours.

The *Antipodes* garden is a pleasure ground inhabited by two women. If it's on the far side of Eden it's no less a paradise for that. Lancelot escaped with Guinevere to his castle Joyous Gard when their relationship was made public by their enemies.[66] In 'Spring on the Plain', one of the poems in Bethell's last collection, Joyous Guard also makes an appearance.[67] It's a phrase which encapsulates for me the liberties Bethell took in her writing. There is nothing defensive about the way she uses it.[68]

> And: Life, life, resurgent life! sings the exalted skylark,
> As on the battlements of spring he mounts his joyous guard.'[69]

Janet Charman is a poet who lives and works in Auckland. Her new poetry collection, Rapunzel, Rapunzel *appears from Auckland University Press next year.*

NOTES

[1] *Ursula Bethell, Collected Poems* (ed) Vincent O'Sullivan (Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1985). (All further quotes from the poems are sourced in this edition.)
[2] ibid., p. xvi.
[3] Holcroft, *Ursula Bethell*, p. 12.
[4] ibid., p. 11.
[5] 'Time', p. 8.
[6] 'Controversy', p. 12.
[7] 'Admonition', p. 20.
[8] 'Incident', p. 13.
[9] 'Glory', p. 19.
[10] 'Catalogue', p. 3.
[11] 'Controversy', p. 12.
[12] Holcroft, *Ursula Bethell*, p. 12.
[13] ibid.
[14] O'Sullivan,*Collected Poems*, p. xii.
[15] *Landfall*, 8: Dec (1948) Vol 2, No.4, p. 279.
[16] O'Sullivan, *Collected Poems*, p. xiv.
[17] D'Arcy Cresswell, *Landfall*, 8, p. 283.
[18] ibid.
[19] 'Perspective', p. 19.
[20] 'Mail', p. 10.
[21] 'Glory', p. 19.
[22] 'Primavera', p. 6.
[23] ibid., p. 7.
[24] *Hamlet*, I, iii, 47, and *Macbeth* II, iii, 22.
[25] 'Primavera', p. 6.
[26] ibid.
[27] ibid., p. 7.
[28] 'Discipline', p. 9.
[29] Holcroft, *Ursula Bethell*, p. 13.
[30] ibid., pp. 13-14.
[31] ibid., p. 15.
[32] O'Sullivan, *Collected Poems*, p. x.
[33] 'Elect', p. 18
[34] Holcroft, *Ursula Bethell*, note 19, p. 53. Thanks to Barney Brewster for his gift of an original edition of the *Antipodes* poems.
[35] *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, p. 887.
[36] *Collected Poems* (Caxton Press, Christchurch, 1950) p. 11.
[37] Foreword, p. 1.
[38] 'Grace', p. 3.

[39] 'Sinensis', p. 7
[40] 'Glory', p. 19.
[41] Bridie Lonie, 'Shifting Signifiers', *Art New Zealand*, No.78, p. 83.
[42] 'Glory', p. 19.
[43] O'Sullivan, *Collected Works*, p. xii.
[44] *Time and Place*, Poems (The Caxton Press, Christchurch, 1936).
[45] O'Sullivan, *Collected Poems*, p. xii.
[46] ibid., p. xiv.
[47] 'Spring Storm', p. 28.
[48] *Botticelli, 80 Colour Plates*, 'Spring', pp. 28-29, 'Birth of Venus', p. 55.
[49] 'November', p. 31.
[50] 'Autumn Afternoon', p. 38.
[51] Manuscript 38, Ursula Bethell Papers, Macmillan Brown Library, Canterbury University. Thanks to Bronwyn Matthews for assistance with a library search.
[52] The original version of the poem refers to Psyche's descent from the hilltop into the depths of the wood where she finds the palace of Cupid (Eros). He becomes her hidden lover. The descent in the revised version is into the underworld where Psyche (the soul) goes in an attempt to placate the gods after they have intervened to separate the couple. Thanks to Murray Edmond for suggesting the relevance of this fable in: Michael Grant, *Myths of the Greeks and Romans*, 'The Invisible Lover', p. 357.
[53] 'Weathered Rocks', p. 40.
[54] *Websters Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*, p. 243.
[55] 'Weathered Rocks', p. 39.
[56] 'Spring 1940', p. 83.
[57] ibid., p. 83.
[58] O'Sullivan, *Collected Poems*, Note 79, p.106.
[59] O'Sullivan, *Collected Poems*, Note 42, p. 105.
[60] L.G Whitehead *in Landfall* 8, Dec. (1948) Vol 2: 4.
[61] Holcroft, *Ursula Bethell*, p. 35.
[62] O'Sullivan, p. xii.
[63] Toss Woollaston, *Sage Tea*, pp. 216, 220.
[64] ibid., p. 217.
[65] ibid., p. 223.
[66] D.S. Brewer, *Malory: The Morte Darthur*, p. 103.
[67] 'Spring on the Plain', p. 45.
[68] This essay evolved from a staff seminar presented at the invitation of the English Department of the University of Auckland during my 1997 tenure as Literary Fellow. Thanks to Jon Battista, Diane Brown, Murray Edmond, Chris Price and Peter Simpson for encouragement on that occasion. A version of this article was judged a commended entry in the 1987 *Landfall* essay competition.
[69] D.S. Brewer, *Malory: The Morte Darthur*, p. 113.

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From Displacement to Dissemination:
Narratives of Experience and Possibility

MARION DOHERTY

> Displacement is an exile from older certitudes of meaning and selfhood, a possibly permanent sojourn in the wilderness.
>
> Mark Krupnick, 1983

> ... the process of dislocation is no less arch-originary, that is, just as 'archaic' as the archaism that it has always dislodged ... All stability in a place being but a stabilisation or a sedentarisation, it will have to have been necessary that the local *differance*, the spacing of a displacement gives the movement its start ... All national rootedness, for example, is rooted first of all in the memory or the anxiety of a displaced – or displaceable – population. It is not only time that is 'out of joint,' but space, space in time, spacing.
>
> Jacques Derrida, 1994

This article examines the way in which displacement is negotiated in two South African narratives – Andre Brink's novel *Imaginings of Sand* and Gillian Slovo's autobiography *Every Secret Thing*. My exploration of displacement focuses not simply on the events of migration or colonisation but on the deeper psychic consequences of being dislocated from a familiar topos and way of establishing identity through imagining one's place in the nation. The issues identified resonate with my own experience of being displaced as a child from family, friends and the country of Zimbabwe.

My family immigrated to New Zealand when I was a small child and I was brought up to understand that we had to leave Zimbabwe because my father would not fight for Ian Smith's government. I coped with the painful realities of displacement by telling myself that our migration was necessary due to the oppression of 'good' black people being meted out at the hands of 'bad' white people. Seeing a film at age ten or eleven about a violent tsotsi (township gangster) threw my whole system of meanings into disarray. Retrospectively, I can see that this representation did not fit into my conceptual schema, which constructed black people as authentically good and oppressed.

By extension, the meaning I had given to our migration was also radically disrupted. Another strategy that I used to 'ground' my experience was to verbally define my origins. I felt the need to tell people repeatedly that 'I am one quarter Irish and three quarters English, was born in Zimbabwe and live in New Zealand.' My desire to reiterate my origins through language and use self and 'other' distinctions in order to solidify my sense of identity, provided a starting point for examining the texts. This article can be seen as yet another attempt to articulate and give meaning to my sense of dislocation and displacement, whilst at the same time seeking to critically examine my own discursive strategies and those used in the narratives.

Angelika Bammer argues that displacement is central to the formation of contemporary subjectivity and identity:

> The separation of people from their native cultures either through physical dislocation (as refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles or expatriates) or the colonizing imposition of a foreign culture – what I am calling here displacement – is one of the most formative experiences of our century (1994, p. xi).

She cites the enormous numbers of people displaced during World War II, those dislocated through wars, natural disasters, colonial and imperialist policies, and ethnic, religious and racial discrimination as the factors which 'have made mass migration and mass expulsion of people a numbingly familiar feature of twentieth-century domestic and foreign policy' (ibid.). If, as Bammer argues, displacement is one of the defining features of contemporary society, then what are the psychic consequences for individuals and nations? How is it dealt with on an individual and social basis and what strategies are used to frame this experience through language? Bammer theorises this inquiry as a question of 'the nature of the relationships among displacement as a theoretical signifier, a textual strategy and a lived experience' (ibid., p. xiii). Through an examination of this experience, represented in literary narratives, I hope to draw some conclusions about the interrelationship of displacement and subjectivity.

This article explores three themes that are central to the negotiation of displacement. The first is the search for stability through recourse to historical origins. Derrida (1994) and Bhabha's (1994a) critique of the connection between origins and archaic displacement form the basis for my examination of this issue. The second theme is

the question of language and its inability to express the displacement experience. The writings of Kilito (1994) and Derrida (1994) on issues of displacement and linguistic instability will provide a counterpoint to Saussure's (1916) definitive formulation of meaning through language. The depiction of the 'other' or 'native' is the third theme I will critique, using Chow (1994) and Bhabha's (1989) theories which elucidate the effects of this construction on notions of identity. Finally, I will examine the common aspect of over-determination, as defined by Freud (1954), which is shared by all three themes. The article concludes with possible universal aspects of displacement and proposes some possibilities for redefining identity through displacement. I will begin, however, with a brief synopsis of the stories.

Narratives of Displacement

Imaginings of Sand by Andre Brink takes place in the week before South Africa's first democratic elections. The central character, Kristien, has been called back from London where she lives because her dying ouma (grandmother) – burnt in the fire caused by the bombing of her house – wants to pass on the stories of the family history:

> The great return. All these years of wondering how it would be; so many others have risked it, some to tumultuous crowds, toyi-toying, shouting, singing; others slinking home along back ways. Not I. The day I'd left the country I'd sworn it would be for good. And I'd held out, unyielding to all natural appeals. Then this phone call, and what else was to be done? I did not even stop to think ... the moment I replaced the telephone, even before I turned to face Micheal, I knew I would go back. What swayed me, ridiculous as it may seem, was what Anna had said about the stories. (1994, p. 3)

The novel is centred around the telling of these stories, which form a historical chronicle of the women in the family, intertwined with the events of the elections. It describes Kristien's experience of displacement – leaving South Africa because she can no longer bear the apartheid regime and her father's role in it – and her discovery of her maternal lineage. This eventually enables her to make the decision to return permanently – yet another kind of displacement:

> I'll probably have to come over to sort out my things. But my life has been displaced. I have to be here now. I have chosen this place, not because I was born here and feel destined to remain; but because I went

> away and then came back and now am here by choice. (ibid., p. 349)

The other text, *Every Secret Thing*, is the autobiographical account of Gillian Slovo's life and her reconstruction of the lives of her family. Her father, Joe Slovo, played a key strategic role in organising the ANC's military campaign and later Mandela appointed him Minister of Housing. Her mother, Ruth First, was a prominent member of the communist party, researcher and union campaigner who was killed by a letter bomb sent by the South African police. In this book Slovo attempts to uncover the secrets of her family, in particular those of her parents, in order to understand her own sense of displacement and the personal pain that resulted from her parents' political involvement:

> I thought of the images of my parents that I had collected; each one different from the one before. The dead stayed still but the rest of us kept going. When finally we looked back, distance distorted what we saw.
>
> And then I thought that Joe had been wrong to try and stop me digging at his past – nothing I had uncovered had made me feel any the less proud of him. It was his South Africa, and it was his life as well, but it belonged to other people too. (Slovo, 1997, p. 281)

Like Kristien's, Slovo's narrative also involves the construction of familial stories but she has to painfully extract them from her father, family and friends. The circumstances of her family's involvement with the ANC meant that the history of her family had been withheld from her; therefore her journey to South Africa is fuelled by a desire to investigate this wall of silence surrounding her life:

> Although my parents' history was enacted not written down and the raw materials of their past were often destroyed the truth of what happened was lodged in the memories of their friends and comrades. My narrative is constructed from many such sources. (ibid., p. v)

These texts share a common thread of recounting and reclaiming personal and family histories and stories that enable the women to re-frame their personal experiences. This act of reclamation allows for the negotiation of displacement as a theoretical signifier, a textual strategy and a lived experience.[1] It can also be seen as an effort

1 This is the phrase used by Bammer to describe Displacements.

to ward off the instability that, Derrida (1994) argues, is produced by the loss of a familiar topos. Kristien's fictional and Slovo's autobiographical narratives express the struggle inherent in establishing personal and cultural identity whilst integrating a past marked by violent displacement.

The Search for Historical Origins

Bammer argues that texts concerning displacement must address 'the relationship between the experience of cultural displacement and the construction of cultural identity. [They are] thus marked by the tension of the historically vital double move between marking and recording absence and loss and inscribing presence' (1994, p. xiv). *Imaginings of Sand* and *Every Secret Thing* demonstrate an attempt to divine a way through this tension by recourse to historical origins This search for national 'roots' is expressed in distinct ways in each text. Ouma Kristina outlines the need to understand familial genealogy by saying to Kristien: 'I had to tell you everything ... If you don't know our history it becomes tempting to see everything that happens as your private fate. But once you know it you also realise you have a choice' (Brink, 1996, p. 324). The performance of matrilineal chronicles narrated by Ouma Kristina enables Kristien to redefine herself and the direction of her life. For Slovo it is the investigation and forcible reclamation of her family's secrets and stories that is central to her strategy for dealing with displacement – even if that means coming face to face with one of her mother's killers.

Derrida (1994) writes of the development of 'national rootedness' as an attempt to ward off the anxiety of a population that is displaced or displaceable. South Africa's history is marked by the violent repetition of this displacement experienced by all its peoples. Many of the founding stories of the nation (the Great Trek, for example) reenact this dislocation and therefore could be seen to reinforce this foundational anxiety. *Imaginings of Sand* is constructed around stories which attempt to reinforce the notion of national rootedness and historical origins stretching back into time. However, it also enacts the ambivalence caused by inscribing both absence or loss and presence simultaneously. For every story that seems to establish the irreducible historical beginnings of the family there is an equally strong element of displacement and instability:

> No one knows where we began. We go back to the shadows. I think we've always been around. There are some old stories about a woman deep in the heart of Africa who came from a lake with a child on her back, driving a black cow before her. Or from a river, the snake-woman, with the jewel on her forehead. Or from the sea. One day a small wave broke on the beach and left behind its foam and in the sun it turned into a woman. (Brink, 1996, p. 174)

The stories which seem to establish the strongest link with Africa and the claim to belonging also contain strong elements of dislocation – enacting once again this double move of presence and loss. Jacqueline Rose compares this instability of national identity premised on land ownership to the sense of precariousness which underpins the ego:

> In a paradox as psychically as it appears to be politically unassimilable, what you call your own belongs to you only in so far as it originally came from, belonged to, somewhere or somebody else. Like occupied land, where your tenancy is by definition dubious, unstable, the ego is a prosthetic object. (1996, p. 40)

The precarious nature of South Africa's white occupation has a concomitant dislocating effect on national identity – mirroring the fundamental instability of the ego. In these books it can be seen that the relationship between these elements of dislocation are played out as the narrators strive to comprehensively frame and articulate their experiences.

Every Secret Thing, like *Imaginings of Sand*, is also marked by Slovo's attempt to establish the history of her family in order to gain stability and make sense of her personal journey and struggle:

> When I'd first arrived, I'd had a jigsaw in mind, the kind that Ruth had relished in the months before her death. I had thought that all I needed to do was to collect the fragments of the past and I would be able to slot them one into the other to build a picture of the whole.
>
> It hadn't turned out like that and now I understood that it never would. (1997, p. 281)

As Slovo struggles to investigate and re-build the stories of her parents' lives she discovers other fragments that serve to counteract the stability, security and meaning she is searching for: 'At the same moment that I had managed to persuade people to talk to me about

Joe's secret military past, I'd found out something I had not wanted to know, that Joe had a son'. (Ibid.) Slovo's maternal grandparents and her father were Jewish exiles from Eastern Europe who had all lost their homes and their ability to communicate in Yiddish by the time they were young adults. Her attempt to reconstruct a genealogical history is thwarted by this reality of brutal dislocation and yet the title of her book – *Every Secret Thing, My Family, My Country* – seems to deny any recognition of this loss. Slovo describes how Joe eventually managed to return to the village of his birth only to find that the synagogue and ritual bath house had been burnt down and no trace of the Slovo family remained, even in memory:

> In 1936, when Joe, his mother and his elder sister had made the journey south, they'd left behind a huge extended family. By his return, not one single member of the Slovo clan could be found in Obelei. Joe's father, Wulfus, had been one of six: he and one brother were the only ones to survive the holocaust. The rest, along with their six children, Joe's grandfather, David, David's three siblings, and most of their children, were slaughtered by their Lithuanian neighbours who continued to wear their clothes long after their deaths. (Ibid., p. 151)

As Slovo struggles to articulate and document the lives of her family, the ambivalence and pain surrounding their continued dislocation also surfaces and undercuts the stability of her narrative.

The modern experience of displacement and exile as it is presented in these narratives is mediated by the language of a community with its roots stretching back into historical time. However, as Bhabha points out, this strategy is highly problematic and may risk 'tipping over into the "timeless" discourse of irrationality.' (1994a, p. 142) Rose echoes this problematic when she states: 'Perhaps it is only when land fossilizes into identity that, like the symptom in psychoanalytic language, the real trouble begins' (1996, p. 48).

In her discussion of Bessie Head's novel *A Question of Power*, Rose states that '[t]he first secret is an intimate, sexual, family secret, a trauma of begetting which speaks a whole history of racial division (apartheid as sexual apartheid as much as, if not before, anything else ... ' (ibid., p. 107). This is enacted in *Imaginings of Sand* in the story of the first woman of the family – a Khoikhoi woman called Kamma. She offered herself to the Boers trekking in the interior in order to stop an imminent war between her people and the trekkers.

This war was provoked by the rape of a Khoikhoi woman and the subsequent castration of a Boer performed in retaliation. After she had spent the night with one of them her own people refused to take her back; she then joined the Boers on their trek and so began the history of Kristien's family – based on the sexual secret of racial mixing that encapsulates this trauma of begetting. This story reinforces the trajectory of Kristien's family stretching back through the history of Boer settlers in South Africa. By linking this genealogy with the Khoikhoi (some of the oldest inhabitants of Africa) the lineage extends back further still – enacting the 'national rootedness' that Derrida (1994) cites as a defence from the anxiety of displacement. However, the story of this first woman also contains the original sexual sin in the eyes of South Africa – she offers herself to strangers of another tribe (and subsequently goes on to betray both tribes to each other). Rose's description of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* 'as a novel of transgenerational haunting where the woman becomes the repository of an unspoken and unspeakable history' (ibid., p. 108) can also be applied to *Imaginings of Sand*. Ouma Kristina becomes the repository of this unconscious and repressed history of the family. In attempting to achieve stability and identity through genealogy, the story of Kamma simultaneously enacts a traumatic sexual and racial encounter which results in the dramatic destabilisation of this same identity.

The Language of Displacement

A central element in the framing of displacement in these narratives is the question of language and the attempt by the women to linguistically express their displacement. Ferdinand de Saussure argues that all meaning is generated through language – by the relationship between the signified and the signifier that together make up the components of the linguistic sign:

> Psychologically our thought – apart from its expression in words – is only a shapeless and indistinct mass. Philosophers and linguists have always agreed in recognizing that without the help of signs we would be unable to make a clear-cut, consistent distinction between two ideas. Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language. (Saussure, 1916, p. 7)

The question that is raised by the examination of these narratives is whether this explanation for the generation of meaning is adequate to understand displacement. Does this semiotic theory account for the aspects of experience that may be 'lost in translation'? I would argue that those aspects relating explicitly to the problems of different languages – such as Kristien's difficulty with English and the inability of Slovo's grandmother and Joe to speak to their parents in their mother tongue – can not be articulated using this formulation. Nor can it account for those aspects that speak more implicitly of the limitations of language in general – Slovo's unresolved disputes with her mother, her inability to share her loss with her sister, and Kristien's realisation that the only valid response to the atrocity of her sister's murder/suicide is silence.

Abdelfattah Kilito's essay 'Dog Words' (1994) deals with the experiences of the bilingual speaker but the themes he identifies are also useful for thinking in more general terms about displacement. He addresses the issues of language and identity, 'how one creates the other, and how the act of speaking a different language threatens to strip the speaker of his or her self' (Elmarsafy, 1994, p. xxi). 'Dog Words' narrates the allegorical tale of the way in which a Bedouin traveller finds his tribe at night using the strategy of barking like a dog. Dogs present in human settlements will respond to the barks and he will be able to identify their location by following the sound. However, what happens if, upon arriving at the settlement, the traveller can no longer speak and can only bark? What if the settlement is not that of his own tribe? What if the barks are not those of dogs but other travellers lost in the desert? Or lost dogs? His tale raises questions about the struggles inherent in establishing identity through language and what the implications are for those not limited to one language. More specifically, in relation to the narratives examined here, his allegory questions whether it is possible to mitigate the effects of displacement or definitively enunciate this elusive experience through language.

The issue of language and translation is raised at the outset of *Imaginings of Sand* and functions as a backdrop for the other issues dealt with in the novel.

> One learns to deal with many things; others return to haunt you, or to take revenge on you at unguarded moments. It is all the more difficult to cope if one tries, as I am doing, to work through it in what remains

> something of a strange language. At the same time it offers the kind of distance useful for the soul-searchings I'm indulging in. During my years in London I became quite fluent in English, of course; I've been told that I have a 'flair'. But it can never be my native tongue. (Brink, 1996, p. 16)

The difficulty Kristien experiences in narrating her story in English rather than in Afrikaans also prefigures the larger issue of struggling to translate her ultimately alienating experience into any kind of linguistic form. This is especially true when she has to deal with the murder/suicide of her sister and her sister's family. The inherent intractability of these issues is symbolised by the partner Kristien leaves behind in London. He is a Shakespearian scholar who ultimately cannot find the words to express his concern and love for Kristien – at times reverting to using quotes and at others silence. At the close of the novel Kristien leaves him and London to return to South Africa – a decision that symbolises the ultimate inability to form a linguistic frame for her experiences:

> A woman came from the desert of death to ask, 'Do you know what I've come to tell you?' The answer, I now knew, was neither yes nor no. The only possible answer was before me, inside me. It was silence. (ibid., 332).

The limitations of language for dealing with displacement also functions as a central concern in *Every Secret Thing*. The book begins with Slovo's reconstruction of the events surrounding her mother's death and almost immediately reveals the intractable communication problems existing between mother and daughter.

> ... at the plate glass of a slick Soho shop, the argument we'd started in the restaurant reached a fierce peak. We were on a battle ground that had been ours for years ... I felt the unfairness of what Ruth's life had done to me. I protested, knowing that I was only making Ruth feel guilty but when she asked me what she should do to change the situation, I backed down. (Slovo, 1997, p. 6)

This theme of the linguistic gulf that separates Slovo and her parents forms the background of the entire narrative, exacerbated by the political necessity of subterfuge and secrecy that governed her parents' lives. After her mother's death Slovo recalls taking a walk along a beach with her partner and her parents: 'Their heads were

bent together, their lips close enough to nudge each other's ears, not out of affection or against the ferocious wind, but so that no one, not even their daughter, could hear what they were saying about my father's secret work' (ibid., p. 19). The sense of alienation and frustration felt by Slovo at being shut out of her parents' world (she describes herself repeatedly as a child of secrets) is palpable throughout the narrative. As the story of her life unfolds it becomes apparent that this insurmountable gulf of language affects all the members of her family. She talks about the inability to find words to share the loss of her mother with her sister Shawn; her disbelief that her grandmother Tilly was literally unable to talk to her great-grandmother in the same language by the time Tilly was twenty-five and the shock she felt when her father revealed that the same was true of himself and his father. The vignette of eleven-year-old Slovo and her sister panicking that their grandmother (the only family member not incarcerated or exiled at that time) might not return serves as a metaphor for this sense of linguistic dysfunction:

> I just couldn't acknowledge it since that way we would both drown.
>
> There it was: somehow we had absorbed the lesson that if we expressed our fears together, we would be lost ... We suffered together but at the same time the secrecy that ruled our parents' political activities contaminated our relationship. We had learned not to share experience but to hold it to ourselves. (ibid., p. 16)

Slovo's narrative simultaneously enacts the elusive nature of displacement and the inadequacy of linguistic forms for expressing her grief. Yet her primary aim is to uncover the stories of her past and that of her family and re-present them in a cohesive narrative. She uses her literary skills in her attempt to piece together the fragments of her life like a jigsaw puzzle. However, as we have already seen, this proves to be impossible. Whilst she struggles to present the unvarnished past through the eyes of her family and friends what she discovers is a further enactment of her original alienation. The past cannot be definitively expressed nor can the truth be narratively reconstructed because the 'distance [of time] distorted what we saw' (ibid., p. 281).

In his discussion of Derrida's work, Mark Krupnick proposes a formulation of language and the linguistic sign that exceeds Saussure's linear formulation of meaning produced through language:

> 'Displacement' in Derrida's formulation connotes an unpredictable turbulence of signifiers generated by 'dissemination', a word that plays on the scattering of semes like semen. But 'scattering' is too mild. For Derrida, displacement involves a violent intervention: turbulence, irruption, explosion: 'the deviance of meaning, its reflection-effect in writing, sets something off.' (1983, p. 11)

This reformulation of meaning and displacement seems to capture some of the violently alienating effects of dislocation as it is expressed in these narratives. It also allows for the possibility that the elements of displacement may remain outside the boundaries of linguistic expression – providing a different reading of the expression 'lost in translation'.

Construction of the 'Other'

The experience of displacement that is central to these narratives is the product of specific historical circumstances. Both Kristien and Gillian emigrate from their homes in South Africa to live in London because of the apartheid regime. Therefore the construction of those oppressed by apartheid, and the relationship of the narrators to them, is central to the way in which experiences are framed and textual strategies used. Rey Chow argues that: '[t]he production of the native is in part the production of our postcolonial modernity (1994, p. 127). If we return to Bammer's argument that displacement is one of the most formative experiences of our century, Chow's theories may serve to elucidate how Western representations of displacement experiences depend upon particular constructions of the 'other'.

In her essay, Chow (ibid.) considers 'how current theoretical discussions of the native problematize the space of the native in the form of a symptom of the white man'. Drawing on the work of Jacques Lacan she uses 'symptom' 'not in the derogatory sense of a dispensable shadow but in the sense of something that gives the subject its ontological consistency and its fundamental structure' (ibid.). Whilst Chow's essay mainly deals with the current theoretical problematisation of this space, the notion of the 'native' as the white man's symptom may be useful for gaining a further perspective on displacement as it is framed within these narratives. If the 'native' does function as a symptom, then it may be particularly in evidence in times of anguish. Chow argues that the construction of Western identity strives to render the native authentic (restricting them to the

metaphorical culture garden) in an attempt to shore up the sense of identity that is brought into question when we encounter the 'other'.

Further evidence of this positioning of the 'native' can be found in Said's (1978) thesis, which examines the construction of Orientalism. He argues that this discipline functioned in certain discrete ways and enabled the White Man in the colonies to form a coherent system of 'being-in-the-world' (ibid., p. 62). This manner of being, and the science of Orientalism that informed it, gave colonists ontological consistency, structure and 'reasoned' justifications for their actions. The experience of displacement can be seen to bring people into confrontation with the limits of stable identity in the same way that colonial confrontation questioned the limits of Western epistemology. The construction of the 'other' that forms a central part of these narratives can be read as an attempt to ensure ontological consistency by warding off the anxiety caused by this destabilisation.

In his discussion of critical theory Bhabha makes the following observation:

> However impeccably the content of an 'other' culture may be known, however anti-ethnocentrically it is represented, it is its location as the 'closure' of grand theories, the demand that, in analytical terms, it be always the 'good' object of knowledge, the docile body of difference, that reproduces a relation of domination and is the most serious indictment of the institutional powers of critical theory. (Cited in Chow, 1994, p. 147)

Bhabha's theory is useful for this analysis because it demonstrates the particular theoretical effects of 'native' constructions and how these function in relation to Western bodies of knowledge (or in this case, narratives of experience). It brings into focus the possibility that displacement as it is experienced and framed in language by white Southern Africans is premised on a codified way of inscribing 'black' people.

Slovo echoes this systematic framing when she writes about discovering that her mother had an affair lasting four years during the State of Emergency:

> His words washed over me as I sat there, thinking how abandoned I had felt during those four years ...
>
> I hadn't blamed her for her distraction: I had protected her from my longings. I had kept repeating to myself that what she did, she did for an

> ideal, for the millions of the oppressed who needed her more than me. And yet now I had learned she had also been doing it with Donald Turgel. No matter how rushed she'd been, she'd found the time to meet him sometimes twice weekly in a friend's flat, not far from Marshall Square where she'd been imprisoned, in the Chinese area. For four years. Hardly a one-night stand. (1997, p. 192)

Slovo's strategy for dealing with her anguish, resulting from her mother's political work and the experiences of displacement, demonstrates this depiction of the 'native' as a docile, authentic body of oppressed people. It stems from a codification of the difference between herself and the 'other' black people and allowed for a justification of her mother's inattentiveness because she was fighting for these unidentified masses. The discovery of her mother's affair challenges the basis of this psychic defence.

Chow argues that '[o]ur fascination with the native, the oppressed, the savage, and all such figures is therefore a desire to hold onto an unchanging certainty somewhere outside our own "fake" experience. It is a desire for being "non-duped", which is a not-too-innocent desire to seize control' (1994, p. 146). The construction of the 'native' in *Imaginings of Sand* expresses this desire for an unchanging certainty and the securing of ontological consistency. Ouma Kristina tells Kristien of her Khoikhoi foremother Kamma and in so doing redefines the boundaries of self and 'other' – difference is now constructed as residing within and rigid codifications of white and black break down. It is this gift of genealogy which allows Kristien to make the decision to stay in South Africa but it is a process which once again relies on the codification of the native as authentic:

> 'This time we must go further back,' says Ouma Kristina ... 'In our family we've been fortunate in always having storytellers around. You have me, I had Petronella, she had Wilhelmina, and so on, far back, all the way to the one who had two names, Kamma and Maria.'... I'm beginning to catch a glimmer to why she felt this urge to bring me back to her. To foretell the past, the way prophets foretell the future. 'That's why you had to come home,' she says as if she's reading my thoughts. 'To know where you come from. To have something you can take with you. Perhaps to help you understand.' (Brink, 1996, pp. 174-75).

The knowledge that Kristien is part Khoikhoi, that the authentic 'other' resides within, redefines her existence and allows for a rene-

gotiation of her legitimacy in South Africa. She had moments of illumination in the past but they were a

> ... discovery of what was wrong in the country, what I had to escape from. Now, standing over Ouma's body ... I knew I had to go further. A discovery of my need of others perhaps. How imperceptibly it had been happening: Anna, Trui, Jeremiah, Jonnie, Jacob Bonthuys, Sam Ndzuta, Thando Kumalo, Abel Jourbert. (Ibid., p. 338)

Of the list of people who have touched her life during her stay, only two are white – the positioning of black people as having access to a 'real' experience of life is further emphasised in this quote.

Freud's (1954) definition of displacement, as it operates in dreams, may serve to further clarify how this construction of the 'other' functions. His central thesis is that dream-work relies on processes of distortion in order to avoid the censorship of one psychic current by another. Displacement is one of the primary mechanisms of this distortion and involves the transference of psychical intensities from latent dream thoughts onto representational dream symbols.

> The consequence of the displacement is that the dream content no longer resembles the core of the dream-thoughts and that the dream gives no more than a distortion of the dream-wish which exists in the unconscious. (Ibid., p. 308)

If we apply Freud's principles to the representational systems of the narratives it can be seen that the construction of the 'native' as authentic, docile body of oppressed, forms the psychic screen onto which the pain of displacement may be projected. The 'black masses', oppressed by apartheid, become the vehicle through which the narrators come to terms with their migration and dislocation.

Conclusion

A central feature which seems to unify all three narrative themes is the way in which they are over-determined. The narratives repeatedly attempt to establish stability and identity through recourse to historical origins, linguistic structure and codification of the 'other' even whilst the ambivalence central to these strategies simultaneously returns to undercut this process of identity formation. Slovo and Kristien both strive to establish their historical roots in South Africa, but the instances of trauma (Kamma's story and the genocide of the Slovo family) undermine this process. Both narratives attempt

to linguistically structure painful memories and experiences whilst at the same time acknowledging the limitations of language and the power of silence. A codified construction of the 'other' allows the narrators to maintain an illusory ontological consistency but this is premised upon a projection of the psychic pain of displacement onto the image of the 'native'.

The concept of over-determination is defined by Freud (1954) as forming a vital part of the displacement and distortion mechanisms of dream-work. As we have seen, this distortion takes place in order for one psychic stream to avoid censorship by another. He explains this process as follows:

> ... in the dream-work a psychical force is operating which on the one hand strips the elements which have a high psychical value of their intensity, and on the other hand, *by means of overdetermination*, creates from elements of low psychical value new values, which afterwards find their way into the dream-content. If that is so, *a transference and displacement of psychical intensities* occurs in the process of dream-formation ... (Ibid., pp. 307-308, emphasis in the original)

If a transfer of psychic intensity is occurring through the process of over-determination in the narrative themes, what is the psychic current causing this distortion and what is being covered over? I would argue that the anxiety caused by threats to the ontological consistency and identity is driving this distortion and the foundational ambivalence underlying the three themes identified is what is being covered over or repressed.

As Derrida (1994) has argued, the attempt to establish national rootedness through historical origins functions to ward off the instability of universal archaic displacement. This is particularly evident in *Imaginings of Sand* – each story that seems to establish the archaic origins of the family simultaneously re-enacts the originary dislocation. The ontological coherence of the linguistic sign and the ability to express displacement through language is brought into question in both narratives. The anxiety caused by this issue is mitigated by the repeated attempts to form cohesive narratives – in *Every Secret Thing* Slovo responds to her father's absolute refusal to talk about his life by continuing almost blindly to investigate and narrate the secrets of the family. The determination to represent the entirety of her history, as expressed in the title, stands in marked contrast to her admission

that she will never be able to piece together all the aspects of her family's story. Chow (1994) and Bhabha's (1989) analysis of the construction of the 'native' demonstrates the over-determination of binary categories of self and other. This functions in the narratives to ward off the instability of identity characteristic of colonial situations and exacerbated by the experience of exile.

The over-determination in evidence in the narrative themes may not be restricted to the experience of exile. Kilito's (1994) tale, whilst dealing with the experiences of the bilingual speaker, serves as a metaphor for displacement, both in specific and general terms. As Rose (1996) has argued, the unstable nature of the ego, like ownership of land, produces a universal sense of displacement which simultaneously elicits both anxiety and denial. It could therefore be argued that the problematics involved in searching for a stable identity based on a familiar land, history, language and people stem from this original formation of subjectivity. Similarly, the ambivalence and anxiety caused by histories of migration, limitations of language and the instability of self and 'other' distinctions can be seen as common subjective experiences. Rose echoes this proposal when she states that:

> [Freud's] vision of culture [was] something in which individual subjects are irretrievably caught but to which they in no way simply or just belong . . . it is to the extent that the individual lives out this adversarial relation, grinds up against and thrashes at the norm that she or he is a human subject at all. (Ibid., p. 132)

Recognition of the impossibility of a stable identity based on historical origins, binary constructions of the world and negotiated through language evidently causes considerable anxiety. This foundational anxiety is distinctly evident in the narratives examined here as it is in my own experience. However, the consequences of accepting the notion of displacement as a universal condition of subjectivity have yet to be examined. Krupnick argues that 'displacement means *never arriving*' (1983, p. 16). Derrida's notion of dissemination may provide a key to this reconceptualisation of identity because, according to Krupnick, it 'is lawless and generative; its textual effects "can never be governed by a referent in the classical sense, that is, by a thing or by a transcendental signified that would regulate its movement"' (ibid., p. 10). This stands in contrast to the textual strategies identified in the narratives which suggest that 'a totalization

of meaning [and] a truth' (ibid.) can be constructed through language. Perhaps this reformulation may offer new possibilities for redefining identity. The notion of *differance* as it is defined by Derrida (1994) in the opening quote may provide a space through which these issues can be articulated. Bhabha argues that it is politically, (and I would argue psychically), imperative that we focus 'on those *interstitial* moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of "differences". These spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood and communal representations that generate new signs of cultural difference and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation' (1994b, p. 269). Redefining displacement as a liminal space may, as Bhabha suggests, ultimately allow for a renegotiation of identity that incorporates the specificities of difference – through *differance* – rather than eliding them.

Marion Doherty is currently studying for her Master's in Psychology at Auckland University. This article was written as part of a graduate paper in Women's Studies on contemporary feminist theory and the state of the nation. Her Master's thesis will involve examining discourses surrounding active female sexuality and the way in which these connect with discursive constructions of normative sexuality and coercion.

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Stubborn Passions:
Gender Imbalance in the New Zealand Feature Film Industry

LARISSA MARNO

In January 1998 I completed a thesis examining the reasons for the decrease in the number of women directing feature films in New Zealand over the five year period 1992–1997 inclusive.[1] In this thesis I interviewed seven women with varying degrees of involvement in the film industry and discussed the key issues with them. Some perceived the changing attitudes towards feminism: the belief that we are in a post-feminist era as influencing both women film makers and the funding of women's film. Further, the impact of New Right politics was seen by some as integral to the gendered changes within the film industry. Psychological barriers and conditioned notions of relative male and female attributes of confidence were seen as impacting on women's involvement in the film industry. These lines of discussion also bring to air the lack of Maori self-representation in New Zealand cinema. This is another area requiring research, and whilst many of the factors contributing to the gender imbalance intersect with the issues attributable to an overall lack of Maori directors, it is beyond the perimeters of this article to examine those issues. Furthermore, I believe strongly that as this research that I am undertaking should be conducted by a woman, such research examining Maori on screen would be most effectively undertaken by a Maori researcher. For the purposes of this article I have chosen to focus explicitly on the impact of New Right politics on the funding of the New Zealand film industry, and how this has in turn affected the number of women directing feature films.

Participants

This research is a discussion of the film industry in terms of gender and gender politics. The subject matter necessitates a practical approach as the two elements – the 'academic' and the 'practical' – are all too often seen as mutually exclusive. Central to this research is a desire to dismantle the perceived boundaries between these two co-existing, yet rarely coupled areas of study. A key strategy in creating

research which crossed over these boundaries was conducting interviews with women involved in the industry. I interviewed seven women in total: four film makers and three who were involved in the industry in ways pertinent to this research. Participants included film makers Gaylene Preston, Nicki Caro, Athina Tsoulis, and Melanie Rodriga. I also interviewed Ruth Harley, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for the New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC), Alison Colvine, who conducted the 1997 survey 'Behind the Scenes. A Detailed Profile of Women in the New Zealand Film/Video/Television Industry'[2] and Allison Enright from the Working Women's Resource Centre and an active member of Actor's Equity. The interview material used in this section precludes some of the comments made by the participants. This is primarily due to the fact that several requested that their statements on this area of debate be withheld – despite their strong views on these issues. This suggests the control the Commission exerts over the film industry, perhaps reinforcing film maker Ian Mune's observation that the Commission 'believes it runs the industry rather than serves it.'[3] This is not a new argument. It is vital to bear in mind, however, that the relationship between any formal body established to administer and dole out funds, and the community it gives those funds to, will inevitably be a fraught one. It has been suggested by some Commission members that the recent criticisms of the Film Commission stem from personal disappointment as a result of unsuccessful proposals.[4] This notion speaks volumes for the nature of the relationship between the Film Commission and some film practitioners. The reluctance of some participants to 'speak out' about the NZFC has limited some of my discussions on policies, economic strategies and the business ideologies currently influencing the Commission.

Film and Representation

Film acts as a vehicle of representation and the end product is inevitably shaped and informed by the world view and ideological beliefs of the person creating the work. In New Zealand the film director frequently also writes or co-writes the script. Not only then is the cinematic vision driven by the director, but also frequently the narrative and the characterisation. This world view is mediated through the camera, 'naturalised' and presented as the 'truth' or as 'reality'. As Merata Mita notes, however, 'There is no "objectivity", no "truth" in film making ... The manner in which information is chosen, the

way it is structured and presented, leave[s] you with a version of the "truth", a subjective truth if you like, but it will always be "biased" always opinionated.'[5] The core output of New Zealand films over the five-year period 1992–1997, has been dominated by male film makers and by a subjective masculinised world view – this world view is in turn presented as a 'truth' or an 'objective' perspective, thus normalising it. Women film makers in New Zealand have had little opportunity for self-representation through feature-film making over that five year period.

This is an issue of concern on both academic and practical levels. Recognition of both the problem and of possible solutions is an integral component of New Zealand feminist film theory. It is also an issue which requires attention by the formal bodies that have the ability to enact measures to assist the current situation. Industry-wide, this issue requires awareness, as currently there is little. I am not suggesting that every film maker ought or needs to commit themselves to these issues. Rather, I am suggesting that there needs to be an awareness or acknowledgment of this problem at an official level at least, allowing for formal support systems and policies to be implemented for those who seek to redress this imbalance.

Funding

Funding is one of the most vital and complex components of film making. In discussing the key factors in the current absence of women directing feature films in New Zealand, several participants highlighted the importance of an analysis of the NZFC – the primary source of funding for the New Zealand film industry. In order to avoid examining the experiences of women film makers and the funding of the cultural sector in New Zealand in isolation, however, there must be external points of reference for discussing the funding of New Zealand film. A comparative examination of the Australian film industry offers this context. I look at levels of support from the Australian Film Commission (AFC) for women directors, and analyse the impact of this support on the number of women directing feature films in Australia. I discuss the intersection of feminism and the resurgence of the Australian film industry in the mid-1970s.

In examining the funding of the film industry in New Zealand, it is necessary to look into the cultural sector in New Zealand as a whole, and to ask how changes to arts funding across the board have af-

fected other Government supported institutions. I look at the current difficulties facing the Royal New Zealand Ballet as an example of a company struggling under New Right arts administration. I examine Creative New Zealand as another source of funding for the cultural sector which relies on financial support from the Government. Are the current difficulties facing the Film Commission unique? I suggest in this article that the economic reforms of the present Government have impacted adversely on the 'commercial viability' or 'financial feasibility' of the cultural sector, and that this impact has had serious implications for women film makers in New Zealand.

Several participants pinpointed the composition and objectives of the Film Commission Board as key factors in the downturn in the number of women directing feature films. I examine Gaylene Preston's observation that over the last ten years the goals and objectives of the Commission have altered from those originally stipulated in the 1978 Film Commission Act. She also indicated that the change in the Commission Chair from David Gascoigne to Phillip Pryke in 1993, facilitated a change of direction for the Commission toward the embracing of New Right policies. She identifies these two shifts as key factors impacting on the number of women directing feature films in New Zealand. The infiltration of New Right ideologies into the structures and policies of the Film Commission have had specific impact on women film makers.

Australia

A comparative analysis of the Australian film industry, specifically focusing on the similarities and differences of experience for women film makers in New Zealand and in Australia, assists in avoiding an insular and isolated discussion of funding and female industry experience, and allows for a discussion which is informed by the global and international film industry and film market. I chose Australia as a point of comparison as there is a comparable centring of the Australian film industry around the international independent film market, and a marked unique 'Australian-icity' which is held in similar regard as the idiosyncrasies of New Zealand narrative film making. Australia exports a similar product, unashamedly idiosyncratic, undeniably Australian, Government funded, and largely sold to the independent market. Furthermore, the film industries in both countries rely on significant Government support of key funding bodies.

Comparison with the Australian film industry indicates that the implementation of formal policy to assist women film makers is a possible area for consideration in looking to redress the current imbalance in New Zealand. 'Policy' includes targeted funding and establishment of women's film bodies to administer funds and hold greater funding bodies accountable for gender discrepancies across the board. It serves as an effective model with which to comparatively interrogate the output of films by female directors in New Zealand.

The mid-1970s saw the establishment of the Women's Film Fund (WFF) in Australia. Writers Jocelyn Robson and Beverley Zalcock note that the establishment of WFF was facilitated by the resurgence of the Australian film industry coupled with the growing influence of the second wave feminist movement. It was administered by the AFC and 'watched over' by various organisations, such as the Sydney Women's Film Group.[6] It assisted in the production, distribution and exhibition of women's short films. Further, WFF conducted research and assisted in training and employing women in the industry. It was dissolved in 1988.

The AFC now has a Women's Programme which 'funds workshops and training for potential women directors.'[7] The work of the Women's Programme also extends beyond focusing on directors. In 1992 it undertook a survey of women working in the film, video, television and radio industries. A key outcome was the recognition that 'child care problems were a major inhibitor of women's career development and their continuation in the industry.'[8] As a result of these findings, child care initiatives were developed and promoted by the AFC Women's Programme in association with the Screen Production Association of Australia. The AFC also administers $20 million dollars annually to 'support the promotion of high quality drama on commercial television'.[9] Many of the AFC's initiatives seek to also benefit women working in the television industry. In 1996 research was commissioned by the AFC to identify factors that assisted the career progression of senior women working in television. Networking and 'skills training' were identified by participants in the research as key areas requiring attention. In response to this, the AFC, in collaboration with a number of groups, held networking forums in a number of locations in Australia. It is also important to note that the Australian Film Commission has a gender-balanced Board. It is of note that for the five-year period 1993–1997 inclusive, films di-

rected by women in Australia totalled 22 per cent of total output, in New Zealand, 12.5 per cent.

The recent initiatives of the AFC and the Women's Programme demonstrate a clear recognition of the obstacles for women working in the industry – even for women operating at a top level management level, in the film industry in Australia. The New Zealand Film Commission does not cater for any similar structure to safeguard or promote women's interests in the film industry. Whilst Women In Film and Television (WIFT) organisations have the potential to offer this support, this is not an initiative from the Commission or the Government.

The greater impact of feminism in Australia is a possible factor in the establishment of both the WFF and the Women's Programme, and the more consistent output of feature films by women in Australia. Melanie Rodriga suggested that entering the New Zealand film industry from Australia was an advantage: 'I came from a loud feminist enclave in Sydney, and I really had the benefit of that when I came to New Zealand because I was already outspoken, politically aware and able to spot barriers.' Athina Tsoulis noted the differences between the two industries:

> I came to this country from Australia 15 years ago, and it was like stepping into somewhere that was ten years behind everywhere else. At least in Australia they had femocrats, women who got into positions of power and demanded tangible things that became established in the legislation. Here it was a big movement, but it had very little impact on the institutions.

The impact of feminism in Australia coincided with the resurgence of the film movement in such a way that the two developed and influenced each other. In New Zealand, feminism influenced a small component of women seeking to utilise film making as a political tool for exploring women's lives, but it did not bring these images to the large screen. It was not institutionally formalised, nor did it effect any change in the film industry until the early 1980s. Melanie also indicated that the emigration of New Zealand women film makers to Australia was accountable in part for the imbalances in representation in film in New Zealand: 'In broad terms I think it's got worse: three of the country's most prolific women film makers (Bridget [Ikin], myself, Jane [Campion]) are basically permanent Australian residents. One could draw obvious conclusions from that.'

New Zealand Arts Funding

Creative New Zealand (CNZ) is a Crown-funded arts organisation similar to the Film Commission. It consists of an Arts Council¡, two Boards – the Arts Board and Te Waka Toi, the Maori Arts Board – and a Pacific Islands Arts Committee. The Creative New Zealand Arts Council, and the two seven-member Boards are appointed by the Minister of Cultural Affairs. The Pacific Islands Arts Committee is appointed by the Arts Board. The Arts Council sets policy and strategic direction, the two Boards 'develop artform policy, allocate grants and carry out initiatives that support the Council's strategic direction.'[10] Applications are assessed by external assessors 'all of whom have experience and expertise in the art form covered in the proposal.'[11] This process has come under criticism, in part because its inception resulted in the end of Arts Council Panels.[12] These panels saw larger groups of artists making recommendations. Now assessors report to the one Board. CNZ funds projects as diverse as dance, music, visual arts, literature and theatre. Whilst they fund Te Waka Toi, they have not implemented any similar formal policies or funding for assisting women in the arts. As with the Film Commission, the majority of CNZ funding comes from the Lottery Grants Board. In 1996 and 1997, 85 per cent of their financing ($20,536,000) came from the Lotteries Board .

Creative New Zealand in collaboration with the New Zealand Film Commission and New Zealand On Air (NZOA) administer funding to the Screen Innovation Production Fund, formally the Creative Film and Video Fund. A panel is selected to administer this funding. It is of note that this is the only remaining panel from the previous Creative New Zealand structure. Athina Tsoulis sat on this panel from October 1995 to April 1997. She notes that the Fund is not dictated by commercial imperatives, and selects projects more for their creativity and innovation than adherence to narrative style or genre. These factors have the potential to increase the number of women receiving funding. Whilst they do not have a formal policy regarding funding women or minority groups, Tsoulis suggests that it is inevitable that the panel chooses projects which reflect the diversity of the panel members. Thus if the panel has a female majority, as it had during her term, then it is likely more women will get funded. There are now, however, fewer women on the selection panel. Athina suggests that the gendered selection process is 'not even conscious', and is

wary of simplifying the issue to 'more women on the selection panel equals more women receiving funding'. She did, however, note the importance of acknowledging the role of subjectivity within the selection process. The Fund now operates with 'a broadened criteria to include the range of moving image arts which new technologies have made possible while retaining a focus on innovation and emerging talent'.[13] Whilst recently restructured, there is still concern from some in the film community that this Fund is under threat, as film and video work is not perceived as 'art' by those on the Council and thus not relevant to CNZ.

There has been little media comment on CNZ's participation in, or response to, the current Government attitude toward funding the cultural sector. There is, however, a bureaucratic awareness of the need to show a profit. In this manner, CNZ provides a useful point of comparison for the Commission as another Ministry of Cultural Affairs subsidiary.

Other arts organisations have been outspoken on the impact of Government attitude on the financial difficulties they currently face. Despite being funded in part by CNZ, the Royal New Zealand Ballet (RNZB) is struggling financially. Efforts to secure more funding from Creative New Zealand, however, would result in a decrease in funding for other arts groups. The corporate sector 'has been pushed to the limit' in what they can provide in sponsorship.[14] Funding limitations have reduced their ability to take creative risks; instead they rely on such traditional shows as *The Nutcracker* in an attempt to cover costs.[15] In an interview in *The New Zealand Listener*, Matz Skoog, the RNZB artistic director, described the current climate of arts administration as management-led as opposed to arts-led, and dominated by a preoccupation with meeting financial targets. 'It prevents you from changing ... and the arts are all about change and opening up new possibilities.'[16]

In contrast, the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra is funded directly from the Government. Where the RNZB has to approach Creative New Zealand annually, the NZSO receives $10 million annually directly from the Government. The impact that this alternative sourcing of funding has on the institutions is evidenced in the pay packets of the artists themselves. A ballet dancer with the RNZB can expect to receive an average income of $29,000 PA, whereas a NZSO musician will be paid between $46,000 and $51,000 a year.[17] The

Film Commission has battled similarly with limited funds that have not increased in line with the rate of increased production costs. Like the NZSO they receive their funding directly from the Government, but theirs is a relatively static payment.

In discussing the changing Governmental emphasis in the cultural sector, close attention is paid to the language used to describe the conditions of funding as the terminology of the New Right rapidly infiltrates the cultural sector. Gaylene Preston noted that 'all bureaucracies [now] have to use the language of buying and selling. "Supporting" and "fostering" are considered "irrelevant and undesirable".' Social and political commentator Sandra Coney suggests that 'economic recovery' demands our focus be turned toward becoming more 'internationally competitive, more business oriented, more efficient and productive ... We are expected to be riveted by the language of niche-marketing, value-adding and export-led.'[18] The application of New Right economic principles to the cultural sector effectively minimises the likelihood of any creative body embarking on 'high risk' experimental, creative, projects. Matz Skoog notes that under the current political and economic climate: 'We're not allowed to have courage because we can't take risks.'[19]

Political journalist Jane Clifton noted that Simon Upton – the Minister of Cultural Affairs in 1997–98 – had 'been dampeningly unsentimental about what he can achieve. He says it is time for cultural organisations to take a more mature approach than that of eternal government supplicant.'[20] As the New Right seeks to eliminate public 'dependence' on the Government in the form of benefits and pensions, it is evident that the Government also sees arts foundations and institutions as 'beneficiaries' of sorts. Inherent in Upton's comment is the suggestion that funding the cultural sector with the 'taxpayer's money' is of little social benefit. A recent survey conducted for Ministry of Cultural Affairs by ACNielsen-McNair, found high levels of public interest in the cultural sector.[21] Of note is the response that '[m]ost (82 per cent) believe that Government should support and encourage culture and cultural activities.'[22] Whilst this survey suggests a public interest in Government support of the cultural sector, given the New Right attitude to 'supplicants', it is difficult to gauge the extent to which these results would be considered by the present Government.

Arts funding is problematic in New Zealand. Partially funded

companies struggle to operate, and are encouraged to seek private sector sponsorship. In many cases arts patronage has been stretched to its limit. Further, this form of economic support for the cultural sector is problematic. Alliance politician Pam Corkery stated her concern that the state was abdicating from the cultural sector, 'our culture is being left increasingly up to Allan and Jenny Gibbs and Fay, Richwhite ... [culture] is not something to be left up to the market and a few benefactors.'[23] Whilst Government involvement at its best aims to be supportive and strives to assist diverse and fair representation of the many facets of New Zealand culture, private funding has the potential to bring unprecedented financial imperatives to the cultural sector. Robson and Zalcock state of Government funding:

> when it is available, government funding rarely brings with it the same commercial imperatives as private finance and the flexibility of funding arrangements in both New Zealand and Australia ... the flexibility of the funding arrangements in both New Zealand and Australia, with their cultural as well as their financial considerations, [have] given local directors a degree of freedom that the money-orientated studio-type system of Hollywood, for example, would be unlikely to accept.[24]

Whilst the film makers I spoke with had all experienced degrees of 'freedom' that they perhaps would not have been accorded working for a Hollywood studio, 'commercial imperatives' are increasingly informing funding decisions across the board in the New Zealand cultural sector. Creative New Zealand states that:

> In the new political and public policy environment the reasons for Government support for the arts will need to be more directly identified. Efforts to win more government funding mean that we will need to be clear in defining the contribution the arts make to the Government's economic, social and cultural goals.[25]

The New Zealand Film Commission CEO Ruth Harley argues that the Government needs to be convinced of the reasons why it should be in the cultural sector generally, and the film industry specifically, in economic terms, 'because that's the speak that the Treasury speaks.'[26] The Film Commission has retained a group of economists headed by George Baker of the Law and Economics Consulting Group, and the 'ex-Treasury No 2' Irene Taylor, 'to argue the industry's case in language the Government understands best – Treasuryspeak.'[27] This kind of acceptance buys into and accepts the

ideologies that drive the economic and political policies of the current Government. These ideologies create an environment where profit equals success and artistic merit and diversity is subsumed to this reasoning.

It is disturbing that a Government should need reminding of the social and cultural benefits of a healthy and thriving arts sector. John Maynard, a former NZFC Board member and producer of such films as *Vigil, The Footstep Man* and *Loaded*, suggests '[t]here's a social cost to all social and cultural things we do. But if we don't do them we've got a land with no memory, a land without a future.'[28] Alan Sorrell, Chairman of the NZFC states: 'Without the proper level of investment, indigenous film will never achieve a powerful place in the imaginative lives of New Zealanders. We will continue to be colonised in our own country, occupying a culturally third world status.'[29]

The New Zealand Film Commission

The New Zealand Film Commission is the key provider of funding to film makers in New Zealand. The Commission is a branch of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, currently headed by Simon Upton. The Ministry appoints key positions within the Film Commission: the 'Commission' or 'Board', who select the projects to receive funding, and the position of the Chair of the Board. The Chief Executive Officer is appointed by the Board. Current NZFC Chair Alan Sorrell noted that in appointing the Board the Government '[applies] its own criteria, having regard to what it regards as appropriate skills to implement and protect taxpayers interests.'[30] This does not reflect the amount of money invested in film production, however, as increasingly film makers are encouraged to look for additional funding from offshore investors, distribution and sales agencies. In the last ten years, more than thirty feature films have been completed with whole or partial NZFC funding, constituting some seventy per cent of the feature film output of New Zealand film makers. Their role is crucial in supporting the film industry, and given the power to allocate funding to projects, their decision making has a crucial effect on the overall demographics of the output of film production. As the Commission is both the key provider of funding for the New Zealand film industry and a Government appointed body, it is inevitable that the altering political climate will have an effect on the Board's funding policies, which will in turn impact on the kinds of films made in the

industry. The changes within the Film Commission are reflective of the wider social, political and economic changes in New Zealand society as a whole. It is essential to recognise that Government directives will drive Government bodies such as the Film Commission, even if those directives are only evidenced in the appointments to the pivotal positions made by the Ministry.

The Film Commission Board

Ruth Harley identified the composition of the Film Commission's Board as a causal factor in the decrease in the number of women directing feature films. She argues that taste in films can be seen as dividing down gender lines. Thus if the composition of the Board is predominantly male, they will be less receptive to 'women's stories'. Unless the Board is constructed in such a way so as to achieve this gender balance, however – which is currently not the case – it is possible that women's stories will not 'get up' through funding from the Commission. Harley was optimistic, however, about the number of women's projects under review. Of the eight films mentioned that were awaiting funding, three had women directors and producers, three had female producers and male directors, and two had male directors and producers. None of the financing had been confirmed for these projects – several rested not on Commission commitment, but on the commitment of funding partners. She notes that there are a 'relatively high number of women's projects in those figures ... and actually what happens will be interesting. And why it happens.' Subsequent to our interview, Christine Parker's film – *Channelling Baby,* produced by Caterina De Nave – succeeded in securing the required funding. The other films are still involved in the funding process.

A comprehensive survey of the various Boards, and the projects each Board funded would give a greater sense of how effective a gender-balanced Board would be. This task proves problematic, however, in that during the period under review a large number of members have sat on the Commission Board. Each Board would have different dynamics, agendas and politics which would effect the allocation of funding to feature film projects. Furthermore, tabulation of the correlating projects funded by each Board would be too extensive for the perimeters of this research. As Athina Tsoulis noted of the Screen Innovation Production Fund, whilst choices to fund projects may not be consciously influenced by gender, areas of interest of the

selection panel will be reflected in the projects receiving funding. If, as Ruth Harley suggests, films are chosen along 'gender lines' consideration of a more balanced Board is necessary. Athina Tsoulis notes that film making is an exercise in communicating your world view, 'and for men on a Board in Wellington they can identify with a young man who writes about his view of the world ... they can identify with that, they understand it.' What is the key to this discussion is a recognition that the Film Commission's internal structure impacts beyond the institution. This recognition offers the possibility for structural change.

The Film Commission Chair and Objectives

The departure in 1993 of David Gascoigne and the instigation of Philip Pryke as the Chair of the Film Commission Board saw a noted change within the Commission toward the embracing of New Right policies. The differing perspectives held by Pryke and Gascoigne embodied the changes in the Governmental position on the (economic) viability and management structure of the cultural sector as a whole. These changes were dominated by New Right economic ideologies.

In 1992 David Gascoigne criticised calls for New Zealand to make more commercial films. He noted that, 'the point of view can't be entirely dismissed, but overseas people like New Zealand films because of their characteristic quirkiness.'[31] He stated that New Zealand films that would be considered commercial by Hollywood standards were generally not successful – '[W]e tried that with *Never Say Die* and it kind of lost its way.'[32] In 1997 he continued to adhere to a less profit-driven motive; he noted that allowing young film makers to fail was an integral part of the process of becoming a film maker: 'Failure is an important part of ultimate success.'[33]

Philip Pryke's appointment in 1993 saw a change in attitude and direction for the Commission. He commented that one of his imperatives as Chair was to see 'a broader view taken of the Commission's cultural obligations', with the hope of redefining culture as 'something more popularist and participatory'.[34] I would suggest that the utilising of the term 'popularist' in this context is a directive for encouraging the creation of more mainstream or commercial product. It was noted at the time that, '[m]aking movies more market driven and the industry less dependent on welfare are two aims of the Film Commission chief Philip Pryke.'[35] Furthermore, according to

Pryke the Film Commission needed 'to put more emphasis on assessing what the market wants so we can make films which New Zealanders want to see, and which appeal to offshore markets.'[36] Pryke further argued that it was only by being 'totally reliant' on success that the industry could flourish, and success in his terms was financial – 'if we had a run of mildly successful movies which *made a return to their investors*, then you would see more investors wanting to invest in film.'[37] (LM's italics)

Gaylene Preston suggested that the changing objectives and goals, particularly in reference to the importance of 'cultural' imperatives for the Commission, had impacted on the number of women directing feature films. I would suggest that this is because 'commercial product' does not allow room for diverse stories, as diversity frequently equals risk.

In 1992, whilst David Gascoigne was Chair of the Film Commission Board, the New Zealand Film Commission Statement of Purpose stipulated that the key function of the Commission was to 'ensure the availability of New Zealand Films which are appreciated by New Zealand and overseas audiences. Films must meet the criteria set out in Section 18 of the New Zealand Film Commission Act.'[38] In the 1994 Annual Report, after one year of Pryke's term, this Statement of Purpose was replaced with the Film Commission's new mission statement: '[t]o sustain and promote New Zealand films as a cultural and economic resource.'[39] In his Chairperson's introduction, Pryke stated that, '[t]he ultimate goal is more quality New Zealand films to delight audiences here and around the world.'[40] These two statements are ambiguous in their commitment to the diversity of New Zealand film making. They suggest a shift from a director-oriented objective, to audience and market-driven goals. Gascoigne pointedly commented in 1997 on the need for maintaining the cultural codes stipulated in the Film Commission Act, stating that they are 'just as valid in today's "meanspirited" times when public expectations of fiscal responsibility jeopardise the creative process.'[41]

The appointment of Phillip Pryke to the Film Commission Chair facilitated the implementation of New Right business policies and strategies into the formal structures of the Film Commission. This is evidenced in the changes to the Film Commission's objectives and goals. New Right ideologies do not recognise gender inequality. Sandra Coney suggests that the New Right embraces a

> tough love policy that supposes that everyone has the capability to raise themselves out of disadvantage through participation in the market. In this philosophy, the obstacles of gender, race or class are discounted. The market is the sole theatre of salvation.[42]

She also notes that, 'under the New Right men and women are regarded as simply fodder for the market – as workers or consumers. This is why the New Right can claim it is neutral about gender and therefore fair towards women.'[43] Thus, addressing 'difference' through cultural representation – in this instance through film – cannot be a priority. A masculinist status quo is thus reinforced through the policies which purport to offer opportunity for everyone irrespective of gender or race.

Policy

Policy is an effective means of addressing gender imbalance. This is evident in the Australian film industry, where women comprise half the Commission Board, a Women's Programme is funded by the Commission, and its recommendations are enacted. The New Zealand Film Commission seems reluctant to facilitate industry-wide discussion on the issue of targeted funding. During the process of writing up the questionnaire for her survey, Alison Colvine encountered some resistance from the Commission to her inclusion of a question on targeted funding. Whilst the NZFC did not commission the survey, they did provide some funding for the research. In the final questionnaire the question asked of participants was, '(do) Film Funds catering for specific groups have the potential to diversify work in the industry.' Over 60 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this comment. There was recognition from participants in Colvine's survey that the current funding system in New Zealand does not cater sufficiently to the diverse needs of those working and creating stories in the industry. One respondent noted: 'These groups (women and Maori) have by and large been ignored developmentally. They need more breaks to get even with many white middle age, middle class men who have done well and built careers on the boys' film funds.'[44]

Participants in this research had varying opinions on the issues of implementing policies to assist women film makers. Niki Caro felt strongly that women did not need targeted funds: '[i]t sounds like we ... are a kind of minority to be supported, we're not, we're a

majority for a start ... I certainly don't believe it's needed.' Melanie Rodriga similarly noted:

> A part of me goes 'no I don't want special treatment', if I can't succeed in the general market place I don't want special treatment. I did go and see *GI Jane*, and when Demi Moore said 'no I don't want special steps so that I can get over the fence easier than the boys', I did kinda go 'yeah I know exactly what you mean. No special treatment!'

These comments are exemplary of the way in which female success is determined in masculine terms. Furthermore, inherent in both these comments is the notion that women's equality has been 'achieved'; the playing field is now level. I dispute this notion, and suggest that 'special treatment' acknowledges and encourages diversity and difference in a positive manner.

Gaylene Preston felt that the implementation of policies was a positive point to start from: 'I think targeted funding would help ... You can demand things like positive discrimination – I think there's a real point to that when it comes out to divvying out community money. Even if [you] just decide that you do a fifty-fifty thing, it would be a start.' She also notes that these issues have implications for Maori imperatives. Central to her comment is the that the Film Commission is allocating community funds, i.e. taxes. If the resulting product does not reflect the diversity of that community, measures must be taken to redress current representations.

I asked Ruth Harley if the Commission was considering instigating 'policy to encourage women directors'. She responded, 'No, I think all we'll be looking for is good films, but I have absolutely no reason to suppose that they can't be made by women. No reason.' Harley did state, however, that in an effort to combat the current gender imbalance in the output of feature films she wanted to ensure that, 'in development, committee and all the development work ... that there's a gender balance on the committee ... as I said, films break down on gender lines. I don't see anything wrong with that as long as you've got the opportunity to have both.' The Commission is not intending to enact formal policy to encourage women directors, however. Whilst more films by women are currently being considered for Commission funding, the reluctance to implement formal support structures or formal policies to assist women speaks volumes for the Commission's unwillingness to recognise areas disad-

vantageous to women working in the industry.

Government policies on the administration and funding of the cultural sector indicate a move toward New Right political and economic ideologies. 'Gender inequality' does not exist in New Right terminology; the free market offers opportunity irrespective of gender, race, class or sexuality. Under these terms, the Government is effectively blind to the imbalance I have discussed. New Right strategies include 'weaning' bodies such as the Film Commission and Creative New Zealand off Government support. Given that women's films are under-represented at present, the possibility of further Government cuts to the arts sector as a whole, or to the Film Commission specifically – as is hinted at in Simon Upton's attitude toward the cultural sector – spell out at best a continued imbalance, and at worse a developing decline in the number of feature films directed by women.

The Government's disinterest in identifying and discussing key areas of gender imbalance or discrepancy of experience between men and women inevitably feeds into the institutions funding the cultural sector, such as the Film Commission. Several elements of the Film Commission's structure require formal examination. The composition of the Commission Board continues to be predominantly male. The Australian Film Commission funds a Womens' Programme and half the total number of Commissioners are women. There are increasing numbers of women directing feature films in Australia, and the last five years have seen a consistent output of feature films in Australia with women directors. The New Zealand Film Commission has no formal support programmes for women, nor do they intend to implement any. WIFT is an important body, but is not an initiative by either the Film Commission or the Government. The influence of the Governmental embracing of New Right policies is evidenced in the change in the Film Commission Chair in 1993. This change in direction impacted on the Film Commission's objectives and goals, and in turn this has had a significant effect on the film industry as a whole, and specifically on women film makers. Right wing government policy and the politics of funding have impacted markedly and directly on the number of women directing feature films in New Zealand.

Larissa Marno completedd her MA in English and Film Studies in 1997 and is currently working freelance as a stage manager and production co-ordinator.

Notes

[1] Marno, Larissa. 'Stubborn Passions: An Interrogation of the Gender Imbalance in the New Zealand Film Industry'. Unpublished MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1998.

[2] Colvine, Alison, 'Behind the Scenes: A Detailed Profile of Women in the New Zealand Film/Video/Television Industry'. Unpublished survey, June 1997. The complete survey results do not have page numbers. Subsequent material quoted from this survey will be referenced according to the section from which it was taken. All subsequent references take the following format: Colvine, Alison, 'Behind the Scenes', 1997, in '(section)'

[3] Mune, Ian, 'Pushy and Passionate', *OnFilm*, November 1997, vol. 13:10, p. 22.

[4] Sorrell, Alan, on Kim Hill 'Nine to Noon', 'Film Commission Funding – Film Maker Gaylene Preston and Commission Chairman Alan Sorrell with Kim Hill, National Radio, 19 November 1997.

[5] Merata Mita, in Seton, Jo, 'We're Taking This Car to Invercargill or The Male Must Get Through', *Alternative Cinema*, Summer 1983–1984, vol. 11:4, p. 11.

[6] Robson, Jocelyn and Zalcock, Beverley, *Girls' Own Stories*, 1997, p. 3.

[7] ibid., p. 3.

[8] Australian Film Commission Annual Report, 1995–1996, p. 73.

[9] Australian Film Commission Annual Report, 1995–1996, p. 4.

[10] Creative NZ /Arts Council of New Zealand /Toi Aotearoa, Draft strategic plan 1998–2001, p. 8.

[11] Creative NZ /Arts Council of New Zealand/Toi Aotearoa, Funding a Guide for Applicants, 1997–1998, p. 30.

[12] Anonymous comment made by participant.

[13] New Zealand Film Commission Annual Report, 1996–1997, p. 16.

[14] Matz Skoog, in Denis Welch, 'Dances With Wolves', *NZ Listener*, 27 September 1997, vol. 160:2995, p. 38.

[15] ibid., p. 39.

[16] Welch, Denis, 'Dances With Wolves', *NZ Listener*, 27 September 1997, vol. 160:2995, p. 38.

[17] ibid.

[18] Coney, Sandra, *Into the Fire*, 1997, p. 41.

[19] Matz Skoog, in Welch, Denis, 'Dances With Wolves', *NZ Listener*, 27 Sep-

tember (1997) vol. 160:2995, p. 38.

[20] Clifton, Jane, 'Culture Vultures', *NZ Listener*, 8 November (1997) vol. 161:3001, p. 17.

[21] Ministry of Cultural Affairs/Te Manatu Tikanga-A-Iwi, 'How Important is Culture? New Zealander's views in 1997'.

[22] ibid., p. 5.

[23] Corkery, Pam, in Jane Clifton, 'Culture Vultures', *NZ Listener*, 8 November (1997) vol. 161:3001, p. 16.

[24] Robson, Jocelyn and Zalcock, Beverley, *Girls' Own Stories* (1997) p. 3.

[25] Creative New Zealand /Arts Council of New Zealand/Toi Aotearoa, Draft Strategic Plan, 1998-2001, p. 11.

[26] Harley, Ruth, in 'NZFC targets '99 election', *Onfilm*, November 1997, vol. 13:10, p. 3. No author cited.

[27] 'NZFC targets '99 election', *Onfilm*, November 1997, vol.13:10, p. 3. No author cited.

[28] John Maynard, in Andrew Heal, 'Horror Story', *Metro*, December 1997, No.198, pp. 67–68.

[29] New Zealand Film Commission Annual Report, 1996–1997, pp. 5–6.

[30] Alan Sorrell, on Kim Hill 'Nine to Noon', 'Film Commission Funding – Film maker Gaylene Preston and Commission Chairman Alan Sorrell with Kim Hill, National Radio, 19 November 1997.

[31] 'Gascoigne Damns LA "Mindset"', *Onfilm*, December 1992, vol. 9:11. No author cited.

[32] ibid.

[33] Wakefield, Philip, 'Failure an Important Element of Success', *On film*, November (1997) vol. 13:10, p. 15.

[34] Wakefield, Philip, 'New Chief Takes Aim at "Welfare"', *Onfilm*, May (1993) vol. 10:5, p. 5.

[35] ibid.

[36] ibid.

[37] ibid.

[38] New Zealand Film Comission Annual Report, 1992, p. 6. The terms of the Statement of Purpose are not defined in this Report, although they are in years previous. See Appendix 4: Goals and Objectives of the New Zealand Film Commission.

[39] New Zealand Film Comission Annual Report, 1994, p. 6.

[40] ibid., p. 5.

[41] Wakefield, Philip, 'Failure an Important Element of Success', *Onfilm*, November (1997) vol. 13:10, p. 15.

[42] Coney, Sandra, *Into the Fire,* 1997, p. 81.

[43] ibid., p. 83.

[44] Colvine, Alison, 'Behind the Scenes', in 'Policy'.

[45] Clifton, Jane, 'Culture Vultures', *NZ Listener*, 8 November (1997) vol. 161:3001, p. 16.

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Dress Making

piecing together the patterns
a tissue of nipples and tucks
folds, huru, darts, bias cut
green prints, star lace evenings

the sequinned network
jigsawed across carpet figures
on all fours on the floor
where whoosh leaves wordspins

blue belt contour tauira
tracing paper over metal roads
a possible body language
hit a nerve and swerve

detour through vital signs
fault lines volcanic plateaus
the junction a detour
zig zagging trampers tracks

in swatches knots and dots ...
domes pockets of bush
hooks to eyes ease
slash mix matches

BRIAR WOOD

The MaryS

I am reading a woman. We are
staying up late alone. She has
the house holed in her mouthing
out a gory oracle

She has taken herself off she has taken her
self over. She expects
parameters lets them scale her
widowed skin

Her landscape is an emptiness in
my unmothered belly. Her body wants
a phosphorous along the soft knock of
my tongue

Explain your sestina to me
while we share garments for heartless
dolls. We put them to
sleep in alphabetical destiny teach ourselves sleeplessness
inventory

She is anxious about the interiority
of kisses. She is wearing a house
a coat of many hours

We stop to heat water
to wipe up screams. Her arms
are exemplary arms are exhausted. She listens
for signs in others until she forgets
her own

She melts down butter over the nuptial
wound

We have tabled the roses the photographs. Breathing
extinguishes a face in the hall. She reads
to me with stiffest fingers the night in pieces a sewing
bee and the moon rocking over
our changeable angel

I lay her face down her spine
arcs a history

TRACEY SLAUGHTER

Mrs Harry Kember
remember

how the years look now

once i would have said
there's none of that left
between us

yet how i wish
you might be goaded
beyond endearments
into my hard arms

your bent head
beginning some suck
such as a mother might endure

our lives are in our long legs
twined in this

our hands ranged
above the flesh holds
at the outer limits of our dress

here's an afternoon
tea i've laid before us

thin cups and collarless bread
a full cake
beating with cherries
and dried ingredients
made on purpose
to put between your lips

you have the strainer
position the metal net
precise above the glass

while i sit
with my littlest finger
slid in the wet

have you noticed?

reach to steady my wrist
as i pour
from the sweating silver
cream pitcher

all down the front of us

the wide legs of the tiered stand
gape above the tray cloth

china knocks

what hush
is this

JANET CHARMAN

Book Reviews

THE COMMON PURSE: INCOME SHARING IN NEW ZEALAND FAMILIES

Robin Fleming, in association with Julia Taiapa, Anna Pakisale, and Susan Kell Easting

Auckland University Press with Bridget Williams Books, Auckland, 1997. $34.95

There are many reasons for welcoming the publication of this book, although it is a pity that it took five years from the fieldwork and three from the FORST reports on which it is based for it to see the light of day. First, it is the only New Zealand study of how income is shared and expenditure managed and controlled within families, albeit confined to two-parent heterosexual families with at least one child over twelve.

Secondly, it is the first such research worldwide to pay real attention to ethnic differences, with three linked studies. Robin Fleming and Susan Kell Easting undertook the research with Pakeha families, while Julia Taipa was responsible for the Maori fieldwork and report, and Anna Pakisale and Ta'i George for the Pacific Island component. Methodological differences in the conduct of the study appropriate to varied ethnic norms were developed, and striking contrasts in the results emerge. While it would have been good to have Asian families included as well, the diversity is already considerable, with six different Pacific Island countries of origin represented. The Pacific Island study covered thirty-two households by direct interviews and seventy-six more through eight focus-group discussions, while the Maori study included twenty household case studies from individuals or couples, and 'twenty "whanau-event" case studies' (p xix), recording whanau organisation of occasions such as tangihanga. The Maori study was based on a sample strongly identified in cultural terms and active in their whanau, with hui preceding much of the data collection. Interviews only were used in the Pakeha study of fifty-nine couples, with forty-one involving both partners, nine the male partner only, and nine the female partner.

Thirdly, the work was conducted and written up with the impeccable standards one would expect from these researchers. Fourthly,

the conclusions are of real importance for gender and ethnic analysis and policy, demonstrating the result that will surprise few readers of this Journal that the combined income of a married couple is frequently not equally available to both partners, while obligations beyond the nuclear family are crucial to Maori and Pacific Island people. Government is currently requiring paid work of almost all adults irrespective of their unpaid child-raising and other responsibilities, while still expecting top performance in the latter. It constructs and attempts to control the meanings of family and dependency, and has no reservations about the family or household rather than the individual as the basis for benefit entitlement. It is therefore important to demonstrate that even within the type of family they wish to be universal, ideologically and to save government expenditure, access to resources for women is not guaranteed.

Finally, while the reports and seminars discussing the important results of the research reached a reasonably wide audience of social scientists and policy analysts a few years ago, the results in policy terms seem noticeable by their absence. It is hoped that this more popular and accessible version can generate a new debate on the findings, with more effect.

The three studies all addressed the question of whether family income can be used as an accurate measure of individuals' access to the economic resources available to the household. A distinction is made between household and family, with the boundaries fluid in the Maori and Pacific Islands samples, due to major obligations to extended family and whanau. This was of less importance in the Pakeha families. The differences in both the *management* and *control* of household finances give much food for thought and show ethnic variation. Control usually indicates power, whereas management is more of a day to day task. A seven-category classification from the international literature was used for money allocation methods, three systems being based on gendered divisions of responsibility (female/male managed whole wage, and housekeeping allowance), two on common ownership and togetherness (whole or partial pooling) and two on autonomy (independent, with or without kitty). The systems based on emphasising the male's breadwinning role (two of the first three), were scarcely used in the Maori/Pacific Island studies, but seven of the Pakeha women had a housekeeping allowance.

Ideology was found to be a crucial determinant of a couple's al-

location system, and part of their 'couple style', particularly in the Pakeha study, with pooling indicating more integration of their lives generally. 'It's a togetherness thing' (p. 39): such relationships were described as emphasising mutual support and sharing, as against an emphasis on either the male breadwinner's role or on autonomy and independence. In the Pacific Island study, collective household responsibility was common and allocation systems chosen more on practicality than ideology, while Maori patterns were less clear.

Control of money and expenditure decisions were far more crucial to Pakeha families than others, with a fairly common belief 'that the control of family money was associated with earning it', so 'only when the woman's income level began to approach that of her partner was she seen as sharing the breadwinning role and therefore the overall financial control' (p. 64). So much for valuing unpaid houshold work! As a result, some women 'have very restricted access to money even when the overall income level is high' (p. 125). In the Maori/ Pacific Island families, control was much less crucial, with different boundaries for family, less significance attached, and on average a smaller amount to control.

Space does not permit more than a mention of the interesting discussions of children's earnings and pocket money, the ways special items like celebrations and rituals are dealt with financially, again differing by ethnicity, or money in reconstituted families. The impact of credit cards (potentially more destabilising on finances than hire purchase) are only touched on, with the rapid growth occuring after the case studies were completed. Future studies will need to analyse the impacts on financial viability, management and control, generally and by gender, ethnicity, and class.

Robin Fleming has done a fine job in distilling the main results of the three reports and the policy-implications volume of The Intra Family Income and Resource Allocation Study into a book of 170 pages, assisted by the co-authors of the study. Those wanting more detail of the methodology and results should consult the original reports. On policy, while the study was not on poverty as such, the authors sensibly use their results to point out the difficulties facing the lower-income families in the study, including a lack of access to health services – and that women in particular often decide that they come last.

The main policy alternatives that they suggest to ensure more

equal access to family resources are to return to a universal payment to women raising children, a fifty/fifty split of income and assets within couples, the individual as the unit for entitlement, and payments for caregivers. My own solution, which encompasses all of these except the second, is a universal basic income, but I am not holding my breath for any of these changes in the current environment. Nevertheless, if we are to effectively challenge current directions, we have to continue accumulating the evidence of both all the unpaid work that is done (cf the upcoming Time Use Survey) and the ways families operate. Hence I await with much interest the results of the author's current similar work on reconstituted families (and perhaps later projects on other households, including those of lesbians and gay men?).

PRUE HYMAN, *Women's Studies, Victoria University of Wellington*

QUEER THEORY

Annamarie Jagose

University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 1996. $29.95

The title 'Queer Theory' locates Jagose's work within a highly contentious field. Indeed, the very naming of this field – and its definition as a field – is under debate. Only a year before the publication of Jagose's *Queer Theory*, Berlant and Warner wrote:

> We have been invited to pin the queer theory tail on the donkey. But here we ... stand half amazed at this poor donkey's present condition. Queer theory has already incited a vast labor of metacommentary.... Yet the term itself is less than five years old.... In our view, it is not useful to consider queer theory a thing, especially one dignified by capital letters. We wonder whether queer commentary might not more accurately describe the things linked by the rubric, most of which are not theory. (1995, p. 343)

Although Jagose's work stands as an uncritical testament to the status of queer 'theory', she is more careful in her approach to queer 'identification'. Jagose rightly sets out to avoid any 'attempt to stabilise the mobile field of queer identification', and instead she 'maps

that very mobility' (p. 2). *Queer Theory* responds sensitively to criticisms that queer theory has forgotten its political and community-based associations (Danuta-Walters, 1996; Smith, 1993) and become immersed in a language inaccessible to most 'queer' people (Tierney, 1997; Malinowitz, 1992). Readers who have struggled with other queer texts will be delighted to find that Jagose makes frequent connections between queer theorising and activism, couching her discussion in terms familiar to those of us without doctorates in psychoanalytic theory, or French poststructuralist thought.

Jagose's stated aim in *Queer Theory* is to examine 'the constitutive discourses of homosexuality developed in the last century in order to place queer in its historical context and [to survey] contemporary arguments both for and against this latest terminology' (p. 6). The first chapter introduces the reader to 'queer' in terms of its semantic implications and its relationship to lesbian and gay studies. In Chapter two, Jagose traces briefly the evolution of essentialist and social constructionist arguments about homosexuality. Chapter three identifies key features of homophile movements in Europe and North America from Hirschfeld to the Daughters of Bilitis. In Chapter four Jagose discusses the influence of 1970s gay liberation movements in the United States upon that in other English-speaking countries, such as Australia. Chapter five describes initial attempts to produce a lesbian feminist analysis. This meant simultaneously challenging sexism within gay liberation and challenging homophobia within feminist movements. Here Jagose reminds the reader that lesbian feminism is not the unified opponent to queer it is sometimes portrayed as, but has produced theorising to which queer theory is indebted. Chapter six traces challenges to *identity*, inspiring a rethinking of (lesbian and gay) identity politics. In Chapter seven, various queer theorists' work is introduced and queer theory is situated within its poststructuralist context. Here Jagose must be applauded for reframing aspects of queer theorising (especially some of Judith Butler's arguments) so that it is more readable and accessible than in its primary source. In the concluding chapter, Jagose discusses critiques of queer theorising.

Throughout *Queer Theory* there is a clear sense that Jagose is doing what she promised and 'placing queer in context'. This does not include engaging in further theorising, or offering critical insights into the workings of queer, but functions more as a review of aca-

demic literatures where queer theory is generated. This combines with Jagose's reader-friendly writing style to produce a text ideal for undergraduate students and readers seeking an introduction to 'queer theory'.

The book's cover claims that Jagose shows how queer theory creates 'new ways of thinking about ... such seemingly given, fixed notions as "sexuality" and "gender", ... "man" and "woman".' Queer indeed attempts this, and Jagose successfully gives the reader an overview of how, signposting important queer texts for any reader who wishes to go further. However, I would have been more inspired by a reading of queer theory that did not perpetuate the image of queer as a 1990s take on gay/lesbian. Jagose rightly mentions how bisexual theorists, and lesbian and gay writers of colour, challenge notions of unified gay/lesbian identity, but she does not convincingly carry that insight through to her writing on queer. After reading this book, I am left with the sinking feeling that gay men and lesbians are the most significant members of the queer family, while bisexual and transgender people are poor cousins who get invited in on special occasions. I appreciate that this is a reasonable and accurate representation of how queer operates in academia and in 'queer' communities. Nevertheless, it would have been refreshing to see that critiqued rather than reiterated. To what extent can queer be expected to provide 'new ways of thinking about ... seemingly given, fixed notions [such] as ... "man" and "woman"', if Queer Theory ignores the groundbreaking transgender and bisexual theorising currently being done?

Queer Theory is a very readable introductory text which traces the historical origins of queer, focusing on the relationship between queer and lesbian/gay, and acknowledging queer's divergences from lesbian and gay theorising and politics.

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KATRINA ROEN, *Doctoral Candidate, Feminist Studies, University of Canterbury*

DISCIPLINING SEXUALITY:
FOUCAULT, LIFE HISTORIES, AND EDUCATION

Sue Middleton

Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York, 1998.
US$19.95 (paper)

Sue Middleton's latest book, though written for an American audience, will be of great interest to feminists in New Zealand. Continuing with her travels in life history of New Zealand teachers, Middleton draws on the experiences of secondary school teachers to consider several aspects of sexuality from the 1920s to the present. A thorough documenting of important feminist and educational milestones is well integrated with the life histories which form the backbone of this narrative.

The book begins with a discussion about the conflict experienced by many women between the rational/academic (usually described as a male domain) and the bodily/erotic (often seen as women's domain). The work of French historian Michel Foucault is central in the analysis of disciplines of the body – the ways that we learn to control bodily movement and expression in the service of 'education'. There are some fascinating comments about the ways that 'clothing politics' helps to organise gendered relations of power.

In Chapter 2 the age-range of participants allows an interesting snapshot of customs across history. There was a change from the early focus on discipline, corporal punishment and hygiene (1920s to mid-1940s) to more openness about the body (especially puberty) in the period of more egalitarian education (1945–1960s). Finally, during the protest eras of the 1970s–1980s, the school uniform be-

came a battleground between school authority and emerging voices of student diversity.

The third chapter looks specifically at sex education, covering puberty, virginity, unexpected pregnancy, contraception, marriage and celibacy. The heterosexual focus is interrupted by sections on coming out as a lesbian. The description of "sexual strategies" (p. 69) taken by women indicates well Sue's focus on women's choices ('agency') in dealing with the disciplines and norms required of us. The teachers describe their experiences in personal terms, which gives the interview excerpts immediacy and emotional resonance. Their comments also suggest that we find it difficult to see ways that individual 'choices' may be pushed along by trends and educational policies of the times.

Sue provides an intriguing account of her time on the Indecent Publications tribunal (Chapter 4), which gives an overview of sexual censorship issues in this country. This provides a much larger world stage for the issues of (genital/erotic) sexuality discussed in earlier chapters, since our debates about censorship issues were somewhat different to those held in other countries.

The censorship chapter integrates Sue's concerns with issues of cyber-pornography and education as a concern for the future, and leads well to her final chapter, which aims towards a more woman-friendly embodied theory for educational practice. She is damning of some traditional theories for their (body-less) lip-service treatment of feminist issues. I was impressed by Sue's praxis in getting Michael Apple to write a rather revealing preface, though he is criticised in the book for failing to acknowledge feminist work. *Disciplining Sexuality* convincingly argues that educational thinking must in future take on board feminist perspectives, particularly about the importance of the body, emotion and sexuality.

My only real quibble with the book, and this is mainly relevant for its use in tertiary classrooms, is with its narrow use of Foucault's work. Sue has taken the idea of 'disciplining the body' as a project of material censorship and boundary-setting, without delving into the complexities of language about sexuality in its wider forms. The view of sexuality presented in the book seems to me to be a particularly Western, individualistic one. Maori perspectives are presented in the book, but I wonder if the text has been reflective enough about different cultural perspectives on sexuality. What aspects of life are con-

sidered to be sexual, and what is at stake in maintaining the boundaries between bodies and between genders in these normative ways? While there is some mention of lesbian and gay issues, the book does not really question the Western heterosexual foundations of discourses about sex. There is considerable reporting of the views of Camille Paglia, but no references to more challenging queer writers such as Elizabeth Ellsworth or Annamarie Jagose.

The book is structured in a gripping way, each chapter focusing on a different aspect. I was struck by the way the author wove together a number of threads from her own personal experience, research and teaching into a far-reaching overview of issues which are not usually the subject of educational writing. Education has seldom been the place for these aspects of life to meet happily.

Sue is an intrepid chronicler of the lives of baby-boom teachers, work for which she has received international attention. The book is written with a catchy style, making this a textbook few students would complain about having to read. It is also a worthy book for every feminist bookshelf.

LISE BIRD, *School of Education, Victoria University of Wellington*

FLOWERS INTO LANDSCAPE: MARGARET STODDART 1865–1934

Julie King

Hazard Press, Christchurch, 1997. $39.95

Margaret Stoddart was an artist whose fifty-year career was one of continuous quiet achievement; in her final years she was regarded as an elder stateswoman of New Zealand art. She belonged to the first generation of New Zealand-born women artists, a generation that included such notable contemporaries as Dorothy Richmond, Grace Joel and Frances Hodgkins. She painted flower studies and landscapes, and was celebrated as a skilled watercolourist. Julie King's book, *Flowers into Landscape*, is a biographical account of Stoddart's work and career, which coincides with an exhibition, curated by the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch. The book is lavishly illustrated in colour, including seventy-two images from the exhibi-

tion, and also includes a chronology and list of exhibitions.

E.H. McCormick wrote of her: 'Miss Stoddart's roses have become part of the tradition of New Zealand painting, as representative of the taste and achievement of their time as Gully's landscape are of his' (p.14). While King does not interrogate this quotation, which is tinged with faint praise, McCormick's description does highlight Stoddart's position in art history. King argues that it is the very accessibility of the genre of flower painting that has led to its lack of serious consideration by local art historians.

The book locates Stoddart within the context of women's art practice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, particularly in colonial New Zealand. As such, it provides an valuable account of how women worked as artists during this period. The main body of the text is divided into three parts: 'The Emergence of a Colonial Woman Artist', 'The Making of a Flower Painter', and 'The Making of a Landscapist'. King's contribution is greatest where she uncovers the unfamiliar territory of Stoddart's family background, her early career and the time spent in Europe between 1898 and 1906. King places the artist within cultivated Canterbury circles; amongst her family's friends were Thomas Potts, an early advocate for the protection of native forests, who helped found the Canterbury Acclimatisation Society, and Julius van Haast, the first director of the Canterbury Museum.

Given this background, and the contemporary interest in gardening, with its related support of botanical drawing and flower painting, it is not surprising that Stoddart was, in her early career, known for faithful pictorial observations of flowers. King discusses in some detail the Victorian association between women and flowers, and the widespread colonial interest in indigenous flora. This interest encouraged Stoddart to explore her local environment, travelling as far as the Chatham Islands in 1886, where she recorded Moriori tree carvings. Her training at Canterbury College School of Art, based on the South Kensington system, also emphasised the close observation of nature. King links Stoddart's work as well with other late nineteenth-century botanical artists, such as Marianne North who established the Marianne North Gallery at Royal Kew Gardens in 1882, New Zealander Edith Harris and prominent Australian flower painter Edith Rowan, who encouraged Stoddart to visit Melbourne in 1894.

It was when working in Europe between 1898 and 1906, that the

focus of Stoddart's work shifted from flower painting to landscape. Like many colonial, British-influenced artists, she was based at St Ives, Cornwall, where she studied plein-air painting with Newlyn School artists, and travelled to Norway, Switzerland, France and Italy. She also met up with such fellow-expatriates as Hodgkins and Richmond. This European experience had a direct impact on her work when she returned to Christchurch, where she painted a series of impressionistic scenes of Diamond Harbour, Sumner and New Brighton. Although initially not well received, being considered too radical, her new style gradually became more acceptable for local tastes.

Ironically, it is in her later career, when Stoddart was her most successful, that the documentary evidence is least abundant. King records her membership of various organisations, such as the Canterbury Sketch Club and her vice-presidency of the Canterbury Society of Arts and the Society for Imperial Culture. Her close connections with prominent figures in New Zealand art are also mentioned – included are recollections of Toss Woollaston and Evelyn Page, and painting expeditions with the Spencer Bowers and Cora Wilding.

It seems a pity, given the paucity of records about Stoddart's later life, that King has not examined the critical responses to her work, as her paintings were regularly reviewed in *Art in New Zealand* and elsewhere. It would have provided her with an opportunity to explore more fully themes she alludes to in her text, such as the ambivalence with which flower painting and the watercolour medium were regarded before the Second World War and, indeed, her contemporary reputation.

Julie King has, however, provided us with an invaluable discussion of a prominent figure in New Zealand art. The detail that she gives us about Stoddart's career, and her locating it within a wider international context, adds breadth to our understanding of successful women artists of the period. It also serves as a counter to the sometimes simplistic accounts of such artists in the writings of later commentators.

JUDITH COLLARD, *Art History and Theory, University of Otago*

STICK OUT, KEEP LEFT
Margaret Thorn
Elsie Locke and Jacqui Matthews (eds)
Auckland University Press/Bridget Williams Books, 1997. $29.95

The title the editors have chosen for the autobiography of Margaret Thorn, socialist, radical, feminist, indefatigable worker, and holder of decided and unswerving opinions, is an apt one. It is lifted from Margaret's account of her differences with her much loved husband Jim, over political strategy:

> We used to bicker over 'compromise' during the Labour government's term of office. I used to rail, 'Stick out, keep left, time will vindicate you.'
>
> I still think I am right ...[1]

Margaret Anderson was born in Manchester in 1897, into an extended family in which women knew hard lives and set out to survive. One grandmother, widowed at twenty-two with three children under three, eked out a hard-earned living as a milliner; the other, between the care of thirteen children and a 'useless' husband, ran a shop where she baked and sold 'muffins, bread and pies', and 'every day roasted a big joint of meat' to sell by the slice. She gave away jugs of broth to those who couldn't afford to buy.[2]

The unionist, suffragist and radical traditions of Manchester marked Margaret's upbringing. Her father was a skilled worker, a bricklayer, who nurtured her reading (she had read Paine, among others, by the age of fourteen). In his other role as public health inspector, his duties impressed on her the conditions of the poor and the imperatives of political action. She was her parents' fourth child, but only the second to survive, and the first to reach adulthood.

The family emigrated in several waves when Margaret was in her early teens. Soon after arrival in New Zealand, Margaret was a member of the Waitresses' Union and the Social Democratic Party, already driven by powerful certainties and uncompromising politics. Then she met James Thorn. When he was imprisoned as a conscientious objector during the First World War, she wrote to him, and once he was freed they married, thus beginning a long political career together. He edited the *Maoriland Worker*, became president of the

Labour Party, later MP for Thames and Otaki, and then High Commissioner to Canada. With three children, Margaret kept the home fires alight for many years, and scraped by on the minimal salary of an MP of the time, but, an inveterate joiner, she was always as much a politician as he was.

She fed and organised unemployed women in the Depression, and raised funds for the party. Once Jim was an MP, she sat on relief, school and ambulance committees, and became a voluntary child welfare officer; with Jim usually away, she dealt with the business passing through the electorate office. Her account demonstrates the extent to which an MP's job was a two-person one. At the national level, her activity was less formalised but no less passionate: she lists, with the attention to detail of a devotee, the social programme of the first Labour Government, and writes 'The Social Security Act for me was something like the creed for a Jesuit.'[3] When it came into effect, the work of the MP's wife in assisting people to get their benefits required 'a system of polygamy. One wife was not nearly enough.'[4] When Jim died, she was hospitalised for a nervous breakdown, got through it, got out – and went out to work.

Margaret Thorn never ran for political office, but was an instinctive politician. As the story of a parliamentary wife, this is both an insider's and an outsider's perspective of the emergence and flourishing of the Labour Party in its early incarnations. It is not uncritical – she marks her disagreement with the government, especially over its introduction of conscription during the Second World War – but it is, on the whole, loyal, as an MP's wife had to be. As the editors note, although Margaret strongly supported access to birth control and abortion, she does not mention equal pay: the differential minimum pay rates for men and women under Labour's 1936 amendment to the Arbitration Act, for example, pass without comment.

Margaret Thorn's voice is vital, forceful, and a valuable clue to the preoccupations and the imperatives of a political period which is currently of particular significance to us. Elsie Locke encouraged Margaret to write these memoirs before her death in 1969; now Locke and Jacqui Matthews have collaborated on a fine edition (though I would have liked an index), and Auckland University Press have produced it handsomely. It is a fitting tribute to a powerful spirit.

ANNABEL COOPER, *Women's Studies, University of Otago*

FEMINIST THOUGHT IN AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND: CONNECTIONS AND DIFFERENCES

Rosemary Du Plessis and Lynne Alice (eds)

Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1998.

RE-ORIENTING WESTERN FEMINISMS: WOMEN'S DIVERSITY IN A POSTCOLONIAL WORLD

Chilla Bulbeck

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998. $39.95

> Feminists at the end of the twentieth century are constantly challenged by 'differences' and 'connections' in their communities and in feminist theorising. (Du Plessis and Alice p. xv)
>
> Finally [this] book asks what kinds of political alliances are possible that both accept our differences and recognise our connections. (Bulbeck p. 17)

I have to confess, a little shamefaced, that the terms 'differences' and 'connections' send a frisson of – well, indifference, down my spine. Is it the sense of predictability which they invoke? We know exactly how we ought to think about these notions, even though we are never quite sure what precisely they refer to. Or is it their self-congratulatory cosiness? Once it was 'we are all sisters', but now 'we' are aware that we are not all the same (and not all white and middle-class I hasten to add). So 'difference' has become the catch word of the (feminist) times – for quite a while now.

For some this has led to a real fear that differences have made 'feminism' impossible – that feminism by definition is predicated on women-as-a-group in theoretical and political terms. Lest we all get beset by such pessimism, others, like the authors of these books, engage a robust celebratory approach and call for 'multiple voices', 'diversity' and 'complexity' in feminist conversations and actions which delight in similarities *and* differences.

In the interests of diversity, Du Plessis and Alice allow many feminist voices to speak for themselves without asserting an editorial or theoretical critique. And Bulbeck's book is only lightly theorised. Perhaps this is the reason for my caution when I see the words connections-and-differences. I anticipate that particular and bland

form of 'openness' demanded by multiplicity – that which brooks no argument. Once you are into multiple voices and diversity, you are committed to listening – especially if you are a middle class Western feminist – without the cut and thrust of critique. But I don't expect a *lot* of sympathy on this one.

This is not to say that these are not fascinating voices. I can say quite candidly that I enjoyed these books. Du Plessis and Alice's does give a good sense of some of the work being carried out by local feminist academics. The thirty-one chapters on a wide range of 'differences' are wonderfully short, and some are very interesting. Students will not only get a sense of feminism as alive and well, but will also feel inspired to explore feminist approaches after reading these pieces. Bulbeck's is enjoyable for other reasons – ones to which I perhaps should not confess.

Bulbeck's intention, she says, is to encourage Western feminist consideration of our own particularity, our own cultural constructedness, and the specificity of our theorising about 'women': 'We will explore why and how the stereotypes of 'other' women are so integral to white western women's constructions of themselves ... what is their purpose in the construction of 'white westernness'?' (p.1) I find the issue of how Western feminists understand ourselves through the 'other' enormously interesting and important. But despite the promises, Bulbeck does not really engage that question at all. Instead, she provides a text which often feels like an anthropological one: there are accounts of sati, the veil, female circumcision, marriage practices and sexual identities in a range of cultures.

Herein lies my pleasure. I find these accounts absorbing, but suspect my enjoyment is simply a sort of voyeurism. Bulbeck's intention is precisely not that. Rather, she desires that as a Western feminist I will understand women's diverse range of practices and beliefs about liberation and politics do not tally with my own, and my universalising assumptions will be challenged. It's a thoroughly laudable desire.

Bulbeck also draws me to consider the ways, as a Pakeha feminist, I find my own cultural practices and beliefs not shared by my white Australian, English and North American – and some 'Kiwi' – counterparts. Can Pakeha (an identity exercised for political as well as emotional purposes) be considered a 'hybrid' identity? Perhaps not if it means an 'interracial identity'; perhaps so, if hybrid is an identity which 'encompasses the contradictory history of colonisa-

tion'. I wanted to hear more from Bulbeck about hybridity – the 'liminal' space where post-dualist consideration of difference might occur. 'Post colonial' was also a term I wanted to consider further, especially as it is in the book's title. 'Postmodernism', says Bulbeck, rather circuitously, '... in the hands of post colonial writers, becomes post colonialism, a discourse which attempts to heal the epistemic violence of imperialism' (p. 14). And....?

Inexplicably, Bulbeck seems to prefer the term 'ex-colonised'. She does outline many 'third world' women's resistance to postmodernist discourses, including Maori writers Patricia Johnson and Leonie Pihama (she quotes several Maori women writers in her 'world-travelling').

Cultural difference is a difficult and complex terrain – something both books illustrate well. I am constantly reminded of the problems in current thinking about difference when I pick up a Women's Studies Association Newsletter (an excellent and informative rag). It prints some rhetoric in the front which says, in part, '....We acknowledge the Maori people as tangata whenua of Aotearoa. This means we have a particular responsibility to address their oppression among our work and activities ...' The paradox in this statement is one which besets much 'cultural difference' talk. It attempts to be 'inclusive' but reinvokes a peculiar form of eurocentrism in its geographical 'we'. Maori women are 'over there', and 'we' must take 'them' into account. In their spirit of ongoing and enthusiastic consideration of difference, these books suggest a revisiting of such phrases.

ALISON JONES, *Education Department, University of Auckland*

THE IDEA OF PROSTITUTION

Sheila Jeffreys

Spinifex Press, Melbourne, 1997. $39.95. 393pp

Serbian feminist anti-war activist Lepa Mladjenovic has described the effect of rape upon a woman as rendering her 'homeless in her own body'. In her latest book, a study of changing ideas about prostitution from the late 1800s to the present, radical feminist Sheila Jeffreys argues that the prostitute similarly 'endures experiences which cause her to vacate her body and dissociate in order to survive'. Jeffreys' central argument is that prostitution is a form of sexual violence. Furthermore, she argues that men's abuse of women in prostitution lies at the very core of the oppression of women. Prostitution, she insists, invariably results in long-term psychological damage to individual women and undermines all women's status and well-being. It cannot be considered a valid 'choice' for women to make, nor can it be considered a legitimate form of work as some liberal feminists and prostitutes' rights activists have argued.

Jeffreys states her case forcefully from the start. In her Introduction she argues that prostitution needs to be reconceptualised as male rather than female behaviour. To assist this reconceptualisation, Jeffreys rejects the terms 'prostitute' and 'sex-worker' in favour of 'prostituted woman'. The term 'client' is similarly rejected. 'Prostitution abuser' is considered but is replaced by the less unwieldy 'john'. Jeffreys strikes an awkward note in this attempt to re-name participants in prostitution. She declares that the use of the term 'john' is apt because it 'implies that the men who use women in prostitution are generic males, indistinguishable one from another' (p. 3). This statement is problematic. At a time when scholars are increasingly acknowledging the diversity of women's experience it seems overly reductionist to speak of 'generic males' in this way. One of Jeffreys' major aims in the book is to provide an overarching explanation of prostitution. Grouping the 'johns' in one undifferentiated category aids this purpose but this approach is not entirely satisfactory. A more detailed discussion of men's motivations would have added greater depth to her analysis.

Despite this criticism, Jeffreys' account is thought-provoking and very readable. She offers a clear and well-documented overview of

changing attitudes to prostitution from the late 1800s to the late 1900s. Chapter I explores first-wave feminist opposition to 'the social evil'. Jeffreys emphasises the unity of opinion among first-wave feminists on prostitution and examines their desire to combat the trade through the promotion of an equal, chaste moral standard for men and women. Although she acknowledges the tactical limitations of this aspect of first-wave feminism, Jeffreys does not discuss the coercive implications this approach could have for young sexually active women. Feminist support for eugenics is also downplayed. Judith Walkowitz and Lucy Bland's accounts of feminist efforts to combat prostitution offer a useful counterpoint to this aspect of her work.[1]

Jeffreys argues that the late nineteenth and early twentieth century feminists were relatively successful in limiting male sexual prerogatives. However, she notes that this success was 'closely followed by a considerable campaign of legitimising propaganda from sexologists and historians' (p. 35). Chapters II and III discuss how sexologists, historians and sociologists helped construct a theory and practice of sexuality based on prostitution and how the sexual revolution institutionalised men's sexual imperative. Jeffreys sees the genesis of the prostitutes' rights movement in this attempt to legitimise prostitution. While the movement was formed ostensibly to promote the rights and status of 'sex workers', she suggests that it tended to serve the interests of the male-controlled sex industry rather those of the women concerned.

Jeffreys' criticism of prostitution and the prostitutes' rights movement has led to charges that she ignores the words of the prostitutes themselves and that she denies such women any agency or autonomy. *The Idea of Prostitution* responds to these charges in depth. 'The problem', Jeffreys points out, 'is in deciding which group of prostituted and ex-prostituted women to listen to.' The solution, she suggests, is to exercise a critical political intelligence in order to decide which 'truth' of prostitution to accept. Jeffreys analyses current debates about the issues of choice and agency. She gives opposing views space and eloquently argues her own case. Her discussion helps explain how liberal and radical feminists have come to differ in the late twentieth century on the vexed question of how best to respond to prostitution.

The Idea of Prostitution offers an in-depth and well-argued critique of prostitution and the ways in which it has been understood since the late 1800s. Jeffreys dissects a range of explanations and analy-

ses of prostitution offered by sexologists, sociologists, historians, queer theorists and liberal and radical feminists. She places prostitution in an international context and provides an often convincing overarching explanation for its existence. While this attempt to provide a global perspective has its weaknesses, principally its tendency to emphasise sameness at the cost of difference, it does provide valuable insights into prostitution as an international phenomenon. This book is well worth reading. It is clearly argued, thought-provoking and a very worthwhile addition to the growing body of literature in this field.

TRACY TULLOCH, *History Department, University of Canterbury*

NOTE

1 Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980) pp. 249, 256; Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885–1914* (Penguin Books, London, 1995) pp. 306-307, 310, 313.

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