POETIC (RE)NEGOTIATIONS OF HOME IN NEW ZEALAND WOMEN'S POETRY OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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1 INTRODUCTION

Poetry is the oldest genre in New Zealand literature written in English and has thus always played a significant role in the country's literary debate. It is not only perceived as a reference point for New Zealand's literary advancement, but is also considered to be an indicator of the country's general cultural sensibility. This is particularly evident towards the end of the 19th century when the poetry written in English reveals a pervasive unease about feeling at home in Aotearoa New Zealand[1], a feeling that is coupled with a strong nostalgia for Britain as the actual Home country.

In the poetic imagination the home had manifested itself for most of the time in metaphors of space, such as the garden or the house. In the early stages of New Zealand poetry, frequent references to the familiar plants from England that stand in contrast to the fauna and flora of New Zealand expressed a continual sense of exile amongst the European settlers. However, in the course of the 20th century, the question of where to locate the home is generally perceived as having undergone a decisive shift. Home became a crucial issue in the process of consciously establishing a distinct sense of identity in New Zealand, in particular after the umbilical cord to Britain was cut after World War II. On its way to becoming a nation, New Zealand started to perceive itself as a bicultural society, in which the major ethnic groups were Maori, the indigenous people, and the Pakeha, people of mostly white European descent.[2] This involved not only a change in New Zealand's relationship to Britain, but initiated a re-consideration of New Zealand's internal affairs.

The issues that surfaced strongly in the public debate after World War II had originated in the 1930s. It is in the poetry of that time that we can detect a decisive shift away from Britain as the sole cultural reference point toward a coming to terms with establishing home in New Zealand in an emotional and cultural sense. The poetry written during these formative years

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1 In recent references to New Zealand, the country is always referred to as Aotearoa New Zealand in its correct formulation as a bi-lingual country. When I am not explicitly referring to New Zealand as a political unit, I employ the simplified English term 'New Zealand' to make the argument more reader-friendly.

2 The articles by various authors in David Novitz and Bill Willmott's publication *Culture and Identity in New Zealand* (1989) all evolve around the debate of New Zealand as a bicultural nation.

reveals a more complex negotiation of the concept of home and belonging. The question of where to locate home that is debated therein no longer plays upon the simplistic dichotomy between Britain as the cultural centre and New Zealand as the colonial outpost, but becomes part of New Zealand's cultural emancipation.

The establishment of a distinct New Zealand cultural identity and with this a representative body of literature was subject of intensive public debate after World War II, a debate that considered women and Maori only on the margin. This can be most clearly seen in the scholarly exchange amongst New Zealand's bourgeois European male critics who sought poems one would "recognise New Zealand by"[3]. The assessment of the poetic imagination went hand in hand with the assessment of New Zealand's identity as a nation but this intertwining of politics and culture is not representative of New Zealand's cultural fabric since it illuminates only a very limited segment of it. The streamlined debate that was lead amongst academics was so focused on the national agenda that it failed to pay attention to the intricate correlation between individual people's lives and the social situation, an important indicator of the country's cultural sensibility.

It is in particular in women's poetry that this relationship is elaborated time and again. However, for much of the 20th century, criticism argued that women's poetry is domestic and emotional and therefore allegedly ill-suited for contributing to the nation's sense of home. Such a critical angle quickly loses ground, since it is especially women who reflect on home most frequently in their work. It is, however, not the home-sweet-home women's poetry propagates. Rather, women position home at the crossroads between the public and the private realm, explore the correlation between personal and national concerns and assess daily life against the backdrop of New Zealand's social development. Home is thus not only a national concern; it is a very complex socio-cultural construct, which has not been paid sufficient attention to in poetry, largely because a suitable approach to capturing the complexity of such interconnectedness was lacking.

This study will investigate women's poetic concepts of home from a socio-cultural angle. The goal is to complement – rather than contrast – the

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[3] Peter Simpson, *Look Back Harder: Critical Writings 1935-1984 Allen Curnow* (1987): 49.

common notions arguing that the question of home as it is expressed in poetry is an indicator for New Zealand's national cultural identity. At the same time, the study aims at revealing the importance of women's poetry for completing the picture of New Zealand's literary history.

1.1 Body of Selected Texts

My choice of the poetry and poets would appear to suggest a particular European focus because I solely analyse New Zealand poetry that is written originally in English. However, it is exactly this focus that will provide important critical evidence for the analysis of New Zealand's cultural development. Although New Zealand increasingly considered itself to be a bicultural nation in the course of the 20th century (a notion that needs to be reviewed in face of New Zealand's multi-ethnic orientation towards the end of the 20th century), the poetry that reached the public eye has mostly been written by native speakers of English, usually of European descent. This is necessarily a crude simplification of the situation; details will be discussed in depth in the respective chapters in this thesis. At this point, it suffices to say that, as a former British colony, New Zealand was highly dependent on Britain not only of its economy and politics, but also in the establishment of its cultural standards. The orientation towards the former mother country shaped New Zealand's political climate in colonial and post colonial[4] times and blocked out voices that did not contribute to this mainstream opinion.

The poetry that is published and readily available is mostly in English. The sources that are accessible will thus inevitably provide only a limited, one might be inclined to say streamlined, insight. The standard anthologies of New Zealand poetry separate Maori from white European (Pakeha[5]) writing. Notable exceptions are Allen Curnow's *Anthology of New Zealand Verse,* dating from 1945, that provides some Maori poetry mostly in translation, and

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4 I employ this term in its temporal meaning rather than a critical notion, which would be the hyphenated version.

5 The term 'Pakeha', the Maori word for non-Maori, came to be used for white European New Zealanders as an ethnic marker and has been under constant debate since. Over time the term Pakeha included more and more white ethnic groups in the context of New Zealand seeing itself as a bicultural nation which eventually also accounted for the racialisation of ethnic relationships. Since I consider the bicultural frame outdated, I will use the term 'Pakeha' as sparingly as possible and only in those discursive contexts in which the academic debate employs the term to discuss New Zealand biculturalism. For further discussion of Pakeha ethnicity see Michael King, *Pakeha. The Quest For Identity in New Zealand* (1991); David Pearson, "Pakeha Ethnicity: Concept or Conundrum?" (1989).

more recently the anthology put together by Ian Wedde and Harvey McQueen, which focuses on the publications in the 1980s.[6] Since it is not the focus of this thesis to account for the development of Maori verse in New Zealand, a work that has already been done by Margaret Orbell in her doctoral thesis dating from 1977,[7] it must be stated as an unfortunate fact that poetry written in English by Maori remained at the fringe of the emerging New Zealand canon. The distinguished exception to this rule is Hone Tuwhare (1922 -),[8] who could be called the elder statesman of Maori poetry written in English before the Maori Renaissance.[9]

The body of poems I have selected for close reading will substantiate my argument of a women's tradition in New Zealand poetry that always existed side by side with that of the men's but has not yet been acknowledged in due depth. First, the poems guide through a spectrum of New Zealand women's poetry and through different eras, each with its own socio-cultural and political debates. By aligning women's poetry from different times and backgrounds, I intend to raise the awareness of a whole section of the poetic imagination that has been largely neglected in critical assessments of the history of New Zealand poetry. Second, I place distinguished poets, such as Ursula Bethell (1874-1945) and Lauris Edmond (1924-2000), alongside less well-known poets, such as Mary Stanley (1919-80), and J.C. Sturm (1927 -) in order to demonstrate that the contribution to the concept of home in New Zealand is not the prerogative of established poets.

The order of analysis guides through the 20th century paying due attention to world events against the backdrop of New Zealand's national sensibility, which inevitably finds its reflection on the poetry of that time. The close reading starts with the 1930s since, as already mentioned, the years between the World Wars were formative years for the development of New Zealand's cultural and national identity. Poetry was still the driving force of New Zealand literature, notably through Ursula Bethell and R.A.K. Mason,

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6 Ian Wedde, and Harvey McQueen, *Contemporary New Zealand Poetry* (1989).

7 Margaret Orbell, *Themes and Images in Maori Love Poetry*, University of Auckland (1977).

8 Hone Tuwhare's first collection of poetry *No Ordinary Sun* (1964) has now become a standard work of New Zealand poetry. He has published numerous volumes since and is still active as a writer in various genres, such as drama or short fiction.

9 More recently Robert Sullivan (1967 -) has brought Maori poetry to the attention of an international audience. Sullivan has published three volumes of poetry so far. With *Star Waka* (1999), he has established himself as a Maori poet writing in English.

who were the first poets to be considered as having consistently published high quality poetry. However, while Mason was celebrated as one of the founding fathers of New Zealand poetry, Ursula Bethell's work, though not lacking in quality and also published in New Zealand as well as in England, remained on the margin of literary and cultural criticism. It is in particular the question of cultural belonging that Bethell extensively negotiates, and for this reason I will examine the impact of her poetry on New Zealand's cultural standing. The chapter "Ursula Bethell: A Woman 'earnestly digging'" provides an analysis of Bethell's sense of being torn between two homelands. I consider her poetic statement a strong testimony of New Zealand's search for a distinct cultural basis of its own in the 1930s.

In the chapter "'I am not more than man nor less': Mary Stanley's *Starveling Year"*, I focus on a strong poetic voice that had for a long time been thwarted by criticism and that almost disappeared into obscurity despite its outstanding quality. Stanley's biography and poetry pays witness to the persisting unjustified marginalisation of women's voices and stands out in New Zealand's male-dominated literary nationalism after World War II. Because public opinion was chiefly governed by the aforementioned desire to establish a national cultural identity, Stanley's poetry– and women's writing in general – was pushed to the margin due to a very traditional gender-oriented model of society. With her one and only volume of poetry published during her lifetime,[10] Mary Stanley delivers a unique poetic statement that not only reveals the strong patriarchal reign after World War II, but also depicts the transition of post-war New Zealand society from a perspective that is refreshingly different from that of the established canon.

In the continuation of the chronological order of my analysis, I focus on the work of Lauris Edmond, who could be seen as the elder stateswoman of New Zealand poetry not only due to being the first New Zealand poet to win the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1985. Her writing transcends many historical boundaries reaching back to the tradition of Bethell while showing particular similarities to her actual contemporary Stanley. Lauris Edmond

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[10] Mary Stanley's *Starveling Year* was published in 1953; it was extended posthumously to a collected volume by Stanley's second husband Kendrick Smithyman, himself a poet under the title *Starveling Year and Other Poems* in 1994.

started to publish at the peak of the Women's Movement in the 1970s,[11] and yet her poetry reveals only a moderate feminism that was nevertheless considered as voicing the concerns of an entire generation of New Zealand women.[12] Edmond's poetry not only resonates in the cultural idiom of her time and place. Her poetics subvert dichotomous conservative structures in style and form and gains momentum beyond the boundaries of her national literature. It is a pity that her work has not been translated into any other language, yet.

At the same time as feminism started to gain pace in Aotearoa New Zealand[13], the Maori Renaissance prepared the ground for Maori voices to reach the public ear. An analysis of the concept of home in Aotearoa New Zealand would be incomplete without the native population's viewpoint. However, it was previously difficult to analyse the two major cultural influences side by side since Maori culture was originally an oral one that was performed in songs and dances during Maori ceremonies. The publication of Maori writing often remained in Maori language and sometimes it did not even leave the tribal boundaries.[14] It was not until the 1980s and 90s that Maori women were recognised as writers. A notable exception is J.C. Sturm who was the first Maori woman to publish her poetry in literary journals as early as 1947.

Although she is more well-known for her short fiction[15] and did not publish a volume of her own poetry until 1996, Sturm's poems provide crucial insights into the concept of home in Aotearoa New Zealand's poetic imagination towards the end of the 20th century. In *Dedications* (1996), Sturm reflects on her Maori and Pakeha background, on the political and even more so on the emotional baggage of biculturalism in New Zealand. Her work tells of the prevailing estimation of Maori culture through Pakeha eyes, and yet she does not follow the path of cultural assertiveness that was initiated by the Maori Renaissance. Rather, the variety of Sturm's subject matter and her

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11 Edmond's first volume of poetry *In Middle Air* was published in 1975, the International Women's Year.

12 Arvidson, Ken. "Affirming Lucidity – Edmond's Wisdom Poetry." (1997): 52.

13 See footnote 1, page 3.

14 Barry Mitcalfe, *Maori Poetry: The Singing Word* (1974).

15 To the present day, J.C. Sturm's *The House of the Talking Cat* (1984), a collection of short stories has set a decisive mark in Maori literature written in English.

recognition of greater cultural complexities exceed the focus on recovering a Maori ethnic identity. Her poetry shows that New Zealand is part of a global world in which geographic and cultural boundaries dissolve and in which the concept of home escapes clearly marked boundaries, both spatial and cultural.

1.2 Structural Outline

This thesis consists of two main parts. In the first part, which entails the chapters two and three, I will give a brief account of the concept of home from various critical positions in the course of the 20th century before I proceed to present my heuristic approach to the concept of home in poetry. The second part, chapters four to seven, engages in the close reading of poetry mentioned above in conjunction with the socio-cultural contexts of the poets and their time of writing.

The chapter "Home at the Intersection of Gender and Culture" will introduce the discussion of the concept of home as it is conducted by various disciplines from the beginning of the 20th century to the present day. The discussion reveals the static understanding of home as a nostalgic and increasingly ideological construct that sharply contrasts social reality. I argue that the construction of home as the place of women has generated a way of looking at the world in which "the identities of 'woman' and of the 'home-place' are intimately tied up with each other."[16] In discussing the stereotypical gender role expectations that have been attached to the home for centuries – seen for example in the image of the 'Angel in the House' of the 19th century or the happy housewife in the 1950s – it will become clear that the strong alignment of the female gender role with the home environment is not coincidental but a construct that was, and often still is, predominantly shaped by patriarchal ideology.

Literary criticism that follows aesthetic guidelines fails to make these socio-cultural constructs visible in poetic writing, and it does not provide convincing strategies with which to detect deviations from the paradigm – not to speak of subvert or deconstruct. It is the underlying stereotype of women's social roles which ties them to domestic space that inhibited the consideration of women's poetic statements in wider critical contexts. With *Spaces of*

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[16] Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (1994): 180.

Overlap and *Spaces of Mediation* I am going to present two critical models which will help to break the tight critical frames when assessing the concept of home in poetry. Both notions are based on a contextualised approach to the poetic imagination in relation to social reality and help to carve out the concept of home in its interconnected patterns.

1.3 Major Objectives

The close reading of selected New Zealand women's poetry in this thesis will reveal the ways in which women poets subvert, transcend and deconstruct conservative concepts of home through their poetic imagination and make space for a more dynamic concept of home in relation to the social reality.

In my view, women's personal negotiations of home translate into moments of cultural insight that transcend the boundaries of the individual poets' concerns. My focus on women's poetry aims at counteracting a traditionally male perspective on New Zealand poetry and providing a more comprehensive picture of New Zealand's literary tradition. It needs to be stressed that I do not intend to provide an alternative women's history of New Zealand poetry, but this thesis does highlight certain women poets who have made a particularly strong contribution to the negotiation of the concept of home through their poetry and widened the all-too tight frame in which New Zealand women's poetry and the question of home have usually been considered.

With the help of my critical notions of *Spaces of Overlap* and *Spaces of Mediation*, I seek to substantiate the concept of home as a carrier of socio-cultural issues. I argue that a contextualised analysis will provide crucial insight into the transition of New Zealand's socio-political and cultural debates. In addition, I hope that my approach will provide a helpful tool for revealing that women's poetic imagination transcends not only the physical boundaries of established notions of home, but also the territorial affiliation of New Zealand's national cultural identity. Eventually, this study might encourage an estimation of New Zealand women's poetic statements beyond the borders of their national literature.

2 HOME AT THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER AND CULTURE

Investigations into the concept of home quickly reveal that home is highly individualized. Yet, it cannot be divorced from the socio-political and cultural context it evolves from. It is the place of privacy but at the same time a prominent issue in public debates, particularly when discussing a newly emerging sense of national identity. Over time, the notion of home in New Zealand has acquired many different connotations that reflect its colonial past as much as its future as a Western nation. Historically speaking, World War II and its aftermath was one of the crucial times in the re-conception and re-evaluation of home in the Western world. In the 1950s, the domestic home environment with the mother and housewife as its centre was in the limelight of public attention, which reveals not only a strong nostalgic backlash to older concepts but also shows how ardently home was (re) designed to reflect a certain social propriety and moral coding.

The nostalgia that generally comes with the yearning for emotional stability after a time of major trauma led to the refreshed separation of public and private spaces, which signals more than just the return to old values. As I will set out in the ensuing discussion of home, the emotional currency of home can be seen as a powerful tool of patriarchy to prioritise men's rule as the normative referent.[17] Home was not only a socio-cultural concept that lay the basis for a new society; more than anything else, it was a construct charged with gender role stereotyping. In this chapter, I will first clarify the notion of home as a construct in cultural and gender terms before I engage in sketching the discourse of home in domestic, national and global contexts.

2.1 Conceptualising Home

By considering home as a construct, I rely on basic principles of constructivism, which describes knowledge as "temporary, developmental, non-objective, internally constructed, and socially as well as culturally mediated."[18] My understanding of the concept of home is subject to these

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17 For a more detailed terminological examination of sets of norms and their indication of patriarchy see Luise F. Pusch, *Feminismus. Inspektion der Herrenkultur* (1983).

18 Ernst von Glaserfeld, "Introduction: Aspects of Constructivism." (1996): 3.

principles. Home is temporary and developmental, which means that it is constantly in flux and thus never fixed. It is non-objective and internally constructed and is thus always reliant on individual conceptions. Because such individual conceptions cannot be divorced from the social reality, it follows that home emerges from social and cultural mediation.

This contextual approach will be the focus of this study and aims at revealing the socio-cultural dynamics of New Zealand by means of analysing the interplay between social reality and its poetic mediation. The variety of subjective responses to the socio-cultural situation generated a new sense of home that holds the potential of changing the allegedly fixed concepts that are propagated and upheld by male-dominated discourse. This study considers New Zealand women's expression of home in their poetry as an appropriation of cultural space as well as a challenge to home as a gendered space, notions that will be discussed in further detail below.

2.1.1 … as a cultural space

By viewing the home as a dynamic concept that is part of people's daily lives, I relate to it in the same way as I relate to the cultural process. In my analyses, culture remains an open concept that does not necessarily separate one ethnic group from the other. On many occasions in history, the notion of one culture as allegedly superior to another, has been misused as an instrument for staking political territory.[19] One example applicable to New Zealand might be the Treaty of Waitangi/ Te Tiriti o Waitangi (1840),[20] which was meant to regulate the question of landownership between the British monarch and the various Maori tribes. Due to differences in its translation, landownership has become a legal and cultural battleground and

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19 Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson and Edward Said. *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*. (1990); Neil Lazarus, "National consciousness and the specificity of (post) colonial intellectualism." (1994): 197-220; Rob Steven, "Land and White Settler Colonialism: The Case of Aotearoa." (1989): 27-34.

20 When the treaty was signed by the Maori chiefs and the representative of the Queen of England, both sides saw it as reinstating their authority over the land. The debate evolves around large cultural misunderstandings of Maori concepts, such as kawanatanga, meaning governorship, and the resulting question of the ownership of the land. For more details about the Treaty of Waitangi, see: Archives New Zealand/ Te Whare Tohu Tuhituhinga o Aotearoa. "The Treaty of Waitangi". URL: http://www.archives.govt.nz/holdings/treaty_frame.html (Mar 19 2004); Ministry for Culture and Heritage/ Te Manatu Taonga. Ed. "Treaty of Waitangi Links." URL: http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/Links/treaty.htm (Mar 19 2004).

the Treaty came to be seen as a colonial tool for securing British power rather than a founding document written on an even cultural footing.[21]

Contrary to such an essentialist understanding, I consider culture a mosaic of different influences that are derived from social, political, and historical processes which are constantly interacting with each other. As a collective noun, culture embraces a variety of phenomena and actions and is thus a concept that is in constant flux rather than being a distinct entity.[22] In its cultural mediation, the concept of home follows such dynamics and must be seen in consequence as a subject of constant (re)negotiation, which is easily traceable in the literary production.

Yet, there was no diversified debate about different cultural references that connect to home, which is particularly apparent when trying to compare Maori and Pakeha notions of home. Much has been written about the new nation and the Home/ home complex of white New Zealanders. However, in the estimation of its literature, Maori were not considered seriously and thus became invisible as a factor in New Zealand's cultural fabric. This ties in with the way New Zealand portrayed itself as a bicultural nation, which was after all a notion that was mainly defined mono-culturally by Pakeha academics.

The disparity in scale and scope of Maori and Pakeha home concepts will be the subject of the ensuing units. Mostly it seems as if Maori marginalization bears a strong resemblance to the marginalization of women. However, for reasons that will be discussed in units 2.2. and 2.3., a direct comparison should be avoided. The discussion of domesticity reveals how deeply the comfortable image of house and home is anchored in Western thought and how little investigation, hence insight, it provided into a Maori sense of personal home space. On the national scale, there are, however, many striking parallels in terms of symbolism and imagery when it comes to defining a national sense of belonging. Both, Maori and Pakeha concepts refer to the female body and nurturing abilities of women and in both cultures, it seems that these images were largely generated by men. In these similarities, gender is a prominent dividing line that carries the potential of

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21 Rob Steven, "Land and White Settler Colonialism: The Case of Aotearoa." (1989): 27-34.

22 David Novitz, "On Culture and Cultural Identity" (1989): 280-91.

revealing hitherto neglected insights into New Zealand's cultural development and diversity.

2.1.2 … as a gendered space

Many of the notions New Zealand referred back to in securing a reliable basis of home, have their origin in the ruling perceptions of 19th century Britain. The angel in the house, for instance, though already contested at its time of emergence, remained a powerful image throughout the centuries. With the progress of industrialisation during the 19th and 20th centuries in Britain, the private sphere came to be treasured as the place and symbol of individuality and privacy, as a kind of bulwark against the public world.[23] The home was the space of the nuclear family, and the often quoted association of the womb/ nest image[24] reveals this concept to be strongly feminised. The public/ private dichotomy dominated the perception of social space. In this frame of thinking, women belonged to the subordinate, powerless, emotional private realm whereas men were associated with the superior, powerful, rational public realm. When applying such a gender critical frame of mind, it will be clear that a patriarchal agenda pervades seemingly neutral and commonplace notions. Home was politicised and can thus almost be regarded as a tool with which to maintain a system of norms tailored toward maintaining male supremacy.

Over time, the domestic space in which the woman was the caring housewife and mother has become the reference point for socio-cultural propriety. In effect, private and public space have increasingly become identified not as public and private but as male and female domains. Space thus determined the social roles of men and women, to the effect that they can be called *gendered*. I employ the term *gender* in reference to the socially constructed sexual role as defined by current gender studies.[25] In consequence, the verb *to gender*, which increasingly appears in recent critical

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23 Douglas Porteous, "Home: The Territorial Core" (1979): 386.

24 This perception has largely been determined by Gaston Bachelard in *Poetik des Raumes* (1960).

25 I lean on Judith Butler's study *Gender Trouble* (1990) as one of the initiators of current gender studies.
In a lesbian context, critics speak of the heterosexing of space. Gil Valentine, "(Hetero)sexing space: lesbian perceptions and experiences of everyday spaces" (1993): 397.

writing,[26] depicts the way in which stereotypical gender role perceptions are applied to concepts that are seemingly unrelated to issues of gender. In their study *Gender, Culture, and Power. Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture,* James and Saville-Smith use the verb *to gender* as a self-explanatory term that presupposes the establishment of New Zealand's social structure on the basis of male and female gender role constructs. Talking about *gendered* space thus points at the application of stereotypical gender role constructions to space on the basis of binary schemes, such as public/ private or powerful/ powerless.

Feminist as well as post-colonial critics argue that such binary frames help the ruling (patriarchal hegemonic) power push the subordinate subject into a confined and therefore controllable space.[27] Moreover, the gendering of space has had further effects on the assessment of its value, since it refers to the immediate association of private space with femininity and public space with masculinity. In consequence, it establishes a hierarchy that complies with the patriarchal power structure of Western societies, in which public space is highly valued whereas private space tends to remain insignificant to the public eye.

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In my ensuing discussion of the concept of home in New Zealand, I will draw from various disciplines that help to illuminate the debate of home as a debate that is deeply rooted in the stereotypical understanding of social roles. In the following unit "The Domestic Home Environment", I present the major arguments that have contributed to the discursive construction of the concept of the family home in which the woman is the main carer. This unit will also critically reflect on the question of the applicability of such arguments to the situation of women, both Pakeha and Maori, in New Zealand.

Similar to the family home, the home of the nation is conceived on the basis of its emotional and gender-related coinage in which women are the carers of the nation and thus responsible for upholding the moral codes of society. In my analysis, I will disclose this as yet another intentional patriarchal construct that not only represents a huge impediment to women

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[26] Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces* (1991); Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith. *Gender, Culture, and Power. Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture.* (1989).

[27] Carole Pateman, "Feminist Critiques of the Public/ Private Dichotomy" (1983): 287.

who want to participate in public discourse but also disregards cultural dynamics. The unit "The National Home Ideal/ Ideology" traces indicators of feminising the national concept of home, in particular after World War II when New Zealand was on its way to becoming an independent country and engaged in securing a national cultural identity of its own. Women, like Maori, were prevented from actively shaping the new nation since they had no public platform on which to make themselves heard. It was men who led the debates. They assessed the advancement of the cultural process and determined who was involved in it. Thus, one might say that the cultural process had for a long time been mono-cultural as much as mono-gendered.

More recently, the debate about the progressing globalisation challenges local and national concepts of home and breaks up established frames of thought. Cultural theories start talking about migrants' multiple home affiliations,[28] which implies that a part of the 'old home' stays with them and will be tested against the new environment. This is an aspect which, in my view, can account for any persons' experience – be they Pakeha or Maori, male or female –in New Zealand past and present. The concluding unit of this chapter, "Conceptualising Home in a Globalising World", therefore, offers a new way of looking at the concept of home as being situated at the centre of social and cultural processes rather than as representing an institutionalised construct.

2.2 The Domestic Home Environment

2.2.1 The European Cult of Domesticity

"men are merriest when they are away from home."
(W. Shakespeare)

"home is the girl's prison and the woman's workhouse."
(G. B. Shaw)

These quotes from two of the most famous literati show that the connection between woman and house has a long-standing tradition in British and European thought. The discursive roots of such a gender construction of home space lie in the archetypal opposition of public and private, a dualism that can be traced back to classical Greek philosophy. In Aristotle's *Politeia* the domestic sphere (*oikos*) was considered a realm that was subordinate to

[28] Judith Schlehe, *Interkulturelle Geschlechterforschung* (2001).

the public because it was run by women and slaves.[29] The freedom of the *polis,* the city, the space of speech and politics, was guaranteed by the home which was meant to support (one might be inclined to say nurture) the male in this public burden and priviledge. Thus, Aristotle's philosophy can be seen as laying the foundation for the division of public and private along the lines of gender.[30]

In England, during the reign of Queen Victoria, domestic space received much critical attention not least due to the radically changing social situation. Industrialisation and the dawn of modern capitalism reinforced the dichotomy between public and private spaces.[31] Victorian society pronounced the home as having a supportive and nurturing function with the woman at its centre, a notion that was rather dogmatically emphasised by John Ruskin's influential lecture *Sesame and Lilies* (1864).[32] In depicting the home as the proper domain for the true woman, Ruskin goes beyond the socio-cultural framework of the discussion and refers to home as an almost essential feature of womanhood:

> Wherever a true wife comes, home is always around her. The stars only may be over her head; the glowworm in the night-cold grass may be the only fire at her foot, but home is yet wherever she is.[33]

By current critical standards, Ruskin's rhetoric discloses a pervasive male anxiety of losing masculinity in face of the arising suffragette movement. The issue of agency and patriarchal power that shines through in these words had not been contested at the time of Ruskin's lecture but only moved into the

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29 Arlene Saxonhouse, "Classical Greek Conceptions of Public and Private" (1983).

30 See also Carole Pateman who follows the division set out by European liberalism in her argument. One of the essential arguments she uses in her article "Feminist Critiques of the Public/ Private Dichotomy" (1983) is "that the doctrine of 'separate but equal', and the ostensible individualism and egalitarianism of liberal theory, obscure the patriarchal reality of a social structure of inequality and the domination of women by men": 283.

31 Liberal philosophy of the 18th century has provided the theoretical basis for such an intensified separation. See Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1990). In "Feminist Critiques of the Public/ Private Dichotomy" (1983), Carole Pateman points out that "feminist critique of the public-private dichotomy is based on the … Lockean view of the two categories; domestic life is paradigmatically private for feminists as it is in (this interpretation of) Locke's theory": 284. See also Anne McClintock who similarly argues on the basis of liberal philosophy in *Imperial Leather Race, Sex and Gender in the Colonial Contest* (1995).

32 See the section "Of Queen's Gardens" in John Ruskin's lecture *Sesame and Lilies* [1864]: http://www.underthesun.cc/Classics/Ruskin/SesameAndLilies/SesameAndLilies4.html (Mar 9 2004).

33 Ibid: 33.

limelight of critical attention when women's and gender studies emerged during the late 20th century.[34]

This paradigmatic notion of home with the woman at its centre returned with a vengeance after World War II in most Western societies and New Zealand was no exception. At the end of the war, during which women had been fully employed in the workforce, the majority of women lost their jobs in order to vacate the placements for men returning home. Domesticity became part of a political culture in which stereotypical gender roles were re-awakened to fit a national ideology where the male was the breadwinner and the female was the 'happy housewife'. Through this 'Cult of Domesticity', women in Western societies were 'complimented' back into the homes on the grounds of needing to contribute their share to rebuilding the nation.

Economically speaking, the ethos of affluence ruled the public discussion of Western post-war societies. Slogans such as "Prosperity Frees People"[35] were embraced in different ways by various democratic states. Vacuum cleaners and washing machines were items that indicated the functionality and the cleanliness of the successful domestic household – and therefore of the woman in it.[36] Thus, the figure of the woman was central to the home in various senses: she was not only the main consumer factor, she was the caring housewife, the mother and the guardian of a nurturing morale. Through the assignation of this role, the woman became a national icon and the ultimate reason and justification to guard and watch the territory of home, an aspect that will be dealt with in depth in the unit "The National Home Ideal/ Ideology".

During the second half of the 20th century, the legal situation watered down the severe gender segregation in society with regard to equal opportunity on the labour market.[37] However, the implied notion of the proper

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34 R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power* (1987), and *Masculinities* (1996); Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (1988).

35 This slogan was induced by the U.S. American Marshall plan to rebuild Germany.

36 This point was taken up by Sara Lennox in a recent lecture at Freiburg University. She argues that the model of the consumer society was responsible for the feminine gender model of the 1950s in America and most of Europe, particularly Germany after World War II. This refers to Sara Lennox' lecture "Warum kehrten die Trümmerfrauen zum Herd zurück?" given on March 19, 2003 at Albert-Ludwigs University Freiburg in a lecture series organised by Carl Schurz Haus e.V., Freiburg.

37 Prue Hyman, *Women and Economics: A New Zealand Feminist Perspective* (1994); Margaret Wilson, "Paid Work, Policy, and the Concept of Equality" (1998).

woman as a housewife and mother was not as easily dismantled. Up until the present day, women must cope with the double burden of being the main managers of households even if their paid work loads are the same as their partners'. The female imagery spun around the domestic environment is so deeply anchored in people's subconscious that a discussion of home frequently reverts to emotional rather than rational arguments.

This is most clearly illustrated by Gaston Bachelard's *Poetik des Raumes* (1960),[38] which falls back on a phenomenological dimension of the home. In fact, his phenomenology links domestic space with the body of women through the 'nest' or womb image. Bachelard claims that whenever we look at a nest, we immediately connote the caring and comforting entry into life.[39] And yet, Bachelard never outspokenly states that the house is a woman's sphere. He only subtly alludes to the womb-like character of the house/home in idiomatic expressions and numerous associative references. For instance, the notion of childhood memories that are manifest in the domestic home environment is strongly aligned with the image of motherly comfort and care, identifying the home as the haven of security in common perception.

> [D]as Haus ist unser Winkel der Welt. Es ist […] unser erstes All. […] Im Leben des Menschen schließt das Haus Zufälligkeiten aus, es vermehrt seine Bedachtheit auf Kontinuität. […] Es hält den Menschen aufrecht, durch alle Gewitter des Himmels und des Lebens hindurch. […] Es ist die erste Welt des menschlichen Seins. Bevor er 'in die Welt geworfen wird',[…], wird der Mensch in die Wiege des Hauses gelegt. Und immer ist das Haus in unseren Träumen eine große Wiege. […] Das Leben beginnt gut, es beginnt umschlossen, umhegt, ganz warm im Schoße des Hauses.[40]

See also Patricia Grinshaw, *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand* (1972) as quoted in Rosemary Novitz's article "Women: Weaving an Identity" (1989): 59.

38 Original title: *La poétique de l'èspace*.

39 Gaston Bachelard, *Poetik des Raumes* (1960): "Wenn wir ein Nest betrachten, befinden wir uns am Ursprung eines Vertrauens zur Welt, treffen wir auf einen Ansatzpunkt von Vertrauen, fühlen wir uns getroffen von einem Ausruf zum kosmischen Vertrauen. […]. Unser Haus, ..., ist ein Nest in der Welt." ("when we look at a nest, we encounter the origin of a trust into the world, we meet the starting point of trust, we feel touched by an exclamation of cosmic trust. [...] Our house ,... , is a nest in the world.) 131-2. Translation: C. Duppé.

40 The house is our corner of the world. It is […] our first universe. […] In the life of a human being the house keeps out any arbitrariness and increases his focus on continuity. […] It guides him through all thunderstorms he encounters in nature and in life. […] It is the first world of human existence. Before he is 'thrown into the world', […], a human being is cradled in the house. And the house always appears as a big cradle in our dreams. […] Life begins positively, it begins enclosed, cared for, warm in the bosom of the house. (the word by word translation of the German word 'Schoß' is 'womb'). Translation: C. Duppé. Gaston Bachelard, *Poetik des Raumes* (1960): 36-9.

Bachelard establishes a firm barrier between an inner (familial) world and an outer (cultural) world, which echoes Aristotle's philosophy on public and private spaces as well as John Ruskin's thesis of the woman as the embodiment of home. Bachelard's theses are prominent in many a study on space.[41] His text has become a standard work that is still immensely powerful with regard to the discursive construction of the domestic environment as a 'sacred' female ground.

During the Women's Movement after World War II,[42] the view of the domestic sphere as the 'natural' female domain and the ensuing marginalisation of women in the public sphere was under permanent attack. It was notably Betty Friedan who was amongst the first critics to identify the domestic sphere as an artificial gender construct in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Friedan argues that women suffered from domestic confinement and that they were shielded from participation in public discourse despite their education. In contrast to Bachelard, Friedan dismantles the image of the caring, nurturing and ever-positive mother in the house and divorces it from a comforting connotation.

Friedan's concern, however, was with educated, white, middle class women in the U.S., and the Women's Movement, following her arguments was also predominantly concerned with the situation of white, middle class women. Friedan's arguments, ground-breaking though they undoubtedly were, were limited to a certain social profile of women. Above all a critical revision of the applicability of these white Western discourses to the situation of Maori women in New Zealand inevitably leads to the conclusion that viewing Maori women's situation in such a critical frame is in itself a colonial act.[43]

The arguments formulated by feminists in the 1970s are more generally applicable to women from various social backgrounds. Adrienne Rich was

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41 Elmar Schenkel, *Sense of Place* (1993), and Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" (1986): 22-27; Henri Lefèbvre, *The Production of Space* (1991).

42 In actual fact, this time depicts the second phase of the Women's Movement. The first phase already took place towards the end of the 19th century. In order to prevent too much confusion I will stick to the term Women's Movement in the ensuing discussion.

43 Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography. The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (1993); Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1988): 61-88; and Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995): Chapter 10: "No Longer in Future Heaven": 352-89.

one of its most prominent voices; with her critical writing she attacks the construction of the home as women's sphere arguing that it delimited women's actions spaces and curbed their creativity. In *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976), Rich engages in a thorough analysis of the misconception that the domestic sphere is women's sphere due to their sex.[44] Like Friedan, Rich questions the concept of home as the safe haven of comfort and care and states that the domestic home not only encompasses warmth and security, but often proves to be a prison, a cage or an institution for the woman in it. With such a conviction, she follows the footpaths of early feminists such as Perkins Gilman whose short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) stands as a signpost for modern feminist criticism of enforced domesticity and the resulting constrictions for women.[45]

Rich furthermore identifies the notion of the heterosexual, married couple as a social norm of society upon which patriarchal power is established.[46] This socio-cultural orientation in modern feminism makes clear that the construction of the domestic environment is embedded in a larger discourse on power relationships in which the home is subordinated to the public space of politics.[47] Women are confined in a patriarchal power scheme in which the home

> contains the least amount of socially valued knowledge. […] Domestic information conveyed within the home is devalued, at least partially because it is possessed by women.[48]

Thus, female authority, as a domestic authority, is subordinate to male authority, which is coeval with public power.[49] In the firm belief that such power schemes are at work within and without the house, Rich follows the

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44 Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976): Chapter V: 110-27.

45 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, " The Yellow Wallpaper" [1892] and "Why I wrote The Yellow Wallpaper" [1913] *Norton Anthology of American Literature Vol. 2*: 645-58.

46 Some of the forms by which male power manifests itself are more easily recognizable as enforcing heterosexuality on women than are others. Yet each one […] adds to the cluster of forces within which women have been convinced that marriage and sexual orientation toward men are inevitable […] components of their lives. Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence [1980]" in *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985* (1986): 39.

47 Carole Pateman, "Feminist Critiques of the Public/ Private Dichotomy" (1983): 284-7; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995): 34.

48 Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces* (1992): 293.

49 See also the complex problem of social subordination laid out by Robert Connell in *Gender and Power* (1987): 91-166.

conviction that the personal is political,[50] and aims at making the public/ private boundary more permeable and empowering women.[51] Home can thus be seen as an ideological battleground of the sexes; its contestation reaches into "economic, political and cultural relations each full of power and with internal structures of domination and subordination."[52]

2.2.2 CULTivating New Zealand

In the beginning of New Zealand's phase as a settler colony, the emerging society amongst the newly migrated Europeans did not have the same class structure as England. Most importantly, the 'colonial household'[53] bore hardly any similarity to a standard household in Britain at the time. On the contrary , it was a space in which women exercised authority and power and which put them equal to men, as Bev James and Kai Saville-Smith convincingly argue in their study *Gender, Culture, and Power: Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture* (1989). The two sociologists' profound argument on gender as a basic determinant of New Zealand's social structure identifies some crucial concepts with regard to the significance of the domestic household in New Zealand and its political and economic resonance. In particular their exploration of the Cult of Domesticity proves very fruitful in the discussion of the applicability of Anglo-American discourse to the socio-cultural situation in New Zealand. They state that

> [w]omen's work and familial roles [in the mid 19th century] were oriented towards the maintenance of the household as a whole. The household was not at this time […] the emotional refuge from the world of competitive production. It was, instead, the site of production. Thus, women were not so much providers of psychological and material support for men, but, rather, participants in the household's overall productive capacity. Men were dependent on women's and children's labour.[54]

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50 "The personal is political" was the slogan of an autonomous movement of women in the 1960s. See Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread and Poetry (1985*), 181.

51 In fact, Rich's repeated use of "the personal is political" triggered some negative reactions amongst feminist scholars some of whom considered the abolishment of the public/ private boundary a threat to femininity per se. See Shelagh Cox, *Public & Private Worlds. Women in Contemporary New Zealand* (1987).

52 Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (1994): 154.

53 Bev James and Kai Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture, and Power: Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture* (1989): 23-30.

54 Bev James and Kai Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture, and Power: Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture* (1989): 24.

James and Saville-Smith argue that the image of white European women in New Zealand is not founded on the notion of victimisation, a position that is also assumed by post-colonial critics.[55] As, for instance, Anne McClintock points out, colonial women settlers were not "the hapless onlookers of empire but were ambiguously complicit both as colonizers and colonized, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting."[56] This is most apparent in the various women's organisations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union,[57] which focused on the national improvement of health and hygiene issues, in particular in the education of their Maori sisters on the benefits of household management, as discussed further below.

Because of New Zealand's early activist suffragette movement, it is generally assumed that European women in New Zealand were more independent than women of other Western societies not least due to their ground-breaking success of gaining the right to vote as early as 1893, twenty years prior to their British counterparts. Nevertheless, the suffragettes' arguments at the turn of the 19th/ 20th centuries clung tight to a Victorian view of life. Being of British descent, the women did not challenge their roles as such but stressed women's authority in the homes and used it to argue against the moral and social decay of society at a time when the introduction of wage labour[58] and the increasing urbanisation changed the structure of New Zealand society. James and Saville-Smith argue that "[t]he fragmentation of the colonial household had been accompanied by the disintegration of networks of social control."[59] Furthermore it is in particular this social control that the women saw as their duty to maintain, which ironically led to a more profound establishment of their stereotypical gender role.

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55 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995), 1-18; 258-95.

56 Ibid: 6; Sara Mills, "Colonial Domestic Space." (1996): 48.

57 The Women's Christian Temperance Union fiercely fought against the spread of veneral disease to keep their families pure and clean. See Margaret Tennant, "Natural Directions. The New Zealand Movement for Sexual Differentiation in Education during the Early Twentieth Century," (1986) and "The Decay of Home Life? The Home in Welfare Discourses" (2003); Bev James and Kai Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture, and Power. Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture* (1989); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995): 168.

58 Prue Hyman, *Women and Economics: A New Zealand Feminist Perspective* (1994).

59 Bev James and Kai Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture, and Power. Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture* (1989): 28.

At the beginning of the 20th century, it was in particular middle class European women who worked for social improvement in New Zealand. Having embraced the role of household manager and guardian of the nation's good health, women held up chastity against male prowess, so that they eventually placed the picture of a clean and happy home at the forefront of personal, communal and eventually national concern. The family was a crucial concept in this ideal.

> Parenthood was increasingly promoted as a vocation of national import, and women viewed as 'race producer and race-developers' not only by members of the medical profession but by […] members of their own sex. […] The emphasis placed by such organisations as the National Council of Women and the Women's Christian Temperance Union on women's unique qualities – initially used by these groups as an argument for women's equal participation in public affairs to counterbalance the male perspective – was just as easily used to justify their […] continued relegation to the home.[60]

As a result, politicians were given the 'proper' tools to satisfy women in their claim on authority while at the same time keeping women's authority firmly tied to domestic areas.

A telling example of propagating such propriety is Thomas Bracken's (1843-98) poem "Woman's Rights" (around 1895). Bracken's influence on public opinion is not to be underestimated since he is considered "the most popular poet of the late 19th century."[61] "Woman's Rights" reads like a reaction to women's claim for equal rights and status while providing the gender mould for the image of New Zealand women for almost a century to come.

> Some people think that women should
> Compete in life's swift race
> With man, and gain each privilege,
> Position, power, and place
> Which he enjoys. I can't agree
> With those progressive lights,
> I'll tell you what appear to me
> To be fair Woman's rights.
>
> […]
>
> 'Tis woman's right to be caressed

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60 Margaret Tennant, "Natural Directions. The New Zealand Movement for Sexual Differentiation in Education during the Early Twentieth Century" (1986): 89-90.

61 Jenny Bornholdt et al., *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English*. (1997): 500. With "The New Zealand Hymn" (1890), the New Zealand national anthem, Bracken has made a lasting contribution to New Zealand identity.

> When love is in the spring,
> And when affection's harvest comes,
> Her right it is to bring
> The garnered fruits of happiness
> To cheer man's dreary way,
> To smooth his rougher nature,
> And refine his coarser clay.
>
> (Woman's Rights, 1-24)

Bracken's persuasive dogmatic arguments are disguised as compliments, which are strongly reminiscent of Ruskin's vocabulary in *Of Sesame and Lilies*.[62] He praises women as the social glue of New Zealand society. In true patriarchal fashion, women are depicted as the guardians of the home-nest, which, in my view, echoes the state's propagation of the Cult of Domesticity in the second half of the 19th century when the colonial household fell apart due to an increasing urbanisation and the lack of women in the homes, which was caused by a changing legal system and new wage-earning options, allegedly put the country in disarray.[63]

Ironically, it was men and women who propagated women's social duty to be in the homes. From there, it was an easy step toward depicting women as individuals who carried the potential as carers, housewives and mothers in their genes[64] so that 50 years after his famous lecture and half the world away, John Ruskin's arguments were promoted once again in delineating the home as "the place of peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division."[65] The gender roles were marked clearly by Bracken in stating

> […] he was made to comfort her,
> And she was made to bless;
> Her bulwark against danger, be
> She daughter, sister, wife
> Or mother, he should guard her well –
> Aye, even with his life.
>
> (Woman's Rights, 43-8)

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62 John Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens." URL: http://www.underthesun.cc/Classics/Ruskin/SesameAndLilies/SesameAndLilies4.html (Mar 9 2004).

63 Bev James and Kai Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture, and Power. Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture* (1989): 23-30; 31-5.

64 Any public reason to prevent women from working was based on the argument of maintaining women's nurturing qualities. The repeated stress on this biological fact strongly indicates the goal of preserving the future existence and reproduction of the nation. (James and Saville-Smith 1989: 34).

65 John Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens." [1864] http://www.underthesun.cc/Classics/Ruskin/SesameAndLilies/SesameAndLilies4.html (Mar 9 2004), sequence 32.

Bracken pronounces the stereotypical feminine side of women's nature, that is caring caressing and nurturing, as the only true one, which rather openly unmasks the political intentions to keep women in their gender role as housewives and mothers whereas men engage in public affairs and function as women's guardians. The poem comes to the conclusion:

> And here, where we're erecting on
> Pacific's breast, a State.
> The mothers of our rising grace
> Can make it poor or great.
>
> (Woman's Rights, l. 53-6)

The depiction of New Zealand as a 'rising grace' that is nurtured by its females conveys their caring function as a primarily national concern. Hence it can be argued that the gendering of New Zealand society has taken place not only in the few regular newspapers but also in the country's emerging literature.

As Bracken's poem prefigures, the conservative focus on women's propriety was further focused on the wife.[66] Conforming to the Victorian British ideal, a woman was only properly respected when she was married and fulfilled the role of mother and housewife. Any improper deviation from the norm was looked down upon without even considering any economic or social pressure the women in question were exposed to. Thus, the verdict of impropriety not only hit prostitutes as the 'obvious' deviants of the norm, but also unmarried working women with children. The conservative understanding of a woman's roles went as far as to prohibit women teachers or nurses from working once they were married, which is yet another reflection of the socio-cultural discourse that prevailed in Britain at the time.[67]

During the Women's Movement in the 1960s and 70s, many feminists' often-repeated claim on the home-place as the last resort of female authority and power intensified its paradigmatic patriarchal construction and paved the way for further argumentation on the basis of gender difference. In the course of the 'back to the home' governmental campaign of 1977/ 78, financial benefits were granted to *families* on the basis that the *wife* had been

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66 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995): 168.

67 Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (1985).

unemployed for more than six months.[68] This exemplifies the current public opinion at the time when

> [a] woman's place is in the home, and many women who always worked through necessity regret that they were not able to stay home. This view of a limited orbit for women is entrenched, and no real recognition is given by the bourgeoisie, either in law or in practice, to the rights of women to work.[69]

The discourse as sketched so far has made clear that investigations into the concept of home revert to emotional rather than rational argumentation and rely on pictures of 'proper' femininity that are generally constructed by men.

At the same time as the second wave of the Women's Movement swept across the ocean, the Maori Renaissance started to gain pace and to voice the concerns of Maori people in public. Coincidence had it that the famous Maori Landmarch in which Maori claimed the authority over their land with the slogan "Not one acre more!"[70] took place during the International Women's Year in 1975. It is often because of this chronological coincidence that the Women's Movement and the Maori Renaissance are often seen as having similar roots.[71] However, what is now called Maori feminism is not derived from an Anglo-American feminism but is part of a Maori nationalism that sought independence from Pakeha-dominated institutions.[72]

Maori women played a significant role during Maori Renaissance but their goal was not to speak out for Maori women in particular but for Maori in general. The domestic confinement, so prominent in Pakeha women's eyes, was thus not an issue of Maori women's emancipation but was turned into an issue of ethnic concern. Since the concept of home was employed as a means to integrate/ assimilate Maori into Pakeha society,[73] the domestic household can be regarded as yet another site on which this debate took place. The endeavour to teach 'the underprivileged native sister' also reveals the complicity of white women in the colonising process. When looking at the domestic environment in Maori communities from a sociological point of

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68 Christine Gillespie, "The Road Ahead for the Women's Movement – Out of the Womb and into the World." (1980): 108-9. Emphasis mine.

69 Ibid: 106.

70 Peter Beatson, *The Healing Tongue*. (1989): 25.

71 Graeme Dunstall, "The Social Pattern" (1981): 429.

72 Radhika Mohanram, *Black Body: Women Colonialism and Space* (1999): 109-21.

73 Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture, and Power. Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture* (1989): 42.

view, it is evident that the structural pressure of a Western society has left its traces.

> After the Second World War, the imposition of [the European] gendered culture on the Maori was associated with the Maori Women's Welfare League. The League explicitly advocated the preservation and promotion of Maori culture, but it was also involved in disseminating Pakeha skills in homecraft and mothercraft among Maori women. In particular, it focused on equipping Maori mothers with the skills to cope and be accepted by Pakeha as competent members of an advanced industrial society. For the League, the adoption of Pakeha techniques of domestic labour was symbolic of Maori equality with Pakeha. Domesticity was more than an occupation, it reflected a moral status.[74]

The Maori traditions and recent criticism in Maori studies reveal that the home as the domestic sphere, something so heavily pronounced as an icon of cultural and social value and morale in European Western perception, hardly features as valuable space in Maori discussion. The emotional agenda that is so intricately intertwined with the domestic home environment amongst Pakeha is unfitting to Maori. Similar emotional and cultural bonds are however pronounced and celebrated with regard to the *marae* (the meeting house),[75] the *whanau*[76] (the extended family) and the concept of *turangawaewae* (the place to put one's feet), which can all be seen to constitute the Maori equivalent to the Pakeha emotional home.

Today, it is still the case that the knowledge of Maori women's concept of home in an individual sense is scarce. This might be due to the careful preservation of cultural values and rituals in the attempt to maintain a cultural continuity.[77] The reference to home is not tied to a domestic and private terrain but manifests itself in the land of the community, the land on which the tribal *marae* is built. One might assume that the emotional value Maori ascribe to their communal identity converges with the individual home ideal of Western discourse. At the same time, the boundaries between domestic and national issues are not as easily distinguished as in a Western culture but

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74 Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture, and Power. Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture* (1989): 44.

75 James and Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture, and Power. Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture* (1989), 26ff, and Radhika Mohanram *Black Body: Women, Colonialism and Space* (1999), 108f. For a brief synopsis of the significance of the marae in Maori culture see Robbie Whitmore, "The Māori: The Marae - meeting place." URL: http://history-nz.org/maori5.html (17 Mar 2004).

76 *Whanau* encompasses much female imagery from placenta to womb to the ancient connection to *Papatuanuku*, the earth mother in Maori mythology.

77 R.J. Walker, "Maori Identity." (1989): 35-52.

merge in a communal concept of the territory of home, the *turangawaewae*, the place to put one's feet.

In today's New Zealand, the paradigm of the domestic sphere as woman's sphere seems to have disappeared. The acceptance of women in high profile public jobs is far advanced, which is most obvious in the political public. New Zealand is one of few countries in the Western world to have a government in which major positions such as the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice, the Attorney General and the Governor General are occupied by women.[78] However, the public/ private dichotomy has not become more permeable and often women are still expected to be both professional women in public as well as the main organisers at home. The domestic arena is still perceived as containing the secluded private life of its inhabitants.[79] This demonstrates that the stereotypical notion of the home-sweet-home people revert to is still prevalent in common perception.

In my eyes, the gendered notion of home has moved onto a different platform. It is no longer in the limelight of middle class feminist interest and has not yet captured enough attention of recent socio-cultural criticism to take up the threads of feminist discourse in a more complex cultural framework. I consider the home-sweet-home concept a relic that is still one of the foundations of current New Zealand society's understanding of moral propriety. The discourse around and the construction of this concept tell of a legacy that grew on the soil of Western gender stereotypes.

2.3 The National Home Ideal/ Ideology

Just as the domestic household came to be seen as the centre of motherly comfort and care, the nation was associated with a mother figure, most notably since the reign of Queen Victoria in England, who was depicted as the mother of the nation. This maternal image persisted in the British colonies not only in application to Britain but also to the post-colonial nation

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78 At the time of writing this thesis, Helen Clark is New Zealand's Prime Minister, Margaret Wilson is Attorney General, Belinda Clark is Chief Justice, and Dame Silvia Cartwright is Governor General. For further information on the New Zealand cabinet and the portfolio of these women, see: *The Official Website of the Prime Minister of New Zealand*, http://www.primeminister.govt.nz/ (Mar 3 2004); *The Official Website of the Governor General of New Zealand*, http://www.gg.govt.nz/ (Mar 3 2004); *The Official Website of the New Zealand Government*: http://www.beehive.govt.nz/ (Mar 3 2004).

79 Margaret Tennant, "The Decay of Home Life? The Home in Welfare Discourses" (2003).

itself, for instance in the reference to 'Mother India'. In this unit, I discuss the different traditions and discourses the white Europeans and the Maori draw from in their respective endeavours of establishing a national cultural identity.

2.3.1 The Mother Nation

Western attempts to theorize the links between the image of the woman in conflation with that of the nation focus on citizenship and challenge the concept of the nation state.[80] These theories examine the way the state acts upon the individual; however, they do not sufficiently address the problem of employing female-coded imagery as a conscious tool in the projection of a national identity. Adrienne Rich states that

> the mother serves the interests of patriarchy: she exemplifies in one person religion, social conscience, and nationalism. Institutional motherhood revives and renews all other institutions.[81]

The issue of women as the bearers of the nation, implied by the previously mentioned concept of the mother of the nation, is also underlined in Benedict Anderson's ground-breaking work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), where he points out that the nation is expressed through 'natural' affiliation to territory in terms of kinship metaphors, such as motherland or fatherland.[82] Such reversion to familial metaphors reveals that the jargon with which the nation has been discussed borrowed much from the domestic connotations, as presented in the previous unit. Above all, the family is situated at the core of national identity, which comes across in phrases like 'adopting a new mother country' and in the comfortable image of the 'family of nations.' And yet, women participated in the discourse of the nation only to a limited degree, though they were essentially present in its public symbols and in "ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/ national categories."[83]

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80 Anne Phillips, *Engendering Democracy* (1991).

81 Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born. Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1977): 45; 60-6.

82 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983): 143.

83 Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, *Women-Nation-State (*1987): 7.

The home ground was idealized in emotional terms as that 'corner of the world' (to revert to Bachelard's formulations)[84] that guarantees security and comfort. Such conflation of space and emotion was also confirmed by human geographers of the 1960s and 1970s, who claim that, in the search for a reliable home base, people's territorial and emotional needs melted together in a sense of 'topophilia.'[85] Derived from the Greek 'topos', meaning place and the suffix 'phil' meaning 'loving', this compound stands as a marker of its zeitgeist. It reminds us once again of Anderson's 'natural' relation of individuals to their country of origin,[86] and ties the general longing for a cultural identity to territory or space. Referring back to the emotional and a-historical coinage of the concept of home, the people's cultural territory not only defines through the boundaries of the nation state but also through a gendered notion of identity.

This complies with Anne McClintock's criticism of gender power relationships in the colonial contest in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995).[87] McClintock argues that nationalism and the discourse thereof are constituted through a European patriarchal lens when a colony undergoes the transition into a modern nation-state.

> No 'post-colonial' state anywhere has granted women and men equal access to the rights and sources of the nation state. Not only have the needs of 'post-colonial nations' been largely identified with male conflicts, male aspirations, and male interests, but the very representation of 'national' power rests on the prior construction of *gender power.* [88]

So far gender power has been thoroughly examined from a Western perspective.[89] However, extensive studies accounting for a gendered image of the nation from an indigenous perspective are still lacking.

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84 Gaston Bachelard, *Poetik des Raumes* (1960): 36.

85 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia. The Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (1974), Douglas Porteous, "Home: The Territorial Core" (1976), Kevin Lynch *The Image of the City* (1960).

86 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991): 143.

87 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995): 352-88.

88 Ibid: 260-1.

89 See the discussion of various elements of this discourse laid out by Robert Connell, *Gender and Power* (1987).

In a Western context, the reference to the mother as the cultural carrier of the nation strongly resonated in an ideological context. Because of the female imagery, it suggests that it is a nation's duty to keep the national territory clean of all impure influences.[90]

> The home may be profaned by the presence of 'dirt' in the form of dust or mud […]. Similarly, the homeland may be profaned by the presence of strangers, or the national culture profaned by the presence of foreign cultural products. In either case, the 'unclean' element, which brings the danger of profanity and thus must be 'cleansed', represents 'dirt' – that is 'matter out of place'.[91]

Thus, the classic concept of nation states draws from archetypal concepts of purity that combine with such ideological gender dichotomy. As Elaine Showalter once said in a comment on Ruskin's essay, the ideology of the angel in the house "projected the hope of national redemption onto the spiritual virginity of women."[92] To put it more provocatively, by asserting the spiritual virginity of its women, a nation could maintain a primeval innocence (or purity), which once again reveals the correspondence between national and domestic ideology.

Up to the late 1980s, such constructs were not sufficiently examined by feminist research, since the focus of attention was the social, economic, legal and political rights of women as individuals. Social geographer Doreen Massey reveals this nostalgic notion of the home as the territorial core, onto which people project their yearning for security and continuity, to be female-coded.[93]

Cultural memory is not only a decisive factor in the (re)construction of communal historic and cultural roots, it is also gendered. Women are seen as the guardians of traditional values, and, as feminist scholars have repeatedly pointed out, they have not been perceived as active shapers of history[94] but as existing in a "permanently anterior time within the modern nation."[95] In the

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90 Mary Douglas, "The Idea of Home: A kind of Space." *Social Research* 1991: 58 (1).

91 David Morley, "Bounded realms: household, family, community, and nation" (1999): 161.

92 Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (1977): 184.

93 Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (1994).

94 Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (1988), Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1977), Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (1970).

95 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995): 359.

feminising of nostalgia, women function as cultural containers and thus become the veritable embodiments of home in a Ruskinian vision.

> Women are represented as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition (inert, backward-looking and natural), embodying nationalism's conservative principle of continuity. Men, by contrast, represent the progressive agent of national modernity (forward-thrusting, potent and historic), embodying nationalism's progressive, or revolutionary principle of discontinuity.[96]

The gender role stereotypes are thus also effective in the context of constituting the nation; women represent nurturing qualities and are thus important for the (re)birth of the nation whereas men are seen as guardians of the national territory of home.

2.3.2 Establishing a New Zealand Nation

Aotearoa New Zealand's process of becoming a nation was painfully ignited through the experience of having fought under British command in both world wars. After this, the question of where and how to locate the home escaped easy answers. Although Home was capitalised by white settlers in colonial days, indicating the strong identification with Britain, this imaginary bond started to dissolve and make space for a more pronounced New Zealand nationalism. In *The Oxford History of New Zealand* (1981), P.J. Gibbons writes:

> The immediate, local consequences of war were the continuance of jingo-patriotism and the establishment of the Anzac [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] tradition. Long after the battles were over, teachers were required to take loyalty oaths and New Zealand children saluted their country's flag.[97]

New Zealand saw itself as a European-style society, having inherited all the cultural and social values of Britain; it was, as Michael King so tellingly points out, 'fringe Britain'[98] until well into the 1950s and 60s. In the public debate at the time, the issue of ethnicity and of New Zealand as a bi- or even multi-cultural society was subsumed under the prominent goal of securing a unified national identity. Women only participated to a limited degree in such

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96 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995): 359.

97 P.J. Gibbons. "The Climate of Opinion" (1981): 314. Anzac Day, which is celebrated annually on the 25 April, remembers the battle on Gallipoli peninsula during World War I, when New Zealand and Australian Forces were at the full disposal of the British authorities and died in thousands.

98 Michael King, "Being Pakeha" in *Pakeha. The Quest For Identity in New Zealand* (1991).

public debates of national concern. The only areas in which they were actively involved complied with their roles as carers. This can, for instance, be seen in the activities of the New Zealand Women's Peace Movement, which argued that "war was an essentially male activity and that the mothers of dying soldiers and the feeders of humanity, had a special obligation to work for peace."[99]

War memorials that were erected after World War II in the crucial phase of New Zealand's process of becoming independent underline this gendered notion of the nation. The Carillion in Wellington, which shows the statue of a mother and her child, reinstates women in their stereotypical gender roles. Such a public monument reinforces the myth that the war was fought for the sake of mothers and children,[100] and thus for the continuance of the nation. In my view, it is ironic that, through their political actions, women should conform to the gender role that had been moulded for them through centuries of patriarchal dominance. Despite their public engagement, white European women's political relation to the nation was still so submerged in their social subordination to men[101] that their contribution to matters of cultural identity was not acknowledged.

The post-World War II cultural debate about what it means to be a New Zealander has been conducted by male historians and scholars in culture studies.[102] Criticism of the decades following for a long time focused on the establishment of New Zealand as a bicultural nation.[103] The major focus of the debate lay on the question of ethnicity and cultural continuity and not on the roles women played in it. In 1989, William Renwick, a New Zealand historian, wrote:

> Our discussions about identity can now be much more concrete and immediate than they used to be. […] The growing body of work of our writers and other

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99 Jock Phillips, "War and National Identity" (1989): 104.

100 Ibid: 103.

101 Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (1994).

102 Jock Phillips, "Our History, Our Selves. The Historian and National Identity" (1996): 107-23, and "War and National Identity." (1989): 91-109; Alan Smith, "National Identity – A Hard Data Framework" (1996): 5-13; Rob Steven, "Land and White Settler Colonialism: The Case of Aotearoa" (1989): 21-34; Stephanie Taylor, "The Discourse of New Zealand National Identity" (1996): 47-54.

103 David Pearson, "Pakeha Ethnicity: Concept or Conundrum?" (1989): 69.

> creative artists, of our scholars and researchers, is helping us to recognize ourselves as people of these islands and not some other country.[104]

The cultural process so enthusiastically described here as a communal enterprise is however rather misleading in its all-encompassing claim.. There is no denying the fact that there has indeed been a growing body of creative work by women and ethnic minorities, but this fact alone does not immediately suggest that they make an impact on the public debates, or are perceived as active shapers of the New Zealand nation, given that the main protagonists in the cultural and political debates have been mostly men.

The 1980s and 1990s were also the peak time for debating biculturalism and reflecting upon New Zealand's colonial past. [105] In particular the 1980s saw the uprising of Maori nationalism, which challenged many established concepts. Biculturalism was usually pictured to provide Maori generously with 'first people status', but, in fact, the ideal of equitable power-sharing was not only criticised as having a strong Pakeha bias,[106] it also added to the racialisation of ethnic relationships[107] in New Zealand's continuous struggle to establish something that might be called an Aotearoa New Zealand identity.

The Maori renaissance was a process of socio-cultural and political activism that aimed at raising public awareness of the severe social, political, cultural and economic marginalisation of Maori people. The crucial socio-political achievements of the past three decades were the official recognition of Maori as Aotearoa New Zealand's second national language in 1987 (the final outcome of the Maori Language Petition) and the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975, which was meant to facilitate and redress the retention of Maori land in Maori ownership on the basis of the Treaty of

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104 W.L. Renwick, "Show us these Islands and Ourselves." (1987): 204.

105 James Belich, "Myth, Race, and Identity in New Zealand (1997); M. H. Durie, "Identity, Nationhood and Implications for Practice in New Zealand." (1997); David Novitz and Bill Willmott, *Culture and Identity in New Zealand*. (1989); Jock Phillips, "Our History, Our Selves. The Historian and National Identity" (1996); Stuart William Greif, *Immigration and National Identity in New Zealand* (1995).

106 Radhika Mohanram, "(In)visible Bodies? Immigrant bodies and constructions of nationhood in Aotearoa/ New Zealand" (1989): 26.
Robbie Whitmore, *History in New Zealand.* URL: http://history-nz.org/maori5.html (17 Mar 2004).

107 David Pearson, "Pakeha Ethnicity: Concept or Conundrum?" (1989): 67.

Waitangi (1840).[108] On a more spiritual note, the intensified focus on Maori mythology and ceremonies was a powerful tool for the re-construction of a Maori identity. Ranginui Walker, a cultural critic of Maori affairs, depicted the 1980s as a "phase of confidence in Maori identity which is manifested in cultural assertiveness."[109]

This cultural assertiveness was highly feminised. The mythical connection between the Maori and their land as seen in the Maori description of themselves as *tangata whenua*, the people of the land, carries the connotation not only of territory but in particular of female territory. The Maori word *whenua*[110] connotes both place and placenta, and the Maori custom of burying the umbilical cord of a newborn baby in ancestral land further emphasises the Maori sense of belonging in a national rather than individual context through female myths. When the Maori nationalist movement reached a peak in the late 1970s/ early 80s, Maori women campaigned side by side with Maori men for racial equality. Dame Whina Cooper, for instance, led the historical Maori Land March through the north island.[111] Maori women's voices therefore merged in unison with their male contemporaries in the shared goal of re-establishing a Maori nation.

Hence, Maori feminism cannot be considered without considering Maori nationalism, a point Radhika Mohanram raises in her study *Black Body. Women, Colonialism, and Space* (1999). She argues that the

> assertion of a female identity among Maori women […] is a requirement of the mobilization of the nationalistic struggle for sovereignty. In the significant roles played by women in the nation, where they signify both its boundary and difference, as well as the maternal body upon which the Maori nation defines and predicates itself, women's roles gain in importance and visibility.[112]

Nevertheless, Mohanram also sees Maori women as functional metaphors that become the "scaffolding upon which men construct national identity,"[113]

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108 For more details, see *The New Zealand Listener* issue No. 3332 (193), 2004 which recapitulates 30 years of Maori Renaissance.

109 Ranginui Walker, "Maori Identity" (1989): 50.

110 P.M. Ryan, *Dictionary of Modern Maori*. (1994).

111 Robbie Whitmore, "The Māori Today: Māoritanga - Māori tradition and customs." URL: http://www.history-nz.org/maori8.html (June 12 2004).
See also Donna Awatere who published *Of Maori Sovereignty* in 1984, today a highly controversial, yet prominent social commentary on Maori nationalism.

112 Radhika Mohanram, *Black Body: Women, Colonialism and Space* (1999): 108.

113 Ibid: 110.

which suggests that Maori women are seen as "embodiments of nationalism's conservative principles of continuity."[114] Mohanram goes as far as to state that there is no agency where Maori women construct themselves autonomously, a claim that no longer holds true when taking a closer look at the presence of Maori women in literature and culture.

In summary, it can be argued that women, Pakeha and Maori alike, participated in the construction of the nation. Pakeha women strongly followed stereotypical gender roles as carers and nurturers and tried to gain power by focusing on their proficiency in these fields. Because of such limitation to their profiles, they were only accepted in certain areas, such as health and education. In my view, the question as to whether or not the outline of the nation, as designed by the predominantly male protagonists in the debate, is a viable one for Pakeha women has still not been sufficiently examined. Maori women seemed to have had a larger share in their culture's national identity construction. And yet, even at the peak of the Maori-sensitive investigation of Aotearoa New Zealand, women's voices remain markedly on the margin.

Owing to these considerations, it can be stated that the concept of home on a national level is strongly reliant on traditional values and cultural assertiveness. It is striking to observe that both Pakeha and Maori concepts of the nation revert to nurturing imagery: the Western concept leans on the mother cradling the child, the Maori perception draws from *Papatuanuku,* the mythological earth mother. In both cases the domestic and communal constructs of home are projected onto the national level. This uncritical transfer inhibits the broader estimations of women's concepts of home in the context of the cultural flux and the growing ethnic diversity in New Zealand. As a result, women remain bound in a-historical paradigms and are denied access to the cultural process.

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[114] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995): 359.

2.4 Home in a Globalising World

The central problem of today's global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenization.
(Arjun Appadurai)

The increasing mobility of people and the growing influence of global economy in the second half of the 20th century[115] have dispersed people's cultural anchor points and given rise to a more troubled understanding of personal and national identities. It is increasingly becoming common currency that home is an imaginary construct which no longer depicts a stagnant space but rather describes the process of locating oneself in different socio-cultural environments. The notion of home as a place or a particular territory becomes obsolete and, with this, also the notion of cultural territories bound by the nation state. Fred Davis, a sociologist, spoke of the erosion of a sense of home with regard to a "specific geographic scale with its own distinctive atmosphere"[116] as early as 1974.

It may be argued that this erosion causes much nostalgia and homesickness that people (and nations) try to overcome by institutionalising the emotional yearning for a reliable home base.[117] This process is described in geography and culture studies by the term 'glocalisation', a compound term in which global and local tendencies are simultaneously depicted. In face of globalisation, which allegedly threatens to blur the familiar boundaries of the nation state, people seek a reliable identification base by putting the local above the global and by excavating a (constructed) past.[118] They compensate their loss of national identification though putting local history on display most often with the help of public statues and museums to commemorate people or historical events. As Claudia Bell argues in *Inventing New Zealand:*

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115 Roland Robertson identifies three phases of globalisation: one in the middle of the 19th century, another at the beginning of the 20th century and more recently he considers the last three decades of the 20th century as a crucial phase in globalisation. See Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (1994): Chapter 10.

116 Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (1974): 124.

117 Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (1994), Chapter 10: Globalization and the Nostalgic Paradigm: 146-63.

118 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983): 9-19.

Everyday Myths of Pakeha Identity (1996), "'heritage' is manufactured."[119] She draws the conclusion that

> [n]ostalgia has a highly functional role in the perpetuation of mythology. […] Envisaged is a past that was (apparently) unified and comprehensible, unlike the confusing, divided present. […] wilful nostalgia appears to derive from the impacts of globalisation that seek universal samenenss. Nostalgic use of cultural artefacts is a way of addressing defiant insistence on visible uniqueness of identity; whether for the nation, or for the small locality.[120]

Benedict Anderson saw nationalism and nationality as such cultural artefacts, a consideration that had triggered his influential *Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983)[121] in which he depicts the modern nation as an imagined community.

> [T]he nation […] is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.[122]

On the basis of such theories, the notorious argument that globalisation has left people spiritually homeless cannot be sustained.

However, these 'virtual' notions of belonging have caused much anxiety regarding the concept of home and prompted the reversion to concepts of the past in the desperate attempt to guarantee cultural continuity: often this is apparent in a country's cultural nationalism[123] as already discussed in the previous unit. Arjun Appadurai depicted this dilemma as a "tension between cultural homogenziation and cultural heterogenization."[124] In this tension, the reversion to nostalgic notions is easier than the embrace of the unknown and this quickly leads down the path of "ignoring the efforts to be drawn to into wider collectives and to erect barriers to cultural flows."[125]

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119 Claudia Bell, *Inventing New Zealand Everyday Myths of Pakeha Identity* (1996): 78.

120 Ibid: 79.

121 This is the subtitle to Anderson's book *Imagined Communities*: *Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). See "Introduction": 4-8.

122 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*: *Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983): 6.

123 Anderson sees the beginning of nationalism in its cultural roots. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*: *Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), Chapter 2 "Cultural Roots": 9-36.

124 Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" (1994): 295.

125 Mike Featherstone, "Global and Local Cultures" (1993): 181.

Such nostalgia that bases on anxiety results in the (re)construction of (gender) stereotypes of past times and complies with the a-historical gendered symbolism that I illustrated in the previous units. When cultural continuity is threatened from the outside, the only possibility of sustaining the reliable cultural basis seems to be the reversion to traditional, often archetypal, notions. Binary patterns that are so effective on the domestic and the national level are all too easily transferred to relationships in the global world, and this is, as Appadurai argues, a highly outdated frame of thinking.

> The new global cultural economy has to be understood as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery model (even those that might account for multiple centres and peripheries).[126]

It is in the application of such binary patterns that modern nation states negotiate their standing in the global world by focusing on a homogenized version of national identity although the multi-cultural character of their societies reveals a different picture. New Zealand as a former European settler colony is no exception.[127] A turn toward multi-cultural notions, however, would seriously challenge New Zealand's bicultural stance in which Maori and Pakeha European New Zealanders are the country's leading forces not only in cultural but even more so in political, social and legal terms.

The conceptualisation of home in a globalising world shows that a more liberal consideration of the contexts is needed, in which the various concepts of home evolve, and of acknowledgment of their multiplicity. The recent debate on spaces of identity and the dynamics of international migration[128] circles around a fluid concept of home grounds on the basis of Anderson's imagined communities. These are not limited by national boundaries, nor tied to places; they are part of individuals' contextualisation of identity. Most work in this regard has been undertaken by social sciences. Doreen Massey as a geographer cum sociologist presents a concept of interactive space that is not generated by a long internalised cultural history, thus implying constructed stereotypical notions, but argues instead that social space is

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126 Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" (1994): 297.

127 Mike Featherstone, "Global and Local Cultures" (1993): 182.

128 David Morley and Kevin Robbins, *Spaces of Identity. Global media, electronic landscapes and cultural boundaries* (1996); Thomas Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces* (2000).

> constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together a particular locus […so that] each place can be seen as a particular unique point of their intersection.[129]

Such sociological theories account for the multiple home idea in which homes evolve at various intersections so that the "so-called post-modern condition is best understood not as a condition, but as a process."[130] Most recently, these processes are taken up by the debate around transculturality, a notion that leans yet again on a sociological notion of transnational social spaces.[131] This is most apparent in migrants' perspectives on home. They need to negotiate the cultural context of their past homecountry with that of the new country and they move easily between different regional and national cultures.[132]

Owing to such considerations, my contention in this thesis is that poetry, as a witness of cultural dynamics, could grant insights into the concept of home as a progressive rather than self-enclosing and defensive notion. In my perception, poetry contributes significantly to the cultural discourse, not as a confirmation or a criticism of cultural theory, but as a separate authoritative impetus, providing a cultural perspective on the problems of locating the home. I consider this current point of view as an opportunity to account, in retrospect, for much innovation in New Zealand women's poetry. However, the insight into the concept of home as a process rather than a spatial concept has so far not been underpinned convincingly by literary criticism. This is the gap I seek to close with my own approach to contextualising poetic concepts of home.

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129 Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (1994): 154.

130 Mike Featherstone, "Global and Local Cultures" (1993): 183.

131 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (1996): 172-6; Thomas Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces* (2000): 195-9.

132 Mike Featherstone, "Global and Local Cultures" (1993).

3 CONTEXTUALISING POETIC CONCEPTS OF HOME

On the basis of the preceding considerations, I suggest that a contextualised reading of the concept of home in New Zealand women's poetry can help to comprehend the ways in which women complement and enrich established notions of New Zealand's cultural identity. On the one hand, women's poetic negotiation of home can be read as an attempt to escape from the aforementioned social confinements. This is not simply a subconscious desire that surfaces in the poems, rather a conscious undertaking to break out of the passivity and silence that patriarchy tries to uphold. On the other hand, home in poetry can be read as a metaphor representative of a variety of social and historical experiences and cultural values. Hence, poetic space becomes a platform on which social issues interconnect and rigid structures, such as the separation of public and private, can be broken up.

The first unit of this chapter will provide a brief overview of the widening gap between the acknowledgment of social change in public debates and the unwillingness or inability to recognise similar changes in women's literary statements. Feminist literary criticism, discussed briefly as a means to detect the 'feminine mystique' in poetry, will be put alongside the interdisciplinary approaches of social sciences in this context. It will become clear that there are no specific literary critical tools for investigating the home as a socio-cultural construct in women's poetry. This is why I am offering a heuristic approach with which to capture the interdependence between social space and poetic space. With this approach, I hope to encourage a new way of reading poetic space, a reading that considers the socio-cultural and historical situation of New Zealand. In the second and third unit, I will present my notion of *Spaces of Overlap* and *Spaces of Mediation* that will provide the instruments needed for investigating into how women succeed in subverting the spatial paradigms that cling to the home in its gendered construction.

3.1 Mind the Gap

Patriarchal dominance not only limited the acknowledgement of women as full members of society but also delineated a similar boundary for the critical assessment of women's creative capabilities. I argue not only that the yardstick with which the value of women's writing has been measured has

been too short, but also that the aforesaid historically grown 'commonplaces' have not been sufficiently reviewed. The old prejudice toward women's writing has all too often been based on the assumption that their space of action was too limited as to provide them with sufficient experiences and was thus lacking in scope. The study most critics fell back to in this kind of argumentation is, as I have laid out, Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*, which can be criticised for having established an ideological frame around the house as women's sphere and delineated it as the epitome of motherly care.

The resulting gender role clichés account for the perception of women as preservers of moral integrity rather than as active participants in the debates of their times. As previously stated, this is particularly evident in the formative phase of a new nation when it seeks to secure a cultural (home) identity. In a new nation's literature, it is most often men who are seen as addressing the 'world at large'. Thus, their poetry is considered more valuable in laying the foundation for the literary identity of the nation. Simultaneously, women's poetry is not appreciated as providing further reaching insights into a cultural sensibility because the stigma of domesticity prevents a critical assessment of their poetic vision beyond the boundaries of personal experience.

The literary nationalism that ruled the New Zealand intellectual scene after World War I until well after World War II is a particularly distinct example of such a marginalisation of women's poetry on the basis of the authors' sex. This is most condescendingly expressed by A.R.D. Fairburn (1904-57), a well-known New Zealand poet and critic, in his judgement of women's poetry as "the menstrual school."[133] Under such circumstances, women's poetic investigation into what constitutes the home was immediately related to their emotional state of mind, limiting the options for critical assessments of women's poetic statements on larger scales.

Although there is no denying the fact that women have always been central to the domestic home environment, it is just as undeniably true that they are active participants in civil society, as holders of public positions, as

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[133] In the 1930s, Fairburn stated that "the Menstrual School of Poetry is in the ascendant, and a mere male is treated with scant respect." Lauris Edmond, "Letter, 1935." *The Letters of A.R.D. Fairburn* (1981): 95.

consumers or as members of the labour force in particular since the 1970s. [134] However, literary criticism, in particular in the 1960s and 70s, failed to recognise an interrelatedness of social reality and the poetic imagination. Even feminist criticism could, in my view, not account for the connection between women's living conditions and their poetry, since many feminist approaches focused on language rather than concepts as a means with which to undermine patriarchal dominance.

Post-structuralist feminism, for instance, set a decisive theoretical mark in this regard by distinguishing between the semiotic and the symbolic. Focusing on the system of language itself, these theories reveal women's texts as disrupters of language's (patriarchal) system of signs, hence the symbolic patriarchal order. Julia Kristéva, who leans on Lacanian theory, plays a prominent role in delineating this discourse. To put it in very rough and general terms, she depicts the symbolic as the standard communicative function of language that is part of an established symbolic patriarchal order. The semiotic, on the other hand, is more original, yet it is not divorced from basic instincts.[135] For Kristéva, the symbolic represents the male, while semiotic represents the female, yet again revealing a dichotomy that is based on sexual difference in language theory.

Such post-structuralist-centred approaches remain too abstract to successfully bridge the gap between the everyday experience of women and the expression thereof in art. Literary criticism based on Kristéva's theories withdraws into an almost atavistic notion of women's writing by viewing poetry as the genre that evolves from *chora,*[136] which, according to Kristéva, translates as female space, as something womb-like. Set apart from the system of signs, *chora* is not yet limited by discursive boundaries, so that Kristéva regards it as representing an ideal starting point for women's subjectivity and authority outside of the established system.[137] The reversion to a female space as a strategy of subversion is, however, counter-productive

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134 See Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture and Power. Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture* (1989): 45-60.

135 Julia Kristéva, *Die Revolution der Poetischen Sprache* (1978): 31-41.

136 Kristéva borrows this terminology from Plato's Timaeus. John Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus* (1999): 113-7.

137 Julia Kristéva, *Die Revolution der Poetischen Sprache* (1978): 39. Toril Moi, *The Kristeva Reader* (1986): 93-9.

to opening the assessment of women's writing to larger socio-cultural contexts.

Furthermore, it is my impression that such a stance segregates women's view of the world from that of men by insisting on a particular female way of writing – something Hélène Cixous depicts as *écriture feminine*. Cixous sees poetry as a means of "gaining strength through the unconscious, that other limitless country where the repressed manage to survive: women."[138] But even on such a level, the insistence on a particular female space of writing would be an escapist vision, a disposition that inhibits the breakdown of the said gender barriers in criticism as much as in poetry itself.

These text-centred approaches neither take historical processes and social changes into account, nor do they read the texts in the contexts of their times. On the contrary, they seem to reinstate pre-existing polarities[139] rather than provide convincing guidelines or strategies that would help to efficiently deal with the complex interrelations of social reality and the poetic imagination. Yet, for a comprehensive assessment of the critical potential of women's poetry and its negotiation of home in the context of contemporary debates, it is necessary to bridge the gap between poetry as art and poetry as part of a larger socio-cultural fabric. I advocate that women re-negotiate concepts of home in their poetic settings and thus step onto a new terrain (rather than reverting to an a-historical one) that is not yet mapped in its interrelation to the public debates of the poets' times.

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This calls for a radical change of thinking toward more interdisciplinary approaches, a task on which the social sciences has been setting out for the past two decades.[140] The patterns of women's spaces of action[141] show that

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138 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" [1976] (2000): 261.

139 Her reversion to the unconscious, as holding the potential of infinite possibilities to women, follows the pre-existing polarity that was established by the theories of Freud and Lacan in which the male perspective is the privileged one in being the model of subjectivity. This train of thought, however, leads into an argument on a psychoanalytical basis, which I will not pursue further in this thesis.

140 Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (1994): 177-90.

141 See H. & M. Muchow, who claimed to depict gender specific criteria of action space on the basis of their research on boys' and girls' movement patterns in big cities in *Der Lebensraum des Grpßstadtkindes* (1935). The interpretation of the findings in this study reveal an orientation on the said gender clichés where a woman has a smaller radius of action space than a man. Recent studies are more critically aware of the cliché. See C. Ahrend, "Lehren der Straße. Über Kinderöffentlichkeit und Zwischenräume" (1997).
All these refer to the discussion, undertaken by Martina Löw in *Raumsoziologie* (2001): 246-53.

the overlap between public and private is a matter of interdisciplinary investigation.[142] In the following, I therefore offer two concepts with which to sound the depth and complexity of the home as a socio-cultural construct in women's poetry. The aforementioned tension between public and private space can be relieved in what I call *Spaces of Overlap* in which the interconnectedness of the two spheres is acknowledged. In consequence, images like the house or the garden will quickly exceed the standard perception of being simple expressions or straightforward symbols of women's 'inner worlds'. Having said that, it is also necessary to understand houses or other references to domestic space not as one-to-one reproductions of a social reality but as, what I call, *Spaces of Mediation,* in which standard connotative patterns of home can be subverted or disrupted through the (re)negotiation of social relationships.

For the development of my heuristic approach, in which I want to investigate the subversive potential of such in-between spaces, I lean on philosophical and sociological understandings of the construction of social space.[143] Henri Lefèbvre's 'third space', which he theorised in *The Production of Space* (1967) is the departure point for what I call *Spaces of Overlap* which will be at the centre of my approach. The focus on such in-between spaces allows me to investigate the subversive potential of the poetic statement since it represents a kind of neutral space that has no paradigmatic coinage, yet. When taking the influence of social reality on poetic spaces into account, one can picture the emergence of a poetic space-between that follows similar rules as Martina Löw formulated for the development of social space in *Raumsoziologie* (2001). Löw sees social space as being at the crossroads of various interconnected processes, a point of view which expresses in sociological terms the mediating function that I ascribe to the space of home in women's poetry. The influence of both theorists, Löw and Lefèbvre, on my

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142 Interdisciplinary approaches were for instance undertaken by MATRIX, a group of feminist architects and more recently notably by geographers and sociologists. Matrix Book Group, *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment* (1984). Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (1994).

143 See Martina Löw, *Raumsoziologie* (2001) and Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (1994) for a sociological and geographical approach and Henri Lefèbvre's discussion in *The Production of Space* (1991) which approaches space from a philosophical, notably Marxist, point of view; a point that I do not want to pursue in further depth.

argument will become clear in the ensuing discussion of *Spaces of Overlap* and *Spaces of Mediation*.

3.2 Spaces of Overlap

The concept of *Spaces of Overlap* builds on a very basic understanding of public and private space. In mathematics, the term 'overlap' indicates the intersection between different sets containing the same mix of elements. In transferring this notion to space, I am proposing that the overlap is the space in which characteristics of public and private are joined together: either as a heterogenous mix or – in extremis – as a homogenous blend. I see *Spaces of Overlap* as a threshold between public and private in which the different notions of public and private exist side by side without necessarily creating a new category.

The garden may serve as a plain and simple example of this argumentation. On the one hand, it can be seen as the figurative threshold between public and private space. On the other hand, the symbolic quality assigned to the garden in poetry exceeds the boundaries of individual poems and depicts a *Space of Overlap* between cultural and social debate that provides a way out of discursive one-way streets. Since it is accessible both from the private as much as from the public realm in daily practice, the garden offers viable space for novel encounters. It is the space of communication and interchange between neighbours, between locals and visitors, between the private and the public world. Such a function of the garden, as a space in which to step beyond the domestic gender role confinement, shines through in many women's works so that the garden can, in my eyes, be considered a symbol for the hope of escaping the paradigmatic connection of woman-house-home. Katherine Mansfield's most well-known collection of short stories is called *The Garden Party* (1922) and Ursula Bethell chose the title *From a Garden in the Antipodes* (1929) for her first volume of poetry. Both writers explore the positive potential of the garden space and employ it as a space of communication and as a springboard into a new understanding of the concept of home as related to (women's) identity.

Such a view of the garden opposes a traditional understanding of it as the extension of the domestic arena, and thus as the extension of female space, which is, in conjunction with the image of the angel in the house, a 19th

century notion. It was also in the 19th century that the image of the genteel bourgeois woman emerged, an image that was closely related to the idea of the garden as a space in which to linger. This meant the garden could only be used in a limited way as a poetic setting in which women could escape the confinement of the house. In the 19th century public opinion, poetry was considered women's genteel pastime rather than a product of cultural relevance. The passivity that was assigned to a woman in contrast to the active, shaping force of a man found its way into a critical pre-disposition that prevailed for almost a century afterward. Against the backdrop of such pervasive stereotypical gender prejudices, women were not perceived as agents in the process of creation. This accounted for many New Zealand women taking on male – or gender ambiguous – pseudonyms at the beginning of the 20th century in order to be taken seriously as poets. Ursula Bethell for instance chose to publish under the pseudonym Evelyn Hayes in the 1930s, a gender ambiguous name.[144]

In my view, the pre-disposition exemplified here through the garden as metaphoric space prevailed in the critical assessment of women's poetry in New Zealand, especially after officially gaining independence from Britain, when the question of national and cultural identity was a pressing one. Since critics and writers focused on the establishment of a national literature that addressed the world at large and expressed a particular New Zealand sensibility, women's poetry that referred to – or even metaphorically explored – spaces such as the garden or the verandah, in fact any setting that was connected to the domestic world, was considered reactionary and counter-productive to this goal. Even though this particular aspect has not found enough critical attention yet, the climate of opinion with regard to women's poetry has changed perceptively, not least since the strong influence of feminism on literary studies in the 1970s and 80s. Since then New Zealand poetry anthologies list a fairly even number of male and female poets, indicating that women's poetry is now established in the canon. Sometimes this new ethos has been perceived as taking affirmative action which allegedly no longer maintains the quality of writing as first priority.[145] Male

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144 Janet Charman, "My Ursula Bethell" (1998): 98.

145 C. K. Stead, "The New Victorians" (1993): 253-4.

critics still all too quickly tend to discard women's poetry as emotional and considered their choice of setting as aesthetically unfit for larger representations.

In the attempt to shed new light on the analysis of spatial metaphors in women's poetics in New Zealand, James K. Baxter, a notable critic and poet, made a seemingly liberal statement in the 1960s by saying

> if a man writes of a garden, he will tend to see it as a private paradise, a sacred place, a womb perhaps, which he enters from the outside […]. A woman, on the other hand, will very likely see a garden as a symbolic extension of her own soul and body.[146]

The alleged difference in the assessment of the garden as a poetic setting however derives from the same disposition. Baxter's words, I suggest, exemplify the patriarchal bias in the assessment of garden space. In both versions, the garden is assigned to a female domain: for men, this is the overtly-emotional and one-dimensional Bachelardian 'sacred space' and womb (which they enter from the outside); for the women this is said to be the extension of their selves and bodies, a notion that quickly leads to psychoanalytical frames of thinking which immediately connects women's overt state of emotions –hysteria –to their biological capacity for giving birth – the womb. As with the social debate, women fuelled segregated points of view, even within feminist literary criticism, by focusing on particular spaces of authority and by attempting to delineate female writing during the high time of the second wave of feminism in the 1970s and 80s. Baxter's argument does not change the reading of garden space perceptively but rather intensifies the notion of it as female space.

Few, if any, critics who engaged in the analysis of space, in particular poetic space as a home ground for female or national identity, have taken into consideration that the garden space (staying with my example) might extend beyond the female body as much as the personal domestic comfort zone – indeed even beyond a whole cultural framework, a notion that is only briefly alluded to in Lefèbvre's reference to Japanese gardens where

> [t]he garden is always a microcosm, a symbolic work of art, an object as well as a place […] It effectively eliminates […] that antagonism between 'nature' and 'culture' which takes such a devastating toll in the West: the garden

[146] Frank McKay, *James K. Baxter as Critic. A selection from his literary criticism*. (1978): 89.

> exemplifies the appropriation of nature, for it is not entirely natural – and thus a symbol of the macrocosm – and entirely cultural – and thus the projection of a way of life.[147]

In this brief example, Lefèbvre shows that the symbolic quality of the garden is not only effective on a micro-level but reaches into larger contexts of significance and can eventually become part of the cultural fabric.[148]

Lefèbvre delineates the pervasive power structures of social spaces. He makes clear that public and private are part of a hegemonic structure and are closely attached to the spatial separation of the sexes. His analysis traces the history of what he calls the male and female principles[149] within transformations of social space. However, his attempt to theorise in-between spaces or third spaces that might break the phallic features[150] of abstract space is categorized into so many variants that this third space loses significance in his argument. Nevertheless, Lefèbvre is critical of binary oppositions even though he occasionally follows some well-trodden paths in assigning the body to the female principle. For the purpose of my argument, it suffices to say that Lefèbvre identifies the problem of the gendered assignation of public and private, stating that neither notion can be discarded altogether. However, he does not delve deeply enough into the notion of 'in-between areas' or third space and therefore does not provide a sustainable model for an understanding of my notion of *Spaces of Overlap*.

It is not my intention to present an all-encompassing theory, be it phenomenological or philosophical, on third space. As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, my notion of *Spaces of Overlap* is meant to be a heuristic one which takes the interplay of social space and poetic space as its foundation. It is this interrelatedness between the reality from which a poem emerges and the poetic negotiation of this reality that lies at the centre of this disposition. Yet again, the garden may serve as an illustration of this thesis. As in many settler colonies, in New Zealand, gardens were often perceived as sites of compensation for a lost home environment and more often than not

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147 Henri Lefèbvre, *The Production of Space* (1991): 157.

148 Lefèbvre refers to the garden mostly in an Asiatic cultural context, in particular the Japanese garden, a strong cultural concept that cannot be transferred to the Western argument that is elaborated in this thesis; however, the basic principles delineated by Lefèbvre for the garden's cultural significance will be a guideline that I follow in my argument.

149 Henri Lefèbvre, *The Production of Space* (1991): 248.

150 Ibid: 309.

the settlers seemed to want to turn them into surrogate homes by planting familiar plants from Home. In poetry, the abundance of flowers and plants from England, such as primroses or roses, often bear witness of a particular Home-sickness.

Such-like yearnings might also account for the prevailing notion of the Victorian home at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century when New Zealand entered a crucial phase of its development as a nation. It is only when taking such socio-historical dynamics into account, that one may start to consider the socio-political status of women and, in effect, the cultural relevance of their writing. The distortion of familiar notions, the way familiar plants are presented or set against local fauna and flora, the critical reflective tone of poems or even the use of alienation effects when pondering over familiar plants from Home, all these provide helpful keys for making the poetic concepts of home visible within the web of socio-cultural relationships. A close examination of *Spaces of Overlap* in women's poetry will, therefore, help to understand the interconnectedness of people, social structures and space as well as to obtain a grip on the mechanism of subversion.

In summary, the notion of *Spaces of Overlap* represents a critical tool with which to unveil the interconnectedness of the concept of home on the textual level with the time and social reality it emerges from. It provides a means with which to disengage the all-pervasive binary frame of public and private that has limited the critical assessment of women's concepts of home for such a long time. In *Spaces of Overlap*, the boundaries of existing notions, be they spatial or discursive, are re-negotiated on a kind of neutral territory. In this way, they are suited for showing how women's concepts of home transcend and break free from the constraints of the private sphere. However, not every domestic image employed in poetry offers itself immediately as a *Space of Overlap*, nor is the concept of home limited to spatial references, which is why I extend this approach with *Spaces of Mediation* as a second critical tool for the analysis of concepts of home in women's poetry.

3.3 Spaces of Mediation

As I have repeatedly stated, the poetic imagination is never entirely divorced from the socio-cultural reality it evolves from. Parallel to this, the general perception is that the concept of home is no longer tied to a particular space as home, which is why I conclude that the most perceivable traces of women re-negotiating or deconstructing home in poetry can be detected in relational patterns constituted by people, space and social reality. I therefore propose the notion of *Spaces of Mediation* which set the scene for a poetic re-negotiation of relationships. The house can thus become a veritable point of intersection, a poetic space in which to re-negotiate power structures and gender-role relations. On many occasions, the house is not pictured as a comfortable nest, but rather as a shell, a construction, which can only become a home through social interaction. It is such a focus on human interaction which renders poetic spaces as *Spaces of Mediation* through which women manage to step beyond the boundaries of stereotypical gender role associations. Through their sensitive investigation into what constitutes the home as a social space they deconstruct and eventually subvert the ruling paradigms of the concept of home.

My thesis on the emergence of home space in poetry in relation to social reality shares much in common with recent considerations in sociological theory. Löw's ideas on the emergence of social space are a helpful illustration of my argument of home space in poetry as being determined by relational rather than spatial patterns. Löw's argumentation relies on two processes she depicts as spacing and synthesis, for which she relies on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the field as something that is determined by relationships.[151]

> Spacing bezeichnet bei beweglichen Gütern oder bei Menschen sowohl den Moment der Platzierung als auch die Bewegung zur nächsten Platzierung. Zweitens […] bedarf es zur Konstitution von Raum aber auch einer *Syntheseleistung*, das heisst über Wahrnehmungs-, Vorstellungs- oder Erinnerungsprozesse werden Güter und Menschen zu Räumen zusammengefasst. (Löw: 158-9, italics mine)[152]

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151 Martina Löw, *Raumsoziologie* (2001): 179-91.

152 Spacing depicts both the moment of the placement as well as the movement toward the next placement. This concerns both moveable goods and people. Second [..] the constitution of space

Though I am aware that the sociological stance in Löw's approach cannot be transferred one-to-one to the poetic process, I am convinced that the aspect of synthesis Löw depicts in her theory can be applied to the interconnectedness between poetic imagination and social reality. The approach that I suggest for literary analysis relies on such reciprocity between the individual and the social reality in order to determine the constitution of home in the poetic imagination.

Löw's sociological notion of synthesis as a simultaneous process of perception, imagination and remembering is a helpful notion with which to explain the socio-cultural traces in poetic concepts of home. In *Spaces of Mediation*, it is above all the synthesis of social structures and relations that extend the scope of the poetic message. The achievement of synthesis of the individual poet on the basis of the surrounding 'reality', be it a discursive, a social or a physical one, is thus a necessary element for the constitution of the home in poetry. The simultaneous process of abstraction, remembering and reflection[153] that constitutes the perception of social space is effective on two levels. On the one hand, it is exercised by each individual poet in the writing of the poem and is thus a basic process in generating poetic home space. At the same time, synthesis can be seen as an abstract process that can influence the discourse of home beyond the borders of individual poetics.

In poetry, I consider a *Space of Mediation* a kind of stage or platform on which to act out this synthesis. I depict this process with the German word *verdichtung,*[154] which might simply translate as condensation – an English term that cannot capture the full spectrum of my idea. From my point of view, *verdichtung* encapsulates two processes at once: on the one hand it suggests a very selective accumulation and condensation of emotion and action. On the other hand it works with simplified notions and focuses on the moment of encounter. *Verdichtung* describes a process that is useful for carving out a particular sensitivity, thus creating a poetic reality. A picture or a film sequence, for instance, can create certain effects by leaving out trivialities or

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requires a certain synthesis, that is to say that goods and people will be grouped into spaces by means of perception, imagination or recollection. Translation: C. Duppé

153 Martina Löw, *Raumsoziologie* (2001): 159.

154 In *Traumdeutung* (1900), Sigmund Freud has used the term *Verdichtung* together with *Verschiebung* (shifting) to depict the subconscious mechanism of suppressing desires. My use of the word is not related to Freud's psychoanalytical definition.

by framing situations under uncommon circumstances or in uncommon places. In a poem, *verdichtung* captures different kinds of rhetoric and stylistic interaction. When describing the process of *verdichtung* in the discussion of the poems, I will therefore extend my critical vocabulary by using the German verb '*verdichten*' and the adjective '*verdichtet*'.

In my approach, a house in a poem is therefore not a physical dwelling place but a *Space of Mediation*. It is an intersection of different relations rather than a fixed autonomous unit and provides the 'stage' on which the concept of home is *verdichtet* in the poem. This will become clear in the close reading of Lauris Edmond's poetry in particular since she frequently interconnects relationships in the domestic environment to the extent that her poetry has been tentatively labelled as a "poetry of relationships."[155] The same could be said of the poetry of Ursula Bethell and Mary Stanley. However, so far criticism has not pursued this line of critical analysis in either of the poets' works or related them to the context of the history of New Zealand poetry. I will pursue these aspects in my close reading of these poets' texts in chapters five, six and seven.

The application of my critical concepts in the close readings is meant to reveal the development of one of the most crucial of cultural spaces, which had not been paid sufficient attention to by literary criticism. Through the analysis of women's poetic home space, I hope to provide insight into a tradition that had not been recognised as such in New Zealand's literary self-portrayal. Women poets should no longer stand singled out as exceptions in New Zealand's literary landscape but share something in common, which I seek to uncover by paying attention to possibly emerging deviations and modifications of their concepts of home.

If one positions the different poetic statements in relation to each other, certain patterns of deviation emerge which will eventually have large-scale implications for the socio-political debate in which these constructs are negotiated and in which they receive their paradigmatic – one might even go as far as to say institutionalised – coinage. This runs parallel to the sociological process, which Löw describes as follows:

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[155] Janet Wilson, "The Art of Lauris Edmond" (1989).

> zunächst [erkennt man] ein Abweichen von der Regel, welches die in Routinen rekursiv reproduzierten Strukturen nicht angreift. Wenn aber die Abweichungen und Neuschöpfungen regelmäßig werden und nicht individuell, sondern auch kollektiv im Rückgriff auf relevante Regeln und Ressourcen verlaufen, dann sind Veränderungen institutionalisierter Räume, bis hin zu Strukturveränderungen möglich. Dabei beginnt gleichzeitig der Prozess erneut, weil regelmäßige Abweichungen selbst zu Routinen werden. (Löw: 185)[156]

What Löw expresses in sociological terms as the emergence of a regular pattern of deviating from the norm echoes Judith Butler's terminology of the performative effect in discourse that depicts the construction of gender as a socially determined role.[157] According to Löw, the little deviations might in time de-institutionalise space and at the same time create other institutionalised spaces that no longer reflect standard social norms. The repetitive patterns can then lead to the establishment of, what she calls, "gegenkulturelle Räume"[158], a notion that I refrain from embracing. The terminology itself suggests that these spaces stand in opposition to existing cultural sites, and I do not intend to put a spatial frame, in fact any limitation, around the concept of home.

This freedom is provided by the examination of *Spaces of Mediation* in women's poetry. Other than *Spaces of Overlap,* they are often not obvious metaphors or figures of speech but they set the scene for the poetic *verdichtung* in the process of which the concept of home constitutes itself. With the help of *Spaces of Mediation*, the concept of home is rendered visible in relational rather than spatial patterns so that the wide-ranging scope of poetry as a cultural process is revealed.

3.4 Re-constituting New Zealand Home Concepts

My close reading of poems chosen from four different authors not only aims to investigate the individual poets' negotiation of concepts of home, but is also meant to reveal that the paradigmatic coinage of running constructs

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156 to start with, [one recognises] a deviation from the rule which does not attack the structures that are reproduced recursively in routines. However, if those deviations and new creations become regular and no longer individually but collectively refer back to relevant rules and resources, the changing of institutionalised space, and even the modification of structures, will be possible. Simultaneously, this entails the restart of the entire process since regular deviations turn into routines themselves. Translation: C. Duppé

157 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990).

158 "Gegenkulturelle Räume" might translate as counter-cultural sites, a notion that has been employed by Michel Foucault in his argument on heterotopias in "Of Other Spaces" (1986): 24. Since I do not want to elaborate Foucault's argument in this thesis, I distance myself from such terminology.

can be changed in areas that lie beyond the textual basis of individual poems. Each of the chosen poets represents a crucial time in New Zealand literary and social history of the 20th century and so it is justified to say that, despite their marginalisation amongst the critical circles, women have significantly shaped the New Zealand notion of home through their writing. Women's poetry makes a large contribution to New Zealand's cultural discourse and is a powerful source of New Zealand's sense of cultural (home) identity. Before we can however talk about women's participation in a national home conception, the ideological ballast of such a train of thought needs to be reconsidered.

In this essay, "… und dichterisch wohnet der Mensch ...," (1954) the German philosopher Martin Heidegger states that poets write themselves into existence; an argument that applies, I suggest, to much New Zealand poetry, notably women's. Heidegger states that "das Dichten lässt das Wohnen allererst ein Wohnen sein" (Heidegger 1954: 183). He can be referred to as the philosopher of *Heimat*,[159] which translates as home. The German word, however, not only connotes the personal scale of the home, but unfortunately also the national(ist) scope of it.[160] The desire for a national home ground can easily further jingoistic attitudes that are based on territorial affiliations to the nation state. The notion of a home ground in art is thus territorialized and runs the risk of being interwoven with political nationalism. In the philosopher's opinion, poetry has a home-building function; it provides the means with which to give meaningful structure and symbolic significance to the relationship between the self and the environment. In this context, literature could easily become a political tool in the cultural institutionalisation of home ground.

Despite New Zealand's pronounced literary nationalism after World War II, which marginalised women's poetry on the basis of such a focus, the notion of home in New Zealand poetry does not lend itself to such a kind of nationalist line of argument. Even though poetry has been used to secure the literary identity of New Zealand by means of providing a cultural reference

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159 Henri Lefèbvre, *The Production of Space* (1991): 120-1.

160 The notion of *Heimat* was a key concept in Nazi ideology. Morley and Robbins even go as far as to say that Nazi ideology has forever intoxicated the German sense of home by means of adding an Arian agenda to the semantic meaning of the word. David Morley and Kevin Robbins, *Spaces of Identity. Global media, electronic landscapes and cultural boundaries* (1995): 93-8.

point, the concepts of home were too diverse to communicate a unified New Zealand identity. Rather, and this has been stated by many critics far and wide,[161] since the beginning of New Zealand poetry, poets have found inspiration mainly in the tension between an old and a new home ground.

Alan Riach, a New Zealand literary critic, depicts this by stating that "if space is […] the first fact to people born in America, perhaps distance has a similar function in New Zealand."[162] The European immigrants, who are mostly from Britain, associate Home with the culture and geography of the British Isles. Maori perceive home on the one hand as space, in the sense of *turangawaewae*: a place where one can put one's feet and on the other hand as the family genealogy, the *whakapapa*, which has its geographical origin in Hawaiiki, from which the first *waka* fleet set off. In my eyes, these examples show that the establishment of a national home concept for New Zealand has never been clear-cut.

Amongst the European settlers, the distance to Home often prompted nostalgia so that their poetry can be regarded as an outlet for compensating a lost home. Yet again, the garden is a highly symbolic image in the process of colonization, in particular in New Zealand as a settler colony. It was the standard metaphor for cultivation echoing not only the notion of physically cultivating a wild country and making it arable, but of doing so in a cultural context. Gardening and sowing seeds that in time grow roots, is one of the most commonly used metaphors for depicting the process of settlement and of feeling at home in a foreign place. Therefore, to reformulate James K. Baxter, when authors (regardless of their sex) write about a garden, it may well be that they are depicting a space where they can re-negotiate their cultural affiliation – or, referring to Lefèbvre's example, the garden enters a higher level of significance in becoming the symbolic carrier of new cultural territory that needs to be appropriated.

In order to apply these notions effectively in the context of New Zealand literary discourse, some of my earlier arguments need repeating. As I pointed out before, women have not been perceived as active participants in

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[161] James K. Baxter, *Aspects of Poetry in New Zealand* (1967); W.S. Broughton, "Problems and responses of three New Zealand poets in the 1920s" (1973); MacD. P. Jackson, "Poetry: Beginnings to 1945" (1991); W.H. Oliver, "The Awakening Imagination" (1981).

[162] Alan Riach, "New Zealand Poetry from 'Then' till 'Now': Wordsworth's Last Stand" (1990): 80.

the cultural advancement of their times but as preservers of a rather a-historic concept of society's moral integrity. However, poetry does not evolve out of a socio-cultural vacuum but is the result of a process that Lefèbvre describes as appropriation and re-appropriation, which basically depicts the assignation of meaning to space. In a cultural context, Lefèbvre sees works of art as the most accomplished form of appropriation.[163] When considering poetry thus as art, it participates in the continuous re-appropriation of cultural territory.

This ties in with Lefèbvre's basic assumption that art and culture "cannot be understood apart from the rhythms of time and of life."[164] And it is these rhythms of time and life that women manage to capture with very perceptive eyes against the backdrop of the socio-cultural debates of their times. From a feminist point of view, re-appropriation can be read as women re-gaining or deconstructing space that had been dominated by men. In the more recent context of global mobility and migration, one might consider re-appropriation as the process of making oneself at home in a foreign place. In both cases, re-appropriation is based on re-negotiation.

In sum, my approach seeks to question existing boundaries rather than to erect new ones or to revert to an a-historical concept that regresses to a space prior to discursive structures. It is the correlation between social reality and literary sensibility that leads the way into reconsidering cultural and gender relationships on the background of recent intercultural (and increasingly transcultural) frames of thought. By stressing this interconnectedness, I want to clarify that my notion challenges rather than replaces hitherto established New Zealand concepts of home. The prominent goal of this study is to pave the way for women's poetry to be considered on a higher level of significance and obtain the critical attention it deserves in the context of New Zealand literary history. With my approach, I intend to enrich and complement current notions in the hope of encouraging re-considerations of established points of view and eventually also critical readings beyond the selection of texts in this thesis.

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163 Henri Lefèbvre, *The Production of Space* (1991): 156.

164 Ibid: 166.

4 MARY URSULA BETHELL: A WOMAN "EARNESTLY DIGGING"

At the time of Ursula Bethell's authorship as a poet, New Zealand poetry was still perceived as expressing exile, homesickness and nostalgia in reaction to being far away from European centres.[165] R.A.K. Mason (1905-71),[166] New Zealand's most well-known male poet at the time, captures this in his often quoted "Sonnet of Brotherhood" (1924), which speaks of "this far-pitched perilous hostile place/ this solitary hard-assaulted spot/ fixed at the friendless outer edge of space." Ursula Bethell also seems to confirm this general perception in the epigraph of her first volume of poetry *From a Garden in the Antipodes* (1929), which reads "Won't you greet a friend from home/ Half the world away?" But contrary to the standard colonial reading of this epigraph, her poetry does not lament the distance to the English Home country. Bethell draws much of her poetic inspiration from the negotiation of British heritage with New Zealand reality, seen most prominently in the image of the garden. Since she does not address "the world at large or empty air,"[167] her poetic vision amounts to a dramatic dialogue between the land and the self.[168]

Like most of her contemporaries, Bethell is constantly returning to the question of where to locate the home. In trying to answer this question, she ventures beyond exile and homesickness and casts a new look on New Zealand's physical and cultural environment. In the process of doing this, she establishes that 'solitary spot at the outer edge of space' as viable home ground for a new poetic sensibility. Bethell can be seen to stand at the beginning of a thorough re-negotiation of the home question in New Zealand poetry. Her work represents one of the first substantial contributions of a woman poet to New Zealand's emerging literary scene. To put it in slightly colloquial terms, one might say that she was paving the way for her successors at a time when

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165 C.K. Stead, *In the Glass Case*. (1981): 248.

166 R.A.K Mason is never referred to in any anthology or publication with his full name, only with his initials so that his sex is not immediately apparent.

167 MacD. P. Jackson, "Poetry: Beginnings to 1945" (1991): 369.

168 Bornholdt et.al. comment on her style as follows: "Although the words she uses are in the main 'English' rather than New Zealand English, and certainly not colloquial, Bethell allows for their new associations in the world where the things they denote pull against their ancient connections." Jenny Bornholdt et.al., *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English* (1997)*:* xxiv.

New Zealand underwent crucial social as well as political changes. Since Bethell's poems reflect the socio-cultural issues of her time, the ensuing unit will briefly sketch the literary debate from the time of the suffragettes up until the 1930s when most of Bethell's work was published. The short overview of her life and writing will further add to the understanding, not only of her dual cultural allegiance, on which her reflection of Home/ home is based, but also of the subtleties of her poetic message with regard to gender roles in New Zealand society.

4.1 New Zealand's Poetic Transition

At the dawn of the 20th century, New Zealand poetry, scattered about as it was,[169] prefigured major issues that prevailed in New Zealand poetry ever since: the negotiation of two or more homelands on a personal level and the desire to establish a New Zealand literary scene. Isolated, exiled, alone in a country far from European centres – keywords like these are found frequently in the description of New Zealand sensibility[170] at the time. In cultural terms, New Zealand was the uncivilised outpost in which a sophisticated culture (in a bourgeois intellectual sense) was not yet present. This has to be seen on the background of New Zealand's demographic data. The population at the beginning of the 20th century counted about 900000 people,[171] most of whom worked in agricultural and few in industrial production.[172] The communication infrastructure was basic, and the need for culture retreated in the background of more pressing economical and political issues in New Zealand's young society.

In the poetic imagination, it was "a silent skeleton world", as Blanche Baughan (1870-1958) states in "A Bush section" (1908).[173] This not only depicts the look at the countryside, but also expresses a cultural silence, which prompted bourgeois intellectuals, such as Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923),

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169 Literary publication at these times is difficult to reconstruct. There were only few established New Zealand platforms where local authors could publish, such as certain university magazines each with different agendas. The majority of poems was published in newspapers and magazines, which were often said to have applied journalistic rather than literary academic criteria. Dennis McEldowney, "Publishing, Patronage, Literary Magazines" (1991): 549-554.

170 MacD. P. Jackson, "Poetry: Beginnings to 1945" (1991): 336.

171 See Appendix III.

172 W.J. Gardner, "A Colonial Economy" (1981): 83.

173 Harvey McQueen, *The New Place: the poetry of settlement in New Zealand 1852-1914* (1993): 195-201.

to leave New Zealand. Frustrated by the lack of sophisticated literary exchange, she suffered from the isolation from European literary circles to the extent that she considered herself as a woman with "the taint of pioneer in her blood", as expressed in her poem "To Stanislaw Wyspianski" (1923).[174] Mansfield's choice indicates that the intended audience for New Zealand writing was to be found overseas. The cultural home affiliation was negotiated in the binary tension of centre versus periphery, Britain as Home versus New Zealand as the place to live, culture versus nature. There was no space between, or, to put it in Baughan's words, "the clearing ha[d] not yet come" (A Bush Section, 12).

This situation changed perceptively in the 1930s when New Zealand no longer strove to be England's most faithful colony.[175] A new self awareness pervaded all areas of New Zealand society and changed the perspective on Britain while sharpening the focus on New Zealand as the physical and emotional home. In intellectual circles, the debate circled around the establishment of a New Zealand literary scene/ canon. Three poetry anthologies appeared almost at the same time: *The Old Clay Patch* (1920) and *Treasury of New Zealand Verse* (1926), edited by Alexander and Currie, and Quentin Pope's *Kowhai Gold* (1930).[176] *Kowhai Gold* is still remembered for having separated the critical public. Recent criticism of the anthology states that it distinguishes the poetry of the 1920s "from the more vigorously nationalist, realist and socially engaged poetry of the next decade."[177] Allen Curnow, New Zealand's most active and prominent critic in the 1940s and 50s, saw it as a compilation of

> magazine verse of a not very high order. […] *kowhai gold* should stand as a warning to the journalistically minded who mistake magazine verse for a nation's poetry. There is nothing in the derivation of 'anthology' to justify such diligent scrapings of a small pot's bottom.[178]

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174 Jenny Bornholdt et al., *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English*. (1997): 474.

175 This refers to a quote from André Siegfried who said in 1904 that New Zealand 'may with justice be regarded as the English colony which is most faithful to the mother country' see: See P.J. Gibbons "The Climate of Opinion" *The Oxford History of New Zealand* (1981): 308

176 For a detailed account of the publishing scene in New Zealand see Dennis McEldowney, "Publishing, Patronage, Literary Magazines." *Oxford History of New Zealand Literature* (1991): 545-600.

177 Jenny Bornholdt et al., *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English* (1997): xxiv.

178 Peter Simpson, *Look Back Harder: Critical Writings 1935-1984 Allen Curnow.* (1987): 34.

On the one hand this prefigures Curnow's political attitude towards what constitutes good New Zealand poetry. On the other hand it shows that New Zealand was still lacking established literary platforms and that the debate of national and literary identity was in full swing.

In *Aspects of Poetry in New Zealand* (1967), James K. Baxter calls the 1930s the time of the "transitional poets"[179] which is now regarded as the formative years of a New Zealand poetry scene. As Baxter states, New Zealand poetry reveals a noticeable shift away from the overpowering turn-of-the-century Georgian and Puritan style. Furthermore, New Zealand poets started to address a local audience, which radically changed the status of New Zealand poetry. Apart from it gaining in popularity, it also prompted a discussion about what New Zealand poetry might be. As a result, New Zealand developed its own critical scene so that the critical assessment of New Zealand writing began to change nationally as well as internationally.

The first steps towards a local literary debate were marked by journals such as the short-lived *Phoenix* founded in 1932 by Bob Lowry. *Phoenix* was 'followed' by *Tomorrow* published in Christchurch, which became a kind of satirical platform for literary and critical exchange. However, it was not liked by many writers, including Ursula Bethell,[180] because it focused too much on the continuing discussion of a distinct literary expression rather than allowing for a greater variety. Apart from the journalistic platforms, such as newspapers and weekly magazines, *Art in New Zealand, New Zealand Mercury* and C.A. Marris's *New Zealand Best Poems* Series (1932-43) proved to be of high value particularly to women poets.

During these times of transition, R.A.K. Mason and Ursula Bethell were leading figures of New Zealand poetry.[181] Bethell and Mason are often mentioned together as the first New Zealand poets who moved away from British features, such as Georgian diction, and shaped a distinct New Zealand poetic style. However,

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179 James K. Baxter, *Aspects of Poetry in New Zealand* (1967): 8-10.

180 Dennis McEldowney, "Publishing, Patronage, Literary Magazines" (1991): 563.

181 In focusing on Bethell and Mason, I do not exclude other important figures like Eileen Duggan, A.R.D. Fairburn, Robin Hyde, Chrales Brasch, or Denis Glover from my consideration.

> the poets of transition were hardly formal perfectionists. Mason could be slipshod; Fairburn relied much on a loose liturgical structure; Bethell's free verse attempted no more than the minimum of control.[182]

Such a criticism shows that many different styles were united under the umbrella of 'transitional poets'. There is no such thing as a unified vision. In *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature*, Jackson notes that "if Mason's poetry is, as Fairburn notes, 'very masculine', Ursula Bethell's has the virtues of much of the best New Zealand verse by women."[183]

Generally speaking, poetry by men was considered to grasp the world at large and to make distinct contributions to New Zealand sensibility. Criticism identifies strong binary oppositions in the estimation of the writing quality, which alternated between the universal (or the 'vatic' in Baxter's terms[184]) and the regional, the abstract and the concrete. Against the backdrop of New Zealand politics, it can be said that the socio-political segregation of public and private spaces was also mirrored in New Zealand's literature. Poetry written by women was branded as genteel and domestic[185] because the general prejudice was that women's vision did not extend beyond the private sphere and its domestic concerns.

Yet again the strong gender bias in the debate about what constitutes the nation's literature reveals the marginalisation of women solely on the basis of their sex. Mason's poetry was not even readily available in print at the time, and yet he was considered one of the formative poets of the 1930s. "With Mason, the transitional poets acquired a prophet and a father figure" James K. Baxter stated in 1967[186] echoing Allen Curnow, who strongly advocated Mason's work. Baxter suggests that this might have been Curnow's means to establish his own work as part of the canon since "it is so much less costly to canonise a literary forerunner than a literary competitor."[187] Owing to such

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182 James K. Baxter, *Aspects of Poetry in New Zealand* (1967): 21.

183 MacD. P. Jackson, "Poetry: Beginnings to 1945" (1991): 359.

184 James K Baxter, *Aspects of Poetry in New Zealand*. (1967): 9f.

185 This derived from the strong assumption that women's poetry was "supposedly dominated by genteel female poets producing pale imitative verse, which differed from colonial versifying chiefly by the addition of decorative local flora." Jenny Bornholdt, et.al., *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English* (1997): xxiv.

186 James K Baxter, *Aspects of Poetry in New Zealand*. (1967): 18.

187 Ibid: 13-4.

commentary, poetry in New Zealand at that time went hand in hand with cultural policy.

Maori literature was not part of this concern, yet. The urge to deal with the national home question in writing was most prominently debated in white European (Pakeha) terms. Maori voices were not considered as equals in the literary production or in critical circles[188] and thus remained absent. Despite the emergence of an own literary and critical scene, New Zealand writers were still strongly oriented on the British scene since success in England was still the yardstick with which to measure a successful writer. Positively speaking, the orientation toward London aligned New Zealand poetry with the English intellectual scene, thus giving it a semi-global character at an early stage of its development. When serving an audience in the mother country, however, New Zealand poetry also ran the risk of losing some of its independence.

4.2 Ursula Bethell: Life and Writing

Like many of her contemporaries, Mary Ursula Bethell had her cultural roots in two countries, England and New Zealand.[189] Born in Surrey, England in 1874, Bethell came to New Zealand when she was 18 months old. She spent her childhood in Rangiora near Christchurch and went to England (Oxford) and Switzerland to finish her secondary education. The ensuing 25 years of her life were spent mostly away from New Zealand engaged in various social work schemes often connected to a religious affiliation. She returned to New Zealand after a long absence to live with her companion Effie Pollen. The two women moved into a house Bethell called 'Rise Cottage' on the Cashmere Hills in Christchurch. It was during the ten years she lived with Effie Pollen that Bethell wrote almost all of her poetry. After the death of her companion in

Credit: New Zealand Book Council / Te Kaunihera Pukapuka o Aotearoa

[188] This is also due to their lack of tertiary education to which Maori did not have the same access as Pakeha New Zealanders at the time. W.H. Oliver & B.R. Williams. *The Oxford History of New Zealand* (1981).

[189] The ensuing information about Bethell's biography are taken from the various internet sources listed in the bibliography, the entry from the *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* and the introductory note of Vincent O'Sullivan to her *Collected Poems*.

1934, Bethell moved out of Rise Cottage to a flat in the house she later donated to the Church of England. She died of cancer in 1945.

Only recently, in particular with the *Collected Poems* (1985; 2nd edition 1997) edited by Vincent O'Sullivan, did Ursula Bethell's oeuvre gain more widespread recognition. Yet, however much Bethell was praised for her exceptional skill in style and form and the wide scope of her poetic vision, even the most favourable criticism of her work has not engaged in a comparative analysis of Bethell's poetry. Despite being considered as outstanding in her own right, Ursula Bethell was not given wider attention in conjunction with the 'mainstream' poets of her time; this might be due to her actual age (she was 50 when she published her first volume) as opposed to her 'literary youth', a fate Lauris Edmond shares with her 40 years later.

Another reason for the scarce attention being paid to her work lies in the social and political situation at the time. The after-effects of World War I and the Great Depression together with the feeling of an impending second military threat did not create a favourable climate for the emerging literature market. In particular during the time of the Depression, people were not inclined to spend money on things that were not essential for physical survival. As a result Bethell's poetry was only read by few. Eventually, Bethell bought her own books to save them from 'remaindering'[190] on the shelves, which further limited the amount of copies that were in circulation. As a middle class intellectual who was well provided for by the inheritance of her father, she could easily afford to do so. Through her privileged financial situation, she could support herself without being married[191] and without the obligation to work for a living or to be housewife and mother, she had all the freedom to become part of New Zealand's small intellectual scene.

Ursula Bethell was a very active intellectual whose advice was often sought by her male fellow writers and critics[192] as some of her acquaintances state in "Ursula Bethell: some personal memories" (1948): a kind of obituary

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190 M.H. Holcroft, *Mary Ursula Bethell* (1975): 20.

191 Raewyn Dalziel. "The Colonial Helpmeet. Women's Role and the Vote in Nineteenth Century New Zealand." *The New Zealand Journal of History* (1977): 112-23. Born in 1874, Ursula Bethell is part of this generation.

192 Charles Brasch for instance discussed his plan for setting up *Landfall*, today one of the leading literary journals, with her.

published three years after her death.[193] The most prominent driving force of this tribute was M.H. Holcroft, whose untiring commitment to and admiration of Bethell's poetic and intellectual skills is unfolded in his publication *Mary Ursula Bethell* dating from 1975. Until the present day, this book remains the most profound analysis of Bethell's life and writing and provides the basis for approaching her work. Vincent O'Sullivan's introduction to the *Collected Poems* for instance reveals a strong orientation toward Holcroft's criticism, in particular with regard to the cautious reference to Bethell's life with her woman partner Effie Pollen. Janet Charman's approach to Bethell in 1998, as seen in her article "My Ursula Bethell", reveals the almost paralysing power of Holcroft's book on any further critical approaches to Bethell's work in particular with regard to homoeroticsim and homosexuality.

Apart from reviews of O'Sullivan's editorship and Anne Else's insightful article on the treatment of women poets in *Landfall* (1985),[194] the publication of Mary Ursula Bethell's *Collected Poems* does not seem to have been of particular interest in critical circles. The prominent features in her poetry that are most frequently alluded to are her religious background and her serenity in style and form.[195]

Many critics find it difficult to step beyond the borders of Holcroft's criticism and estimate the resonance of Bethell's aesthetics in New Zealand poetry. New approaches in the 1990s, most notably by women scholars, tried to gain insights into hitherto neglected aspects of Bethell's poetry, but their criticism only accounted for marginal comments in New Zealand's poetic history. In my view, Ursula Bethell's literary merit is all too often underestimated, although she has become a role model for many New

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193 H.C.D Somerset, D'Arcy Cresswell, M.H. Holcroft et al. "Ursula Bethell : some personal memories" (1948).

194 Anne Else, "Not more than man nor less : the treatment of women poets in Landfall, 1947-1961" (1985).

195 See Beardsley (1999) who says that Bethell has produced "numerous beautifully crafted poems rich in content and austere in form, illuminated by her religious outlook, humanity, scholarship and perceptiveness" in:
http://library.christchurch.org.nz/Heritage/LocalHistory/CanterburyWriters/ursula_bethell.asp
see also Vincent O'Sullivan's introductory note to Bethell's *Collected Poems*.
see also Allen Curnow' introduction to A Book of New Zealand Verse in: *Look Back Harder. Critical Writings 1935-1984. Allen Curnow.* Ed. Peter Simpson. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1987: 69.

Zealand women poets up until the present day.[196] Through my analysis of Ursula Bethell's depiction of the home, I put Bethell in the context of a traditional line of New Zealand women's poetry past and present in the hope of providing due space for a critical estimation beyond the borders of her own work.

In the following units, I will analyse poems from her three volumes of poetry published during her lifetime: *From a Garden in the Antipodes* (1929), *Time and Place* (1936) and *Day and Night: poems 1924-1935* (1939). In *From a Garden in the Antipodes*, the image of the garden is omnipresent. Since it is such a prominent metaphor, the garden an be seen to represent Bethell's true home space from where most of her poetic vision evolves. In my view, the garden image goes beyond Bethell's personal concept of home and makes a particularly insightful contribution to the perception of New Zealand as home. It is a space in between the public and the private realm so that it escapes any overt gender attribution. At the same time, the garden is a cultivated space as opposed to wilderness and thus also carries a cultural baggage in the context of New Zealand's colonial history.

In the unit "Half the World from Home", I will examine to which extent Bethell's poetry gives evidence of being torn between two cultures and how perceptively she shapes the image of New Zealand in her poetry. S.A. Grave's brief attempt to decipher the image of New Zealand in the poetry of Bethell[197] will serve as a preliminary starting point for my discussion of Bethell's reference to and employment of cultural codes. In extension of this analysis, I will assess Bethell's concept of home in its wider philosophical and historical resonance at the end of this chapter.

4.3 At Home in an Antipodean Garden

From a Garden in the Antipodes (1929) is Ursula Bethell's first volume of poetry. It was published under her pseudonym Evelyn Hayes in England. A brief glance at the title and above all the epigraph, "Won't you greet a friend from home,/ Half the world away,"[198] suggests a late 19th/ early 20th century

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196 Anna Jackson, a recent New Zealand poet stated in a personal interview that she takes inspiration from the work of Ursula Bethell.

197 S.A. Grave, "The image of New Zealand in the poetry of Ursula Bethell" (1954).

198 Vincent O'Sullivan, "Introduction" *Ursula Bethell Collected Poems*. (1994): x.

orientation toward a British readership. It gives the volume the flair of a literary document from the Commonwealth dominions that alludes to England as Home, and such an epigraph seems to re-confirm the marginal status of New Zealand literature in face of the mother country's.

> The pull of London, and the dilemma of the expatriate who wanted to be in two places at once, were strong influences in the 1920s, emerging from a conflict of ancestral and colonial experience.[199]

However, this would be an all too simplistic assessment of Bethell's poetry. In fact, it binds her in critical and social patterns, that were responsible for the marginal critical attention paid to her work. Janet Chraman's article only recently transcends the standard critical frame around Bethell's writing. Charman states that

> [t]he *Antipodes* poems question […] 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, […]. 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'. (Charman, 96)

This 'not admitting' otherness and Bethell's rejection of the conventional cultural and critical imperatives are crucial signposts to her poetry. I suggest that it might also be the reason why her poetic voice troubled critics so that she was acknowledged as a skilled poet but never put on the same level with her male contemporaries. [200]

In my view, the title of her first volume also tellingly indicates Bethell's major source of inspiration: the garden, which in my perception does not merely resonate in the tight centre-periphery paradigm of early post-colonial discourse. On the contrary, it is in particular the garden space that carries the potential of loosening such paradigmatic ties and allows interpretations on different figurative levels in its function as a Space of Overlap. Bethell's poetry explores the potential of the garden as a Space of Overlap in a variety of ways. As a space of communication, it relieves the tension between the public and the private space in New Zealand society turning the garden into a

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[199] M.H. Holcroft, *Mary Ursula Bethell* (1975): 16.

[200] In "Aspects of New Zealand Poetry", Allen Curnow writes: "Ursula Bethell, of Christchurch, a woman poet of rare invention and rhythmic skills, has written pure and uncomplex celebrations of the scene about her … Yet I think Mason, even if he were not the finest architect of language New Zealand has produced, would still stand on a plane above; though he has seen or recorded far less of visible New Zealand, he has suffered more as a New Zealander." (35)

semi-public space for women to engage in dialogue with the public world. As such, the garden can be seen as a neutral ground on which the boundaries between public and private are broken up.

In addition to such an social function of the garden, Bethell's vision also carries bourgeois feminist features, which aligns her work with that of her famous fellow writer Virginia Woolf in Britain. The publication of Bethell's *From a Garden in the Antipodes* coincided with the publication of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* in 1929. As educated women who followed current affairs in their respective societies, Bethell and Woolf shared the same sensitivity to women's issues at the time. Both women felt the need for a room of their own, which many women writers lacked; and both had the financial means to afford one. Judging from the omnipresence of the garden in Bethell's poetry and the care she devoted to her gardening as well as the pride she took in it,[201] Bethell's garden can be regarded as the room of her own in which she let her creative powers flourish. Continuing on this train of thought, it could be called a 'green' area(l)' where the woman writer finds a fertile ground for her creative expression.

My extended reading of Bethell's garden as a Space of Overlap also resonates in the context of gender identity. The pseudonym "Evelyn Hayes" that Bethell chose for publishing was most often interpreted as the expression of her desire to maintain her privacy. From a feminist point of view, it can be seen as the 'typical thing' women poets did in order to circumvent an immediate negative response to their work and to be taken seriously as a poet. In compliance with such considerations, Evelyn is an androgynous pseudonym conveying the poet's desire to be seen as an artist irrespective of gender, which complies with Virginia Woolf's notion of androgyny in *A Room of One's Own.*[202] In a letter to Sidgwick and Jackson, her publishers in London, Bethell explained the choice of the first name 'Evelyn' as a "cowardly vagueness of gender."[203] It is this 'gender issue' that apparently

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201 M.H. Holcroft, *Mary Ursula Bethell* (1975).

202 In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf writes of George Eliot, as the epitome of a great writer, and his seclusion in a cottage in St. John's Wood "cut off from what is called the world" (106f) which can be related to Ursula Bethell living at Rise Cottage similarly remote from leading a conventional life. Moreover, Woolf stresses the freedom of the creative mind in saying that "a great mind is androgynous" (149)

203 Vincent O'Sullivan, "Introduction" *Ursula Bethell Collected Poems*. (1994): xii.

troubled many critics[204] who tried to conceal the fact that Bethell was living with Effie Pollen. An intimate lesbian relationship might have rendered Bethell less as a respectable and more as a deviant woman.[205] Apart from the question of propriety, it is quite understandable that Bethell's supportive critics shied away from this issue since homosexuality – at least for men – was condemned as a crime at the beginning of the 20th century.[206]

Only few critics, such as Anne Else and Janet Charman, considered it necessary to take Bethell's lesbian identity into account in order to be able to get a grasp of Bethell's subtleties, in particular with regard to gender determination.[207] In such a frame of thought, Bethell's garden can be read as reaching beyond the boundaries of standard sexual normativity. Her extensive exploration of relationships and communication in the garden resonates in recent gender/ queer studies contexts as breaking the boundaries of heteronormative spaces – spaces that are constructed as gendered spaces on the basis of standard heterosexual gender norms.[208] Bethell challenges the construction of gendered spaces not only on the basis of female versus male but also in the context of homosexuality.

Her bemused ironic play with conventional gender roles can best be seen in the poem "Grace" in which the poetic voice is seemingly 'husbandly'. The poem enacts a clichéd husband-wife relationship

> she feeds me, she scolds me
> she scolds me, she feeds me,
> I'm a hungry old sinner,
> she brings me my dinner
>
> (Grace, 7-10)

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204 H.C.D Somerset, D'Arcy Cresswell, M.H. Holcroft et al. "Ursula Bethell : some personal memories" (1948).

205 In New Zealand the public discussion centred on the husband-wife relationship as the moral prerogative for clean homes and a clean nation. Issues in this debate were the spread of veneral disease by prostitutes. The argument was conducted along the same lines as banning masturbation which reveals a strong angst with regard to 'deviant' sexual practices. Andrée Lévesque "Prescribers and Rebels: Attitudes to European Women's Sexuality in New Zealand, 1860-1916" (1989): 1-12.

206 It was in the same year Bethell published her first volume of poetry that Norris Davey (later Frank Sargeson) was arrested at a boarding house with Leonard Hollobon and charged with performing 'indecent acts'. In October 1929, Norris Davey was convicted and given a suspended sentence (in return for giving evidence) see: http://www.queerhistory.net.nz/Part1.html

207 Janet Charman, "My Ursula Bethell" (1998): 98

208 Gil Valentine, "(Hetero)sexing space: lesbian perceptions and experiences of everyday spaces." (1993): 395-7.

At first glance, these lines depict a stereotypical heterosexual couple at the dinner table. At a second glance, however, the gender role play is disquieting for Bethell's contemporary audience because her play with masculine and feminine does not remain in a standard conventional frame. Since it was common currency that the author of *From a Garden in the Antipodes* was a woman,[209] Bethell's readers assumed a female voice behind the poetic speaker so that the relationship, which is so intimately conveyed in this poem, as a matter of fact points at a homosexual couple.

Such plays with gender role stereotypes run like a red thread through Bethell's early poems. She often enacts them through spatial imagery, most prominently the garden. Her awareness of the gendering of space can be seen in the poem "Discipline"[210], where the poetic voice is drawn away from "considering roses in the garden" (Discipline, 1) and "made to sit down and scrape potatoes" (Discipline, 4) instead:

> 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.
>
> (Discipline, 1-6)

The gender of the disciplined person is not clear, however the distinction between masculine (outdoor) space and feminine (indoor) space is. The speaker is drawn from the outside to the inside, which suggests a movement from the public realm into the inner circle of the house and hearth. In a conventional (heterosexual) reading, it immediately suggests that the man is called into the house by the wife to help her with the housework. In this reading, the poem sounds ironic and funny.

However, the gender assignation is not as clear-cut. It is in the gender ambiguity that this poem gains in strength and depth. The poetic persona wants to "observe the deployment of [the roses'] petals/ and compare one variety with another" (2-3). This contemplation of the roses is not a purely aesthetic activity, but the observer casts a scientific, empirical eye on them.

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209 Janet Charman, "My Ursula Bethell" (1998): 98.

210 Ursula Bethell, *Collected Poems.* (1994): 9.

Conventionally speaking, roses are associated with beauty and thus related to feminine features. Bethell's choice of intertwining the image of the roses with an analytical eye collecting empirical data renders the contemplation of the roses as a masculine activity. The garden becomes a Space of Overlap, a setting in which Bethell can play with the readers' expectations to the extent that she manages not only to blur the boundary between public and private but even more so the rigid dichotomy between male and female, masculine and feminine features.

In doing so, Bethell skilfully avoids drawing a frontier between the domestic and the public, daily life and art, and in effect the male and female gender role. I argue that Bethell employs the poem as an interface to negotiate conventional expectations and to enact an ironic play on gender stereotypes. In this way, the garden is also a Space of Mediation in which Bethell manages to *verdichten* the construction, not only of public and private, but also of gender roles alongside a binary paradigm. In the end, the poem resolves the contention in the shared meal when the "taste of the potatoes was satisfactory" (Discipline, 9).[211]

Apart from the autobiographical undertones, which have been read as depicting Bethell's relationship with Pollen in their garden,[212] the gender issue raised in this poem reaches into a different discourse. By reading "Discipline" according to Virginia Woolf's agenda of the artist attaining her own room, the garden is the experimental lab of its gardener in more than one way. The scientific research in the garden reveals the seemingly 'masculine mind' of a woman artist. I argue that, with this shifting of gender characteristics, Bethell protests against her confinement as a woman artist and academic in New Zealand of the 1930s.

In "Perspective", the dialogue with someone from the outside of the garden depicts Bethell's garden as a threshold between the public and the

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[211] Since the taste of the potatoes describes a very physical satisfaction, this can also be read as a sensual picture. In "Spring Storm", Bethell is more explicit about the sensual undertone when fusing bodily female attraction with the land. The poetic 'protagonist' Primavera (the spring) is awakened and rides the spring storm. ("Spring Storm", 11-15) Janet Charman calls this "Eros embodied in the landscape" (Charman, 101). Such tangible sensations can be found in the garden poems only in the gardening activity or in the plants which renders the garden as the figurative expression of Bethell's desires, an aspect that provides impetus to further investigation outside of this thesis.

[212] Janet Charman, "My Ursula Bethell" (1998): 94-5.

private. Bethell uses the perspective of two people, that of a 'right-minded person' (Perspective, 3) and that of the poetic speaker who says:

> I find vegetables fatiguing
> And would rather buy them in a shop.
> But to the right-minded person the soul of his holding
> Is the parallel-rowed, neat, early, vegetable plot.
>
> (Perspective, 1-4)

This first perspective on the garden displays the utilitarian character of the garden as a vegetable source for supplying the household and the householder, even if the poetic speaker is clearly bored by this way of looking at the garden. She[213] has a completely different view on the garden and looks at it more with an artist's, one might even say painter's eye,[214] rather than a conventional gardener's.

> 'I hope you like the colour-pattern of this garden,-
> White flowering creepers by the white painted cottage,
> By the middle path red roses, purple underlings,
> By the east path yellow, and pale and dark violet,
> Here gentlest pink all interspersed with lilac,
> And here I design blues, sapphire blues-
> Rich and rejoicing, is it not, to the spectator?
>
> (Perspective, 5-11)

This second perspective is a lot more enthusiastic and reveals the artistic achievement of the gardener. The last line of the stanza, however, breaks the poetic dialogue with the help of two technical cues. First, the line is formally set off from the rest of the stanza. Second, the grammatical ambiguity dissolves the distinction between the poetic addressee and the readers. As a result, the readers feel as if they are directly addressed, as if the poetic speaker asks them to be the judges of the two different perspectives in the poem. With such a confidentiality, the poems transcends the purely poetic realm.

In the closure of the poem, the garden is the object of a double standard of expectations and conventions. Bethell's critique focuses on the preconceived notions of the 'right-minded person' who pays compliments to the woman of the house in praising her vegetable garden.

> 'Yes, very nice, very nice indeed …

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[213] In cases in which the critical convention asks for a gender neutral statement, in particular with regard to the notion of the poetic speaker, I will use the female form to make the argument more reader-friendly. The other sex is however also implied.

[214] Gregory Treadwell, *A Painter's Eye : The Poems of Ursula Bethell* (1994).

How well your beans and cabbages are coming on.'

(Perspective, 12/13)

This not only reveals the standard convention of seeing the woman as the housekeeper and gardener, it also alludes to her nurturing duty. Due to the strong interference of gender role convention in the dialogue of the two people involved, the conversation drifts into the void to the extent that the speaker perceives the comments in the last line as an almost deliberate misunderstanding by the invited person who comments on the vegetables rather than giving his or her attention to the beauty of the colour arrangements. Such a closure suggests that the gardener feels condescended by the visitor who perceives her as a stereotype rather than an individual creative mind. 'Right-minded' in this context also reads like an ironic allusion to most people bowing to conventions.

The condescension of the visitor reads like an allegory to the pervasive public opinion of women writing literature in the 1930s. As much as the visitor in the poem refuses to see the artist, in particular the woman as artist, people involved in the public debates, usually men, rather condescendingly, perceived women's poetry from a somewhat 19th century perspective as genteel pastime rather than real art. Again, the words of Virginia Woolf resonate in this train of thought. She criticises an "external authority"[215] that discards literature which evolves from the domestic world as being trivial without paying proper attention to the quality of the writing. The poem does, however, not end on an angry note. The readers are trusted to perceive the mismatch and the hidden agenda of the condescension from the part of the visitor. Yet again, Bethell's skilful play with double standards reveals her subtle, but nonetheless sharp, criticism of the male establishment in New Zealand's intellectual scene.

Through the image of the gardening, Bethell makes clear that women participate significantly not only in the physical and social but also the cultural 'design' of New Zealand. Through her poetry, she paves the way for such a perception to reach the public eye and become, as she so tellingly points out in "Time", established.

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[215] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own.* (1929): 111.

'Established' is a good word, much used in garden books,
'The plant, when established' . . .
Oh, become established quickly, quickly, garden
For I am fugitive, I am very fugitive - - -

(Time, 1-4)

The insistence on the term 'established' with an almost childlike and naïve urgency not only provokes a strong resonance in the context of New Zealand as home but also in the context of poetry as home ground. In compliance with the closure of the stanza, it can be read as a yearning for the state of fugitive to come to an end and to recognise New Zealand as home, an issue that concerned her in general as some of her friends recalled upon remembering her posthumously.[216] One might say that the extended metaphor of the garden in her first volume of poetry is deliberately designed as a neutral ground for counterbalancing the enthusiastic embrace of New Zealand as the new nation, which was often all too rigidly designed along gender-related separation of public and private spaces.

In her poetry, Bethell creates a visionary space in the form of the antipodean garden. This vision not only exists in her poetry but is also closely linked to her actual life, a reciprocity commented upon by friends and critics, who also consider the naming of Rise Cottage part of Bethell's construction of home. O'Sullivan suggests with a "touch of irony at the disparity in scale, she called her new home 'Rise Cottage'."[217] Holcroft suggested that she might value "accuracy, and named her new home Rise Cottage – remembering as she did so Rise Hall, the family home in Yorkshire."[218] But from a more recent socio-cultural point of view the "fashionability of her place"[219], as Janet Charman states, cannot be left out.

Seen side by side, these comments also reflect the different agendas and critical positions from which to perceive not only the home of the poet, but also her work. The ambiguity amongst the critical reception shows that the

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[216] H.C.D. Somerset remembers her thus: "A member of a pioneering family, she had spent her early years in North Canterbury and so had a keen interest in rural problems. She wanted to see people really *established* on the land-." H.C.D Somerset, D'Arcy Cresswell, M.H. Holcroft et al., "Ursula Bethell : some personal memories" (1948): 276.

[217] The use of the term 'home' can be confusing in the context of my argument. I believe that O'Sullivan uses it synonymous to the house which renders the term too simplified in my analysis of it. Vincent O'Sullivan, "Introduction" *Ursula Bethell Collected Poems*. (1994): xi.

[218] M.H. Holcroft, *Mary Ursula Bethell* (1975): 12.

[219] Janet Charman, "My Ursula Bethell" (1998): 92.

home that evolved around Rise Cottage in terminology, in reality and certainly in the poems is an integral part of Bethell's personal concept of home. After Effie Pollen's death, it becomes clear that home not only depicted the place but even more so the relationship with Effie Pollen. After the death of her companion, Bethell writes to Holcroft that

> it means […] a complete shattering of my life; from her I have had love, tenderness, & understanding for 30 years, & close & happy companionship […] in this house for 10 years. I shall not want another home on this planet.[220]

Bethell carefully distinguished between the house and the home which shows that the two were different concepts for her.

As such, Rise Cottage and its garden is never merely the physical place. It is the figurative space Bethell created for herself, a space that existed in real terms on Cashmere Hills but even more so in the poetic imagination and Bethell's discursive presence. It is therefore justified to say that Bethell's poetic garden space becomes a model for future women poets and artists who feel the need to break free from their assigned gender roles and the related social conventions thereof. Bethell's successors, such as Mary Stanley and Lauris Edmond, also sought the space of poetry to generate a more viable home ground in art. Both poets drew a distinct line between the socio-cultural reality of the home space in the domestic environment and the expression of their home space in poetry.

In reading the emphasis on 'established' in the poem "Time" from the point of view of a lesbian voice, it can be regarded as expressing the desire to break the shackles of heteronormativity that are tied to the home in a society that focuses on the husband-wife relationship and turns the woman into an icon of the happy housekeeper and guardian of the nation.[221] Poetry, in this case, is Bethell's space of refuge from socio-cultural convention. The wish to escape standard expectations is underlined by the anaphoric urgency "I am fugitive, I am very fugitive - - -" (l. 4) at the closure of the first stanza in "Time". The personal outcry translates into a cultural statement.

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220 M.H. Holcroft, *Mary Ursula Bethell* (1975): 13-4.

221 Margaret Tennant, "Natural Directions. The New Zealand Movement for Sexual Differentiation in Education during the Early Twentieth Century" (1986): 90.

It is not only on such occasions that Bethell's investigation into what constitutes the home extends a personal agenda. In her poem "Controversy"[222] Bethell alternates between depictions of the dwelling house and the demesne, i.e. the territory surrounding it and eventually enters an interior landscape, which prompts the readers to investigate their concepts of home.

> Controversy
>
> There is perpetual contention
> Between the guardians of the dwelling house and the demesne.
>
> Shall the garden be a paradise,
> And the inside of the cottage a shambles?
>
> Or contrariwise, the garden a wilderness,
> While we preserve the image of a Dutch interior?
>
> While one cries out The wash-up waits!'
> The other murmurs wistfully The lawns! the lawns!'
>
> Tell me now, what is your dream-
> The neatest apartment in Knightsbridge?
> Or in a deep glade of Eden a booth of green boughs?

The perpetual contention between good and bad, beautiful and ugly, indoor and outdoor is conveyed in couplets that leave no space for an overlap of the two positions. This contention is acted out through the dichotomy of paradise and shamble and, most prominently, of nature and culture.

It is in the last stanza that Bethell's skilful play with binary opposition reaches a multi-dimensional climax in linking gender with space, space with cultural convention, and culture with identity since the dichotomy of the urban and the rural translates into England versus New Zealand. Thus, it is not only a poem that touches on the diversity of the two worlds that inhabit Bethell's creative mind, it is a poem that digs into the New Zealand problem of being torn between. The 1930s were a difficult time for New Zealand, when established notions, such as being a farming country, fell apart and New Zealand realized that it had a higher percentage of people living in urban than in rural areas. Yet, the country's economy was heavily reliant on agricultural products. Politically speaking, New Zealand's dominion government was more and more challenged to make decisions that deviated from British

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222 Ursula Bethell, *Collected Poems* (1994): 12.

policies.[223] Thus the last stanza of the poem captures New Zealand's public debate in a nutshell with the question: "Tell me now, what is your dream?"

The Edenic quality of the garden in the last line of "Controversy" when the poetic speaker asks whether the readers dream of "a deep glade of Eden a booth of green boughs?", corresponds to the garden metaphor in the last line of the poem "Time":

> Planned. Planted. Established. Then neglected,
> 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.'
>
> (Time, l. 8-12)

Bethell writes with the awareness that the home space she created in her poetry and on the Cashmere Hills can wither away like the plants in the garden. This adds an organic quality to Bethell's poetic home spaces, "those small fond human enclosures" (Pause, 18); in my view, it conveys the transient character of homes and shows that her vision extends beyond the physical boundary of the garden into more philosophical spheres.

The garden space in the poems of *From a Garden in the Antipodes* is Bethell's clearest depiction of home space in her poetry; it is the core of her poetic perception and speaks of the desire to be taken seriously as an artist, an intellectual and a woman. At the same time, it reaches beyond the standard metaphoric reading of the garden as a "symbolic extension of her own soul and body,"[224] to re-quote Baxter's statement. Bethell's poems show that their author was well aware of current affairs in New Zealand society at the time and negotiated many of her society's contentions. And when Janet Charman says that Bethell is today "entitled to recognition as a lesbian [and that] she constructed a satisfactory path through the homophobia of her own time,"[225] it is clear that Bethell's garden allows for a third space to evolve which breaks free from more than the public/ private dichotomy.

Ursula Bethell did not try to be overtly political, nor did she stress the fact that she was living with a woman. From today's liberal point of view, a

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223 Dorothy Page exemplifies the political conflicts through the question of women's nationality in her essay "Women and Nationality. Feminist Organisations in the Inter-War Period" (1986): 156-75.

224 Frank McKay, *James K. Baxter as Critic. A selection from his literary criticism*. (1978): 89.

225 Janet Charman, "My Ursula Bethell" (1998): 105.

refusal to acknowledge this, as her contemporary critics have done, would be overlooking a valuable part of her poetic expression. Hence, an analysis without the sting of gender ambiguity would not only have us miss out on the pleasures of tongue-in-cheek references to gender role stereotypes in Bethell's poetry; it would furthermore lead to underestimating her gender criticism and to mainstreaming women's socio-cultural experience in New Zealand of the 1930s.

4.4 Half the World from Home?

The epigraph from Bethell's first volume had cast a long post-colonial shadow on the assessment of her as a New Zealand poet. She came to be considered as a colonial writer who lived amongst her educated circle of friends and to whom culture mattered in a European sense of the word. However this narrow assessment of her as a colonial does not pay justice to the scope of her poetic vision. In this unit, I will show how Bethell questions the notorious perception of feeling half the world from home, and I will argue that Bethell's poetry reveals a new sensitivity towards New Zealand as home country.

Even though there is no denying the fact that Bethell did express feelings of homesickness, it is also necessary to point out that the homesickness she expresses in her poetry stems from an authentically felt homesickness,[226] and not a projected nostalgic one. "Primavera"[227], a poem from her first collection, had been termed "the most 'homesick' for England" of Bethell's poems[228] but I argue that the poem expresses a new coming-to-terms with New Zealand as home

> I must pass you by, primroses. I must pass you by
> When I boast of the fair flowers translated to please our eye,-
> The sight of you here under the apple-tree has too sweet a sting.
> So like, so unlike the sight of you in an English orchard in spring.
>
> You should not be here, primroses, yet must I have you here

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[226] She had family members living in Britain, in particular her sister Rhoda. "'Home' was not […] a place of sentimental pilgrimage but remembered faces and houses. […] The tug [Bethell] felt from England was personal, touching her feelings; and in those days, when letters came by sea and needed five weeks for the voyage, separation could seem to have a painful finality." M.H. Holcroft, *Mary Ursula Bethell* (1975): 16-17.

[227] Ursula Bethell, *Collected Poems* (1994): 6-7.

[228] Janet Charman, "My Ursula Bethell" (1998): 94.

> To look up at us with your patient smile in the strange spring of
> the year-
> The strange September spring, whereas in April we should be
> In the greenwoods or ever their green veil has lost transparency.
>
> (Primavera, 1-8)

The primroses are the symbolic carriers of a physical and a cultural negotiation of Britain and New Zealand. Foreign to New Zealand's native flora, primroses were generally planted, together with various other European plants, in the colonies to make the unfamiliar environment more 'homely'. With phrases such as "[s]o like, so unlike the sight of you in an English orchard in spring (Primavera, 4), or with the thoughtful pondering of "you should not be here, primroses, yet must I have you here" (Primavera, 5), Bethell's poem grapples with the negotiation of two homes. However, her poetic path leads away from simple dualist notions of either Home or exile. The primroses symbolize the contention between two cultures, and it is through the cultural connotations they trigger that Bethell negotiates past and present.

> If you were nothing more, primroses, than yellow and sweet,
> I would ask Time to turn back again that youth and I might meet,
> That I might go looking for you in a winding English lane,
> And your tender fragrance so fresh in the mist, in the rain-
>
> But there are reasons, primroses, there are secret reasons,
> Why we shall not resent the sure process of the seasons,
> Our transitory springtime and the quick passing of the years,
> But like you with the dew on you smile up through our tears!
>
> (Primavera, 17-24)

Despite the obvious sadness conveyed with the tears that correspond to the dew on the primroses, the poetic speaker maintains a clear sight of the present and does not lose herself in nostalgic dreams. Homesick though the speaker in the poem undoubtedly is, Bethell's poem reveals what S.A. Grave had observed in his article on her poetry, namely that

> to be a New Zealander is to be the product of two worlds – a culture insensitive to either would contradict the geography and history of New Zealand – and to belong to one.[229]

[229] S.A. Grave, "The image of New Zealand in the poetry of Ursula Bethell" (1954): 387.

"Primavera" enacts the negotiation of the two cultures through anthropomorphising the flowers. As the actual protagonists in the poem, the flowers mirror the settlers' task to physically and culturally engage in making a home at the 'other end of the world'. With unconcealed honesty the poetic voice admits to being torn between two home countries:

> The sight of you here under the apple tree has so sweet a sting,
> —And in patria, primroses, in patria?
>
> (Primavera, 31/32)

In the last line, Bethell locates the primroses visually and grammatically between two homelands. The primroses are torn between and Bethell skilfully conveys this through the word order. After the speaker's first calling of 'patria', the primroses seem to be in place. However, through the second calling of 'patria' in conjunction with the question mark, the assignation of the primroses to one single 'patria' is challenged. The last line in "Primavera" conveys both the longing for and the disconnection from a mother country half the world away while a potential home country is at one's doorstep. The primroses as symbolic carriers of home are strategically positioned at the intersection of a past and a present home country, which prompts me to conclude that two concepts of home overlap in the image of the primroses. Part of both worlds, the English Home country and the New Zealand soil, the image of the primroses expresses the potential of uniting two cultural streams in one.

In my view, Bethell intertwines the connotation of two geographies in the image of the primroses to the effect that they turn into the carrier for a third, a new sensitivity to the here and now in New Zealand. In keeping with the garden metaphor, Ursula Bethell carefully breeds a new sensitivity to the land in her antipodean garden that connects to her predecessor Blanche Baughan (1870-1958), who was one of the first New Zealand poets to cast an honest eye on life in New Zealand landscape without glossing over the hardship of farm work. Her poem "A Bush Section" can be regarded as a signpost to the white settlers' inner struggles with accepting New Zealand, not only physically but emotionally and culturally, as home territory.

"A Bush Section" was on one occasion considered to be the "best New Zealand poem before Mason's."[230] Baughan's poem outlines the feeling to be caught between two worlds, and the notorious feeling of being forced to make a home in a country that is not yet home to the imagination. "A Bush Section" describes the process of making the land arable while coming to terms with the New Zealand landscape as an emotional home.

> Ay, the fire went through and the Bush has departed,
> The green Bush departed, green Clearing is not yet come.
> 'Tis a silent skeleton world;
> Dead, and not yet re-born,
> Made, unmade and scarcely as yet in the making;
> Ruin'd, forlorn, and blank.
>
> (A Bush Section, 11-16)

In Baughan's gloomy depiction of a skeleton world, devoid of beauty, New Zealand is a place of hardship. The "clearings that are not yet come" (12) also indicate a fundamental Victorian faith that nature can be tamed. The image of the garden that shines through in these lines is the ultimate goal of the settlers' endeavours

> [t]ill the skeleton valleys and hills
> With greenness and growing, with multiplied being and
> movement,
> Changeful, living, rejoice!
>
> (A Bush Section, 208-10)

Baughan does not romanticise the garden as a compensation for a lost home but plays upon the binary distinction between wilderness and cultivation. The 'clearing that is not yet come' can be read as a metaphor for wanting to cultivate the wild country, not only in physical terms, but also in spiritual ones. In such instances, Baughan discloses her belief in the pervasive 'Pastoral Myth' or 'Pastoral Paradise'[231] wanting to turn

> New Zealand into England's profitable overseas farm and garden […] building in New Zealand a just and harmonious society.[232]

Such a goal derived from a British middle class nostalgia for what they had left behind in Britain. Even though Baughan did not gloss over the hardship

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230 MacD. P. Jackson, "Poetry: Beginnings to 1945" (1991): 362.

231 Lawrence Jones, "Versions of the Dream: Literature and the Search for Identity" (1989) and Claudia Bell, *Inventing New Zealand. Everyday Myths of Pakeha Identity* (1996).

232 Lawrence Jones, "Versions of the Dream: Literature and the Search for Identity" (1989): 187.

of farm work in New Zealand and stopped idealising New Zealand daily life, she reveals herself to follow the cultural paradigms of her home culture wanting to establish an English home in New Zealand. Bethell's coming to terms with New Zealand as home no longer reflects Baughan's skeleton world but moves on to the next stage of cultivating a home land.

The poem "Mail"[233] is another example of Bethell compounding two concepts of home into a new one. And again, the poetic persona is in the garden. She interrupts her garden work in expectance of mail from overseas.

> But I laid down my trowel when I heard the postman's whistle,
> For I knew that he might bring an ocean-mail,
> Went up to the gate-box and there found your letter,
> And left my dahlias dormant in their nest.
>
> You had been out walking on a Sunday,
> And in the Regent's Park had much admired fine dahlias,
> All with their names, in ranks, magnificent.
>
> I could not go on with my gardening
> For dreaming of loved and lost London,
> And Regent's Park on summer Saturdays,
> And hearing the shrill calls of young boys playing cricket.
> And ceaseless distant scream of captive seals.
>
> (Mail, 7-18)

The dream of England is reduced to London, to a picture-book London that depicts Regent's park on a sunny Saturday. And although it is not as real as the trowel and the garden, this dream captures the speaker's full attention. The wave of homesickness cuts like a knife into the daily routine of the gardener so that the two worlds that inhabit her mind become visible.

"Mail" might tell of Bethell's pain of being separated from friends and family in London but it also shows the poet's strong sense of a physical home in the soil of New Zealand. This is particularly apparent in the subtle positive statements about New Zealand that can only be found in *absence présente*. It is as if the realization that New Zealand is as a positive home space seeps in without the poet or the speaker noticing. The speaker for instance remembers the *shrill* calls of boys, and the *ceaseless* distant *scream* of *captive* seals. This is anything but a rose-tinted vision of England. It is rather the opposite when one considers what is not said, namely that seals in New Zealand do not live

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[233] from the collection *From a Garden in the Antipodes* (1929) in Ursula Bethell, *Collected Poems* (1994): 10.

in captivity but in freedom. Furthermore, gardens in New Zealand as opposed to London's Regent's Park are not artificial oases of urban life; they are less landscaped and more natural thus providing people with more freedom.

The most striking subtle allusion is however the homophone connection between seal and soul which might lead to a reading that conveys the opposite of what the surface meaning suggests, namely that the soul lives in captivity in England whereas it is set free in New Zealand. Against the backdrop of gender identity, this might be a crucial aspect of Bethell's choice of living in New Zealand. In a purely autobiographical reading, one might say that – to quote a famous line from Emily Dickinson – Bethell's soul has selected her society, and it is not England.

The reading of these two poems shows that Bethell skilfully negotiates homesickness for England while being part of an emerging New Zealand self-awareness. I argue that Bethell's extensive use of the garden setting is not only effective on a personal scale but becomes a platform on which the poet allows for two cultural affiliations to meet. The garden is the Space of Overlap in Bethell's poetry: it brings together the two worlds within the European settlers' minds and provides the space in which to develop a new response to New Zealand as home ground, which has the potential to develop into a distinctive marker of white European sensibility.

These issues surface more clearly in Bethell's second volume *Time and Place* (1936). Again the choice of title indicates the major themes addressed in this volume. Time and place, history and geography are Bethell's recurrent concerns, suggesting that seeing New Zealand as home country for the imagination is one of the author's primary focal points. O'Sullivan considered Bethell a colonial with a clear sense of the traditions she has to negotiate.

> 'Colonial' in her case, primarily takes one to that common enough circumstance in any new literature, the need to be fed by two sources at once. As she [Bethell] made clear, she was emotionally committed to a tradition that was moving – however slightly – beyond her immediate grasp, and at the same time confronting a present which demanded not only a different eye, but attempts at a differently modulated voice. (O'Sullivan, *Introduction*: xv)

It is in particular the 'different eye' O'Sullivan mentions in this criticism that is crucial when analysing Bethell's awareness of New Zealand as home. In the

poems "Levavi Oculos"[234] and "The Long Harbour"[235], Bethell's fresh look at New Zealand as the physical home ground and her sensitivity to the settlers' dilemma of being drawn to England as the cultural centre signal a new development in New Zealand poetic imagination.

4.4.1 Lifting the Eyes: "Levavi Oculos"

"Levavi Oculos" is one of Bethell's most complex and multi-layered poems with regard to establishing New Zealand as a home for the imagination. It corresponds to Bethell's most famous poem "Pause" which is often quoted as the indicator poem for a new response to New Zealand as home country.

> When I am very earnestly digging
> I lift my head sometimes, and look at the mountains,
> And I muse upon them, muscles relaxing
>
> (Pause, 1-3)

Although "Pause" was highly praised by critics, they have shied away from in-depth analyses of "Levavi Oculos", arguing that the words of the poem

> may seem to have been chosen for strangeness rather than exactness, and are [thus] less successful. It may be true that 'paduasoy', in "Levavi Oculos", allows the poet to use one word instead of several to describe a corded silk first made in Padua; but it turns a reader towards a dictionary instead of the tussock hills whose texture she is trying to suggest.[236]

I argue that the wording is a crucial indicator for Behell's lifting not only her eyes but also those of her fellow New Zealanders. The Latin phrase 'levavi oculos' that translates into "I have lifted my eyes" is title, motto and leitmotif of the poem. As much as the Latin phrase needs translation, I argue that Bethell's poetic voice sees the need to trans-late – in the sense of the latin word 'tra-dere' meaning 'handing' down or 'carry across' –the visual impression into words while making the layers of preconceived cultural association visible.

In the first two stanzas of "Levavi Oculos", the poetic voice presents New Zealand in visual impressions as if she were describing a painting:

> The delicate lines of the hills of this country,

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234 Ursula Bethell, *Collected Poems* (1994): 33-34.

235 Ibid: 29-30.

236 M.H. Holcroft, *Mary Ursula Bethell* (1975): 30-1.

Rain-swept and sun-tanned, naked to the four winds,
Console our tired eyes as the high-lineaged kine do,
With their fine-chiselled flanks in a near field reclined,
Bring solace, calm as the quiet hills are,
Composed of the same lineaments in one design.

These tussocked hills have the texture of paduasoy,
Seen afar off, or a venerable mere[237] smoothed
And soft-surfaced by immemorial friction;
Or of brown-leathered, road-worn shoes;
Or of shrine steps, foot-rounded by pilgrims,
Or a dun-wooded, kiss-saluted rood.

(Levavi Oculos, l. 1-12)

The anthropomorphism of the country as being 'rain-swept, sun-tanned and naked' holds a strong resemblance to the Maori legend of *Papatuanuku*, the earth mother, who after the separation from *Rangi*, the earth father, was exposed to the dawn of the first day.[238] The naked earth indicates a new beginning, a fresh soil in which plants can grow roots, which is why I argue that the poet can be seen as acting like a cultural gardener cum archaeologist who reads the stories of the land and cultivates new history on its soil. The unspoilt nature of the countryside, suggested by the nakedness, stands in opposition to the archaic wording which signals just the opposite, namely the layering of New Zealand by European cultural concepts.

Hence, one might say that Bethell deliberately chose "strangeness rather than exactness"[239] in order to alienate her readers from the New Zealand landscape, which was often merely appreciated as arable land or bush. Bethell's artistic focus has two effects: one is the perception of the landscape as artificial and the other is the recognition of preconceived notions in this artificiality. In this sense, "Levavi Oculos" turns the physical landscape into a cultural canvas on which to constitute New Zealand as home.

Interestingly, the poem refers to a tribal history that is not solely a Maori tribal history but includes all "foreign tribes, (even ours, ours the invaders)" (Levavi Oculos, 15), thus seeing the British colonists as a tribe, too. In the 1930s, this was a rather revolutionary perception, which has only over the past two decades found a more widespread audience. In the late

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237 A *mere* is a short flat club, a Maori weapon. P.M. Ryan, *Dictionary of Modern Maori* (1994).

238 Thomas Sebastian Franck, *Mythen der Maori. Geschichten von Neuseeelands ersten Menschen* (1997).

239 M.H. Holcroft, *Mary Ursula Bethell* (1975): 31-2.

1990s New Zealand started to perceive itself not only as a bicultural nation but also as a country of immigrants, most tellingly in the display in the national Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington, which opened in 1998. The most symbolic exhibition of Te Papa is the indoor *marae,* traditionally a Maori meeting house that displays a tribe's history by means of carvings inside the building. The *marae* in the museum incorporates not only the mythological history of the Maori arriving at New Zealand shores, but also the European colonial and more recent migrant history of New Zealand. It thus unites more than one culture of New Zealand under one roof.

In "Levavi Oculos", Bethell not only lifts her eyes to cast a new look on the country, she also critically reviews New Zealand's historiography.

> These lines, at nightfall, […]
> […]
> Affect us as a faint air might, played upon a virginal,
> So long ago that all pain it held then is allayed;
> Or clarinet, so far distant it brings us but a memory
> Of healed lament, in the dim twilight, dying away.
>
> (Levavi Oculos, 19-24)

The instruments' music dying away conveys the fading influence of the European connotations and the speaker starts to re-consider New Zealand as a foreign land. Once again, Bethell creates an alienating effect when describing the waking up to a new dawn:

> These hills at dawn are of an austere architecture,
> Claustral; like a grave assembly, night-cold numbed,
> Of nuns, singing matins and lauds in perpetuity,
>
> (Levavi Oculos, l. 25-27)

This simile of the nuns' singing is meant to convey the awe-inspiring presence of and the reverence for the New Zealand wild countryside. The effect of correlating the land to the ecclesiastical singing is two-fold. On the one hand, these lines convey the beautiful and sublime features of the New Zealand landscape that failed to be recognised due to the cultural layering induced by the colonists' nostalgia. On the other hand, the image is evidently foreign to New Zealand, which cannot build on such an ecclesiastical tradition. While the day unfolds in the poem, the vision of the speaker becomes more light-

hearted, which is suggested in the imagery that lies closer to the here and now than to past traditions.

> At sunrise carmined, gilded; as of rare cosmetics
> A girl takes, for more beauty now, lest her lover come.
>
> But at midday, the bare hills have a remote wildness,
> Like a young colt or filly, unrestrained
>
> (Levavi Oculos, l. 29-32)

New Zealand is no longer pictured as a grave and austere place but as a joyful and young country in the image of the young girl putting on makeup. Through the underlying image of the sunrise, Bethell skilfully supports the clearing vision. In opposition to the painting process, I suggested earlier, Bethell's poem moves from sophistication to simplicity rather than the other way round. In my view, Bethell linguistically peels off various layers of cultural misconception in which New Zealand was previously clothed (or wrapped). Layer by layer, the poem gets rid of the unnecessary ballast that inhibited the look at the true image of the land and in the end leaves us with a simplified and 'lighter' image. Bethell skilfully supports this process through the two movements in the poems, that of the sun rising and the eyes lifting. In the end, the poem shows that it is possible to perceive New Zealand as a young country in as carefree a manner as a young colt or filly

> […] never having known bit nor bridle,
> Or lying down quiet, knowing nor spur nor rein …
> How often, on dusty plain pent, have I lifted up mine eyes there,
> And found freedom, and found mind-liberty again!
>
> (Levavi Oculos, l. 34-end)

Whereas in "Mail", the cry of the captive seals gloomily lingers on after the reading of the poem, the conclusion of "Levavi Oculos" shows how the poetic speaker has found 'freedom and mind liberty' again and expresses a strong affirmative 'yes' to New Zealand. Through having lifted her eyes, Bethell lifted the veil that inhibited the look at New Zealand.

With "Levavi Oculos", Bethell invites her readers to free themselves from cultural preconceptions and engage in a personal reconsideration and renegotiation of what being at home in New Zealand means with regard to the historical and above all cultural implications. With the poems in *Time and*

Place, Bethell often puts her finger on a sore point, i.e. the pervasive uneasiness at a time when

> New Zealand [became] strange to New Zealanders and they to themselves, as the illusion of a 'Home' in another country wore out and unfathomed locality broke in.[240]

"Levavi Oculos" successfully manages to acknowledge the pervasive feelings of strangeness and disillusionment without drowning in nostalgia or feeling exiled. Maybe more than any other poem of the 1930s, "Levavi Oculos" reveals that New Zealand had been a cultural artefact when New Zealand writers started to culturally conceive of it. Ursula Bethell's poem thus makes an important contribution to the constitution of New Zealand's cultural territory in the 20th century and lays the basis for a new poetic vision.

4.4.2 Anchoring in New Zealand: "The Long Harbour"

"The Long Harbour", one of Bethell's most anthologized poems and praised as "part of the poet's discovery – or rediscovery – of Canterbury,"[241] follows a chronological structure in telling New Zealand's history in brief.

> Grass springs sweet where once thick forest
> gripped vales by fire and axe freed to pasturage;
> but flame and blade have spared the folding gullies,
> and there, still, the shade-flitting, honey-sipping lutanists
> copy the dropping of tree-cool waters
> dripping from stone to stone.
>
> White hawthorn hedge from old, remembered England,
> and orchard white, and whiter bridal clematis
> the bush-bequeathed, conspire to strew the valleys
> in tender spring, and blackbird, happy colonist,
> and blacker, sweeter-fluter tui echo
> either the other's song.
>
> (The Long Harbour, 13-24)

As in "Levavi Oculos", Bethell confronts the readers with outdoor impressions from two cultures, such as the hawthorn hedge from England and the New Zealand bush. In fact, she seeks the tension between binary opposites, such as black and white, not demarcate boundaries but to unite, one might be inclined to say 'marry' (in reference to the bridal clematis), the two major cultures of New Zealand.

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240 S.A. Grave, "The image of New Zealand in the poetry of Ursula Bethell" (1954): 381.

241 M.H. Holcroft, *Mary Ursula Bethell* (1975): 23.

The blackbird, as a European species, is representative of the happy colonist: the *tui,* even blacker, points at the indigenous Maori. They do not meet, but echo each other's song, which might be an indication for both of them being 'the other' in the context of New Zealand. Both 'human species' migrated to New Zealand, both can thus be considered different tribes, which once again confirms that Bethell ventured way beyond the debates of her own times. In my perception, this reveals Bethell's appreciation of poetry as the most suitable platform for cultural encounter, a train of thought that is supported by the wider semantic meaning of song in the sense of lore, folklore and history so that " The Long Harbour " negotiates two cultures, two geographies and two histories in a similar way as "Levavi Oculos". In such instances, Bethell employs poetry as a Space of Overlap which reaches across cultures and above all across history. Poetry in this context becomes a visionary platform in which the question of identity in New Zealand can be (re)negotiated on neutral ground.

Holcroft praises "The Long Harbour" as having " compressed whole chapters of the colonial story [in a few stanzas]".[242] However, the poem not only tells of New Zealand's colonial past but investigates its emotional capacity.

> From far, palm-feathery, ocean-spattered islands
> there rowed hither dark and daring voyagers;
> and Norseman, Gaul, the Briton and the German
> sailed hither singing; all these hardy venturers
> they desired a home, and have taken their rest there,
> and their songs are lost on the wind.
>
> (The Long Harbour, 25-30)

Ursula Bethell's poem stresses that New Zealand is not only bound to Britain but that it has a history unique to the 'islands in the pacific' in which the British heritage is but one piece. The desire for home, expressed explicitly in this stanza reveals the dilemma of New Zealand colonial immigrants. They wished for a home but only took rest in New Zealand. And with the "songs lost on the wind" (30), the poem seems to lament the lack of poetic predecessors as much as criticise the persistence of the transitory home

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[242] M.H. Holcroft, *Mary Ursula Bethell* (1975): 25. In telling New Zealand's colonial history, Bethell's data is not exact because she does not mention the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman who was the first to arrive in New Zealand even though he did not colonise the country officially. She also does not mention various French explorers.

identity. This is yet another indicator for the changing sensibility at the time. The songs that are lost to the wind might also indicate the dissolving bonds to Britain as Home or the fact that these bonds have turned into cultural artefacts. As a result, the concept of home was more transitory than ever despite the repeated efforts to render it as a stable and reliable concept in the 1930s.

In revisiting New Zealand's history, Bethell can also be seen to take a an almost modern feminist stance since she introduces a particularly female heritage by means of remembering the lives of pioneer women on the hillside ossuary:

> those dauntless, tempest-braving ancestresses
> who pillowed there so gladly, gnarled hands folded,
> their tired, afore-translated bones.
>
> (The Long Harbour, 40-42)

The speaker feels in line with female ancestry, in particular the public women figures of the past. This women ancestry sets New Zealand apart from the mother country in being able to draw on a history of women in public which refers back to New Zealand women winning the vote as early as 1893. However, as I said in chapter two, women still came to be seen primarily as the guardians of the domestic sphere in their standard roles as housewives and mothers. Bethell does not want women to remain in such an ideological corner where their status and achievements are in the service of a patriarchal social structure. Instead, she acknowledges women's historic contribution to New Zealand society and culture. In "The Long Harbour", women are portrayed as active shapers of their country's history and not as its cultural containers and a-historic guardians of morale.

Ursula Bethell sees New Zealand's cultural historiography as its own rather than trying to put it into a discursive framework of preconceived (post)colonial notions. She lifts the poetic expression of New Zealand and puts it on a more philosophical level by means of picturing the search for home as an ongoing voyage. Such a reading is also embedded in recent considerations of culture studies. Bethell's concept of home thus steps beyond the national boundaries so heavily pronounced at her time of writing, indeed beyond the actual yearning for rootedness.

> It would not be a hard thing to wake up one morning
> to the sound of bird-song in scarce-stirring willow-trees,
> waves lapping, oars plashing, chains running slowly,
> and faint voices calling across the harbour;
> to embark at dawn, following the old forefathers.
> to put forth at daybreak for some lovelier,
> still undiscovered shore.
>
> (The Long Harbour, 43-48)

The issue of transience is strongly supported by a religious undertone,[243] which reveals that the home Bethell seeks is more existential than conventional. This existentialism is rooted in the poet's deep Christian faith,[244] which accounts for the more transient visions in Bethell's later poetry, in particular after the death of Effie Pollen, when Bethell needed a spiritual anchor point.

In *Time and Place,* Bethell displays her sense of the particular and the concrete, providing "insight into its universal significance."[245] This can be best seen in "By Burke's Pass"[246], a poem that not so much ponders about the question of New Zealand as home, but digs deeper into the philosophical resonance of the concept per se. Bethell relates the question of home to the whole universe, and not least to a Christian religious context:

> Nature, earth's angel, man's antagonist,
> The stern antagonist from whom he wrests his bread,
> Long heretofore with vast magnificence
> Did carve this scene, prepare the arena, spread
> Bronze tussocked terraces before precipitous
> Great purple alps, loose glacier-shed
> Fierce-laughing streams in circuitous riverbed.
>
> (By Burke's Pass, 1-7)

Nature is pictured as the antagonist of humankind. But the forces are not equal. In fact, the human endeavour to wrest the bread from the stern

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243 In this sense her ultimate physical home is the soil (which also reverberates in the focus of the garden) in the sense of 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust'. The material body will fulfil an organic lifecycle while the spirit will find the home in the life after death.

244 For a further elaboration of the religious themes in her writing see H.M. Holcoft *Mary Ursula Bethell* (1975) section IV: 31-41, where he speaks about her spiritual response to the landscape saying that "her response was shaped in part by her long and close acquaintance with the Bible." (32) In particular the presence of hills resonate in a biblical sense to the effect that "the hills and plains of Canterbury began also to have intimations of an apocalypse." (33) In acknowledgment of profound theological allusions, I will not pursue this issue in further detail since it would require too much explanation on the Biblical background.

245 S.A. Grave, "The image of New Zealand in the poetry of Ursula Bethell" (1954): 382.

246 Ursula Bethell, *Collected Poems* (1994): 36.

anatagonist reinforces the awe of nature and of the Creation. Humankind is but a transitory presence in this context and Bethell ironically refers to humankind depicting itself "vaingloriously" (By Burke's Pass, 13) as the crown of God's Creation. In the end of the poem, when "the small fond human enclosures" she spoke of in "Pause" are described as

> Homestead? Nay, halting-place, accommodation
> Achieved . . . […]
>
> (By Burke's Pass, l. 22-23)

Bethell's home vision becomes more philosophical in the awareness of human transitoriness. It is in this transient vision that Bethell resolves contentions and controversies about belonging and home, in particular in an autobiographical sense after the death of Effie Pollen.

4.5 Bethell: Visionary Poet Beyond her Time

Today, Ursula Bethell's far-reaching visions and her influence on New Zealand poetry are still underestimated. This might be due to the fact that critics did not start paying attention to the 1930s New Zealand poetry scene until the 1940s and 50s when New Zealand literary criticism first got under way. Critics looked back on this era of New Zealand poetic history and passed judgment on it, leaving out women like Bethell. She was mentioned and given due space in anthologies but was generally seen as a 'special case' rather than part of a 1930s poetics in New Zealand. For some critics, her literary youth seems to stand in opposition to her fifty years of age when she published her first volume. Holcroft argued that

> [s]he belonged to another generation, but escaped from it as a poet by using a diction so individual that it placed her outside the main currents of her time.[247]

Above all, she remained in the shadow of her male contemporary R.A.K. Mason, who was praised as New Zealand's literary forefather. Without wanting to diminish Mason's poetic achievement, I consider it high time to acknowledge the quality of Bethell's poetry which makes clear that the birth of a national poetry is not solely men's merit.[248]

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[247] M.H. Holcroft, *Mary Ursula Bethell* (1975): 42.

[248] Peter Simpson, *Look Back Harder: Critical Writings 1935-1984 Allen Curnow.* (1987): 35.

While she can be (and most often was) considered to be outside the mainstream of 1930s poetry, Bethell would not have fitted an earlier or later mainstream either.

> Bethell's verse is hardly served by lining it up against […] identity-kit assumptions. It is too intelligent, too closely contoured against the movement of an individual mind, to serve merely as illustration to a particular cultural movement.[249]

The lack of identity-kit features might have put Ursula Bethell on the margin of the 1930s poetry scene because it was then and there that such signals were sought. However, the close reading in this chapter has shown that Bethell's poetry is more than the mere illustration of New Zealand sensibilities in the 1930s. Her poetry successfully transcends the boundaries of local and even national socio-cultural contexts, indicating that her poetic quest leads her further to as yet undiscovered shores.

The last three lines of "July 9. 1932. 7 a.m." could be considered a signpost for future generations of New Zealand poets.

> There shall be no insistence upon symbolism;
> Let each eye take the tokens, heart interpret,
> individual tongue make fit respond.
>
> (July 9. 1932. 7 a.m., 9-11)

Bethell encourages writers to loosen the paradigmatic layers of the imagination and respond individually to their environment acknowledging that it is only through such individual response that poetry can become a true platform for the New Zealand imagination. Owing to my analysis of Ursula Bethell's poems, I argue that she wrote as someone with a clear perception of the emergence of a New Zealand cultural homeland. Contrary to the poetry of her male contemporaries, Bethell's poetry is more directed towards enriching cultural statements than challenging or directly confronting them. Her poetry acknowledges the physical reality in front of her eyes and displays a mature sensitivity to New Zealand that lays the foundation stone for the turn toward a novel human landscape in poetry. In the transient visions in *Time and Place* (1936) and *Day and Night: poems 1924-1935* (1939), her work exceeds the focus on the local and lifts the New Zealand imagination far beyond exile and 'Homesickness'.

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[249] Vincent O'Sullivan, "Introduction" *Ursula Bethell Collected Poems*. (1994): xv.

5 "I AM NOT MORE THAN MAN NOR LESS" MARY STANLEY'S *STARVELING YEAR*

The times after World War II in New Zealand are considered crucial for the emergence of the country's national identity, notably in literature and history.[250] The literary debate at the time was almost exclusively led by men so that women hardly ever featured to a significant extent. In retrospect, Mary Stanley is now often referred to as a talented writer but she has never been regarded as an important contributor to New Zealand's literary canon. This is partly due to her status as a woman in the 1950s and 60s in New Zealand and partly to her living in Auckland, where men dominated the publication media. The social and literary conventions of her time, in particular the Cult of Domesticity, did not leave much room for a married woman writer to obtain serious criticism of her work. The general opinion still was that "the woman has an expected role to play […] and the role of an artist, accepted seriously, would contradict this."[251] Some of Stanley's friends state that the constant condescension from the side of the male establishment eventually kept her from continuing to write. I consider Mary Stanley's *Starveling Year* (1953), singular though it unfortunately remains, an important witness of women's poetic response to post-war New Zealand. Stanley's biography is representative of those of many women in the 1950s who wrote but were never published, largely due to the tight patriarchal conventions.

The only critic who recognised Stanley as a promising poetic talent at the time she was published was James K. Baxter, who states that she writes "tenderly, but is never sentimental,"[252] something he regards as a sign of her maturity as a writer. Stanley's poetry reveals a versatile voice that is skilled in different styles; her poems are carefully crafted, often employing literary and profoundly philosophical themes as vehicles for her criticism of broader social, cultural and political issues. For the better understanding of the scope of Stanley's poetry, it will be crucial to illuminate the literary debate after World War II. This was not only a groundbreaking era in New Zealand

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250 Robert Rabel, "War History as Public History: Past and Future" (2001): 55-65.

251 Frank McKay, *James K. Baxter as Critic. A selection from his literary criticism*. (1978), [1948]: 89.

252 Ibid: 156.

literary history but also the time that shaped Stanley's life and writing, both of which are strongly intertwined with the ruling paradigms of the 1950s and 60s.

5.1 Poetry Politics after World War II

In literature, the post-World War II period was dominated by "the desire to bring into being a national consciousness [in which] literature and arts were seen as the means of representing that consciousness struggling to be born."[253] This desire found its expression in the compilation of anthologies, notably *The Caxton Book of New Zealand Verse (1923–45)* edited by Allen Curnow, one of the most prolific New Zealand poets and critics. First published in 1945, this anthology was considered a cornerstone of a New Zealand canon during the formative years. Some of the poets who appeared in the *Caxton Anthology* have become New Zealand's most distinguished poets. Amongst them are Curnow himself, Charles Brasch, James K. Baxter,[254] R.A.K. Mason and Denis Glover, notably all men. In retrospect, most critics agree that no other anthology has provoked so many divergent attitudes to what a national literature/ poetry should be, and no anthology left such a deep imprint on the academic and public mind. This is largely due to the extensive foreword that remained the yardstick with which to measure New Zealand poetry for almost 40 years following. With his famous statement: "The good poem is something we may in time recognise New Zealand by,"[255] Curnow asked, however vaguely, for a distinct focus on New Zealand.

The creation of such a prescriptive norm lured the literary community into what we might ironically call a 'corporate identity' trap. The academic mindset inspired by Curnow, Glover and Brasch in their roles as editors, critics, and poets was intended to strip off the colonial brace of isolation and inferiority, which, in their eyes, inhibited the growth of a New Zealand

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253 Jenny Bornholdt et al., *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English* (1997): xxv.

254 Baxter's poetry had been included by 'accident'. As Allen Curnow reports in the interview with Harry Ricketts, Baxter was still unpublished by then but Curnow had seen the manuscript for the first volume of his poetry which was due to be published at the same time as the *Caxton Anthology*. Curnow asked permission to include some of Baxter's poems which he had immediately liked. So, even though Baxter is also associated with the *Caxton Anthology*, we should not be mislead to put him in Curnow's circle. This will be more clear further down.

255 Peter Simpson, *Look Back Harder: Critical Writings 1935-1984 Allen Curnow* (1987): 49.

tradition due to an all too close orientation on British literary conventions. The discussion they spurred was led on aesthetic grounds that created a "paradigm of exclusion,"[256] arguing that realism was the representative mode of expression. The groups of poets and academics around Curnow, which came to be known as the Auckland Group,[257] discarded anything that was remotely related to British diction in their focus on the development of a realist New Zealand style.

This realism, which was meant to pay particular attention to local issues, was after all a vague notion. In consequence, the clean sweep of style and content had the complete opposite effect of what it originally intended. Instead of liberating New Zealand poetry from imperialist conventions, it presented itself as a limiting and delimiting rule, to the extent that it was perceived as a "nationalistic strait-jacket."[258] Such was the perception of the Wellington Group of poets around Louis Johnson and James K. Baxter who stood against the Auckland Group's 'naïve nationalism'.[259] The two separate schools of poetry harboured an antagonism that persisted in New Zealand poetry discourse until the 1980s. The polarisation of poetic styles, which has never been proven in actual fact, fuelled a divide that inhibited the growth of a greater variety. In an interview conducted by Harry Ricketts in 1985, Louis Johnson reflects on those times:

> The argument was conducted along personal lines ultimately and the issues, the ideological issues, became smokescreens that didn't clarify much at all. It's quite significant that apart from some sniping in the correspondence column of the *Listener*, there were never really any direct confrontations in an argumentative or extended critical sense. […] At the same time we were playing partly for publicity; […] We knew we were and we didn't mind because it all helped to create a larger public here for poetry; it created public interest.[260]

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256 I refer to a recent paper given by Allen Phillipson at the Annual Conference of the New Zealand Studies Association in London 3rd July 2004 entitled: "The New New Poetry: Anthologies, Critics and the Rhetorics of Exclusion".

257 In the initial stages of his work for Caxton Press, Allen Curnow still lived at Christchurch. It was not until 1951 when Curnow joined the English Department at Auckland University that we can actually speak of the Auckland group of poets. He retired from there as Associate Professor in 1977. He died in September 2001 and was posthumously awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Auckland in April 2002.

258 Elizabeth Caffin, "Poetry 1945-90" (1991): 404.

259 Ibid.

260 Harry Ricketts, *Talking About Ourselves: Twelve New Zealand Poets in conversation with Harry Ricketts.* (1986): 148.

This public interest has not receded even today. Poetry is being read and talked about not only in academia; the number of copies of a poetry volume that sell in New Zealand can, proportionally speaking, easily exceed a minor European novel. This broad reception of poetry in New Zealand society is a unique feature of this country's literature and hardly ever found anywhere else in the world.

Despite such positive publicity, there is no denying the fact that the literary debate was led by a male, white, intellectual elite, which set distinct stylistic guidelines for what poetry in New Zealand should be. It was men who compiled anthologies and edited the leading New Zealand journals, such as *Tomorrow* (1935-41) and *Landfall* founded in the aftermath of the war in 1947. Due to such a "masculine literary culture,"[261] women's poetry scarcely reached the public eye; as Kai Jensen points out, women were not thought of as writers but as wives, mothers and lovers.[262] Furthermore, he argues:

> One other strategy for presenting literature as masculine was to make fun of women and women writers. […] Certainly, many of our best writers of the first three decades of the century were female: Mansfield, Mander, Devanny, Baughan, Bethell, Duggan. […] Curnow, arguing in 1960 that the Georgian anthologies of New Zealand poetry had too readily included '[hobbyists] and ungifted amateurs', observed that eighteen of the thirty-five new contributors to *Kowhai Gold* had been women. Evidently he was confident that his readers would join him in equating amateurism with female gender.[263]

Such blatant disregard for women, only on account of their sex, is hardly comprehensible today. I argue that it is yet another indicator of a gender divide that ran through New Zealand culture at the time and finds its continuation even today. Literary space was perceived as an influential public platform women were not admitted to. This can, for instance, be seen in the strong hostility toward C.A. Marris' annual series *New Zealand Best Poems,*[264] which repeatedly included women, such as Robin Hyde, Eileen Duggan and not least Mary Stanley. This series was continued by Louis

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261 A term coined by Kai Jensen in *Whole Men: The Masculine Tradition in New Zealand Literature* (1996).

262 Kai Jensen, *Whole Men: The Masculine Tradition in New Zealand Literature* (1996): 80.

263 Ibid: 78.

264 Often this refers to Dennis Glover's publication *The Arraignment of Paris* dating from 1937, in which he attacks (ironically but nevertheless distinctly) the late romantic poetry in the series. Kai Jensen, *Whole Men: The Masculine Tradition in New Zealand Literature* (1996): 85; MacD. P. Jackson, "Poetry: Beginnings to 1945" (1991); Peter Simpson, *Look Back Harder: Critical Writings 1935-1984 Allen Curnow* (1987).

Johnson, who published many new writers, and not few of them were women.[265] He came to be known as the "energetic and unfailing generous editor and promoter of poetry."[266] His activities, however, did not have a great impact on the running debates because they remained apolitical. Still, it was largely due to Johnson's persistence that *Starveling Year* was published at all in 1953.

The political undercurrent of debates, led by the male academic elite at the time, was particularly noticeable in *Phoenix*, an Auckland University quarterly, which, although it only lasted four issues, turned into a politically and socially critical platform under the editorship of R.A.K. Mason.[267] Poets and literary critics participated actively in the public debate, shaping their readers' opinion on the New Zealand nation. Their undisguised male bias contributed to the emergence of New Zealand literature as a man's affair. Since women were generally perceived in stereotypical roles, which was reinforced after World War II through the re-awakening of the Cult of Domesticity, they were left out of the debate.

Interestingly, it was James K. Baxter who noticed "an unconscious bias against a feminine tone"[268] in New Zealand critics' and editors' work. However this male bias looks like anything but unconscious, and I agree with Kai Jensen, who identifies it as "the mortar they used to build a literary community"[269] with. Women were not only marginalised because male editors failed to understand their different use of symbolism or style, they were also neglected in academic considerations because the stereotype of their social role pervaded all areas of New Zealand society.

It would, however, be misleading to think that only women were the victims of this literary nationalism. Men too were left out of the literary landscape if their style did not agree with the macho sentiment at the time and did not confirm a "muscular growth,"[270] or a "crusty commonsense tone."[271]

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265 Harry Ricketts, *Talking About Ourselves: Twelve New Zealand Poets in conversation with Harry Ricketts.* (1986): 147-59.

266 Elizabeth Caffin, "Poetry 1945-90" (1991): 404.

267 MacD. P. Jackson, "Poetry: Beginnings to 1945" (1991): 380.

268 Frank McKay, *James K. Baxter as Critic. A selection from his literary criticism.* (1978), [1948]: 89.

269 Kai Jensen, *Whole Men: The Masculine Tradition in New Zealand Literature* (1996): 175.

270 Frank McKay, *James K. Baxter as Critic. A selection from his literary criticism.* (1978), [1948].

271 Kai Jensen, *Whole Men: The Masculine Tradition in New Zealand Literature* (1996): 76.

Furthermore, it has to be stated once again that Maori voices remained in the shadow of literary considerations. One reason for this is that Maori literature was often only available in translation, but Maori were also considered to be minors in the emerging New Zealand canon.

Baxter and Curnow continued their argument on what New Zealand poetry should be well into the 1960s. However, despite the fierce exchange on aesthetic principles, neither of the two groups' poets stayed entirely true to a particular line, which is, after all, also dependent on the zeitgeist. Curnow himself rethought his dogmatic attitude. In his revised edition of the *Caxton Anthology*, which then became the *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1960), he no longer spoke of clear-cut categories but remained vague about defining a distinct 'New Zealandism'. Additionally, and interestingly enough, his own poetry was perceived by critics as having developed in a direction that was not necessarily in favour of his own dogma.[272]

Stanley's work resists being grouped into any of the two ruling schools of poetry after World War II: sometimes she employs a strict form and modernist style, other times, she uses free verse and focuses on immediate and mundane issues. Her poems display a confident and innovative use of formal and linguistic craft and, in my view, she engages just as much in the debate about New Zealand identity as her male contemporaries. It is through her style that she criticises the two schools' debate about aesthetic principles, showing them to be artificial constructs and disclosing that such strict guidelines inhibited the free flow of the poetic imagination.

[272] Elizabeth Caffin, "Poetry 1945-90" (1991): 406.

5.2 Mary Stanley: Life and Writing

Little is known of Mary Stanley's life prior to her second marriage with Kendrick Smithyman, an influential poet and critic. My major sources for her biography are the unpublished MA thesis written at Auckland University by Maryann Savage, who conducted many interviews with Stanley's family and friends, and an interview I conducted with professor Peter Simpson at Auckland University in April 2002. Simpson was a close friend of Smithyman's and taught a course on Stanley's and Smithyman's poetry at the University of Auckland in the summer of 2002.


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Mary Stanley was born in 1919 and grew up in Christchurch on the South Island of New Zealand. In the 1930s, she came to Auckland University to be trained as a schoolteacher. There she met Bryan Neal, her first husband. They married in 1943 before he went away to war, where he was killed soon after. Deeply depressed by Neal's death,[273] Stanley continued teaching at a school in the Waikato area and then moved back to Auckland to return to university, where she graduated with a degree in philosophy. In 1946, she met Kendrick Smithyman, who was also studying to become a teacher. They married soon after, and she did not continue her academic education, although she had been repeatedly asked to return to Auckland University and enter an MA program. By that time, she was already pregnant, and many friends and family recall her almost impatient desire to have children. Some critics speculate that this might have stemmed from of a sense of love for her first husband, with whom she did not have children.[274]

After her marriage to Smithyman, Stanley's output remained small but was still of the exceptional quality of her earlier work, when three of her poems won the Jessie Mackay Memorial Award of 1945. She went on to publish in periodicals like *Kiwi*, *Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand* and *Here & Now*, notably the leading poetic platforms before *Landfall* came into

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[273] Source: interview with Peter Simpson who considers many of Stanley's poems to be devoted to Neal, one of the most evident examples is "To B-".

[274] Maryann Savage, "Wound Logic: the invincible necessity of Mary Stanley" (1997).

being. However, since "there can only be one poet in the family,"[275] Stanley was discouraged from writing, although she had published regularly until then, mostly in C.A. Marris' quarterly.

Her one volume of poetry *Starveling Year* was published in 1953 and was extended in a posthumous publication in 1994, edited by Kendrick Smithyman. Both volumes have been reviewed accordingly,[276] but no critic has put her in the context of New Zealand's leading women poets since her output was considered too small. Paul Millar suggests that she might have been "a victim of the 'quality is a function of quantity' school of criticism."[277] She did however appear in *Private Gardens*, an anthology of women's poetry compiled in 1977 by Riemke Ensing, but not in an anthology including both sexes until McQueen's and Wedde's new edition of the *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* in 1985.[278] The only close reading of her work has been undertaken by Maryann Savage, who analysed the philosophical and aesthetic contexts to which Stanley's poetry related.

Starveling Year has been praised as a "book in which each poem is […] a real event."[279] Despite such a praise of her literary merit and professionalism, Stanley remained in the shadow of public recognition, largely because she was kept in the shadow of her husband Smithyman's poetic fame.[280] Ever since she submitted work to Charles Brasch, the editor of *Landfall*, and was rejected, she never attempted to approach that journal again, and thus cut herself off from, what was to become, New Zealand's leading literary platform. Furthermore, it did not help a creative mind to be put down by her husband in discussions with other poets, such as Keith Sinclair who "enjoyed dismissing women's poetry – including hers – in the

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275 Maryann Savage, "Wound Logic: the invincible necessity of Mary Stanley" (1997): 142.

276 For an overview on the various reviews, see: The University of Auckland Library Te Tumu Herenga. "Mary Stanley." URL: http://www.library.auckland.ac.nz/subjects/nzp/nzlit2/stanley.htm (6 July 2004).

277 Paul Millar, "The kowhai ungilded." (1994): 4.

278 Ruth France, on the other hand, who wrote under the male pen name of Paul Henderson, had been included in Curnow's edition of 1960 and continued to be included ever since.

279 This criticism was cast by JamesK. Baxter in his review of *Starveling Year*. See: Frank McKay, *James K. Baxter as Critic. A selection from his literary criticism*. (1978): 156.

280 Kenrick Smithyman was a poet and critic of the Wellington group. Far from being as strictly nationalistic as the Auckland group mentioned earlier, the Wellington group also generated a particular poetic style at the time and consisted solely of male members.

course of their endless, scathing discussions for the emotionalism which 'weakened' it"[281]

This brief overview tells the story of a woman's fate in the 1950s, a fate Stanley shared with many women of her time. As a housewife and thus being measured by her household proficiencies, she neither had the time nor the space to write. As Savage reports, her husband had a study to himself where he could write and read. Stanley lacked such luxury for herself and instead had to take care of three children and a house, while her health increasingly deteriorated.[282] As her children grew, she confided in them that Kendrick's egoism and competitiveness had stopped her writing and it was understood that she had developed a writer's block.[283] After long suffering from arthritis, which, since it literally crippled her, had also increasingly affected her mentally, Stanley died of a heart attack in January 1980.

Mary Stanley's poems witness New Zealand's poetic and intellectual transition after World War II, which is why I read her in the context of New Zealand's literary history and, in particular, in the context of the first wave of the international Women's Movement, following Betty Friedan's social criticism. In analysing the concept of home in Stanley's poetry as the quest of a New Zealander during the crucial phase of New Zealand's search for a distinct cultural identity, I hope to provide particular insights into the development thereof from a woman's perspective. My close reading will show that her poetics anticipated many characteristics of New Zealand poetry, which only emerged decades later, and that she reconnects to predecessors like Bethell. In my eyes, Stanley's poems are highly critical of New Zealand society in particular with regard to women's issues, which is most prominent in "The Wife Speaks".

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[281] Quotes from interviews with Stanley's relatives, conducted by Maryann Savage. "Wound Logic: the invincible necessity of Mary Stanley" (1997): 143.

[282] Stanley suffered from arthritis, an illness that in the last stages crippled her fingers to the degree that she had to have fingers amputated which were then replaced by toes. Many people believe that this stopped her from pursuing her writing and yet she started to learn playing the piano when arthritis already pained her and continued doing so even in the last stages of her illness. (Savage)

[283] Maryann Savage, "Wound Logic: the invincible necessity of Mary Stanley" (1997): 151.

5.3 The Wife Speaks

"The Wife Speaks" is the most famous of Mary Stanley's poems, and it is the one that always appears in the few anthologies where she is included. Published in 1947,[284] it stands out as a very feminist and strong poem in the post-World War II era. "The Wife speaks" makes it clear that Stanley provides a woman's point of view on New Zealand society. The issues raised in Stanley's poem are closely related to Betty Friedan's in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). In Stanley's poem, it is the woman who speaks. Yet it is not only that, it is the wife who speaks – a position in New Zealand society in the 1950s that is not expected to have a public voice since she is subordinate by law and social convention to the husband's rule.

The Wife Speaks

Being a woman, I am
not more than man nor less
but answer imperatives
of shape and growth. The bone
attests the girl with dolls,
grown up to know the moon
unwind her tides to chafe
the heart. A house designs
my day an artefact
of care to set the hands
of clocks, and hours round
with asking eyes. Night puts
an ear on silence where
a child may cry. I close
my books and know events
are people, and all roads
everywhere walk home
women and men, to take
history under their roofs.
I see Icarus fall
out of the sky, beside
my door, not beautiful,
envy of angels, but feathered
for a bloody death.

"The Wife Speaks" stresses the voice of the woman as a vital part of New Zealand society and sensibility. It provides women with a more substantial public profile in depicting the woman in the poem both as a carer and an intellectual. The opening sentence of "The Wife Speaks" is seemingly

[284] This was the original publication in a journal. In the collection *Starveling Year*, it was not published until 1953. The poem can be found in the most recent edition of Stanley's poems: Mary Stanley, *Starveling Year and Other Poems* (1994): 23.

feminist in declaring that woman is 'not more than man nor less', a statement that claims the recognition of women's equal social and political status. However, I argue that Stanley goes a step further in making it clear that the home is not solely the private space, but she reflects on its inhabitants', the people's and hence the nation's socio-cultural identity. The house-home serves as a Space of Mediation in which various social and historical processes interconnect.

> […] . I close
> my books and know events
> are people, and all roads
> everywhere walk home
> women and men, to take
> history under their roofs.
>
> (The Wife Speaks, 14-9)

If we read an echo of "the personal is political"[285] in these lines, it signals that a new wave of feminism was under way, but at the same time Stanley suggests that the political is personal, that the home is the place where the nation's sense of identity emerges from.

"The Wife Speaks" does not glorify the domestic space as an ever-positive and solely nurturing environment. Stanley correlates the house with the social situation through formal and rhetoric *verdichtung* so that the house is eventually unmasked as the framework for confining women to a particular social role. The formal means of the poem – the scarcity of adjectives, and the simplicity of style supported by the run-on lines – not only keep the poem in a tight optical shape but correlate to the social confinement of the woman that is expressed in the poem. The almost iron grip of form and structure forces readers to continue reading without interruption, which generates a sense of descending or ascending a spiral staircase to the effect that the readers can almost physically experience the confinement themselves.

Stanley's use of enjambments puts several layers of meaning to the house as a confining space for women by blurring grammatical references. Each line thus transcends into the one before and after, for instance in

> […] A house designs
> my day an artifact
> of care […]

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[285] Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread and Poetry (1985*), 181.

(The Wife Speaks, 8-10)

In merging the lines, Stanley conveys the inseparable conjunction of the house with a woman's social role to the point that it becomes an integral part of her identity. From my point of view, Stanley objects to the socio-symbolism spun around the figure of the woman as the carer of the nation. To her, this is already a cultural artefact. This prefigures Friedan's criticism that a woman is "barred from the freedom of human existence [and declined] a voice in human history."[286]

In my perception, Stanley's poem is meant to encourage everyone, not least women, to engage in public debate. Her means for doing this is poetry. In poetry, she can reveal that the public steps into the private domain as much as the private is destined to be public, to be political. In "The Wife Speaks", men and women "take history under their roofs" (19), and the poetic voice recognises public history as being generated from within the home. Stanley thus re-evaluates the home as the socio-political core of New Zealand society, undermines the paradigmatic binary between public and private and criticises the view of the domestic environment as subordinate to the public space.

Like Bethell, Stanley is ahead of her time. "The Wife Speaks" can be seen as a forerunner of the gender debate, since it extends the feminist argumentation by turning away from a sexual dichotomy to the notion of a socially determined gender identity. The woman "answers imperatives of shape and growth" (The Wife Speaks, 2-3). She is determined by her biology to menstruate. However, the voice is critical, sometimes full of sorrow talking about the

> bone attest[ing] the girl with dolls,
> grown up to know the moon
> unwind her tides to chafe
> the heart
>
> (The Wife Speaks, 4-7).

Stanley makes clear that women are bound to social conventions solely on the basis of their sex. The chafing of the heart is a social and not a biological process, which is skilfully indicated by the correspondence of the picture of the bone, as the natural image, with that of the doll, as the cultural one –

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[286] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963): 60.

attributes which both relate to the girl, and thus the woman in the moulding phase of her identity. In my view, "The Wife Speaks" questions New Zealand's "fostering of a greater and more rigidly defined domestic role for women"[287] and demands an investigation into the socio-cultural construction of a woman's sphere, rather than fanning the flames of a war of the sexes.

The ending of the poem brings Stanley's concerns in line with the political and cultural debates after World War II. I suggest two readings for the last five lines: a historical reading that ties the poem to the contemporaneous background of post-war New Zealand, and a literary aesthetic reading, that relates it to the debate between the Auckland and the Wellington School of Poetry.

> […] I close
> my books and know events
> are people, and all roads
> everywhere walk home
> women and men, to take
> history under their roofs.
> I see Icarus fall
> out of the sky, beside
> my door, not beautiful,
> envy of angels, but feathered
> for a bloody death.
>
> (The Wife Speaks, 20-4)

The closing of the books, prior to this vision of the poetic speaker, can be read as a criticism of an academic modernist style that refers to T.S. Eliot's poetry as a cornerstone. "The Wife Speaks" refuses to admire the daring of Icarus as one of the classic motives modernist aesthetics draws from. Stanley plays with the conventions of her time. On the one hand, she employs modernism by mimicking its major conventions and style, on the other hand, she favours a commonsense tone, which should have rendered her poetry part of the zeitgeist. And yet, it was ignored by the male critics. In my perception, this neglect has two reasons: one is the strong male bias against female writers, and the other is the strong battle regarding aesthetic principles in New Zealand poetry after World War II. In the poem, Icarus is not celebrated for having tried to get close to the sun, which is usually understood as an image

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[287] Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture, and Power. Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture* (1989): 31.

for having crossed intellectual borders, but rather his endeavour is seen as an example of hubris, as he lies like a dead bird on the speaker's doorstep. The woman in the poem seeks a new kind of art not solely in classic images but rather in the immediate, the mundane environment of the home. Irony has it that Stanley's poem reveals the process from academic diction to a realist mode while she is thwarted for ostensibly overt emotionalism, simply on the grounds of being a woman.

Read against the backdrop of New Zealand's participation in military operations during World War II, it can be argued that Stanley clearly criticises the glorification of death as an honourable service to the nation. Historically speaking, she alludes to the terrors of war that had arrived at people's doorsteps when thousands of New Zealanders lost their lives. Stanley demystifies such heroism through demystifying Icarus, who is 'not beautiful', not 'the envy of angels', not the epitome of the aesthetic, but just as much mortal as any human being. From my point of view, the poem turns against nation-building on war credits and against public myth-making. It demands, instead, a more open-minded and down to earth reconsideration of the past and the future of New Zealand. The home is positioned at a crucial point in this debate, not least because Stanley recognises its incorporating qualities with regard to public and private, an overlap blurring the boundaries between the two realms. Stanley calls for a more inclusive approach to the nation's identity, an approach that is not solely rendered in public displays but starts at the core of New Zealand society, in the homes.

In my view, "The Wife Speaks" deconstructs the stereotypical chain of woman-house-home by employing the domestic setting to mediate and interconnect private with public, and the personal daily life with general public history. In consequence, Stanley succeeds in relieving the tension between the dichotomies when the woman in the poem closes the books. In the ensuing reflection on her situation, inside and outside merge so that the woman transcends the paradigmatic social and political boundaries of her gender role. "The Wife Speaks" illustrates how carefully Stanley depicts the sensibilities of New Zealanders, notably women, toward their society. "The Wife Speaks" manages to *verdichten* the emotional and cultural currency of the concept of home from the point of view of New Zealand women.

5.4 A Home Behind the Barricading Sea?

Apart from investigations into the domestic sphere as valuable and viable space in private and public terms, Stanley's poetry reveals the author's clear perception of New Zealand sensitivity in the process of establishing a national identity. Many poems in *Starveling Year* disclose the poet's concern with belonging and identity, which was shaken in its very foundation after the trauma of World War II. Stanley's vision has thus been seen in relation to existentialist philosophies, such as Nietzsche's.[288] In the aftermath of the War, the notorious feeling of torn between two home worlds retreats into the background, giving way to a strongly felt spiritual emptiness.

In my perception, the feeling of being bereft and the simultaneous desire to forget lingers underneath the deliberate turn to realism in New Zealand literature. Mary Stanley captures this bereavement through the use of metaphors of isolation, most prominently through the sea as a menacing force. The home concept she presents is a concept in transition that is no longer enveloped in nostalgia for Britain though it has not yet arrived in New Zealand either. Furthermore, Stanley links women's identities with national identity through the complex metaphoric allusions of her spatial imagery.

In the poems "The Wrecks"[289], "The Shore in Retrospect"[290], "Sonnet for Riri"[291], "Time is a River"[292], and "Cut off by Tides…"[293], Stanley investigates the divide between the old and the new world through geographical isolation, mostly drawing upon the metaphor of being cut off by tides. We encounter this phrase word by word in "Cut off by Tides…", in "Time is a River" and in a wider sense in the poems where the sea is the core metaphor. Together with other references to the elemental forces of nature, seascape is the carrier of Stanley's sense of social and spiritual isolation. The sea is ever-present in New Zealand and never really far away. It simultaneously connotes isolation and transition, being boundary and

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288 Maryann Savage, "Noble is burial." URL: http://www.nzepc.Auckland.ac.nz/authors/Stanley/savage.ptml (July 7 2004)

289 Mary Stanley, *Starveling Year and Other Poems* (1994): 9.

290 Ibid: 21.

291 Ibid: 11.

292 Ibid: 6.

293 Ibid: 33.

threshold for any New Zealander who needs to travel to another country. Stanley's frequent allusion to the sea's elemental force corresponds to the characteristic features of many an emerging literature, such as early American literature, where the wide open country occupied the imagination, or Canadian literature where the "monster of nature" was ever-present in the imagination.[294]

In "Sonnet for Riri", Stanley depicts New Zealand from the perspective of a migrant to whom New Zealand is but a mundane daily reality.

> Stranger, this hostile element becomes
> Your daily dress, by dint of wearing year
> by year this place where you are not at home.
>
> (Sonnet for Riri, 1-3)

The sonnet addresses Riri, an Egyptian friend of Stanley's, who came to New Zealand as a war bride.[295] In pondering on the friend's situation as an exile in New Zealand, which to her is a hostile and foreign place, she reminds us of the feelings Blanche Baughan expresses in "A Bush Section". In Stanley's poem, the depiction of New Zealand reminds strongly of Baughan's skeleton world, but not in the sense of a physical skeleton, rather in a spiritual emptiness in the aftermath of World War II. The metaphor of the daily dress, which remains on the outside of a person's body, indicates that New Zealand might be a physical dwelling place, but not an emotional home place.

And yet, New Zealand seems to have been hailed as the promised land, echoing the notion of New Zealand as God's Own Country.[296] This notion was frequently used in the 1950s and 60s political debate, when it was argued that the booming economy and the functioning welfare system put New Zealand ahead of other developed states.[297] This was well-suited for fuelling the pride of New Zealanders about their country.

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294 Margaret Atwood, *Survival* (1972):45-7.

295 Interview with Prof. Peter Simpson.

296 The first public person to introduce the term to New Zealand was Prime Minister Richard John Seddon at the beginning of the 20th century. P.J. Gibbons, "The Climate of Opinion" (1981): 308-9.

297 The same label had been claimed by the U.S. and Australia at many occasions to boost the image of the countries as countries of freedom and self-made fortunes. However, New Zealand's claim to be 'God's Own Country' in the 50s and 60s was special since it had succeeded to be the ideal state in many respects, such as cutting unemployment rates and not knowing homelessness and providing health care for the entire population. Unfortunately, these ideal social conditions ended in the 70s when Britain entered the European economic union and cut economic ties to New Zealand. G.R. Hawke, "The Growth of the Economy" (1981): 369-76.

> What flags made holiday along the streets
> when to a child a change of government
> was flight to Egypt where the sullen heat
> weighted like a hand? What wind of chance has sent
> you here, behind the barricading sea
> that widens always to your homesick eye?
>
> (Sonnet for Riri, 9-14)

Despite such allusions, Stanley's poem pictures New Zealand as the land that lies "behind the barricading sea" (Riri, 13). This designates isolation and distance rather than national pride and local colour. The image of the sea can thus be read as the condition of the human mind, empty of spiritual anchorage, an emotion common to many migrants after World War II to whom New Zealand was not yet home even though it was somehow perceived as the 'promised land'. Such feelings can almost be seen as universal throughout New Zealand's history as an immigrant country, in paricular when comparing it to Allen Curnow's famous poem "House and Land" (1941), in which the speaker states that

> […] you can't attribute to either
> Awareness of what great gloom
> Stands in a land of settlers
> With never a soul at home.
>
> (Allen Curnow, "House and Land", 37-40)

Curnow's words reveal a strong white European bias and can therefore be seen as capturing only the settlers' emotional capacity. Parallel to him, Stanley realises that it is not the land that needs to be cultivated and made arable, as in Baughan's poem, but the soul is "not at home" (Sonnet for Riri, 3). Spiritual anchorage is the most important factor here. And the frequent employment of metaphors of exile indicates disconnection and loneliness, such as in the poem "Cut off by tides" which opens with the lines:

> Cut off by tides we here are islanded
> also by time and graver circumstance
>
> (Cut off by tides, 1-2).

These lines not only reveal how starved Stanley was herself for this anchorage, but they also capture a general Pakeha New Zealand feeling of starvation.

"Sonnet for Riri" carefully distinguishes between New Zealand's 'face value' and the sensibility underneath. Stanley shows that New Zealand is not paradise but that it suffers from the same wounds as the rest of the world that was physically closer to the war activities does.

> […], we sleep as safe
> as Europe. Under your pillowed arm the bomb
> encompasses the death of friends.
>
> (Sonnet for Riri, 5-7)

Yet again, history is literally brought home with the bomb under the pillow. New Zealand celebrated the returning soldiers as national heroes and established war memorials all over the country in memory of those who lost their lives. This was not only in reverence for the deceased, it was the physical foundation of New Zealand's national identity at the same time. Stanley opposes such purely political reconditioning of history. Rather, "Sonnet for Riri" reads like an admonition not to fall into the trap of assuming that New Zealand remains God's Own Country just because it is spatially remote from Europe.

In "The Wrecks", Stanley describes a scene at the shore. The descriptive character of the poem and the lack of a poetic persona convey a similar sense of detachment, as if the reader were looking at a painting. Savage reads the poem in an existentialist philosophical context and alludes to the title of the volume *Starveling Year* as the expression of the slow painful process that corresponds with Nietzsche's philosophy.[298] In Nietzsche's perception, the world is a process of creation and fading, an eternal cycle of life and death. In the exposition of his view of the world, he uses the metaphor of the sea, in which everything that is finite emerges, takes shape and fades away.[299] It is not my intention to read Stanley in relation to Nietzsche, but the cross-reference helps to reveal the intertextual dimension of Stanley's work. "The Wrecks", for instance, resonates in many different philosophical and literary contexts, not least due to the scarcity of the employed images.

The Wrecks

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[298] My reference to Nietzsche's philosophy only scratches the surface of his existential philosophy. For a more profound philosophical reading of her work, see Maryann Savage, "Wound Logic: the invincible necessity of Mary Stanley" (1997).

[299] See conclusion of Friedrich Nietzsche *Der Wille zur Macht. Versuch einer Umwertung aller Werte* [1882] (1930).

> Offshore, sea beached these wrecks, their ribs
> picked clean by seasons of salt, and here
> the raping wave is master at last.
>
> No bell is burial. Shag and gull
> preach their heresies over the drowned
> and foundered derelicts, no one mourns.

With the mentioning of a burial without a bell (4-5), the poem turns toward the lack of religious ceremony, which suggests the lack of the spiritual base of life. The seascape becomes the setting in which to mediate the sense of spiritual emptiness. It is in the wrecks that both, humanity and the sea, can meet, but it is a bleak vision of a skeleton ship that is at the mercy of the elements. The elemental force of nature not only points at Nietzsche's metaphor; it is also indicative of the sublime that lies beyond human grasp. Such sublime features of the elements also align Stanley's poem with the imagination of New Zealand's sister literature in Canada, in which nature was perceived as a menacing monster.[300] In "The Wrecks", the crude physicality of the sea impinges just as mercilessly on the reader and seems to leave no space for humans.

The shipwreck can thus be read on a personal level as the social and spiritual isolation of the woman poet, but it can also be related to the state of the nation. Stanley presents the sea as a hostile element, a barrier that is as insurmountable as it is menacing. In its sublime features, it also corresponds to Caspar David Friedrich's romantic painting *Die gestrandete Hoffnung* (1824),[301] in which the rugged ice floes assume a similar prominence in the picture as the wrecks in Stanley's poem. The comparison of Stanley's poem to the romantic 'intertext' of Friedrich's painting helps to illuminate Stanley's sense of being at the mercy of larger power structures, be they physical or socio-political. The wrecks are thus the physical manifestations of failed hopes and dreams. Against the backdrop of Stanley's biography, "The Wrecks" can be read as expressing Stanley's own sense of shipwreck as a poet in New Zealand and as


Credit: Kunsthalle Hamburg

300 Margaret Atwood, *Survival* (1972): 45-8.

301 'Stranded (failed) hopes'. Picture Source: http://www.hamburger-kunsthalle.de/seiten/cdf.htm.

a woman confined to the house and her husband's rule, in particular when considering that she and Smithyman lived on a little island off the shores of Auckland.[302]

In recent analyses, Friedrich's painting has been interpreted as expressing the political resignation in early 19th century Germany in regards to not having found the unity that was hoped for after the wars against Napoleon.[303] Against the backdrop of New Zealand's endeavour to establish a national identity, Stanley's image of the wrecks might be read as epitomising an emotional numbness in New Zealand after World War II, when the normal pace of life and death was disrupted. In my eyes, Stanley expresses the need for mourning the dead. The bleakness of her pictures, and the very essentialist manner in which Stanley conveys the emotional emptiness, align her with a Western post-war imagination.

The image of the wrecks finds yet another intertextual reference in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), to whom the wreck was also a supply of essential tools and weaponry. Robinson Crusoe is the classic literary castaway who makes a home for himself on an uninhabited island. For a long time, he was the representative not only of human determinacy against the forces of nature, but also of the noble mind of a coloniser who civilises the wilderness. Stanley's employment of such traditional motives relates her poetry to a larger literary tradition and reminds us not only of New Zealand's immediate past, but also of its colonial history. Since Stanley's wrecks are not nurturing, but derelict, the colonial success story of Crusoe is distorted.

A similar sense of unease, regarding the colonial Western heritage is expressed in "Time is a River", a poem in which the poetic speaker mourns the death of a son. As the metaphoric title suggests, history is depicted in a rather fluid manner, blurring historical as much as geographical boundaries.

> On hill top cut off by tides,
> by seas and centuries, the new
> world hailed from the doorstep
> of the old Europe
> in chains to where the few
> first ships let the Antarctic

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302 Source: personal interview with Peter Simpson in 2002.

303 http://www.hamburger-kunsthalle.de/seiten/cdf.htm.

finger ice their spars,
and in their rigging tomorrow blew

a gale, […]

(Time is a River, 9-17)

The colonial heritage, alluded to through the reference to the 'old Europe', is New Zealand's historical baggage settlers took with them when setting sail to a new future. Reminiscent of Bethell's "Levavi Oculos" and "The Long Harbour", Stanley's poem seems to capture the sense of joyful departure. However, the broken syntax of the poem conveys a broken sense of belonging. It does not become clear whether or not the "new world" is at home in the Pacific or still at the doorstep of the old world. Yet again, Stanley chooses the image of the sea in order to capture the sense of being in-between places and cultures. The sea simultaneously represents the connective link to other places as much as the isolation thereof. It is the historic symbol for barrier and passageway, for danger and daring for exploration and for wanting to be home at the same time.

In this metaphoric cluster, the ship can be read as an allegory to New Zealand's sense of a nation. A gale is blowing in the 'rigging tomorrow' suggesting that the new nation needs to withstand great forces. As a verb, 'rigging' depicts the preparation for setting sail. As a noun, it depicts the structure of ropes that is necessary to set sail; hence, it is a crucial framework for the boat to be able to move forward. The gale blowing into this new rigging thus not only indicates turbulent times for New Zealand's emerging social structure, it also suggests an underestimated force that the rigging might not be able to withstand. Against the backdrop of post-war times in New Zealand, the gale can be read as a metaphor for the strong nationalism that pervaded all areas of New Zealand society and suggests the impatient desire to arrive at a solid sense of national identity on antipodean shores.

At the same time, Stanley's poem plays upon a distorted perception of inside and outside when turning to the seemingly easy life in New Zealand where on a

Friday night
in the shops, the innocent fly
protesting in the spider slum,

> the wrong stretching antennae
> promising spurious slumber. […]
>
> (Time is a River, 20-24)

In this sequence, the poem unmasks the awareness of a New Zealand nation as a delusion people only perceive superficially in regards to social security and prosperity. Stanley saw the danger of accepting things at face value rather than questioning the socio-political and above all cultural constitution of the new nation. Her poem aims at encouraging people to see through their own eyes and make up their minds towards New Zealand as homeland rather than being lulled into "spurious slumber" (24) by propagated concepts.

Through her 'earnest digging', as Bethell would have phrased it, Stanley uncovers much confusion about New Zealand, which is best seen in the first two stanzas of "The Shore in Retrospect".

> Enigma of islands, the riddling tides
> instruct the rocks. Astride your coasts
> the water-walking god in greed
> exploratory fingers thrusts.
>
> Gull and gale announce his loud
> triumphant fugue, and ships like shells
> swing at his fingertips. His words
> are sirens singing where they kill.
>
> (The Shore, 1-8)

As in "The Wrecks" and "Sonnet for Riri", Stanley chooses to foreground nature's elemental force in the image of the water god, drawing upon Greek and Maori mythology at the same time. Both the sea and the land are mysterious; they are enigma and riddle and lie beyond human grasp. Incomprehension and awe are triggered by the imagery of nature as much as by the epic and mythological intertexts Stanley *verdichtet* in the poem. Read in the context of the Maori creation myth, the 'water-walking god' represents *Tangaroa,* the god of the sea, who is constantly fighting *Tane*, the god of the woods, over land after the separation of mother earth and father sky.[304] In the context of the Greek epic, Stanley's poem conveys the seafaring adventures of Ulysses through the image of the sirens; and the water god in this context is Posseidon. Like in "The Wrecks", humanity is defenceless and exposed to

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[304] Thomas Sebastian Franck, *Mythen der Maori: Geschichten von Neuseelands ersten Menschen* (1997): 15.

elemental force when the ships swing like shells at the water god's fingertips. "The Shore in Retrospect" is an epic inspection of New Zealand within the historical and mythological context of the land prior to the arrival of settlers.

Like Bethell, Stanley investigates New Zealand historiography; unlike her predecessor, however, Stanley's poem does not describe an awakening to the beauty of the present but to the difficult past, inscribing a geography of pain when maps are made

> […] with lives. Murder and sleep
> are rinsed away; sea-wrack for wreath,
> the vigilant fish destroy our hope.
>
> (The Shore, 14-6)

The sea remains the only authority. It washes away murder and sleep, which is reminiscent of a baptism that washes clean of all sins. I argue that in the exploration of seascape and sea scope, Stanley investigates the potential of home in New Zealand.

Owing to this reading, I contend that Stanley does not see New Zealand as a nation modelled after Britain 'when flags made holiday along the streets' (Sonnet for Riri) but a country in which many traditions and determinants of daily life are still unaccounted for in cultural terms. Although, Stanley clearly draws from an occidental cultural tradition, the prominence of nature as an antagonist to humanity demonstrates her investigation into New Zealand historiography prior to the colonisation of the country by the British. "The Shore in Retrospect" expresses the hope that

> this sand may teach
> legends and histories to reveal
> the face behind the face, where each
> is Caliban and Ariel.
>
> (The Shore, 17-end)

However much she leans on Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1623), one of the classic texts that had shaped the colonial mind, Stanley does not follow the footsteps of colonialism but deconstructs the message by investigating Caliban, the native and Ariel the enchanting spirit as simultaneous presences. The voice of the poem keeps returning to a general identity; it seems to ask: "Who are we if we are Caliban and Ariel?" In this question, we therefore find the invitation to reconsider our own colonial 'mindset', to peel off the layer of

preconceived cultural notions and investigate the "face behind the face" in the search for New Zealand as homeland.

Stanley negotiates New Zealand as home on the basis of her own (Pakeha) cultural heritage whilst being aware of another mythological discourse that presents itself as a riddle to her. Her retrospective investigation into New Zealand historiography – painful though it often is – is free from the notorious homesickness and nostalgia. Britain is but a distant country "behind the barricading sea" (Sonnet for Riri, 13). Stanley's 'realism' does not display features of the vernacular or overt local colouring but reveals a post-World War II existentialist quest for home. Her *verdichtung* of occidental literary and philosophical tradition with New Zealand's historiography reveals that New Zealand's search for home is not only a journey into the future but is an investigation of its past in imaginative as much as historical terms.

5.5 The New Philosopher

The bleak imagery in many poems of *Starveling Year* indicates that New Zealanders still lacked a trustworthy concept of home. The concepts and images that were proclaimed in public did not seem to rest at ease with the state of emotions amongst many white Europeans. Stanley's "The New Philosopher"[305] discloses its author's sharp critical eye for New Zealand sensibility. I consider this poem one of the guiding texts of New Zealand post-World War II poetry, since it captures both the struggle with past ideals and the need to remember while simultaneously recognising the present as well as the future. Stanley's poem addresses public and private projections that are personified in the figure of the new philosopher.

The New Philosopher

It is small use now to bid us sit
With futile hands clasped like old men
Praying for rain in a dry season.
This is not what we have learned
As we rode eagle-winged dawn wind
Upon the tides of air. Reason
Prompts us now to hasten Time's
Imperative, take action, move
The deadened skin that hides new growth.
We shall not forget landfall
On foreign coasts, sea-grave by ice

[305] Mary Stanley, *Starveling Year and Other Poems* (1994): 1.

Or coral white like bone; these both
The mind have jarred, the taut nerve strung.
The new philosopher comes home to farms
Sloping northward to the sun
To factory above the harbour
To the playground where the gulls settle
At lunch-time and children run
To summer bays, young moon-curved
Under fire-petalled trees. Of these
He dreamed half-world away or felt
Again for one heart-beat the cool
Of early morning streets, inland
In some small town, saw snow melt
Milky green on shingle, ere
The earth reeled over, washed him then
To unknown shores. Such hard-won prize
Will not be spent on sport for fools
Or cranky knaves who garner wealth
Out of our comrades' tears and cries.

The poem can be divided into two sections. The first section reflects upon the past, inspiring action to deal with the post-war trauma. The second part envisions a brighter and peaceful future for New Zealand. Both, past and future visions centre in the figure of the new philosopher. His homecoming is set against the dark images of the War as a symbol for hope. This is one of the first occasions in New Zealand literature that New Zealand, the country where the farms 'slope northward to the sun', is depicted as home. The poem reveals that the experiences during World War II, when New Zealand had fought under British command, are an integral part of the emerging sense of identity and of cutting the umbilical cord to the former mother country.

However, even though the new philosopher seems to encompass a new home vision, I argue that this new conceptualisation of home builds on a similar nostalgia that had formed the base for the notion of Britain as Home in colonial times. It is a constructed home that the new philosopher "dreamed half-world away" (21), indicating a strong topophilic attitude towards home as the territorial core. The new New Zealand, as it is presented through the eyes of the new philosopher, is depicted as an idyll in the scene with the children running to the beach, in the picture of an early morning in small-

town New Zealand and in hyperbolic local colouring with the 'fire-petalled' Pohutakawas.[306]

The idyllic picture of New Zealand as the clean, green and beautiful country counteracts that of war-destroyed Europe and turns into a cliché that is still drawn upon even today. Stanley presents two patriotic clichés: on the one hand, the poem depicts the soldiers' sense of pride in their heroic undertaking of riding "eagle-winged dawn wind/ [u]pon the tides of air" (5-6) into the battle, and on the other hand, the poem presents an all-too-sweet image of a New Zealand idyll. The new philosopher participates in both clichés. As a soldier who engages in the world conflict, he follows the calling to bring honour to his country and lead New Zealand into a new era. After the experience of the war, he envisions New Zealand as the happy home that is not soiled by war activity but is clean, green and beautiful. In my view, the figure of the new philosopher stands as a kind of poetic memorial of the new nation's identity since it encompasses the same sense of suffering and national pride as the actual physical war.

The poetic voice functions as a cultural monitor that conveys the sense of patriotism and disillusionment after World War II. Taking a closer look at the imagery Stanley chooses to employ, the poem reveals stereotypical gender binaries that pervade the patriotic statements: the eagle wings of the warriors represent an ideal of outgoing masculinity that is contrasted with the summer bays lying "young moon-curved/ [u]nder fire-petalled trees" (The New Philosopher, 19-20), an archetypal allusion to the female sex. The nationalism after World War II thus moves from identifying with overt masculine ideals, such as the tall, brave and chivalric New Zealand warrior,[307] toward embracing a pastoral myth that bears feminine features. In my view, the homecoming in the poem conveys the sense of returning to a hearth and home that is reliant on the nurturing mother figure. The personal yearning of the new philosopher in the poem indicates the yearning of an entire nation.

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306 The pohutakawa is a tree that can be found in New Zealand and South Africa. During the time of its blooming, in December, it develops blossoms with crimson red needles. The Pohutakawa has become an association for New Zealand Christmas.

307 The mythology of the New Zealand soldier as a "knight of the frontier" with all positive characteristics like bravery, gallantry, heroism, self-discipline and chivalric behaviour originated during World War I. This reputation persisted through to the Second World War, creating what Phillips calls a culture of the soldier where the ideal of mateship ruled. Jock Phillips, "War and National Identity" (1989): 94-103.

Once again, Stanley monitors the nationalism of her time with sharp-witted intelligence. The poem hints at the conservative backlash after World War II that was largely driven by the re-established Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. It is their strict ethos of moral and social integrity that the poem echoes at the end:

> […] Such hard-won prize
> Will not be spent on sport for fools
> Or cranky knaves who garner wealth
> Out of our comrades' tears and cries.
>
> (The New Philosopher, 28-end)

It is only in the last line of the poem that the poetic voice becomes part of the communal 'we' through the possessive pronoun in "our comrades." I read this as a deliberate move of letting drop the detached position and admitting to be part of a New Zealand voice. The voice of the poem engages in the discussion about the nation-building process in the crucial phase of New Zealand independence. However, the final lines do not assert public patriotism and the kind of national identity that was fashioned by a predominantly socio-political debate. Stanley asks for a more comprehensive understanding of New Zealand as home, not as the glorious nation or the ever-positive paradise. She presents a picture that includes the emotionally dark sides of New Zealand's past, 'the jarred mind,' but also acknowledges people's yearning for a more peaceful and happy future. In my eyes, the concluding lines of the poem express an intellectual weariness of foregrounding the economic and political rather than the cultural side of New Zealand sensibility on the way to a new national identity.

5.6 A Home in Literature

Part of the underlying message of *Starveling Year* is the search of a woman poet for her home. I argue that Mary Stanley seeks to find it in literature, not only by writing her own poetry, but also by connecting to an Western literary and philosophical tradition. Her metaphors of isolation and exile have a strong resonance in the history of world literature, in particular with regard to their female imagery. Thus, Stanley's focus on the situation of women in daily public and private life connect her to the awakening feminism

in women's writing worldwide, a feature of her work that can only be duly assessed in retrospect.

In "The Wrecks", Stanley employs the sea and the ship as her main metaphors. Generally speaking, both images carry female connotations: the ship as a carrier, a comforting and safe container, a home and haven; the sea as part of mother nature, as the nurturing element and the birthing pool of life on earth. However, in Stanley's poem, the sea turns into a raping master and the wrecks are the victims of this violence. The feminist message of this image is best carved out when looking beyond the socio-cultural context of post-World War II New Zealand, and putting it in correspondence with one of the most well-known feminist poems published in the United States in the 1970s: Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck" (1972). In Adrienne Rich's poem, the poetic persona dives into a wreck.

> I came to explore the wreck
> […]
> I came to see the damage that was done
> and the treasures that prevail.
> […]
> the thing I came for:
> the wreck and not the story of the wreck
> the thing itself and not the myth
>
> (Diving into the Wreck, 52ff)

Rich's metaphor of diving into the wreck has been interpreted as a kind of detective exercise of finding women in history, of discovering 'herstory'. It has become one of the most quoted feminist poems and has made the metaphor of the wreck a very popular one. Parallel to Stanley, who seeks to find the "face behind the face" in "The Shore in Retrospect" (19), Rich's poetic persona does not believe in constructed myths but investigates the wreck for herself.

Stanley's wrecks are seen from a distance; their defencelessness and vulnerability is recognised without anything being done about it. The poetic voice in her poem keeps a passive distance to the scene. Rich's wreck is

> the evidence of damage
> worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty
> the ribs of the disaster
> curving their assertion
> among the tentative hunters.
>
> (Diving into the Wreck, 66-70)

Defeated and exposed in a similar way as Stanley's wrecks, the wreck in Rich's poem keeps authority and dignity, and it remains attractive with a threadbare beauty and curving ribs, clearly disclosing female features. In Stanley's poem, the wrecks are the "foundered derelicts, no one mourns" (The Wrecks, 6). A feminist-oriented reading of the central metaphor of the wreck in Stanley's poem in comparison to Rich's text 20 years later gives an indication of the progress of women writer's self-assertiveness. Stanley's "derelicts no one mourns" tell of women being powerless and dominated by men in the 1950s, Rich's active "diving into the wreck", however, speaks of women who challenge male power and gain authority of their own.

At her time of writing, Stanley evidently sought such authority to refer back to in a literary and philosophical sense. In order to achieve this goal, she went as far back as the classical Greek epics to find suitable literary reference points not only with regard to trace a female tradition but also to find a reliable literary historic basis for capturing the emerging sense of home after landing on alien shores. In her poem "The Shore in Retrospect", she thus seems to indicate the desire to provide a secure cultural basis for the emerging New Zealand nation. The poem cuts through Western literary tradition by alluding to the voyage of Ulysses in Homer's *Iliad*, while using the main protagonists of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Vergil's *The Aeneid.* Through the literary-philosophical *verdichtung* of the epic themes, it can be stated that Stanley engages poetically in the debate about women's roles in the formation of a national identity as much as the discussion of New Zealand as home space in cultural, in particular literary, terms.

> Out of time's journeying wave I see
> Ulysses homing to this shore.
> Here Dido weeps for love and spray
> darkens the fall of Helen's hair.
>
> Navigators from the north
> made maps with lives. Murder and sleep
> are rinsed away; sea-wrack for wreath,
> the vigilant fish destroy our hope.
>
> Prospero, this sand may teach
> legends and histories to reveal
> the face behind the face, where each
> is Caliban and Ariel.
>
> (The Shore, 9-end)

From a feminist point of view, the history of women and women in history are most apparently the poem's major subtexts, which is underlined by the allusion to the epic figures of Queen Dido of Carthage and Helen of Troy. Both women were prominent public figures and thus involved in their respective countries' policies, and both women lose their status through politically motivated intrigue. Dido of Carthage, governor of the city of Carthage, aimed at rebuilding the city as a home for her people. She is the female counterpart to the male protagonist Aeneas in *The Aeneid*. Through her love to Aeneas, she is seen to have lost her governing strength, as epitomised in the poem through her weeping, so that her plan falters and eventually fails. Helen of Troy is a symbol for the defeat of the Trojans in the Trojan War. With the image of the spray of the sea that darkens Helen's hair, Stanley suggests two things: first, the fall of Helen's hair, a motive for women's sensuality, in particular in Victorianism, suggests the woman as an erotic object and no longer as a public figure. Second, the darkening of her hair with spray suggests tears of mourning, mourning of having let the hair fall, which can be read as mourning the loss of public status.

With the entry of a male partner into Dido's and Helen's lives, the women's public roles as leaders cease, and they are pushed back into the roles of lovers and wives which keeps them from shaping the public affairs of their countries. Both women are defeated by patriarchal rule. In an allegorical reading, this defeat can be seen to reflect the social situation of women in New Zealand after World War II as well as the disregard of their intellectual work in the critical and literary circles of New Zealand which were dominated by men. These issues, as I frequently suggested earlier in this chapter, held particular implications to Stanley's personal situation as the wife of a poet and intellectual who participated in thwarting her literary talent and ambitions.

Against the background of women's social situation in Western states in the 1950s, Dido's story can be read as a representative of many women's fates at Stanley's time of writing. Had women held responsible positions in the public and the working world during the War years, they were dismissed from their jobs when the War ended.[308] The returning men took over jobs and

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[308] Sandra Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine. A History of New Zealand Women since They Won the Vote* (1993).

public duties, and women were required to remain at home and care for house and children regardless of their qualifications. Stanley's poem also reveals that the author was aware of a female symbolism in the establishment of the new nation, a symbolism that derived from the dogmatic opinion that the war had been fought for women. Through her brief allusion in the poem to the story of Helen of Troy, who was the cause of the Trojan War in the first place, Stanley raises attention to such-like public making of myths. The Trojan epic is meant to remind us that the prevailing attitude in the war propaganda of New Zealand rests on the conviction that women need to be saved and preserved in order to guarantee the perpetuation of the state.[309]

In relation to New Zealand's literary nationalism after World War II, this reads like a mock-ironic allegory on the male bias against women's poetics. Stanley's poetry does not display the overt 'emotionalism' which allegedly 'weakens' poetry by women. On the contrary, the ease with which she uses the classical texts, while clearly investigating the question of New Zealand as a new nation, indicates a sophistication of style and profound knowledge of literary history that is anything but emotional or even remotely indicative of any overt personal agenda. So it is clear that she was disregarded by the male establishment for the simple reason of being a woman.

5.7 Mary Stanley's *Starveling Year* Consolation in Poetry

Mary Stanley's *Starveling Year* was received as exciting poetry by a notable few who regretted that she stopped publishing. The reasons have remained obscure to the majority of people today, but, as the title of her volume suggests, Stanley might have been in a state of intellectual starvation. Despite her small output, I consider her a major poetic voice in post-World War II New Zealand. Her social and political criticism clearly shows that the emancipation of a national consciousness requires a profound debate in all areas of society. Mary Stanley's poems are pervaded by a sense of shipwreck and isolation in a cultural as much as in a personal sense. She suffered through the loss of her husband during World War II, she was thwarted by the male critical establishment, and she felt socially isolated in her role as housewife and mother which curbed her creativity. Having lived through

[309] See chapter 2.3..

these experiences, the issues Stanley negotiates in her poetry by far exceed her personal life. In my view, her work is an important marker of New Zealand's literary zeitgeist.

The poems in *Starveling Year* prefigure many issues of New Zealand feminism in the early 1970s. Stanley's poetry engages in an aesthetic and philosophical investigation of the home seen from the perspective of a woman writer in New Zealand, a country without a substantial literary tradition. Other women of her time, such as Lauris Edmond, who published later but conceived her poetry at the same time as Stanley, show the same suffering from social constraints in the 1950s. Mary Stanley seeks spiritual and emotional anchorage, a quality that also characterises the works of Edmond, who did not start publishing until the 1970s. Both poets criticise gender role convention and try to free the home from its low-level status as the private sphere, and to make it a viable environment in the public eye.

Mary Stanley's *Starveling Year* is an outstanding volume of poetry in post-World War II New Zealand that cannot be categorized according to the narrow aesthetic arguments debated by the Wellington and the Auckland group of poets. Their black and white picture of writing that saw poetry as either realist or modernist, either personal or universal, was mainly drawn on political grounds. Stanley's poetry shows features of all styles and themes that concerned intellectuals in New Zealand at the time; it reaches from political to personal issues, from traditional to experimental form. Savage aligns her with Janet Frame, saying the two women "elaborated the disruptive power of modernism made at the level of language to contradict the imprisonment of women."[310] Stanley's disruptive power, or, what I would call subversion of paradigmatic structures, is most skilfully expressed in her *verdichtung* of different aesthetic notions and literary motives. Her work delivers a poetic vision that transcends many boundaries, be they aesthetic, social or political.

Mary Stanley's poetry forges a path through the treacherous grounds of the aesthetic debate led by male intellectual circles in the 1950s and 60s. She might have seen herself as starving; her poetry, however, tells of survival.

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[310] Maryann Savage, "Wound Logic: the invincible necessity of Mary Stanley" (1997): 6.

6 LAURIS EDMOND'S HOME JOURNEY

Had it not been for the Women's Movement, Lauris Edmond's, and other notable women's, poetry would most likely have met the same fate as Mary Stanley's since the male dominance that had emerged after World War II was still perceptible in New Zealand's critical circles in the 1970s. At the same time, various different groups sought to change the social pattern of New Zealand and the ensuing wave of activism was seen as having created a particularly favourable climate for women in the arts, allowing them "considerable scope for success."[311] However, it was not only the opening doors that account for Lauris Edmond's accomplishments as a poet. Edmond captures women's awakening to larger social constraints that determine their life choices. Her poetry witnesses the transition from housewife and mother to active public voice revealing affinities to other New Zealand women poets before her while becoming a role model for her young contemporaries.

Edmond's poetry opens up a new interconnected socio-cultural experience. Through her style, she manages to break many rigid dichotomies, such as public and private, by offering a more integrative concept of home. Her poetic vision acquires a philosophical depth that resonates beyond mere personal or cultural concerns at a time when women's issues were more and more in the limelight of public attention.

6.1 Women's Exodus from Domestic Confinements and New Zealand's New Stand in the 1960s and 70s

Although Edmond's poetry was not published until the peak of the Women's Movement in the 1970s, her work witnesses women's exodus from domestic confinements like no other woman poet's in New Zealand. In cultural terms, critics speak of women "seeing themselves through their own eyes,"[312] which not only ignited the discipline of women's studies[313] but shows that women saw their homes in the context of larger socio-cultural constraints 'from far below' their personal worries. Feminism did not come out of the blue and hit New Zealand with a bang. It was rather the final result

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311 W. H. Oliver, "The Awakening Imagination" (1981): 459.

312 Rosemary Novitz, "Women: Weaving an Identity." (1989): 55.

313 The Society For Research on Women (S.R.O.W.) was founded in 1966 and published a social survey of New Zealand women under the title *Urban Women* in 1972.

of an ongoing process of fighting against social inequality and discrimination of women. This transition is most thoroughly captured in Lauris Edmond's work. She bridges the gap between living a private life, in the role assigned to her by social convention, and aspiring to a creative fulfilment that gained her a highly popular public profile. In my view, Edmond epitomises what Lydia Wevers, the editor of *Yellow Pencils* (1988) the second major anthology of women's poetry, saw as characteristic for women writing in the 1970s and 80s, namely that the new women poets changed their attitude to poetry by no longer celebrating feeling but turning to "an investigation of what it is to be a women poet; a reconsideration of role and stereotype."[314]

Edmond's path to becoming a writer needs to be considered against the backdrop of the social and political transition of New Zealand, which experienced many radical changes in its political, economic and social makeup in the second half of the 20th century. After it had a boost of confidence in the 1950s and 60s when New Zealand sought to separate from the mother country and pronounced a distinct identity, politics needed to wake up to the fact that New Zealand had mostly prospered on account of the secure trade relations with Great Britain. When the UK released the strong bonds to New Zealand in the 1970s and turned to the European market, the most important importer of New Zealand's agricultural export goods broke away. In need of trading partners that would also provide industrial goods, New Zealand knew its economy was dependent on the international situation. The various Pacific relations New Zealand established in the 1950s and 60s, such as forming the ANZUS[315] an alliance with the U.S., and becoming a 'dialogue partner' of ASEAN,[316] the Association of South East Asian Nations, grew more important.

New Zealand was thus increasingly tied to a Western world order and even though the question of national identity was a burning one, the answer for it could no longer be sought solely within New Zealand's geographical and political boundaries but was henceforth linked to international social and political developments:

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314 Lydia Wevers, 'Introduction' to *Yellow Pencils* (1988): xxi.

315 See Malcolm McKinnon's account of New Zealand's position in the cold war. http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/Gallery/se-asia/cold-war.html (Feb 18, 2004)

316 http://us.politinfo.com/Information/Country_Profiles/country_profile_052.html (Feb 18, 2004)

> The Vietnam protest and the anti-apartheid movement […] were socially unifying in recruiting minority support from a wide spectrum; […] The anti-apartheid movement confidently shifted its focus to racial discrimination at home; a heightened demand for rights and recognition arose from some Maoris; civil rights were jealously defended; a radical feminist movement emerged; censorship became more liberal; the anti-nuclear movement broadened its support […] it is not surprising that a decade so marked by confidence, action and affluence experiences growth and diversity, both in movements of opinion and in the arts.[317]

The two strongest movements that had mutual effect on literature and society were the Women's Movement and the Maori Renaissance. They account for a new diversity in New Zealand literature, which was enriched by the voices of the previously marginalised, such as women and ethnic minorities. However, there are distinct differences between Maori voices accessing the literary canon and women's voices being published. This unit will focus on Pakeha women's voices breaking into the male Pakeha dominance. The path of Maori poetry into the New Zealand canon will be dealt with separately in chapter seven.

Because of the diversity of poetic styles and authors, New Zealand literary criticism could no longer block off or deny international influence. However, instead of liberating the critical paradigms from the tight realist conventions of the 1950s, the new critical authorities yet again attempted to delineate a distinct New Zealand style. C.K. Stead, one of the leading literary critics in the 1970s,[318] claimed to move New Zealand poetry closer to international dynamics by stating that there was a paradigm shift away from Curnow's realism towards an anglo-American and British modernism. Stead saw the need for

> a movement which would have fundamental theoretical implications. In the 1960s […] it can be argued [that] such a movement occurred. A new wave of young New Zealand poets discovered what I'm calling the Modernist tradition. They found it partly in Pound and Carlos Williams; they found it even more in the post-war American poets.[319]

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317 W. H. Oliver, "The Awakening Imagination" (1981): 457-8.

318 Kendrick Smithyman, Allen Curnow, Bill Manhire and Vincent O'Sullivan also belong into this category of leading New Zealand critics.

319 C.K. Stead, "From Wystan to Carlos – Modern and Modernism in Recent New Zealand Poetry" [1979] (1981): 147.

As with Curnow's statements, Stead's critical stance was more exclusive than inclusive. Even though Stead himself denied doing this,[320] he delineated a new aesthetic guideline for New Zealand writing that was just as controversially debated as Curnow's.[321] Edmond, for instance, had never embraced the aesthetic notions of modernism. In fact, she detested modernist writing and discarded it as "male poetry which is about the intellectualising of ideas and doesn't work well in poetry."[322]

Parallel to Curnow's times, Stead's critical ethos of the 1970s also singled out a small group of Auckland poets as representative of the new poetic sensitivity in New Zealand. They were connected to the magazine *The Word is Freed,*[323] a short-lived Auckland journal, whose editors Alan Brunton, Murray Edmond and Stewart Mitchell mainly used it as a platform for their own work. Stead assesses their endeavours as follows:

> The periodical *Freed* which ran through five issues from 1969 to 1972 […] was the strongest and clearest single assertion that new poets of the decade were taking a different path from their predecessors, and that they were interested in matters of poetic theory.[324]

Stead deliberately leans on the tradition initiated by Curnow. Elizabeth Caffin's article in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature*, on the other hand, denies the *Freed* poets such monumental status by stating that "[f]ew memorable poems were written, and they developed no coherent body of theory."[325]

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320 C.K. Stead, "From Wystan to Carlos – Modern and Modernism in Recent New Zealand Poetry" [1979] (1981): 158-9.

321 Elizabeth Caffin, "Poetry 1945-90" (1991): 420-1. Parts of this arguments also refer to Allen Phillipson's paper at the Annual Conference of the New Zealand Studies Association in London 3rd July 2004 entitled: "The New New Poetry: Anthologies, Critics and the Rhetorics of Exclusion". The publication is due with the conference proceedings.

322 Sue Kedgley "Interview with Lauris Edmond" (1989): 187.

323 Murray Edmond, "Creating a Potent Image – Notes on the Magazine *The Word is Freed*" (1983); Dennis McEldowny, "Publishing, Patronage, Literary Magazines" (1991): 588-9; Elizabeth Caffin, "Poetry 1945-90" (1991): 418-9.

324 C.K. Stead, "From Wystan to Carlos – Modern and Modernism in Recent New Zealand Poetry" [1979] (1981): 147-8.

325 Elizabeth Caffin, "Poetry 1945-90" (1991): 419.

The opinion of what New Zealand poetry entails was delimited once again by a male critical establishment that focused on male poets.[326] In his review on *Big Smoke* (2000),[327] one of the most recent new anthologies of New Zealand poetry of the 1960s, John Newton critically illuminates its rebellious zeitgeist from a gender perspective:

> For men, new modes of sexual and aesthetic expression and new forms of public consciousness marked a jump, but one readily accomplished from the platform of inherited gender privilege and double standards. Women were obliged to travel further and faster, assimilating the sexual and aesthetic adventures of the new youth culture while at the same time negotiating a radical disruption of the kinds of conjugal and career socialisation that had been modelled for them by their mothers.[328]

As the anthology sets out to expose, the poets of the 1960s were not mainly male but the successful ones were. This means that the critical gender bias that had emerged in the 1940s and 50s persisted.

Despite the growing amount of women's publications, women's poetry often failed to break into the phalanx of men on account of the conservative critical standards that were set. The lack of a 'female establishment' accounted for the lack of a female poetic tradition. Despite pioneers, such as Bethell who was published in England and New Zealand, women were almost erased from literary consciousness after World War II. The only woman who started to become a 'role model' for fellow writers was Fleur Adcock (1934 -). However, Adcock is an ambivalent example from a New Zealand literary perspective because she followed a different cultural calling, emigrating to England, the country of her birth, for good in 1963. Claimed by two literary canons ever since, Adcock, though expatriate, is still considered one of New Zealand's most prolific and successful poets while she also gains highest praises in Britain.[329] In Janet Wilson's recent analysis "Fleur Adcock: Ambivalent Expatriate, 1964-1974" (2003), the critic focuses on the poet's

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326 Jan Kemp (1949 -) was the notable example at the time and has recently received new attention through the re-evaluation of the 1960s poetry scene in New Zealand. She has published consistently ever since her first book of poetry *Quiet in the Eye* (1975). However, due to her living as an expatriate for more than 25 years teaching English in Canada, the Pacific region, Hongkong, Singapore and Germany it could be assumed that she simply was not present in the critical estimation while she lived abroad. See: The University of Auckland Library Te Tumu Herenga. Ed. "Jan Kemp" URL: http://www.library.auckland.ac.nz/subjects/nzp/nzlit2/kemp.htm (16 July 2004)

327 Alan Brunton, Murray Edmond, and Michele Leggott, *Big Smoke: NZ Poems 1960-1975* (2000).

328 John Newton, "The Typewriter in The Next Room" (2000): 144.

329 In Britain's most recent search for the position of Poet Laureate, Fleur Adcock was amongst the last three candidates.

dual cultural affiliation in her early poetry. As Wilson remarks, Adcock is still read in New Zealand and included in its canon, although she excluded herself outspokenly from it in stating that

> [t]he decision to settle permanently in another country leads to a subtle but distinct alteration in one's consciousness and attitudes; without ceasing to be a New Zealander one develops a view of the world whose focus is elsewhere.[330]

In her poem "Ngauranga Gorge Hill"[331] (1971) Adcock writes "Wellington and I have no/ quarrel. But I think it was a barren place" (30-1). To a certain extent this might point toward what Adcock perceived as the lack of imagination or, as some critics called it, anti-intellectualism in a country preoccupied with the outdoors and team sports rather than culture. On the other hand, she might have perceived the male bias in publishing as suffocating. Strictly speaking, she is not part of the local New Zealand scene. Nevertheless, her imagination paves the way for women like Edmond who started to re-negotiate their space in New Zealand society and literature. Wilson states that

> Adcock's occupying of interstitial spaces, in-between zones where identity can be constructed and deconstructed, arose from the need to find some equilibrium between her dual allegiances.[332]

Adopting Wilson's view of Adcock's early poetry, I argue that the poet's search for interstitial spaces relates to my notion of poetry as a Space of Overlap and a Space of Mediation. Adcock's poetic imagination became the model for New Zealand women because she mediated a dual calling in her quest of identity. Where Adcock negotiates two cultural homelands, women living in New Zealand try to get two terms with two commitments: on the one hand, their social role as mothers and housewives, and on the other, their personal desires.

When the International Women's Year was celebrated in 1975, a new women's confidence forged its path. It was in that same year that Lauris Edmond made her appearance on the literary scene as a promising new poetic voice, winning the PEN First Book Award for *In Middle Air*. As with many

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330 Fleur Adcock, "Introduction" *Oxford Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry* (1982): xiii.

331 The poem appeared in Adcock's collection *High Tide in the Garden.* Fleur Adcock, *POEMS 1960-2000.* (2000): 43.

332 Janet Wilson, "Fleur Adcock: Ambivalent Expatriate 1964-1974" (2003): 55-6.

of her fellow women, she had realised that the patriarchal grip on women's lives inhibited their future prospects and consequently had started to distance herself emotionally from the gender role model of the 1950s. Her poetry accounts for the changing role of white New Zealand women in the knowledge that the fight for equal opportunities had only begun.

> Working mothers still bore the chief responsibility for maintaining the home. The lack of child-care centres reflected the continuing strength of the view that women with pre-school children should remain at home. Till the late 1960s at least, most women entered the work-force without altering either the assumptions about their "place" or the actual pattern of discrimination which kept them in sex-typed jobs.[333]

Hence, women were still bound to their assigned social role as housewives and mothers. In consequence, women who aspired to professional and creative fulfillment outside of this paradigm could not find the space to do so in a social or cultural sense. Dinah Hawken captures this dilemma in her poem "Balance" (1987)[334] where she writes:

> And what I ask
> from far below my own life,
> as the rescue work goes on, and what
> we must know in this time of crisis, yes,
> and grief, hunching towards the best,
> most ambitious dead end of all, is where
> are the women, where exactly are we?
>
> (Dinah Hawken, "Balance")

The poetic speaker in Hawken's poem not only points to the dilemma of women lacking space but also shows that there is a communal 'we' in search of a substantial presence of women in the socio-cultural makeup of New Zealand.

As was the case with the post-World War II era, poetry anthologies were in the limelight of New Zealand canon discussions in the 1970s. Riemke Ensing's anthology *Private Gardens* (1977) can be seen as pioneer work that had long been overdue. The introduction to this first anthology of New Zealand women's poetry is rather defensive as if in apprehension of the criticism to come. Ensing almost apologises for having compiled an exclusively women's anthology:

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333 Graeme Dunstall, "The Social Pattern" (1981): 427-8.

334 The poem is published in Hawken's volume *It Has No Sound and is Blue* (1987).

> A collection of women poets seems to me to be no more arbitrary than a collection of say, *Young* New Zealand poets, or *Recent* New Zealand poets […] as arbitrary in fact as *any* collection whose tastes and slant must inevitably represent the editor's choice and point of view. (italics original)[335]

The title *Private Gardens* evokes the division of New Zealand society along a binary gendered space model: on the one hand, the public space, mostly a male, hence dominant space, and on the other, the private, female, hence dominated space. Yet again, this is mirrored in the critical assessments of the quality of poetry at the time. C.K. Stead, for instance, states that

> poetry must be public: not in making political, or moral, or religious, or philosophical, or national pronouncements (though of course it may want to do any of these things). Primarily the poem must be public *in not being private*. It must be one man's vision, or one woman's vision, of a shared world. (italics original)[336]

The shared world suggests the awareness of patterns that are larger than each individual's lifeworlds. I argue that this awareness was growing, not only in an aesthetic sense as Stead suggests, but more poignantly so in a socio-cultural sense. In my view, once criticism considers 'public' a marker of good New Zealand poetry, it cuts out a whole segment of poetic sensitivity.

Since the ruling critical notion was still oriented toward the male tradition, the title *Private Gardens* seemed to confirm the prejudices towards women's poetry. It reminds of Baxter's statements on regarding the garden in women's poetry as the "symbolic extension of their soul and body."[337] The same stereotype might have driven the critical arguments toward the poems in the anthology as lacking in range, as well as being personal and limited[338] – judgments which Janet Frame, New Zealand's most famous woman prose writer, might have anticipated in not consenting to be included in the anthology.[339] Lydia Wevers interprets the title as a space that limits women's creative freedom through "understood boundaries,"[340] which underlines, even more markedly, that the choice of title was a rather unfortunate one.

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335 Riemke Ensing, 'Introduction' to *Private Gardens* (1977): 10.

336 C.K. Stead, "From Wystan to Carlos – Modern and Modernism in Recent New Zealand Poetry" [1979] (1981): 154.

337 Frank McKay, *James K. Baxter as a Critic. A selection from his literary criticism* (1978): 89.

338 Lydia Wevers, 'Introduction' to *Yellow Pencils* (1988): xix.

339 W. H. Oliver, "The Awakening Imagination" (1981): 459.

340 Lydia Wevers, 'Introduction' to *Yellow Pencils* (1988): xx.

When reading the title as a socio-cultural metaphor of its time, it can be seen to capture the gradual and tentative exodus of women from the domestic environment. The adjective 'private' suggests shelter in a semi-public space. It has to be said that not many of the women published in *Private Gardens* continued writing. For a few others it was a springboard into establishing themselves as New Zealand's leading women poets, as was the case with Lauris Edmond, Rachel McAlpine and Elizabeth Smither. This was largely because their work was never considered to represent the "current poetic orthodoxy"[341] in the first place. Without being overtly, radically feminist, these women managed to appropriate their own cultural territory and continued doing so especially when the prejudices against women in public allegedly no longer existed. That this was a misjudgment became clear when, as Wevers stated, the compilation of an anthology of women's poetry raised "the political questions about the importance of gender in writing and publishing."[342]

The awareness of a larger cultural agenda eventually lead to what Rosemary Novitz calls, a "cultural feminism," which

> involves the creation of a 'women's culture' through music, the visual arts, novels, poetry, plays, films and cartoons. This is a means of expressing a uniquely female perspective as an alternative to male-dominated artistic and cultural production.[343]

Such unique female perspectives are often expressed through a focus on the domestic environment, but, whereas the critical establishment considered this focus as a limitation, I argue that many women poets employ the domestic environment as a Space of Mediation to bring together different relational patterns that constitute the home. The metaphors that are constructed around domestic surroundings serve as 'codes' or carriers of ironic, sometimes even satirical, twists. Lauris Edmond's poetry and prose chronicle a New Zealand woman artist's struggle with social convention and gender role stereotypes during the crucial phase of New Zealand women emancipating themselves to become indispensable voices in their country's literary canon.

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341 Elizabeth Caffin, *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature* (1991): 438.

342 Lydia Wevers, 'Introduction' to *Yellow Pencils* (1988): xvii.

343 Rosemary Novitz, "Women: Weaving an Identity" (1989): 58.

6.2 Lauris Edmond: Life and Writing

Initially torn between her art and her role as housewife and mother in the 1950s, Edmond experienced the transition from a private to a public woman voice in the last three decades of 20th century New Zealand. She successfully managed to unite both 'worlds', or 'life one' and 'life two' as she herself termed them,[344] in her poetic and personal life while becoming New Zealand's most popular woman poet. Born in 1924 near Napier on the north island, Edmond trained to become a teacher and a speech therapist at Victoria University Wellington. As the wife of Trevor Edmond, a school teacher, she lived in various places, mostly in small towns in New Zealand.


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The start of her career as a poet was marked with the PEN Best First Book Award for her debut volume of poetry *In Middle Air* published in 1975, the International Women's Year. She continued publishing from then on gradually becoming not only a prominent poet but also very active in the Wellington literary scene. Numerous honours followed her first one. When Edmond was awarded The Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1985, she was the first New Zealand writer ever to be bring this prestigious award to her country. She was also one of the few working writers who was given an Honorary Doctorate for her achievements in and services to literature.[345] In 1986, she was awarded an OBE (Order of the British Empire) for services to New Zealand literature.

Until her death in January 2000 at her home in Wellington, Edmond remained a committed and active spokeswoman for New Zealand poetry. In many respects, she has proven to be a forerunner for women writers in New Zealand. Edmond was the cofounder of *New Zealand Books*, the review journal of the Peppercorn Press that was initiated in 1990; she remained its poetry editor until her death. Since the early 1980s, anthology entries of

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344 Lauris Edmond, "Where Poetry Begins" (1986): 37-49.; "Only Connect. The Making of *An Autobiography*" (1994): 313-9.

345 Lauris Edmond received an honorary doctorate for services to literature from Massey University in 1988.

Edmond's poetry are given as much space as that of many an established fellow male poet's.

In her twelve collections of poetry,[346] Edmond reveals a woman's voice who often draws from her experience as a mother of six children, which is why Lauris Edmond is often reviewed as having spoken for an entire generation of New Zealand women, in particular with her *Autobiography* (1994).[347] In *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature*, she was thus referred to as "the great New Zealand poet of parents and children,"[348] which – though positively meant – draws a one-sided picture of Lauris Edmond's skill and scope of poetry. Unfortunately, such a view of her poetry persisted and nourished the argument that her 'domestic focus' distanced her from the crucial New Zealand debate of what constitutes the country's literary outlook.[349] This shows that the literary merit of a New Zealand poet was still measured according to his/her contribution to the country's national literary sensibility and not least according to his/ her the fulfilment of aesthetic standards.

Edmond was well aware of the male intellectual bias that regards the private sphere as culturally inferior. However, she pursued her path in believing that what she had to say mattered in a larger cultural context. The pronounced personal voice of her poems and the frequent congruence of author's and poetic speaker's voice might have lead critics to easily jump to conclusions about the autobiographical character of her poetry. Hence, it should be assumed that the personal directness and the "intimate, conversational mode"[350] of Edmond's poetry might not only have been troublesome for many critics, but indeed had been seen as a weakness that

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346 This figure only counts individual volumes. I count *A Matter of Timing* and *In Position* as one since they are basically the same volumes, published simultaneously in New Zealand and in Britain. The European edition contains a few more poems. Various editions of *Selected Poems* are not included. For a chronological list of Edmond's poetry publications see appendix.

347 Edmond's *An Autobiography* was originally published in three volumes: *Hot October* (1986), *Bonfires in the Rain* (1991) and *The Quick World* (1992). A revised and abbreviated one volume edition was published in 1994 under the title *An Autobiography*.
In my further reference to the autobiography, I do not regard it as a factual account of her life but I consider it as a further elaboration of her poetic statement. See also Lauris Edmond "Only Connect: the writing of an autobiography" (1994), Ken Arvidson "Affirming Lucidity – Edmond's wisdom poetry" (1997), and Anne French "The Truth Problem" (2002).

348 Elizabeth Caffin. "Poetry 1945-90" (1991): 439.

349 Kendrick Smithymann, "New and Selected Poems" (1992): 249-51.

350 Janet Wilson, "The Art of Lauris Edmond" (1989): 9.

disqualified Edmond's work as a valuable contribution to New Zealand's national literature.

Without wanting to deny the fact that Edmond's poetic speaker often possesses an autobiographical undertone, it is not justified to reduce her work to mere personal – or even confessional – poetry. When doing that one misses out on an important aspect of Edmond's writing. Edmond's poetic vision reaches further than the boundaries of her personal experience, as many reviewers notably Ken Arvidson, Janet Wilson and Fiona Farrel Poole have shown.[351] The popularity of her work – unsurpassed by any other woman poet in New Zealand even today– shows that Edmond's personal poetic moments translate into moments of cultural insight, in particular when she positions the role of women in New Zealand society in the centre of her poetic attention.

One of the first critics to realise this dimension in Edmond's poetry is Ken Arvidson, who is probably the most prominent scholar on Edmond's work.[352] He called her a "cultural subject" by saying that

> [s]he […] affirms most of the cultural conventions concerning the roles of women even while critiquing them, and it is for this reason that her values and her angles of vision are so culturally interesting.[353]

In extension of Arvidson's argument, I regard Lauris Edmond as a cultural feminist since her poems articulate the concerns of a generation of women who were silenced through ruling gender role conventions. Her poems invite the readers to critically reconsider the intricate construction of the concept of home around gender role conventions in a personal as much as cultural sense. The feminist attitudes that are apparent in Edmond's poems are therefore not driven by an outspoken political feminism but they are expressions of Edmond's cultural sensitivity. In my view, she can in due right be called a

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[351] Ken Arvidson, "Review of *The Pear Tree and Other Poems*. (1978): 69; --- "Review of *Catching It*" (1983): 352-6; --- "Review of *Summer Near the Arctic Circle*" (1990): 127; --- "Review of *A Matter of Timing*" (1996): 1-3.
Janet Wilson, "Catching Up" (1986): 26; --- "The Art of Lauris Edmond" (1986): 9-19.
Fiona Farrel Poole, "Review of *Selected Poems*" (1985): 45-6; --- "Review of *Seasons and Creatures"* (1987): 63.

[352] Ken Arvidson has written exceedingly on Lauris Edmond's poetry and provided many an introduction to her publications. Recently, he has provided introductions for the inlet of the CD *The Poems of Lauris Edmond including Wellington Letter and In Position*. (2000), *50 Poems Lauris Edmond A Celebration*. (1999) and *Lauris Edmond Selected Poems 1975-2000*, published posthumously in 2001. The latter was also edited and selected by Ken Arvidson.

[353] Ken Arvidson, "Affirming Lucidity – Edmond's Wisdom Poetry" (1997): 51.

spokeswoman for many women of her times however much she herself might have argued against this.[354]

Despite her pivotal presence in New Zealand literary circles, both as a poet and critic, and despite the high praises she gained for her style and literary merit, Edmond was rarely read in the context of her local literary tradition. Critics such as Arvidson or Wilson repeatedly stated that her oeuvre is a marker within New Zealand literary history but their criticism mostly focuses on Edmond's own work rather than assessing it in close comparative analysis to other notable New Zealand women poets. In her article "The Art of Lauris Edmond" (1989), Wilson highlights the outstanding quality of Edmond's poetry by balancing aesthetic and cultural factors. Her essay reveals that the estimation of women's poetry lacked a critical history. Partly she seeks to place Edmond at a crucial position in a women's literary heritage by stating that Edmond's work as displayed in the *Selected Poems*[355]

> achieves something of the consistency of a unified vision similar to that found in the writings of Edmond's predecessors like Ursula Bethell, Robin Hyde, Katherine Mansfield and her contemporary Janet Frame. Like these women writers Edmond's voice has emerged apparently independently of the New Zealand poetic tradition.[356]

Wilson puts her finger on the heart of the critical dilemma in aligning Edmond's work with that of her predecessors who were often referred to as 'outstanding' in their own right whilst having emerged independently of a New Zealand poetic tradition. This does not come as a surprise when considering that the tradition discussed here is primarily a male one. However, Wilson does not pursue the issue further and does not provide textual examples to back up her reference to Edmond's predecessors. This is part of the gap in Edmond's critical reception that I seek to close.

My perspective on New Zealand women's poetry from a position outside of New Zealand's local academic circles is of advantage because I do not have to position myself with regard to any particular school within New Zealand's literary circles. Joseph Swann was the first European critic to

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354 See interviews with Sue Kedgley (1989) and with Janet Holst (1997).

355 Lauris Edmond, *Selected Poems* (1984).

356 Janet Wilson, "The Art of Lauris Edmond" (1989): 9.

engage in a close reading of Edmond's poetry from the 'outside'.[357] He approached Edmond's poetry from an aesthetic and philosophical viewpoint by calling her:

> a modern poet, modern in a sense to which we are only gradually becoming accustomed. There is a holism in her [Edmond's] view of the world that is radically different from the discontinuities which have governed Western thought from Luther to Kant to Gadamer and MacLuhan: those discontinuities have given rise both to the ironies of romanticism and to the *angst* of modernism. (Swann, 117)

Even though I cannot agree with Swann about the assumption of an inherent holism in Edmond's poetry, for reasons of certain unresolved questions that are also part of her impetus to write, I believe that his view helped to free the reception of Edmond's poetry from New Zealand critical currents.

Swann considers Edmond's literary merit without feeling the need to anchor her in the context of New Zealand literature. In calling her more modern than the modernists, Swann shows his profound appreciation of the depth of Edmond's poetic achievements and reveals the tremendous potential of a poet who is all too often categorised as writing domestic and family-oriented poetry. Like Wilson, Swann remains focused on Edmond's own work and does not engage in a textual comparison to other poetry.

This brief overview of major criticism on Edmond's poetry reveals that critics all too often pictured Edmond as outstanding in her own right without pursuing an analysis of the socio-cultural and historical anchorage of her most prominent concern, the home. In my ensuing close reading of Edmond's poetry, I distinguish between an individual home that evolves out of a very personal treatment of the subject and a cultural home that stems from a general consciousness of historical and literary roots. Her vision perpetuates the emotional currency of the concept of home, even whilst the physical anchorage thereof becomes more and more lucid. As a result, it can be stated that her re-negotiation of one of the most contested issues in New Zealand poetry represents the connecting link between the poetry of women like Bethell and Stanley and more recent women's poetry at the turn of the millennium to some of whom Edmond has become the role model she herself sought.

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[357] Joseph Swann. "The Separate Self: Wholeness and Continuity in Lauris Edmond's Poetry." (1990): 106-20.

6.3 Seeking Home

The search for home, of where it is and what it entails, runs like a red thread through Lauris Edmond's work whether she writes fiction or poetry. The repeated employment of domestic scenes in her poetry, as discussed below, indicates that the house serves as a Space of Mediation in which to explore the conditions of major emotional trauma while it also negotiates the tug of war between socio-cultural constraints and personal aspirations. At the same time, poetry itself can be regarded as Edmond's most viable homeground which the second ensuing subchapter will reveal.

6.3.1 … in the house

The poems "Playing House"[358], "The Room"[359], "The Task"[360], and "One Way"[361] reveal the domestic environment as a space in which to constitute the home by means of a close investigation into relationships that are *verdichtet* in it. I argue that Edmond uses space, in particular domestic space, to venture beyond the assigned surface value of family relationships and conventional concerns related to the home.

In "Playing House", Edmond uses domestic space to illustrate her poetic search for home. In this poem, the house becomes the metaphorical stage on which Edmond acts out the contrast between spatial and emotional qualities of home. The first stanza presents the house in the manner of a still life painting. It sets the scene that allows readers to become spectators in the *play* about 'playing house' and the *game* of 'playing house', for it is both a play and a game around which Edmond contrives this poem. The game of the child, that is narrated in the poem is a metaphor for the poetic search for home.

Playing House

I come into the hot house
smelling of absence and dust
dead bumblebees on the sill
dry stalks, strange torpors
lying their heads on the air
sunlight ticking stilly

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358 Lauris Edmond, *Selected Poems 1975-1994* (1994): 114.

359 Lauris Edmond, *Catching It* (1983): 42.

360 Lauris Edmond, *Selected Poems 1975-1994* (1994): 172.

361 Lauris Edmond, *Catching It* (1983): 17.

on yellow triangle of floor –

then the door from downstairs flies open
and she is here, my small friend
serious collaborator
in the comical business of living
– I mean, we know precisely
when money and things
are nothing but air in the hand
shop counters and shelves a mirage

(Playing House, 1-15)

It is through the child that the dichotomous design of the poem becomes visible. The entrance of the girl into the house not only breaks the contemplative tone of the poem; it starts the action and draws the reader into a game of illusions about where the home is to be found.

but we know too that some things are real –
the present she's kept for me
tiny soap heart in a tin
a halcyon heart
perfect in her palm, in mine –
we gaze down, consider in silence
this grain of the dust of the stars
'You mustn't put that in the shop' she says
counting transparent money.

Well of course not. This is
an exact and judicious magic
– and I have come home.

(Playing House, 16-end)

The handing over of the soap heart, as a symbol of love, syntactically supported through the parallel structure in "perfect in her palm, in mine – " (Playing House, 20) entails the spatial and emotional concerns of the poetic drama. The house is the Space of Mediation in which the home manifests itself through the relationship between the speaker and the child who play house. In this way, the poem becomes the carrier of Edmond's home vision in a multi-layered *Verdichtung* of space and emotion, reality and imagination. Such complexity illustrates how deeply Edmond's personal home base is rooted in her relationships with people and language. It is the essence of Edmond's home in poetry, "the burning substance" as she so tellingly states in "Driving from the airport" (20).[362]

[362] Lauris Edmond, *Selected Poems 1975-1994* (1994): 102.

Edmond's concept of home is contrived around relationships with people and communication – major themes that are also the focus of her poem "The Room". In contrast to "Playing House", which narrates the gain of home, "The Room" reads like a résumé of the loss of home. In opposition to the action and the conversation in "Playing House", Edmond describes two scenes that are dominated by silence: one in which the "strident silences […]/ quarrelled without relief" (The Room, 6-7) and a second in which the quiet feels like "a bus stop vacated after hours" (The Room, 12-3). This emphasis on silences implies more than the mere absence of communication. The room as a space has two functions: on the one hand, it is the Space of Mediation in which Edmond acts out the drama of relationships; on the other hand, the room can be read as the refuge for the poetic imagination, or Edmond's space as a poet. In the end the speaker is

> Alone in this unbruising dark
> I ponder the bright and ready commotion
> we for twenty years
> reliably called home.
>
> (The Room, 14-end)

Edmond reveals the reader that, to her, a house cannot be a home without compassionate and lively interaction, however bruising this might be. Without communication, the home is lost, and this is a homelessness that is most intensively felt when being alone. In an interview, Edmond confirms this by stating:

> Looking back over my poetry I see that I have been fairly preoccupied with the question of being alone. I'm obviously troubled by that and I haven't yet sorted it out so it keeps coming back to me.[363]

These words first indicate that Edmond had not resolved to live without a partner, but they also indicate her general anxiety of losing emotional bonds, in particular with her family.

This is most painfully expressed in *Wellington Letter* (1980)[364], when the poetic speaker tries to deal with the death of the daughter[365] who is

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[363] Sue Kedgley. "Interview with Lauris Edmond" (1989): 189.

[364] Lauris Edmond, *Wellington Letter* (1980). The quotes in the ensuing discussion refer to Edmond's *Selected Poems 1975-1994* (1994): 31-44.

[365] Edmond's daughter Rachel committed suicide in her early 20s. References to her daughter's death are very frequent in Edmond's work. *Wellington Letter* has in fact been read as Edmond's most accomplished elegy.

present in "the smiling photo beside/ the telephone, the laughter stilled/ on a tape casually recorded" (Letter II, 1-3)[366]. "Wellington Letter II" states:

> Death is an explosion in the mine
> of love; this letter tells of
> reconstruction, failed attempts,
> of gifts, […]
> like neighbours bringing
> soup and clothes to families made
> homeless by disaster.
>
> (Letter II, 23-9)

This homelessness caused by death shows repeatedly in Edmond's poems. It is never really resolved and cannot be made whole.

> […] yet this is the work
> grief gives, to set about composing
> the lifetime that we thought we knew,
> without falsity or fear to try to make
> it whole. […]
>
> (Letter II, 15-9)

In my view, these lines epitomise the striving for wholeness as Edmond's major impetus in conceiving the poem. It is, however, not, as Swann stated, an expression of wholeness. The death of a loved person is the unresolved traumatic event that renders the home in fragments.

"The Task" speaks of death as "the signal, the summoning" (1), which brings the family together in the house where they will take leave of

> […]; the still figure
> in the ward, drawn already away into silences
>
> too remote for mother or sister or lover.
>
> (The Task, 10-12)

In the inability to grasp the home beyond death through language, the poem works with fragmented replacements, such as the picture of the idyllic domestic scene with "the dry timber/ of walls and verandahs, the creaking of stalks/ in the autumn garden" (The Task, 14-6). The house is the familiar place and also the place where absence begins: it is start and goal, beginning and end, of Edmond's poetic journey. I argue that Edmond uses it as a Space of Overlap in a more universal sense than I discussed in chapter three. She is not concerned with the public/ private dichotomy but more prominently with

[366] Lauris Edmond, *Selected Poems* (1994): 31.

the antagonism of grief and happiness and ultimately life and death. To Edmond, faith in the incorporating powers of the family home translate into a more philosophical conception of the home as an enabling space.

In the poem "One Way" (1983)[367], the speaker searches for home in memories of the past, drifting between nostalgia, yearning and the knowledge of loss. Yet again, the poem can easily be compared with another genre: that of film. In the same way a dream is presented in film through the blurring of the scene, Edmond wraps the poem into the "ghostly outlines of rain"; a very fitting image to convey a memory flashback.

> One Way
>
> Rain at evening; the ghostly outlines of rain;
> in a foreign garden the shadow of places
> I shall never come to again.
>
> What an endless leaving our lives are,
> how they stretch back complete with houses
> and people all directions familiar:
>
> those we knew still yarning to one another
> at doorways or in chairs out on the verandah
> looking up at the weather
>
> or in town at dusk hurrying to the bus stop
> remembering near home to pick up a paper
> and cigarettes from the last little shop –
>
> 'There!' we say, 'that was home,' and look
> for ourselves in their faces; but there
> is nothing. They don't want us back.
>
> Perhaps we too have become, for them, the old town
> now left behind for ever; and there is only
> some strange garden, palm leaves; rain.

The poem zooms in on the memory of the past, on the scene in a small town of New Zealand. The past stretches back "complete with houses/ and people all directions familiar" (One Way, 5-6) so that the moments in time can be put on the map. However, the details of small town life, in particular the houses, are presented in so abstract a manner that they look like accessories on a shelf. The seeming recognition of home reveals itself to be an illusion, or a mirage that emphasises homelessness and disconnection when Edmond

[367] Lauris Edmond, *Catching It* (1983): 42.

verdichtet special and emotional sensations. It reaches its densest point when the speaker states to "look/ for ourselves in their faces; but there/ is nothing" (One Way, 13-5). The nostalgic home journey 'down memory lane' is unmasked as wishful thinking with which the poem makes clear that houses are only illusions of home once the human relationships do not exist any longer.

The speaker's final realisation of her own nostalgia in "One Way" reminds of Ursula Bethell's poem "Primavera", where the poetic speaker concludes:

> […] there are reasons, primroses, there are secret reasons,
> Why we shall not resent the sure process of the seasons,
> Our transitory springtime and the quick passing of the years,
> But like you with the dew on you smile up through our tears!
>
> (Primavera, 21-24)

But whereas Bethell's poem keeps pondering on the 'sweet sting' (Primavera, 31) of nostalgia, the speaker in "One Way" realises that houses and places become, what Edmond aptly calls the "commotion we […] reliably called home" in "The Room" (15-7). In the final line of "One Way", it is the rain that persists, but not the home.

This poem also shows that Edmond's nostalgic quest for home is undertaken in a different cultural homeland than Bethell's. It does not point back to the cultural context of Britain but to rural New Zealand. Apart from showing the autobiographical colouring of Edmond's nostalgia, it shows how far the New Zealand imagination has travelled: the quest for home is no longer enacted on the old 'h(H)ome' complex but is more intricately conveyed in a 'here and now'.

Edmond's personal quest for home is thus also a cultural one in her attempt to confront and comfort New Zealanders with the country they live in. She tries to make visible what is real and discloses nostalgia as an all too comfortable illusion. The two major themes of the poem "One Way", memory and history, are supported by the formal composition of the poem, which reveals the one way to be both spatial, through a linear structure, and temporal, through the use of a circular structure. The attempt at breaking up the linearity of time through memories fails, in such a way that the speaker finds herself trapped. In opposition to Bachelard who depicts memory as a

healing and soothing exercise of returning to the childhood home that he sees as refuge, shell, or cradle[368] Edmond shows that memories with such a large amount of nostalgia can trap the poetic wanderer rather than provide consolation.

It is not until 1996, when her collection *In Position/ A Matter of Timing*[369] appeared that Edmond expresses a sense of arrival in her poetic quest for home. She wrote "we embark, there is no arriving" in *Wellington Letter* in 1980, while she states in "Discovery" in 1996[370]:

> This is
>
> home, I whisper, amazed. If
> anything is mine it is this
> luminous gift held out across
>
> the unknowing dark.
>
> (Discovery, 6-10)

Again the speaker is in the domestic environment. But this time, the house is no longer empty and is not an expression of absences. Rather the opposite, it is the quiet place of solace. For the first time, the poetic speaker is not troubled by being alone but rather comforted by the stillness around her.

> In this stillness I neither
>
> lift nor handle, I stand at the window,
> weighing nothing, carrying nothing.
> I breathe, and the light grows
>
> within me. Home is where your life
> holds you in its hand and, when
> it is ready, puts you quietly down.
>
> (Discovery, 15-end)

In a similar fashion as in "Playing House", Edmond introduces the home as a gift; it is the luminous gift that represents the home. The gift is not handed over but the speaker participates in it herself, which Edmond so graphically depicts through the speaker's symbiosis with the light. Eventually, she comes

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368 Gaston Bachelard. *Poetik des Raumes* (1960): 35-40.

369 In Europe this volume was published under *In Position* (Bloodaxe Books), in New Zealand under *A Matter of Timing* (Auckland University Press). There are a few more poems in the European edition where the poems are arranged in a slightly different order. According to Edmond herself, the different makeup of the New Zealand publication was largely due to the editor.

370 "Discovery" can only be found in *In Position* (1996): 61.

to realise that she carries her home within her. Here, Edmond's sense of arrival outgrows spatial, in particular domestic, boundaries. In "Discovery", she displays, for the first time, a wholeness between inside and outside while acknowledging the infinite vastness of each.

6.3.2 … in Poetry

To Edmond, poetry provides habitable space for individual and personal as much as cultural homemaking. Poetry can function as a surrogate home which renders it independent of time, place and social constraints. In reference to Virginia Woolf, poetry can be considered Edmond's room to let herself be the outlet for her creative powers. In my view, Edmond confirms such an argument on her writing in her *Autobiography,* where she states that

> [h]ome had always been the starting point and final destination for every journey, but what I now saw […] was a centre which already was not central at all, not one thing but many, parallel rivers into which I plunged, taking intermittent runs from one to another and back again. They never came together and I never tried to make them do so.[371]

This metaphoric depiction of the parallel rivers as the home mirrors the multi-dimensional quality of Edmond's concept of home. Throughout her oeuvre, Edmond's poetry moves between inner and outer worlds, between the self and the speaking voice. This is stated in the manner of a brief conceptual sketch in her poem "I name this place", Edmond put as an epigraph to the one-volume edition of her *Autobiography*:

I name this place
to find it

by looking truly
I can hear and speak my dream

this is where I stay
also my journey

(I name this place, l. 1-6)

The starting point of each poetic journey is the home, which in turn is given and received through language. To Edmond, writing enacts the activity of building a home, or, in other words, it represents her quest for home, her Odyssey.

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[371] Lauris Edmond, *An Autobiography* (1994): 317.

This is most intensely expressed in *Wellington Letter* (1980), a sequence of poems that has been praised most frequently for its accomplished elegiac qualities. Lauris Edmond did indeed write the sequence in order to come to terms with the suicide of her daughter Rachel. The subject matter of each poet always spurs them to circle around the search for words to describe the unspeakable, but at the same time this searching reveals that poetry is the organiser of Edmond's most intensely felt emotions. *Wellington Letter* illustrates the personal, cultural and literary aesthetic axis around which Edmond's concept of home revolves.

> […] this is the work
> grief gives, to set about composing
> the lifetime that we thought we knew,
> without falsity of fear to try to make
> it whole […]
>
> (Letter II, 18-22)

Poetry in those passages carries the hope of reconstructing irredeemable loss in a way similar to Mary Stanley's more personal poems. Like Mary Stanley, who dedicated many poems to her first husband who died in the Second World War, Edmond seeks to overcome the grief for her daughter by remembering her through poetry. To a certain extent, this also relates to Bethell who considered her home lost forever after the death of Effie Pollen. In Bethell's poetic development, grief conditions her vision in the final phase of her writing. This might have given her poetry a more profound philosophical and religious depth, but it also took away much of the tongue-in-cheek lightness of her early poetry. In Stanley's work, grief is interwoven with her general cultural and creative disillusionment so that it can be seen as an integral part of her poetic impetus. The same can be said for Edmond. However, whereas it darkens the tone of Stanley's poetic voice, grief in Edmond's work reinforces a sense of joy about the experienced moment. It thus conditions the moment when poetry 'elbows into joy'.

To Edmond, poetry becomes the saviour from spiritual death; it is the veritable companion and friend who

> […] took me outside
> to breathe the biting air. This was
> the new seed.
>
> (Letter IV, 31-3)

The new seed depicts the self-realisation of the poetic persona as a poet. Writing becomes the healing exercise that helps to cope with the disintegration of the personal home and to start rebuilding it. 'The new seed' starts another life cycle; it is the grain out of which Edmond's poetry evolves, and it is a positive life-embracing force.

Edmond's repeated reference to nature shows the interconnectedness of the world within and around her. According to Wilson, Edmond's empathy with the natural world translates into a "transcendental metaphysic,"[372] which may best be seen in the final poem of *Wellington Letter*.

> […] We are the cells
> of time; snow will fall upon us
> with its crisping touch, wind blow
> our dust, water wash us in the pebbled
> body of the sea, and the stars
> take always their dark road.
>
> (Letter XVIII, 17-22)

The voice of the poem, now depersonalised, becomes part of the elements. Similar to Mary Stanley in "Time is a River", Edmond weaves the personal life into the larger context of the creation.

The speaker in her poem knows she is part of a cycle of life and death, something Wilson might have called a "circle of wholeness,"[373] which comes close to Swann's opinion of Edmond's ontology of relatedness.[374] Transience is the major reference point for putting personal emotion into perspective. Whereas Stanley spoke of the land "behind the barricading sea" (Sonnett for Riri, 13), Edmond refers to

> […] this land of giant angularities
> how we cultivate mind's middle distances;
> tame and self-forgiving, how easily
> we turn on one another, cold or brutish
> towards the weak, the too superior . . .
>
> As I write the morning still sleeps
> on the white water – that same sea
> that through ripe and oblivious reasons
> must flare at last into horizons that
> we have never learned to recognise.
>
> (Letter XVI, 23-32)

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372 Janet Wilson, "The Art of Lauris Edmond" (1989): 12.

373 Ibid: 12.

374 Joseph Swann, "The Separate Self: Wholeness and Continuity in Lauris Edmond's Poetry." (1990): 108.

The picture of the sea with the horizon extending ad infinitum employed here is a typical one for New Zealand. Most obviously, the feeling of remoteness, of disconnectedness – often exile – shines through in the metaphor of the sea. Space is a major factor in Bethell's, Stanley's, and Edmond's work; it conditions their imagination and the makeup of their extended metaphors be they domestic, local or national. Edmond perceives nature as an infinite source for the poetic imagination. Her experience is no longer 'islanded'[375] and isolated. The image of the wanderer and home seeker that underlies many of her poems indicates that she is on a poetic journey and travels far beyond geographical boundaries. Edmond calls for a positive engagement with cultivating the imagination in New Zealand and not only at "mind's middle distances" but further towards, as Bethell had called it "still undiscovered shores" (The Long Harbour, 48). Like her literary ancestor, Edmond's search for home, as it is expressed throughout her oeuvre, can be read as an ongoing voyage.

In my view Edmond's metaphors of space are less concerned with exile but instead turn to the individual as a cultural subject. She no longer relies on Britain as a cultural reference point, even though her education is Pakeha European. Instead, she turns toward the examination of New Zealand as her homeland, which yet again reminds of Ursula Bethell's words in "Pause", where she encourages the reader to go beyond the familiar and comfortably moulded cultural image of New Zealand by means of digging deeper.

The emancipation that began with Bethell's "earnest digging"[376] finds its continuation in the last sequence of Edmond's *Wellington Letter*.

> there is [no love]
> great enough to cross the seas that roar
> between our separate mountain tops.
> We embark, there is no arriving.
>
> (Letter XVIII, 6-9)

Ulysses, the eternal wanderer, becomes the literary leitmotif of Edmond's search for home space. Like Ulysses, Edmond perceives her home quest as an everlasting journey, and, like the epic hero's, the home is at the same time the starting point and final destination of her quest. Such binary opposites, be

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375 See the analysis of Mary Stanley's poem "Cut Off by Tides" in the previous chapter.

376 Ursula Bethell "Pause" (1). See also chapter 4.4.

they spatial or emotional, condition Edmond's search for habitable space in a personal and cultural sense.

6.4 Women-House-Home

It is now a commonplace stereotype, yet it must be stated again that women have often been pictured as the archetypal homemakers. However, have they succeeded in making homes for themselves, too? In Lauris Edmond's poems, like in Mary Stanley's, the house is questioned as the sole centre of women's existence. Both women address the strong limitations to their creative powers because of being confined to the house and the household in the role of mothers and housewives. But where Mary Stanley was strongly inhibited by the conventions of the 1950s and eventually stopped writing, Lauris Edmond was celebrated as a new woman's voice in New Zealand poetry in the spirit of the 1970s Women's Movement. As housewife and mother, Edmond realises that her home is a 'nowhere place', a kind of blind spot in the public eye, and yet it is a place that is of crucial significance to her personal existence, the place where she has "intensely belonged"[377] for almost an entire lifetime. As she continues to question her identity as a woman and a writer, standing between her social role and her desires, her poetic message does not let itself be pinned down. Undermining coincides with underpinning of the stereotypical bond between the woman and the domestic environment.

6.4.1 Ancient Humilities

Edmond's attitude to the roles of women in the home is often ambiguous. She criticises the overtly sweet and stereotypical 1950s idyll while at the same time embracing a home that provides comfort and stability. In "Epithalamium",[378] it becomes clear that Edmond does not want to discard the home as the centre of the family. However, the poem also shows that she perceived the confined gender roles of women in the homes as a socio-cultural construction which paid no heed to women as individual people with individual desires.

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377 Lauris Edmond, *An Autobiography* (1994): 262.

378 Lauris Edmond, *Selected Poems* (1994):132.

By definition, an epithalamium is a song or poem written to celebrate a marriage. However, Edmond's poem with the same title leaves open whether or not this poem is actually meant to celebrate or to mourn marriage because it conveys the tone of an obituary.

> Wife, woman, hausfrau, female companion
> You are rightly summoned again
> To the careful ceremony. But you know,
> You never left off being married
> As you went on guarding your supplies
> (ripening figs, soup stock, pears
> to be bottled) with a gentle managing tact
> somehow avoiding the crowd of waiting
> ambitions while you nourished the cells
> of the house –
>
> (Epithalamium, 1-10)

The woman's role in the home is so central that she becomes an essential, functional part of a living organism called house. Yet again, Edmond uses the house as a Space of Mediation in which to investigate social and cultural patterns of female identity.

The opening line of the poem, which enumerates different names for the woman in the house/ home, reads like a reduction of the female self solely to domestic and caring activity. The chorus-like repetition of the opening line in the second stanza of the poem mirrors the repetitive rhythm of household duties and establishes a female solidarity that spans across history and cultures. The term 'hausfrau' is not only the German term for housewife, it is at the same time the epitome of the happy 1950s woman in the home. With the telling line "let me redefine the notion" (12), the voice of the speaker breaks with such cultural coinage:

> Wife, wif, woman, let me redefine the notion
> Stand it before me, observe
> The natural wave of its greying hair
> The unclamorous refrain of the voice
> And the confident smell of a cleaned kitchen
>
> (Epithalamium, 12-16)

The poem laments the fact that female confidence is so tightly connected to the household that the woman's self and her creative identity is confined to the limited sphere of domestic space, in this case the kitchen.

In my opinion, Edmond mourns the "unclamorous refrain of the voice" (Epithalamium, 15) that is so deeply embedded in women's subconscious, or

is so seductive, that "the crowd of waiting/ ambitions" (Epithalamium, 8-9) is never listened to.

> yes the wife in you, widowed, kept up
> its daily preparation of house room
> for the heart, stayed mysteriously content
> with the ancient humilities
> a lit fire, a boiling kettle
> the deep solace of bread.
>
> (Epithalamium, l. 19-end)

With 'ancient humilities', Edmond alludes to a long history of the patriarchal construction of women at the hearth. The speaker perceives this construction as anachronistic wondering why the woman can be "mysteriously content" (21) with housekeeping. The tone of Edmond's poem is not negative and does not discard such 'humility', rather Edmond investigates two positions in a whole spectrum of women's identities: one woman is still content with her role, and the other feels utterly mystified by such desires. In reducing the picture of the woman in the house to a few attributes that are universally exchangeable, Edmond carves out an anthropological pattern of women's roles as carers of the nest, as the a-historical guardians of the home. In such moments, Edmond transcends the cultural context of New Zealand and aligns New Zealand women's fates with those of women all over the world.

In a more extended feminist reading, "Epithalamium" can be seen as questioning the necessity of the standard husband-wife partnership, which was previously and is still sometimes seen as the basis of a woman's identity. By pretending to celebrate, Edmond's poem undermines the concept of marriage and the evaluation of it on the social scale. Her poem thus echoes the statements of Adrienne Rich and Monique Wittig about marriage as an institution that curbs the intellectual and creative freedom of women.[379]

In her deconstruction of the concept of home, Edmond does not solely criticise such social constraints, she also questions the ruling perception of the home as the emotional refuge from the world, Bachelard had identified. In

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[379] See Monique Wittig's essays "One is not born a woman" (9-20) and "On the Social Contract" (33-45) in *The straight mind and other essays (1992).* Wittig's formulations are useful to understand the institutionalisation of the heterosexual marriage even though she argues from a radical lesbian point of view. Another important point in this debate is made by Adrienne Rich who praises the 'marriage resistance' of many women artists, notably poets in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" in *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985* (1986) 56-8.

"The sums", Edmond deconstructs the Bachelardian "cosmic trust"[380] in the positive notion of the house as the warm and positive nest.

> Somewhere you are always going home;
> Some shred of the rag of events
> Is forever being torn off and kept
> In an inside pocket or creased satchel
> […]
> it's kept for the moment when you go
> mooching along the verandah and through
> the back door, brass-handled, always ajar.
>
> (The sums, 1-9)

Like in "Epithalamium", Edmond draws on the image of homeliness which immediately evokes the image of the mother because the cultural codes of domesticity and homeliness are recognisable throughout the generations. The verandah, the back door that is always open and, the smell of savoury kitchen steam evoke childhood memories in New Zealand readers. At the same time, these cultural codes strongly resemble a British homeliness which indicates New Zealand's European cultural lineage.[381]

In "The sums" and in "Epithalamium", the house is depicted as a living organism. In both cases, the cells of the house need to be nourished by the woman and it can be stated that the house and the woman are almost in a state of symbiosis. Changes to the physical setting concur with changes to the emotional setting of the poem. Eventually, Edmond invokes the perspective of a child in which the woman cannot be identified as a woman, not even as a person, but as a

> floured apron [that] stands monumental
> above veined legs in a cloud of savoury steam,
> mince, onion, the smell of childhood's Julys;
>
> (The sums, 10-2)

The metonymic use of the apron reduces the woman to a function, the apron becomes the pars pro toto for her image. In such moments, Edmond unmasks Bachelard's sense of wholeness, which manifests itself in the memory of the home, as a delusion. Instead, she presents the ruins of a shattered ideal.

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380 Gaston Bachelard, *Poetik des Raumes* (1960): 131.

381 Lauris Edmond considered herself part of a European-English-New Zealand Pakeha culture. In the interview with Rick Johnson she says that she considers the Maori side of New Zealand culture enriching, also language-wise, but she stresses that her own background is English and European. Rick Johnson "An Interview with Lauris Edmond" (1989): 65.

> Your life's a ruined verandah, the apron,
> the disfigured legs that with a stolid
> magnificence used to hold up the world.
>
> (The sums, 21-end)

Such words peel off the gloss of childhood memory, showing that the public notion of the womb-like character of the home as it is upheld by many critical voices in public discourse is long gone. Instead they confirm the house as Mary Stanley's "artefact of care" (The Wife Speaks, 9-10). The omnipresent nostalgia for these visions in the ensuing decades stem from the lack of a viable home place. In fact, the surfacing of problems at home, inside the family, that 'nuclear grain' of society, have proven that many a family is dysfunctional, and the only socio-political solution seems to have been to return to the 'ancient humility of a boiling kettle' (Epithalamium, 22-3). Against the background of this Cult of Domesticity, these words read like bitterly ironic social criticism.

Edmond's deconstruction of the domestic environment as a positive space for women is also poignantly expressed in "The Deal".[382] The line "man woman house tree" in "The Deal" (7) resembles the enumeration "wife, woman, hausfrau, companion" in the first line of "Epithalamium". In the latter case, Edmond works with synonymy in order to suggest the different functions of the woman. In "The Deal", Edmond uses a chain of words that connects four different 'domains' with each other. Because she chooses to omit any punctuation, Edmond manages to suggest a similar synonymous *Vedichtung* as in "Epithalamium" so that "man woman house tree" (The Deal, 7) is perceived as a unit.

The linguistic 'bonding' of the man and the woman with the cultural as well as the natural habitat indicates that Edmond seeks to extend the notion of house and hearth as the sole basis for their relationship. Putting the tree as the final image in this line alleviates the all-too tight boundaries of cultural space and provides the potential of new growth. Most prominently this is supported by the image of the garden, which brings the poem into line with Bethell's work. Similar to many of Bethell's poems, the poetic speaker acts like a

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[382] Lauris Edmond, *Catching It* (1983): 44.

pragmatic gardener in not considering the poetic gloss of 'honeysuckle' but rather by taking it for what it is in most gardeners' eyes: a weed.

> Slashing honeysuckle on the hill
> I breathe the metaphor
> poets love gardens for – and it is true
> this ruthless growth will smother
> every other green thing,
>
> (The Deal, 1-5)

Through the reflective moment of the speaker on the poetic vocabulary, Edmond literally slashes any aesthetic claim of the poetic moment and brings the message of her poem down to earth. Contrary to its poetic sounding name, honeysuckle is 'smothering' and becomes the metaphoric carrier of a claustrophobic atmosphere in the poem. Edmond chooses the image of honeysuckle as an instrument with which to disclose the gap between the aesthetic and the ordinary.

This down-to-earthness of Edmond's style moves her poetry closer to people's daily lives. Moreover, this poem unmasks the seeming beauty of the honeysuckle in a similar way as Mary Stanley unmasks the beauty of Icarus, who is not beautiful or 'the envy of angels', falling from the sky. Both poets are concerned with the discursive construction of the aesthetic which is after all a man-made one. It can therefore be stated that both poets work on the fine line that is responsible for gender role stereotyping in writing as much as in life. As with Stanley's poem "The Wife Speaks", in which all roads lead both women and men to the home, where they take history under their roofs, Edmond's "The Deal" states that society's expectancy of women's roles also conditions the roles of men and thus has wider implications for the social network.

Owing to such considerations, it can be said that "The Deal" reinforces Edmond's socio-cultural criticism when the "crowd of waiting ambitions", as expressed in "Epithalamium" (8), appears here as "every other green thing" (The Deal, 5) that is smothered before it can start to blossom. Edmond suggests that society is heavily reliant on the work of women as homemakers and that without their commitment the fundamental basis of the concept of home will be destroyed and fall, as Edmond predicts in "The Deal", to "the pit of clay below" (9).

> and yet it binds us –
> man woman house tree –
> without it the caught ground falls
> to the pit of clay below.
>
> (The Deal, 6-10)

In reference to Edmond's own biography, one might say that she addresses the problem of either conforming to her social role, in which she would have developed into a "Crazy Jane" (A Literary Age), or to deviate from it and find a position or a space between. Edmond chose the latter and was often accused implicitly or explicitly of being responsible for a broken home. In her endeavour to build a new home closer to reality – a home that does not remain in the stasis of heavily gendered monumental magnificence – Edmond not only fought the gender role stereotyping in New Zealand society in clear knowledge of the danger of falling to the "pit of clay below" (The Deal, 10) but also challenged (and was challenged by) her own family. The tension this created releases itself into powerful poetic statements with which the poet tries to bridge the gap that divided her self, her family and her home.

The title "The Deal" therefore indicates a kind of agreement, negotiated between the sexes to manage a family, that is in strong alignment with the gendered space dichotomy. Edmond illuminates this through the strong allusion to a binary frame of mind whereby saying that the woman is caught between earth and sky. The archetypal gender binary of the male sun and the female earth[383] is painstakingly clear-cut in the final climax of the poetic speaker's fight for survival.

> The sun mounts and holds me down.
> Between earth and sky
> I am fighting for my life.
>
> (The Deal, 10-end)

Seen through a feminist lens, it is justifiable to describe the scene as a depiction of power relationships where patriarchal power, here symbolized by the sun, mounts and keeps the woman down but cannot weaken her. The

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[383] The fight for survival between earth and sky bears a surprising similarity to Maori mythology. In the Maori creation myth of the world, Rangi (father sky) and Papatuanuku (mother earth) had to be separated to enable their children to survive. I do not want to suggest that Edmond tried to draw an analogy between the fight of a Pakeha women and Maori mythology but the parallel is there and it is striking. See also Lauris Edmond's comments on New Zealand culture in the interview with Rick Johnson (1989): 65-6.

figurative tension of being caught between earth and sky thus translates into a tension between male and female domains.

The fight for survival, so dramatically described in this poem can be read as a fight for space in the socio-cultural makeup of society. In an interview, Edmond once expressed the feeling that her space was a nowhere place in New Zealand society,[384] a feeling she shared with many women of her time and generation. Seemingly caught in the dichotomy of public and private, male and female, there seems to be no space where the different domains overlap. Edmond's poetic search for such a Space of Overlap sets the stage for socio-cultural and aesthetic re-negotiation of the home space. With "I am fighting for my life" (The Deal, 12), Edmond delivers a personal statement that gains cultural momentum for women in New Zealand.

6.4.2 Prefiguring a Larger Pride

In her repeated critical evaluation of home space and her role as mother and housewife, Edmond was acutely aware of women's lack of literary traditions. This is not only because of the critical gender bias, but is also rooted deeply in social patterns. Edmond's poem "Square-dance theme"[385] illustrates the reciprocity of the historical and socio-cultural development in New Zealand's gendered culture.

In "Square-dance theme", Edmond puts women into the centre of historical attention. The dance theme encircles four generations of women,[386] and moves from the past to as yet "unimaginable beginnings" (Square-dance III, 20). The poem draws a picture of New Zealand women that is not glossed over by nostalgic visions of colonial life. From the start, Edmond destroys the colonial stereotype of a British tea-drinking gentlewoman through the figure of Clara Eliza, the

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384 "Interview with Janet Holst" (1997). Audio Source.

385 Lauris Edmond, *In Position* (1997): 62. From now on, I will refer to the poem in abbreviated version of the title as "Square-dance".

386 Ken Arvidson, "Affirming Lucidity- Edmond's Wisdom Poetry" (1997).

> […] five-foot legendary grandmother,
> battling woodfires in the freezing dawn,
>
> riding to town with an empty purse, the old man
> blank with booze – I can see you, moving about
>
> in the dim grey weather where history lodges;
>
> (Square-dance, I, 1-5)

Edmond shatters the image of the self-sacrificing, permanently working, pioneering man New Zealand history builds on and unmasks him as a drunkard. Edmond's poem travels back to the very beginning of the Cult of Domesticity at the turn of the century when 'mateship' and the 'Man Alone' were the ruling notions that delineated New Zealand masculinity. James and Saville-Smith state that

> [t]he Cult of Domesticity was used to disarm the challenge of the Man Alone in two ways. Firstly, it provided a basis from which unpropertied men's political power could be countered. Secondly, the Cult of Domesticity was instrumental in defining a less disruptive role for men.[387]

The consumption of alcohol was a major issue in the public campaigns of the Women's Christian Temperance Union at the beginning of the 20th century to the extent that a man's excessive consumption of alcohol in public was seen as his being "devoid of manliness".[388] Edmond's poem points instead at women's authority and their integrity in leaning on that female heritage that helped to establish New Zealand society in its beginnings. Edmond empowers women through their social commitments, not despite of them. Once again, she looks at the domestic sphere as an enabling and empowering space where New Zealand history is being made.

In a literary context, one might compare the women in this poem to the "dauntless, tempest-braving ancestresses" in Ursula Bethell's poem "The Long Harbour" (40). Such a reading eventually reveals a New Zealand female literary tradition. For this reason, I read "Square-dance theme" as a poetic revisiting of a New Zealand herstory. The fictional meeting with the dead grandmother is not only a celebration of achievements, it is a moment of recognition:

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[387] Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture, and Power. Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture* (1989): 36.

[388] Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country. The Image of the Pakeha Male: A History* (1987): 63.

> […] – I think that I have always
> known you, from tales that had their first telling
>
> three years before I was born, when consumption
> at last devoured you. […] you used
>
> every second of your dense half century creating
> a clan, taking for materials your doggedness,
>
> imagination, love.
>
> (Square-dance I, 9-15)

Edmond perceives her ancestress as a figure more central to life in early New Zealand history than history books were ready to acknowledge. In this poem, she transcends the context of her own time and establishes a connection to the past and the future by invoking an oral handing down of experience as the most fundamental way of making history.

The couplet-form supports the oral quality of the poem with which Edmond translates a New Zealand women's history into poetry. She appropriates a new cultural territory through the deliberate calling upon an oral medium to suggest that that tradition has always been present. The poem is her Space of Overlap in a literary historical sense as much as in an aesthetic sense. Through the poem, she can enact a tradition on the poem's stage that is not fixed on paper. In Edmond's perception this is one of the most original functions of poetry since, as she frequently stated in interviews, poetic language is not conceived in another dimension or belongs to a different category[389] than that of the everyday. Edmond understands poetry as an oral craft.

> Poetry is the language of speech. It's not a literary language or an official language of poetry. It's the language of ordinary speech and what I most want in poems of mine is for the speaking voice to be heard.[390]

On another occasion, she commented on the same issue with regard to the creative process by saying that "your home base is your own spoken language."[391] In these comments, Edmond underlines her fascination not with

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389 Joseph Swann, "The Separate Self: Wholeness and Continuity in Lauris Edmond's Poetry." (1990), 114/5.

390 Rick Johnson, "An Interview with Lauris Edmond" (1989): 64.

391 Ibid.

the word, but with the world. She wants to appropriate cultural space for women and (re)write a 'herstory'.

"Square-dance theme" makes it clear that New Zealand women are bred from the stock of Bethell's dauntless ancestresses with a pioneer blood in their veins that is not tainted as Katherine Mansfield perceived it in "To Stanislav Wyspianski". In contrast to Mansfield's poem written almost 100 years earlier, in which the poetic speaker considered New Zealand "a little island with no history" (3), "Square-dance theme" can uncover a historic and literary heritage. Where Mansfield bemoans the lack of culture and of history, and presents New Zealand in terms of what it lacks, Edmond's poem raises a poetic voice that participates in the development of a female tradition.

> first grandchild, […]
> […] Let me tell you
>
> of long dead Clara, show you the silent peak
> of the mind on which I stand, looking back
>
> a whole century to her, forward to you,
> sweetly alive here, carrying like a lively germ
>
> the secrets of future time
>
> (Square-dance II, 7-13)

The poetic speaker is the authoritative voice of a poet who considers it her duty to hand down the inheritance in a "lively germ [that holds] the secrets of future time" (12-3). Similar to the soap heart in "Playing House", which contained Edmond's personal concept of home, the square dance theme is the carrier for women's contribution to a cultural concept of home. In this poem, the passing down of knowledge through the generations is meant to express a historic as much as a cultural process. Edmond also lived this conviction in her untiring commitment to New Zealand poetry[392] and the support she gave to younger women in their writing.

Through the square-dance theme of changing dancing partners, Edmond creates a network of female continuity, as best expressed in

> […] You too, daughter of many daughters,
>
> latest inheritor, will likely give birth to a girl

[392] Edmond was founding member of *New Zealand Books*, a monthly journal of literature and ready platform for poetry. In the last years of her life, she was the journal's poetry editor.

who in turn will depart for a later, stranger time.

(Square-dance II, 18-20)

There is a sensation both of arrival and of prospect so that women are enabled to recover a past and prefigure a future and thereby to be motivated to contemplate the circle of their being – free from the constrictions of social gender roles.

The temporal makeup of the poem does not reveal a clear-cut division between past, present and future but knits the different generations together through the music of the square-dance. Eventually, the poetic speaker addresses the grand-daughter again:

[…] you will mature among women

with a larger pride in their powers. Take what
we offer, the learnt habits, the faith; respect them,

and alter them . […]
[…]

[…] Take my hand
now as I took and held hers, feel the current,

the tingle of courage she passes through me to you.
Keep it and use it, through unimaginable beginnings.

(Square dance III, 12-end)

Unimaginable beginnings, as Edmond says, lie ahead of the women. The poem portrays a female "mystic continuity"[393] that underlies much of Edmond's work through the physical contact between the speaker and the great-grandmother. But it is not only continuity which is alluded to. The poem also envisions a different authority amongst women that might grow on the knowledge of being part of a longer historical line.

In claiming cultural space as a woman, Edmond is driven by the desire to preserve a home vision that is viable and would not negate her existence as mother and housewife. She sought a Space of Overlap where public and private, old and new, conventional and innovative could interconnect. Edmond tries to reconcile the struggle between the desire to preserve tradition and simultaneously embrace progress. The analysis of her cultural message therefore requires a complete reconsidering and critical assessing of national

[393] Ken Arvidson, "Affirming Lucidity – Edmond's wisdom poetry" (1997): 53.

and literary identity which had been connected to male and masculine images for most of New Zealand's history.

6.4.3 "Little Wellington, Edmond's London"[394]

In the attempt to reconcile her private and public identities, Edmond frequently uses the home/ quest image patterns in order to reveal the conflicts she has faced as a women who aspires to the position of a poet and public voice in her country's socio-cultural discourse. In her poem "A Literary Age" (1997), [395] she reflects upon her desire to be accepted as a serious poet rather than being written and talked about like the notorious 'madwoman in the attic'.[396] The relaxed voice of the speaker reveals that Edmond wrote this poem at a mature stage of her work.

A Literary Age

I am not mad like Yeats' Crazy Jane
nor half asleep, nor touched by spells,

nor given to raging at the lost hours
of a regretted, virtuous youth. Ulysses

suits me better, the journey beyond journeys,
unimaginable frontiers, some risky

passionate vista: the baths of all
the western stars quiver above my sleep.

When Edmond's speaker assumes the role of Ulysses as an archetypal male literary persona, she indicates that this quest for home space crosses many boundaries. The unimaginable frontier represents both a Romantic yearning as well as a modernist intellectual passion to enter realms of poetic imagination that have not been described before. In assuming the role of Ulysses, as Stanley had done, Edmond puts her poetic quest in line with the epic protagonist's. The direct contrast to the 'Crazy Jane' indicates the underlying criticism of gendered aesthetics which generally align the crossing of such frontiers with male prowess.

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394 This is in reference to the line in her poem "Talking to Friends" *In Position,* p. 12: "the harbour had become a Whistler's Thames/ and little Wellington, a London". (l. 11/12)

395 Lauris Edmond, *In Position* (1997): 38.

396 This expression is taken from Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's analysis of literary women figures in the 19th century: *The Madwoman in the Attic.* (1979).

The "unimaginable frontiers," beyond which the poetic speaker seeks to journey, can thus be interpreted as the frontiers a woman encounters when seeking home space, both in a figurative as well as a literary sense. The fact that Stanley and Edmond employ the figure of Ulysses not only discloses their awareness of modernism as a strong aesthetic mainstream but also suggests that they intended to raise an awareness of their confinements as women poets. In this context, Edmond's poem "Word"[397] can be seen as enacting an aesthetic disagreement on the idea of writing and literary criticism as 'staking territory'.

Word

'It is perfect' you say
and my pain listens
wearing its evil grin:
I grow faint
it leans over me
monitoring my defeat.
Wind cries at the corners
of winter streets.

'... because complete' you go on
with gentleness. I draw in,
flesh achieves
a new density.
I am a hurt cell
dark with life
that somewhere else
will elbow into joy.

In its reflective tone, the poem displays the poetic process by describing the search for the one word that is 'perfect'. The alternation between the perspectives of the poetic speaker and of the critic regarding the creative moment builds up a tension between inside and outside. As the poem proceeds, this initial tension translates into the tension between speaking and listening, the active and the passive voice. Wounded by criticism, the speaker continues the search for, what Edmond calls, "the burning substance" in "Driving from the Airport" (l. 20) in an almost painful *verdichtung* of the poetic self to the "cell/ dark with life" (l. 13/4). The eventual 'elbowing into joy' is similar to the sudden release of a taut spring. This phrase is Edmond's idiom for the poetic moment as a moment of joy when poetry is conceived.

[397] Lauris Edmond, *Selected Poems* (1994): 77.

The dichotomy of inside and outside that pervades the poem indicates the spatial dimension of the poetic process. In "Word", the space where poetry begins is depicted as a 'somewhere else', a place that is neither here nor there, a place that is not assigned to the category of either public or private. It is an 'in-between-place' which the critic, as the representative of the outside world, cannot access. I argue that it is Edmond's Space of Overlap which is situated between the private conception of the poem and its public reception, establishing a link between the world around her and the creative power inside. In my opinion, Edmond's poem depicts the appropriation of home space within the poetic process.

In reading the speaking voice as the voice of a woman poet, the poem also acquires a feminist edge. The relationship between the poet and the critic becomes a gendered one where the male critic applies aesthetic standards in judging on the result of the poetic process which is reminiscent of the condescension Bethell expressed in "Perspective". However, the speaker in Edmond's poem feels indifferent to this criticism, having found a space which cannot be accessed by any outsider. Thus, allegedly passive and criticised, the speaker keeps her poetic authority in having found the 'room of her own'.

With poems such as "Word" and "A Literary Age", Edmond stresses both her desire and her undisputable belonging to a New Zealand literary tradition. Like Bethell's poem "Perspective" in which the poetic persona struggles with the opinion of the 'right-minded' person towards her garden as a utility rather than art, Edmond's poem "Word" enacts such aesthetic disagreement on a linguistic level. This authority of the poetic speaker tells of Edmond's conviction of being a poet irrespective of critical opinions.

6.5 Lauris Edmond: Leading Light of New Zealand Women's Poetry

Lauris Edmond's oeuvre bears witness to the struggles of a *femme de lettres* with the conventions of society she both affirms and rejects. The concept of home, as it is displayed in her oeuvre, often runs "counter to the negative stereotypes of domesticity by celebrating it even as it is undermined in her own case."[398] Initially, the house is the centre of her existence as mother of six children. Later, it reveals itself to be an environment which

[398] Ken Arvidson, "Affirming Lucidity – Edmond's wisdom poetry" (1997): 51.

curbs her creative desires. Lauris Edmond's statements resonate strongly in the New Zealand public and the socio-cultural focus in her work is masterfully captured by Ken Arvidson's conclusion about Edmond's poem "A Matter of Timing" when he states that:

> 'A Matter of Timing' is an image of the poet's split-second recognition of her complicity in our cultural metaphors and the volume as a whole sets forth her personal experience of some of our strongest cultural conventions, especially those concerning death and love and marriage and solitude and being a woman.[399]

Edmond is well aware of this complicity and of the fact that her personal insights gain momentum, which is most tellingly laid out in her *Autobiography* (1994) and the private/ public debate that evolved from its publication.[400]

Readers can easily relate to Edmond's writing, be it prose or poetry. Her poems stem from her lively interaction with the world around her. Many a time when she was asked why she put a certain tree or landscape into her poems, Edmond said: "because they were there."[401] Simple though this may seem, it is Edmond's skill in conveying the mood and atmosphere of the experienced moment brings it to life for the reader. This is often revealed in the *verdichtung* of social, emotional and spatial conceptions of home like, for instance, in "Playing House" and in "The Deal". The reality these poems speak of is both of personal and a cultural relevance. Poetry serves Edmond as a magnifying glass for providing insights into aspects of daily life that would all too often pass by unnoticed.

Owing to my analysis, Edmond's concept of home manifests itself in a permanent quest. Had she felt to be *In Middle Air* (1975), she expresses a sense of arrival in her collection *In Position/ A Matter of Timing* (1996). In my opinion, poetry is Lauris Edmond's travel space of the mind and has in time become her home. Edmond breaks free from gender conventions and creates a home in poetry which helps her to come to terms with the worlds

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399 Ken Arvidson, "Affirming Lucidity – Edmond's wisdom poetry" (1997): 47.

400 Most tellingly this is the case with the public statements and the resulting problematic relationship with some of her children. In reaction to his mother's autobiography, Martin Edmond published *The Autobiography of My Father*.
William Broughton, "*The Quick World*. Simple Fact or Subtle Fiction?" (1992): 13; Lauris Edmond, "Only Connect: The Making of an Autobiography" (1994): 247-54.; C.K. Stead, "Honest Lauris, honest Iago (2000): 49-50; Anne French, "The Truth Problem" (2002): 1-2.

401 Lauris Edmond, *Learning Media*. 1991.

within and around her. It is through intertwining everyday 'trivialities' with a profound philosophy in her poetic language that Edmond succeeds in generating poetic home space through language. This home is constituted by her exploration of relationships rather than being "complete with houses/ and people all directions familiar" (One Way, 6). Such investigation of relational patterns reveals that she has left the spatial paradigms behind and is moving into more recent uncertainties about where to locate the home in the face of increasing globalisation. In my view, her work is the connecting link between the poetic imagination of the first half of the 20th century and the one at the dawn of the third millennium.

In my view, Edmond's poetry takes an active lead in mapping a female literary tradition in New Zealand. Because she remains open to the oral experience and does not restrict her language to rhyme schemes and metric forms, her poetry responds to the dynamics of socio-cultural interaction. Thus, I argue that the conservative label that was previously often applied to Edmond's poetry, by calling her a Victorian or a late Romantic cannot be sustained. On the contrary, her work serves as a stepping stone into a more modern style of poetry. New Zealand poetry without Lauris Edmond is unthinkable.

7 J.C. STURM CARVING HOME

As already briefly exposed in chapter two, Maori were re-appropriating political and cultural territory in the process of the Maori Renaissance. After being forcefully alienated from their cultural roots, such as being forbidden to speak their own language,[402] Maori compensated for this gap in their cultural practice and development through a pronounced assertiveness in the late 1970s and early 80s. Literature was one of the major 'tools' in re-appropriating cultural territory in this process. Nevertheless, the number of Maori women writing poetry in English was and is still small. It was not until the 1990s that Maori women's poetry forged its path into public consciousness.[403]

One of the primary figures of literature written by Maori women is J.C. Sturm who made her first appearance in the literary world with *The House of the Talking Cat* (1984), a volume of short stories with which she was seen to have "set her mark in the post-war Maori literary movement"[404]. Born Maori and raised by Pakeha foster parents, Sturm reflects on personal relationships in *Dedications* (1996), her first volume of poetry which in fact was triggered by members of her family asking for a poem.[405] She is not primarily concerned with bringing Maori issues to the attention of a general political public, as was the focus of the Maori Renaissance, but investigates the viability of Maori concepts in current New Zealand.

Like Lauris Edmond, Sturm did not publish her poetry until late in life, which might be the reason for the relaxed and often bemusedly ironic tone of her poetic voice. It might also account for her deep interest in what she herself

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402 From 1867 onwards, the original bi-lingual policy in New Zealand was abolished in favour of English only. As a result, Maori in spoken and written form deteriorated over time. Jane McRae, "Maori Literature: a Survey" (1991): 3-4.

403 In 1983, Hinewirangi Kohu-Morgan published *Broken Chant* together with Robert de Roo under her maiden name Rosemary Kohu. Being the only Maori woman voice in poetry at that time, she was once considered in a study conducted by Peter Beatson on the characteristic themes in Maori literature. See: Peter Beatson, *The Healing Tongue: themes in contemporary maori literature* (1989). Kohu-Morgan's poetry reveals a strong orientation on her native culture's mythology and traditions. However, she did not continue writing poetry and is currently more active as an organiser of cultural events.

404 Paul Millar "Reviews: *Dedications*, J.C. Sturm; *Soft Leaf Falls of the Moon*, Apirana Taylor." (1997), 377-82. Millar quotes from a review by Witi Ihimaera(p. 377).

405 In a personal interview given to me in March 2005, Sturm said that her return to poetry was triggered by a poem she wrote for her granddaughter Stephanie and that other members of her family started to ask for a poem dedicated to them. Hence the title *Dedication*s came into being.

calls the "interior landscape"[406]. Her dual cultural allegiance is at the heart of her poetic investigation, which, similar to Edmond, spans more than the decade in which it reaches the public eye. In my view, Sturm's poetry signposts the way for both Maori and Pakeha poetry to transcend the bicultural framework and to arrive at a more comprehensive vision of the concept of home.

In order to make the literary background and the roots from which Sturm's writing emerges more comprehensible, the following chapter will briefly sketch the key arguments of the socio-cultural and political debate of the Maori Renaissance and the concept of biculturalism in the second half of the 20th century. Before I engage in the close readings of selected poems, it will be necessary to briefly go into details of Sturm's biography since she was not only the first Maori woman to obtain a university degree but also married to New Zealand's most prolific Pakeha poet James K. Baxter, experiences that have shaped both her life and her writing.

7.1 Maori Literary Renaissance

In the 1970s and 80s, Maori literary 're-birth' intertwined with the notion of New Zealand as a bicultural nation. It has often been said that such a bicultural mind-set was initially aimed at providing a better basis for cultural variety.[407] However, as many post-colonial critics point out, the misbalanced power-sharing in this bicultural frame led to the racialisation of Maori/ Pakeha relationships:

> it is Pakeha who control the resources. Pakeha have, Maori have not; Pakeha give, Maori receive. […] Although the discourse of biculturalism seems to recognise first people status, it also skews the primacy of Maori claims. Bicultural discourse might suggest that Maori and Pakeha coexist as subjects with equivalent properties, but one group is more equal than the other.[408]

Although biculturalism was placed mostly on the side of the Pakeha, who remained the normative referent, the catch-phrase of "Pakeha have – Maori have not" boils the socio-cultural complexity down to an all-too simplistic formula. With the increasingly global and multi-cultural outlook of modern

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406 This line is taken from Sturm's poem "Travelling", which will be analysed in due depth further down.

407 Bill Willmott, "Introduction: Culture and National Identity" (1989): 6-11.

408 Radhika Mohanram, *Black Body: Women, Colonialism and Space* (1999): 26.

Western states toward the end of the 20th century, New Zealand society has changed perceptively, not least with regard to the variety of ethnic groups,[409] which is to say that arguments on the grounds of an ethnic dualism are losing ground.

Unfortunately, dichotomous patterns dominated the approach to New Zealand's literary canon, where Pakeha and Maori traditions have, for most of the time, been segregated because Maori literature was either not written at all, since Maori is originally an oral culture, or it was not as easily accessible to native speakers of English, being written in Maori. Jane McRae's survey on the Maori literary tradition in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English* (1991) draws the conclusion that Maori literature

> might be seen to fall into two categories, neither entirely exclusive of the other. One category comprises the outward-looking and public literature created by innovation (the interaction with Pakeha) rather than tradition. […] The second category comprises the inward-looking and personal literature of the oral tradition […] In this category, too, there is the new writing in Maori which, like the oral tradition, is self-conscious and primarily concerned with securing Maori values, but which is also open to changes which are acceptable to Maori conventions.[410]

In my view, recent Maori women's poetry fits into the last category McRae describes. Writing in English, Maori women orient their message toward a general New Zealand public, while their poetic quest reveals the desire to incorporate their traditional roots. The look inward and outward are two sides of the same coin and describe a reciprocal process that is most clearly visible in the poetry of J.C. Sturm.

The prevailing dual approach to New Zealand literature might account for the general scarcity of Maori poetry in the New Zealand canon. The Pakeha-dominated critical establishment had erected a barrier that was difficult to overcome. Hone Tuwhare, today New Zealand's most highly acclaimed Maori poet writing in English, was fortunate that the outstanding quality of his work found a positive response. In 1963, R.A.K. Mason called Tuwhare a "member of the Maori race qualifying as a poet in English and in the idiom of his own generation."[411] Maori poetry in English has thus always

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409 See the variety of ethnic groups as published in the 1996 New Zealand census: Appendix II.

410 Jane McRae, "Maori Literature: a Survey" (1991): 23.

411 R.A.K. Mason, "Foreword" [1963] *No Ordinary Sun* [1964] (1998): 7.

been associated with Tuwhare, whose first collection *No Ordinary Sun* (1964) was followed by ten other highly successful collections and which set an outstanding landmark in New Zealand poetry.[412] Mason's remark 'allowed' him access to the literary scene. Nevertheless, it has to be said that Maori literature was not all-too quickly welcomed in the New Zealand canon. J.C. Sturm, who started to publish poetry as early as 1947 in local magazines, could not find a publisher for her collection of short stories until 1984. And even though the climate of the publishing world changed favourably toward Maori authors, *Dedications* (1996) needed some 'dedication' to be eventually published by Steele Roberts.[413] Sturm, this might suggest, always had to overcome peculiar difficulties in finding her space in New Zealand society as much as in her country's literary world as someone who constantly deviated from the expected 'idiom' of her ethnic background.

Generally speaking, the opportunities for a Maori writer to be published has become easier ever since the publication of *Into the World of Light* (1982), the first anthology of Maori writing in English. It put Maori literature on the map of the New Zealand canon. The editor of this milestone was Witi Ihimaera, himself now one of the most highly acclaimed Maori authors and literary critics.[414] Ihimaera's work as an editor does not display a particular gender bias and yet Maori women poets remain markedly few in numbers. This phenomenon still lacks a scholarly opinion. Apart from the general marginalisation of Maori writers, one might speculate on two lines. One is that Maori women often express themselves in other genres, such as the performing arts and music, rather than poetry. The other is that the patriarchal pattern of Western society was transferred to a Maori environment to the effect that Maori women met the same marginalisation as their Pakeha counterparts had during the post-World War II literary nationalism.

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412 In recent years, Robert Sullivan has followed Tuwhare's footsteps winning national and international audiences for his poetry.

413 Paul Millar "Reviews: *Dedications*, J.C. Sturm; *Soft Leaf Falls of the Moon*, Apirana Taylor." (1997), 377-82, (p. 377). In a personal interview in March 2005, Sturm related to me that it was in fact also due to a German filmmaker named Gerd Pullman who wanted to make a film about her husband's, James K. Baxter's, life, that her poetry was discovered. After the interview, Pullman then discussed it with his friend Roger Steele, director of Steele Roberts who published it soon after.

414 Apart from his numerous works of fiction, Ihimaera recently gained international fame through the film adaptation of his novel *The Whale Rider*. Ihimaera can be seen as the prominent driving force for Maori literature, as an author, editor, critic and academic teacher.

And indeed, recent research[415] reveals that Western constructs of women's gender roles have been uncritically transferred to Maori women. In consequence, the public function of Maori women and their leading roles in cultural and political affairs[416] has often been misapprehended. This is most evident when looking at the depiction of speaking rights on the *marae*, the Maori meeting house.[417] Western feminist opinion claimed that Maori women were not allowed to speak on the *marae* since the speaking right was judged to be a male prerogative. But, as Mohanram argues,

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> [f]or many Maori [women] having the right to speak on the *marae* is not an issue and never has been, It is viewed as Pakeha women's preoccupation which is irrelevant to Maori. The ritualized nature of speaking on the *marae* consists of several parts, however: *karanga* ('greeting'), *waiata* ('song'), *tangi* ('mourning') and *whaikorero* ('speech-making'). Protagonists in this debate have recognized only *whaikorero* as speaking.[418] In short, the forms of speaking in which women participate have not been recognized by Pakeha feminists as no equivalent categories exist within Pakeha feminism.[419]

The *waiata*[420] was not considered as speech making in a Western sense, despite being an integral part of ceremonies on the *marae,* the only public platform of Maori communities. As the poetically most important song,[421] the *waiata* can be considered to be the poetic heritage modern Maori women

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415 Patricia Maringi G. Johnston, "Maori Women and the Politics of Theorising Difference" (1998): 30-1.

416 Dame Whina Cooper was such a female Maori leader. She lead the historical Maori Land March crossing the entire north island of New Zealand to protest for control, retention and management of Maori land to remain with the Maori and their descendants which preceded the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal Robbie Whitmore, "The Māori Today: Māoritanga - Māori tradition and customs." URL: http://www.history-nz.org/maori8.html (June 12 2004).
See also Donna Awatere who published *Of Maori Sovereignty* in 1984, today one of the most influential publications of Maori nationalism.

417 *marae* = meeting area of whanau (extended family) or iwi (tribe, people, nation), focal point of settlement, central area of village and its buildings, courtyard.
P.M. Ryan, *Dictionary of Modern Maori* (1994). All ensuing translations of Maori to English refer to this dictionary unless otherwise indicated.

418 Radhika Mohanram quotes Kathie Irwin "Towards Theories of Maori Feminism" *Feminist Voices. Women's Studies Texts for Aotearoa New Zealand* Eds. Rosemary DuPlessis et al., Auckland. Auckland University Press, 1992, 12.

419 Radhika Mohanram *Black Body: Women, Colonialism and Space* (1999), 108. Italics original.

420 Waiata also means to sing, chant psalm, song poem. See P.M. Ryan, *Dictionary of Modern Maori* (1994). For a detailed account of the history of the waiata in Maori traditions, see: Barry Mitcalfe, *The Singing Word: Maori Poetry* (1974).

421 Margaret Orbell, "The Maori Tradition" [1985] (1986): 58.

poets can draw from since it was almost exclusively sung and composed by women.[422] In my opinion, the *waiata* carries the potential of becoming a mediator of Maori women's voices, even more so because it traditionally unites personal grief and public lament in a song/poem.

> Maori poetry was generally inspired […] by sorrow and loss […] Words had power for Maori; they were a kind of action, […] When they were faced with separation and defeat and no other form of action was open to them, poetry provided an outlet and a means of assertion, and their songs became a kind of triumph over their circumstances. This was especially the case with the waiata, in which a poet publicly lamented a situation stated its consequences and often envisaged some further action.[423]

Prior to the Maori Renaissance, few Maori women had made deliberate use of the *waiata's* potential. Tuini Moetu Haangu Ngawai (1910-65)[424] is one of the notable exceptions. She stands out as one of the most prolific composers of *waiata* songs in the 1930s and 40s. Unfortunately, her songs were only written and performed in Maori so that they remained secluded in a Maori public world. This might have inhibited their wider cultural resonance.

By including the *waiata* as a literary referent, I do not want to investigate the very beginnings of this tradition. Without intending to use it as my theoretical underpinning, I suggest that the analysis of Sturm's poetry will gain in depth against the backdrop of such a literary heritage since the search for ethnic identity is one of the perennial concerns in J.C Sturm's poems. Yet, she is not solely concerned with her Maori identity but with a dual cultural allegiance by tracing her way back to her personal roots as a Maori having lived through the Pakeha system for 70 years.

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422 Jane McRae, "Maori Literature: a Survey" (1991), 14-17.

423 Margaret Orbell, "The Maori Tradition" [1985] (1986): 59.

424 Anaru Kingi Takurua, "Ngawai, Tuini Moetu Haangu 1910-1965" *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography Online* [July 31 2003] URL: http://www.dnbz.govt.nz/ (Oct 28 2003).

7.2 J.C. Sturm: Life and Writing

J.C. (Jacqueline Cecilia) Sturm (*1927) is better known as a writer of short fiction than poetry and unfortunately all too often simply as the wife of James K. Baxter. A close reading of her poetry thus covers new ground in more than one way and sheds light on the work of a New Zealand poet who has for most of her life occupied a space between. Sturm was the first Maori woman to obtain a university degree, having completed her BA at Canterbury University in 1949. A first class honours MA at Victoria University Wellington followed soon after and in 2002, she was awarded an honorary doctorate from Victoria. In 1948, she had married James K. Baxter, who was to become one of the most prolific New Zealand poets and critics in the formative years of New Zealand literature. After the break up of their marriage in 1969, she coped with being a solo parent and lived through similar social limitations as did other women in those times. Similar to Edmond and Stanley in their poetic careers, the duties as mother and housewife – and as a point of speculation possibly her husband's literary fame – kept Sturm from seriously pursuing her creative writing. On top of that, she was marginalized on the grounds of her Maori ethnicity so that it was not until 1984 that she eventually found a publisher for her collection of short stories *The House of the Talking Cat*. J.C. Sturm retired in 1992 from working life as a librarian to live in a small village north of Wellington.


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Dedications (1996) is the outcome of Sturm's return to writing after the publication of her short stories. The volume immediately received the Honour Award for Poetry in the 1997 Montana Book Awards, and has been celebrated by reviewer Paul Millar as a "publishing event." [425] *Dedications* is a very personal volume of poetry in which Sturm negotiates various dualities in her life, such as youth and age and not least her being Maori with a Pakeha upbringing. *Dedications* was followed by *Postscripts* in 2000, as a kind of

[425] Paul Millar "Reviews: *Dedications*, J.C. Sturm; *Soft Leaf Falls of the Moon*, Apirana Taylor." (1997): 377.

extension to it.[426] The list of secondary criticism on her poetry is short, and, consisting only of reviews, is lacking in a profound analysis of the powerful themes and exceptional quality of Sturm's writing. It is her unique way of negotiating the question of where to locate home in a personal as much as a cultural sense that I seek to investigate in due depth in this analysis.

The search for home in Sturm's poetry takes place on different levels. On some occasions, she negotiates the home against the backdrop of her own biography and experiences in the attempt to close a crucial gap in the emotional fabric of her personal home. At other times, the poems address unresolved tensions between the individual and larger cultural and social constraints so that the poetic voice in her poem can be read as a cultural monitor of Maori/ Pakeha relationships. Sometimes, Sturm embraces her Maori heritage, other times she keeps a distance to overt identification with Maori issues, thus her poems remain refreshingly apolitical. A closer look at Sturm's work will reveal how her cultural 'in-betweenness' inevitably challenges dichotomous structures, as much as questions and blurs boundaries hitherto thought of as clear and unfailing. In my opinion, Sturm's personal cadence acquires a strong and singular cultural resonance that has the potential of transcending the bicultural framework and of arriving at a new (do we dare to call it transcultural?) vision of the concept of home in New Zealand.

7.3 Tracing the Way Back to a Personal Home

Although, as Paul Millar states in his review, "mentioning identity has become a bit of a cliché"[427], *Dedications* reveals Sturm's search for her personal home space as a Maori woman in 20th century New Zealand while trying to unite the two pulls in her life. In tracing home as a woman, many of Sturm's poems reveal parallels to other poets of her generation, such as Lauris Edmond. Like Edmond's, Sturm's poems immediately speak to women who have lived through stereo-typical gender limitations. This is particularly

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[426] The poet herself commented upon the choice of title and the publication as follows: "When I had finished *Dedications* I still hadn't finished what I had to say. That's why I've called the second book *Postscripts*... sometimes when you write a letter the thing you really want to say you add as a postscript." Paul Millar and Aorewa McLeod, "'J.C. Sturm, Author Entry'" URL: ttp://www.vuw.ac.nz/nzbookcouncil/writers/sturmjc.htm.

[427] Paul Millar, "Reviews: *Dedications*, J.C. Sturm; *Soft Leaf Falls of the Moon*, Apirana Taylor." (1997): 378.

striking in "Coming of Age"[428], which can be seen to depict a woman's retribution for having been a functional part of other people's lives.

> I'm warning you,
> After forty-two years
> Of enforced domestication
> And your tyrannical
> Occupation of my life,
> I am finally planning rebellion.
>
> I will not, do you hear
> Be bound by your house rules
> Any longer, maintain myself
> With unrelenting care
> Like a vintage car
> For your exclusive use,
> Or save myself up
> To be your Xmas bonus
> For another Roman holiday.
>
> (Coming of Age, 1-15)

A Maori background is not emphasised at all in this poem; rather, the experience as a woman "maintaining [her]self/ with unrelenting care" (Coming of Age, 9-10) for her family's use is foregrounded. Contrary to Stanley's poem where the daily routine of the woman in the house has become an artefact, the speaker in "Coming of Age" considers herself an artefact, as best captured in the comparison to the vintage car. Sturm uses the jargon of economics as an ironic sidekick to the material world in which the value of a woman is assessed in market economy terms. The poem takes the emotional 'currency' of being a mother literally so that the lifetime of experience, care, and love, in fact, conveys the sense of a savings account in which the end of life is the time when the speaker threatens to spend herself "recklessly/ Down to my very last cell/ in a dangerously/ extravagant spending spree" (Coming of Age, 31-4).

Like Edmond, Sturm often plays with the picture of the stereotypical woman in the house. Similar to Edmond's "The Deal", Sturm's "Coming of Age" conveys a sense of imprisonment, of being under lock and key, from which she demands release. And in yet another parallel to her Pakeha contemporary, the tone of the poem remains rather bemusedly detached.

> Can't you see
> I've come of age at last,

[428] J.C. Sturm, "Coming of Age", *Dedications* (1996): 46-7. The poem is dedicated to her family.

So give me that big gold key
Hanging round your neck
Or I swear I'll leave home
For good without it, […]

(Coming of Age, 16-21)

The title adds an ironic twist to the poem. Coming of age depicts the process of reaching adulthood, of arriving at a mature stage of life, something that a person is generally assumed to have reached long before retirement age. Since the poem is dedicated to Sturm's family, the 42 years of "enforced domestication" (Coming of Age, 3) lead to the conclusion that she is speaking of her time as a carer for her family. In direct comparison to her Pakeha contemporaries, such a poem is not extraordinary but Sturm is the first Maori-New Zealander to talk about such socio-gender constraints. By disclosing her own personal experience to the public eye, Sturm gives it a larger cultural audience.

Sturm does and yet does not perceive her situation as the one of a stereotypical housewife in the 1960s and 70s. Due to her dual cultural background, she is in a unique position occupying the space between, a space that is yet invisible, an invisibility, Sturm masterfully captures through the formal structure and thematic shifts in "Coming Home"[429]. Here, the poetic speaker takes a summary look at her life, presenting crucial stages that read like milestones in an ongoing search for home. The poem visualises an inner conflict of being torn between through the stanzas that are not in line but are alternately indented so that it looks as if they jump back and forth on the page.

The bones of my tupuna[430]
Safe in the secret places up north
Must wait a little longer
Before they claim me for good

The love of my second parents
[…]
never quite made me theirs.

(Coming Home, 1-8)

The closure of each stanza conveys a sense of perennial unrest; each depicts a different departure point for Sturm's search for home, be it the memory of her

[429] J.C. Sturm, "Coming Home", *Dedications* (1996): 48-9.

[430] Tupuna = ancestors, grandparents

ancestors (her *tupuna*) or her foster parents. As one of the most openly autobiographical poems in *Dedications*, "Coming Home" neither acknowledges the Maori origin nor the Pakeha upbringing as a reliable basis for a personal concept of home. Having led a life as the wife of an intellectual, as a mother and housewife in the 1960s and 70s while being torn between two ethnic polarities has fanned a spectrum of identities so that the concept of Sturm's personal home multiplies. The constant movement and unrest suggest that the personal concept of home is mediated by her poetic journey.

In the attempt and desire to sound the depth and viability of the different homes, the poems in *Dedications* often convey a strong sense of being emotionally and culturally bereft. The gap Sturm perceives in her ethnic identity is caused by the disconnection to and alienation from her native culture, a gap that many other Maori artists tried to bridge partially through re-connecting to their *whakapapa* in terms of their Maori names. Sturm refrained from changing her name back to a Maori one.[431] Hence, to an outsider, the name J.C. Sturm neither reveals the bearer's sex nor his/her ethnicity. This little fact might indicate that Sturm never unconditionally embraces her Maori heritage although some poems in *Dedications* clearly show that Sturm suffers from not having lived as Maori.

Most openly, such suffering is lingering in the poems "In Loco Parentis"[432], a poem dedicated to her Pakeha foster parents, and in "Anniversary Day"[433], which is dedicated to her Maori mother. In "In Loco Parentis", the speaker states:

> Twenty years they planted, nurtured
> Trained, pruned, grafted me
> Only to find a native plant
> Will always native be.
>
> (In Loco Parentis, 27-30)

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[431] Rosemary Kohu-Morgan changed her first name back to Hinewirangi. Roma Potiki after having changed her name from Janet to Roma also puts her tribal affiliation Te rarawa, Te Aupouri, Ngaai Rangitihi after her name in most publications. J.C. Sturm never felt she had to change her name, even though she has a Maori name she could 'change back' to. Rather her maiden name became her nom de plume without any intention to conceal her ethnicity or her gender.

[432] J.C. Sturm, *Dedications* (1996): 76.

[433] Ibid: 74-5.

Through the metaphor of the plant, Sturm suggests a biological heritage, a genetic make-up of the speaker's that cannot be changed. The repetition of the adjective 'native' in two consecutive lines indicates not only a biological determinacy but also a deliberate emotional one. It seems as if this fact alone helps the speaker to rid herself of Pakeha influence and nurturing. However, this native side is not pursued any further. In my view, Sturm suggests that she and her (foster) parents had been victims of larger circumstances. Her foster mother wanted "to be needed/ One more time" (23-4), her foster father felt the "impulse to do a lasting good" (In Loco Parentis, 25). The tension of ethnic difference is eventually alleviated, yet not resolved, in the loving relationship:

> More profitable to recall instead
> Daily lessons in caring and sharing
> Beyond necessity,
> […]
> And forget the rest.
>
> (In Loco Parentis, 34-71/end)

Here, it is apparent that individual people's relationships and human empathy are the focus of Sturm's poetic investigation. Especially when tracing her Maori roots, Sturm puts human relationships above ethnic belonging. Her coming home is constituted by people rather than spaces. This is most tellingly expressed in the final lines of "Coming Home", when the speaker lies down beside a lover "and felt without warning/ I had come home" (Coming Home, 34-end). Such a view of home as constituted by relationships reveals yet another striking parallel to Edmond's convictions. In an interview, Sturm confirms her deep interest in:

> relationships between adults and children, men and women, women and women, men and men […constitute] the complexity of where you're coming from culturally, where you find yourself, how you react to it.[434]

Through her view of the individual in the network of his/ her relationships, Sturm illustrates that cultural identity is a process that cannot be reduced to a simplistic notion; she rather seems to suggest that it should be seen as a mosaic of influences.

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[434] Briar Wood, "Between the Roses and the Taupata: J.C. Sturm." (1994): 177-8.

In her own personal mosaic, some pieces are painfully missing, pieces she tries to track down, for instance in "Anniversary Day", where she tries to re-establish a relationship with her biological mother who died when she was fifteen days old. The poem tries to recall both the painful truth of her mother dying of "medical negligence/ and unattended pain" (13-4), while "desperately seeking/ […]/ someone, anyone/ to save [her] nineteen years" (20-4), as well as a happy vision of growing up

> Calling you mummy,
> To know your ways
> And those of the old people.
>
> […]
> Never having to make
> An imaginary pilgrimage like this
> And a paper offering.
>
> (Anniversary Day, 28-30; 47-end)

Having grown up Pakeha, Sturm seems to reassemble her *whakapapa* by means of poetry. The "paper offering"[435] seems to suggest that home is not constituted by spatial affiliations, not even by the often-quoted Maori connection to the land. Poetry is the means and the space in which to find habitable space, in which to weave together the threads of home that cannot be found in real life, and in which to come to terms with the fragmented and multiple character of one's sense of belonging. In this quality, Sturm's poem bears resemblance to the works of Lauris Edmond and Mary Stanley, to whom the grief for a lost person became an integral part of their poetic vision. Sturm feels bereft of a past she never had the chance to live. So in a Maori context, one might say that her *waiata* of lament transcends the context of her own biography and translates into a cultural statement.

Sturm's home of relationships is a vision in which time, place, and ethnicity retreat into the background. This can best be seen in poems such as "Houses, hills, valleys"[436] and "Coming Home"[437]. In "Houses, hills, valleys", the speaker states:

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[435] The 'paper offering' is, according to Sturm herself, an allusion to the Chinese tradition of burning paper money on the grave of loved ones.

[436] J.C. Sturm, *Dedications* (1996): 33-4.

[437] Ibid: 48-9.

We can never return
You and I
To that old tree house
Encircled by sterner hills
Where I laid down lovingly
Painstakingly, your foundations
Year upon stony year
Foolishly forgetting how easily
A hurricane can uproot an old tree,

An average earthquake shake
To dust and rubble
Any Spanish castle.

(Houses, hills, valleys, 21-32)

Similar to Edmond in "One Way" or "Epithalamium", Sturm realises that a return to physical places does not provide her with a home. Be it a tree house, or a castle, both are only physical entities that do not provide anchorage in the sense of an emotional home. "Houses, hills, valleys" conveys this lack of emotional anchorage through metaphors of space, such as the castle and the tree house, which cannot withstand the forces of nature. By taking into account that, as Millar states, Sturm's "natural images are frequently metaphors for social processes or human relationships"[438], the hurricane and the earthquake that shatter human dwellings could be read in analogy to the political, social and cultural structures of New Zealand. The concept of home, both the emotional home and the cultural home, is thereby conditioned by these larger circumstances that prioritise society's needs over those of individuals.

In "Houses, hills, valleys", Sturm reduces the standard features of home to such an extent that only the generally valid scaffold remains. In the continuous change of houses, the names of places or details of the homes are no longer relevant. In my perception, the poem renders such mobility as a kind of attitude of the mind.

Now as you gather yourself
To move again
From someone else's house
To someone else's house,
Your good friend of a year
And a day

[438] Paul Millar, "Reviews: *Dedications*, J.C. Sturm; *Soft Leaf Falls of the Moon*, Apirana Taylor." (1997): 378.

Having moved on already,
The thought of what lessons
And what tutors
Await you in the new place
On another hill
Above a different valley,
Trips my pulse
And almost takes my breath
Quite away.

(Houses, hills, valleys, 33-end)

The mobility and the speed with which the physical dwelling place is changed not only makes the speaker almost breathless, it also does not give the readers time to linger. The tending of the home is futile; the houses are just shells, which reminds of Edmond's accessory use of houses in her poem "One Way".[439] Through the utter reduction, Sturm's poem erodes the sense of one place as home and, in an early 21st century context, one might be inclined to add that it reveals an existential orientation that is indicative of the quick pace of modern life in which in particular the attachment to a *place* to live becomes less and less important.

A similar sense of forces that lie beyond individual human influence might have provided the impetus to the poem "In the eye of the storm"[440] where the forces of nature represent the outside sphere. The eye of the storm, the calm centre, is the space of repose that remains undisturbed:

Be calm now, here
In the eye of the storm.
Learn how everything
Falls apart, falls away
From a hollow centre.

Dreams, prophecies
Hopes, fantasies
All will delude you,
Memory turn you to salt.

(In the eye of the storm, 1-9)

The metaphor of the eye of the storm is a particularly powerful and versatile one. Meteorologically speaking, a storm of such a dimension only emerges when there are extreme differences in temperature or pressure. Read as an

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439 See the discussion of "One Way" in chapter 6.3.1.

440 J.C. Sturm, "The Eye of the Storm" *Dedications* (1996): 30.

allegory for forces that condition individual people's lives, such as political systems, the storm can be seen as the result of two opposing forces. Against the backdrop of New Zealand's biculturalism, the two opposing forces might be read as Pakeha and Maori.

In "The eye of the storm", such frameworks are no longer seen at a distance. Having entered the eye of the storm, the poetic voice gains insight into their innermost fabric, learning "how everything/ Falls apart, falls away/ From a hollow centre" (The eye of the storm, 3-5). This moment of insight resembles the moment of recognition in Edmond's poem "One Way" when the speaker realises on a nostalgic journey 'home' that "there is/ nothing"[441]. The poetic voice in Sturm's poem faces a "hollow centre" (5) in which "[d]reams, prophecies/ [h]opes and fantasies" (The eye of the storm, 6-7) are unmasked as delusions. Unlike Edmond, Sturm conveys this emptiness as repose, not as emotional emptiness; it is more likely a therapeutic release. Owing to such considerations, the eye of the storm could be regarded as a clean canvas in the sense of a new beginning. This resonates both in a personal sense, in other words Sturm's poetic space where she can find her home, and in a cultural sense as the neutral territory on which to renegotiate cultural space. "The eye of the storm" indicates that the space between the two cultures is still uncovered ground, a ground that has never really been investigated in poetic terms.

Sturm's poetry steps into this emptiness and explores what she calls in "Travelling" the "interior landscape" (14), yet another retrospective inspection of her own biography. The speaker states that it is

> [t]ime now to travel instead
> The interior landscape,
> Life-long familiar
> But still unknown,
> Continually adjusting itineraries
> To a shifting juxtaposition
> Of time and place,
> An ever changing order
> Of priorities.
>
> (Travelling, 13-21)

The "interior landscape" suggests that the home is something we carry inside us. Travelling this landscape suggests the recognition of these

[441] See discussion in chapter 6 of this thesis.

interconnections, these juxtapositions across time and space that yield a home that can incorporate changes, shifts and an ever changing order of priorities. Sturm explores the interconnectedness of individuals and their socio-cultural environment. She is interested in the way people react "within their cultural limitations. I hate to use the word cultural clashing but, if you like, cultural meeting."[442] This attitude conditions her poetry and opens a space between, a kind of platform on which to make space for cultural meeting, a place in which to allow the overlap of cultures. In my perception, her interest in "cultural meeting" renders her poetry a kind of *marae* in one of its most incorporating and welcoming functions.

7.4 Poetry as Marae

The Maori communal meeting house has no equivalent in Western societies. It is not simply a town hall but a place where all rituals and ceremonies of the community take place. It is the site of celebrating birth and marriage as well as mourning the dead and remembering ancestral history.[443] In Maori culture, the *marae* is part of the *turangawaewae*, the place to stand, which indicates Maori spiritual connection to the land as their home. It is also, as the brief account about the *waiata* has shown, the public place where Maori poetry begins.

Sturm's poems neither approach such complex Maori concepts with the naivety of a young poet writing in the wake of Maori Renaissance, nor with the political determination of a Maori activist fighting Pakeha dominance. Rather, Sturm tries to reveal the transcultural potential of Maori concepts, an endeavour that can be seen clearly in the portrayal of the *marae* as a meeting place of cultures in "At the Museum on Puke-ahu"[444]. In order to highlight the innovation of Sturm's vision, it will be useful to compare her poem to Hinewirangi Kohu-Morgan's "Marae" [445], which pictures the *marae* as a crucial space for Maori to re-connect to their cultural roots in the 1980s, and to Roma Potiki's[446] "Compulsory Class Visits"[447] dating from 1992 which

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442 Briar Wood, "Between the Roses and the Taupata: J.C. Sturm." (1994): 177-8.

443 Peter Beatson, *The Healing Tongue: Themes in Contemporary Maori Literature* (1989), 56.

444 J.C. Sturm, *Dedications* (1996): 13-4.

445 Rosemary Kohu, and Robert de Roo, *Broken Chant* (1983): 49.

turns against Pakeha assigning of Maori to their *marae*, as "the only place they can be Maori on" (Compulsory Class Visits, 7-8).

Kohu-Morgan's depiction is reminiscent of a Bachelardian notion of reverting to the home of childhood memories.

> You call me on to the Marae,
> And I bring my dead with me: my sisters,
> My grandparents, all my people
> […]
> I sit to one side now and you speak;
> You speak poetry,
> Placing everything in context
> With your powerful words, spine-tingling
> In their exuberance,
> Energy and wit. You sing
> And the land seems to respond
> As you tie all the threads into a reason for being here.
>
> (Marae, 4-19)

In its attempt to re-connect to cultural roots, Kohu-Morgan's poem displays a strong sense of nostalgia and of the desire to be cradled in womb-like comfort – notions that convey the sense of a-historical concepts. Where Kohu-Morgan retreats into an idyllic traditional notion that is disconnected from time and place, Sturm is already beyond such an attempt at conserving cultural conventions since she recognises that this inhibits the broader estimations of the *marae's* cultural relevance as a viable home for Maori in an increasingly globalising world.

In order to recover Maori authority and treasures (the *taonga*), Sturm's "At the museum on Puke-ahu" investigates the emotional and cultural resonance of the publication of *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography Maori Edition/ Nga Tangata Taumata Rau.* The *waiata mo nga taonga*[448] is Sturm's means with which she mediates her concern. Through the appropriation of the traditional form, Sturm lets the Maori words free on the page and resonate in their natural references. In consequence, her poem acquires a sense of fluidity which not only reflects the meeting of Pakeha and

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446 Roma Potiki's poetic writing encompasses the volumes *Stones in Her Mouth* (1992), *Shaking the Tree* (1998) and *Oriori* (1999). She is a regular contributor to New Zealand poetry written in English by Maori women, although she worked primarily in theatre as a performer, playwright, manager and critic of Maori performing arts and culture. In 1996, her play *Going Home*, won international acclaim being performed in Sydney. Potiki's latest play *Sanctuary* toured New Zealand in 2001.

447 Roma Potiki, *Stones in Her Mouth* (1992): 33.

448 The Song for the Treasures. Translation provided in Sturm's volume *Dedications* (1996): 87.

Maori in linguistic terms, but even more so in cultural terms. At the same time, the poem makes clear that such cultural meeting is a very personal affair

> It was too special an occasion
> For anonymity,
> Nothing less
> Than a public show of origin and identity
> Belonging and commitment
> Would do
> For the job to be done:
> The lifting of a tapu[449]
> The launching of a new taonga
> 'Nga Tangata Taumata Rau'[450]
> Into the world of books
>
> (At the museum on Puke-ahu, 1-10)

The poem suggests that Maori cultural history had been sacred (*tapu*) for a long time, and that it now finds its continuation in an originally Pakeha medium, a book, *Nga Tangata Taumata Rau/ Dictionary of New Zealand Biography Volume I Maori Edition.* This transfer signposts a way for Maori and Pakeha culture to merge in a new way. The written word becomes the 'virtual' space in which to mediate two cultural conventions in a new understanding of *turangawaewae*, a place to stand – a sense of home.

The lifting of *tapu*, the opening the archive of the most sacred treasures of Maori culture to a general public is a crucial step in this context. "With Rarakia Haka Whaikorero Waiata" (At the museum on Puke-ahu, 11-5), Sturm not only enumerates ceremonies of a *marae* protocol for lifting a *tapu,* she also lets her readers participate in the ceremony. The poem turns into a *marae,* thus creating a space that allows participation in the cultural process.

During the ceremony described in the poem, the *tangata whenua*, the people of the land, are lead by their priest (*te tohunga*) into a new way of being:

> From foyer to echoing hall
> Pakeha present to Maori past
> One kind of knowing and feeling
> To another way of being.
>
> We laid down
> Our personal taonga
> Of individuality

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[449] Sacred. Translation provided in Sturm's volume *Dedications* (1996): 87.

[450] Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Volume I, Maori Edition. Translation provided in Sturm's volume *Dedications* (1996): 87.

As koha[451] on the marae
And made the perilous passage
From one world to another

(At the museum on Puke-ahu, 20-9)

Tradition and the participation of individuals in the cultural process is seen a something positive. At the same time, such participation requires the letting go of individuality for the sake of becoming part of a larger whole. It is in the Maori communal spirit that conventional cultural barriers are transcended in the poem so that the passage from one world to another can take place. Present and past, rationality and emotionality, melt together in a new vision of belonging.

With such a train of thought Sturm runs counter the ideas of some of her contemporaries, such as Roma Potiki who sees the meeting of cultures in ideological misbalance caused by New Zealand's colonial past. In Potiki's poem "Compulsory Class Visits", the *marae* is pictured as leftover space – in a way the Maori's last stand – whose authority and status is not acknowledged by the Pakeha.[452]

they come in classes now
many pakeha ones too
and even the maori start to call themselves
new Zealanders.
and even the maori stand on the marae saying 'this is the only
place
you can be maori on'.
it is not enough for me.

(Compulsory Class Visits, 1-7)

The *marae* is the central picture in this poem and, almost contrary to Sturm's poem, it is presented as a place of cultural alienation. Read against the backdrop of the Maori Renaissance and New Zealand's bicultural policies, the poem points at a kind of half-heartedness of cultural rapprochement. Potiki does not use the *marae* in its original meaning as an incorporating space but sees it as a marker of distinctive Maori culture.

Whereas Potiki's poem struggles with giving away authority, i.e. lifting the *tapu*, Sturm's poem reads like a statement of courage. In "At the museum

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451 A gift. Translation provided in Sturm's volume *Dedications* (1996): 87.

452 This is seen against the backdrop of New Zealand cultural policy, which wanted to provide compensation for dispossessing Maori of 95% of the land by classifying 464 *marae* as reserves. Ranginui Walker, "Maori Identity" (1989): 41-50.

on Puke-ahu", the *koha*, the gift, is not the book itself, it is the celebration of courage, of having allowed the transition. Sturm's *koha* reminds us of Edmond's soap heart in a tin in "Playing House", where the gift of home travels from one palm to the other. In Sturm's poem, the change is even more monumental and dramatic; the *koha* "made the perilous passage/ From one world to another" (At the museum on Puke-ahu, 28-9). With such a transfer between worlds, and cultures, Sturm's poem signals that it is open to cross-cultural dynamics. In my view, she finds the perilous passageway through tradition towards a transcultural vision of Maori identity, or, as the poem states, "a kind of knowing and feeling/ To another way of being" (At the museum on Puke-ahu, 21-2).

In this openness, the poem does not discard tradition but acknowledges a rich and long heritage with the perception of being

> The end of a line
> On a whakapapa
> A mark on a page
> A notch on a stick
> A mere speck
> Of historical dust.
>
> (At the museum on Puke-ahu, 36-41)

To a Western reader, this reduction to seeing Maori as the end of a line conveys the sense of an endemic species. However, exactly the opposite is the case. Sturm does not see Maori as being doomed to extinction, but instead emphasizes their continuity.

And yet the poem ends with the reflection on the "painful truth/ Of irretrievable loss" (At the Museum on Puke-ahu, 70/end) which is an indicator of Sturm's poetic quest for her native heritage. The final cadence of the poem is that of the *waiata*, the song of lament.

> And all the old taonga
> Moved restlessly
> In their glass-caged sleep
> Dreaming of their prime
> Of release and being
> Taken home —
> 'Awhinatia mai
> Arohatia ra' —[453]
> Sharing with us

[453] Give help, show compassion. Translation provided in Sturm's volume *Dedications* (1996): 87.

> The painful truth
> Of irretrievable loss.
>
> (At the museum on Puke-ahu, 54-end)

Sturm weaves her personal sense of loss into a communal sense of loss. Individuality, as suggested in the opening stanza, becomes part of a communal 'we' towards the end when the individual quest dissolves into a non-exclusive cultural assertiveness oriented toward Maori lines.

Whereas Sturm is open to transcultural experiences Potiki's poem "Compulsory Class Visits" draws a distinct cultural demarcation between Pakeha and Maori culture in which the vision of Aotearoa New Zealand is rendered as an artificial construct.

> at the powhiri[454] they are directed to sing
> there is no kaea[455] there is no ihi[456]
> holding their papers, they look at the words –
> Ao-te-a-roa.
>
> (Compulsory Class Visits, 10-end)

Kaea and *ihi,* which can be summarised as authority, remain closed entities, their cultural complexity cannot unfold which is particularly clear through the last line of the poem. Potiki interrupts the vowels of Aotearoa with dashes, thus giving the impression of an unskilled reader (for instance a first year schoolchild) who tries to read an unfamiliar word. In effect, Potiki presents a chain of letters that do not form a smooth word and thus keeps her readers from perceiving it as a proper word and hence a proper concept. Aotearoa New Zealand, the official name of the country that is meant to point at an embrace of the new bicultural nation, remains an artificial construct in this poem.

Where Potiki sees no viable Space of Overlap that would relieve and at best resolve the tension between cultural concepts, Sturm dares to investigate the transition of cultural significance from "one kind of knowing and feeling/ to another way of being" (At the museum on Puke-ahu, 22-3). Reading Sturm's poetry as a poetic *marae* therefore offers the potential of a cultural Space of Overlap where not only the Maori community may meet, but where

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454 powhiri = wave, welcome, opening ceremony, fan

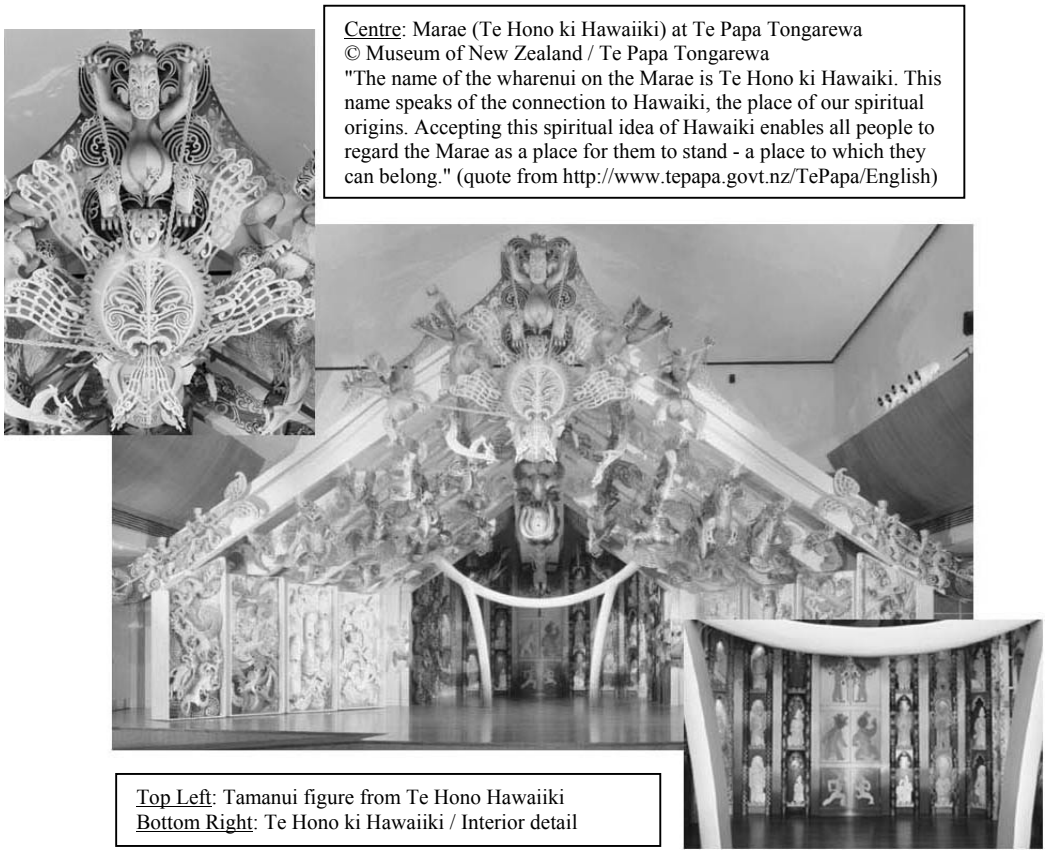
455 kaea = haka leader, roam trumpet

456 ihi = power, essential force, shudder, sun's ray, hiss, tendril, split, awe, awe-inspiring, excitement

a new poetic sensibility may emerge. A similar line of thought might have provided the impetus for the modern *marae* on the top floor of the national Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington (see pictures). The museum describes the *marae* as a place where:

> [a]ll cultures can feel at home […] Iwi[457] can identify and relate to their ancestors through the striking contemporary carvings. So too can other cultures. Carved ancestral images reflect the occupations and origins of newcomers over the last two hundred years - farmers, educators, clergy, parents, artists - linked with Pākehā, Asian, and Polynesian design references.[458]

The museum thus sees the *marae* as an intersection of different cultures, as a cross-cultural meeting space, or, maybe even as a transcultural space that unites the different cultural influences in the hope of communicating an incorporating sense of culture.



Centre: Marae (Te Hono ki Hawaiiki) at Te Papa Tongarewa
© Museum of New Zealand / Te Papa Tongarewa
"The name of the wharenui on the Marae is Te Hono ki Hawaiki. This name speaks of the connection to Hawaiki, the place of our spiritual origins. Accepting this spiritual idea of Hawaiki enables all people to regard the Marae as a place for them to stand - a place to which they can belong." (quote from http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/TePapa/English)

Top Left: Tamanui figure from Te Hono Hawaiiki
Bottom Right: Te Hono ki Hawaiiki / Interior detail

457 Iwi= tribe, bone, race, people, nation, strength

458 National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. The Marae/ Te Marae. URL: http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/TePapa/English/WhatsOn/LongTermExhibitions/TheMarae.htm (27 July 2004).

Owing to these considerations, Sturm's poem could be seen as indicative for the cultural zeitgeist of the 1990s, indeed as a poetic signpost to where New Zealand's bicultural path is leading. *Dedications* was published in 1996, two years prior to the opening of The National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington. The poem "At the Museum at Puke-ahu" was written even earlier and describes the original National Museum of New Zealand, situated on Puke-ahu, the little hill near Government House in Wellington. The transfer of the *whare whakairo* (the carved house) into the new museum suggests that even the concept of the *marae* is not necessarily tied to a physical place. Similar to Edmund, Sturm advocates that home, most of all, needs to signify emotional (in this case cultural) belonging.

"At the Museum on Puke-ahu" shows a passageway for the imagination, which can move from cultural assertion to cultural fluidity. In my view, the poetry of Maori women, viewed over the past three decades, scarce though it undoubtedly is, reveals a rapid shift from an initial cultural assertiveness in the 1980s to a bicultural and eventually even transcultural sensitivity in the face of the increasingly powerful globalisation in the late 1990s. To date Sturm's poetry is one of the most accomplished witnesses of this transition.

7.5 Splitting the Stone

With her poem "Splitting the Stone"[459], Sturm's vision relieves the tension between old and new or, one might say, between tradition and recent cultural fluidity and successfully opens a space between. On the surface level, the poem evolves around the creative process, describing the work of an artist who starts off with a designated task and arrives at a piece of art that exceeds the original expectations.[460] Apart from such a figurative interpretation, the poem can be seen to depict the search for an in-between space in which to re-negotiate cultural home space.

The heavy grey boulder "From that other beach/ Up north —/ The place I call home " (Splitting the Stone, 4-6) can be seen to symbolise the home

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459 J.C. Sturm, *Dedications* (1996): 15.

460 This is a way of looking at the poem Sturm herself supports in the interview Briar Wood, "Between the Roses and the Taupata: J.C. Sturm." (1994): 178.

from up north, a home that is rendered in fragments. Removed from its original location, the stone is already uprooted from its home ground. The brevity of the lines indicate a nervousness about the impending task of carving the stone as if the speaker of the poem hesitates to put down in words what is about to happen. Sturm's poem suggests right from the start that the carving process might not happen according to the designated way, and this creates a sense of foreboding.

> You started to make
> According to instructions
> A flax pounder
> Like the Old Ones
> Used to use
> (Some can still be found
> With other missing things
> In various museums)
>
> (Splitting the Stone, 24-31)

The pounder, a tool that "would have [been] used for pounding roots or fibrous material"[461], is the set task for the artist to carve out of the stone. This set task can be read as an analogy for the status of a Maori carving artist as a preserver of cultural continuity and as a teacher. From a Maori perspective, 'looking back' is thus a means of looking forward since it guarantees the cultural continuity.

Sturm's poem does not criticise this path but shows a different outcome of such a pursuit. Her poem carves a new way for Maori cultural continuity and thus chooses a path that is not well-trodden. The poem maintains the breathless tension through the cupped lines. Insertions, such as "as I knew I should" (35), or "as I knew it would" (37), convey the sense of quick breathing in between.

> Striking stone on stone
> Carefully, patiently
> While I kept away
> As I knew I should
> Waiting for the stone
> To split
> As I knew it would
> And let the Mauri through.
>
> (Splitting the Stone, 32-9)

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[461] Briar Wood, "Between the Roses and the Taupata: J.C. Sturm." (1994): 178.

Eventually the tension is relieved when the stone splits. The strong symbolic meaning of the splitting is pronounced through positioning the event at the heart of the poem. The splitting is thus not a setting apart but a connective link between the Maori past and the Maori future.

The outcome of the carving process is initially a relief through having set free the Mauri, the "life-principle" or "special character"[462]. Through the homophone connection between Maori and Mauri, Sturm suggests that Maori heritage is brought back to life. She thereby stresses the exploration of the interior landscape and not the political position of Maori culture. "Splitting the Stone" thus not only challenges the conservative path of cultural assertiveness, the splitting also suggests the alleviation of the tension by going beyond the traditional ways of re-establishing connection.

> And after
> Your amazed silence
> I watched you set to,
> Forgetting the pounder
> And all those
> Sad museum pieces,
> And make instead
> Like the Old Ones used to
> A stone dwelling
> For the newcomer —
> A place to call home
>
> (Splitting the Stone, 40-50)

With the unexpected outcome of the carving process, the poem suggests that the Maori tradition can outgrow its original roots and build a new home with cultural tools of old. Like Edmond and Bethell, Sturm reveals herself to be a believer in art and poetry as the means with which to subvert conventional notions and to appropriate cultural space.

> And when it was finished
> You stood there
> In the small space between
> The roses and the taupata,
> Heavy grey rain
> Soaking through your clothes
> And the pores of your skin,
> And looked in wonder
> At what you had done,

---

[462] See P.M. Ryan, *Dictionary of Modern Maori* (1994). Mauri also depicts greenstone, the New Zealand equivalent of Jade.

Nursing a bruised hand.

(Splitting the Stone, 59-end)

As the bruised hand indicates, such a path toward a new way of seeing and shaping Maori culture is not easily accomplished. Her poem thus simultaneously tells of reconstruction while deconstructing Maori tradition.

Interestingly, the concluding lines call upon the garden as a space between. In her own commentary on "Splitting the Stone", Sturm calls the space between the roses and the *taupata* the 'small green space':

> [w]hen the stone is split, the artist stands in the small place between the roses and the taupata; it is there that the creative process takes place. And I am here talking quite simply and obviously metaphorically. The roses refer to his Pakeha side and the taupata refers to his Maori side and the small green space between is where this artist works.[463]

In her own words, Sturm extends the integrative potential of the garden space to become a cultural Space of Overlap between the Pakeha culture, symbolised by the roses, and the Maori culture, symbolised by the *taupata*. This allegorical reading of the two plants can be carried further. The *taupata* is a wild tree that is not only very robust in harsh weather conditions, its roots can break up the clay so that other plants can grow.[464] The roses, on the other hand, are the result of a long process of breeding and need a lot of care and shelter to flourish. Seeking an overlap in the as yet undefined and, unfortunately, still too often invisible, space between is thus mutually beneficial.

7.6 J.C. Sturm Envisioning Home beyond Cultural Borders

The poetry of J.C. Sturm, as displayed in *Dedications,* impressively reveals the search of a poet for cultural anchorage who needs to negotiate two cultural allegiances. It also delivers the vision of a passageway into a new sense of home for the New Zealand imagination. Despite her frequent calling upon traditional motives and the undisguised yearning for a reliable home space, Sturm does not embrace Maori traditional concepts in order to provide a homogenous cultural continuity. Sturm's bold thrusting forward into the space between is not only an example for Maori, but for anyone who needs to

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463 Briar Wood, "Between the Roses and the Taupata: J.C. Sturm." (1994): 180.

464 http://uneli.unitec.ac.nz/our_auckland/greylynn/Forest%20Trees.htm

negotiate multiple home affiliations in times of increasing globalisation and cultural crisis.

Sturm advocates that home, most of all, needs to signify emotional belonging while showing a passageway for the imagination, which can move from cultural assertion to cultural fluidity. Thus Sturm ventures into the unknown and does not erect barriers for cultural flows. On the contrary, her poetic voice expresses an appropriation of new cultural territory. This is why I consider her poetry highly progressive rather than self-enclosing or even defensive. One might say, in quoting loosely from "At the museum on Puke-ahu", that Sturm launches the *taonga*, the treasures, of Maori identity into a new way of being.

Entranceway (waharoa) to Te Papa's Marae, portraying Kupe, the Maori navigator and other explorers. © Museum of New Zealand / Te Papa Tongarewa: #F004841 Waharoa Gates Open

8 CONCLUSION

This thesis has provided a close reading of New Zealand women's poetry in English that covers a period of time of more than 70 years. The focus of attention has been the concept of home because, as I established in chapter two, it is a construct that is conditioned by social, cultural, and personal factors. The concept of home provides valuable information about New Zealand's emancipation as an independent nation, in the process of which Britain retreated more and more into the background as a cultural reference point.

This analysis has shown that women's poetry is particularly well-suited for chronicling this process, since it (re)negotiates the concept of home both on a personal as much as on a national level. In doing so, this study started to close a gap in the critical assessment of New Zealand's poetic history that had been focused all-too intensively on male authors as the shapers of the literary canon. However, it can most clearly be seen in women's poetic concepts of home that the personal, cultural, and social determinants of different writers' times connect with each other. Often the strong personal tone in women's reflections on home was misleadingly read as the expression of their domestic focus and gave their poetry the impression of being confessional. My analysis has shown that home in the poetry of New Zealand women reaches beyond the conservative borders of a socio-cultural construction, and beyond the notorious gendered imagery tied around it. Furthermore, the analysis has revealed that women's poetry is part of a larger cultural process in which these conservative notions of home give way to more flexible and interconnective ones.

Apart from highlighting the need to contextualise women's poetic statements in this process, I have also suggested that the approach to, and understanding of, the concept of home in the poetic imagination needs to be extended. The critical tools of Spaces of Overlap and Spaces of Meditation that I have defined in this thesis aid in revealing the strong connection between poetic imagination and socio-cultural dynamics. These notions have been useful for detecting women's subversion and deconstruction of running socio-cultural (and gendered) constructs. They have also helped to unveil the

transition of New Zealand's national cultural identity. This transition finds its strongest representation in the poetic negotiations of the concept of home; though it had previously been understood as a concept that was conditioned on the basis of spatial belonging, it has become more flexible and is no longer tied to space or place in the wake of globalisation.

The four poets discussed here stand as representatives of the susceptibility to such changes at their time of writing. Poets like Bethell and Edmond, often highlighted as pivotal figures in critical commentary, had not been given due space in the overall assessment of New Zealand's poetic history. Their central and representative role in the advancement of the New Zealand poetic imagination was therefore generally underestimated. To a large extent, Stanley's and Sturm's poems have not yet been recognised by a wider critical audience. Such omission is not comprehensible today, in particular when evaluating the four women's contributions to the concept of home.

In the 1930s, Ursula Bethell's poetry intensively reflects personal attitudes toward New Zealand. Bethell's poems turn away from Homesickness and cast an 'earnest look' at New Zealand as home and can thus be seen as contributing perceptively to the beginning shift of the poetic imagination toward the so-called "human landscape"[465]. The vitality and frankness with which Bethell approaches the issue of New Zealand as home can be seen as having laid the foundation for the new poetic confidence that followed. Bethell's poetry stands as an example for other migrants of today; she can thus in due right be called a visionary poet before her time.

Mary Stanley's brief appearance on the poetic scene broke through the phalanx of the male-dominated critical and literary establishment after World War II. But this is not her only outstanding merit. Her deeply philosophical look at New Zealand, and her attempt to make a home in the poetic imagination after the trauma of World War II, render her poetry a highly sensitive witness to the time when New Zealand was establishing its own literary canon. Her poems do not display the 'crusty commonsense' tone criticism favoured at that time; Stanley's work rather discloses pain and grief. Her almost apocalyptic and existentialist perception of the forces of nature

[465] Jenny Bornholdt et al., *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English* (1997): xxvi.

grants insight into a pervasive unease that was below the surface of confidence as New Zealand journeyed towards independence. In my view, Mary Stanley's poetry continues the investigation of the human landscape while simultaneously connecting it to a general post-war sensitivity.

Lauris Edmond's influence on the New Zealand imagination is great, though it has often been underestimated. In most critical appraisals, she was considered as 'pivotal' in her own right, but textual analyses of her work that compare it with that of other New Zealand poets were painfully missing. In my view, Edmond plays an important role in New Zealand's literary history: having started to write and publish during the second wave of the Women's Movement, her work resonates strongly, both against the backdrop of New Zealand socio-cultural change affecting the situation of women, as well as in the politico-cultural context of forging a path for women poets to gain their rightful position in the literary canon.

Yet, she always refrains from being overtly political; her battlefield is a more subtle, but no less powerful one. Edmond's profound investigation of home is not only a personal quest that translates into a cultural statement about women's gender constraints. Her poetic (re)negotiation of the concept acknowledges home as an imaginary construct that is no longer tied to space or place but manifests itself in multiple ways. Since her work transcends many boundaries, be they aesthetic or critical, and since it breaks with many conventional constructs, I argue that Edmond's work can duly be called the leading light for Zealand women's poetry at the dawn of the millennium.

Although she is from the same generation as Edmond and Stanley, J.C. Sturm's poetry is the most recent in this analysis. Like Edmond, her own biography plays an important role in her poetry. Being born a Maori and raised Pakeha, Sturm suffered marginalisation on the basis of her sex and her ethnic identity throughout her entire life. Because of her dual cultural allegiance (sometimes maybe despite of it), Sturm is open to transcultural experience. Her poetry reveals the desire to increase mutual respect and to work toward common cultural goals. As does Edmond, Sturm does not linger on any spatial paradigm but presents a multiple concept of home that is highly dependant on human relationships.

The close reading of women's poetry in this thesis has shown that the concept of home indicates a multi-cultural and even trans-cultural dimension of New Zealand's poetic sensibility at an earlier stage in the country's cultural development than generally acknowledged. I suggest that, from the very beginning, New Zealand women poets have been writing at the heart of their country's poetic sensibility.

Bethell, Stanley, Edmond, and Sturm are representatives of their time and particular socio-cultural backgrounds. Read together, their poetry bears witness to the transition of New Zealand's poetic sensibility despite the fact that the local male critical establishment failed to recognise their achievements. My textual analysis has hopefully contributed to remedying this. In having chosen to focus on Bethell, Stanley, Edmond, and Sturm, I had to exclude many others whose poetic works would have been worthy of attention. I hope that this thesis encourages further critical readings of women's poetry that will acknowledge women's contributions to New Zealand's literature in the past, in the present, and in the future.

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10 APPENDIX

I. Lauris Edmond: Poetry Publications

In Middle Air, Pegasus Press, 1975

The Pear Tree, Pegasus Press, 1977

Salt from the North, Oxford University Press, 1980

Wellington Letter: A Sequence of Poems, Mallinson Rendel, 1980

Seven (with linocuts by Jim Gorman), Wayzgoose Press, 1980

Catching It, Oxford University Press, 1983

Selected Poems, Oxford University Press, 1984

Seasons and Creatures, Oxford University Press and Bloodaxe Books, 1986

Summer near the Arctic Circle, Oxford University Press, 1988

New and Selected Poems, Oxford University Press and Bloodaxe Books, 1991

Five Villanelles, Peppercorn Press, 1992

Scenes from a Small City, Daphne Brasell Associates, 1994

Selected Poems, 1975-1994, Bridget Williams Books, 1994

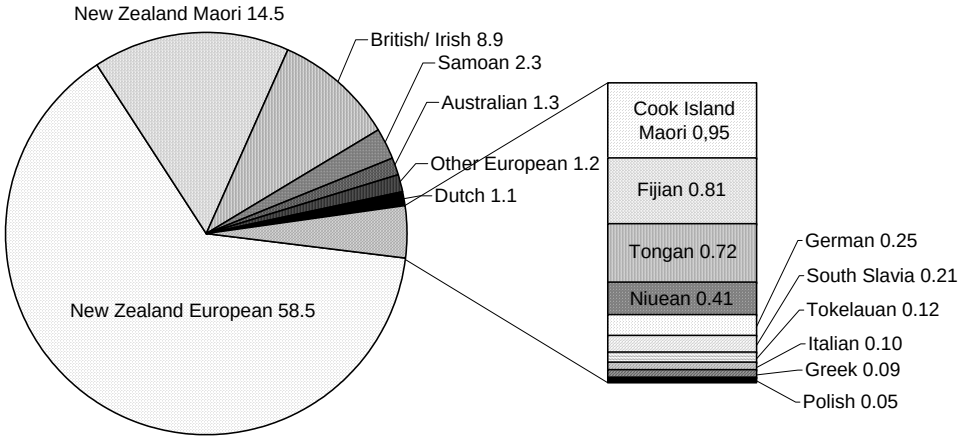
A Matter of Timing, Auckland University Press, 1996 (published by Bloodaxe Books as 'In Position')

50 Poems: A Celebration, Bridget Williams Books / Peppercorn Press, 1999

Late Song, Auckland University Press, 2000

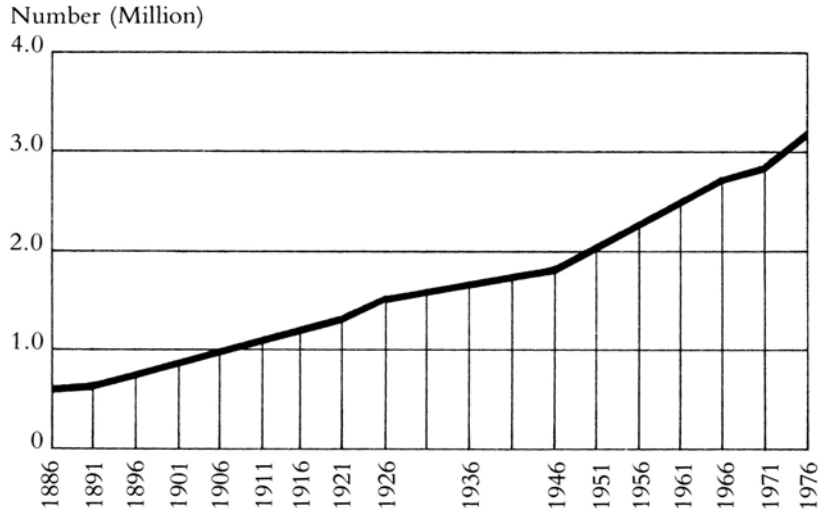
Carnival of New Zealand Creatures, Pemmican Press, 2000

II. New Zealand Ethnic Groups 1996



Official census figures from Statistics New Zealand / Te Tari Tatau (Table 2A)

III. Enumerated population at five-yearly censuses



Note: No censuses were taken in 1931 and 1941.

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