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METAMORPHOSIS AT 'THE MARGIN':
BRUCE MASON, JAMES K. BAXTER, MERVYN
THOMPSON, RENÉE AND ROBERT LORD, FIVE
PLAYWRIGHTS WHO HAVE HELPED TO CHANGE
THE FACE OF NEW ZEALAND DRAMA.

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

at Massey University [Palmerston North],
New Zealand

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2006

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my grandfather and my mother, neither of whom had the privilege of gaining the education that they both so much deserved. I stand on their shoulders, just as my son, David, will stand on mine. The writing of this thesis, however, would not have been possible without the unstinting assistance of Ainslie Hewton. Finally, to my irreplaceable friend, Zeb, the puppy I wanted and never had as a child. Zeb nurtured me throughout this long project and then, in the last week of completion, was called by the black rabbit. Thank you for everything you taught me Zebedee. You and I will always be playing alongside your beloved riverbank.

ABSTRACT

Drama has been the slowest of the arts to develop an authentic New Zealand ‘voice.’ This thesis focuses on the work of five playwrights: Bruce Mason, James K. Baxter, Mervyn Thompson, Renée and Robert Lord, all of whom have set out to identify such a ‘voice’ and in so doing have brought about a metamorphosis in the nature of New Zealand drama.

New Zealand has traditionally been regarded as being on ‘the margin’ in relation to the dominant culture of the colonizer (the Eurocentre). Before Bruce Mason began to challenge this ‘centre’ of power in the early 1950s, New Zealand playwrights were so intimidated by the Eurocentre that they usually set their plays in Europe, particularly in England, in order to make them acceptable to their audiences. Mason proposed that ‘the margin’ of New Zealand, rather than being seen as inferior, should be re-defined as a fertile place capable of nurturing a new individual dramatic form quite distinct from colonial norms.

All of my chosen playwrights have insisted upon the intrinsic value of a two-tiered concept of ‘the margin.’ By setting their plays (wherever possible) in the country of their birth, highlighting New Zealand social issues and in the process persuading theatre-going audiences that plays about this country are worth watching, they have given new life to ‘the margin’ (the culture of New Zealand as a whole).

At the same time all of these five playwrights have recognized that minority groups – ‘voices’ from ‘the outer margin’ in relation to the Pakeha ‘inner margin’ of power – have been largely unrepresented or misrepresented in New Zealand plays. They have advocated the vital importance of women’s ‘voices,’ Māori ‘voices’ and gay ‘voices,’ for example, in their exploration of a more sophisticated and inclusive understanding of what constitutes our national identity. Moreover, in a period of less than forty years, they have helped to facilitate the transition of New Zealand theatre from amateur to professional status and have been instrumental in providing the practical framework whereby future New Zealand playwrights may find an outlet for their work.

July 2006

PREFACE

The date which appears in brackets after the first reference to the title of a stage play is the year of the play's first production in New Zealand.

If the play was originally written for radio or television then the date which appears in brackets after the first mention of the play is the year of the play's first broadcast by BCNZ (known until 1978 as NZBC) or TVNZ.

The year of a play's first performance (which appears in brackets in the text) may not be the same as the date on the script which has been used in this research (which is recorded in the bibliography).

If the play has not been performed in New Zealand then the date which appears in brackets after the first mention of the title is the date, if there is one, on the script used for this research. Brief details of the location of the script are also included in these brackets. These details are expanded in the bibliography.

This thesis confines itself to plays which have been performed in New Zealand. Overseas productions of these plays are referred to only in passing where this is relevant.

The dialogue and stage directions in a script are reproduced in the same format as the one to be found in the script which has been used for this research.

The titles of articles and reviews are reproduced in grammatically correct format. For example 'act features first return' becomes 'Act features "First Return."

Anthologized titles are placed in single quotation marks.

Quotations are accompanied by single quotation marks.

Square brackets are placed around my ellipsis points.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to Massey University for awarding me the scholarship which has made this research possible. Thanks also to the Graduate Research Fund which has helped to finance the archival work. Playmarket has been helpful in making scripts and other resources available to me and I am grateful in particular to Dilys Grant and Katrina Chandra. Nicola Frean has been very efficient in assisting me to find my way through the vast amount of material that is housed in the Bruce Mason Papers in the Beaglehole Room at the Victoria University of Wellington Library. Rejieli Loon at the National Library has located references which have been particularly difficult to track down. Jacqui Baxter and Diana Mason have granted me access to primary archives. Renée has provided me with her unpublished scripts. Howard McNaughton has made the Mervyn Thompson Papers in the Macmillan Brown Library at the University of Canterbury available to me. Fiona Farrell has given me a script of Kainga of the Ladye Birds. Diana Mason, Rebecca Mason, Nonnita Rees, Bebe Lord, George Webby, Sunny Amey and Renée have contributed specialist knowledge that was unavailable elsewhere. Finally, I extend my appreciation to my supervisors and co-supervisors: in particular to Dr William Broughton and Professor Dick Corballis. Thank you, Dick, for guiding me through the shoals of doubt and the rapids of despair, especially in the final stages of this long journey.

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THE METAMORPHOSIS OF A MARGIN:

INTRODUCTION

In 1981, during the course of one of his last interviews, Bruce Mason put forward this proposition: 'I have a theory that English drama is fertilised from the periphery – in fact you could say that world drama has been fertilised from the periphery' (Paske 15).

The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines 'peripheral' as being 'marginal' and to 'peripheralize' as to 'chiefly marginalize.' Accordingly, this thesis will regard 'the periphery' as being synonymous with 'the margin.' In the same dictionary 'peripheral' is further explained as being 'superficial,' 'of minor importance,' 'not essential or relevant,' or 'subordinate.' In computer technology the dictionary adds, the term means 'without being an integral or necessary part.' With regard to the nervous system 'peripheral' is considered to be 'other than central.'

All these definitions share an understanding that 'the periphery' is always inferior to 'the centre.' Mason's statement about the nature of drama as a genre therefore appears to be paradoxical. How can what is looked upon as 'not essential or relevant' or 'without being an integral or necessary part' be at the same time a source of fertility? Even when viewed in its most favourable light, how can what is 'superficial' or 'of minor importance' or 'subordinate' challenge the superiority of 'the centre'? Nevertheless, Mason's 'theory' insists upon the essential function of 'the margin.'

The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines to 'fertilise' as to '[m]ake fertile or productive' or to 'develop a new individual.' Mason's 'theory,' therefore, overturns the traditional assumption that productivity emanates from 'the centre.' Instead 'the margin' is re-defined as a 'fertile' and 'productive' place with the capacity to 'develop' drama in English into 'a new individual' form.

As a colonized culture New Zealand has traditionally been regarded as being on 'the margin' in relation to 'the centre' of Europe. The dominance of European

culture, particularly English culture, is reflected in New Zealand drama before the early 1950s, which mimicked the theatre of the perceived 'centre' to such an extent that New Zealand playwrights often felt it necessary to set their plays in the British Isles in order to make them acceptable to theatre-going audiences.

The proposition of this thesis is that the exploration of 'the margin,' gaining momentum from the early 1950s onwards, has enabled New Zealand dramatists to discover a representative national 'voice' and so 'develop a new individual' dramatic tradition.

This proposition will be illustrated by a series of interfacing metaphors. The metaphor which gives the thesis its title functions as a unifying device for the material contained within the argument as a whole. It is derived from the geomorphological structure of the earth, made up of areas of young rocks pushing up against areas of older rock. The old rocks are relatively stable and are called shield areas. The younger rocks, by contrast, are notoriously unstable, being characterized by earthquake and volcanic activity. The largest area of young unstable rock in the world is called *The Pacific Ring of Fire*.

Under the forces of heat and pressure, the young rocks change. This process is called metamorphosis. Though the elements of the rock are the same as those in the shield areas, as a result of metamorphosis new rock types emerge. Arthur Holmes, in his textbook Principles of Physical Geology,¹ describes this process: '[R]ocks respond to the earth's internal activities [. . .] by recrystallisation [. . .] into new types of rocks, [. . .] metamorphism brings about its [a rock's] transformation' (Holmes 55-56).

These physical facts relating to the geomorphological structure of the earth can be applied to the discussion of the development of New Zealand drama. The old rocks of the shield areas correspond to the culture of Europe. This will be referred to as the Eurocentre. The main focus of the thesis, however, concentrates on the

¹ This textbook was designed to 'appeal not only to university students and the senior classes in schools and their teachers, but also to the wide range of general readers' (Holmes v). It was first published in 1944, reprinted eighteen times and fully revised in 1965.

areas of young unstable rock, which are still in the process of formation. The physical action, in geomorphological terms, of the young rocks pushing up against the shield areas, corresponds to the challenge to the Eurocentre which has produced a 'transformation' in New Zealand drama. In keeping with the process of physical metamorphosis these new forms of drama, however, are derived from structures that originated in the Eurocentre.

The Pacific Ring of Fire, in geomorphological terms, covers a vast area circling the Pacific Ocean, which includes countries as culturally diverse as those of North and South America, the Pacific Islands and Australasia. The artistic challenge to the Eurocentre, in the attempt to identify and to develop a distinctive national 'voice,' has already taken, or is taking, place in these countries, where colonized peoples, including New Zealanders, have been regarded as being on 'the margin' of the perceived 'centre' of power. The widespread occurrence of the colonial relationship is emphasized by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin:

More than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism. [. . .] Literature offers one of the most important ways in which these new perceptions are expressed [. . .].

We use the term 'post-colonial' [. . .] to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonialization to the present day. [. . .]²

So the literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka are all post-colonial literatures. The literature of the USA should also be placed in this category. [. . .] What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the

² This thesis adheres to this definition of the term 'post-colonial.'

imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre (1-2).

The concept of ‘the centre’ in relation to ‘the margin’ implicitly or explicitly informs the whole body of post-colonial theory. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s influential text The Empire Writes Back, for example, makes this concept the basis of the central argument:

A ‘privileging norm’ was enthroned at the heart of the formation of English Studies as a template for the denial of the value of the ‘peripheral’, the ‘marginal’ [. . .]. Literature was made as central to the cultural enterprise of Empire as the monarchy was to its political formation (3).

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin then go on to investigate the relationship between ‘the margin’ and ‘the centre’:

In practice the history of distinction between English and english has been between the claims of a powerful ‘centre’ and a multitude of intersecting usages designated as ‘peripheries.’ The language of these ‘peripheries’ was shaped by an oppressive discourse of power (8).³

Post-colonial criticism emphasizes the success that the colonizing powers have had in indoctrinating colonized cultures to believe that they are inferior. One of the first influential texts to subject this process to close analysis was Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978), which came to a groundbreaking conclusion:

In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand.

³ It is clear from this statement that Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin define these ‘peripheries’ as multiple. The concept of ‘the margin’ as multiple is also emphasized elsewhere in The Empire Writes Back. For example, the text also points to ‘[t]his privileging of the “margins” in post-colonial writing’ (40). Accordingly, this thesis will regard ‘the margin’ of New Zealand as one of these ‘multitude of intersecting usages designated as “peripheries.”’

Above all, a discourse [. . .] is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, [. . .] political [. . .] intellectual [. . .] cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), [. . .] moral (as with ideas about what ‘we’ do and what ‘they’ cannot do or understand as ‘we’ do) (7, 12).

Said identifies categories of behaviour – political, intellectual, cultural, social and moral – in which ‘the centre’ (which he terms ‘the Westerner’) claims to be superior to ‘the margin’ (which he terms ‘the Orient’).⁴ Said is writing about the relationship between Asia and the Eurocentre, but his understanding of the nature of ‘the Orient’ as a construct can be applied to all colonized countries, including New Zealand.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak likewise confronts the problem of ‘an uneven exchange with various kinds of power.’ She defines all cultures that have been marginalized by the Eurocentre as examples of ‘epistemic violence,’ before proceeding to ask a key question: ‘Let us now move to consider the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center) [. . .] the oppressed [. . .] We must now confront the following question: [. . .] *can the subaltern speak?*’ (25).⁵

Spivak employs the metaphor of the ‘subaltern’ in order to investigate the doubly marginalized position of native women in Indian society but, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin also observe, ‘[b]y implication, the silencing of the subaltern woman extends to the whole of the colonial world, and to the silencing and muting of all natives, male or female’ (177-178).

⁴ The title of Edward Said’s book *Orientalism* expresses ‘the Westerner’s’ concept of the people of the East. Said views this as a rigid template which restricts, rather than gives access to, accurate representation:

In a sense Orientalism was a library or archive of information commonly and, in some of its aspects, unanimously held. What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective. These ideas explained the behaviour of Orientals; they supplied Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere; most important, they allowed Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics. But like any set of durable ideas, Orientalist notions influenced the people who were called Orientals [. . .], Orientalism is better grasped as a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought (41-42).

⁵ The term ‘subaltern’ is constructed from the Latin words for ‘under’ (*sub*) and ‘other’ (*alter*) to mean a person of lesser rank. In post-colonial theory it is often used to refer to the colonized subject (Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 7th ed. 237).

Spivak writes of the concept of ‘the margin’ as ‘the margins,’ identifying it as plural. Homi Bhabha’s definition of those groups who have been traditionally ‘silent, silenced’ and ‘oppressed’ is wider than even Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s categories. It extends to include ‘women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities’ (936).

These various interpretations of the doubly marginalized recognize that societies such as New Zealand have inevitably displayed two tiers of marginalization which I shall refer to as ‘the inner margin’ and ‘the outer margin.’ The power that the former exercises has been only perceived power, since for the greater part of the time span covered by this discussion most *real* [my italics] power has emanated from the Eurocentre, which those in ‘the inner margin’ could only mimic. ‘[T]he outer margin’ has comprised the dispossessed, including all the categories listed by Bhabha: ‘women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities’ (936). All members of New Zealand society – inner and outer – have been traditionally marginalized in relation to the Eurocentre. ‘[T]he outer margin’ has been doubly marginalized.⁶

In an even earlier post-colonial text, Prospero and Caliban (1950), O. Mannoni employs two characters from William Shakespeare’s ‘The Tempest’ as a metaphor to examine the relationship between the assumed superiority of the colonizer, whom he likens to Prospero, and the inferior status of the colonized, whom he likens to Caliban. It is interesting to note, at this point, that key post-colonial texts such as those of Mannoni and Spivak have used metaphor, as does this thesis, as a succinct means of analysing the relationship between ‘the margins’ and the perceived ‘centre’ of power.

⁶ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin emphasize that even when Europe declined in political and economic power, cultural power has continued to come from the Eurocentre. Of particular relevance to this thesis is the influence of British literature, which still dominates the colonized world:

In the spheres of politics and economics [. . .] Britain and the other European imperial powers have been superseded by the emergent power of the USA. Nevertheless, through the literary canon, the body of British texts which all too frequently still acts as a touchstone of taste and value [. . .] the weight of antiquity continues to dominate cultural production in much of the post-colonial world (6-7).

Said, Spivak, Bhabha and Mannoni are all writing from the perspective of the latter category. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin term the former category the ‘settler colonies,’ whose immigrants, still firmly rooted in the Eurocentre, proceed to impose their imported culture upon an alien landscape:

They established a transplanted civilization which eventually secured political independence while retaining a non-Indigenous language. Having no ancestral contact with the land, they dealt with their sense of displacement by unquestioningly clinging to a belief in the adequacy of the imported language – where mistranslation could not be overlooked it was the land or the season which was ‘wrong’ (24).

A tension therefore develops in ‘settler colonies’ such as New Zealand, between those ‘unquestioningly clinging to a belief in the adequacy of the imported language’ – English (and along with it the culture it represents) – and those who, attempting to identify an authentic national ‘voice,’ question the ability of the imported language to express their individual experience of ‘the margin.’ These two opposing points of view fuel an increasing debate as New Zealand literature as a whole, including New Zealand drama, develops.

Spivak anticipates such a debate when she proposes that ‘the margins’ are as significant as (‘one can just as well say’) the ‘silent, silenced center.’ In other words, she suggests that the relationship between those at the perceived ‘centre’ of power and those who have been traditionally relegated to ‘the margin’ is subject to change. ‘[T]he margins’ which have been ‘silent, silenced’ and ‘oppressed’ may at some time, to use the phraseology of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, ‘assert[ed] themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre’ (2).

The poet, critic and playwright Allen Curnow⁸ was one of the first New Zealand artists to challenge the traditional relationship between the country of his birth and

⁸ Allen Curnow is a major New Zealand poet whose first volume of poetry Valley of Decision was published in 1933. He has also written influential essays on New Zealand poetry and edited two

the Eurocentre. In his Preface to the published volume of his Four Plays (1972)⁹ he outlined his philosophy as an artist in one of the ‘settler colonies’:

I wanted to place New Zealand at the centre, the only possible place. Never mind the provincial cold-shudder at the thought that this is not the place at all, and never can be; that here is a centre of sorts, but not *the* centre [. . .]. The islander, even while he shudders, is feeling something at his own centre (7-8).

Curnow’s challenge to the Eurocentre depicts the colonized artist as ‘feeling something at his *own* [my italics] centre,’ albeit accompanied by the ‘shudders’ of a sense of terror. Thus Curnow, primarily as a poet, encouraged New Zealand artists anxious to assert the validity of their ‘own centre.’ Furthermore, in his widely-anthologized poem ‘The Unhistoric Story,’ which marks a milestone in the attempt to identify a national ‘voice,’ Curnow emphasized the unique character of New Zealand, claiming that it contains within it ‘something different, something/Nobody counted on’ (Collected Poems 79).¹⁰ Curnow can therefore be seen as part of a world-wide movement among artists in colonized countries, who, in the words of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, were engaged in ‘emphasizing their difference from the assumptions of the imperial centre’ (2).

significant anthologies: A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-45 (1945) and the enlarged edition of this, The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse (1960).

⁹ Curnow’s Four Plays includes his verse plays ‘The Axe’ (1948), ‘The Overseas Expert’ (1961), ‘The Duke’s Miracle’ (1966) and ‘Resident of Nowhere’ (1969). Although Curnow’s poetry and criticism have had enormous influence on New Zealand literature, particularly on the poets of his generation and the generation that followed, his plays have made relatively little impact. The theatre historian John Thomson remarks, for example, that ‘The Overseas Expert’ ‘received no stage performance (but was later adapted for radio) and is unlikely to have been published but for the author’s reputation’ (New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 53). Of Curnow’s reputedly best play, ‘The Axe,’ he comments that although the play was one of the few in the 1940s to explore race relations (55), ‘it had little influence on later theatre’ (33).

¹⁰ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin note that, apart from developing a body of literature, an essential part of this process is to compile a history of that literature:

[W]hen a substantial body of texts has been written in the settler colony, the task of compiling a national literary history has usually been an important element in the establishment of an independent cultural identity. [. . .]

Collections and anthologies, for example, [. . .] The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse (Curnow 1960) have also, by the values implicit in their selection, been important sites for recording and even initiating shifts in critical taste and cultural stance (133).

The opinion of Curnow and those who agreed with him, however, remained the minority viewpoint. In an editorial published in the Listener in 1977 entitled 'The Kiwi Cringe,' the New Zealand author Ian Cross spelled out in no uncertain terms that the majority of New Zealanders still considered themselves to be inferior to the dominating Eurocentre:

Too many New Zealanders are, in brutal fact, cultural cripples who depend on the crutch of overseas leadership and certification in their tastes and enjoyment. 'The colonised is elevated . . . in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards,' wrote a psychiatrist in his diagnosis of the mental health of non-white people in a situation of inferiority. This condition is invariably treated as a third world phenomenon and never related to the white colonies of New Zealand, Australia and Canada. The erroneous assumption is that we have escaped inferior status, or are happy provincial members of the master culture (10).

The 'psychiatrist' to whom Cross refers is Frantz Fanon. Cross quotes from Fanon's early post-colonial text Black Skin White Masks (1952) which analyses the psychology of the black individual living in white-dominated communities. In Black Skin White Masks Fanon coined the term '*the other*' to identify a sense of dissociation between the black self and the self that is presented to the white man: 'The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man than with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question' (13). In fact Fanon's *other* (the Negro's White Mask[s]) is an alter ego adopted to please the white man.¹¹ Cross, however, equates the position of what he terms the 'white colonies' of countries such as New Zealand with 'non-white people in a position of inferiority.' If this interpretation is pursued then New Zealand's position in relation to the Eurocentre can be equated not only to Fanon's Black Skin but also to Caliban's position in relation to Prospero in Mannoni's analysis; so in some respects the 'settler colonies' and the societies in

¹¹ The term '*the other*' has been adopted in literary circles and is now used in a wider sense than its original definition to denote one who is different. In this thesis I will employ the term for the most part in this wider sense to refer to the characters of 'the outer margin.' I retain Frantz Fanon's original format, which is in italics.

which English is an alien language share similar problems of articulating a national identity. As Maxwell points out, there is a 'fundamental kinship' between these 'two broad categories' (quoted in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 25).

Implicit in the aspirations of Curnow and Cross for the country of their birth is the necessity to re-define 'the margin.' The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary explains 'the margin' as '[a] condition near the limit [. . .] beyond which something ceases to be possible or desirable.' This interpretation lies at the root of 'The Kiwi Cringe.' New Zealand accordingly becomes the 'limit,' the farthest distance it is possible to travel from the cultural centre, in relation to which it becomes a place of dilution: it is inferior because it is sterile. For an artist, to create anything of value in these conditions, to use the words of the dictionary, 'ceases to be possible or desirable.' This definition, however, is in direct opposition to Mason's 'theory' of 'the margin' as a 'fertile' and 'productive' place from which 'a new individual' might be developed.

The same dictionary also delineates 'the margin' as 'a brink.' The implication is that it is a place on the edge of the utmost danger where, as Curnow recognizes, the 'islander' 'shudders' at the same time as he recognizes his 'own centre.' 'The margin' is thus a paradoxical place where the hint of fulfilment is pervaded by a sense of alienation as experienced by Caliban when he breaks the traditional bonds with Prospero, his master, but also his protector.

A related definition provided by this dictionary associates 'the margin' with 'a border.' The noted Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood, writing of her own problems as an artist attempting to identify and articulate a national 'voice' from a position on 'the margin' of the U.S.A. in 1972 (the same year in which Curnow wrote his Preface to Four Plays), points out that in America, the first ex-colony to develop a fully-fledged national literature, the metaphor of 'The Frontier' frequently denotes national identity. Atwood interprets 'The Frontier' in positive terms:

[A] flexible idea: [. . .] it suggests a place that is *new*, where the old order can be discarded [. . .] a line that is always expanding [. . .] it

holds out a hope, never fulfilled but always promised, of Utopia, the perfect human society (31-32).

There are similarities between Canada and New Zealand in their struggles to identify and to promote a national 'voice.' Both countries have been colonized by the Eurocentre but both contain within them indigenous populations. Both are 'settler colonies' with a developing sense of their own mythology, largely based on pioneer European settlement.¹²

Atwood's concept of 'The Frontier' is much closer to Mason's 'theory' than the other interpretations of 'the margin' which have been cited so far. Both regard 'The Frontier' as a vital place. Rather than being a position of inferiority it becomes a celebratory location where, in Atwood's words, '*new*' solutions might be generated. This is very similar to Mason's opinion of the ability of 'the margin' to 'fertilise': meaning that it has the capacity to 'develop' into 'a *new* [my italics] individual.'

The unique position of 'The Frontier' as a place where 'the old order can be discarded,' however, has its own problems in relation to '*new*' creative possibilities, not the least of which is the difficulty of articulation, if the accepted modes of artistic expression are derived from the Eurocentre and therefore ultimately alien. Empowering the '*subaltern*' to '*speak*' (Spivak 25) is not only a matter of re-defining the character of 'the margin.' It also becomes an issue of re-constructing the language of the colonizing power. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin identify the problem for the artist attempting to '*speak*' from 'the margin' as a sense of 'gap':

The gap which opens between the experience of place and the language available to describe it forms a classic and allpervasive (sic) feature of post-colonial texts. This gap occurs for those whose language seems inadequate to describe a new place, for those whose

¹² The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'mythology' as a 'collective or personal ideology or set of beliefs which underpins or informs a particular point of view.' The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary adds that a 'myth' may be a 'traditional story, either wholly or partially fictitious' or 'a similar newly created story.' I take the narratives of Bruce Mason, James K. Baxter and Mervyn Thompson, in particular, to be 'newly created' stories which are 'partially fictitious.'

language is systematically destroyed by enslavement, and for those whose language has been rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power. [. . .] In each case a condition of alienation is inevitable until the colonizing language has been replaced or appropriated as english (9-10).

This distinction between the 'English' of the 'colonizing power' and the 'english' of the colonized subject reflects 'an uneven exchange with various kinds of power' (Said 7).

Another Canadian writer, Dennis Lee, sums up the predicament of any young literature in a 'settler colony' before the marginalized 'english' of its identity has become distinguishable from the imposed imperial English:

The colonial writer does not have words of his own. [. . .]

Try to speak in the words of your home and you will discover – if you are a colonial – that you do not know them . . . To speak unreflectingly in a colony then, is to use words that speak only alien space. To reflect is to fall silent, discovering that your authentic space does not have words (quoted in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 141).

Frank Sargeson, who is credited with capturing an authentic New Zealand 'voice' in short stories such as 'A Great Day' (1937) and 'The Making of a New Zealander' (1939), can be said to have forged his literary reputation by means of the illustration of this observation.¹³ At the end of 'That Summer' (1943), for example, a young man who is out of work, but who has devoted himself and all his resources to the care of his dying 'cobber' (The Stories of Frank Sargeson 169), is able to express his devastation in the final days only by repeating over and over again his friend's name, 'Terry.' When Terry, much the older, asks him '[w]hat is it boy?' the reply is '[n]othing.' The young man, who is also the narrator of the story, has no words to describe his feelings: 'But I could never get

¹³ Frank Sargeson's short stories were included in a collection of stories by Australian and New Zealand writers published by the Caxton Press in 1945 and significantly entitled Speaking for Ourselves.

any further than just saying Terry. I wanted to say something but I didn't know what it was, and I couldn't say it' (226).

Curnow, in an interview in 1973, expressed the opinion that drama has been 'far and away the most profoundly backward and immature of all the arts in New Zealand' (MacDonald P. Jackson, 'Conversation with Allen Curnow' 158). One possible explanation for this may lie in Lee's observation that for the colonial '[t]o reflect is to fall silent, discovering that your authentic space does not have words.' It can be argued that in stories such as 'That Summer' Sargeson illustrates the sense of 'gap' identified by post-colonial critics such as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin and Lee. If, as Sargeson would appear to suggest, the most accurate means by which the New Zealand artist might express his own culture is through the exploration of silence, then this poses a problem for the dramatist, whose traditional tool of expression is dialogue.¹⁴ Prompted by the need to attract 'the inner margin' – the Pakeha middle class mimic of the Eurocentre – the dramatists went on speaking 'unreflectingly' for at least a generation after the poets and fiction writers had articulated the problem.

One interpretation of the history of theatre in this country is to view it as an expression of the tension between the conflicting ideologies of Prospero and Caliban. Generally speaking, Prospero has held the upper hand in the argument, even beyond the turning-point of the early 1950s, when Mason began to argue the case for Caliban. For most of its history, however, theatre in New Zealand has been dominated by the colonizer wielding 'an uneven exchange with various kinds of power' (Said 7).

The first recorded dramatic performance in this country was by David Osborne, who arrived in Auckland from Scotland in 1841, and performed 'a series of entertainments' on 13 November of that year at the Blue Bell Inn (Downes 10). New Zealand's first playwright was James Marriott, engraver, instrument maker and optician, who arrived from England on the *Thomas Sparkles* in 1842 (12) and built the first theatre in the country (14). Marriott, borrowing from the theatrical

¹⁴ For this interpretation of the 'backward and immature' nature of drama in relation to the rest of the arts in New Zealand, I am indebted to one of my co-supervisors, Dr William Broughton.

tradition of the Eurocentre, wrote the melodrama Marcelina and the Yorkshireman, New Zealand's first recorded play, which was performed at the Britannia Saloon, another theatre space which Marriott had opened, in 1848 (24; Farrell, 'Nineteenth Century New Zealand Drama' 61).¹⁵ In the first four years of its existence the Britannia Saloon presented three hundred performances and entertained approximately sixty-eight thousand people (Downes 22). A similar enthusiasm for theatre is evidenced at the height of the gold rush in the 1860s when the Royal and Princess theatres in Dunedin were open every night from Monday to Saturday (54). These early theatrical enterprises set the template for what was to become the established pattern in New Zealand theatre. Drama was popular, but the plays were directly imported from, or displayed the overwhelming influence of, the Eurocentre.

The earliest surviving script of a New Zealand play is Kainga of the Ladye Birds which is described on the title page as '*A New Grand SEMI-MAORI CHRISTMAS PANTOMIME.*' The pantomime was premièred at the Academy of Music in Wellington on Boxing Night 1879 (Farrell, 'Nineteenth Century New Zealand Drama' 64). The script is a curious hybrid cobbled together from a hotchpotch of theatrical traditions borrowed from the Eurocentre.¹⁶ Apart from the Ladye Birds themselves (who, as the title page explains, are 'FOUNDED ON THE OLD NURSERY CHANT') there are seventy-five parts in all (63) including roles for: spirits, demons, a clown, a harlequin, a pantaloone, a Corps de Ballet, an 'Army of Cadets,' 'a fiery spirit from Taupo' and 'a fire worshipper from Tongariro' (63-64).

The play was printed in Wellington at the office of the New Zealand Times and the title page notes that the 'Pantomime Dialogue' and the 'Songs' were written by 'Grif.' It has still not been firmly established who 'Grif' might have been.¹⁷

¹⁵ No script of this play has survived (Farrell, 'Nineteenth Century New Zealand Drama' 61).

¹⁶ It may also be said that the play owes something to the spectacular burlesques being mounted in Melbourne and Sydney theatres at that time.

¹⁷ Fiona Farrell speculates that 'Grif' may have been a pseudonym for R.W. Cary, who is mentioned on the title page of the script as the producer and director of the show. Cary also took the part of Koura te Kino the 'Demon of Colonial Finance' ('Nineteenth Century New Zealand Drama' 63). She goes on to surmise that whoever the playwright was, he almost certainly took his pseudonym from a New Zealand novel of the time, Grif: A Story of Colonial Life (1865) by Benjamin Farjeon, which was probably adapted for the stage in Dunedin in 1886 (61-63).

His script, however, is an intriguing record of what the young ‘settler colony’ regarded as entertainment. The show was very popular; not only was it hailed as a ‘glorious success’ (72), but on the opening night the Academy of Music had a full house (64).

All of the major characters are given Māori names but the ‘SEMI-MAORI’ description of them on the title page is apt: they are ‘Maori’ in name only. When Matatu appears, for example, after making a fleeting reference to ‘Te Whiti’ he launches into a list of what appear to have been the hotly debated issues in the capital at that time. He refers to, amongst other things, the decline of the racing club, protection for local industry and the tax on ‘grates and fenders’ and ‘tongs’ (‘Grif’ 6). Just as incongruously, another ‘Maori’ character, Rangitira, emerges from her ‘flax-bush’ to remark on the need for the ‘five million loan’ in circumstances where the ‘money market’ has been a ‘little tight’ (7).

‘Grif’s’ knowledge of the indigenous culture is sketchy at best. He knows barely enough to make his characters token ‘Maori’; they obviously function as mouthpieces for Pakeha concerns. This is hardly surprising, however, since at the time the play was written there were no urban Māori communities (Kiernander 38).¹⁸ All the ‘Maori’ parts in the play are played by Pakeha (Farrell, ‘Nineteenth Century New Zealand Drama’ 63-64).

The script reveals New Zealand as a colonized culture thanks not only to ‘Grif’s’ borrowings from the theatrical traditions of the Eurocentre,¹⁹ but also to the way he supplies his ‘Maori’ characters with the trappings of prestige from ‘the centre’

Howard McNaughton, however, in The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English identifies ‘Grif’ as Mr Griffen of Wanganui (325), citing as evidence page twenty of the Otago Witness, published on the 25th September 1880.

¹⁸ In his Introduction to the printed text of The Land of the Moa (1895), Adrian Kiernander remarks upon the lack of interaction between the Māori and Pakeha communities in the early days of the ‘settler colony’:

By the mid 1890s few New Zealand city-dwellers in either the North and South islands probably had much first-hand familiarity with Maori life as there were no Maori communities in the cities themselves. Most Maoris had retreated from contact with white settlers, many of whom were [. . .] fairly recent arrivals from Britain (38).

¹⁹ The choice of Boxing Day for the première also reflects the influence of the culture of the Eurocentre.

in order to award them status with his audience. For example, the character of Tumanako has already been Europeanized before he even appears: he is identified on the title page of the script as 'HARLEQUIN PRINCE TUMANAKO' and is referred to in the dialogue as 'his Royal Highness' ('Grif' 9). Tumanako, according to the stage directions, lives in a 'Palace' which is entered by 'Golden Gates' (12) and when the entertainments begin they take place in his '[s]uperb ball-room' (14) where the company dance 'QUADRILLES' (18) in the best tradition of the English aristocracy.

Meanwhile, outside the 'Golden Gates' the Company has been joined by the 'Army' of 'Naval Cadets' who enter to the strains of the 'Lilliputian March,' accompanied by Miss Irwin and Miss Wyatt, who then play the 'double Hornpipe' (12). All this was obviously highly regarded by the audience of the time. The Evening Post reported that this scene in particular was popular with the audience: 'the little fellows gained a perfect tornado of applause' (Farrell, 'Nineteenth Century New Zealand Drama' 69).

The fact that references to the Royal Navy, along with its musical traditions, were included in the proceedings at all, provides a fascinating snapshot of a young 'settler colony' still reliant upon, and trusting in, the protection of the Eurocentre. The whole process of colonization is, in fact, never questioned in this script. 'Grif' ostensibly sets his play in a rural landscape. At the beginning of the action the dawn comes up to reveal '[t]he Parihaka bush' ('Grif' 17). Later in the script 'Grif' makes the claim that his setting is about to become a prime example of racial harmony in New Zealand:

When through Parihaka a railway we see,
The Pakeha and Maori will forever agree (19).

The assumption is that colonization (expressed in the image of the railway) will bring peace and benefit to the indigenous people.²⁰ 'Grif,' along with his

²⁰ Although 'Grif' mentions Te Whiti and the 'West Coast natives' who have 'proved a trouble' (6) he appears to have been unaware of the true nature of race relations at the time he was writing. Only two years later, this setting which he claimed would become the place where 'Maori and Pakeha will forever agree' (19), in fact became the location for one of the most notorious disputes between Māori and Pakeha in New Zealand history.

audience who so approved the show, appears to have assimilated without question the traditional relationship between Eurocentre and ‘the outer margin.’

A less egregious example of the pantomime’s blinkered vision is its inability to identify a national ‘voice.’ The most patriotic song in the play, ‘Zealandia the Free,’ is sung to the ‘Air, “Erin my Country”’ (19) suggesting a society trying to locate itself in the New World whilst still having its roots firmly embedded in the Old. As Fiona Farrell pertinently remarks, ‘Kainga of the Ladye Birds is not “great art.” It is not even “good art”’ (‘Nineteenth Century New Zealand Drama’ 72). It is, however, very sensitive litmus paper for the social climate of its time.²¹

One of the first significant expressions of a national dramatic ‘voice’ in the theatre is to be found in Alan Mulgan’s Three Plays of New Zealand (1922).²² The theatre historians Peter Harcourt (18), Howard McNaughton (New Zealand Drama 28) and John Thomson (New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 6) all herald this publication as the inception of authentic New Zealand drama. In his Preface to the first printed edition, Professor James Shelley²³ appears to endorse their opinion: ‘It is to be hoped that these interesting beginnings presage the development of an adequate means of expressing the growth of our national

²¹ The Land of the Moa written by George Leitch opened in the capital sixteen years later than Kainga of the Ladye Birds but displays similarities with the earlier text. It also has a large cast which includes ‘Māori’ characters, and on the opening night it attracted an audience of over a thousand people (Kiernander 27). As with the pantomime, the audience were impressed by its spectacle and particularly admired the scene on the Pink Terraces (28) which included ‘several pools’ represented by ‘rice and spangles,’ bordered by ‘rata and pohutukawa bush in crimson flower’ with a backcloth ‘painted for day and moonlight effects’ (Leitch 138). Leitch, like ‘Grif,’ displays a sketchy knowledge of Māori. Roto, ‘a handsome young Maori’ is cast as a romantic hero wearing ‘[g]rey riding pants, tanned gaiters and boots [. . .] a bright sash around his waist.’ Roto also has ‘gold rings in his ears’ (79). In his Introduction to the printed version of the text Kiernander notes, ‘[i]f Leitch’s depiction of the Maori customs and language was often inaccurate [. . .] most of the audience seems not to have noticed or cared’ (41).

²² Alan Mulgan was a man of many parts, a journalist who was also a poet and an historian. His books include Maori and Pakeha: A History of New Zealand (1922), From Track to Highway: A Short History of New Zealand (1944) and his autobiography The Making of a New Zealander (1958) (Thomson, ‘Bibliography’ 845).

²³ Professor James Shelley was very influential in the development of drama in New Zealand. He emigrated from England in 1920 and became Professor of Education at Canterbury University. He was particularly revered in Christchurch where he founded the Canterbury Repertory Society and the Canterbury University Drama Club (Harcourt 31). The Little Theatre, which became the home of the Canterbury University Drama Club, was built entirely by students, under Shelley’s direction (62). Shelley also invented the ‘box scheme’ which supplied drama scripts and art reproductions, along with notes of explanation, to all those who requested them. This service later developed into the Country Library Service and still later into the National Library Service (64). In 1936 he was made Director of Broadcasting (31).

consciousness' (4). Thematically, Mulgan's plays are concerned with the social problems of the new 'settler colony' and Shelley draws attention to the tension that exists between the Old World and the New: 'The re-valuations involved in the struggle between the memory of old traditions and the presence of new conditions' (4).

The first play in Alan Mulgan's anthology 'For Love of Appin' (1920) depicts this 'struggle.' It is particularly interesting for its 're-valuations' of 'the margin' in relation to 'the centre.' The central characters Angus Buchan (who was born on a tenant farm in the Scottish Highlands) and his wife (who was born in Bermondsey) both represent 'the margin' of the working class in relation to the Eurocentre. Early in the play Mrs Buchan describes the living conditions in a poor suburb of London: 'I was brought up one of a family of eight in two rooms [. . .]. Four of the eight died' (9). She goes on to explain how her husband emigrated to New Zealand after he and his family were driven off their land by the aristocratic power in their local community:

Angus' family 'ad been on a farm for 'undreds o' years. [. . .] Then the lord or the dook or somebody who owned the place wanted more room for a forest to keep deer in, and turned Angus' father an' mother out and pulled down the 'ouse' (11).

Angus Buchan remains homesick for the land of his birth and longs to see again 'the sight o' the heather' (25), but his wife perceives that in 'the colonies' (19) the traditional relationship between 'the margin' and 'the centre' may be subject to what Shelley terms 're-valuations.'

At the beginning of the play she emphasizes that her standard of living is now much higher than it would have been if she had stayed in the place where she was born. She and her husband own five hundred acres and in the previous year their farm cleared a profit of 'a hundred pounds' (9). Moreover, the very first scene reveals that the class system of the Eurocentre – the mechanism by which the unequal sharing of national wealth is maintained – is already breaking down in the new 'settler colony.' The play is set in the humble living conditions of the Buchan household '*the kitchen-living room in a small farmhouse in the back-*

blocks of New Zealand' (7). Nevertheless a local farmer, Harding, although he is an '*educated man*' (8) who has '*spent two years in England*' (9), calls in and has a cup of tea. Harding has come to ask if Angus is available for '*a day's mustering*' (8). Despite the signs of his higher education, it is noticeable that he and Mrs Buchan are on equal terms and there are no social barriers between them.

This scene foregrounds the major theme of the play, which explores how the relationship between '*the centre*' of power and those who have traditionally been relegated to '*the margin*' is subject to change. To use Spivak's phraseology, '*the oppressed*' may at some time find themselves at '*the [. . .] center*' (25).

These '*re-valuation[s]*' are further illustrated by a catalyst in the form of a '*swagger*' (13) who asks the central characters for a '*shakedown*': '*I'd be obliged for something to eat and a corner to sleep in*' (15). Angus quickly deduces that the stranger was trained to be '*a gentleman*.' Like Harding, this man indicates that he has been '*educated*' by speaking without any trace of a regional accent. Angus' accent ensures that the stranger can immediately locate the '*part of Scotland*' that Angus '*came from*' (17), but his own manner of speech makes him unidentifiable with any particular region. It does, however, make him immediately recognizable to the working class characters as a man who is used to privilege. This is evidenced once again when the stranger makes reference to a play he saw in London and quotes from Tennyson (16). As is the case with Harding, education is equated with a knowledge of the Eurocentre.

The climax of the plot comes in the discovery that '*the swagger*' is, in fact, Duncan, the son of the '*Black Laird*' (18) who drove Angus and his family from their home in Scotland. The positions of the Eurocentre and '*the margin*' are thus reversed – Angus Buchan and his wife now have the power to drive the son of the laird from their home and into the cold wet night without food or shelter. In the key speech of the play, however, Mrs Buchan makes a plea that the animosities which have been forged in the Old World be reconciled in the New:

I've got sense enough ter know that what makes this country much better to live in than England is that there ain't no gentry on the one side, and poor touching their '*ats* on the other; that there ain't lairds

and tenants an' deer forests. [. . .] Anyway, you've climbed up and 'e's come down, an' yer can both meet as equals – yer couldn't ha' done that in England. [. . .] You take my advice an' make it up – not as Scotchmen, but as New Zealanders (21-22).

Alan Mulgan's text defines 'the margin' of the new 'settler colony' as being synonymous with Atwood's concept of 'The Frontier': it is a 'place' of 'new' possibility 'where the old order can be discarded.' The 'Utopia, the perfect human society' (31-32) that the playwright envisages is equated with an egalitarian distribution of national wealth and opportunity.²⁴

'For Love of Appin' is not without its flaws. The meeting between the central characters and the 'swagger' appears contrived. Alan Mulgan is unsure of Mrs Buchan's Cockney accent and does not quite bring it off. Nevertheless, Harcourt rightly considers it 'to have been a considerable step towards a drama with an identifiable New Zealand personality' (18), and believes that it 'deserves to be remembered as a play that marked a turning-point in our development as a country with a theatre of its own' (30).

Such challenges to the culture of the dominant Eurocentre were rare and, with the gift of hindsight, they appear to be very significant. It must be remembered, however, that they made relatively little impact on the theatre climate of the time. Alan Mulgan's career as a playwright was short-lived. Drama in New Zealand flourished throughout the 1920s and the 1930s but, as Harcourt points out, it continued to mimic the Eurocentre and in particular theatre in England:

[I]t was a time when hundreds of New Zealanders were actively engaged in amateur theatricals. Their blinkered concentration on the West End of London persuaded many would-be writers to set their own sights on that Emerald City; others, even just before the turning-point in the mid-1950s, saw England as a more universal setting than their little corner of the world (50).

²⁴ Works such as 'For Love of Appin' place Alan Mulgan in the working class theatre movement.

In the decade after Three Plays Of New Zealand was published, the career of the playwright Merton Hodge provided the most prophetic example of the benefits and dangers inherent in the adoption of the theatrical version of 'The Kiwi Cringe.' Hodge was born in Gisborne and trained to be a doctor in Dunedin. When he went to Otago he noted 'it rained and it rained and it rained [. . .] it might have been Scotland itself' (44). Whilst still a student he became fascinated with the stage and developed the habit of going backstage to make the acquaintance of the actors who were performing with the touring companies.

After working his way to England as a ship's doctor, he spent time in Edinburgh where he 'hated the wind and hated the rain' (44). The city that was the original namesake of his own university town ostensibly became the setting for his play The Wind and the Rain. Hodge had utilized the friendships forged backstage in Dunedin to introduce himself into the theatrical London scene and in 1933 his play opened in the West End and became a brilliant success, running for over a thousand performances, a record at that time for a London play. It was subsequently a hit in other capitals, including New York, Paris and Berlin (Harcourt 44-6; McNaughton, New Zealand Drama 30; Thomson, New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 22).²⁵

In some respects The Wind and the Rain is clearly autobiographical. The central characters are medical students and one of them, Gilbert, even speculates that he might become 'a ship's doctor, and see the world' (16) as Hodge himself had done. In other and more significant respects, however, the playwright appears to be at pains to negate his own origins and to mimic the theatre of the Eurocentre. Harcourt pertinently notes that the weather described in the title is much more likely to refer to Hodge's experience of his five years in Dunedin than to his stay in Edinburgh (44); nevertheless, the playwright chose to set The Wind and the

²⁵ Overseas touring companies were very influential in New Zealand theatre from the 1880s onwards, 'bringing with them not merely one or two "name" actors, but complete casts, productions and in many cases scenery and properties as well' (Downes 87). The most influential of these, run by J.C. Williamson, was known as 'The Firm' and dominated Australasian theatre (88). 'The Firm' was particularly renowned for its productions of Gilbert and Sullivan to which Williamson held the exclusive performing rights for Australia and New Zealand (81). George Leitch, who wrote The Land of the Moa, was in brief partnership with Williamson in 1886 (Kiernander 13). 'The Firm' also toured New Zealand with a production of The Wind and the Rain in 1935 (John Thomson, New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 23).

Rain in ‘a Scottish university city’ (7). Added to this, the majority of the characters are British and the playwright condones the British class system.

Although lighthearted in tone, this text, unlike Alan Mulgan’s, appears to accept the traditional relationship between various representations of ‘the margin’ and the Eurocentre. The only working class character, Mrs McFie, remains peripheral to the plot and her lower station in life is evidenced by her strong Scottish accent and by her being there only to serve the privileged class who are at the centre of the action. Hodge’s stage directions suggest that, as medical students, the central characters are not particularly well off – the ‘*floor*’ of their ‘*student’s study*’ is ‘*covered with a well-worn carpet of a dingy shade of green*’ (9) – but Mrs McFie waits upon these able-bodied young men, cooking their meals for them (30, 114) and bringing in the coal (46). Unlike ‘For Love of Appin,’ where working class characters are placed centre stage and are ‘the centre’ of power, in Hodge’s text they are marginalized and treated as inferiors. The lower status of the working class ‘margin’ is illustrated in a telling exchange when Dr Paul Duhamel first meets Charles Tritton and pretends to be an Englishman. ‘*[E]ssaying a dialect*’ he declaims ‘Eh, laad, come from Lancashire.’ Confronted with the possibility that Paul might be ‘from’ an inferior class, Charles becomes ‘*a little embarrassed*’ (25) in his company until he realizes that Paul is playing a joke.

As in Alan Mulgan’s ‘For Love of Appin’ the central characters indicate that they are ‘educated’ by speaking without a regional accent and by reference to overseas travel. An intimate knowledge of the capitals of Europe carries particular prestige. When Paul meets Charles and tells him that he was born in Paris (25), Charles responds that he, too, has ‘been there [to Paris] quite a lot with my mother’ (26). Similarly, when the play opens Gilbert has just ‘[b]een to Paris!’ Mrs McFie, however, as another indication of her station in life, has never travelled abroad (11).

A different representation of ‘the margin’ then enters in the person of the central female lead, Anne Hargreaves. When Charles first meets Anne, he assumes that, like everyone else, she must be ‘from’ the Eurocentre – ‘Do you come from London?’ – but Anne replies that she originates from ‘a very long way from here.

New Zealand.’ Immediately before this revelation Anne has identified herself as a Caliban to Charles’ Prospero: ‘I’m that awful thing . . . a colonial!’ She then interprets the relationship between ‘the margin’ she represents and the Eurocentre: ‘I don’t expect you’ve ever heard of it outside a butter advertisement!’ (47). The subtext suggests that the value of the colonized is defined primarily by the amount of produce they can supply to the colonizer.

In accordance with Anne’s description of the country of her birth being ‘a very long way’ from the Eurocentre, Charles’ perception of New Zealand is that it is on the limit, so distant that one country in the Antipodes is indistinguishable from another: ‘My mother’s brother lives in New Zealand, or Australia, or somewhere.’ Charles goes on to assume that because he has a relation living in the southern hemisphere then Anne must know him, even though, as she tries to point out, ‘[t]here are quite a lot of people living over there, you know. You can’t know everybody’ (47). Charles is so Eurocentred that this thought has obviously never occurred to him. It is possible that Hodge is being ironic in this key exchange between Anne and Charles, but, taken at face value, his script appears to dismiss ‘the margin’ of his homeland as inferior. The play ends, for example, with Anne deciding to give up her plans to return to her family and the man she expected to marry in New Zealand and to marry Charles instead (113). The implication is that happiness is to be found at the Eurocentre.

Hodge is representative of a world-wide movement of artists who were willing to eradicate their cultural heritage from their work in order to become assimilated into the dominant cultural ‘centre.’ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin view this as a mimicry which ensures the maintenance, in Said’s phraseology, of the ‘relative upper hand’ (7) of the colonizer:

[W]hen elements of the periphery and margin threatened the exclusive claims of the centre they were rapidly incorporated. This was a process, in Edward Said’s terms, of conscious affiliation proceeding under the guise of filiation [. . .], that is, a mimicry of the centre proceeding from a desire not only to be accepted but to be adopted and absorbed. It caused those from the periphery to immerse themselves in the imported culture, denying their origins in an attempt

to become 'more English than the English' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 3-4).

The passage from Fanon that Cross quotes in 'The Kiwi Cringe' offers an explanation for the acclaim awarded to Hodge: '[that he had been] elevated . . . in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards' (10). Hodge's brilliant success overseas did much to re-enforce 'The Kiwi Cringe' in budding New Zealand playwrights of his generation. John Thomson remarks on the reluctance of New Zealand dramatists to write about their own experience of life: 'If playwrights had contemplated the question "Who are we?" they had done so in terms of European heritage and seen their characters as displaced British citizens' (New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 54). This compulsion to persist in 'denying their origins' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 4) is to be found not only in Hodge but in the work of even the most avant-garde New Zealand dramatists of the time such as Eric Bradwell and J.A.S. Coppard,²⁶ both of whom produced innovative theatre which reflected the influence of psychoanalysis on dramatic structures.

Bradwell's 'Clay' (1936), for example, focuses on five different aspects of a woman's mind. The woman herself, '*raised considerably from the level of the stage,*' remains unspeaking throughout and '*until the end she makes no move other than occasionally wearily burrowing her head still further in her hands*' (11). In its emphasis upon the subconscious mind, the script is clearly influenced by August Strindberg's 'A Dream Play.'²⁷ 'Clay' was highly unusual in the New Zealand theatre of the day and McNaughton judges the play to be well ahead of its

²⁶ Both Eric Bradwell and J.A.S. Coppard wrote plays for the British Drama League playwriting competitions. In 1932, Betty Blake opened a branch of the British Drama League (B.D.L.) in New Zealand (Harcourt 68; Thomson, New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 12; McNaughton, New Zealand Drama 28) and it began to run annual competitions, particularly for one act plays. New Zealand themes for locally written plays were not required but were encouraged, though many of the playwrights still chose an overseas setting for their work (Thomson, New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 13). Coppard's first success, 'Sordid Story,' was premièred at the Scottish Drama Festival in 1932, where, as Howard McNaughton remarks, it 'made an impressive impact' (New Zealand Drama 35). In 1939 it won first prize in a B.D.L. Festival in New Zealand (Thomson, New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 24). The one act play competitions provided the major outlet for New Zealand plays for the next thirty years.

²⁷ The influential Swedish dramatist August Strindberg outlined his experimental intentions in the Preface to 'A Dream Play': '[T]he Author has sought to reproduce the disconnected but apparently logical form of a dream. [. . .] The characters are split [. . .]. But a single consciousness holds sway over them all – that of the dreamer' (193).

time: '[T]he most significant technical advance in all pre-World War II New Zealand drama, anticipating the convergence with radio and stage techniques which was to distinguish much New Zealand drama in the 1960s' (New Zealand Drama 34).

Nevertheless, despite its experimentation, 'Clay' is a 'Cringe Play.' Although the stage directions provide no specific setting, references in the script reveal that Bradwell, too, has chosen to set his play in the Eurocentre. At the beginning of the action, when the characters are still in England, Stephen asks Lona, his wife-to-be, who wants to be an artist, 'My dear, if you really wanted to sculpt [. . .] couldn't you do it just as well in England?' (15).²⁸ Bradwell, like Hodge, peoples his play with characters who are effectively, in Thomson's phraseology, 'displaced British citizens' (New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 54). This script, like The Wind and the Rain, assumes that the Eurocentre, particularly Paris, is 'the centre' of culture. Lona feels that in order to become a sculptress she must be trained on the 'Continent' (15). Stephen marries Lona, and to oblige his wife, takes her on honeymoon to Paris and pays for her to be trained by a French tutor (18). Lona does not feel as though she has earned a reputation as an artist until she has been praised by the French critics (21).

The superiority of the Eurocentre is also evidenced in the charisma of its citizens. The equivalent of Paul in The Wind and the Rain is Carl, Lona's lover in 'Clay.' Carl (whose mother was Belgian (25)) is described as being '[r]ather mysterious [. . .] [r]ather attractive [. . .] [r]ather thrilling' (23). In the words of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, Bradwell displays 'a mimicry of the centre proceeding from a desire not only to be accepted but to be adopted and absorbed' (4).

Bradwell, even more than Hodge, appears to have 'adopted and absorbed' the prejudices of the colonizing power. No representative of 'the margin' enters this play. All the characters are privileged and speak with upper class accents, which, according to Hodge and Bradwell (and even Mulgan), are indicators of a superior

²⁸ John Thomson notes that there were advantages for New Zealand writers who wrote 'Cringe Plays' with 'settings which were unobtrusively English.' He goes on to remark that Bradwell was 'rewarded' for this by having a volume of his plays published in London in 1935 (New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 21).

education. Bradwell's characters are particularly Anglicized. Lona tells Stephen at the end of 'Clay' that she loves him 'so terribly, terribly, my dear' (42) and her son, Roger, calls his mother 'Mater' (46). Superior status is once again evidenced by an interest in the arts, particularly in theatre. Lona herself is a sculptress and when Carl courts her he suggests, 'I thought to-night that you might like to see a theatre' (24). The assumption in Hodge's and Bradwell's texts is that wealth and privilege are indicators of a superior race who originate in the Eurocentre. In 'Clay,' for example, when Lona asks what is the 'fee' for her artistic training, her husband replies (*laughing*): 'Rather fabulous. But fortunately we can afford it' (18-19). Both The Wind and the Rain and 'Clay' thus reveal a subtext which suggests that well-heeled upper class Europeans are the appropriate subject for theatre.

Another experimental New Zealand playwright of the 1930s, J.A.S. Coppard, who, like Bradwell, showed an interest in the subconscious mind, took issue with this assumption. Coppard's first successful play, 'Sordid Story' (1932), adopts non-realistic techniques to investigate the protagonist's motivation for murder. The stage directions state '*[t]he Play takes place in the Mind (represented by the stage set) of an individual*' (296). Within '*the Mind*' the senses (the eye and the ear) and the emotions (fear, jealousy and anger) appear as individual characters with their own idiosyncratic appearance and costuming (298-299). In another of Coppard's plays, 'Candy Pink' (n.d.) the heroine, Gloria, is accompanied on the stage by Black and White, two other '*characters*' who, the stage directions instruct, '*represent, one for and one against, the eternal argument between right and wrong*' (5). Within these non-naturalistic settings Coppard displays a persistent interest in 'the margin.' The protagonist of 'Sordid Story,' most unusually in New Zealand playwriting of the time, is a working class anti-hero '*who may best be described as a back-street city type, devoid of any finer instincts or feelings*' (296).

Coppard was interested in making social commentary by means of the exploration of 'the margin' as is illustrated in another of his plays, 'Machine Song' (1939),

which appears to have been influenced by German Expressionism.²⁹ In this play, as in 'Sordid Story,' all the human characters are from 'the margin' of the working class. In 'Machine Song' the protagonist, Joe Smith, is a factory worker whose life is enslaved by the machine he works at, grinding bolts for door locks. Though Joe longs to be outside among the 'trees [. . .] an' green grass' which he has 'seen [. . .] on Sund'ys' (274) he cannot escape the daily grind. In the end, prompted by the character of Rebel who has 'walked on grass [. . .] slept under the trees' (290), Joe smashes his machine (293).

Despite his interesting ideas regarding 'the margin,' however, even Coppard has eradicated all reference to the country of his birth. 'Sordid Story,' 'Machine Song' and 'Candy Pink' do not have specific settings but Coppard opts to give his characters working class English accents.³⁰ Added to this 'Machine Song' is located in a heavily industrialized landscape which is atypical of New Zealand.

The cultural dominance of the Eurocentre, therefore, had the effect of convincing New Zealand playwrights to write about what they did not know. Inevitably, in 'denying their origins' and in their attempts to become 'more English than the English' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 4) they made mistakes. Coppard's Joe Smith, for example, like Mulgan's Mrs Buchan, speaks with a working class English accent that never quite rings true.³¹ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, however, recognize that the colonizer's attempts to subdue the national 'voice' of the colonized could not, in the end, continue to be effective:

²⁹ Thomson, however, points out that Coppard claimed he was not aware of German Expressionism even though his plays appeared to be influenced by it (New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 24).

McNaughton notes that 'Machine Song' displays striking similarities with Elmer Rice's The Adding Machine (1923) (New Zealand Drama 36).

³⁰ In his Preface to Five New Zealand Plays the editor, Thomson, recognizes that 'Candy Pink' is not a New Zealand play in the full sense, though he also acknowledges that it is based on a 'true New Zealand incident' (n. pag.).

³¹ In 1938 in Radio Record (the forerunner of The Listener) an English stage personality, Lydia Sydney, warned that adopting 'The Kiwi Cringe' was more likely to result in failure than success:

Your amateur playwrights make one great mistake. Why will they not set their plays in New Zealand? They know the life here, but New Zealanders' plays with English settings which I have read would never by any chance be produced because they are too full of glaring errors about manners and customs (Harcourt 73).

[T]he alienating process which initially served to relegate the post-colonial world to the 'margin' turned upon itself and acted to push that world through a kind of mental barrier [. . .]. Marginality thus becomes an unprecedented source of creative energy (12).

This thesis proposes that playwrights who have regarded their position on 'the margin' as an 'unprecedented source of creative energy' have instigated the metamorphosis of New Zealand drama. To use Atwood's imagery, they have welcomed 'The Frontier' as 'a place that is *new*, where the old order can be discarded' (31). In terms of Mason's 'theory,' they have viewed their position on 'the periphery' as a 'fertile' and 'productive' place with the capacity to 'develop' colonial drama in English into 'a new individual' dramatic tradition.

This thesis focuses on the work of five playwrights: Bruce Mason, James K. Baxter, Mervyn Thompson, Renée and Robert Lord, each of whom has produced a body of work which has made a significant contribution to the development of a representative New Zealand 'voice' on the stage. The analysis of selected plays by these playwrights confines this discussion to a period of approximately forty years, from 1953 until 1992.

In their common desire to identify and express a national theatrical 'voice,' these dramatists form a rebellious influence, often at odds with mainstream theatre at the times in which they were writing. In terms of the unifying metaphor, they represent the young rocks of the *Pacific Ring of Fire* that push up against and challenge the shield areas of the dominant Eurocentre. In accordance with the process of geomorphological metamorphosis, these playwrights worked towards a 'transformation' (Holmes 56) in New Zealand drama. It was, however, a 'transformation' of style and content rather than of structure. Just as the elements of the new rocks are the same as those in the shield areas, so the new plays were derived from structures that originated in the Eurocentre.

At the same time each of these playwrights has developed his or her own individual view of what constitutes the distinctive flavour of New Zealand life. For this reason the work of each of the five is expressed through a set of

secondary metaphors. Each chapter heading identifies an image from that writer's formative years, which has acted as a springboard for the formation of their individual view of New Zealand society. Each chapter then goes on to identify the particular facets of 'the margin' on which each of the five focuses.

This thesis pays a great deal of attention to the effects that biographical influences have had upon the artistry of these chosen playwrights. During the course of my research, I have discovered overwhelming evidence, much of it archival, which verifies that each of these playwrights adheres very closely to their own life experience. This should not be surprising. Their determination to rebel against the hegemony of the Eurocentre caused them to dismiss its traditional themes and conventions. Deprived of ready-made material, they turned almost inevitably to their own life experience which they sought to mythologize. It could be argued that autobiography becomes a means, perhaps the only means, of discarding 'the old order' (Atwood 31).

As the writing of this thesis has progressed I have become interested not only in identifying and analysing the various components of 'the margin' that these playwrights have chosen to focus upon, but also in investigating the reasons that caused them to display a sustained interest in their chosen peripheries. The second of these interests in particular has taken my discussion into psychological territory.

The body of work that has been written on the subject of drama in New Zealand to date remains very limited, particularly in the area of critical analysis. Though numerous studies have been produced on the relationship of 'marginalized' literatures in relation to the colonizing 'centre' on a world-wide scale, no lengthy discussion has been attempted in relation to New Zealand drama. This thesis attempts to redress the balance.

CHAPTER 1

BRUCE MASON: THE BOY IN THE FLAXBUSH

A: THE LESSONS OF THE FLAXBUSH

1 INTRODUCTION

Bruce Mason was born in 1921. His mother was an English war bride and his father was descended from immigrants from the earliest days of British settlement in Wellington (Dowling, Introducing Bruce Mason 1-2; McNaughton, Bruce Mason 3). When Mason was five the family moved to Takapuna and this landscape and its inhabitants would have a profound effect on the mature writer's work. To a large extent the content of his oeuvre is autobiographical. Often his characterizations are drawn from life and he consistently re-works a portrait of his adolescent self. The Takapuna landscape is transformed into the myth of Te Parenga, which forms the backdrop to his most influential work. In an interview with Howard McNaughton Mason explained how 'Te Parenga' came into being:

I invented the name, and then looked it up in a Maori dictionary to see if it had any meaning. It did, 'the bank'. And this was appropriate for what I had in mind: a bank, rising from a beach on the North Shore of Auckland ('The Plays of Bruce Mason' 107).

In 'Beginnings,' an autobiographical essay, Mason recalls how, 'as a child on our verandah,' he learned of the transformative power of theatre through the comic genius of his father:

I could never hope to convey the experience of seeing my father suddenly metamorphosed into a figure of wild, outrageous comedy. [. . .] He would spring into our calm evenings utterly transformed and more hilarious than any actor I have ever seen (148).

Here Mason recalls his father as a performer whose theatrical instinct was so acute that it ensured perfect empathy between himself and his audience. This memory made its way into “Sunday at Te Parenga” the first section of ‘The End of the Golden Weather,’ Mason’s most successful solo performance work.¹ In this monologue, as playwright and mature actor, Mason re-creates one of his father’s ‘party turns.’ He re-enacts his father as a performer whose timing is such that he leaves his audience ‘[g]asping, [. . .] scream[ing] for more,’ with a stage presence so powerful that even when he returns to his everyday self, a man with ‘the mildest of airs,’ they still ‘gaze at him with astonishment and awe’ (Bruce Mason Solo 11).²

Achieving a rapport between his artistic and his public selves, which Mason’s father forged so effortlessly, became for his son a life-long endeavour fraught with the utmost difficulty. In 1976, in reply to a student enquiry ‘[h]ow did you manage to become such a well known playwright, actor, adjudicator and critic,’ Mason replied tersely, ‘by one means only: persistence in the face of every odd’ (Every Kind of Weather 244-245).

In many ways the most pertinent image that emerges as Mason, the mature writer, looks back on the budding artistry of his childhood, is that of the boy in the flaxbush. In ‘Not Christmas, But Guy Fawkes,’ another of his solo performance pieces, Mason tells his audience,

I could not have been more than seven or eight when I first scooped a hole in the flaxbush and made a rough seat there. I would sit by the hour, unseen, scribbling in tattered exercise books. (Bruce Mason Solo 88).

The flaxbush becomes a refuge and also a place from which the young writer can observe unnoticed the comings and goings of the outside world. In the same play he remembers, ‘I wrote at no other time but in the flaxbush and only when there

¹ In one of his last interviews Mason told Helen Paske that he had performed ‘The End of the Golden Weather’ 968 times (15) in every New Zealand centre except Alexandra and Blenheim (14). At the time of this interview, in 1981, ‘The End of the Golden Weather’ was the most performed piece of New Zealand theatre (15).

² Mason’s solo performance works ‘The End of the Golden Weather,’ ‘To Russia, With Love,’ ‘Not Christmas, But Guy Fawkes’ and ‘Courting Blackbird’ are collected in Bruce Mason Solo.

were adults in front, unaware that I was there' (88). Already the boy is beginning to form an impression that any artistic creativity, such as writing, would be frowned upon in that adult world, that it would be 'something arcane: if not precisely forbidden, then heavy with the possibility of discovery and guilt. Like masturbation, then. No, not like: this *is* what it was, a secret and guilty joy' (88).³ From the beginning then, this activity is associated with covert sexual excitement.

Even at that early age, Mason sensed that writing would become his obsession in life:

Yet here, even here, I saw dimly the form, felt faintly the pressure of Vocation. That I was to be some kind of artist is implicit in everything I thought or wrote and more: it is implicit in the situation itself, I alone in the flaxbush, possessed – God knows why – of the Word, and Them Out There to consume it (89).

In 'Beginnings,' Mason recollects that this early sense of 'Vocation' to be 'some kind of artist,' allied to a natural academic ability, ensured that he was set apart from the rest of his community. The sense of being marked and treated differently informs his account of his schooldays. Mason was the Dux of his primary school (146).⁴ On his first day at secondary school, during the traditional initiation ceremony, he remembers that whereas each new boy had a 'trickle of water' (146) poured over him, he, on the contrary, had 'water sloshed in my face so that I could scarcely breathe.' Then, he 'looked up to see the whole school booing' whilst one boy 'screamed' at him 'That's how we treat swots!' (147). The victimization continues in the description of his sixth form year when he was ridiculed by the Headmaster at assembly and in front of the whole school for not attending rugby practice (146). Artistic and academic interests were considered to be effeminate. In the same essay Mason records his father exclaiming in 'baffled exasperation' in his son's 'fifteenth year,' 'God, boy, you haven't one single

³ This observation is repeated, almost word for word, in 'Beginnings' (144).

⁴ He went on to graduate with a B.A. from Victoria University College in 1945, after serving with the New Zealand Army in New Zealand between 1941 and 1943 and the Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve, based in the United Kingdom, between 1943 and 1945.

manly pursuit!’ (145).⁵ The pursuit of his natural abilities, therefore, left the young Mason with a sense of ostracism which, as a mature writer, he expressed once again in the image of the flaxbush:

If I were a neurotic little boy, then my neurosis had its roots in the world around me. We *are* the world we live in. I in my flaxbush and the people on the lawn form a context; if I could not communicate with them, then it was because they refused communication with me, or the likes of me. And the reasons for this refusal have occupied me ever since (147).

Thus the image of the boy in the flaxbush becomes a seminal metaphor employed by Mason to express the paradoxes which lie at the heart of his craft. The obsession with the creative process which brings fulfilment, allied to a sense of sexual excitement, becomes at the same time the root cause of his being regarded with disapproval by many members of the society in which he lives. The activity of writing, the means by which he will try to communicate his point of view of the world, will at the same time isolate him and ensure that he pursues his chosen ‘Vocation’ amidst a sense of loneliness. Also contained within the metaphor is the desperate need of the artist to connect with the very people who appear to be destined to reject him. As a mature writer in ‘Not Christmas, But Guy Fawkes,’ Mason identifies the purpose of his chosen ‘Vocation’: ‘[H]ow to reach them? How to cross the twenty feet or so of paspalum lawn and make them listen?’ (Bruce Mason Solo 89).

Significantly, writing is associated in the young Mason’s mind, from the age of ‘seven or eight’ (88), with being positioned ‘alone’ and apart (89). His mother’s position of being an immigrant in a foreign country may have exacerbated his dilemma, as Mason himself observes: ‘I owe to her, I think, an early sense of geographical displacement which, for all I know, was what turned me to literature at an early age’ (Dowling, Introducing Bruce Mason 2). This compounded sense

⁵ From his early adolescence Mason also displayed a natural talent as a pianist. In ‘Beginnings’ he writes that he ‘worked hard and made rapid progress as a musician.’ This artistic accomplishment, however, was frowned upon in his community. In the same account Mason comments, ‘I was appalled to discover that when I began to show off about it that this prowess secured for me not the awed respect that I had hoped for but the most withering contempt’ (145).

of ‘displacement’ ensures that Mason’s artistry takes place at the periphery, while those who are being written about remain ‘in front’ (Bruce Mason Solo 88). In other words, from the very beginning of his creative life, Mason places himself on ‘the margin’ in relation to the perceived ‘centre’ of his community.

In “Christmas at Te Parenga,” the third section of ‘The End of the Golden Weather,’ Mason, already obsessed with the ‘Vocation’ that was to become his craft, acts out one of his first encounters with the conundrums of his chosen genre. The aspiring playwright, now a young teenager, has gone to enormous trouble, arranging ‘for weeks’ (21) beforehand a theatrical performance which is to be presented to his parents and their friends on Christmas night.⁶ He has written his own play, devised a varied bill, and even made all the costumes himself, including a ‘rope wig which took days to tease out’ (24). It all goes horribly wrong. His brother, who has been dragooned into the project, sabotages the performance by fluffing his lines, acting the clown in the wrong places and deliberately misleading the audience. They, in return, pay hardly any attention to what is being presented on the stage. Their minds are elsewhere. As Mason, the fraught young performer, ‘stand[s] close to the curtain to hear what they are saying about the concert, and about me,’ he overhears, ‘No, it’s funny; haven’t heard from Joyce this year . . .’ (22). Even when they appear to pay attention, his audience still don’t seem to understand. When they are asked, for example, to guess the subjects of ten elaborate tableaux, the prize has to be awarded to Auntie Kass, the only one who ‘has two right’ (24). Clearly, the budding playwright has failed to communicate with his audience.

Frustration leads the young Mason into a physical fight with his brother on the stage. The embryonic writer and actor ends the evening exhausted and in tears, while those around him appear to remain blithely unaware of his torments. This only increases his overwhelming sense of isolation. He watches his sister, for example, remain ‘quite unruffled’ and ‘calmly marking’ (24) the inadequate

⁶ In ‘The End of the Golden Weather: A Television Script,’ which is included at the end of Bruce Mason Solo, Mason emphasized that he had written the characters of his parents and his brother and sister exactly as he had known them (199).

responses to the tableaux from an audience that misinterprets and makes fun of all his efforts.⁷

“Christmas at Te Parenga,” however, ends on a poignant note, with the image of two siblings on the beach, Mason ‘silent, still grappling with wedges of fury,’ while his brother, in a moment of sudden insight, blurts out, ‘I was . . . scared’ (25). This ‘hint of the complexity of human motive and behaviour’ dispels the teenage writer’s despair. He becomes ‘suddenly calm.’ This part of ‘The End of the Golden Weather’ concludes with the two brothers reconciled, walking hand in hand along the beach ‘under the wide and healing arch of the stars’ (25). Playwriting, it appears to Mason, despite the frustrations, can result in personal fulfilment and in empathy from the most unexpected quarters. The balm of an unexpected empathetic response to his craft was one that the mature playwright experienced only rarely throughout his career.

Mason had written earlier on ‘the complexity of human motive and behaviour’ in relation to the shared theatrical experience in “The Conch Shell.” Once again, this work is based on an autobiographical experience from his early life and is set in the mythologized landscape of Te Parenga. It started as a short story which was first published in Landfall in 1958 and was later re-worked into the dramatic monologue which forms the fourth and final section of ‘Not Christmas, But Guy Fawkes.’

Both versions focus on an ashamed recollection of the eleven-year-old protagonist’s schoolboy bullying of an outsider, Ginger Finucane, a classmate of Irish parentage, who is rejected and relegated to ‘the margin’ by his schoolmates because of the ugliness of his appearance and the poverty of his background. Bowing to peer pressure, the young Mason copies the behaviour of the majority by pushing Ginger into the sea, soaking his victim’s new suit of clothes and almost breaking his glasses. Ginger cunningly seizes this as an opportunity to

⁷ Mason’s sister’s response to drama is as lukewarm as his brother’s, though it is expressed in a different way. He has asked her to mark the answers to the tableaux. When Auntie Kass is about to be awarded her prize, the young performers discover their mishap. His sister, unperturbed, announces to one and all, ‘Auntie Kass has won the prize but naughty Uncle Jim is eating it!’ The young Mason, on the other hand, is still emotionally involved and can ‘hardly hear because I am in tears again’ (Bruce Mason Solo 24).

turn the tables by dangling before his oppressor's frightened eyes the threat of the police and the Children's Court.

Events take an unforeseen turn when Ginger pursues his revenge by forcing his tormentor to take him back to the Mason home, where Ginger in turn becomes the bully, forcing the schoolboy Mason to perform various outrageous acts against his will. One of these involves going into the parental bedroom and dressing up in Mason's mother's clothes. The escapade, which began as a punishment, now rapidly develops into the antithesis of this. In 'beads, earrings [and] assorted baubles' the boy Mason suddenly has the sensation that 'the muse of comedy had been summoned, and these were her celebrations, surely the weirdest rites ever held in her honour' (Bruce Mason Solo 131). This shared theatrical experience results in bonding. In that moment Mason realizes that he 'knew suddenly that I liked Ginger Finucane, liked him as much as I had ever liked anyone' (131).

Unlike the majority of the events described in "Christmas at Te Parenga" this shared theatrical experience results not in a burden of misery but in a new-found happiness. The young prankster records '[a] wave of laughter ran through me, like a sudden warmth on my limbs' and 'I felt wisp-light, airy, liberated' (131).

The delight that results from the evocation of the comic muse recalls the boy's earlier experience of the transformative power of theatre as demonstrated by his father, but this recollection portrays the experience in a more complex light. The older Mason, looking back, recognises that the sense of being 'liberated' is instigated by acts of rebellion, such as cross dressing, which also involve the breaking down of social barriers. The camaraderie of Mason and Ginger, dressed as women and smoking up large, is broken only by Mason's mother, who, returning unexpectedly with the shopping, stares at her son 'aghast' at the sight of 'her blue felt hat askew on my head, her fox fur awry on my shoulders' (132).

This episode indicates the significance of recollection in Mason's work; this is indicated by the fact that he re-worked it three times in three different genres.⁸

⁸ In the dramatic monologue Mason narrates throughout in the first person as if he is recalling an adolescent experience and this is the version I refer to. In the short story published in Landfall

The gist of all three is that the boy in the flaxbush has allied himself with ‘the margin’ while the parent represents ‘the centre,’ who regard the rebelliousness of his artistic expression with dismay.

Thus the boy in the flaxbush has learned, by his own account, two important lessons about the shared theatrical experience. The attempt to communicate with those of his own community results for the most part in frustration and isolation. ‘[H]ow to reach them? How to cross the twenty feet or so of paspalum lawn and make them listen?’ (Bruce Mason Solo 89) remains the perpetual conundrum in his relationship with the middle class community into which he was born. In refreshing contrast, playacting can also lead to bonding and liberation in the company of those from ‘the outer margin.’

This thesis as a whole focuses on five playwrights who have written about ‘the margin’ of New Zealand society. Mason is the subject of this first chapter, not only because he is New Zealand’s first professional playwright, but also because he is the first playwright to produce a body of plays which persistently challenged the traditional relationship between the Eurocentre and ‘the margin.’ He also re-defined the culture of New Zealand by insisting on the value of characters who had previously been relegated to an inferior position on ‘the outer margin,’ both in literature and in the theatre.

In a career that spanned thirty years, Mason laid the foundation for New Zealand drama to capture the complexities of a representative national ‘voice.’ The other four playwrights built upon his groundbreaking efforts. Like him, they also rely upon autobiographical experiences to authenticate their portraits of ‘the margin.’

Mason becomes Ross and his mother Mrs Stone. These character names are repeated in another version of The Conch Shell subtitled A Play for Television housed in the J.C. Beaglehole Room in the Victoria University of Wellington Library. The narrative remains essentially the same in these other versions.

“The Conch Shell” concludes with the adult Mason in London visiting Ginger, who has now become a Shakespearean actor, backstage. Dr Mason remembers that when she and her husband were in London they went to a production of Shakespeare, that one of the actors was someone Bruce had known since childhood and that Mason went backstage to talk with him. She also recalls that Mason’s friend had completely eradicated his New Zealand accent (Dr Diana Mason Personal Interview 17 Sept. 2001).

Like him, they employ theatrical structures derived from the Eurocentre. All four continue the thematic revolution in New Zealand theatre that Mason initiated.

Mason was the first New Zealand playwright to make a career of rejecting 'The Kiwi Cringe.' In challenging the dominance of the Eurocentre he wrote thirty-four plays in all and was working on his thirty-fifth when he died – 'only two less than Shakespeare,' he remarked significantly in one of his last interviews (Dowling, 'David Dowling Interviews Bruce Mason' 167). Comparing himself to Shakespeare was one of this playwright's last rejoinders to the prejudice that 'the margin' he represents is inferior.

2 THE STORY OF BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

In 1965 Mason premièred his solo performance work The Waters of Silence, which he translated from Le Silence de la Mer written in 1941 by the French author Jean Bruller under the pseudonym ‘Vercors.’⁹ Mason’s adaptation provides a clear example of how the lessons of the flaxbush have influenced the mature playwright’s point of view. Mason re-named the ‘Vercors’ prose piece and turned it into a dramatic monologue. The story of Beauty and the Beast is an essential component within this work. I interpret the re-telling of this fairy story as the metaphorical expression of Mason’s view of his function as a playwright, which I will now illustrate by comparing Mason’s translation with the French original.

In the ‘Vercors’ text, a Nazi soldier, billeted with an old man and his niece, is seen through the resentful eyes of the old man as a symbol of the German occupation of France during the Second World War. Mason makes a vital adaptation when he changes the point of view to that of the Nazi soldier. Also, although Mason translates the original text almost word for word, the slight changes that he does make all serve to soften the German character. For example, in the French version the physical appearance of the Nazi is more stereotypical, as ‘Vercors’ emphasizes the blondness of the Nazi and adds the detail of a gold tooth (Le Silence De La Mer 29). These physical features are omitted by Mason. In the adapted script the soldier repeatedly addresses his hosts as ‘Monsieur’ and ‘Mademoiselle,’ appearing more deferential and polite than in ‘Vercors.’ In the Mason version, but not in the original, the soldier attempts to humanize his relationship with his hosts and to make closer physical contact with them by offering to fill the old man’s pipe and to hold the niece’s wool for her while she

⁹ This text has now been translated into seventy-two languages (Edge 11). The author, Jean Bruller, wrote it during the Second World War when France had suffered the worst military defeat in its history and was occupied by German troops. Bruller served with the French army and his battalion was stationed at the foot of the Vercors massif (15). When the French army was defeated Bruller refused to work in occupied France and returned to his village where he eventually came into contact with the literary circles of the French Resistance (Thody 16). Occupation resulted in rigorous censorship. ‘Vercors,’ in collaboration with Pierre de Lescure, set up the Editions de Minuit which published and distributed material written by Resistance writers (18). The first printing of Le Silence de la Mer ran to only 350 copies, which were all handsewn (Edge 26) and which were produced and distributed under conditions of the greatest security. The book aroused so much interest that many more hand-made copies were produced (11).

knits (The Waters of Silence 2). Also in Mason, but not in 'Vercors,' the Nazi shows more consideration to his hosts by offering to dine alone and to eat in the kitchen after they have finished their meal (1-2).

Mason was in active service in the navy during the Second World War and served in the escorts to the Arctic convoys, which sailed between England and Archangel along the western coast of what was then the U.S.S.R. Though he rarely spoke of his combat experiences and though he did not write about them, it is certain that he must have seen many ships torpedoed (Dr Diana Mason Personal Interview 17 September 2001). It is testimony to Mason's compassion that, twenty years later, he chose to portray on the stage a sympathetic characterization of the enemy whom he had once fought against and whom he had seen cause so much suffering among his comrades.¹⁰

Moreover, Mason explained in an interview with McNaughton how he identified himself with the German soldier:

[H]e's so much my sort of person ... a bit of a goat in so many respects. So gormless and guileless, and, in the face of massive evidence against it, so convinced of the ultimate goodness of people. His visit to Paris, and his utterly washed-out and disillusioned return is similar to the moment where the boy in Golden Weather gets a boot in the face ('The Plays of Bruce Mason' 108-109).

The fundamental shift in point of view between the original narrative and the dramatic monologue in The Waters of Silence, allied to the interview statement, make it clear that Mason not only sympathises with, but sees himself as, what Frantz Fanon has termed '*the other*' (13). Suffering ostracism in his own community as a boy, Mason allies himself with the likes of Ginger Finucane and

¹⁰ The extreme reaction that the sight of a Nazi uniform still had the power to provoke is illustrated in a story told by Dr Mason. She recalls that when she and her husband went on a trip to Lima and Mexico City, Bruce intended to perform The Waters of Silence for some people they were staying with. When he changed into his costume, which was an authentic Nazi uniform, however, their host was so shocked and upset that the performance never took place (Personal Interview 17 Sept. 2001).

the Nazi soldier, who, like himself, are artistic and have been relegated to 'the margin' by the society in which they live.¹¹

In The Waters of Silence and in the French original, the old man and his niece refuse to speak to the Nazi throughout the length of time that he is billeted with them. The entire text of the play is made up of the attempts and repeated failures of the protagonist to communicate with the people around him. In the words of the boy in the flaxbush, 'how to reach them? How to cross the twenty feet or so of paspalum lawn and make them listen?' This is the conundrum common to both situations.

Central to the plot of Le Silence de la Mer as well as to Mason's adaptation is the re-telling of the traditional French fairy tale of Beauty and the Beast. Mason has translated this section of the script almost exactly. Beauty is described as a 'proud and noble' woman who has 'made herself hard, resistant' (The Waters of Silence 4). 'The Beast' is 'worthier than she thinks him' and 'has a heart [. . .] and a soul.' But Beauty in her hatred cannot see 'the Beast' for what he really is. It takes her a 'long time' to recognise in his eyes a 'glimmer' that is in fact 'a reflection in which can be read entreaty and love.' Once Beauty recognizes the humanity of 'the Beast,' '[s]he finds that she hates him no longer and she holds out her hand to him.' As Beauty reaches out both physically and spiritually to that which she has previously scorned to look upon, 'instantly, the Beast is transformed: [. . .] before her stands a young, handsome and shining knight' (5).

The fairy story of Beauty and the Beast is a central metaphor in both versions of the text. In 'Vercors' it is used by the Nazi soldier to illustrate his opinion that France and Germany need to unite (Le Silence de la Mer 42). Mason, on the contrary, interprets the fairy story more in terms of the Nazi soldier's attempts to

¹¹ There are striking similarities between the German character and Mason himself. In both the original 'Vercors' and in Mason's version of the text, the young Nazi soldier, like Mason, has a passion for literature. In both versions also, the young German is an accomplished musician, with a love of classical music. In "Limp Bananas: An Occult Farce," the third sequence of the solo performance piece 'Not Christmas, But Guy Fawkes,' Mason tells his audience of his own early ambition to become a classical pianist. His parents did not buy him a piano until he was thirteen, but nevertheless, he 'prepared for a musical career' and was 'a fanatical student,' rising at five in the morning in his last year at school to practise (Bruce Mason Solo 104). In Le Silence de la Mer and The Waters of Silence the German, von Ebrennac, was a composer before the war broke out.

communicate with the niece. Both versions make it clear that the Nazi identifies his situation with that of ‘the Beast.’ Equally clearly in Mason the niece is being alluded to as Beauty.¹² Mason does not reach the part in the story where Beauty ‘holds out her hand’ to the Beast. Both texts end where the niece both looks at, and speaks to, the Nazi soldier for the first time. Though the only word she says in both works is ‘Adieu,’ the Nazi, according to Mason’s stage directions, ‘TURNS TO THE NIECE, BEGINS TO BOW, THEN STOPS, SUDDENLY ARRESTED, LOOKS AT HER AMAZED’ (12).¹³ The single spoken word, by itself, is ambiguous and could be interpreted as simply the dismissal, once and for all, of the hated intruder. Mason, however, then instructs that after the ‘Adieu’ and the eye contact the Nazi soldier ‘STANDS BY THE DOOR SMILING’ (12). We infer that we have now reached the parallel point in the fairy story where Beauty first looks at ‘the Beast’ and recognises what the ‘glimmer’ in the eyes really means. The further implication is that she will eventually come to communicate with ‘the Beast’ and recognise his true worth.

These two metaphors – the image of the boy in the flaxbush and Beauty and the Beast – sum up in many ways the essence of Mason’s oeuvre. The boy in the flaxbush already suspects that the pursuit of his ‘Vocation’ will result in his being treated as an outsider in the community in which he lives. Writing from the ‘displacement’ (Dowling, Introducing Bruce Mason 2) of his position on the periphery, Mason, the mature writer, reveals a predilection for identifying with those who, like ‘the Beast,’ have been marginalized, demonized and rejected. Characters from a wide variety of backgrounds inhabit his work – Nazis, lunatics, Māori, lesbians – drawn from both international and national sources. What they all have in common is that they have been regarded by society at some time as ‘*the other*.’ Mason’s main concern as a playwright is to shift ‘the outer margin’ to a sympathetic positioning centre stage. In The Waters of Silence, in the role of the Nazi, the playwright is intent on persuading Beauty in the form of the niece to appreciate ‘the Beast’ whom she has previously scorned. I interpret this dramatic

¹² There is a key incident in which the young soldier comes upon the niece when she is alone. Mason, much more than ‘Vercors,’ turns this into a courtship scene. The soldier asks the girl if he can talk to her (5) and, when playing the piano, makes a point of saying that he is playing for her (6). These details are not in the French original.

¹³ As Mason’s version of the text is a dramatic monologue then the niece’s farewell can only be indicated by the response of the protagonist.

image as a metaphor for Mason's view of his function as a playwright. He becomes the facilitator, attempting to persuade the Beauty of his audience to appreciate the true worth of 'the Beast' whom they have previously scorned to look upon.

B: MANIFESTATIONS OF 'THE BEAST'

1 THE MAD BEAST

I have already emphasized that one of the tactics of effective colonization is to make the colonized believe that they are inferior. In 'settler colonies' such as New Zealand, the colonized then adopt, in the words of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 'a mimicry of the centre proceeding from a desire not only to be accepted but to be adopted and absorbed' and attempt to become 'more English than the English' (4). From his artistic beginnings as a boy in the flaxbush 'scribbling in tattered exercise books' (Bruce Mason Solo 88), Mason displayed a determination to challenge the values of the dominant Eurocentre and with them those of its mimic, 'the inner margin' of Pakeha middle class New Zealand.

This determination is already illustrated in 'Summer's End,' one of Mason's earliest works, which appeared in Landfall in 1949. In it Mason's autobiographical childhood experiences are fictionalized. He becomes John and his mother and father become May and James Crome. But 'Summer's End' is dominated throughout by one character – Firpo – and the kernel of the story is the development of his relationship with the young John Crome. The material for 'Summer's End,' Mason significantly records, came from one of those 'tattered exercise books' that he had un-earthed from his childhood days:

[T]he images that fascinated me were always those of luxurious bondage. I describe one of them in Summer's End, the novelette from which I later quarried The Made Man, [. . .] taken almost literally from an exercise book I found years later (Bruce Mason Solo 88).¹⁴

¹⁴ There is a draft of Summer's End in the Alexander Turnbull Library which is handwritten in an exercise book. This version also has the characters of John and Firpo and contains material that is not in the printed version of the story. Firpo, for example, teaches John to talk to plants as if they are people (51).

Mason habitually drew his characters from life, as Dr Mason confirms: 'None of Bruce's characters, apart from the ones in The Waters of Silence, are entirely fictitious' (Personal Interview 17 Sept. 2001).

“The Made Man” is the fourth section of ‘The End of the Golden Weather.’ It, too, revolves around the story of Firpo, which remains essentially unaltered from Summer’s End.

Firpo is a representation of the doubly marginalized. He is a lone figure – an outcast who does not conform to the norm, who is ostracized and ridiculed by the community in which he lives. Although the boy in “The Made Man” has lived all his life in Te Parenga, he is twelve before he accidentally comes across the place where Firpo lives. Walking along the beach one day, the boy finds a way, that he has not seen before, up a steep cliff which leads to the house of the Atkinsons, a family whom he knows to be ‘old and stinking rich.’ Once on the Atkinson property he discovers ‘a tumbledown whare’ (Bruce Mason Solo 27) where Firpo is living in abject poverty. On the porch ‘[b]oards are broken’ (27) and ‘[t]he window gapes [. . .] [through] crossed boards nailed from the inside.’ The place is covered in ‘[t]hick dust’ and all Firpo appears to own is ‘[a] table and a battered chair [. . .] [and] [a] calendar on the wall, five years old.’ Firpo appears, himself a reflection of his surroundings: ‘I am staring at the thinnest man I have ever seen, dressed in dirty jeans and the top half of a tattered woollen bathing suit, button gone on the shoulder. The face. Long, whitish, with two bulbs of eyes that stare not at me but restlessly about, grey bristly hair, a mouth full of broken teeth’ (28).

From the beginning, there is a sense of secrecy and the inexplicable. At their initial encounter Firpo displays a sudden explosion of anger when he ‘lurches to the table, bangs his hand on it’ and exclaims, ‘[s]he’s sent me down here. Like an old dog’ (29). The mystery is deepened further for the boy when a ‘thin elderly woman,’ whom he does not initially recognize, appears. She has brought a stretcher and three blankets and the boy suddenly realizes she is Mrs Atkinson. Significantly though, before he does so, his instincts have registered that her face is ‘the face of Firpo, transposed’ (30). From their first meeting the boy suspects that there is a blood tie between Firpo and Mrs Atkinson.

Firpo appears to have two names. He reacts angrily to Mrs Atkinson calling him ‘Tim’ (30) and insists to the boy that his name is Firpo. When the boy asks his father about the origin of the name, he is told it is that of a ‘great athlete. A world

beater' (34). During his first conversation with the boy, Firpo claims that he too is aiming to be a great athlete. Clearly this is a ludicrous ambition, considering his physique, but Firpo is grasping at this straw as a means by which to change the attitude of the community towards him, to earn their '[r]espect' and to 'wipe those smiles off' (29).

From the beginning of the story, therefore, Firpo is a pathetic and disadvantaged figure, but at the same time he can never be entirely discounted. One day the boy sees him training and is impressed by his natural athletic ability. In spite of his emaciated condition, Firpo is 'prancing along the beach like a mettlesome horse, his knees lifting rhythmically high in the air' (35). Yet equally significantly his performance is undercut by 'a tribe of gleeful small boys, legs lifted high to keep in time. They advance along the beach like a grotesque dance troupe [. . .] A wave of laughter leaps up from the sprawling bodies on the sand' (35-36).

This callous ridicule which the giggling posse of small boys represent leads to a prank that the young bloods of the town play on Firpo, the development of which takes up the greater part of the plot of "The Made Man." They send him a letter which challenges him to '*a friendly challenge race on the beach.*' The heavy irony of the letter continues as the challengers profess to take Firpo's athletic claims seriously: '*We hear you are a contestant for the Olympic Games*' (40).¹⁵

This ridicule expands to the whole community as they turn up *en masse* to scoff at the hopelessly unequal contest that has been set up, with Firpo pitted against six athletes much younger, fitter and stronger than he is. The situation is made even more grotesque by the insistence of the community that this unfair contest be conducted according to the correct rules of racing, whilst at the same time they display unsportsmanlike behaviour: they jeer at Firpo, lustily cheer on the younger athletes and levy bets on who is going to win.

¹⁵ In the handwritten version of Summer's End which is housed in the Alexander Turnbull Library the note reads 'we have heard that you are a contestant for the 1933 Olympic Games.' This confirms that Mason himself would have been at that time the same age as John, the protagonist in the story.

Yet couched within the text there is also the suggestion of an ambiguity in the attitude of the crowd. When Firpo first appears, 'dressed as always in his dirty jeans and frayed bathing top, tattered canvas shoes [and] [r]ound his shoulder, an old vari-coloured tweed coat,' they react with 'a murmur of discomfort' because 'Firpo's self-possession has carried a weird authority' (48). Then, for a moment at the start of the race, it appears that against all the odds, Firpo might just succeed because he 'has left the mark as if propelled by a giant boot: already he is ahead [. . .] moving forward in great loping bounds: he seems to touch the sand with regret' (49). The talent he displays momentarily stills the sneering: 'The crowd is silent' and one spectator grudgingly concedes the respect that Firpo has always craved, but is now too far away to hear: 'By Christ he can run though, can't he? [. . .] Not such a young joker either' (50).

Inevitably, however, Firpo's moment of glory is short-lived. He is soon overtaken by the other runners and he ends up exhausted, demoralised and 'shaken by a long fit of dry retching' (50). At the sight of his absolute humiliation the scorn of the crowd is relentless. They declare that Firpo is 'a nut!' and that he '[o]ughta be locked up!,' but the acute instincts of the boy record that he could 'feel relief in their laughter' because the status quo has been maintained and 'they would not have to cope with a Firpo who had won' (50).

Spent in both spirit and body, Firpo is a broken man after the race. When the boy takes him back to his whare, he 'sits on his bed and with the laboured deliberation of an old man, tries to take off his shoes [and] [. . .] [a] thick muffled sound tells [. . .] that he is crying' (51). In his abject humiliation he gives up entirely on his ambition: 'Firpo's finished. That's the end of the made man! He's finished!' (52).

"The Made Man" concludes 'The End of the Golden Weather' and appears to offer little hope for the representatives of the doubly marginalized. When the boy tries to find Firpo again '[t]he paths are once more tangled and overgrown' (53) and on the porch of the whare sits a stranger, who explains,

[s]on, they've taken him off to the nuthouse. He was gettin' violent, you know. Took to old Mr Atkinson and you could hear right down

the beach what he was sayin' 'bout Mrs Atkinson, who's been so good to him. So they carted him off in a strait jacket. Aw, weeks ago now (54).

The play ends with the image of the boy, alone by the porch of the whare (54).

Further examination of the episode, however, reveals that throughout, Mason is deeply critical of the Pakeha middle class, the mimic of the Eurocentre. The key representatives of this community in "The Made Man" are not the young bloods but the Atkinsons. Mason enmeshes his portrait of this couple in a web of negative connotations, which reveal his challenge to the values of the dominant Eurocentre and also to those of its mimic, Pakeha middle class New Zealand.

The atmosphere of the household, which first appears to the teenage boy to be benign, with a garden that is 'tended and civilized, [. . .] [with] flowering borders, roses on long stems,' hardens when he enters the house and '[t]he red stone floor chills my bare feet' (31). There is a pervading sense of death and decay. Mason re-worked his portrait of the Atkinsons several times in his oeuvre;¹⁶ in this version Mr Atkinson appears 'in a wheelchair [. . .] a great loose frame of bones.' He is associated with the image of a spent flame: 'He seems to have been passed through fire, leaving this heap of fierce whiteness: a touch and he will crumble to ash' (31).

The 'fierce whiteness' manifests itself in a barely concealed irritability with his wife. His responses to her assume 'a sudden sinister emphasis' (32). She, in turn, appears to be used to verbal intimidation. When speaking to her husband, '[s]he opens her mouth, sighs; her lips tremble' (32). Although clearly browbeaten, however, Mrs Atkinson is not silenced. It is she who offers the boy an explanation of Firpo's background and circumstances:

¹⁶ The Atkinsons are important characters in three of Mason's works. Not only do they appear significantly in 'Summer's End' and "The Made Man"; they also re-surface as orchard owners in The Pohutukawa Tree. Dr Mason says that her husband drew this portrait from life and that the Atkinsons were 'taken straight from my parents' (Personal Interview 29 June 2004). Mr and Mrs Shaw, Diana's parents, were orchard owners in the Bay of Plenty (Mason, New Zealand Drama: A Parade 56).

This man you met just now, it's poor Tim Barlow, my sister Jane's son. She died last year, [. . .] I'm afraid he's not all there. [. . .] He's been in an asylum but he talked of killing himself all the time so they asked me to look after him (32).

Mrs Atkinson is portrayed as being not only more compassionate but more alive than her husband. As the boy is leaving, after his first visit, she offers him a toffee and 'a timid frightened girl flashes suddenly' (32). Almost in the same breath that she admits the family tie, however, Mrs Atkinson swears the boy to secrecy: '[W]e don't want people to know about him. [. . .] We're well-known people. You're not to tell anyone, understand? Not even your own people. Promise' (32).

Although she has just affirmed that '[b]lood's thicker than water,' obviously if that blood is a social embarrassment then it should be disinherited and kept apart: '[W]e just can't have him in the house. He's dirty and he upsets things. But he'll be quite all right in the bach while the warm weather's on. Thank goodness we didn't pull it down' (32). The 'girl' that the boy glimpses momentarily is now almost entirely obliterated, for Mrs Atkinson appears only 'through old flesh' as her face 'crumples into a wavering smile' (32).

In contrast to the atmosphere of decay, verbal aggression and emotional deprivation that surrounds the Atkinsons, the boy's developing relationship and bonding with Firpo facilitate personal growth and fulfilment. There are two important developments that both versions of Firpo's story emphasize. Firstly, the boy's defence of his friend, against the odds and the opinion of the majority, unexpectedly gives him a new status in the eyes of his family and the rest of the community. In particular, after the race, the boy's brother treats him with new respect.

Secondly, his bonding with Firpo makes the boy feel differently about himself. In 'Summer's End,' helping Firpo in the humiliation of his defeat means that John makes the decision to place his friend before all other considerations. The minute he does so he 'felt a sudden sharp warmth, intense, shocking. He had never been

so happy in his life' (143). At the same point in the story, "The Made Man" repeats the description of this emotion almost word for word: 'I feel a sudden sharp warmth. I've never been so happy in my life' (Bruce Mason Solo 51).

In 'Summer's End' the boy, explaining to his parents how he had cared for another human being, finds his articulate self for the first time:

The words came without effort; the ideas he used to find so difficult formed and came out with a will of their own. As he spoke, a new person seemed to be standing by him, and he had the strangest feeling that he was not speaking at all – it was the other new one. He felt no fear (146).¹⁷

Thus in both 'Summer's End' and "The Made Man," the process by which the boy comes to make his care for a kindred spirit his chief priority in life becomes a metaphor for Mason's own creative process. It is through seeking out and empathising with 'the outer margin' of New Zealand society that he will be able to find his own artistic voice and be able to fulfil his 'Vocation.' The story of Firpo re-iterates the lessons of the boy in the flaxbush. Firpo, like Ginger in "The Conch Shell," teaches the young protagonist that the process of bonding with the representatives of 'the outer margin' can facilitate the breaking down of social barriers and has the potential to result in personal fulfilment and a new-found happiness.

John's devotion to Firpo leads him to disobey his parents' wishes when he takes care of his friend after he has lost the race. The reactions of his parents to this situation differ in the two versions of the story. In 'Summer's End' the boy's father threatens to give him the 'slipper' for his disobedience, calls Firpo '[a] dirty, stinking loony!' (145) and tells the boy that 'people are watching to see if you're soft' (146). His mother, on the other hand, is upset only because her son has been disobeying his parents' instructions. When she hears the full story, that

¹⁷ In the handwritten version of Summer's End which is housed in the Alexander Turnbull Library the relationship with Firpo facilitates a clearer understanding of the world: 'He [John] felt as if until now a screen had intruded between his eye and its object and that he had only seen shadows projected on it. Now it had lifted and he caught a glimpse of what had been indisputably [. . .] behind it' (113).

John has only been doing this in order to help his friend, she kisses him and confirms 'I like my boys to help other people' (146), even though in making this gesture she is seen, uncharacteristically, not to support her husband's stance. In "The Made Man" the father's disapproval is omitted, and the mother's support for her son's empathy with the outcast is displayed subtextually. In answer to the boy's question about whether his parents are very angry with him for disobeying them and not coming straight home, his brother replies, 'Mum's made some fruit salad for us and she sent me up to the shops for ice cream' (Bruce Mason Solo 53).

These details from the two texts are included here to illustrate another of the lessons of the flaxbush. The attempt of the boy to communicate his intentions to his own society, including even his own father, has resulted for the most part in frustration and isolation. There has been, however, as in the ending of "Christmas at Te Parenga," the consolation of an unexpected empathetic response. The story of the boy's friendship with Firpo is, in this regard, more optimistic than the story of his relationship with Ginger. In "The Conch Shell" the mother's 'aghast' reaction, when seen in the light of the flaxbush metaphor, ensures that she remains 'in front' with 'the adults' (Bruce Mason Solo 88), whereas her son, positioned apart in the flaxbush, has bonded with those on 'the outer margin.' Both versions of this story of Firpo hold out hope that it is possible to 'reach' a minority in the Pakeha settler society.¹⁸ The perpetual conundrum in relation to the majority of his own community remains, however: '[H]ow to reach them? How to cross the twenty feet or so of paspalum lawn and make them listen?' (89).

¹⁸ The characterization of the mother in these texts, which is drawn from life, reflects both the Eurocentre and its mimic, Pakeha middle class New Zealand, as Mason's own mother was an English war bride who had emigrated to New Zealand.

2 THE BROWN BEAST

In view of the lessons of the boy in the flaxbush, which led him to bond with those on 'the outer margin' it is perhaps predictable that Mason should develop a fascination with Māori. There had been Māori characters on the stage since the pioneer days, but they were all created by Pakeha playwrights who often placed Māori on the periphery of the plot.¹⁹

Even plays such as Kainga of the Ladye Birds and Land of the Moa, which have central characters who are ostensibly 'Maori,' display sparse authentic knowledge of Māori people or their culture. This is hardly surprising, since the playwrights who wrote them had encountered few Māori when they wrote the plays.²⁰ City dwellers in New Zealand had little first-hand knowledge of Māori because there were no urban Māori communities (Kiernander 38).

This pattern of population distribution had not changed very much by the time Mason was born. As a child he had scant knowledge of Māori people and knew none at school (Mason, New Zealand Drama: A Parade 55). His first contact with them did not take place until he was thirteen and his family 'took a house in Rotorua for two weeks of the summer holidays' (Every Kind of Weather 264). The sight that met the young teenager's eyes there was a culture shock:

¹⁹ The frontispiece of Peter Harcourt's history of New Zealand theatre is an illustration of the first image of New Zealand to be shown on the world stage. Described as 'a man of New Zealand, tall' it is a costume design for a Māori male, prepared for the pantomime Omai, which was performed at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, in London in December 1785 (2).

The pantomime is named after the first Polynesian to visit Britain, who was picked up by one of Cook's captains and who, under the patronage of Lord Sandwich and Joseph Banks, became a curiosity in aristocratic circles. After two years Omai was taken back to the Pacific by Cook and left on the island of Huahine. The pantomime Omai was based on the account of Cook's last voyage (the official account of which had been published the year before) for which Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg designed the costumes (McCormick 314), one of which Harcourt refers to in his frontispiece.

²⁰ George Leitch, who wrote The Land of the Moa, arrived in Australia from England in 1883 (Kiernander 11) and by 1885 had begun to make a name for himself in New Zealand. He moved backwards and forwards across the Tasman, but worked mainly in Australia until 1894 (13), when he leased the Theatre Royal in Napier (16). Mounting debts prompted him to devise and stage The Land of the Moa (19), which opened at the Opera House in Wellington on 29 July 1895 (27). After taking the show on tour to Dunedin, Christchurch (50) and Auckland (52), however, Leitch left for Sydney in the same year (54), never to return to New Zealand again (60).

[E]verywhere, the Maori people: old women dressed in black, wide-hatted, ravaged by incommunicable loss and grief, old men with faces tattooed like Paisley shawls, orating interminably and incomprehensively outside public houses; [. . .] I was still a tourist, gaping at them not merely as foreigners, but as aliens: they might have been in a zoo (264-5).

Already the compassion of the boy is in evidence, in his instinctive registering of the mood of the older generation of Māori. At the same time, however, he also recognizes that his view of the indigenous culture has been prejudiced by his education:

The Maori people, by the time I came to write, formed only 6 per cent of the population. [. . .] My knowledge of the race whose patrimony I had unwittingly helped to destroy and with whom I shared the land was confined, as a boy, to a detestably dull and grossly imperialist history (264).

In these passages Mason identifies a basic contradiction in his attitude toward Māori. On the one hand, from an early age he displayed an empathy with those operating on 'the outer margin' of his own society. On the other, his childhood perspective of the indigenous people as being 'aliens' who are other than human, animals who 'might have been in a zoo,' reiterates the Eurocentre's view of the indigene as Caliban.

The Māori people, as representatives of 'the outer margin' in relation to 'the inner margin' correspond to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's representation of the doubly marginalized within Indian society. To re-iterate Spivak's metaphor, the fundamental question for the doubly marginalized indigene in the context of a Eurocentred society is '*can the subaltern speak?*' (25).

Mason was to strive throughout his writing career to represent accurately the 'voice' of this facet of 'the outer margin.' His Māori plays constitute a key category in his oeuvre. They cover a time span ranging from the early days of British settlement to the time at which Mason was writing, and they all place

Māori characters centre stage. There are five major works in this category: The Pohutukawa Tree (1957), 'Awatea' (1965), 'The Hand on the Rail' (1967), 'Swan Song' (1967) and 'Hongi' (1968).²¹

Mason's intention was to understand Māori culture²² and to depict it sympathetically on the stage, but in order to do so he had to overcome daunting obstacles. He was, after all, a Pakeha born and bred. His formal education, like that of most New Zealanders at that time, was based on the English system and referred almost exclusively to models derived from Britain.

"The Made Man" makes a telling comment on the education of the boy in the flaxbush. All the time he is learning a lesson in life through his association with Firpo, his formal education consists of imported English subject matter which bears no relevance to his New Zealand experience. Whilst trying to cope with the implications of the letter that challenges Firpo to the race, the boy is being expected (by a teacher from London who considers that he is now in the 'colonies') to learn by heart William Wordsworth's poem about daffodils 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' (216). Unable to concentrate, the boy draws a sketch of Firpo, the subject that is really on his mind. When he finds it, the teacher 'screws The Made Man into a ball, [and] throws it on the floor' (Bruce Mason Solo 42). He then gives the class a lecture on how they should really be British, but are 'savages' underneath (43).

²¹ The dates given above all refer to the first year in which these plays were performed. The last four were first performed as radio plays. The Pohutukawa Tree was first published in 1960. 'Awatea' was first published in 1969. All five plays were published in a collection with the overall title The Healing Arch: Five Plays on Maori Themes in 1987, five years after Mason's death in 1982.

Three of Mason's Māori plays, 'Awatea,' 'Hongi' and 'Swan Song,' were written for Inia Te Wiata, the world famous New Zealand Māori baritone, though he only performed the first two of these. Attending Inia's funeral on the Ngati Raukawa marae, Mason recalled how their association had begun. He writes that when Te Wiata returned to New Zealand in 1965 to play Porgy in George Gershwin's Porgy and Bess, William Austin commissioned Mason to write a radio play for him. The result was 'Awatea,' but Te Wiata was disappointed with the script. In response, Mason records that he wrote two more scripts within a week, which Te Wiata liked 'even less' though he does not give details of the reasons for Te Wiata's disapproval ('Inia' 4). All three plays were eventually recorded by NZBC.

²² Mason had been a linguist since his early academic years and during the course of his career he studied Latin, Spanish, German, Italian and Chinese. He was fluent in French as well as Russian. Part of his commitment to the understanding of Māori culture was to become familiar with the language. In 1969 he was awarded an A pass in Māori 1 at Victoria University of Wellington (Dowling, Introducing Bruce Mason 6).

This incident can be interpreted as a metaphor for the position of the young Mason within his own culture. Just as Firpo is marginalized, the 'settler colony,' despite its attempts to mimic the Eurocentre, is marginalized by the later generation colonizer. When the teacher, the representative of the colonizing power, 'screws' up the image of Firpo and 'throws it on the floor' he is rubbishing the young Mason's national identity. In the teacher's lecture New Zealanders become Caliban in relation to his Prospero and 'the Beast' to his Beauty. Already the boy in the flaxbush has identified himself with 'the outer margin' of his own country and begun to challenge the values of the Eurocentre.

David Dowling comments perceptively about Mason allying himself to 'the outer margin' of Māori people within his own society: '[W]hen he turned to the Maori, he found both values he could embrace and a standpoint from which he could examine his own culture' (Introducing Bruce Mason 5). This 'standpoint' is not unlike the young Mason's flaxbush. From this 'standpoint,' Mason the mature writer was able to see that the culture of his ancestors, when removed to 'the margin' of New Zealand, had lost something essential in translation. He commented many times on the lack of ritual in Pakeha culture. In a lecture given in 1966, he identified what was for him a central 'problem' as a New Zealand artist, that 'of working in a country which will admit only games as viable rituals, [. . .] a country which has several purely masculine athletic rituals collectively amounting to a national religion, which alone is taken seriously' (Every Kind of Weather 135).

In the Māori people, Mason recognized he had discovered an alternative culture, where ritual was not only deeply entrenched, but embedded in a rich oral tradition which had been handed down through the generations. This tradition, first observed by the young boy outside the pubs in Rotorua (264), seemed to the mature artist to lead naturally to an expression of deep emotion that was avoided by the Pakeha. Mason commented further on the divide between the two cultures:

For the Maori deep emotion flows like a river [. . .]. Compare, for example, a pakeha-style funeral with a Maori tangi. The grief is neither less nor more. But for pakehas it must be stifled and buried

[. . .]. To the Maori, grief is urgent and eloquent, expressed in a soaring passion (238).

It seemed to Mason that the oral tradition of the Māori not only endowed them with a means of tapping into emotion on a grand scale, but also enabled them to naturally elevate the quality of expression. ‘I have done some research into the modes of Maori speech’ he remarked, in preparation for writing The Pohutukawa Tree, ‘and I find that strong emotion, even in conversation, was expressed by the Maori as poetry’ (Theatre in Danger 100).

These three foundations of Māori culture – the oral tradition, the expression of deep emotion and the poetic form – were much more in keeping with Mason’s values as an artist than the cultural traditions of Pakeha society into which he was born. The mature Mason discovered in Māori, to use Dowling’s phraseology, ‘values he could embrace.’²³

At the same time, however, Mason’s lack of grounding in that culture begs the question of whether he was capable of creating an authentic portrayal of the indigene. To use Edward Said’s terminology in Orientalism, how much is Mason’s portrait of Māori a construct, the creation of ‘the Orient’ by ‘the Westerner’? Mason himself remained well aware of the limitations that his background placed upon him when he attempted to tackle Māori issues as his subject matter. Writing in Act in 1979 he admitted, ‘I had no possible brief to speak for the Maori people, and I would never make so ludicrous a presumption’ (‘An Open Letter’ 66).²⁴

²³ Bill Pearson has commented that Roderick Finlayson, to use Dowling’s phraseology, also found in Māori ‘values’ that he ‘could embrace’:

Roderick Finlayson was the first New Zealand writer (apart from Katherine Mansfield in one brief story) to see in Maori life a preferable alternative to some objectionable features of Pakeha life; to write lyrically of Maori warmth, courtesy, generosity, and especially the freedom from the Pakeha obsessions of time and money. It was an important advance in our thinking about ourselves (‘The Maori and Literature 1938-65’ 100).

Finlayson’s sympathetic portraits of Māori began with his volume of short stories Brown Man’s Burden (1938).

²⁴ He does not mention that he was the editor of Te Ao Hou for almost two years.

Spivak's fundamental question, '*can the subaltern speak?*', therefore, now leads to another equally important question: whether, once a white writer does '*speak*' on behalf of '*the subaltern*' it can be with an authentic '*voice*'? This question will be kept in mind as I undertake a literary analysis of Mason's Māori plays.²⁵

Just as the portrayal of Firpo, my first illustration of Mason's focus on the doubly marginalized, appeared first in prose form, so the germ for the characters in The Pohutukawa Tree began in 'Genesis,' a short story published in Landfall in 1952.²⁶

'Genesis' sparked off a lengthy correspondence between Mason and John Pocock, occasional theatre critic and then Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge. These letters were published in book form, entitled Theatre in Danger, in 1957. Among the many theatrical issues discussed in this volume, one of the most fundamental for Mason's approach to writing is the Yeatsian concept of '*the wild*.' He illustrates this in relation to 'Genesis':

I think I can claim that in my published stories, I have sought '*the wild*'; [. . .] you have sufficiently expressed to me your approval of a story like 'Genesis' which I think contains symbols and characters of a kind which Yeats might have approved (48).

In another letter Mason explains in more detail his understanding of this concept:

I submit that the forces at work in civilisation can be represented as a pair of reciprocating opposites, and if one be called *the wild*, I would call the other *the garden*. We are born in *the wild*, but to observe the many taboos which are the distinctive sign of a culture, we have to live in *the garden*, since its cultivation represents civilisation, and

²⁵ Although there had been Māori characters on the New Zealand stage since the pioneer days, they were all created by Pakeha writers and few displayed any authentic '*voice*.' Douglas Stewart's 'The Golden Lover,' for example, first performed on Australian radio in 1943, was written by a New Zealander and is ostensibly about Māori. Nevertheless, as the theatre historian John Thomson points out, 'this is a story which assumes that humans are always and everywhere the same. The easy verse makes no attempt to incorporate Maori linguistic usage, and traditional Maori imagery is remarkably absent' (New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 35).

²⁶ 'Genesis' is set in Te Parenga, which also forms the backdrop to The Pohutukawa Tree. There is a passing reference in this story to Aroha, a Māori woman (277), and to Athol Sedgwick 'the curate' (279).

provides the framework for our lives. But *the garden* cannot grow without *the wild*. Exclude the fructifying dung which *the wild* represents, and *the garden* becomes arid and will finally nourish none (91).²⁷

Mason elaborated this point in a subsequent interview: 'I have a theory that English drama is fertilised from the periphery – in fact, you could say that world drama has been fertilised from the periphery' (Paske 15). If we put the two statements together, we find that 'the fructifying dung' represented by '*the wild*' is synonymous with the fertilization of post-colonial drama in English from the 'periphery.' An amalgamation of the two theories then suggests that the portrayal of 'the margin' will lead to the re-fertilization of post-colonial drama in English.

In Mason's Māori plays the indigenous people represent 'the outer margin' in relation to the New Zealand 'settler colony.'²⁸ Accordingly, they are also a manifestation of '*the wild*.' In placing Māori centre stage Mason is attempting to re-vitalise New Zealand drama in English. I take the 'reciprocating opposites' referred to in his theory of '*the wild*' and '*the garden*' to represent the Māori and Pakeha cultures respectively. Mason implies as much in a letter to Pocock in which he outlines the basic structural idea for The Pohutukawa Tree: 'Everywhere

²⁷ Yeats' early poems refer to the concept of '*the wild*' as a place associated with the natural world in which there is an awareness of the spiritual dimension. This stanza, for example, is from 'The Stolen Child' in his first book of poems Crossways (1889):

Where the wandering water gushes
From the hills above Glen-Car,
In pools among the rushes
That scarce could bathe a star,
We seek for slumbering trout
And whispering in their ears
Give them unquiet dreams;
Leaning softly out
From ferns that drop their tears
Over the young streams.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you
Can understand (Collected Poems 21)

²⁸ Pearson notes that Pakeha New Zealand writers have traditionally viewed Māori as representatives of the marginalized. In his article 'The Maori and Literature 1938-65' he comments on the frequency of this definition: 'All of this writing [Pakeha writing of Māori] is concerned with the Maori as an outsider or debutant in New Zealand society, individually or communally' (99).

I could, I brought two opposing sets of images, beliefs and myths face to face' (*Theatre in Danger* 93).

The Pakeha culture, according to their lights, constitutes '*the garden*' of 'civilisation;' in other words it seeks to replicate the Eurocentre. The Māori culture, on the contrary, represents '*the wild*.' Many Pakeha of the 1950s regarded Māori as 'savages' who had been only superficially touched by the Eurocentre's ideas of what constituted so-called 'civilisation.' In The Pohutukawa Tree Sergeant Robinson represents the Eurocentric view of authority: 'Law and order; not so easy for them [Māori people] with their background. Not used to it. They see things a bit different. [. . .] Scratch them, you'll find savages underneath, ready to break out into violence at the drop of a hat' (The Pohutukawa Tree 79).

The entire text of The Pohutukawa Tree is designed to discredit Sergeant Robinson's view. Mason turns the tables on the hegemony of the Eurocentre by advocating older Māori as the true representatives of authority. In an interview the playwright expanded further on his point of view: 'I'm interested in the older Maori as a repository of authority' (McNaughton, 'The Plays of Bruce Mason' 113). In Aroha Mataira, the protagonist of The Pohutukawa Tree, Mason creates a character who not only represents the 'authority' that he mentions in his interview with McNaughton, but who also epitomises his concept of '*the wild*.' But is this character merely a construct, created as a vehicle to verify Mason's personal mindset, or does this '*subaltern*' indeed '*speak*' with an authentic 'voice'?

In Fear and Temptation Terry Goldie has made an extensive study of over three hundred and fifty portraits of the indigene in texts written by white authors in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Despite the wide-ranging geographies of these studies, he finds startling similarities between these portrayals and concludes that this is because they are all imbued with the prejudices and the wish-fulfilments of the Eurocentred writers who created them. One of the plays Goldie analyses in order to substantiate his hypothesis is The Pohutukawa Tree.

One of the central themes in this play arises from the alienation of indigenous land. The only piece of Māori land left in Te Parenga is a very small section dominated by a huge pohutukawa ‘towering over’ (The Pohutukawa Tree 52) the house where the Mataira family lives. Aroha Mataira speaks with impressive dignity and in detail about what the tree represents to her: a victory that her people, led by her ancestor Chief Whetumarama, achieved in battle during the early days of Pakeha colonization. She describes the feat as ‘the greatest victory ever won by the Maori against the pakeha’ (23). The tree was planted by Whetumarama on the site where he killed an English captain, ‘that its red flowers should be a sign of blood between Maori and pakeha forever’ (24). Yet, in the same long speech, Aroha also acknowledges that the single tree is the remains of ‘a great totara forest’ and that the landscape is now dominated by ‘[t]he oranges and lemons of the Atkinsons’ orchard.’ The beach is now one ‘where those pakeha children play’ (23) because the rest of her tribe have moved away from the area. The play opens with the Reverend Athol Sedgwick bringing a letter to Aroha from that tribe, which begs her, not for the first time, to sell the land and join them. Although Aroha’s eyes are still partly fixed on a landscape that existed a hundred years or so before, it is clear that she and her two children are now the lone representatives in the local area of a disinherited people. Though Aroha insists that her people were never overcome by force, over time their culture has been eroded. Aroha expresses the loss of her people’s land and culture metaphorically: ‘Slice by slice from the whale’ (24).

Aroha displays several of the characteristics identified by Goldie as common to portraits of the indigene by white writers. For example, he observes that many of these characters ‘show the essential violence of the indigene manifested in [. . .] the noble savage’ (94). Goldie himself cites Aroha as an illustration, quoting as evidence her reference to the pohutukawa tree as a metaphorical representation of violence. Goldie notes also the common feature of the ‘elevated’ (33) indigene and the ‘indigenous sage’ in such works – ‘old men and women’ who ‘provide an image of the elder as the embodiment of the wisdom of the tribe’ (138). He remarks further that such an ‘indigenous sage’ is often presented as a museum piece: ‘[A]n historical artefact, a remnant of a golden age that seems to have little connection to anything akin to contemporary life’ (17). Mason himself

acknowledged that Aroha is a static 'artefact': '[I]t's a play about petrification, it's a slow turning to stone, or wood if you like, of the central character' (McNaughton, 'The Plays of Bruce Mason' 114). Goldie also notes that in texts by white authors '[t]he indigene is often used to present the possibility of nature in human form. [. . .] nature becomes human [. . .] human becomes nature' (19). Aroha's association of the erosion of her tribe's land and her own family's culture with the image of the whale illustrates this point.

Goldie goes on to say that 'in so many of the texts in this study, the white needs not to instil spirit in the Other but to gain from the Other. Through the indigene the white character gains soul' (16). In The Pohutukawa Tree Mrs Atkinson's care of the dying Aroha reverses their former roles, Mrs Atkinson becoming servant to Aroha's needs and finally admitting the superiority of the woman she once regarded as her inferior: 'Why should she cut herself down to size? She's got immense nobility. [. . .] Who'd want to be my size, sitting here, cutting flowers? For nearly twenty years, I patronised her; thought of her almost as a servant. [. . .] Beside her, I'm nothing' (95).

Like Aroha, all of Mason's Māori protagonists embody, in Mrs Atkinson's words, 'immense nobility.' In 'Awatea', the protagonist, Werihe Paku, has many characteristics in common with Aroha Mataira. Like her, he dominates the play. Like her he is the lone representative of '*the wild*' drawn on an epic scale, with a natural flair for oratory. Like Aroha, in Goldie's words, Werihe is presented as an 'elevated' indigene who is also an 'indigenous sage.'

Goldie points to the frequency and the significance of the death of the native in these texts: 'The number of indigenes which represent the dying gasps of their culture seems almost limitless. [. . .] The death of the individual indigene is equivalent to the death of the race' (160). Once again Goldie singles out Aroha as an illustration. Mason appears to verify Goldie's hypothesis. As the play progresses and the fortunes of the Mataira family decline and as Aroha draws closer to her death at the end of the play, so, literally and symbolically, the branches of the pohutukawa tree bend lower and lower over their home. Mr Atkinson draws the attention of the audience to the tree's increasing state of

decay: 'Your tree's looking sick. [. . .] It's falling over. Tell your mother she'll need to get a strainer wire on it. Or cut it down' (The Pohutukawa Tree 74). In four of Mason's five Māori plays an indigene dies and in three the indigene protagonist dies at the end of the play. In all these respects Mason's Māori characters appear to be constructs who exhibit characteristics which Goldie has identified as typical of the prejudices of the white Eurocentred authors who created them.²⁹

The influence of the dominant Eurocentre on Mason's formal education informs his Māori plays in other ways too. As a playwright he clearly draws upon European models. Dowling draws attention to Mason's debt to the Eurocentre when he points out that in both The Pohutukawa Tree and 'Awatea' 'the emphasis on oratory and visual symbol in the Māori culture, suggest parallels with Greek theatre' (Introducing Bruce Mason 29). Mason acknowledged these sources himself and matched 'Awatea' to Greek theatre in more detail:

[T]he whole play takes place outdoors [. . .]. There is a blind old sage (Tiresias?) and a herald, in Emma Gilhooly, bearer of alarum and portent, bringing messages from the outer world. There is extended oratory, choric song and dance ('An Open Letter' 65).

McNaughton points to the 'almost colossal stature' of Mason's Māori elders (Bruce Mason 27). Aroha and Werihe in this respect display similarities with Shakespeare's flawed tragic heroes and heroines. What Dowling says of Aroha is equally true of Werihe: 'Like King Lear, Aroha is silly, but like him too she gets the best scenes and the best lines' (Introducing Bruce Mason 24). Like Gloucester in 'King Lear,' Werihe is not only physically, but also figuratively, blind. Werihe is obsessed with his only son, Matt, whom he believes to be a doctor, practising in Auckland. In fact his son has failed his medical exams and has become a freezing worker.³⁰ Matt, in this sense, becomes Edgar.

²⁹ Pearson, writing of how Pakeha New Zealand writers have portrayed Māori, identifies similar characteristics: 'These Maori characters are usually proud, with a "poetic" tradition of myth and war; they are courteous; they are fatalistic and can will themselves to die' ('The Maori and Literature 1938-65' 107). Aroha Mataira displays all these attributes.

³⁰ Mason records that the character of Matt was drawn from two young Māori men whom he had known. The first was the only Māori in his district to pass his University Entrance exams, who then dropped out of medical school and became a freezing worker in Auckland (Notes on Awatea

Herein lies a basic contradiction which casts even more doubt on Mason's ability to create an authentic Māori 'voice.' On the one hand he acknowledges that Māori have a unique culture – an oral tradition which expresses deep emotion in poetic form – on the other he chooses to base his portraits of 'the older Maori as a repository of authority' (McNaughton, 'The Plays of Bruce Mason' 113) on theatrical models derived from the Eurocentre.

In other respects, however, an equally persuasive case can be made for the validity of Mason's representation of the indigene. He certainly laboured hard to produce authentic Māori characterisations. The whole script of The Pohutukawa Tree, for example, was re-written twelve times and some parts of it were revised up to fifty times (Mason, New Zealand Drama: A Parade 61).³¹ The playwright's efforts were rewarded when, 'still doubtful of the truth of what I had set down,' he read the play to a Young Māori Leaders' Conference attended by a hundred delegates. Their judgement was that Aroha as a character was 'wrong, but authentic' (62).³² Further verification of authenticity came when a Māori actress playing Aroha told Mason that to play the part she did not have to act: 'All I had to do was to think of my old grandmother' (Paske 15).

There is, moreover, irrefutable evidence that in some significant respects the Māori plays are drawn from life. For example, Mason modelled the characters of Aroha and Johnny in The Pohutukawa Tree on Māori people he met when working on his father-in-law's orchard in the Bay of Plenty. The woman he called 'Aroha' also worked in the orchard, as did her son, whom he called 'Johnny.' One day 'Aroha' arrived late for work in a state of terrible grief because her son had been arrested after getting drunk, breaking into a local

1. J.C. Beaglehole Room. Victoria University of Wellington Library). Mason gives Matt all these characteristics. The second was a young Māori prisoner whom Mason wrote to every day for six months when he was editor of Te Ao Hou. The letters he received in reply, according to Mason, contained 'searing imagery and eloquence' (11).

³¹ The Pohutukawa Tree is also one of the first New Zealand plays to consistently incorporate Māori words into the script. This was so unfamiliar at the time that Mason included footnotes in the first printed version of the text, published in 1960, to explain the Māori terminology.

³² This judgement is quoted by Mason but not explained. He goes on to remark, however, that he took it to mean that the play had 'a clean bill of health' because 'authenticity was above all, what I had aimed at' (New Zealand Drama: A Parade 62). This implies that the Conference delegates had considered the portrait of Aroha to be 'authentic' but that they thought her opinions were 'wrong.'

cinema, attempting to steal money from an empty till and leaving a note ‘Robin Hood was here’ (Mason, New Zealand Drama: A Parade 57). Mason also accidentally discovered ‘Johnny’s’ secretly drawn ‘tattered school exercise book’ under the floorboards in the packing shed; it contained a ‘saga, running through almost a hundred pages’ of the legend of Robin Hood in which ‘[the] horses were magnificent; he could have made a career as an artist’ (58). Shortly after the incident in the cinema ‘Johnny’ was sentenced to six months imprisonment. Before the six months were over his mother was dead. ‘Johnny’ was allowed out of prison early to attend her funeral.

Mason’s own account of his sources illustrates that the playwright largely depicted what had actually happened, changing only a few details, such as the transfer of the scene of the crime from the cinema to the church. In the play Mason also softens the real six month sentence (which he considered to be ‘savage’ (57)) to ‘[t]hree months reformatory detention’ (The Pohutukawa Tree 86).³³

At the same time the playwright acknowledges, however, that although ‘Aroha’ in life was ‘a humble woman,’ he decided to give her more authority: ‘[S]he needed grandeur, so I inflated her status to rangitira, leader of her tribe’ (Mason, New Zealand Drama: A Parade 59), but Dr Mason remembers that the real-life ‘Aroha,’ whom she named, displayed an aristocratic mana in keeping with her fictional characterisation: ‘She was very dignified, I would have said highly. She used to

³³ Sergeant Robinson, the policeman in The Pohutukawa Tree, is another character whom Mason re-works in his oeuvre. He appears again in “Sunday at Te Parenga,” the first sequence of ‘The End of the Golden Weather,’ where he is described as a ‘small’ man with ‘a nuggety grandeur’ (8). In the second sequence of this work, “The Night of the Riots,” this character again becomes the embodiment of law and order as he changes from ‘ole Robbie [. . .] a good ole stick’ (Bruce Mason Solo 12) to a sinister figure ‘mounted, baton in hand, [. . .] his face square and remote’ (14) when he encounters men protesting about their hunger in the Great Depression of the 1930s.

There is also an undated and unpaginated fragment held in the Bruce Mason Archive at Playmarket, entitled Rangi Robinson, in which the eleven-year-old protagonist meets a Sergeant Robinson when he comes to the local school to teach road safety. This man is described as ‘vast’ and ‘the biggest man in Te Parenga’ whose nickname, ‘Rangi,’ is derived from Rangitoto, the ‘huge and brooding’ volcanic cone that dominates the local landscape. The young protagonist is a pianist who is learning classical music as did Mason when he was a young adolescent. In the television script of ‘The End of the Golden Weather,’ which is included at the end of Bruce Mason Solo, Mason says that he ‘deliberately made my sergeant a small nuggety man, because the man I remember was huge’ (200). So it appears that this fragment provides a portrayal much closer to the actual policeman of Mason’s childhood.

come and work for my mother in the garden and she always had a very patrician nature' (Personal Interview 29 June 2004).³⁴

The authenticity of Mason's Māori characters is further confirmed by the way in which they exhibit the psychology of the coloured individual in dominantly white communities, as it has been represented by post-colonial thinkers with first-hand knowledge of the experience. In an influential study on this subject, Black Skin White Masks, Fanon concludes that '[e]very colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality' – develops a split self. One self, in mimicry of the Eurocentre, 'becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle' (14). This is the alter ego, 'The White Mask[s]' whom Fanon terms '*the other*' (13). The real self is the 'jungle' self which emphasizes his blackness and causes him and his race to be judged by white people as 'savages, brutes, illiterates' (83).³⁵

Sergeant Robinson in The Pohutukawa Tree, illustrating Fanon's theory, discounts Māori as 'savages' after Johnny has emphasized his blackness by brandishing a taiaha and smashing a stained glass window in the local church, thus breaking the Eurocentric rules of law and order and identifying himself as a representation of '*the wild*.' In the same play, the symbolism surrounding the protagonist mirrors the split self which Fanon says is characteristic of the colonized indigene. Over the fireplace in Aroha's home are two pictures which face each other and which are symbolic of two irreconcilable philosophies: '*Holman Hunt's "The Light of the World" and a heavily framed photograph of a*

³⁴ She also recalls that her mother, 'when she was just a little bit tiddly,' had said at Diana and Bruce's wedding, 'Where are our lovely Maoris?' (Personal Interview 29 June 2004). In the wedding scene in The Pohutukawa Tree Mason paraphrases this remark when Mrs Atkinson says, 'Where are the Maoris! We want our lovely Maoris!' (47).

³⁵ Fanon is writing about his experience of being a black man born in the Antilles, but his text has been widely used as a commentary on the position of a coloured minority living in a predominantly white community. At the beginning of his Introduction to Black Skin White Masks, Fanon quotes the black poet Aimé Césaire, who, like himself, was a native of Martinique. In this extract Césaire is writing about the effects of colonization on the indigene: '*I am talking of millions of men who have been skilfully infected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement*' (7).

tattooed Maori chief Whetumarama' (The Healing Arch 73).³⁶ Aroha has never come to terms with the fact that she cannot follow the philosophies of 'The Prince of Peace' from the Christian 'garden' and those of the warrior from 'the wild' at one and the same time.

This fundamental contradiction of values prompts Athol Sedgwick to call Aroha patronisingly '[a] [p]oor creature' and 'a battlefield' (The Pohutukawa Tree 94). What Sedgwick interprets as an inability to establish a consistent belief system, Fanon sees as an inevitable consequence of colonization, resulting, to use his phraseology, from the 'death and burial of [. . .] local cultural originality' (14).

The main theme of 'The Hand on the Rail' also endorses Fanon's theory of the 'death and burial of [. . .] local cultural originality.' This play opens with a group of farmers reading in the newspaper that Rangi, son of the protagonist, has been convicted of manslaughter. The plot then becomes a documentary-style investigation into the reasons why such an upright man's son has come to the point where he has killed another human being. The main reason, according to Mason, is Rangi's loss of cultural identity, which is expressed in the metaphor of the title:

[T]he names fill the mind with the common past. There is this great rail for our fists to grip, room for every hand that wants to clasp it. And you can stand firm beside the rail, as a people. Behind us, the atuas, slowly loosening their grip; ahead, the young, learning the proper clasp. That is the race, the iwi (The Healing Arch 130).

Rangi, like Aroha, is torn between this philosophy of 'The Hand on the Rail' and the need to become 'whiter as he renounces his blackness' (Fanon 14), what Fanon termed the White Mask[s] of his alter ego. On the one hand we see Rangi's father trying to convince him of the significance of whakapapa, on the

³⁶ The stage direction quoted here is taken from the version of 'The Pohutukawa Tree' that is printed in The Healing Arch. The stage direction in the first published version of the play differs slightly: 'Right of the door, a fireplace, and above it, a print, tacked on to the wall with drawing pins, of Holman Hunt's "The Light of the World." A photograph of an old Maori chief, WHETUMARAMA, in close proximity to it, but occupying a space slightly below it' (The Pohutukawa Tree 52). Apart from the stage direction quoted in the main text all quotations from The Pohutukawa Tree are taken from the first published version.

other we see his mother preparing her son for a Eurocentric school test about Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales.' Mason himself said of the character of Rangi, '[h]e's totally split' (Dowling, 'David Dowling Interviews Bruce Mason' 165).³⁷

In Mason's Māori plays, the eroding of cultural roots, in conjunction with the racial prejudice of '*the garden*,' spurs the younger male generation of Māori into displaying what Fanon terms their 'black' or 'jungle' selves. Johnny in The Pohutukawa Tree and Rangi in 'The Hand on the Rail' are cases in point. Likewise, in 'Awatea', Matt, the son of the protagonist, gets into trouble with the police. When a carcass falls on his back at the freezing works where he is employed, he is unable to earn the money he usually brings into his local community at the beginning of the year (The Healing Arch 257). In desperation he robs a safe, assaults an old man, and steals a car (222).³⁸

Mason wrote to Pocock, '[t]he wild is irrational but not unreasonable; if it is ignored, it can manifest itself in weird and monstrous forms' (Theatre in Danger 91). In Porcupine, a play written for television, Hori is a Māori who is subject to verbal abuse by the Pakeha on a daily basis. As in other Māori plays by Mason, the inhabitants of '*the garden*' relegate the indigene to 'the outer margin' by defining him as 'bestial': 'The monkey jumps!' (3). This ensures that Hori is in a constant state of irritation, and he retaliates by displaying his 'jungle' self in accordance with the Pakeha settler community's expectation of him. Hori's abrasive and antagonistic reaction accounts for the title of the play. His Pakeha friend, Denis, protests: 'Who wants to be stuck with a bloody porcupine? Quills out from breakfast to milking time,' to which the Māori boy replies, 'Brown is thin. As you'd know if you was. Pink, and it can be cowhide. As yours is' (4).

³⁷ Another influential early post-colonial writer, W.E.B. DuBois, in The Souls of Black Folk (1903) was one of the first to identify the split self of the black man in white-dominated communities: 'It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others' (869).

³⁸ Throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, therefore, in texts such as The Pohutukawa Tree, 'Awatea' and 'The Hand on the Rail,' Mason was expressing his concern that Māori, particularly young Māori men, were turning increasingly to crime in reaction to the position in which they found themselves in New Zealand society. Over a decade later, in 'Songs to the Judges' (1980), Mervyn Thompson expressed a similar concern. One of the songs in this play which Thompson said he based on 'New Zealand's crime statistics' (Selected Plays 184), states that Māori are '[t]hree times more likely' (168-169) than Pakeha to offend and to be convicted in a court of law.

It is noticeable that Rangi's violent outbursts in 'The Hand on the Rail' also occur in a climate of verbal abuse. In a flashback showing an argument in a pub, Rangi is called 'just another drunken Hori' and 'Hori trash.' In retaliation he calls one of the drinkers a 'Pakeha slob' and Pakeha as a whole 'a puffed-up bunch' (The Healing Arch 137). The altercation ends with Rangi throwing a glass of beer into the face of one of his accusers (138). In these texts, Mason suggests that racial prejudice is responsible for the 'thin skin' of tolerance that Māori display, through which retaliation so frequently erupts. This backlash of violence is part of the 'weird and monstrous form' which *'the wild'* manifests in response to its cultural identity being 'ignored' by the inhabitants of *'the garden.'*

'Hongi' is Mason's most extreme example of these 'weird and monstrous forms.' In this play, set in the early days of European settlement, the chief of the title becomes increasingly brutal on his return from England, after he perceives the basic hypocrisy on which the British Empire is built: claiming to be Christian and to follow the doctrines of the 'Prince of Peace' while in reality operating as a repressive colonizing power.³⁹ At the end of the play, when he is dying, Hongi has a small boy brought to him, whom he declares he is going to eat because he is 'five years old and succulent. They will cook him [. . .] feed me morsels' (The Healing Arch 38). Hongi justifies his action by explaining what the process of colonization would do to the young child's identity if he was allowed to live: 'You will stuff him with the Gospel. Better that I eat him, pass him through my bowels. I would do less harm to him thus' (38).⁴⁰

By means of this image Mason delivers one of his most damning indictments of the effects of colonization on the indigenous people of New Zealand. The script of Hongi (1968) in the Bruce Mason Papers housed in the J.C. Beaglehole Room at Victoria University Library has lines which have been deleted by the playwright. One of these refers to the split personality of the colonized indigene

³⁹ An early play of Mason's which is particularly critical of the so-called 'civilization' of the Eurocentre is A Case in Point (1956), in which he points out the barbarity of the English penal system by dramatizing a case in which an eleven-year-old boy was hung in 1833 for stealing a dozen eggs to feed his starving brothers and sisters.

⁴⁰ Hongi recants this extreme solution. At the end of the play he dies and the penultimate image is of the Reverend John Cutler 'leading the boy off into darkness' (The Healing Arch 40). The play 'Hongi' also has an alternative title: 'The Noble Savage' (7).

that Fanon identified. Hongi says, '[a]lready my people are rua ngakau – two minded. The gourd is broken; how shall we piece it together?' (27). This does not appear in the printed version of the script. Mason intended that his Māori plays be published in a collected version under the title The Broken Gourd (Dowling, Introducing Bruce Mason 23)⁴¹, indicating that he considered Fanon's concept of the split between the Negro self (the Black Skin) and '*the other*' (the White Mask[s]) to be fundamental to the understanding of the situation of Māori in a Pakeha dominated society.

⁴¹ The planned title for the collected version of the plays was Te Hue Pakaru, The Broken Gourd (Dowling, Introducing Bruce Mason 23), but the title of the printed version was devised by Dr Mason (Personal Interview 29 June 2004).

3 THE SEXUAL BEAST

In another category of plays sexuality is the theme used to explore the 'reciprocating opposites' of *'the wild'* and *'the garden.'* Again Mason unfailingly damns life in *'the garden'* and equally strongly advocates the ways of *'the wild.'*

Mason's first performed play, *The Bonds of Love* (1953), opens in the sordid room of a prostitute, Sally, who has an appointment to meet a regular client of hers, George.⁴² When Sally's sister, Edna, arrives unexpectedly, the relationships of the two couples that make up the plot are compared and contrasted. Edna is in a conventional marriage and Sally makes a living by the sale of her body. These two opposing ways of life are an early instance of Mason's juxtaposing of *'the wild'* and *'the garden.'*

Trapped within the confines of the conventional suburban marriage, Edna is deeply unhappy and subjected to outbursts of violence from her partner. She arrives at Sally's room with a black eye, which she says has been given to her by her husband because she refused to have sex with him: 'I wouldn't lie down with him the minute he came home. There was I, in the middle of cooking, just about to feed the baby, and in he comes, stinking of beer saying: (sic) All right, Ed: get your things off, as if I were a dog, or a tart.' Edna says her husband is 'a lustful, dirty-minded, violent beast' (15). She has formed a very negative opinion of marriage: 'I hate it. I never dreamed it would be like this. It's so crude and beastly' (16).

The emotional deprivation and violence in this marriage mirrors the Atkinsons' marriage in "The Made Man." In *The Bonds of Love*, however, the abuse handed out by the male is made much more explicit. I have already identified the

⁴² John Osborne is credited with marking the watershed between the old style of English theatre and a new contemporary style when his play *Look Back In Anger* was first performed in 1956. The theatre historians Griffiths and Woddis remark, 'the dingy bedsit where Jimmy and Alison [the two central characters] live, gave rise to the term "kitchen sink drama"' (278). *The Bonds of Love* preceded 'kitchen sink drama' by three years and illustrates that Mason was ahead of his time in anticipating the influential working class theatre movement of the late 1950s and 1960s. It should also be noted, however, that Arthur Miller wrote *Death of a Salesman* in the U.S.A. in 1948.

Atkinsons as representatives of '*the garden*' in Mason's oeuvre. The similarities in the relationships of the married couples identify Edna and her husband with their way of life. Speaking of her marriage as being 'crude and beastly' Edna once again confirms Mason's portrait of marriage within '*the garden*' as the less civilized option. By means of reversals such as this the playwright challenges the hegemony of the Eurocentre.

By way of contrast, the association between Sally and George, the representatives of '*the wild*,' displays genuine warmth. Before Sally gives George the physical satisfaction he has come for, they chat about the races, share a drink and reminisce about their childhoods (1-5). There is more foreplay in the relationship of paid prostitution than in that of conventional marriage. The whole structure of this play consists of a series of such ironic reversals, designed to illustrate the theme that the 'marriage' within '*the wild*,' which has no legal or social acceptance, in fact brings about greater personal bonding and fulfilment than marriage in '*the garden*' ever does.

Edna, for example, feels as though her husband treats her like a prostitute. She protests 'bitterly' to her sister, '[h]e's fond of one thing, and one thing only' (16). The implication is that sex in a conventional marriage is no more than an exchange, a form of prostitution by means of which the woman maintains her financial security. In a later play, Zero Inn (1970), Sandra, the protagonist, views her conventional marriage specifically in these terms: 'Yes, in the twilight of our lives together, he's made me Madam in his guilt-edged whorehouse' (77).

A similar portrait of marriage in '*the garden*' as an ordeal to be endured in order to ensure financial security is to be found in another early work The Licensed Victualler (1954). Although this opera of one scene is a farce, it conveys a serious social commentary when it describes marriage in terms of confinement: '[O]ur problem as married women, is to get him [the husband] to live for maybe forty years in a two by four box.' Rather than providing any emotional satisfaction for either party, marriage as an institution is viewed as a purely practical means of ensuring security:

Marriage is a game ladies. It's your game and it's mine. How are we going to play it properly: that's the guts of it. Now the first thing we've got to understand is that no man would stand for it that's in his right mind. But we've got to make him: because we've got to live, and we've got the kids, and they've got to live too (13).⁴³

As far as Mrs Brindle, the speaker here, is concerned, the only way to make the situation tolerable is to ply the male with alcohol so that the misery of his life is forgotten: 'So you fuddle him. Let him do his work, and when that's over, give him something to make him a bit woozy' (13).

Do Not Go Gentle (1982)⁴⁴ portrays a similarly negative view of marriage. The confined married couple at the centre of this play are '[t]wo unhappy people, full of spite and doubt' (23). The husband, Charlie, who is dying of cancer, is a bitter man, feeling that he has been '[t]ricked into marriage, tricked into paternity' (60).⁴⁵ On his deathbed Charlie tries to show his wife some affection, but by that time relations between them are so damaged that, although at first '[g]rudgingly, she edges an inch or two up to the bed' (31), when he tries to take her hand, she 'pulls it away.' Charlie's wife recalls, '[i]t's years since you touched me, brushed me in passing. We passed each other in corridors, we didn't touch' (31). At the end of the play, just before he dies, Charlie reveals his unhappiness in the confinement of his marriage: '[D]eath gives me the only freedom I've ever had, since I married' (63). His only consolation lies in the alcohol that his mates bring for him. Charlie dies with a 'beautiful smile' on his face saying, '[m]y patron saint. Saint John Barleycorn, friend of sinners' (72). As in The Licensed Victualler alcohol is an antidote to the misery of marriage.

⁴³ Even at his most light hearted Mason still condemns conventional marriage. The Uses of Adversity (n.d. Bruce Mason Archive. Playmarket) is an 'Opera Buffa' for which Mason wrote the libretto to David Farquhar's music. In it, the male partner of the central married couple finally admits that he has not heard a word that his wife has said for years because he has had the hearing aid he wears 'fitted [. . .] [w]ith a silencer [. . .] [t]o switch you [his wife] off' (6).

⁴⁴ The script available in the Bruce Mason Papers in the J.C. Beaglehole Room of Victoria University of Wellington Library is described as 'A play for television' and dated 1976. It was screened by TVNZ as part of The Mason Trilogy in 1982.

⁴⁵ Similarly in Rise and Shine (1982 Bruce Mason Archive. Playmarket), which is one of Mason's last scripts, the protagonist James Tyndall is dying, this time of muscular dystrophy. James, like Charlie, is a disappointed man who sums up his relationship with his family in bitter terms: 'Married an agreeable girl, now a complaining shrew [. . .]. Fathered three dull children, with whom I can't converse; I never see them and I don't want to' (36).

To re-iterate Mason's phraseology, life lived exclusively in '*the garden*' deprived of the 'fructifying dung' of an association with '*the wild*' is shown throughout his oeuvre to be the product of an 'arid' environment, which will 'finally nourish none' (Theatre in Danger 91). Nowhere is this more poignantly illustrated in Mason's plays than in The Evening Paper (1953).

This play is dominated by Elfreda, an intelligent woman of monumental energy, who has been in a stable marriage for years with her mild-mannered husband, Ernest. Yet the suburban New Zealand environment only serves to confine the family. Their living room (which is described in the stage directions as 'oppressive') is filled with an 'appalling collection of useless bric-à-brac' which causes the room to appear 'over-stuffed and undersized' (1). The proliferation of objects which are of no practical use to the family symbolises a society where the acquisition of material wealth becomes a surrogate activity for physical and emotional satisfaction.

The characters who inhabit this environment, although decent enough human beings in their own right, are deeply unhappy and unfulfilled. The lives of the central married couple, for example, have deteriorated into a monotonous round of domestic routine within which communication has almost entirely broken down. The husband shuts himself away behind the evening paper, the stage prop which gives the play its title and which becomes symbolic of the emotional block between him and his wife. Mason himself describes his stage prop in these terms: '[T]his paper [. . .] is both a physical shield and a symbol of his need for protection' (Theatre in Danger 54).

The 'protection' Ernest seeks is from his wife. Though her name is Elfreda, Ernest calls her 'Freed' (The Evening Paper 3) and the nickname is deeply ironic because, rather than enjoying any kind of freedom, Elfreda is physically, spiritually and emotionally confined within a room and a marriage that is too restrictive for her needs. Her frustration is illustrated not only by her obsessive accumulation of junk, but also by an unnatural pent-up energy, which makes her habitual motor actions forceful to the point of violence. She charges round the

stage in an 'impatience with life' (2), her repressed anger expressing itself in relation to the objects which increasingly restrict her. When arranging flowers, for example, she 'grabs a vase too roughly; water spurts in her face. She [. . .] puts the vase on the open keyboard – jangle of keys – [. . .] jams flowers in' (3). As her husband retreats behind the paper she 'charges round the room' (2). Later she 'snatches' the cushion from under her husband as he is reading, 'pummels it' then 'throws it in the air, punches it as it descends, hurls it onto the chair' (5).

This portrait of emotional and physical deprivation in the midst of material plenty is repeated in Mason's other domestic plays. In Zero Inn, for example, the middle class couple Max and Sandra are affluent enough to build for themselves a holiday lodge on the edge of a lake. Even though the opening stage directions instruct that the house 'bristles and gleams with newness; the paint and varnish seem barely dry,' like the set of The Evening Paper it is already 'so stuffed [. . .] with assorted, unsorted **bric a brac** [. . .] that it looks as if the contents of a junk-shop had been emptied into it' (5).

Within this interior, the housewife Sandra, like Elfreda, expresses her frustration in her violent reactions. One of her first demonstrations of this is when she 'sprays the room with an imaginary machine gun' (11).⁴⁶ As in The Evening Paper, communications between the married couple have almost entirely broken down. Sandra tells her mother that she and her husband are no longer sleeping together (14). The play opens at midnight on Christmas Eve. Her husband, Max, is still roaring round the lake in his new motor launch and it appears that he intends to spend the night on his boat. Just as Elfreda abuses her husband at the beginning of The Evening Paper, calling him 'a great fat pig' (2), so Sandra, at the beginning of Zero Inn, is verbally aggressive towards her partner. In a 'sarcastic cooing voice' she calls to him, '[s]weet dreams, Max! Cold feet, Max! Merry Christmas, Max! Boil your head, Max' (14). Sandra's mother comments on the

⁴⁶ There are echoes here of Ibsen's 'Hedda Gabler,' who, confined within the household interior and frustrated in her marriage, likes to play with pistols.

violent negativity of both parties: '[Y]ou so coarse and fierce, and Max so angry' (11).⁴⁷

This repeatedly grim portrait of marriage in '*the garden*' is made even more contentious in The Bonds of Love when, later on in the play, Edna lays down the conditions on which she will return to her husband: 'I want to be left alone, Bert. I'll look after Josie [their child], cook your meals: keep the house as tidy as you like' (31). In exchange she consents to turn a blind eye to her husband's affairs: 'If I don't know about it, and he doesn't spend all our money on it, I shan't mind too much' (32). Bert, like other characters in Mason's domestic plays, views marriage not in terms of emotional or physical satisfaction, but in terms of physical security: '[A] man's got to settle down sometime, and get some regular meals in' (32). In response to his wife's suggestion that he seek sex outside marriage, 'BERT is suddenly hugely relieved. He sees a future full of exciting possibilities' (33).

Mason repeatedly contends that the greatest emotional and physical satisfaction is to be found not inside but outside conventional marriage. In his domestic plays marriage in '*the garden*' goes hand-in-hand with the affair and his characters often express double standards of morality in relation to this arrangement. Rather than resisting infidelity, they, like Bert in Mason's first play, often revel in its exciting possibilities. In Zero Inn Sandra openly exclaims, 'I want a great big beautiful screaming affair' (77). Implicit in Sandra's definition of the affair is the suggestion of sexual release and this is how this experience is viewed by others of Mason's characters. In Do Not Go Gentle Charlie tells his wife that he was faithful to her for only 'a few months' (36) after their marriage and he boasts, 'I must have made a hundred women happy! Simmering with joy' (52). In Virtuous Circle (1978)⁴⁸ Barbara, who is still in a marriage which has lasted for twenty-two years (4), recalls happily that 'twenty five minutes' after meeting her lover,

⁴⁷ There is an early draft of Zero Inn entitled 'Chance or A Chancy Business or A Game of Chance or The Chance of a Lifetime (Author's present favoured title)' (n.d.) in The Bruce Mason Papers.

⁴⁸ This play was originally entitled The Light Enlarging and was written in 1963. The script was then adjusted slightly and it was submitted as a radio play, but was rejected by William Austin on the grounds of immorality. It was submitted again in 1971 and was again rejected. The stage première, under the original title, took place in 1978 at the Company Theatre, Tauranga and was directed by the playwright.

Kevin, 'we were making love in the back seat of my V-dub' (4). The sexual excitement of this encounter is placed in direct contrast to Sandra's relationship with her husband. Later in the play she remarks upon the emotional deprivation in her marriage: 'I doubt if it's ever occurred to you [her husband] that I might have an emotion of any kind' (31). She next accuses her partner of treating her 'as if I were a piece of well worn furniture' (32).

The sexual satisfaction engendered by the affair is often signalled by the motif of classical music. Barbara in Virtuous Circle first becomes attracted to Kevin, who is an opera singer, when she hears him hit high C in performance (4). This play opens with a scene between Barbara and her lover, which begins with an aria from Puccini's La Bohème.

In 'Swan Song' (1987) the central character, Smithson, who is part-Māori, has been trapped in a long and loveless marriage. His description of his wife bears all the hallmarks of the physically 'sterile' and emotionally 'arid' environment of marriage in '*the garden*.' He describes his dead wife as 'the dullest, nastiest-minded, joy-quenching piece of deep-frozen coconut ice I've ever tried to take a bite out of' (The Healing Arch 170). Smithson is dying and he recalls his affair with an Italian opera singer as the highlight of his emotional and sexual life. Even though it lasted only six weeks, he remembers the experience in terms of sensual delight associated with the motif of classical music: 'Above all, song! The ecstasy of the blood and heart. The singing of my blood deafened me' (190). This relationship between Smithson and his lover was initiated by her performance of Tosca (187-188).

Mason's domestic plays, therefore, to use his own phraseology, juxtapose the 'reciprocating opposites' (Theatre In Danger 91) of conventional marriage within '*the garden*' and the affair in '*the wild*.' The Bonds of Love is unusual in that it awards these 'reciprocating opposites' a roughly equal weighting within the structure of the play. More habitually, Mason focuses his attention on '*the garden*.' Despite his persistent disapproval of its values, this appears to be the way of life he knows better. '*The wild*,' if it appears at all, is glimpsed only in passing and even then often in reported speech. In Zero Inn the affair that Sandra

craves never eventuates. In Do Not Go Gentle Charlie talks about his affairs but they do not form part of the action of the play and the same can be said of Smithson's affair in 'Swan Song'.⁴⁹ Only in Blood of the Lamb, Mason's last play, is '*the wild*' given persistent centre stage attention, though even then it is still counterpointed with damning descriptions of conventional marriage in '*the garden*.'

Blood of the Lamb is the first New Zealand play to place a lesbian relationship at the centre of the plot.⁵⁰ Eliza and 'Henry' Higginson have broken all the rules of conventional marriage that were in force at the time the play was written.⁵¹ Not only is theirs a 'marriage' between a same sex couple, but one of the partners has dressed throughout their physical relationship as a male and they have presumed to rear a child together.⁵² Even their daughter, Victoria, now in her twenties and living in Australia, is still unaware that the parent that she has regarded throughout her life as her father is, in fact, not only a woman but also her own birth mother.⁵³ Mason re-iterates in this play that the unconventional marriage in

⁴⁹ Dysfunctional families are a major thematic concern in Mason's oeuvre, but despite his characters' advocacy of the 'joy' (Do Not Go Gentle 52) of the affair, broken marriages are rare. The Evening Paper, Zero Inn and Virtuous Circle all progress towards a point where the central married couple attempt to resolve their differences. An exception to this is The Garlick Thrust (1982). In this play the dysfunctional family is again central to the plot, but in this case the wife has had an affair and has left her marriage to go and live with her lover in Australia. 'The Garlick Thrust' was screened by TVNZ as part of The Mason Trilogy. There is an earlier version of this play entitled The Rules of the Game (n.d.) in The Bruce Mason Papers.

⁵⁰ One of the first plays to focus on a lesbian couple was The Killing of Sister George by Frank Marcus, first produced in London in 1966. This play, like Blood of the Lamb, emphasizes the lesbian stereotype of 'butch' and 'femme.' According to theatre historians Marcus' play still 'maintains a fierce hold on the public imagination' (Griffiths and Woddis 239). The play was produced at Downstage in 1968.

⁵¹ Mason alludes here to George Bernard Shaw's play 'Pygmalion' in which the two central characters are Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins. These are the assumed names of the lesbian couple in Blood of the Lamb. Shaw himself is alluding to the Greek myth of Pygmalion who fell in love with a statue of a beautiful woman which, according to Ovid, he had sculpted himself. Aphrodite brought the statue to life and Pygmalion married his own creation (Harvey 355).

⁵² The idea for Blood of the Lamb came when Dr Mason told her husband of a post natal that she had just done, which was the only time she knew of that she had delivered a lesbian woman of her baby. When the couple came to the appointment one of the women was wearing man's clothing including winkle picker shoes. Her partner was holding the baby but the mother was the woman who was cross dressed (Personal Interview 17 Sept. 2001).

⁵³ In Mrs Potyomkin (1972 Bruce Mason Archive. Playmarket), a play written for radio, the central character, whose real name is Lydia Losonczy, also cross dresses. There is a detailed description of her unorthodox appearance in the script:

[S]hort and five foot nothing, slim and straight with rudimentary breasts: she had the flat-board shape of a boy. Long before they became fashionable, she wore tight-fitting black trousers, a jewelled bolero, and a tiny black top-hat, which sat on her like a blocked chimney, belching a great white frizz of unteased hair-smoke. She

'*the wild*' is the relationship which brings about the greater personal bonding and fulfilment.

As in others of Mason's domestic plays the 'reciprocating opposite' of conventional marriage within '*the garden*' is shown to be a confinement in which emotional and physical deprivation is perpetuated amidst surroundings of material plenty. In Blood of the Lamb the woman who calls herself 'Henry' Higginson was born Gladys Talbot and was once about to be married to Rodney, a wealthy sheep farmer's eldest son and heir to the family estate. 'Henry' delivers a series of searing monologues, which detail the gruesome circumstances of her courtship:

He [Rodney] stripped me to the waist in one imperial gesture, blouse-buttons flying, and clamped his mouth to my breasts like a gigantic suckling baby: they were raw and sore when I got home. [. . .] And when I walked in one night, really limp with it all, Dad looked at me and made that elbow gesture, so beloved of macho males – [. . .] I could have died of shame (57).

As in The Bonds of Love, sex in '*the garden*' becomes a brutal weapon wielded by the male in order to browbeat the female. The tacit approval among the males of a behaviour pattern of sexual violation illustrates yet again that within '*the garden*' the female is prostituted as a sex object.

Just before the day of their wedding, Rodney takes his bride-to-be out for a picnic on his father's farm. In a setting that identifies it as a literal representation of '*the garden*' – 'a little copse of English trees by a stream [. . .] landscaped to look like The Hay Wain by John Constable, even to the tumble-down cottage and a plaster horse between the shafts' (62) – Gladys finds a stray lamb with a broken leg which she takes into her arms. In response, Rodney performs a sacrificial ritual:

[He] tore it away from me, pulled a bowie knife from his back pocket and slit its throat. [. . .] [Then he] [. . .] tied it up by its hind legs to a

puffed on Sobranie cigarettes through a diamante-encrusted holder eight inches long (n. pag.).

This character is associated with the motif of classical music. Lydia is a fanatically dedicated classical violinist and there are persistent references to classical music throughout the script.

branch above our heads to drain its blood. And then, very slowly and menacingly, he took off his shirt and pants and boots and stood under it, while the blood dripped over his face and neck and back [. . .] blood dripping off the purple, veined and rampant prong jutting out of him, pulsing and throbbing there. [. . .] Then he said, very meanly, very quietly, ‘Okay, tight-twat: it’s Open Sesame time!’

I retreated, held up beseeching hands, said ‘No, no, no’ but he tore off my clothes and threw me on the grass, spread my legs and plunged in and out, in and out, roaring like a rutting bull (63).

This graphic description of a rape that takes place in a New Zealand landscape feigned to replicate an idealized image of the English countryside is one of Mason’s most damning indictments of the ‘inner margin’s’ mimicry of the Eurocentre. The association between the sacrificial lamb and the blood-dripping female is made graphically clear: ‘I screamed, screamed with pain; I was still a virgin; blood streamed out of me right down my legs and soaked the grass’ (63).

This connection is made even more explicit that same evening when Rodney ‘insisted, just insisted, despite my weakness and fatigue, that I attend the family dinner. [. . .] [b]ecause the lamb was to be served up to me in a fricassee, and he made bloody sure I knew’ (64). The suspicion that Rodney (who throughout, according to Gladys, has behaved ‘quite methodically’ (63)) is re-enacting a traditional sexual initiation of the female, is verified when at the dinner Sybil, Rodney’s mother, regards her future daughter-in-law with ‘knowing and sorrowful eyes’ (64).⁵⁴

The scene of the rape, where, as in The Pohutukawa Tree, the land owned by the Pakeha farmers has been manicured to replicate the English countryside, allies Rodney’s family with the Atkinsons and identifies them as inhabitants of ‘*the*

⁵⁴ Despite the groundbreaking nature of the subject matter of Blood of the Lamb Mason can be accused of creating flawed portraits of lesbians. Not only does he adhere to the lesbian stereotype of ‘butch’ and ‘femme,’ he also suggests that even after the horrific rape Gladys could still be attracted to Rodney. After the meal where the sacrificial lamb is served up to her as a ‘fricassee,’ Rodney has sex with Gladys ‘a couple more times,’ an experience which Gladys says she ‘rather enjoyed’ (64).

garden.'⁵⁵ The imagery surrounding the wedding in both plays identifies sex in conventional marriage as a blood sport. In The Pohutukawa Tree even the benign local doctor, in claiming the right to be the first to kiss the bride because he delivered her as a baby, identifies himself as the hunter male: '[F]irst blood to me. Now it's open slather. Be in, lads' (41). Claude Johnson, a close friend of the family, who has known the bride's parents from the time of their courtship, describes his presence as best man at their wedding a generation before also in terms of a blood sport: '[I]n at the kill!' (42). So, the association of sexuality with animal sacrifice and the association of the woman with that sacrifice is shown to be passed down through the generations.

In Blood of the Lamb, accordingly, the female inhabitants of '*the garden*,' trapped within the confines of conventional marriage, become synonymous with the blood-drained sacrificial lamb of the play's title. Sybil is described as being 'bone thin and all grey: grey dress, grey hair, grey face and an air of majestic ruin' (60). The pervading atmosphere of decay surrounding her is reminiscent of the portrait of Mrs Atkinson in "The Made Man." Likewise, Sybil's vulnerable, wasted image is mirrored in Gladys' remembered image of her own mother, herself from a wealthy farming family: '[A] sad, frail little wraith, a melancholy tendril that waves in my mind' (52). Gladys herself, on the day before the wedding, is 'deathly pale and walking slowly as a ghost' (73). These women are all victims of a pattern of sexual abuse. Gladys' own father, for example, in his young days, displayed exactly the same behaviour as Rodney, being 'a frantic, rip-roaring old tomcat, always out on the tiles' (52).

All this physical and emotional abuse is carried on within the environment of overpowering material plenitude, underlined in the text as Gladys lists her wedding presents: '[T]hree huge roomfuls of them, [. . .] three gigantic

⁵⁵ In the wedding scene in The Pohutukawa Tree Claude Johnson spells out how the English immigrants have attempted to turn New Zealand into a replica of their homeland:

This very land we're standing on was thick in virgin bush. It all had to be cleared by hand, cut down, burnt off. And when the land was cleared, it all had to be grassed: only tussock here, so the seed had to be brought from England – twelve thousand miles by sea – makes you think, doesn't it? And you know, in two generations, it looks like rolling English countryside (43).

chesterfield suites, five one-hundred piece dinner sets, an acre of silver plate and enough crystal goblets for the Waldorf-Astoria' (61).

Hand-in-hand with the images of material abundance, however, go images of death: 'Every room had its grisly parade of stuffed heads' (61). These two images are brought together again in Gladys' summation of her mother-in-law's home: '[S]omething between a castle and an abattoir' (61). Images of animal sacrifice re-surface once again in the description of the meals that are served up in the house: 'Vat upon vat of steaming meat [. . .] no greens at all, not even a wisp of lettuce' (61). In reaction to the atmosphere of the 'abattoir' the central characters become vegetarian.

It is significant to note that amid these images of sacrifice, abuse and death, the lesbian relationship initially develops, not from any natural inclination, but from the women's need to defend themselves against the continuing process of brutalization. Though they have been intimate friends since their childhood days, their relationship has always been 'totally innocent. Puppy love! A schoolgirl crush and a scent of violets' (54). Rodney's reaction to his new wife-to-be's desertion after the brutal rape – on the wedding night Gladys and Eliza connive to leave the celebrations and secretly drive away to Gisborne – is to pursue her to the refuge of her hotel room, kick down the door, grab her by the hair and try to strangle her. The only way that Eliza can stop the attack is to fabricate that she and Gladys are lovers. The description of Rodney's response to this possibility is of vital significance: 'All the blood drained from his face. Then a scratching, gagging sound, and he was sick all over the floor' (74). The repetition of the idiosyncratic verb 'gagging' and the reference to the draining of blood connects Rodney to the image of the lamb with the broken leg when he first cut its throat (63). The lesbian alternative is used as a retaliatory weapon, a means by which the victim can revenge herself by turning the tables on her attacker. In the short time it takes Rodney to stagger out of the room and down the stairs he has aged into 'a tottering old man' (75).

The unconventional 'marriage' between 'Henry' and Eliza therefore comes about as a direct result of the brutality of the conventional marriage within '*the garden.*'

The antidote takes the form of seeking alternatives to conventional heterosexual marriage. The healthier (and by implication more natural) alternative of unconventional marriage in *'the wild'* is asserted subtextually in the contrast between the profitable market garden which Eliza and 'Henry' now tend and the artificial and sterile folly of The Hay Wain in *'the garden'* where the brutal rape takes place.

Another unconventional 'marriage' is illustrated in The Evening Paper, which precedes Blood of the Lamb by almost twenty years. In this play Elfreda appears to be desperate to marry off her daughter, Winsome, to a suitable young man. She asks Philip, a distant cousin who has been living in England, round to dinner. At his first visit Philip appears to divine Elfreda's intentions as he likens the family home to a castle and Winsome to the fairy tale character of Rapunzel: 'The Kapok Castle. That's where you live, my fat Rapunzel. And your mother puts down the rope for the fairy prince: white silk, a blue sash and a four-course meal: that's the bait to lure them into your boudoir' (40). Things are by no means as they appear to be, however. Whilst seeming to encourage young men, Elfreda has in fact deliberately discouraged them, by dressing her daughter in grotesque clothes and serving gargantuan meals to suggest that Winsome has an eating disorder. Elfreda finally admits her true intent to her husband: 'Yes, I had young men meet her. No, they didn't come back. Perhaps I did help, to keep them away' (70-71).

In the controversial ending to this play Winsome admits that she hates men and makes her mother promise not to ask them to the house again (83). Men are, in fact, superfluous to both mother and daughter. The true bonding and fulfilment lies not between husband and wife but between mother and daughter. The dialogue concludes with the two women together in the kitchen and Winsome exclaiming 'Mum, I'm so happy' in response to her mother pronouncing 'gaily' '[m]en [. . .] they're pretty useless creatures' (84). As in other plays by Mason the unconventional 'marriage' is accompanied by the motif of classical music: '*The lights slowly fade*' to the '*swelling*' of '*the Sibelius Symphony*' (85).

Blood of the Lamb is Mason's only work in which *'the wild'* is given persistent centre stage attention and, accordingly, the whole play replicates a structure which

is derived from classical music. It is given an alternative title, Cosi Fan Poche and a subtitle, A Three Part Invention in Homage to W.A. Mozart.⁵⁶ Classical music is played throughout the play. Having run away together to a Utopian setting – ‘[a] sheer cliff, a bandage of white water unrolling down it; three basins, [. . .] the lowest at our feet, a perfect brimming bowl, its walls as smooth as alabaster’ (77)⁵⁷ – the central characters become lovers for the first time, an experience which Gladys later describes as ‘sheer, unutterable bliss’ (78). Before they make love the women bathe themselves, enacting a ritual baptism: the symbolic rejection of their former lifestyle and their initiation into ‘*the wild*.’ After this ‘baptism’ they break social barriers by espousing an alternative lifestyle, which includes one of the partners cross dressing so that they can live together as ‘man’ and wife, initially in a Māori village. At this point Gladys becomes ‘Henry,’ who describes their life in the village as one perfectly suited to both: ‘[T]he nights were soft and the work was *very* sweet’ (85). As in some of Mason’s other plays it is in ‘*the wild*’ that the characters find sexual fulfilment.

In response to Gladys and Eliza absenting themselves from the wedding celebrations, Mason yet again calls the so called ‘civilisation’ of ‘*the garden*’ into question. When the wedding guests suspect that the pair have become lovers (a

⁵⁶ The title of the play alludes to Mozart’s opera Cosi Fan Tutte which translates ‘thus do all women’ or ‘they all behave like this.’ Mason gives his play an alternative title Cosi Fan Poche, which means ‘thus do *some* women’ [my italics]. In his alternative title, therefore, Mason insists that the lesbian minority be recognized as an accepted part of society.

Dr Mason recalls that her husband particularly admired Mozart. She showed me his library and pointed out a collection of books relating to this composer, including a printed collection of all Mozart’s letters (Personal Interview 17 Sept. 2001).

David Dowling also details how Mozart has influenced the text of Blood of the Lamb: ‘The whole play is carefully structured on Mozart’s Cosi Fan Tutte, with reference to Mozart’s organ music (for the wedding), The Marriage of Figaro, and a possible “undiscovered opera by Mozart, written at the age of 2, Köchel . . . a half”’ (Dowling, Introducing Bruce Mason 35).

Mason’s own accomplishments as a classical pianist are referred to in ‘Et In Arcadia Ego’ first published in Landfall in 1955 and then re-worked into the second sequence of the solo performance piece ‘Not Christmas, But Guy Fawkes.’ In the latter account of his experiences in London as a twenty-two year old serviceman (Bruce Mason Solo 97) during the Second World War, Mason remembers being invited to the Churchill Club which ‘had started with the aim of introducing servicemen from overseas to the best in British culture’ (96). Mason recounts playing Chopin’s ‘Ballade in G Minor’ in the music room one morning, when a woman came in, sat beside him at the piano and began playing the treble an octave higher. He found himself looking at Myra Hess, who then spent the next half hour telling how he might improve (97).

⁵⁷ Dr Mason said that her husband incorporated into the script of Blood of the Lamb the location of a pool that the family used to bathe in which is located north of Gisborne and above the road that led to her nephew’s farm (Personal Interview 17 Sept. 2001).

false assumption at this point) they track down the two women and submit them to a grotesque ritual of rejection:

[F]orty, maybe fifty women rushed across the road and gathered round us like a rookery of vultures. [. . .] I had to leave Gladys for a moment [. . .] seconds later, Gladys was gone, drowning in them; then I saw her swim up and out, arms flailing. It was as if she were covered in gleaming lace. She stood there, trembling, her hair and arms and shoulders and back plastered in streams of saliva (76).⁵⁸

The inhabitants of the Māori village also in turn reject the couple when they find out that ‘Henry’ is pregnant, but although they declare that the women are ‘in a state of mortal sin’ and ‘from Hell’ (87), their reaction, by way of contrast, is by no means brutal. When ‘Henry’ goes into early labour, the ‘whare kohanga’ (nest house) is cleaned out, and although the midwife of the tribe will not touch a ‘tapu’ woman, she gives Eliza instructions on how to deliver the baby (88). Other reactions are even more accepting. Mohi, who first gave the women a lift in his truck and who takes them to the village in the first place, finds out their secret before anyone else. His reaction is to ‘just about bust a gut, laughing’ and to enquire saucily, ‘No wai te ure?’ which ‘Henry’ translates to her daughter to mean ‘who has the clarinet?’ (83).⁵⁹ In bringing together Māori and lesbian – two different representatives of ‘the outer margin’ – within this script, Mason once again insists that life lived in ‘*the wild*’ is the more civilised option.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Mason himself spelled out in detail how this scene alludes to a classical model, first by quoting from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and then by applying the quotation to his text:

‘When Dionysus invaded Thrace, Orpheus neglected to honour him and preached the evil of sacrificial murder (i.e. animal sacrifice) to the men of Thrace, who listened intently. In vexation Dionysus set the Maenads on him . . . It was also said that Orpheus preached homosexual love’ – Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Dionysus would surely be a bit ratty about his rites at Kirklees being wrecked, and would instruct the Maenads to do their worst (Dowling, *Introducing Bruce Mason* 35).

⁵⁹ Mohi actually asks who has the penis, which Henry translates euphemistically as ‘the clarinet.’ The reference to this particular musical instrument also underlines the allusion to Mozart’s opera because of the importance of the clarinet in the musical score: ‘One would not attempt to define the “musical physique” of *Così fan tutte* without drawing attention to the role played by the clarinets’ (Glock 3).

⁶⁰ I have already quoted Mason’s letter to John Pocock in which he refers to his short story *Genesis* as having ‘symbols and characters of a kind which Yeats might have approved’ to express ‘*the wild*’ (*Theatre in Danger* 48). In *Genesis* there is a reference to the title of Mason’s last play when Miss Effie asks the ‘Preacher’ if he will ‘wash’ the baby that she anticipates she will one day conceive ‘in the blood of the Lamb’ (268). Once again Mason’s subtext makes a plea for compassion towards life lived in ‘*the wild*.’ Miss Effie is intellectually handicapped and the child

Daphne and Chloe (1982), a television play which was screened as part of The Mason Trilogy, also has a lesbian theme.⁶¹ The plot focuses on the relationship between Edith and Daphne, two women in their forties who 'do everything together' (10) and who are rumoured to have a lesbian relationship, (though this is referred to in the script by the euphemism of being 'Lebanese' (28)). The women, in fact, are not lovers and Edith forms an infatuation with Kevin, a young man half her age. Daphne's furious reaction, however, indicates that there is an unconsummated sexual dimension in the relationship and after Kevin rejects Edith the friendship between the two women blossoms again. The play ends by suggesting that the pair become lovers. In a shot of the beach Daphne swims towards a buoy at sea. As her hand comes to rest on it 'another hand appears in the frame, on top of hers' (59).⁶²

There are clear similarities between the central relationship in this play and the same sex couple in Blood of the Lamb. The unconventional 'marriage' in both cases is accompanied by the motif of classical music which identifies it as a representation of '*the wild*.' The women in Daphne and Chloe meet at a concert (40), go frequently to concerts, and in the final shot of the play are seen together at a concert. As in Blood of the Lamb the sexual potential of their relationship remains latent for years. Also, as is the case with Gladys (who despite his defects had been attracted to Rodney (60)), it is suggested that one of the partners is bisexual.

Blood of the Lamb is atypical in Mason's oeuvre because in it a central character leaves a conventional lifestyle for a lover. The alternative lifestyle espoused by the lesbian couple is an unqualified success. After twenty-two years of what the daughter they have raised speaks of as a 'marriage' (77), they are still blissfully happy together. Despite remaining largely isolated from the community in which they have come to settle, they have become financially successful: 'We now own

that she does eventually conceive is illegitimate. The 'Preacher' that she speaks to is the father of her child.

⁶¹ Here Mason has adapted the Greek myth of Daphnis and Chloe to Daphne and Chloe, so the heterosexual romance becomes a same sex version of the story.

⁶² In a letter to Richard Corballis in May 1982 Mason defined Daphne and Chloe as 'a variation on Blood of the Lamb.'

[. . .] seven florists' shops [. . .]. We have eighteen people working for us! Our haul, net, for this fiscal year, was ninety-one thousand dollars' (38). Although their daughter is initially estranged from them, by the close of the play she is reconciled with her family and plans are being made for 'Henry' and Eliza to attend her wedding.

Blood of the Lamb, like "The Conch Shell," advocates that happiness is facilitated by acts of rebellion which involve the breaking down of social barriers and cross dressing.⁶³ Sexual ambiguity is built into Mason's portrait of '*the wild*.'⁶⁴ I have already indicated how representations of '*the other*' are dramatic masks for the playwright himself. Blood of the Lamb is no exception, as Mason himself verified: '[T]he play [. . .] is largely a metaphor for my own life' (Dowling, 'David Dowling Interviews Bruce Mason' 164).

Directly in statements such as these and indirectly by suggesting involvement through the motif of classical music, Mason, who was himself bisexual (Rebecca Mason Personal Interview 19 May 2006; George Webby Personal Interview 5 Nov. 2005), allies himself with the lifestyle of '*the wild*' and states persistently that it is not only the more civilized option, but the one most likely to result in personal happiness and fulfilment.

⁶³ Cross dressing is also the theme of 'The Glass Wig,' Mason's first short story to be published in Landfall in 1947. The narration centres around a Welshman, Gefyd Hughes nicknamed Taff, who has the misfortune to be born a completely hairless man, 'as smooth all over as a brass Buddha' (285). Taff has had 'a miserable childhood, mostly retreating from the thoughtless laughter that everywhere met him' (289). Serving in the male homosocial society of the navy in the Second World War, Taff finds a solution to his disability by donning a magnificent blond wig, from which the story takes its title. On top of this traditionally feminine garb, Taff places his navy cap 'like a little black wart' (287). As in "The Conch Shell" and Blood of the Lamb, cross dressing is an act of rebellion which facilitates bonding, for the glass wig and the controversy surrounding it cement the friendship between Taff and the narrator of the story. Mason writes this account in the first person, and references it with the date of 1942 (283). The autobiographical content is verified by Dr Mason who says that the character of Taff was based on someone whom Mason knew in the navy (Personal Interview 17 Sept. 2001).

⁶⁴ In the unpublished script of The Conch Shell which is housed in the J.C. Beaglehole Room there are stronger sexual overtones in the developing relationship between Ginger and the protagonist than in the other versions. After his dunking in the sea Ginger suggests that he should have his tormentor's dry clothes: 'You wear mine and I'll wear yours.' This suggestion is repeated in the same words in all three versions. In this script, however, the exchange takes place, Mason directs, with 'Ginger gazing at Ross's body with an expression of superior contempt Ross gazing at his, with envy' (18).

C: CONCLUSION

Mason was the first New Zealand playwright to produce a body of plays which persistently challenged the traditional relationship between the Eurocentre and 'the margin.' Due to the process of colonization, 'the margin' was considered at the time he was writing to be inferior to the dominant Eurocentre. In a book written for schools in 1973 Mason made it clear that he was acutely aware of this definition of 'the margin' when he referred to 'a prickling sense of inferiority when we placed ourselves beside the best [. . .] in Europe' and 'the argument that nothing we have to say can make any possible impact on the world at large because we are so insignificant' (New Zealand Drama: A Parade 51).

Throughout his lifetime Mason campaigned to convince his audience that New Zealand should not be dismissed, in his own word, as being 'insignificant.' In the same text Mason continues '[t]here is no inherent reason, none that I can think of, why insights from this part of the world should not be as valid and viable as from anywhere else' (51). In adopting this point of view he was the first New Zealand playwright to consistently insist on the affirmation of his own culture and so challenge the hegemony of the colonizing power.⁶⁵ Persuading his audiences to

⁶⁵ In 1960, when working as a theatre critic for the Dominion, Bruce Mason's challenge to the Eurocentre is evidenced in an incident which he called 'Peter and the Wolfit.' In January of that year, Sir Donald Wolfit, the famous English actor who had been knighted for his performances of Shakespeare, visited New Zealand as part of his world tour. In a review in the Dominion on 21 January, Mason acknowledged that Wolfit displayed 'the full range of the star actor' (Every Kind of Weather 81), but on 27 January he qualified his admiration by judging the performance as not 'wholly successful' because the company had 'failed' and not 'touched the imaginations of the audiences' (83). Outraged, Wolfit, in a private letter headed 'Strictly Private & Confidential' accused Mason of 'rudeness' (Letter to Bruce Mason 16 Feb. 1960). Mason, however, refused to back down. He had already suggested that he and Wolfit debate the issue of whether a critic had the right to an honest opinion in public and had proposed that the Concert Chamber of Wellington Town Hall might be a 'suitable' venue (Letter to Sir Donald Wolfit 7 Feb. 1960).

Sir Donald withdrew but the incident produced a furore of debate. An editorial written by 'M.H.H.' in the New Zealand Listener, however, supported Mason's stand, claiming that New Zealand criticism had 'suffered too long' from 'polite and anaemic writing,' that critics 'want[ed] to think and judge for themselves' and that it was now 'too late [. . .] to see this country as a place where simple inhabitants [. . .] welcome third-rate plays and casual productions' ('The Wasp in the Theatre' 10). 'Peter and the Wolfit' marks one of New Zealand's first theatrical challenges to the dominance of the Eurocentre.

Mason's rebellion, however, was not without its repercussions. Wolfit went to the Gisborne solicitors Gillanders, Scott and Wilson asking them to request that the Dominion 'publish no further matter upon our client's performance and allow the whole controversy to die' (Letter to the

reject 'The Kiwi Cringe,' however, proved to be an uphill struggle, which gives some indication of the Eurocentre's dominance. In an interview with McNaughton Mason commented on the reluctance of New Zealanders to take their own culture seriously: 'They weren't prepared to accept that local themes, local personages, could have a resonance [. . .] equivalent to that from overseas [. . .] we are nothing and elsewhere is everything' (McNaughton, 'The Plays of Bruce Mason' 103).

In his attempt to disabuse New Zealanders of the belief that 'we are nothing and elsewhere is everything' Mason's plays were set wherever possible in New Zealand and focused on local themes. For years he laboured, initially virtually alone, to establish a representative New Zealand 'voice' on the stage.⁶⁶ His dedication to this task prompted Mervyn Thompson to define him as 'the Sisyphus of New Zealand theatre, pushing his rock up thankless and resistant slopes in a lonely struggle' (*All My Lives* 117). As the boy in the flaxbush had suspected, the activity of writing caused the mature writer to be regarded with disapproval by many in the society in which he lived and ensured that he pursued his chosen 'Vocation' amidst a sense of loneliness. '[H]ow to reach them? How to cross the twenty feet or so of paspalum lawn and make them listen?' (*Bruce Mason Solo* 89) remained Mason's perpetual conundrum throughout his artistic career.

On the other hand, writing from the flaxbush, Mason placed himself both literally and symbolically on 'the margin' in relation to his own community, 'the inner margin' which so often mimicked the Eurocentre. This led him to identify with those on 'the outer margin' of New Zealand society. Mason's writing places

directors of the *Dominion* newspaper 20 Feb. 1960). When the *Dominion* did not print Mason's statement about the 'controversy,' Mason resigned from the paper (Letter to the Editor of the *Dominion* 25 Feb. 1960).

⁶⁶ One of the most successful playwrights in New Zealand at the time when Mason first began writing was Claude Evans, who wrote eight full length plays and whose work was often successfully produced by the Canterbury Repertory Society. Reviewing a printed anthology of Evans' work by the Pegasus Press in 1956, Mason remarks that the first four plays display 'The Kiwi Cringe':

[N]owhere is it evident from the texts that Mr Evans is living in New Zealand, nor that his plays have been presented to New Zealand audiences. I might remark that all his plays have been presented publicly in Christchurch. They are set in Hereford, London, near London, and China. With excursions into Buckinghamshire ('The Plays of Claude Evans' 43).

centre stage all of the groups identified by Homi Bhabha as constituting the traditionally 'oppressed' and 'silenced' representatives of the doubly marginalized: '[W]omen, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities' (936).⁶⁷

Even though it can be argued that his portraits of the doubly marginalized, especially of lesbians and Māori, are seriously flawed, nevertheless, Mason remains the first to give a range of minority groups (the indigene, the homosexual, the mad) prominent and serious 'voice' on the New Zealand stage. Despite the fact that his structures are derivative, his plays are of particular value in being the first to consistently place Māori-Pakeha relations at the centre of the plot and to insist upon their vital relevance to New Zealand society.⁶⁸ Mason expressed the strength of his point of view in one of his last interviews: 'The future of this country depends upon learning just about everything we can from the Maori people' (Paske 15). He is the first playwright to persistently define New Zealand as a bicultural society: 'In all my plays,' he emphasized, 'there's a Maori reference if I can get it in' ('David Dowling Interviews Bruce Mason' 165).⁶⁹ Significantly, Mason's mythical township bears a Māori placename.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ For the sake of this argument the phrase 'the bearers of policed sexualities' will be taken to refer to homosexuals as a whole, even though lesbian activity has never been a criminal offence in New Zealand.

⁶⁸ *The Pohutukawa Tree* was initially more warmly received in the Eurocentre than it was in New Zealand. Its second production was in Wales and its first professional production was by BBC-TV in 1959. Mason remarked in an interview that the play which was 'hugely successful' in the BBC production had been turned down by BCNZ because it was said to be 'too inflammatory' about race relations (Interview with Elizabeth Alley 12 Aug. 1981). Even at the time of its first production, there were those such as Peter Harcourt who reacted with relief and appreciation on hearing a New Zealand 'voice' on the stage: 'It was so distinctively "New Zealand" it marked a sharp move away from the influence of the "West End" type of theatre [...] there was about the characters a familiarity which produced an instant shock of recognition' (Dowling, *Introducing Bruce Mason* 25-26).

⁶⁹ The insistence Mason displayed in urging New Zealand to re-define itself as a bicultural society is illustrated in his response to the work of other New Zealand playwrights such as Roger Hall: 'My objection to Roger Hall as a *New Zealand* dramatist is this: I have found only one Maori reference in all four of his plays – when someone in *Prisoners of Mother England* gives someone else a present of paua jewellery' ('David Dowling Interviews Bruce Mason' 165).

⁷⁰ In a poem dedicated to Mason which he included in 'Passing Through' (Mervyn Thompson's one man show which became his 'swan song') Thompson recognizes that Mason mythologized both the landscape of Takapuna and the characters he drew from life. The poem was written when Thompson returned to Takapuna beach after Mason's death in 1982:

Beyond the power of words to pump it up.
 No Te Parenga here,

 Eccentrics there are none. Firpo's tragedy shrinks:

During Mason's lifetime, however, his attempts to convince his audience of the relevance of his portraits of a two-tiered margin in New Zealand often met with resistance and outrage. His contention that the representatives of 'the outer margin' (the likes of Aroha Mataira, 'Henry' Higginson and Firpo) are a superior breed led him to be especially damning of '*the garden*': 'the inner margin' of Eurocentric Pakeha middle class New Zealand. Unfortunately its denizens made up the majority of the theatre-going audience in the New Zealand of the time.⁷¹

Revolutionaries, however, are rarely popular and Mason's work was certainly revolutionary. In his account of theatre history in New Zealand, Peter Harcourt identifies 'the turning-point of the mid-1950s' (50). Harcourt does not attribute this watershed to any particular playwright, but it was surely due, to a large

Fifty years ago you stood here, in late innocence saw
Nights of riot building in the water's dark.
But as confusion came
And troubling weathers of the soul,
And your last sandcastle washed away,
Already you were sculpting in your mind
A fort of magic, a shield of images,
Stored up against the vanishings of time.

Larger-than-life, and truer,
The world you made
Than this I see on Takapuna Beach,
Half a scorching century away.

⁷¹ In a letter to the Evening Post written in 1965 Mason outlined the reaction to his early plays by the largely middle class Pakeha theatre-going audiences of the time:

My first play, *The Bonds of Love*, was greeted in 1951 by shrieks of rage, the most articulate and memorable of which described it in your columns as 'a bucketful of filth sloshed on the stage.' When *The Pohutukawa Tree* was given on BBC-TV in 1959, both Maoris and pakehas who saw the play in England wrote to the Minister of Internal Affairs, each protesting that it was an insult to their race, though how it could be both at once I find it difficult to know (Every Kind of Weather 123).

Similarly McNaughton records that when *The Bonds of Love* was awarded first prize at the annual B.D.L. Festival for one act plays in 1953, Mason was hissed by the audience (Bruce Mason 6). Writing to John Pocock Mason commented further on his reaction to the audiences of the time: 'I recall the baffled wonder of the Drama League audiences that such a beastly play could possibly be about them, and this was one of the effects I intended to produce' (Theatre in Danger 50-51).

Thomson judges the negative reaction to Mason's early work to be part of post-war New Zealand's reluctance to face up to the reality of their own society: 'The sleep of these people might be fretful, [. . .] but asleep they were, and the dramatist who, like Bruce Mason, attempted to shake them from their dreams was likely to be turned upon' (New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 27-28).

extent, to the life-long contribution of Mason, New Zealand's first professional playwright.⁷²

⁷² Towards the end of his life Mason's contribution to the literature of New Zealand was recognized. In 1979 he was awarded an honorary Doctorate in Literature from Victoria University of Wellington. In 1980 he was made a C.B.E. Professionally his work came to be increasingly produced. Birds in the Wilderness was put on by the Lyric Theatre in London in 1958. 'The End of the Golden Weather' was performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1963. On the home front The Bonds of Love won the B.D.L. Festival of one act plays in 1953 and Birds in the Wilderness won a national competition in 1958. The Evening Paper was the first New Zealand play to be televised by TVNZ and 'Awatea' opened to a full house at Wellington Town Hall and was again a hit, directed by Mervyn Thompson, during the Commonwealth Games in 1974 (Black, 'Bruce Mason's *Every Kind of Weather*' 85). Thompson's production of 'Awatea' provided Mason with one of his happiest experiences in the theatre. In a letter to Beryl Te Wiata Mason described the audience response: 'On the last night, I was called on stage, and made a brief speech in Maori to an entire house on its feet. The first time this has ever happened to me and very moving it was' (Every Kind of Weather 229). Mason went on to conclude: 'All I can say is that the first and last nights were two of the greatest in my life' (230). Towards the end of his career Mason wrote to Thompson of how warmly Blood of the Lamb had been received: 'Blood of the Lamb has been an absolute sell-out everywhere; they had to give extra performances in Dunedin, and three extra at Circa, and even these were jammed' (Letter to Mervyn Thompson 21 Oct. 1980).

Sebastian Black sums up Mason's achievements by defining him as 'a prolific and successful writer' ('Bruce Mason's *Every Kind of Weather*' 84).

CHAPTER 2

JAMES K. BAXTER: THE BOY IN THE CAVE

A: INTRODUCTION

James K. Baxter was born in 1926 so he and Bruce Mason were contemporaries, Mason being five years the senior. Baxter was born on a small farm at Kuri Bush, a small coastal settlement. When he was five the family moved north to the larger coastal settlement of Brighton (McKay, The Life 21-23) which is twenty kilometres south of Dunedin. As a writer, Baxter, like Mason, was profoundly influenced by the local New Zealand landscape in which he spent his childhood and adolescence, though in his case it was that of South Otago. Baxter, like Mason again, mythologizes this landscape in an oeuvre which is largely autobiographical. The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines ‘mythologize’ as to ‘[m]ake mythical; convert into myth or mythology.’ By using this term I mean that James K. Baxter ‘convert[ed]’ the South Otago landscape into a symbolic environment, which supported his own ‘set of beliefs.’¹

Baxter made up his mind early in life that his vocation was to become a writer, though in his case his choice of genre was initially poetry. By his own account he began writing at about the same age as Mason and produced his first poem when he was seven (‘Beginnings’ 237). In ‘Beginnings,’ an autobiographical essay, Baxter described the creative process he used from the beginning:

The first poem I wrote was no doubt significant, if not in its form or content, at least in the way I approached the writing of it. I climbed up to a hole in a bank in a hill above the sea, and there fell into the attitude of *listening* out of which poems may rise – not to the sound of the sea, but to the unheard sound of which poems are translations ...
[. . .] I don’t find that my methods of composition have changed much since that time (239).

¹ See page 12 above.

This description identifies three important characteristics, which remained seminal in Baxter's writing throughout his literary career. The first is the significance of the 'hole in a bank in a hill above the sea' as the breeding ground for his inspiration. The second is the distinctive local landscape which acts as a springboard for creativity. The third is Baxter's concept of the aesthetic nature of that creativity: as the translation of 'unheard sound' into words.

Although Baxter's parents both came from the Otago area that triggered their son's inspiration,² they were from very different family backgrounds and very different value systems. Baxter's mother's side of the family was prestigious, intellectual and middle class. His maternal grandfather, John Macmillan Brown, had emigrated to New Zealand with an Oxford degree and become the foundation professor of Classics, English and History at Canterbury College. Baxter's maternal grandmother, who also had a degree, was Principal of Christchurch Girls' High School when her daughter (Baxter's mother) was born (Oliver 10).

Baxter's father's family, by way of contrast, had a long tradition of self-education. His ancestors were Highland Scots who emigrated to Otago at the time of the gold rush and earned a living by physical labour (McKay, *The Life* 12). Baxter's father Archibald, known as Archie, was born in a sod cottage (5).³ In keeping with his family tradition, Archie left school before his teens to go out to work, and he and his six brothers were all casual farm labourers in their early working lives (6). Nevertheless, despite their relative lack of formal education, all of the Baxter brothers liked reading. Archie in particular was a literary-minded man, given to reciting romantic poetry (McKay, *The Life* 7; Oliver 7) and he also wrote poetry

² In 'Letter to Noel Ginn II,' written in 1948, Baxter writes that he mythologized the local landscape from an early age:

From the high window I can see the swells
 Roll in with their incessant cannonade
 Upon that shore where once, a lonely child, I made
 My own mythology of weeds and shells
 And dreamed I heard from the green water shade
 The pealing of sea drowned cathedral bells

(*Collected Poems* 72).

³ Archie's mother, Mary, was born in Glencrevan, Ballachulish in the Scottish Highlands in 1858. She married Archie's father, John, in New Zealand in 1879. After their marriage the couple settled in Brighton where their second son, Archie, was born in 1881 (McKay, *The Life* 5).

as well as prose. An unpublished novel, written by Archie and based on the adventures of his Gaelic-speaking ancestors when they first arrived in New Zealand, still survives in the Hocken Library.⁴

In his biography of Baxter, Frank McKay makes a significant comment on Baxter's attitude towards the conflicting values in his family heritage:

James always felt closer to the rugged, uneducated, working-class Baxters. Macmillan Brown represented for him a system of education, a puritan devotion to hard work and material advancement, conformity, and respectability. Against these he was increasingly to rebel (The Life 32).

McKay also emphasizes that, as a descendant on both sides of his family from the earliest waves of white settlement in New Zealand, 'Baxter was more conscious than most of his ancestors' (The Life 1).⁵ An essential component of Baxter's mythologizing of his own history and landscape was the claim that his forebears had emigrated to New Zealand with the intention of building a New Jerusalem, which he called the 'Just City,' an ideal which he believed had never eventuated:

The pioneering dream was of a Just City. If we suppose that this dream has been realised we condemn ourselves to the ultimate nonentity of false prophets. If we state the truth (that we now live in an Unjust City) we thus purge ourselves of a lie commonly held to be truth and begin to speak meaningfully (Recent Trends in New Zealand Poetry 16).

A fundamental theme in Baxter's plays is the loss of the New Zealand dream, which he represents as the 'Unjust City.' In stating that '[t]he pioneering dream'

⁴ The novel is an eighty-three page document in manuscript and is untitled (Novel by Archibald McColl Baxter. James K. Baxter Papers. Hocken Library). Baxter's father also published a memoir We Will Not Cease (1939) about his experiences as a conscientious objector in the First World War.

⁵ On Baxter's paternal side, his ancestor John Baxter came from the isle of Bute in the Western Highlands of Scotland and emigrated with his wife and three children on the *Lady Egidia*, which landed in Port Chalmers in 1861. On his maternal side, Baxter's great-grandfather Archibald McColl also came from the Western Highlands and emigrated with his wife and seven children on the *Alpine*, which landed in Port Chalmers in 1859. This Archibald's mother tongue was Gaelic and he never became fluent in English. Both the Baxter and the McColl families settled in Brighton (McKay, The Life 1-4).

had not been realized and that New Zealand society, had on the whole, become instead an 'Unjust City,' Baxter labels New Zealand as a place of failure rather than one of achievement,⁶ and sets out on a quest to restore the 'Just City' in his plays.

His first play, 'Jack Winter's Dream,' was written in 1956, and first produced on New Zealand radio in 1958. During the course of his literary career Baxter wrote twenty-two plays (McNaughton, 'Baxter as Dramatist' 184).⁷ In his Introduction to the published Collected Plays, the editor, Howard McNaughton, emphasizes Baxter's own view of himself as being primarily a poet: 'Baxter never stopped being a poet; he wrote poetry while he was working on plays'⁸ (xiii-xiv). Nevertheless, Baxter's plays form a substantial component of his oeuvre.⁹

To date these plays have been given scant critical attention. They are included in this thesis, however, because this playwright is one of the first New Zealand dramatists to reject the 'The Kiwi Cringe.' Baxter also created a two-tiered portrait of 'the margin.' In relation to 'the margin' of New Zealand as a whole Baxter, like Mason, set his plays wherever possible in the country of his birth. Thirteen of the fifteen plays in Collected Plays have New Zealand settings.¹⁰ Even when his subject matter does not allow this habitual practice, as in 'The

⁶ In this respect Baxter is a direct descendant of poets such as Curnow, Fairburn and Glover who were writing about New Zealand in a similar vein between 1935 and 1945.

⁷ Baxter's unpublished plays are not available to the public. They are held for the most part in the Hocken Library, Dunedin. This analysis of Baxter's plays will confine itself almost exclusively to the scripts included in Collected Plays. These scripts are 'Jack Winter's Dream,' 'The Wide Open Cage,' 'The First Wife,' 'Mr Brandywine Chooses a Gravestone,' 'Who Killed Sebastian,' 'Requiem for Sebastian,' 'The Hero,' 'The Sore-Footed Man,' 'The Bureaucrat,' 'The Devil and Mr Mulcahy,' 'The Starlight in Your Eyes,' 'The Temptations of Oedipus,' 'Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party' and 'The Day That Flanagan Died.'

⁸ Baxter's reputation was first established when he shot to fame with his first volume of poetry, Beyond the Palisade (1944), which was published when he was only eighteen. His second volume of poems, Blow, Wind of Fruitfulness (1948), established him as one of the leading poets of his generation. From the beginning, Baxter allied himself with the national movement that had been joined by other writers, such as the influential poet Allen Curnow.

⁹ Baxter acknowledged that Curnow's play 'The Axe' inspired him to become a playwright. After attending the première in 1948 he wrote to his mother that he had begun to write his first play (McNaughton, Introduction Collected Plays vii). This was the first reference to 'Jack Winter's Dream' which was produced on New Zealand radio eight years later.

¹⁰ 'The Sore-Footed Man' and 'The Temptations of Oedipus' are both versions of Sophocles' plays by Baxter. Accordingly, the former is set on the Greek island of Lemnos and the latter near the Greek city of Colonus.

Sore-Footed Man,' Baxter still manipulates his material to impose a New Zealand 'voice' on a classical text.

Both Baxter and Mason challenge the hegemony of the Eurocentre by regarding 'the margin' of their homeland as being synonymous with 'the Frontier.' I have already mentioned Margaret Atwood's use of this concept to encourage the development of a Canadian literary identity. In Atwood's interpretation 'the margin' then becomes not a place of limitation, but a place of 'new' possibility, where the 'hope [. . .] of Utopia, the perfect human society,' might be realized (31-32). I have also remarked that there are similarities between Canada and New Zealand in their respective struggles to identify a national 'voice.' Baxter's concept of the 'Just City' is another attempt to construct 'the perfect human society' that Atwood envisages in her interpretation of 'Utopia.'

Both Baxter and Mason focused their 'hope' of achieving 'the perfect human society' (or at least a better society) by promoting the merits of the doubly marginalized. The similarities in their respective aims led them to select similar subject matter in their dramatic explorations of 'the outer margin' of minority groups. There was, however, one significant difference. Baxter's conversion to Catholicism made him the first New Zealand playwright to articulate consistently a Catholic minority viewpoint, which placed him on another 'outer margin,' New Zealand being a predominantly Protestant society.

Baxter's oeuvre, like Mason's, is founded on autobiography as McKay confirms: 'The best account of Baxter's life is the one he gave himself [. . .] for his poetry was always autobiographical' (The Life 290). Differing autobiographical influences, however, caused some variation in their respective foci. Baxter's predilection for the values and traditions of his father's side of the family meant that his primary interest lay in male homosocial groups. I will argue that the reason for his misogyny is to be found in his Oedipal anxiety.

B: THE POETIC CAVE

Christopher Parr (7-10), Charles Doyle (47-50) and Vincent O'Sullivan (4, 7-10) have discussed the vital importance of the metaphor of the cave or, to use Baxter's terminology, the 'hole in a bank in a hill above the sea,' in the work of Baxter the poet. McKay also remarks upon the influence of such locations on Baxter's early life: 'James had a real fascination for entering caves and holes in the ground. Later he would draw on this childhood experience for the poem 'The Cave' (The Life 29). At the Baxter Conference held at the University of Otago in August 1994, Lloyd Godman, then Lecturer in Charge of Photography at the School of Art at Otago Polytechnic, included a "Composite Print from the inside of the Cave on Big Rock" as the first of his selection of six key images that make up his 'Homage to Baxter' (97).¹¹

Baxter wrote two key poems about a cave location situated close to his home town of Brighton. The first, written in 1948, was 'The Cave' (Collected Poems 69); the second, 'The Hollow Place,' is thought to have been composed in 1962 (251-2).¹² Despite being written fourteen years apart, both poems convey the significance of the central metaphor which is common to both.

This central metaphor of the cave, which is also 'a hole in a bank,' lends itself to a Freudian analysis. Doyle (48) and O'Sullivan acknowledge this as a possible way of interpreting these two poems. O'Sullivan in particular recognises that this is an obvious line of enquiry: '[T]o write on the chance exploration of a cave can

¹¹ Lloyd Godman accompanies this image with Baxter's description of his creative process from 'Beginnings.' He identifies the location in the photograph as Baxter's autobiographical cave. Godman's version of the text, however, is slightly different from Baxter's original: 'I climbed up to a hole in a bank in a hill above the sea, and there fell into the attitude of listening (sic) out of which poems may arise (sic)' (97).

In 'Inscription' which prefaces J.E. Weir's edition of Baxter's Collected Poems the poet also refers to a cave location:

Within that land there is a range,
And on that range there is a cone,
And on that cone there is a rock,
And in that rock there is a cave,
And in that cave there is a stone,
And on that stone I carved my name.

(Collected Poems 1).

¹² All the dates of Baxter's poems are derived from Weir's suggested dates of composition in Collected Poems.

hardly avoid some kind of Freudian address, by which usually we mean that the poem will be read, at least in part, as a sexual allegory' (8). O'Sullivan is referring in this case to 'The Cave,' but the same may be said of 'The Hollow Place,' which explores similar subject matter.

In both poems the cave may be regarded as a womb. The cave's actual location in 'The Cave' is described in the first phrase of the poem as '[i]n a hollow of the fields' (Collected Poems 69) and in 'The Hollow Place' the cave is entered by means of a 'passage' that is 'long' (251). The cave is then further allied to the female by allusion: in 'The Cave' it is a 'crevice' that 'leads' the poet 'to the sunless kingdom/Where souls endure the ache of Proserpine' (69).

McKay (The Life 198), W.H. Oliver (43), O'Sullivan (27), Parr (4), Doyle (126-128) and Tara Hawes (42) have all noted Baxter's preoccupation with death and the association with sex.¹³ In 'The Hollow Place,' for example, the atmosphere of the actual cave which becomes the metaphorical womb is described as 'dark and cool' (251). In 'The Cave' these two adjectives are implied again as the cave is described as the 'sunless kingdom' (69), a phrase which in Greek denoted the Underworld, also known as the House of Death.¹⁴

At the same time the choice of the verb 'ache' associates this 'sunless kingdom' with the female womb and the sensation of sexual desire. This idea is reinforced again in 'The Hollow Place' when the poem concludes with the poet 'crying out: "Open, mother. Open. Let me in."' Implicit in the imagery is the suggestion that the desired entry is phallic. The poet attempts to enter through the '[d]oor' by means of 'a dry stick' (252). If we extend the phallic interpretation, earlier in the poem the poet's sexual potency has been affirmed when he claims that he has

¹³ The association of sex and death goes back to the English poetic tradition of the late 16th Century, in the work of poets such as John Donne.

¹⁴ A.R.D. Fairburn, who '[a]t the time of his death [. . .] was widely regarded as New Zealand's foremost poet' (Mac Jackson, Introduction 12), wrote a poem called 'The Cave' in 1943 which precedes Baxter's poem by five years. Fairburn at first seems to take a similar approach to Baxter; the cave is spoken of as 'the hole' and 'the secret place' which is the 'sole emblem of mystery and death.' In the end, however, it is a place where two lovers consummate their passion and the act of lovemaking ('the brief eternity of the flesh') becomes a regenerative force: '[W]hatever dies or changes this will persist and recur' (Fairburn 104-105). Fairburn's poem, therefore, develops into a very different poem from Baxter's.

stood '[a]live in the hollow place' (251). The womb of the cave now becomes the source where erection is both stimulated and destroyed as the potent penis withers to 'a dry stick' (252).

Doyle briefly acknowledges the possibility of an Oedipal element in Baxter's poetry (124-125). In his biography of Baxter, however, Oliver is much more explicit on the subject and Janet Wilson, in her paper delivered at the Baxter conference in 1994, is adamant about the importance of this element in the development of Baxter's psyche (58). Both 'The Cave' and 'The Hollow Place' can thus be seen as metaphorical expressions of Oedipal anxiety. If we now relate this idea to incidents from Baxter's childhood, this interpretation appears to carry some weight.

Oliver identifies Baxter's mother as 'the awakener of sexual awareness' (28) in her son, reinforcing his argument by drawing attention to lines from his poem 'At Serrières,' written in 1962:

Through a chink in the bedclothes, watching my mother dressing:
The heavy thighs, the black bush of hair
(Collected Poems 250)

In both 'The Cave' and 'The Hollow Place' the metaphorical womb is associated with imagery suggestive of pubic hair. In the former poem it takes the form of a tree 'whose roots are bound about the stones' and which 'hides well that crevice at the base,' while in the latter the interior of the cave is associated with 'demon' thoughts of 'the black knot in the thighs.' The connotations of both these passages associate the central metaphor of the cave with the early memory of the mother.

Baxter himself appears to have been aware of his Oedipal predicament.¹⁵ Oliver quotes from a sestina which Baxter wrote for his mother: '*He [Baxter] has no*

¹⁵ Frank McKay points out that Baxter was well versed in psychological theory: 'Psychology fascinated Baxter. He was reading [when he first went to university] [. . .] texts of Freud, Jung, and Adler, not in potted versions, but in full. He knew them well enough to be able to argue with the lecturers over their interpretations' (The Life 72).

house but in his mother's womb [Oliver's italics] (40). Baxter expanded further on what appears to have been a central unresolved conflict in his life in his famous poem 'The Homecoming,' which he wrote in 1952 (Collected Poems 121).

In this poem the son, who has 'come home, to the gully farm' shaded by a 'macrocarpa windbreak' (an accurate description of the small farm at Kuri Bush where Baxter spent his early childhood) confronts a mother who threatens to consume him. Her 'love demanding all' is insatiable and fathomless, 'sea-dark and contentless' and excludes any other lasting female commitment from his life: 'She counts it natural that he should never marry.' Moreover, she seeks to fossilize his development at the foetal stage and to cut him off from all other outside influences:

Still she would wish to carry
Him folded within her, shut from the wild and many
Voices of life's combat, in the cage of beginning.

Her son, in response, is equally attracted and resistant to the womb, 'the cage of beginning,' which offers nurture but also entrapment. In the end, however, his will is subdued by hers: '[H]e – rebels; and yields/To the old covenant.'¹⁶ The dash indicates an initial reluctance. Though they are locked in a battle of wills, the fight to the death between the two is never verbally acknowledged. They speak instead in superficialities, the son listening to his mother 'complain of the south weather/That wrings her joints.' Yet all the time he is acutely aware that the contest between them is as enduring and potentially deadly as the most famous battles ever fought in the outside world: he describes his stay with his mother as '[t]he siege more long and terrible than Troy's.' The reference is to an enduring and terrible conflict that was caused by a woman who had aroused sexual desire.

In Baxter's play 'The Temptations of Oedipus' which is an adaptation of Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus, Baxter gives a loose translation of the speech by Oedipus which gave Freud the idea for the Oedipus complex:

When Jocasta – your mother and mine as well – was in my arms she was like any other woman. Her breath was sometimes foul and sometimes sweet. [. . .] Every boy has killed his father and slept with his mother before he is fifteen. 'Ah,' they will say, 'but that is only a dream. You, Oedipus, did what others dream of' (Collected Plays 232).

¹⁶ The choice of the Biblical term 'covenant' invests the relationship with religious dimensions.

The connection with the Trojan War is deepened further as the narrator describes the emotions of the Greek hero Odysseus, come home to his wife Penelope.¹⁷ This allusion deftly implies that what was the mother figure is now synonymous with the wife.

The almost unbearable tension between the son and the mother-wife in 'The Homecoming' is repeated in the semi-autobiographical novel Horse, in which Baxter, in the eponymous central character of the title, once again links the mother with the phallus:

Horse and his mother loved each other. The misunderstanding between them, more profound than any communication, stretched right back to the cotton wool and enemas and foreskin-clipping doctors of a Karitane nursing home (7).

Perhaps part of this 'misunderstanding' is an incident which Oliver records, in which the six-year-old Baxter was caught by his mother Millicent, as he, his cousin and another little girl were showing each other their bottoms. Oliver records Millicent's outraged reaction: '[S]houting his [James'] name, anxious and angry.' The lasting impression that all this made on her son was, in his own words, that 'God and all his bulldozers were on the march [. . .] the fear . . . was, quite honestly, the most extreme I have ever felt' (28).

Millicent's extreme response is indicative of the sexual taboo that pervaded the Calvinist religion in which Baxter was raised. In 'Beginnings,' Baxter writes: 'All the pressures were on me at this time to accept the Calvinist ethos [. . .] work is good; sex is evil;' (240). Both Oliver (28) and Wilson (51) quote from 'A Family Photograph 1939,' written in 1961, to highlight the image of the castrating mother:

My mother in the kitchen sunshine
Tightens her dressing gown,
Chops up carrots, onions, leeks,

¹⁷ At the same time Baxter imposes New Zealand history on the classical narrative. In a poem written in 1952, the hero, returning home after a long and bloody conflict, can be readily interpreted as a returned serviceman of the Second World War. I am grateful to one of my co-supervisors Dr William Broughton for this idea.

For thick hot winter soup (Collected Poems 237).

This is a more extreme version of the mother associated with 'foreskin-clipping' in Horse.

The complex image implicitly establishes the mother as guardian of the 'Calvinist ethos.' As she '[t]ightens her dressing gown' about her and '[c]hops' up the vegetables that reproduce the shape of the erect phallus, she advocates not only that 'sex is evil' but that the way to banish it from thought is by the adoption of a rigorous work ethic. At the same time the 'thick winter soup' she is so assiduously preparing is like the 'meals' the mother 'will cook' for the returned son of 'The Homecoming' – a means by which to bind him to her. The mother figure is the dominant female presence who bonds by physical nurture and arouses but then denies sexuality. The sexual arouser remains inexorably fused with the castrator in the image of the just-risen mother in the dressing gown wielding the kitchen knife.

All this evidence serves to confirm Wilson's conclusion: '[T]he oedipal (sic) conflict between mother and son, which Baxter recognised, struggled with in various guises, but never resolved, was central to his artistic makeup and a pervasive influence on his life' (48). These 'various guises' of the central Oedipal conflict, which are expressed in the poems, also provide the key to the understanding of Baxter the dramatist.

C: THE DRAMATIC CAVE

Baxter's poems illustrate the importance of the 'hole in a bank in a hill above the sea' ('Beginnings' 239) as the breeding ground for creativity. Two poems, 'The Cave' and 'The Hollow Place,' reflect the importance of this seminal image. The same technique is found in his plays, a notable example being 'The Sore-Footed Man' (1967), which provides a very significant link between the imagery of the poems and the playscripts and confirms that Baxter's thematic concerns remain very similar in both genres. My aim in pursuing this link is to establish that Baxter's Oedipal predicament is fundamental to his view of society and in particular to his attitude towards conventional marriage.

The writing of 'The Sore-Footed Man' came about when Baxter went to Dunedin in 1966 to take up the Robert Burns Fellowship and met Patric Carey. Carey and his wife had built a small theatre in their house in London Street which they named The Globe.¹⁸ Baxter was persuaded by Carey to write original scripts for this theatre and the two formed a close working relationship and became firm friends.¹⁹ The first of Baxter's plays performed at The Globe was 'The Band

¹⁸ David Carnegie notes that The Globe had 'an influence on Dunedin Theatre (sic) out of all proportion to the small numbers of people who went to see the plays' (15). In 1958 Rosalie and Patric Carey started an alternative to the Dunedin Repertory Society by producing plays in churches, halls and gardens. One of these was a new translation of Aeschylus' 'Oresteia.' By 1959 they were producing Beckett, Ionesco and Genet in the living room of their Victorian home. With the help of volunteer labour the Careys then built a theatre in their house (16). Carnegie notes the impressive list of playwrights whose work was produced at The Globe: 'Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Webster, Molière, Turgenev, Ibsen, Strindberg, Shaw, Chekhov, O'Casey, Lorca, Sartre, Beckett, Saroyan, Genet, Ionesco, Williams, Albee, Pinter, Wesker' (17). Baxter's 'The Band Rotunda' was the hundredth play to be staged at The Globe (18). This was followed by 'The Sore-Footed Man' (1967), 'The Bureaucrat' (1967), 'The Devil and Mr Mulcahy' (1967), 'Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party' (1968), 'The Day That Flanagan Died' (1969) and 'The Temptations of Oedipus' (1970). Two other plays that Baxter wrote during this time were put on at other venues, The Spots of the Leopard (1967) at Downstage directed by Richard Campion and 'The Starlight in Your Eyes' (1967) at Otago University directed by John Casserley.

¹⁹ In one of his rare interviews, given in 1969, Baxter described The Globe as a venue that was 'just about ideal' for his plays and at the same time emphasized that the purpose of his playwriting was to educate his audience:

I couldn't be bothered just to write for entertainment because that means you are giving them back the frame of reality they already have with a little twist at the end just to cheer them up. I don't want to cheer them up. I want to make them less despairing. That, in a sense, would be the moral issue: when you make sense of life you despair less (Baysting 9).

Rotunda' (1967), which is set in New Zealand.²⁰ Baxter wanted to go on writing drama but expressed a concern to Carey that he needed structures, plots and themes to work with. His friend suggested that he solve the problem as T.S. Eliot had done by going back to the Greeks, and he lent Baxter some copies of Greek plays to help him do this (McKay, The Life 229). One of the results was 'The Sore-Footed Man,' which was produced at The Globe in the same year as 'The Band Rotunda.'

'The Sore-Footed Man' is Baxter's adaptation of 'Philoctetes' by Sophocles. Both texts focus on the hero of the title, who, according to Greek legend, was abandoned by Odysseus on the remote and uninhabited island of Lemnos after he had been bitten by a snake and the wound would not heal. Odysseus and the rest of the Greek army then sailed away to fight the Trojan War. Both the Sophocles play and Baxter's adaptation commence at the point where Odysseus has returned to Lemnos after an absence of ten years to rescue Philoctetes. He comes back because it has been prophesied that the Greeks can win the Trojan War only with the help of Philoctetes and his bow, which was given to him by Heracles.

There is evidence to suggest that from the play's inception both Carey and Baxter were thinking about the relevance of the classical Greek text to contemporary New Zealand. McKay records that Baxter and Carey would go into a coffee shop in Dunedin and spend hours there, discussing what New Zealand society had in common with the Athens of Sophocles (The Life 231). Like Mason, Baxter found that there were times when his subject matter did not readily lend itself to a New Zealand setting.²¹ Even when this was the case, however, Baxter was at pains to imbue his scripts with a distinctive 'kiwi' flavour.

²⁰ Rosalie Carey records that Baxter's plays like Mason's produced an outraged reaction in traditional theatre-going audiences: 'Because of Baxter's colourful language and down-to-earth characters many of the older members were angered by *The Band Rotunda*, and indeed by all Baxter's plays that were to follow.' She adds that some of The Globe's habitual audience even threatened to withdraw their support: 'One august matron vowed, "If you do any more of those nasty Baxter plays I shall cancel my membership!"' Patric Carey, however, was stalwart in his support of Baxter the playwright: he replied, 'I shall do all the plays Baxter likes to give me' (90).

²¹ There were times when Bruce Mason's subject matter necessitated an overseas setting. The Waters of Silence is a case in point. Another is the solo performance piece 'To Russia, With Love,' which is set in the U.S.S.R. and based on autobiographical experience. David Dowling records that Mason was sent as part of a 'three-man cultural delegation' to the U.S.S.R. where he met "Igor," a dissident – the germ for *To Russia, With Love* (Introducing Bruce Mason 47).

This produced a curiously hybrid text. The sailors in the Greek army led by Odysseus in 'The Sore-Footed Man,' for example, blend Greek costumes with the New Zealand vernacular.²² One such Greek, speaking as an 'average kiwi joker,' comments that his comrade's mother 'runs a mollshop in Syracuse' (136).²³ The sailors also display the anti-establishment attitude associated with the New Zealand 'tall poppy syndrome': 'I don't like the nobs. They get more than their share of the wine – more than their share of the loot – and a bloody sight more than their share of the women!' (149).²⁴ The 'nobs' that are referred to here are the heroes of Sophocles. In Baxter these supermen are cut down to size and humanized; Odysseus has 'got too fat' (130) to climb up the steep cliff face to the cave of Philoctetes and the Trojan hero Hector is dismissed as 'a most crashing bore' (151).

'The Sore-Footed Man,' like 'The Homecoming,' is set at the time of the Trojan War, which Baxter then transports into a New Zealand context. One of the men in Odysseus' army, for example, describes the return of the Greeks to the Trojan plain in terms that suggest the fighting conditions of the First World War: 'Back to Troy [. . .]. Back in the trenches' (149). Twentieth century warfare is incongruously grafted onto a battleground of the Ancient World. Baxter likewise adapts the setting of 'Philoctetes' to suggest a New Zealand location. Sophocles' play takes place on the island of Lemnos, which in Baxter's version becomes '*[a]n island coast*' (129) making it feasible to interpret it as a New Zealand coastline.²⁵ All this amounts to strong indications that Baxter has adapted the Greek myth to represent 'the margin' of New Zealand.

There is also a journal that Mason kept of this visit, which is housed in the J.C.Beaglehole Room at Victoria University of Wellington Library.

²² It could be argued, however, that to impose a contemporary vernacular on an historical play is a dramatic technique that is at least as old as Shakespeare.

²³ Mason recognized the 'kiwi' element in the script. When he played Odysseus at the Victoria University of Wellington James K. Baxter Festival 1973, he gave him a 'caricatured' New Zealand accent (Corballis, E-mail to the author).

²⁴ In the New Zealand of the 1960s the drinking of wine would ally the sailors more to the Greek than to the New Zealand component of the hybrid.

²⁵ Baxter's poetry also transposes the Ancient World on to the New Zealand landscape. 'Wild Bees,' for example, likens the New Zealand experience to events in Carthage, Rome and Troy (Collected Poems 82-83). Similarly, the poet R.A.K.Mason, born in 1905, imposes the mythology of the Eurocentre onto the New Zealand situation. In 'On the Swag' he likens a swagman to Christ (Collected Poems 56) and in 'Vengeance of Venus' a woman is compared to the goddess of the

In other more important ways, too, Baxter transformed Sophocles' script to represent his view of society. I have already noted McKay's comments on the autobiographical nature of Baxter's poetry (The Life 290). In O'Sullivan's opinion the autobiographical influences extend even further. He writes, '[t]here is no period of Baxter's life, and no important event,' which is not 'already there in published poems, plays and essays' (4-5). It is hardly surprising, then, that 'The Sore-Footed Man' can be interpreted as another expression of Baxter's Oedipal predicament.

In the original text, during the time of his exile Philoctetes has made his home in a cave, the characteristics of which bear a striking resemblance to the autobiographical cave of Baxter's poetry. The cave in 'Philoctetes' is situated up a steep cliff face facing the sea. In 'The Hollow Place,' the cave which inspired Baxter's poems is likewise 'above the plunging sea' (Collected Poems 251). Sophocles includes a very specific description of the home of Philoctetes in his script:

[A] cave with two mouths.

There are two niches to rest in, one in the sun
when it is cold, the other in a tunnelled passage
through which the breezes blow in summertime (Grene 195).

This location is reproduced in Baxter's version: the home of Philoctetes becomes 'a cave with a double entrance' (Collected Plays 130). Baxter's cave on the coastline of South Otago also had a double entrance and the similarity between this cave and the one described by Sophocles may well have been what first attracted him to this particular Greek play.

In both texts Philoctetes has been abandoned by his comrades because he has been bitten on the ankle with a snake wound which will not heal, but there are significant differences in the circumstances surrounding the two bites. In the Introduction to his version of the script, David Grene draws attention to the fact

title and a parallel is drawn between the situation of the poet and 'Paphos of old' (89). This is an allusion to the myth that Aphrodite landed at Paphos in Cyprus after she was born from the sea (Harvey 129). Like Baxter, R.A.K. Mason combines New Zealand colloquial expression with allusion to produce a hybrid text.

that the misfortune of Philoctetes' wound would have been 'an accident' brought about because '[h]e had unconsciously stumbled into the precincts or shrine of a God' which 'was probably an unmarked and unfenced place' (191).

In marked contrast, Baxter's version has Philoctetes say that because he has 'always been a religious man' (Baxter himself was by this time a 'religious man') he *deliberately* 'paid a visit to the shrine of the goddess Chryse' (Collected Plays 140). This shrine is in yet another cave on Baxter's island, which is clearly marked 'with the sign of the goddess above it [. . .] the round eye painted on the rock' (137). In Sophocles the snake bite does not even happen on Lemnos. Philoctetes says in the original script: 'I was already bitten when we put in here/on my way from sea-encircled Chryse' (Greene 206). In Baxter's version, however, Philoctetes confirms that the incident happened on 'this island' (Collected Plays 140). So the 'sea-encircled' island of Chryse in Sophocles is changed into the goddess Chryse whose shrine is a cave on '*[a]n island coast*' in Baxter.

In Baxter's adaptation the circumstances of the snake bite are obsessively returned to by three different characters: firstly by Odysseus (129), next by the Third Sailor (137) and thirdly by Philoctetes himself (140). In each account the associations of the wound with the female are insisted on and expanded upon. The most detailed account of the event is by one of the sailors, who accompanied Philoctetes when he first arrived on the island. This sailor remembers that when Philoctetes came to the shrine and saw the mark of the goddess upon it his initial fear was overcome – he 'didn't run' – because of the presence of an attractive woman: '[T]here was a woman standing at the door of the cave. She smiled at him with eyes like a snake. [. . .] He followed her into the shrine – and crack! The guardian of the shrine bit him on the ankle' (137).

Earlier in the conversation, another of the sailors says that when he first landed on Lemnos he was attracted to a girl who also 'had eyes like a snake' (not the same girl as the priestess who stood 'at the door of the cave') and this sailor then interprets the girl's thoughts of him to his mates: 'Fresh blood! You come into my burrow, sailorman, and I'll wrap myself around you and suck the juice right out of your liver' (136-137). Later in the conversation the sailor once again

speculates on the nature of this girl with 'eyes like a snake': '[M]aybe she has a goddess – a snake goddess, a small one – sitting just behind her navel' (138).

The protagonist in 'Philoctetes' has been marooned on an uninhabited island:

[T]his Lemnos and its beach
down to the sea that quite surrounds it; desolate,
no one sets foot on it; there are no houses (Greene 195)

so there are no females in the Sophocles play. Baxter's island, on the contrary, is inhabited by females of all kinds, who, by their association with the imagery of the snake, are all linked to the blood-sucking reptile who inflicts the grievous wound. Thus the goddess, her priestess and all women who are sexually attractive become interchangeable. Furthermore, it is important to note that the 'snake goddess,' according to the sailor, is housed in the womb 'just behind [. . .] [the] navel' of the female: yet another representation of the 'cave/womb' that assumes such resonance in Baxter's poetry.²⁶

In 'The Sore-Footed Man' Odysseus sums up the nature of Philoctetes' affliction in terms that can be interpreted as an expression of Oedipal anxiety: 'An ordinary wound would have healed up – or else he'd have died of it – but this one neither healed up nor did it finish him off – it just kept him in a state of agony' (129).²⁷

The Macmillan Browns were Calvinists and Baxter associates this religion with his mother. It could be argued that Baxter's version of 'Philoctetes' is overlain with connotations of The Fall. If this line of argument is taken further, then the 'wound' that will not heal becomes the metaphorical expression of the Oedipal predicament, which is in turn connected with images of the loss of innocence in

²⁶ Kai Jensen emphasizes the influence of Jung in Baxter's writing and quotes from Jung's *Dreams* in support of his argument:

A man's unconscious is . . . feminine and is personified by the anima. The anima also stands for the 'inferior' function and for that reason frequently has a shady character; in fact she sometimes stands for evil itself . . . She is the dark and dreaded maternal womb, which is of an essentially ambivalent nature (214).

This idea does seem to be reflected in the connotations surrounding the female womb in Baxter's writing.

²⁷ 'The Sore-Footed Man' was preceded by a mime entitled 'The Woman' when it was first performed at The Globe in 1967. In it 'The Woman' of the title is represented by a tailor's dummy. When a man, the only actor in the mime, 'kneels in front of it' and 'makes movements of religious supplication' 'encircling' the dummy 'with his arms and kissing it,' in response the woman inflicts a 'wound' (*Collected Plays* 323).

the Garden of Eden, caused by Eve working in conjunction with the serpent. The goddess Chryse and all the women who mirror her then in turn become reflections of the first woman, Eve. When Baxter, in the persona of the Greek hero, comes to worship at her shrine, she, in return for his devotion, inflicts him with the 'wound' of his Oedipal attachment.²⁸

The fundamental changes which Baxter makes to the Sophocles play, therefore, all serve to make his script another expression of his Oedipal anxiety. Philoctetes becomes a dramatic mask for Baxter the playwright, just as another Greek hero in 'The Homecoming' becomes a dramatic mask for Baxter the poet. Both masks express the same personal problem.

The priestess of the goddess, Eunoe, almost immediately becomes a substitute mother. Like the mother in 'The Homecoming' she is, according to Philoctetes, a nurturer: '[S]he looked after me. She fed me and bathed my wound' (140). As long as Philoctetes remained in the world of men he was able to function as a superior human being. When Eunoe first meets him she thinks, 'Ah, how handsome he looks! What a hero!' (134). But the 'wound' of the Oedipal condition has an emasculating effect. Philoctetes feels obliged to marry the nurturer of his 'wound' and so Eunoe is able, by its means, to transform herself into the dominant partner. By the time the play opens Eunoe has come to despise her husband for his fixated emotional state which she herself is perpetuating: 'I didn't think I'd be saddled with a sort of adult child' (134) she exclaims not long after the play opens.

As Eunoe metamorphoses from nurturer to castrator she becomes the replica of the mother-wife in 'The Homecoming,' but she achieves what the latter can only desire, which is to keep the male 'folded within her' (Collected Poems 121), in a foetal asexual position. Thus in the play, as in the poem, the demarcation line between mother and wife becomes indistinguishable.

²⁸ McKay makes the point that the Catholic theologian's view of man's nature being 'flawed, not vitiated, by the Fall,' it being 'troubled by passions, a darkened intellect and a weakened will' but that man himself remained 'intrinsically good' was one of the main ideas that attracted Baxter to Catholicism ('Notes on Baxter's Criticism' vi-vii).

Analysts of Baxter's poems have frequently noted his preoccupation with the imagery of death and a linking of this imagery with sex.²⁹ In 'The Hollow Place,' the atmosphere of the real cave that becomes the metaphorical womb is described as 'dark and cool' (Collected Poems 251). In 'The Cave' these two adjectives are implied again as the cave is linked to the 'sunless kingdom.' This phrase was used in Greek mythology to denote the Underworld, also known as the House of Death. The cave which is the home of Philoctetes and his wife in 'The Sore-Footed Man' has become just that for the people who inhabit it. Baxter's poem 'The Cave' further underlines the concept of the cave/womb as a place of living death by referring to it as a place '[w]here souls endure the ache of Proserpine' (69).³⁰

By linking the image of the cave/womb to the Underworld Baxter distorts the conventional view of marriage as a seedbed for fertility and converts it into a sterile environment, which blights the growth of both partners as long as they remain trapped within it. Philoctetes himself speaks of marriage as a kind of living death: 'It's like living in one's own grave' (Collected Plays 150).

'The Sore-Footed Man,' by implication, indicates Baxter's jaundiced view of conventional marriage. His frequently anthologised poem 'Ballad of Calvary Street' (Collected Poems 213-214), however, expresses the same point of view using the same imagery in an explicitly New Zealand setting.

²⁹ Plays such as Oscar Wilde's Salomé (1896) make an obvious link between sex and death. Baxter was familiar with Wilde's work.

³⁰ Proserpine is another name for Persephone (Harvey 350). In Greek mythology this beautiful daughter of Zeus was kidnapped by Hades and made the queen of the Underworld. As long as she was confined there the earth remained in the grip of winter and could not regenerate itself (314).

Baxter is also aware of references in Māori mythology to the equivalent of the House of Death, which, like the cave location, he associates with images of the sea. In the poem 'East Coast Journey,' for example, written in 1962 or 1963 he remarks:

In great dryness of mind I heard the voice of the sea
Reverberating, and thought: As a man

Grows older he does not want beer, bread, or the prancing flesh,
But the arms of the eater of life, Hine-nui-te-po,

With teeth of obsidian and hair like kelp
Flashing and glimmering at the edge of the horizon

(Collected Poems 273).

The cave, which is also the House of Death, re-surfaces again in this poem when the home of the central married couple is said to be 'an empty tomb.' Baxter's habit of imposing Greek myths onto a New Zealand situation is evidenced once more when 'Mum' is likened to '[a] goddess in her tartan skirt.' 'Mum,' who was once more than willing to enjoy her husband's sexual banter, has become over the years, like Eunoe, the dominant partner. 'Mum's' experience of life has 'rubbed it home that men like dirt.' When 'Dad' digs up a giant parsnip, the image of his once active phallus, she is no longer interested in the man or in his jokes (213). The prediction that 'Dad' '[w]ill get no sugar in his tea' (214) suggests that, as is the case with Philoctetes and Eunoe who now sleep in 'twin beds' (Collected Plays 135), sexual activity, certainly sexual enjoyment between the married couple, has dried up altogether.³¹ The link that 'Mum' makes between 'men' and 'dirt' associates her with what Baxter terms the 'Calvinist ethos.' 'Mum's' opinion of sex is that 'sin is sin' (214), which paraphrases Baxter's interpretation of Calvinist belief: '[S]ex is evil' ('Beginnings' 240).

In common with Baxter's other portraits of the mother-wife, 'Mum' nurtures the stomach with her 'meal-brown scones.' As in 'The Sore-Footed Man,' communication between the couple has now deteriorated to a superficial minimum, 'Dad' being reduced to a 'Grunt Grotto at the back' avoiding conversation behind 'the Sporting Page' and from the safe distance of the toilet (213). Like Philoctetes, whose mind strays constantly back to his days as a soldier, 'Dad' also lives in his imagination in the masculine world. In reality, however, both 'Dad' and Philoctetes have been effectively caged and emasculated by the institution of marriage. 'Mum' has metamorphosed from nurturer to castrator. Her 'polished oven' that 'spits with rage' (213) not only expresses her Calvinistic work ethic, but is also a personification of this metamorphosis.³²

³¹ Here, once again, Baxter makes a marked departure from the Sophocles original, where Neoptolemus describes Philoctetes' lonely existence: 'A pallet bed, stuffed with leaves, to sleep on, for someone' (Greene 196). By way of contrast, in Baxter's version, a female presence is evidenced in the cave of Philoctetes from the beginning. In his script Neoptolemus points to '[a] couple of rough wooden beds' as well as '[a] woman's brooch and necklace!' (Collected Plays 131).

³² In the poem 'Pig Island Letters 4' Baxter writes in a similar vein:

A skinny wench in jeans with kea's eye:
The rack on which our modern martyrs die.

I prophesy these young delinquent bags

In 'Ballad of Calvary Street,' as in 'The Sore-Footed Man,' the central married couple in the winter of their domestic relationship remain trapped like Proserpine/Persephone within the Underworld. Dad now walks 'in boots of lead' and man and wife remain forever at odds politically: 'National Mum and Labour Dad' (213). Philoctetes, as I have already noted, describes marriage as 'like living in one's own grave' (Collected Plays 150). In 'Ballad of Calvary Street' his sentiments are paraphrased when marriage is described as a 'tomb' in which 'two old souls go slowly mad' (213).

'Ballad of Calvary Street' is one of the small proportion of Baxter's poems which focus on marriage. The subject of conventional marriage, however, is a major thematic concern in his plays. Thirteen of the fifteen plays in Collected Plays are set in 'the margin' of New Zealand and I have now discussed at some length how a fourteenth, 'The Sore-Footed Man,' is, by implication, a New Zealand play. All of the fifteen Collected Plays contain characters who are, or have been, married and all the featured marriages are, in varying degrees, unhappy. In the majority of these plays, as in 'The Sore-Footed Man,' the wife has come to dominate the relationship and nags the husband. Likewise sexual activity, certainly sexual enjoyment, between the couple appears to be non-existent and communication has been reduced to superficialities.³³ Baxter's plays, therefore, constitute a damning indictment of the institution of marriage within conventional middle class Pakeha society.

'The First Wife' (1967) opens with the woman nagging the husband about how much 'work, work, work' and mess he and the children make for her, so that she cannot enjoy their annual holiday. Her reaction when her husband tries to console her is one of irritation: 'You just keep your hands off me, Michael! I'm not

Will graduate to grim demanding hags

(Collected Poems 279).

³³ The Rendezvous (n.d.), an unpublished and unperformed play of Baxter's, also presents marriage in these terms. In this play, which consists entirely of a dialogue between a boy and a girl, the boy describes to the girl the unhappy marriage of his parents: 'They bitch at one another. Sometimes they sit for hours and say nothing except – "Pass me the sugar" – or – "Has it stopped raining yet?" I think they like it that way. [. . .] If people wanted to be happy, they'd do something about it! [. . .] Happiness isn't like bacon and eggs. People can get along without it' (4. James K. Baxter Papers. Hocken Library).

anybody's teddy bear! I'm tired enough without *you!*' Her dislike of sex appears to go back to their honeymoon: 'No doubt *you* enjoyed it. I didn't' (57). Once again the female expresses Baxter's view of the 'Calvinist ethos' ('Beginnings' 240). Men are associated with 'dirt' (in 'The First Wife' it becomes 'rubbish' (Collected Plays 57)), which in turn becomes synonymous with the woman's opinion of sex. As in 'Ballad of Calvary Street' and 'The Sore-Footed Man' the henpecked husband does not retaliate, but chooses rather to retreat into a memory from the world of men. In 'The First Wife' the husband returns in his imagination to his childhood when he dreamed of being 'a soldier' in a 'revolution' with 'lots of fighting' (58).

In 'Mr Brandywine Chooses a Gravestone' (1968) communication between the married couple has broken down so completely that the husband cannot bring himself to tell his wife that he has only six months to live. The wife appears to be completely insensitive to her husband's feelings. She, instead, is preoccupied with the acquisition of material possessions and is mainly concerned with nagging him to buy a new car. This subject both begins and ends the play. In this case the main recourse of the dominated husband is to 'that horrible homebrew' (69). In this text Baxter blames the wife's materialism for the unhappiness in the marriage.

Again, in 'Who Killed Sebastian' (sic) (1969) the wife is the insensitive partner. This play opens on the day of the funeral of the couple's only son. In response to her husband's attempt to express the depth of his grief, his partner can only remark: 'I wish you'd stop swearing, John' (83). As in 'Mr Brandywine Chooses a Gravestone' the wife lives on a superficial level and is materialistic. She views the funeral in terms of keeping up appearances – serving cake to her guests whilst still maintaining a 'stiff upper lip' (83). Once again, the more compassionate husband can find consolation only in drink.

Even when Baxter focuses on a married couple who appear to be more contented in each other's company, as he does in 'The Hero' (n.d. Collected Plays),³⁴ the

³⁴ Howard McNaughton gives no information on the date of composition for 'The Hero' in Collected Plays. Doyle also lists the play as one for which the date of composition cannot be established (178).

family is still deeply dysfunctional. In this play, as in 'Who Killed Sebastian,' the son is already dead when the action opens, though in this case he has been killed in the war. Nevertheless, when he appears on the stage, invisible to his parents, he vents his frustration by shooting them with a 'noiseless gun.' When this proves to be ineffective, the young man realizes that his parents are already dead: 'You're ghosts! You've never been alive!' (97).³⁵

Thus in Baxter's plays as well as in his poems, conventional marriage is viewed as the Underworld, the House of Death that traps both parties who have entered into the contract. Usually the playwright lays the blame for the unhappiness of the marriage on the Calvinistic female, but there are exceptions.

In 'Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party' (1968)³⁶ the husband is the one who is obsessed with material possessions, boasting he has built homes for 'five hundred people [. . .] – TV sets, hot and cold water, electric blankets, booze in the cupboards – that's civilisation!' (265). His friend, who is Jewish and has lived through the Holocaust, however, counts the cost of materialism: '[T]he people stare all night at the little TV screen and say nothing to each other [. . .]. It is the country of death! No real words! No people! No voices! The synagogues are empty! The churches are empty! The women do not want to have children!' (266). Yet again marriage is a sterile environment, associated with the Underworld.

³⁵ Baxter's parents were both pacifists (McKay, The Life 20). In 'Pig Island Letters 8' Baxter wrote of how his father was persecuted during the First World War because of his pacifist beliefs:

When I was only semen in a gland
Or less than that, my father hung
From a torture post at Mud Farm
Because he would not kill.

(Collected Poems 281).

Baxter's brother Terence became a conscientious objector during the Second World War (McKay, The Life 55). Baxter's own pacifist convictions are illustrated in 'The Hero' in the son's anti-war sentiments: 'We were dropping grenades into a tunnel. It could have been anyone down there – soldiers, women, kids, old men, anyone' (Collected Plays 95).

In another of his plays Baxter is equally condemning of the effects of war. 'The Starlight in your Eyes' takes place in a New Zealand landscape which has been devastated by nuclear war and in which the social order has broken down.

³⁶ 'Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party' is Baxter's version of 'The Bacchae' by Euripides.

In 'The Devil and Mr Mulcahy' (1967) in which Baxter broaches the subject of incest between brother and sister,³⁷ the wife is the more compassionate partner. Her husband, who has become a member of The Seed of Light – an extreme form of Calvinism – regards all enjoyment as sin and strikes his wife brutally when he comes upon her enjoying herself with another man, '[s]miling and dancing!' (199). In this case it is the husband who has espoused the Calvinist point of view and his wife is the one who has the more liberal attitude towards sexuality. Once again Baxter portrays Calvinism in a negative light, this time suggesting that its influence causes the son to murder his sister at the end of the play.

In all these scripts Baxter makes it clear that Calvinism, which he associates with the middle class Pakeha, is the villain of the piece. Although there are a few exceptions, a salient characteristic of Baxter's oeuvre is that he associates what he terms the 'Calvinist ethos' with women in this society.

The reason for Baxter's simplistic attitude to gender may have its roots in his relationship with his family. Baxter's characters advocate the superiority of his Baxter heritage and his compulsion to rebel against the middle class materialistic values of the Calvinistic Macmillan Browns.³⁸ Accordingly, middle class Pakeha females in his work are often, to use Hawes' phraseology, 'the guardians of the Calvinist society he detests' (41) particularly in their judgment that 'sex is evil' and that 'work is good' ('Beginnings' 240), because Baxter associated this

³⁷ This play has echoes of Eugene O'Neill's 'Desire Under the Elms,' first produced in 1924, which also has the theme of incest. In *The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre* Christopher Innes identifies characteristics of O'Neill's playwriting which parallel those of Baxter. He comments that O'Neill's work is 'strongly autobiographical' and that his plays reveal a 'general theme' of '[t]he life-denying repression of the puritan ethic' (413-414).

In Baxter's 'The Temptations of Oedipus' the subject of incest is also an important theme. Ismene, the daughter of Oedipus, says that she was first seduced by her brother, Eteocles. Her sister Antigone replies, '[w]hat you've described probably happens between brother and sister in every second farmer's family in Attica.' Ismene then goes on to comment on the frequency of the incest bond: 'I was talking about love, dear sister. I love Eteocles, you love father, father loved mother. The people we love best – with sex and soul and everything – are our own relatives' (*Collected Plays* 248). Incest is thus portrayed by Baxter as a common condition which affects all levels of society.

³⁸ One of the teachings of Calvin that Baxter particularly disagreed with was one which he described as '[t]he Calvinist thesis that the Fall is absolute and natural man totally depraved' ('Conversation with an Ancestor' 21). He commented further on what he considered to be the poisoning effect of such notions: 'The society into which I had been born [. . .] carries like strychnine in its bones a strong unconscious residue of the doctrines and ethics of Calvinism' ('The Man on the Horse' 91).

attitude with his mother. The 'right wing and conservative' stance taken by many of Baxter's females, to which Hawes also draws attention (42), is similar to what McKay terms the 'conformity, and respectability' (The Life 32) associated with the Macmillan Browns.³⁹ So when the playwright insists that Calvinism and materialism are the chief causes for the institution of marriage turning into the sterility and destruction of the House of Death, he appears to be making a personal statement of rebellion against his mother and the maternal side of his family.

In *Concrete Grady*, the protagonist of 'The Band Rotunda,' Baxter creates the antithesis of the middle class Calvinism. Grady has no formal education, no work ethic, no job, no possessions, no respectability, no regard for hygiene and a liberal attitude towards sexuality. He is therefore a representative of 'the outer margin' of the doubly marginalized. Baxter, significantly, identifies himself with this 'outer margin': 'I am not Concrete Grady, though Concrete Grady is one of my secret selves' (Some Possibilities for New Zealand Drama 11).⁴⁰

This telling statement reveals once again that Baxter adopts various dramatic masks in order to disguise the autobiographical nature of his oeuvre. In other words, no matter what his choice of genre, Baxter is essentially writing about himself. William Broughton has also emphasized this salient characteristic of Baxter's drama: 'Few of the personae of those [Baxter's] plays spoke with voices other than Baxter's'.⁴¹ The voice has many tones and cadences, but it is always the same voice. Like the poet, the personae of the plays tend to preach and philosophise' ('A Discursive Essay' 83).

³⁹ John Macmillan Brown was born in Irvine in Ayrshire in 1846. His family were strict Calvinists (McKay, The Life 12). After he emigrated to New Zealand he became a respected lecturer at Canterbury College and attracted large classes at a time when student fees went to the professor (14). Throughout his working life Macmillan Brown worked a sixteen hour day, even in the university vacations (15). By dint of shrewd investment he became a rich man (Oliver 10), eventually buying a three storey house in Macmillan Avenue, Brighton, which had a spacious library and extensive gardens looked after by full-time gardeners (McKay, The Life 31). McKay also points out 'a puritan devotion to hard work and material advancement' (32) in the Macmillan Browns.

⁴⁰ O'Sullivan recognizes Baxter's own lack of hygiene, which can be interpreted as part of his rebellion against the 'Calvinist ethos': '[A]n exultation, almost, in physical dirt, in decay, in the coprological. His lice, his crabs' (Lawlor and O'Sullivan 82).

⁴¹ Baxter himself admitted that his characters could be interpreted as 'one of his menagerie of interior selves' and that 'any character who breathes on the stage is brought to life by an infusion of the dramatist's own blood' (Some Possibilities for New Zealand Drama 3).

Baxter can be seen to ‘preach’ and to ‘philosophise’ in the ‘persona’ of Concrete Grady. Grady, the alcoholic drop-out who lives by, but not in, ‘The Band Rotunda’ of the title of the play, explains why he steers clear of women:

If I had a woman – a steady one – she’d want to sleep up in the rotunda. She’d turn it into a house [. . .] she’d be hanging out her bits of rag along the rail [. . .]! Or else she’d begin nagging, ‘Why don’t you get a job, Con? Why don’t you have a shave?’ No – a man can’t be independent . . . (113).

Despite Concrete Grady’s ‘preach[ing]’ on the necessity for men to be ‘independent’ of women, it is interesting to note that in Baxter’s plays, no matter what the problems, husbands in general show a reluctance to leave their wives. In ‘The Bureaucrat’ (1967), although Fireman says that he did not care about his wife, and that she looked as though ‘she was dying inside a cell’ (188) (a remark that once again associates conventional marriage with the House of Death) they are only separated when she dies of cancer.⁴² Similarly in ‘Jack Winter’s Dream,’ Webfoot Charlie, although he says his wife was ‘very strange’ to him, and although he is disparaging about her obesity, was only separated from his partner in death when ‘[t]hey had to break the wall down to carry her out’ (8). Both ‘The First Wife’ and ‘Mr Brandywine Chooses a Gravestone’ end with husbands being reconciled, albeit uneasily, with their wives and deciding to remain within the marriage.⁴³

⁴² When it was first performed at The Globe ‘The Bureaucrat’ was preceded by the mime ‘The Axe and the Mirror.’ The ‘Mirror’ represents ‘the face of a woman’ to whom the protagonist ‘was making love.’ Although he ‘withdraws from the MIRROR’ with ‘deep puritanical rejection’ at one stage, the mime ends with the man holding the mirror ‘against his breast’ as he ‘curls up in the foetal position’ (*Collected Plays* 324-325).

⁴³ Baxter married his wife when he was twenty-two and, despite there being times when they were separated, remained married to her until the day he died. Jacqui’s poem ‘And again 1989’ written seventeen years after her husband’s death illustrates how deeply she still feels his loss:

Searching, combing
The landscape of my mind
Over and over again,
Desperate to find
The reason for your going
Or just to hear,
Still lingering
On the listening wind,
An echo of your voice

(Sturm 79).

The reason for this reluctance to leave appears to be located in Baxter's Oedipal predicament. Rob Jackaman implies as much when he discusses the mask of Odysseus that Baxter consistently assumed in his poetry. Jackaman identifies as integral to this dramatic mask 'the temptation not to set out on the journey at all, to be aware of the necessity, the wanderlust, the 'call of the wild'⁴⁴ but not to heed it' (336). Similarly in 'The Sore-Footed Man' Baxter once again expresses the strength of this 'temptation' not to leave when Odysseus sums up the central philosophical debate within the play as the clash between 'the desire for freedom and the dread of freedom – the issues that will fight for ever in the heart and head of their [Philoctetes' and Eunoë's] son' (Collected Plays 154). I contend that they fought forever in 'the heart and head' of Mrs Baxter's son also.

In 'The Sore-Footed Man,' the central question is whether a man should stay within the confinement of marriage or whether he should be 'independent' (as Concrete Grady terms it) and join the world of men. This debate is just as prominent in the mind of Odysseus as it is in that of his fellow soldier Philoctetes. Both men initially appear to opt for the security of marriage, despite the disadvantages, and to reject the world of men. Even though Odysseus, for example, has slept with 'a hundred [women] perhaps' (133), he still dreams of monogamy: 'I want to be back in Ithaca, with my family, watching the crops growing. I want to leave that blood-soaked Trojan beach and plain behind me' (132).

The same debate concludes 'The Cave.' Safe in the womb that represents the female, the poet is reluctant to leave: 'Gladly I would have stayed there and been hidden/From every beast that moves beneath the sun' (Collected Poems 69). Once again, in 'The Homecoming' Odysseus hears clearly the beckoning of the world of men, expressed in the metaphor of the sea coast: 'On reef and cave the sea's hexameter beating.' At the end of the poem, however, he still remains in his 'cage' with his mother-wife (121).⁴⁵ Philoctetes displays a similar reluctance to

⁴⁴ Rob Jackaman refers here to the Jack London story The Call of the Wild (1903) set in the male homosocial world of the pioneer settlement days of North America.

⁴⁵ Alfred Tennyson also wrote a poem about Odysseus' state of mind when he returned to Ithaca at the end of the Trojan War. He called it 'Ulysses' after the Roman version of the Greek hero's name. Tennyson's Ulysses is bored with domestic life and longs to return to the sea where life is

leave his mother-wife despite their difficulties. He protests, like Odysseus, that all his needs can be summed up in an image of domesticity: 'A little hut beside the sea, with a few olive trees growing near the door. A wife who loved me and kept the hut in order; the conversation of intelligent friends; perhaps two or three of a family. [. . .] A philosopher's Utopia – without hate, without bloodshed' (Collected Plays 157).

At the end of 'The Sore-Footed Man' the central Oedipal conflict which has been expressed metaphorically throughout is resolved. As soon as Odysseus agrees to grant Philoctetes' wish for a domestic 'philosopher's Utopia,' the old soldier is suddenly no longer so sure that this is his preferred option. Earlier he has contradicted himself anyway by describing marriage as 'terrible boredom' (150). At the very end of the play he changes his mind and decides to return with Odysseus to the battlefield. As soon as he does so his 'wound' is healed. Odysseus unravels the mystery of this miracle with these prophetic words: 'The serpent of the mother goddess is fear' (158).

Baxter makes a fundamental departure from the original version at this point. Sophocles achieves resolution at the end of 'Philoctetes' by having Heracles descend as a *Deus ex Machina* to order Philoctetes to return to Troy with the Greek army. In Baxter's version there is no supernatural intervention. On the contrary, the cure for Philoctetes' wound is to be found within the protagonist himself, once he realizes the true 'serpent' of the 'mother goddess' is the emotion of fear.

This may be interpreted as a final recognition that the mother-castrator is able to 'cage' her 'son' only as long as he remains afraid of the world outside the cave/womb. Baxter's solution to the cutting of the Oedipal tie is to overcome that fear and to join the homosocial world of men. The same solution is implied at the conclusion of 'The Cave' where the poet 'turned and climbed back to the barrier,/Pressed through and came to dazzling daylight out' (Collected Poems 69).

full of the challenge '[t]o strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield' (Tennyson 90). In the Tennyson poem also the sea is associated with the male homosocial world, to which the protagonist eventually decides to return.

In finally finding the strength to be able to leave the cave/womb (reflected in the stress laid upon the word 'out'), the world of the female is rejected. Once 'out' in the 'dazzling daylight' of the South Otago coastal landscape, the world of men would immediately come into view. In Baxter's plays the dramatic masks of Odysseus, Philoctetes and Concrete Grady all in the end make this world – the world of 'the outer margin' – their preferred option.

D: 'MAN ALONE' ON THE LANDSCAPE

Baxter associates 'the outer margin' with the paternal side of his family. For him it represents a place of escape, because those within it who manage to avoid the domestic tie are free from the confining influence of the mother-castrator. Baxter's avowed preference for this world, expressed through various dramatic masks, led him as a dramatist to focus on male-dominated minority groups who rebel against respectable middle class Pakeha society.

The world of Baxter's father was deeply rooted in Brighton and its environs where he and his ancestors farmed the land and where Baxter's cave is located. Baxter emphasizes the influence that this landscape had on his artistic sensibilities: 'More than half the images that recur in my poems are connected with early memories of the Brighton township, [. . .] especially the seacoast' ('On Returning to Dunedin' 4).

One of Archie's idiosyncrasies was that he believed that he could make contact with the spirit world, an ability which Baxter's mother, Millicent, termed 'Highland second sight' (McKay, *The Life* 299).⁴⁶ Baxter likewise claimed that he could call the spirits of his ancestors into an actual physical presence:

I go along the river track towards that gully where the clan built their houses [. . .]. The sods of their houses have vanished. I do not recognise the man who meets me there [. . .] but his eyes hold my attention [. . .]. He wears a plaid over his shoulders and in his hand he carries large needles made of shiny black wood, such as the clan used for thatching their houses. A smallish wiry man, well into his eighties – it is, I think, Chennor, my great-great-grandfather [. . .]. When he speaks to me the language is Gaelic ('Conversation with an Ancestor' 28).

⁴⁶ Oliver notes Archie's belief in 'hearing voices and receiving messages' (24). Likewise McKay relates the story that when Archie visited his dying father he saw an old man lying on the hospital bed beside him, which Archie took to be one of the 'ancestors come to help his father over' (*The Life* 7). McKay then adds a footnote to explain that Millicent said that these occurrences were not unusual (299).

This image of his paternal ancestor was conjured up in a lecture delivered in 1966 when Baxter was a Robert Burns Fellow at the University of Otago. It shows how determinedly he attempted to anchor himself in the world of his father. As a preface to this description Baxter explained how he called up such ancestral images 'time after time in imagination, looking for some fragment of lost unity on which to build a poem' which caused him to 'reach out to the tribe that no longer exists' (28).

I have already mentioned that Baxter's father had a great love of poetry and that he wrote an unpublished novel about his Gaelic-speaking ancestors. Baxter's dedication to poetry as a genre and his insistence on the influence that his Gaelic-speaking ancestors had on his imagination are indications of his attempts to turn himself into a mirror image of his father.

These paternal influences are then translated into Baxter's plays. In 'Jack Winter's Dream' the people who identify closely with their local landscape have those among them who are able to connect with the past, just as Baxter himself claimed to have been able to do. When Jack Winter falls into a drunken sleep in the ruins of the shanty pub, in his 'Dream' he is able to see the events of a murder that took place on that same spot in the days of the gold rush.⁴⁷ Conversely, the Preacher, as part of those events and in the same location, is able to connect through to the future:

[T]he dead mad Preacher sees, beyond time, Jack Winter lying under the elder tree, its moondark clusters heavy with sleep. He hears the

⁴⁷ In his note at the beginning of the Landfall edition of Jack Winter's Dream Baxter emphasized that the consequence of murder is the central idea: '[T]here is one notion that lies behind the play, and in a sense accounts for it: that the shedding of blood christens a place, makes it part of the soul and imagination of man; that the natural world shares in our guilt, agony and perhaps redemption' (quoted in Collected Plays 2).

Baxter incorporates part of his paternal family history into 'Jack Winter's Dream.' His great-grandfather, John, found gold in the Dunstan goldfield (McKay, The Life 3) where this play is set. In the play young Will Trevelyan also finds gold. On his way back to Dunedin John Baxter was almost robbed by a group of men who waylaid him on the Dunstan track (3). In 'Jack Winter's Dream' Will Trevelyan is robbed of his gold by Webfoot Charlie who then murders the young man.

clenching shudder of root in earth. He sees time past and time to be
[. . .]. He sees his own coffin (Collected Plays 7).⁴⁸

These males become in turn dramatic masks for the playwright, allying himself to the world of his father by incorporating Archie's 'Highland second sight' (McKay, James K. Baxter 299) into his texts.

Baxter's father's family had a tradition of self-education. Bill Manhire has commented that one of the idiosyncrasies of the James he knew was Baxter's mistrust of academia: 'Baxter made rather a fetish of disparaging the university world' (11). Baxter himself discounted the value of his formal education:

I don't think any school ever touched me where I live. Things that happened at school touched me all right – thefts, fights, escapes, punishments, humiliations – but these could have reached me anywhere, in prison or on a sheep station ('Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet' 129)

Baxter's decision to leave university when he was twenty after only a year of study and to earn a living instead in a series of blue collar jobs (as a farm labourer, freezing works labourer, foundry worker and a postman) can be regarded as another facet of his alignment to the world of his father.

Yet another aspect of this alignment is the point that Baxter made of identifying himself with his paternal grandfather. As early as 1946 in 'Elegy for my Father's Father' he was writing of this man's inability to form intimate relationships:

He knew in the hour he died
That his heart had never spoken
In song or in bridal bed (Collected Poems 51).

⁴⁸ McNaughton discusses how the concept of the 'Dream' which is incorporated into the title of this play reflects August Strindberg's influential Preface to 'A Dream Play' which emphasizes the importance of the subconscious mind. McNaughton also points out that Baxter admired Strindberg ('Baxter as Dramatist' 185).

An unpublished and unperformed play of Baxter's, Mrs Aggle's Id (n.d.) also experiments with the exploration of the subconscious mind. Although the play is only a light farce, Mrs Aggle's Id appears as a character who moves and speaks throughout the script (James K. Baxter Papers. Hocken Library).

Twenty years later, writing 'Grandfather' (1967), he had come to see this hard-drinking man 'always a worry to your wife,' as a mirror image of himself, calling him 'my looking-glass twin' (379).⁴⁹

To some extent Baxter succeeded in transforming himself into this 'looking-glass twin.' McKay observes that this paternal grandfather, John Baxter, although he was a good worker, moved from job to job and 'the fact that such a hardened drinker became intoxicated after only a few drinks suggests that he may have been an alcoholic' (*The Life* 5). Baxter also moved between jobs throughout much of his working life and at the end of his autobiographical essay 'Beginnings' he admitted his own drinking problem: 'Turn the bag upside down, mate, there's something stuck at the bottom, [. . .] it's only alcoholism and poem-making' (242).

Taking all these characteristics of Baxter's paternal heritage into account, then a self-educated protagonist such as Jack Winter – who is ostensibly based on Jimmy Lawson, an Otago 'solitary' (*Oliver* 17, 92-3) – can be identified as being less of a portrait of a character from New Zealand's past than another dramatic mask for the playwright himself.

Jack Winter is isolated not only because he is a 'solitary' man who inhabits an unpopulated landscape, but also because he, like Baxter's grandfather, is unable to connect with other people. Baxter likewise wrote of his own sense of isolation from others: 'I think that various factors combined early to give me a sense of difference, of a gap – [. . .] between myself and other people' ('Beginnings' 238).

Jack Winter, again like Baxter and his paternal grandfather, is an alcoholic who has no settled employment. At the beginning of the play he is described by the Narrator as a 'rabbiter, swagman and station rouseabout' with '[s]ixty-eight convictions for being happy [drunk] in a public place' (*Collected Plays* 4). The reference to rabbiting links Jack yet again to Baxter's paternal line; McKay notes

⁴⁹ There is no poem written to his grandfather on the maternal side.

that Archie and his brothers all relied on rabbiting at various times as a means of earning a living (The Life 6).

Even more significantly, Baxter insistently portrays the male homosocial world as a whole as alcoholic. 'Jack Winter's Dream,' for example, creates a world of hard-drinking solitary males operating on 'the outer margin' of respectable New Zealand society. When Jack first enters the play his meagre supplies of '[b]read, lean mutton, tea and tobacco' are augmented by 'a bottle of Brandyvino' (Collected Plays 4) and he is already the worse for wear as he 'stumbles' up the hill out of Abelstown singing as he goes (Collected Plays 3). Similarly, in 'The Sore-Footed Man' the sailors in Odysseus' army appear on stage drinking wine (135-138) and then, '*slightly drunk*' and singing (147-149). The first time that a sailor speaks in this play he tells Odysseus that he has a hangover: 'I've got a bad head from the wine last night' (129). Once again this is a manipulation by Baxter. There is no alcohol or singing among the sailors in the Sophocles original.

The song that Jack sings as he 'stumbles' into 'Jack Winter's Dream' displays an ambivalent attitude towards women. Every stanza of the song refers to the male's relationship with a different woman, but at the same time in each of the relationships the emotional tie has been broken by alcohol: '[F]or I was never sober' (3-4). Alcohol becomes a substitute in a world where women have to be left behind. In the end, however, this is the preferred alternative because the world of women, as elsewhere in Baxter's oeuvre, is portrayed as being superficial and materialistic. The Narrator in 'Jack Winter's Dream' describes this world as one of 'plaster gnomes and paper doilies.'⁵⁰ As elsewhere in Baxter's work, the sexual urge in conventional marriage is likened to the House of Death: '[H]ot love and cold pillows' (4). The pioneer male of 'the outer margin,' by focusing his attention on the alcoholic world of men is able, in body if not in mind, to abandon the world of women. There are, for example, only three female characters in the play. One is the daughter of Webfoot Charlie, who remains

⁵⁰ The first stanza of 'Ballad of Calvary Street' uses a similar image of plaster gnomes to describe respectable middle class New Zealand society: 'And gnomes like pagan fetishes/Hang their hats on an empty tomb' (Collected Poems 213). The world associated with women in 'Jack Winter's Dream' can therefore be equated with Pakeha New Zealand society.

upstairs and unheard for most of the action. The other two are female trampers who take up only a few sentences at the very end of the script.

In Jack's solitary life, then, the presence of a woman has been replaced by alcohol. It is noteworthy that the bottle of 'Brandyvino' he carries is personified as a female voice speaking in the caressing tones of a lover:

I'll be your Sunday wife. I'll make you a bed of goose feathers, heavy as snow on the ground, and we'll creep in together. I'll kiss you to sleep like a bad, old mother. I'll hold you closer than your bones (5).

Even when portraying the male homosocial world, then, Baxter's Oedipal predicament still re-surfaces. Jack's bottle woman is both a 'Sunday wife' and a 'bad, old mother.' Mother and wife are once again inextricably combined.

This female personification of alcohol has an advantage over the female characters in Baxter's portrayal of conventional marriage. She has been arrested at the stage of nurturer and has not developed into the domineering mother-castrator. She still has the advantage of being a 'mother' but one who is free of Baxter's dread of the 'Calvinist ethos.' Rather than believing that 'sex is evil,' she is more than willing to bed down with her lover. Jack, in response, avows his devotion to his bottle woman in sensual terms that are not to be found in Baxter's portrayal of marriage in 'the inner margin':

BOTTLE (*Softly.*) Jack, do you love me?

JACK More than gooseberry fool. More than a Christmas candle. More than mutton and gravy. More than a church full of windows (Collected Plays 5).⁵¹

At this point in the play it becomes clear that Jack Winter is Baxter's dramatic mask, when, despite the persuasive charms of the bottle woman, Jack stops short of saying that he wants her more than he wants to go to Heaven. Though Jack

⁵¹ The richness of the imagery in Baxter's expression is reminiscent of the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas as Baxter himself acknowledged: 'The debt to Dylan Thomas is obvious enough' (Collected Plays 2). Thomas' Under Milk Wood is also a play with an eye-of-God narrator which was written for radio. Baxter, however, again emphasized the paternal influence in his writing in considering that he owed an equal debt of inspiration to his father for the 'many fertile conversations on every subject from alluvial goldmining to demonology' (2).

avows he loves her more than he loves himself, when the bottle woman asks him 'Do you want me more than Heaven?' Jack replies, '*very slowly* I don't know.' Baxter at the time of writing this play had already been converted to Catholicism.⁵²

In the male misogynical world of 'Jack Winter's Dream,' women are kept at a safe distance. All the males in this male-dominated play are single. In the pioneer world of 'the outer margin,' material trappings, that are so valued by middle class respectable society, are of value only as a poeticised image which can be used to relieve a momentary sexual urge. Young Will Trevelyan builds an image of domesticity for Webfoot Charlie's daughter in order to bed her as quickly as possible:

We'll build a house of our own a mile from the sea, with a big orchard behind it, with apples and pears and damsons, and a red currant and black currant, and gooseberry and sugar plum. There'll be a walnut tree for the children to climb. And a roof made of sea slates. We'll write our name on every one of them (14).

Shortly afterwards he climbs out of bed with the intention of leaving her for good.

Courtship and consummation on the pioneer version of 'the outer margin' are but a fleeting stage in a man's life. Will Trevelyan meets, courts, beds and leaves Webfoot Charlie's daughter within the space of an evening. Similarly, in all the songs in the play the romantic image of the female is maintained, but her relationship with the male, like Will Trevelyan's with Webfoot Charlie's daughter, is fleeting. Apart from the song that Jack sings as he 'stumbles' (Collected Plays 3) into the play, Ballarat Jake sings of '[c]harming Mary Gray' whose 'breasts were the land of Canaan' – but he remains unmarried (8). Likewise, Webfoot Charlie sings of a 'young maid' who was married to a sailor, then bedded by another sailor who left her on the next tide (9). On the rare occasion when the male is trapped in conventional marriage, the relationship with

⁵² W.H. Oliver records that Baxter had been interested in Catholicism since the 1940s (50) and that Baxter, Bill Pearson and Colin McCahon had endless discussions about the Catholic religion. In 1948 he was baptised a Catholic (51). In accordance with Baxter's own dislike of materialism Jack is quite willing to give up 'a church full of windows' (Collected Plays 5) for the bottle woman, but not the spiritual redemption of Heaven.

the female quickly deteriorates and romanticism evaporates. Webfoot Charlie, whose wife is now dead, describes his partner of many years in terms that are anything but romantic: 'A great, ugly slummock in skirts she was' (8).

A vital aspect of Baxter's mythologizing of New Zealand's past is to claim (without providing any documentary evidence) that his ancestors had emigrated to New Zealand with the 'pioneering dream' of building what he termed the 'Just City,' which had unfortunately turned into what he termed the 'Unjust City' (Recent Trends in New Zealand Poetry 16). He then, very simplistically, assumes that the 'Unjust City' is respectable middle class Pakeha society and the 'Just City' (the expression of the 'pioneering dream' of his ancestors) is to be found among those of 'the outer margin.' In particular, he claims, the 'Just City' is represented by alcoholics like himself.⁵³

Baxter was at pains to legitimize his point of view of New Zealand society by allying his work not only to the mythology of the Eurocentre but also to what he considered to be the most significant image in New Zealand literature:

The dominant symbol, however, of New Zealand literature [. . .] [is] *Man Alone*. I take the name from the title of John Mulgan's novel, [. . .] in New Zealand prose and verse it has taken on a local colour and a central importance. The 'Man Alone,' whether young or old, lives on the fringes of society, often eccentric, sometimes criminal, aware of acute isolation from every social aim (The Fire and the Anvil 70).

The 'Man Alone' symbol itself is representative of the doubly marginalized in relation to the Eurocentre.⁵⁴ Baxter's mythologizing of both of these representations of 'the outer margin' – the 'Just City' and 'Man Alone' – are

⁵³ In his Introduction to the published version of 'The Band Rotunda' and 'The Devil and Mr Mulcahy' Baxter explained how he identified himself with the alcoholics: 'I am myself a member of the great tribe of drunks who hold a mirror to the world of chaos we inhabit. This meant that I had no problem in digging out the material. It was already embedded in the marrow of my bones' (quoted in Collected Plays 331).

⁵⁴ In John Mulgan's novel, Man Alone (1949), which is the prototype for what Baxter terms '[t]he dominant symbol [. . .] of New Zealand literature,' the unmarried protagonist moves frequently from job to job in a largely homosocial society, accumulating few material possessions and meeting women only in passing.

brought together in characters such as Jack Winter and Concrete Grady, who display an 'acute isolation from every social aim' and are at odds with 'the inner margin'⁵⁵ which Baxter condemns for its mimicry of the Eurocentre:

[W]hen I consider those monasteries of pain, our prisons, and the people who are afflicted there – men without skins, compulsive men, alcoholics, poor sex mechanics [. . .] – nothing seems as terrible as the man outside, [. . .] justified by the approval of Caesar ('Conversation with an Ancestor' 16).

Here, once again, as in 'The Sore-Footed Man,' Baxter imposes an image from the classical world upon 'the margin' of New Zealand. The 'man outside' the prison is the instrument of the colonizer, and so the Roman Empire is made synonymous with the British Empire. The 'man outside' then becomes the representative of the 'Unjust City' who maintains the colonizer's autocratic rules of law and order. In terming New Zealand prisons 'monasteries of pain' Baxter implies that those who break the social rules are performing acts of religious faith. By such reversals Baxter makes his anti-social characters, the inhabitants of 'the outer margin' of the alcoholic subculture, the anti-heroes and anti-heroines of his 'Just City.'

Baxter's alcoholics regard 'those monasteries of pain' as part and parcel of their lifestyle.⁵⁶ The drunks in 'The Band Rotunda' are so familiar with the prison that they refer to it euphemistically as 'Mother Crawford's Boarding House'⁵⁷ and they sing a song about it. They also paraphrase Baxter's observation that 'nothing

⁵⁵ In his Introduction to The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse Allen Curnow draws attention to Denis Glover's protagonists such as 'Dirty Mick' Stimson and 'Arawata Bill' (William O'Leary) who, like Jack Winter, are based on real New Zealand 'solitaries' 'for whom their own company and that of the mountains [. . .] made sufficient society' (52). Curnow goes on to ally Arawata Bill, in particular, to the 'dominant symbol' that Baxter identified in New Zealand literature: 'He is Man Alone: he is the anti-mask of the comfort-seeking, never-get-hurt New Zealander of the Social Security State' (53).

⁵⁶ In the theatrical tradition of the Eurocentre alcoholics are portrayed as comic characters. Baxter made it clear in his Introduction to the printed version of 'The Band Rotunda' that was published in Landfall that he wanted alcoholism to be taken seriously:

In this play the main characters are drunks. It would be a mistake for a producer or actors to identify them as merely comic types or grotesques, though there are grotesque and comic elements in the action and dialogue. Their illusions – nostalgic, acquisitive, romantic, political, religious – are the common illusions that make up the mental life of others. [. . .] Their central problem is, as for us, the incommunicable weight of life itself (quoted in Collected Plays 331).

⁵⁷ Wellington Prison is situated on Mount Crawford.

seems as terrible as the man outside' when they affirm that prison life is the more compassionate society: 'A bloody sight more human than the company outside' (Collected Plays 117).

Within this 'Man Alone' territory females are once again in the minority and once again contrive to allay Baxter's Oedipal anxieties by being arrested at the stage of nurturer and rejecting the 'Calvinist ethos' that he associated with the world of his mother and Pakeha middle class New Zealand society. Instead they assume the function of the bottle women in approving 'the outer margin' lifestyle of the pioneer male and catering for his sexual needs. Norah, the prostitute in 'The Wide Open Cage' (1959), for example, defines her function in life to be 'a kind of human gumboot' and claims this to be a 'vocation.' Deliberately inverting Calvinist morality, she tells Father Tom, the Catholic priest, that 'the poor man finds his Heaven' in her breasts and her womb.⁵⁸ Though Skully is poor and a reformed alcoholic, Norah tells him she would rather sleep with him 'than with a maharajah' (22), so rejecting the materialistic values of the 'Unjust City.'

The alcoholic Rosie in 'The Band Rotunda,' who is also a prostitute, is equally understanding of male needs. When even her fellow alcoholics take her to task for selling herself to an elderly man, she berates them for their lack of understanding: 'The old man can't even – he's just a lonely old man that wants to look at me and play around a bit [. . .]! And at least he is polite. He treats me like a human being' (117).

Rosie has been treated much worse by men in the 'Unjust City.' A married man there abandoned her when she became pregnant by him. The man she did marry who came from 'a good home,' turned out to be a con man who persuaded her to prostitute herself in order to keep him and then left her for another woman (123). The inhabitants of the 'Just City,' by comparison, treat each other with kindness

⁵⁸ It could be argued that Norah's relaxed attitude towards sexuality is reflected in the title of this play 'The Wide Open Cage.' This contrasts with the situation in other Baxter texts such as 'The Homecoming' in which the male is trapped in a 'cage of beginning' with his frigid mother-wife. The title can also be seen to represent the state of this 'cage' once the male has escaped from the cave/womb into the world of men.

and consideration. Rosie sold herself to the old man in order to buy her friend Jock a meal of fish and chips (116).

Norah is not only the representation of Baxter's wish-fulfilment: she is also the mouthpiece for his point of view. She wants nothing to do with respectable Pakeha New Zealand society or with its institutions. When Skully proposes marriage, she declines, believing that it will transform them both into inhabitants of the House of Death:

But we *will* change. You'll be an old man down at the bowling green.
With one foot in the grave. Smoking a pipe and talking about nothing.
And I'll be at home, cleaning the kitchen stove. Waiting to nag you
when you come in. Each of us waiting to die. Each in our own little
box. Hating each other and blaming each other because nothing ever
happens any more. [. . .] Marriage is worse than murder. Murder is
quick. We're better off the way we are (39-40).

The reference to conventional marriage as 'the grave' where Norah is 'at home, cleaning the kitchen stove' and '[w]aiting to nag you [the husband]' links this text with others of Baxter's works such as 'The Sore-Footed Man' and 'Ballad of Calvary Street.'⁵⁹ The females of Baxter's 'outer margin' of the alcoholic subculture condone the view of the male on the pioneer version of 'the outer margin' that the preferred male-female relationship involves a momentary sexual

⁵⁹ Similarly in *The Seduction*, the fragment of a play which is housed in the Hocken Library, the Calvinistic wife Bertha equates cleanliness with happiness, once again expressed in the image of the scrubbed stove: 'If the Angel of Death should come tonight he would find us all together in our happy home. The clothes are ironed and folded in the linen cupboard. Both the passages have been scrubbed. The stove is polished and the coal bin is full. It must be like this in Heaven' (12. James K. Baxter Papers. Hocken Library).

Baxter frequently associates his portraits of the Calvinistic female with obsessive cleaning. This is also part of his mythologizing of his own family. In fact, his mother was an unenthusiastic housekeeper, as Baxter himself observes in 'A Family Photograph 1939' when he describes the interior of the Baxter family home:

No broom or duster
Will shift the English papers piled on chairs
And left for weeks (Collected Poems 237).

Ironically, it was actually Baxter's great-grandfather John, from the paternal side of the family, who was obsessed with hygiene as McKay records: 'Until the year before his death at the age of ninety-four, he [John] took a daily dip at a little bay just north of the big rock at Brighton, even during the intense cold of an Otago winter. This was one manifestation of his obsession with personal cleanliness' (*The Life* 3).

urge and is transitory. In 'The Band Rotunda' when Jock courts Rosie, like Will Trevelyan, he persuades her to have sex with him by creating a romanticized image of domesticity: 'We'll get a little bach beside the sea.' As soon as Jock and Rosie show any sign of really wanting the material trappings of the 'Unjust City,' however, their relationship deteriorates and they begin to quarrel (109).⁶⁰

Baxter condemns the 'Unjust City' for its racial prejudice as well as its materialism. Significantly, both Norah in 'The Wide Open Cage' and Rosie in 'The Band Rotunda' are Māori. Broughton has commented that Baxter came to see 'the Maori world' as 'an alternative to the world of urban Pakeha society' ('The Life of James K. Baxter' 527). In Baxter's view of society Māori, as representatives of the doubly marginalized, are integrated into to the more compassionate society of the 'Just City.'

A similar point of view is expressed in 'Who Killed Sebastian' where the 'Calvinist ethos' of the mother of the boy of the title has driven her own son away from the 'Unjust City.' Helen, a girl who had a Rarotongan grandmother and who lives on 'the outer margin' of respectable society, shows herself to be a better mother to Sebastian than his own mother ever was. Helen takes Sebastian in 'off the streets' and becomes his mother-wife. When he was 'cold and dirty' she would 'wash him and put him to bed and feed him' even though he 'was on drugs when he first came' (85).⁶¹ Sebastian, whom Helen describes as being 'not a man – more like a baby,' commits suicide when Helen tells him she has to go back to

⁶⁰ Neither the inhabitants of the 'Unjust City' nor those of the 'Just City' are faithful partners in Baxter's oeuvre. In 'Ballad of Calvary Street' 'Mum' is still punishing 'Dad' for 'that affair with Mrs Flynn/(It happened thirty years ago)' (*Collected Poems* 214). In 'The Band Rotunda,' though Rosie has been married (*Collected Plays* 123) and Jock has lived with a married woman and had two children by her (109), neither has remained faithful to their partners. In the *Fragment of a Play* (n.d.) held at the Hocken Library one of the central characters Ephraim takes it for granted that there will be unfaithfulness within marriage: 'A man who is faithful to his wife is a man who has no dreams' (n.pag. James K. Baxter Papers. Hocken Library).

⁶¹ Baxter persistently asserts that, despite their personal problems, the inhabitants of the 'Just City' make the better parents. In 'The Wide Open Cage' Skully's shack, which is home to the old bachelor who is a reformed alcoholic, is a haven for the discontented young. Ted, a boy of eighteen, explains that Skully has become a surrogate father to him: 'I can't stand it at home [. . .]. If it wasn't for you, I think I'd be going insane' (*Collected Plays* 25).

her boyfriend, who has just come out of prison, and suggests that he contact his real parents (86).⁶²

Rather than being grateful to Helen, Sebastian's mother, as representative of the racially prejudiced inhabitants of the 'Unjust City,' insults her and attempts to throw her out of the house (85).⁶³ In 'The Wide Open Cage' Norah remarks bitterly on the double standards of the respectable Pakeha society which professes to accept her but in reality persistently rejects her: 'Maori and Pakeha. All in the same canoe. (*Savagely.*) Balls! What do I get out of it? A kick in the guts' (42).⁶⁴

The 'Just City,' by way of contrast, is a multi-cultural society. Skully, as its representative in the same play, displays his hatred of racism: 'There's no apartheid in this house. I don't give a bugger if your mother was an Eskimo' (41).⁶⁵ Baxter, like Skully, displayed no racial prejudice against Māori. His

⁶² An undated and unpublished verse play 'Requiem for Sebastian' also refers to a character of the same name. It is not made clear whether this Sebastian is the same as the drug addict in 'Who Killed Sebastian' but he is described in similar terms: '[A] child in a man's body' (*Collected Plays* 92). This Sebastian was an alcoholic who 'drank like a fish,' who treated his wife badly, was unfaithful to her and who has committed suicide by drowning himself (90).

⁶³ Baxter made it clear in an interview that he regarded Sebastian's family to be typical of Pakeha middle class society:

Her [Helen's] relationship with him [Sebastian] is somewhat maternal. She's trying to nurse him back to functioning order. Part of it [the play] is a conversation later between the girl and the mother. The mother realises to some extent that they haven't made too good a job of bringing up their white-haired boy. The father has retired from life pretty much to the whisky bottle. Quite a normal sort of business household (Baysting 90).

Similarly in *Three Women and the Sea* a homeless woman, Sophia, who, like Helen, is a representative of 'the outer margin' and is waiting for her boyfriend to finish his prison sentence, is able to breathe new life into a man (James K. Baxter Papers. Hocken Library).

⁶⁴ In the fragment of a play *The Seduction* a similar racial prejudice is displayed by the inhabitants of the 'Unjust City.' Peter, who is a middle class Pakeha academic, is tolerant of Māori as long as he does not have to come into contact with them: 'I've known some fine Maori people. Good citizens. I take my hat off to them in the abstract' (13 James K. Baxter Papers. Hocken Library).

Also in *The Spots of the Leopard* a similar racial prejudice against Māori is displayed by the inhabitants of the 'Unjust City' when another academic thinks that his daughter's life will be spoiled by her relationship with a Māori boy (James K. Baxter Papers. Hocken Library).

⁶⁵ Skully's use of the word 'apartheid' is particularly damning of race relations in New Zealand. It likens the New Zealand situation to the extreme racial segregation in South Africa at that time.

'The Wide Open Cage' is one of the first New Zealand plays to make serious commentary on Māori-Pakeha relations. In the same year Jean Lawrence's *Pity My Betrayer* (1959) also touched on the issue, in its examination of the isolation of an Englishwoman married to a Māori labourer whose part-Māori daughter is rejected by the other children in the community.

widow Jacqui is Māori.⁶⁶ His funeral was most unusual in the New Zealand society of the time in that it ‘mingled’ both Māori and Pakeha mourners ‘to an extent seldom seen before’ (Parr 1). His grave is marked with the inscription ‘Hemi,’ the Māori name he assumed in the last years of his life (McKay, The Life 290).

Another aspect of the compassion and sense of social justice in the homosocial world of the ‘Just City’ is its insistence that all conditions of men and women are worthy of acceptance. When Snow and his friend Larry first appear in ‘The Band Rotunda,’ according to the stage directions ‘[t]hey are holding hands, but cease to do so as they come closer to the others’ (102). Later in the play, just after Concrete Grady has explained to Rosie that ‘[o]ld Snow’s a queer, and this lad’s his bumboy!’ Jock, who is a communist, goes to punch Larry, but Grady holds him back with an admonition:

You just leave the boy alone. [. . .] A queer’s no different from anyone else. Some parrots are born with blue feathers, some with green. If the bourgeoisie want to hunt down the queers, leave them to it — they were brought up stupid. [. . .] Maybe Lenin was a queer — or Mao Tse-Tung — they must have had a few games together in the caves of Yenan (120).⁶⁷

By means of these allusions Grady suggests to Jock that some of the people he most admires may have been gay.

⁶⁶ Baxter met his wife Jacqui when he was first a university student in Dunedin. Jacqui was most unusual in the university community of the time in being Māori and a medical student (Oliver 44-45). They were married in 1948.

⁶⁷ In the fragment of a play The Seduction a similarly tolerant attitude towards homosexuality is displayed between hard-drinking men. Scene Four of this play takes place in a pub where two ‘cobber[s]’ Barney and Peter are talking together. Peter has been to a psychiatrist, who has told him that he is ‘some kind of queer.’ When Peter asks Barney if he thinks this is true, Barney replies, ‘I couldn’t care less! If you’re queer that’s your business’ (16. James K. Baxter Papers. Hocken Library).

Similarly, another fragment of a play The Roaring Season (n.d.) sets down in verse the right of the homosexual to have an active sex life:

You can write it high in the eastern sky
And crown it in letters of gold
You may be queer, or you may like beer
But you still won’t sleep on your own

(n.pag. James K. Baxter Papers. Hocken Library).

Shortly afterwards Grady admits that there have been homosexual episodes in his own life: 'I've worked on the boats and slipped the cabin boy a length before now — it's not my style, but you get hard up at sea' (120). 'The Sore-Footed Man' also makes the point that homosocial naval groups are homoerotic. When one of the sailors is describing what happened when Philoctetes first landed on Lemnos another sailor remarks, '[y]ou seem to know a lot about him. Did you ever sleep with him, Sugar Plum?' (137).⁶⁸

It has already been established that Concrete Grady is a dramatic mask for Baxter himself. Both of Baxter's biographers make the point that Baxter, like Grady, had homosexual episodes in his life (McKay, *The Life* 94-5; Oliver 19-20; 44).⁶⁹ Concrete Grady's statement 'the bourgeoisie want to hunt down the queers' (*Collected Plays* 120) confirms that the 'Unjust City' is middle class, materialistic and homophobic.⁷⁰

By way of contrast Concrete Grady asserts once again the compassionate attitude of the 'Just City':

It won't matter much if the bastards that run the world are shopping each other to the cops night and day. Honour at the top can go for a skate — [. . .]. It's down here it matters. Down here at the bottom. If

⁶⁸ Baxter's poems also make reference to homosexuality. For example in 'Seraphion,' written in 1952, the hermit of the title remembers a same sex relationship which is once again associated with a homosocial naval reference:

But at night a voice comes on the wind, a phantom
Torments me, touching my ageing limbs with fire:
A sea boy out of Smyrna. Two years we lived
In unlawful love, thieving and drinking together,
Till he left me for a wealthy Lebanese
For an overcoat and a villa in Cairo

(*Collected Poems* 128).

⁶⁹ Baxter wrote sympathetically of homosexuality in other genres. As early as 1955 in 'Over the Tin Fence' he defined Oscar Wilde's homosexuality as 'the underlying condition which gave tension and significance to his work' (*James K. Baxter as Critic* 161). Later in the article he claims that Wilde's *De Profundis* has a central theme of idealized homosexual love: '[F]riendship which would demand more altruism of the parties than is normally present in matrimony' (162).

⁷⁰ D'Arcy Cresswell's *The Forest* (1952) is subtitled 'A Comedy in Three Acts' but is one of the first New Zealand plays to make serious reference to male homosexuality. In this verse play the protagonist, Clive, makes no secret of the fact that his love for his friend George is stronger than any feelings he has for women. Speaking of his friendship he tells his mother, '[w]e love each other, and always did at school.' When his mother protests 'there are pretty girls,' Clive avows, 'I'll never love a woman as I love George.' When his mother exclaims, '[i]t gets unnatural [. . .]. There's laws against such nonsense!' (54), Clive replies defiantly, '[t]wo men in love can laugh at all the world' (55).

there's no honour among thieves, the sun can't rise — or if it does rise, it rises on a bloody desert (Collected Plays 119).⁷¹

In 'The Day that Flanagan Died' (1969) the moral superiority of the alcoholic version of 'the outer margin' is affirmed yet again. This play opens with Flanagan, a publican, in his coffin on the stage.⁷² His mother, representing the 'Calvinist ethos' of the 'Unjust City,' judges her son to have led 'a bad life,' pointing out as evidence 'the brandy bottle under the mattress' (303) 'then the housemaid' (304). Annie, however, a Catholic girl who is bearing Flanagan's illegitimate child (they have been in a *de facto* relationship), describes him as a superior person: 'He was a king. A king in disguise. And he made me feel like a princess' (306). Though she knows he has slept with other women, Annie says she fell in love because of the compassion Flanagan showed to other human beings in need:

[T]here was an old drunk [. . .] he'd fallen down beside the step, and there he was covered with spew — and I told Barney, and he went and picked him up and wiped his face with his own handkerchief. And then he took off his own coat, and he put the old man on the bunk in the shed, [. . .] it was real love — not just getting rid of a nuisance (307).

Flanagan, the alcoholic who has had multiple affairs with women and who is compassionate to alcoholics like himself, like most of the inhabitants of the 'Just City,' is another dramatic mask for the playwright himself.⁷³ Similarly, Oliver

⁷¹ Concrete Grady is one of Baxter's favourite dramatic masks. He also wrote poems about him. 'The Holy Life and Death of Concrete Grady' (1961), for example, has seven different parts (Collected Poems 239-243). In the title of the poem Baxter affirms once again Grady's moral and spiritual superiority.

The character of Concrete Grady also appears in the fragment of a play entitled The Seduction (n.d.) which is housed in the Hocken Library, Dunedin.

⁷² The dialogue begins with a poem which is printed in Collected Poems under the title 'Lament for Barney Flanagan,' which Baxter wrote in 1953, so the character in the poem is probably the source for the protagonist in the play.

⁷³ Baxter became a member of Alcoholics Anonymous in 1955. He was always willing to help other alcoholics and said that it was good for him to visit what he called the 'meths kings' in the public hospital (Oliver 75). The alcoholics in 'The Band Rotunda' are also meths drinkers. In describing such men as 'kings' Baxter once again asserts their superiority.

interprets Baxter's characters in 'The Wide Open Cage' as an expression of different facets of the playwright's own personality:

The play projects a multiple self-portrait. Skully is the Baxter who had believed that he could save himself without church and priest; Hogan the self-destructive alcoholic. The climax – the devil-possessed Hogan killing Skully – is the fate Baxter had feared from the drink. Ted is the questing adolescent James, still in Bohemia; Eila the kind of troubled girl he went with; and Norah the rough loving mistress-mother he kept looking for (92).

These characters from the alcoholic subculture of 'the outer margin' are enmeshed by Baxter in Biblical allusions. Annie's description of the alcoholic Flanagan's care of an old drunk implies that he is a modern day Good Samaritan. The title of the play 'Who Killed Sebastian,' along with the opening speech within it, liken the young drug addict to an early Christian martyr. In 'The Wide Open Cage' Hogan kills Skully in an alcoholic rage with the words '[t]here is too much brightness in you' (Collected Plays 52), suggesting that Skully, emitting a halo, is a Christ-like figure. The same can be said of Snow, whose very name has connotations of purity. Snow (who goes to prison for robbing a charity box) is drunk every day, but he won't drink on Good Friday (105). He also carries a copy of the Bible in his overcoat (110) and has visions of Christ (111).

Elizabeth Isichei is of the opinion that what attracted Baxter to Catholicism 'above all, was the fact that the Catholic church was not a body of self-selected spiritual athletes, but a place where misfits, alcoholics, and prisoners could feel at home.' She then goes on to comment that Catholics were 'over-represented' in the final two categories (236-237). It is significant that Baxter's protagonists of

In her paper delivered at the Baxter Conference in 1994 Elizabeth Isichei points out that Baxter makes reference to his two children born out of wedlock in one of his poems (249):

Tormenting myself with moral inventory
While I cut the sods and lay them straight

To make a wall to shelter beans,
I think of my two illegitimate children

And how they will judge me when they come of age
(Collected Poems 470).

the 'Just City' – the likes of Skully, Flanagan and Concrete Grady – are also Catholics. Catholicism is another representation of 'the outer margin' in relation to the Protestant majority (often portrayed by Baxter as Calvinist) of New Zealand society. Subtextually, therefore, by associating Catholicism with the 'Just City' Baxter implies that this representation of the doubly marginalized is also superior.

Baxter's inverted social code suggests that alcoholism, prostitution and larceny are signs of purity, virtue and spiritual superiority. This inverted snobbery is taken to its greatest extreme at the end of 'The Band Rotunda.' The drunks gathered around the bandstand of the title on Good Friday become the re-enactment of the crucifixion of Christ with Grady in the title role.⁷⁴ Harold W Smith, in his review of the play when it was first performed at The Globe in Dunedin in 1967, noted the depth of the allusion to the life of Christ, seeing Snow's 'self-tortured tirade to himself' as an 'Agony in the Garden' and the breaking of Larry's guitar as a 'Scourging of the Temple' (58).

Forming a tableau that is the mirror image of the mourners at the foot of the Cross, Rosie tells Concrete Grady '[y]ou think you're God' (124). The play concludes with Grady making a plea to the crucified Christ, whom he can obviously see (although the audience cannot) as he '*sprawls on the rotunda steps*' (125). Baxter's self-mythologizing is taken here to an excess: he becomes one of the disciples in the presence of the crucified Christ.⁷⁵ Significantly, however, the risen Christ chooses only to appear to the inhabitants of the 'Just City' and in particular to the Catholic Concrete Grady, one of Baxter's favourite dramatic masks.

⁷⁴ Baxter's interpretation of Catholicism is similar in many ways to that of another Catholic writer, Graham Greene. Greene's finest novel, *The Power and the Glory* (1940), has a protagonist who is an alcoholic priest trying to perform his religious duties despite threats of death by a revolutionary dictatorship. Pearson recalls Baxter reading Graham Greene ('Two Personal Memories of James K. Baxter' 3). The influence of Greene on Baxter's writing is indicated in texts such as 'The Starlight in Your Eyes' (1967). In this play Baxter envisages a country which has become a dictatorship which is, by implication, New Zealand. One of the central characters is a priest who is killed by the army of the dictator for carrying out his priestly duties and refusing to divulge the last confession of a young Māori man.

⁷⁵ This self-mythologizing is further illustrated in the mime entitled 'The Cross' which preceded 'The Band Rotunda' when the play was first produced at The Globe. In repeatedly drinking from a 'JUG' of 'fiery liquor' the protagonist of the mime is identified as an alcoholic. In persistently carrying around the stage an 'invisible piece of timber' which becomes 'heavier,' in pressing 'NAILS' 'between the fingers of each hand' and in his final pose in 'a rigid cruciform position' the protagonist is also alluded to as the crucified Christ (*Collected Plays* 325-326).

E: CONCLUSION

Both Mason and Baxter contributed much to what Peter Harcourt refers to in his history of the theatre in New Zealand as 'the turning-point of the mid-1950s' (50). An essential characteristic of that 'turning-point' was the rejection of 'The Kiwi Cringe' as dramatists attempted to identify the authentic 'voice' of 'the margin' that is New Zealand.

In their challenge to the hegemony of the Eurocentre, both Mason and Baxter covered similar ground in their portraits of 'the outer margin.' Both contributed to the thematic revolution in the drama of this country by advocating the rights of homosexuals and Māori. Mason, however, gives these representatives of 'the outer margin' greater prominence than Baxter does, by making them the central characters. Both were ahead of their time in their insistence that New Zealand should re-define itself as a bicultural society.

The stances taken by these two playwrights display fundamental similarities. Baxter's concept of the 'Unjust City' bears a striking resemblance to Mason's concept of '*the garden*'.⁷⁶ These terms were coined to refer to respectable Pakeha middle class New Zealand, which, as the mimic of the Eurocentre, had established its own dominance within 'the margin.' Both playwrights were deeply critical of this white 'settler colony's' value system, even though it formed part of their own family backgrounds. Their scathing snapshots of the lifestyle of this society, however, also represent some of their finest writing.

There are clear similarities between Baxter and Mason's viewpoints on the subject of conventional marriage. Both portray it as a sterile environment where communication is reduced to superficialities, and sexual enjoyment quickly evaporates. They even employ the same object, the newspaper, as a symbol of the breakdown of these relationships. Both insist that the environment of

⁷⁶ It is interesting to note that both Mason and Baxter draw upon Celtic mythology in order to give resonance to their New Zealand 'voice' and to challenge the dominance of the Eurocentre. Baxter mythologizes his Scottish ancestry and displaces it onto the New Zealand landscape and Mason's concept of '*the wild*' is derived from Yeats. It could be argued that the Celtic culture is another colonized 'margin' in relation to the perceived 'centre' of colonial power.

conventional Pakeha society is damaging, not only to the unhappy couples trapped within it, but also to their offspring. Both emphasize the female dislike of sex and the male finding consolation in alcohol. Both suggest that the extra-marital affair is intrinsic to New Zealand society, though Mason emphasizes this more constantly than Baxter. Both chart the aggression between male and female, though Mason is more explicit on the subject of domestic violence. Both are consistently damning of the materialistic values of respectable middle class New Zealand. In all these respects Mason's condemnation of marriage in '*the garden*' is very similar to Baxter's view of marriage in the 'Unjust City.'

Baxter emulates Mason in creating an oeuvre which advocates an alternative set of values. Baxter's portrait of 'the outer margin' that is the 'Just City' is in many ways a reflection of Mason's theory of '*the wild*.' These idiosyncratic terms denote the privileging by these two playwrights of the various minority groups which have traditionally been unrepresented or undervalued on the New Zealand stage.

In mounting these rebellions, however, both playwrights relied on theatrical structures derived from the Eurocentre. Paradoxically, at the same time as they challenged the hegemony of the colonizer, they also drew heavily on its literary traditions. Characters such as Mason's Aroha Mataira and Werihe Paku, for example, who ostensibly represent Māori, nevertheless owe much to the protagonists of classical Greek theatre and Shakespeare's tragedies. Similarly, Baxter consistently attempted to add stature to his protagonists by setting up parallels between them and the heroes of Greek mythology.

Despite these similarities in theme and technique, there is also a significant variation in the various facets of 'the outer margin' that interest these two playwrights. Baxter, in determinedly allying himself to the world of his father, was predominantly concerned with the male representatives of 'the outer margin' such as pioneer settlers and alcoholic down-and-outs.⁷⁷ This led him to exploit

⁷⁷ In his review of Baxter's *Collected Plays*, published in the *NZ Listener* in 1983, Thompson emphasizes Baxter's focus on the most disadvantaged in New Zealand society: 'His [Baxter's]

'Man Alone' mythology. Mason, by way of contrast, was fascinated by strong atypical females both from the Pakeha middle class and from 'the outer margin,' his portraits of whom constitute arguably his finest dramatic creations.⁷⁸ As the first New Zealand dramatists to tackle consistently the subject of Māori-Pakeha relationships, both playwrights remain important facilitators of the emergence of Māori theatre.

The different creative processes of these two playwrights underline further their contrasting points of view. Baxter, creating both literally and metaphorically from his position in the cave, '*listening*' in isolation 'to [. . .] unheard sound' ('Beginnings' 239) fashioned a universe out of his own psyche. Mason, creating both literally and metaphorically from his position in the flaxbush, attempted to understand '*the other.*' This seeming disparity is, however, deceptive. The metaphors of the flaxbush and the cave both contain the sense of being alone and set apart. These writers identify with 'the outer margin' of their own society because of their own sense of alienation. Both are narcissistic, creating portraits of the New Zealand world which are essentially dramatic masks for their own lives. Narcissism, however, is probably an inevitable characteristic of playwrights who are engaged in the attempt to sever the bonds of a dominant colonizing culture and to articulate a national 'voice' out of their own life experience.

greatest power as a dramatist undoubtedly lies in his ability to probe the lower depths of our society and lift what he finds up to the level of myth' ('Glimpse of a Dramatist' 98).

⁷⁸ It can also be argued that Mason's strong atypical female characters display the influence of Greek models such as the protagonist of Euripides' *Medea*.

CHAPTER 3

MERVYN THOMPSON: THE BOY WHOSE ROOF BLEW OFF

A: 'I KNOW AT LAST WHOSE I AM, WHAT I BELONG TO, WHAT I MUST DO'

1 INTRODUCTION

Mervyn Thompson was born in 1935 in Kaitangata, a small coalmining settlement in South Otago.¹ Unlike Bruce Mason and James K. Baxter, he had an unsettled childhood, as the family moved frequently: '[F]rom Kaitangata to Runanga, from Runanga to Kaitangata, from Kaitangata back to the Coast again, this time to Rapahoe, from Rapahoe back to Runanga' (*All My Lives* 12).² Thompson's parents on both sides were working class: his father was a coalminer and his mother came from a background of domestic service. Thompson perceptively identifies the contrasting reactions of his mother and father to the nomadic existence of the family during his early life:

Those shifts. How significant they seem to me now as I attempt to follow my father and mother into territories that grew more unsettling and uncertain every year. My father searching for an eldorado and obviously not finding it. My mother searching for a place of rest but her spirit becomes more restless daily and she sinks further and further into depression and mental illness (12).

¹ Although many references, including *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, give Mervyn Thompson's date of birth as 1936 (Thomson, 'Bibliography' 861), his birth certificate states that he was born in 1935.

² Thompson wrote that he had early memories of having relations from both sides of his family in the Kaitangata area. His mother, who was Cornish, came from a 'huge family.' His father was a first generation New Zealander whose parents had settled in Stirling, seven kilometres from Kaitangata. Thompson's parents had married young, his father being twenty and his mother sixteen, and he was the first grandchild of both families (*All My Lives* 10-11).

This reference, in his first autobiography, to his mother's instability as 'she sinks further and further into depression and mental illness' highlights a state of mind which resulted eventually in her suicide. These traumatic events had a lasting effect on the mature writer's psyche and on his artistry.

According to Thompson's own account,³ his childhood and adolescence, unlike Mason's and Baxter's, were characterized by a demeaning poverty.⁴ Thompson's father, like Baxter's, was a literary-minded man who had little formal education but who passed on to his only son a tradition of self-education. Although he was a coalminer all his working life, he was also an avid reader, well versed, according to Thompson, in 'books which celebrated class war and the struggle of the little man against his oppressors' (18). Thompson's father believed that the 'eldorado' he was seeking lay in social revolution. As a committed communist (17) he was convinced that the problems of his family, including their financial difficulties, could be solved by espousing Marxist doctrine. The revolution, however, never materialised and the family remained poor. Although, like Mason, Thompson achieved academically at school,⁵ on the insistence of his father he was made to leave on his fifteenth birthday and to join the workforce, in order to supplement the family income (23). Though his first job was in a hardware store (23), in 1954 he became a coalminer, like his father before him (39).

Despite their differences, however, Thompson's oeuvre is similar to Mason's and Baxter's in three key respects. Firstly, his writing is largely autobiographical and he makes frequent references to the experience of his childhood and adolescence. Secondly, he is profoundly influenced by the local New Zealand region in which he grew up. In Thompson's case this was the coalmining settlement of Runanga on the West Coast of the South Island. Thirdly, he creates a mythologized version

³ No biography of Thompson has yet been written. The most detailed testimony of his life is to be found in his two volumes of autobiography, *All My Lives* (1980) and *Singing the Blues* (1991).

⁴ In *All My Lives* Thompson wrote '[w]e were a poor family even by Runanga's standards.' He then went on to outline the 'embarrassing' incidents that he and his sisters suffered at school because his parents could not afford school uniform, school equipment, or school trips (14).

⁵ David Dowling notes that from his early schooldays Bruce Mason was '[m]arked as a scholar' (*Introducing Bruce Mason* 2). James K. Baxter, on the other hand, achieved below his ability at school (Oliver 33). Thompson, like Baxter, eventually gained a degree after first joining the workforce, but unlike Mason or Baxter he earned a living as an academic before becoming a playwright.

of this landscape. Like Mason, he invented his own name for the local area and then used it as a backdrop to some of his most important work: Runanga becomes 'Blacktown.'⁶ Thompson, like Mason again, peopled his landscape with characters drawn from life, including his own parents.

As a writer Thompson, like Mason, was first and foremost a playwright and it is upon his work in the theatre that he built his artistic reputation.⁷ Neither of Thompson's autobiographies, however, indicates that he shared with Mason and Baxter the experience of deciding at an early age to become a writer. On the contrary his first play, 'First Return,' was not begun until he was thirty-five.

Between 'First Return' and his death in 1992, Thompson wrote twelve plays in all. Four of these – 'First Return' (1974), Coaltown Blues (1984), 'Lovebirds' (1990) and 'Passing Through' (1991) – are heavily autobiographical. Of the remaining eight, six – 'O! Temperance!' (1972), 'Songs to Uncle Scrim' (1976), A Night at the Races (1977), 'The Great New Zealand Truth Show' (1982), Brecht in Exile (1989 Playmarket Script), and Big George (n.d. Mervyn Thompson Papers. Macmillan Brown Library) – have themes firmly rooted in the playwright's experience of the West Coast coalmining background of his childhood. 'Songs to the Judges' (1980) and 'Jean and Richard' (1990) also reflect this influence, but to a lesser extent.⁸

'First Return' was begun on 1 January 1971 (96). In All My Lives Thompson acknowledges that he knew instinctively his first play would be autobiographical: 'I knew as certainly as I knew that my hair was thinning that the first thing of any consequence I would write would be The Confession. Tortured with some cranky expressionistic form, The Confession would be an autobiographical play or novel

⁶ There is another reference to the mythologized landscape in Thompson's second volume of autobiography, Singing the Blues, which he published independently under the name Blacktown Press.

⁷ Thompson's work in the theatre, like Mason's, also included both acting and directing. In an interview in 1989 he commented, 'It is one of the strange ironies that I could have made a career of directing the classics during the last 15 years [. . .] I took another line. I decided I would pursue New Zealand theatre' (Cassels 8).

⁸ 'First Return,' 'O! Temperance!,' 'Songs to Uncle Scrim' and 'Songs to the Judges' are collected in Selected Plays and 'The Great New Zealand Truth Show,' 'Lovebirds,' 'Jean and Richard' and 'Passing Through' are collected in Passing Through and Other Plays.

of unusual candour' (81). 'First Return' turned out to be an 'autobiographical play' of 'unusual candour' which is '[t]ortured into some cranky expressionistic form.' It can be assumed, therefore, that it is also 'The Confession.'⁹

There are many similarities between the protagonist's experience of the academic world in 'First Return' and his creator's own experience of academia. As part of the process of gaining his formal education in Christchurch, Thompson admitted in All My Lives that he had been persuaded to adopt 'The Kiwi Cringe' because this was the accepted point of view among academics at that time: 'I was making a good fist of being middle-class. I was doing very well what our education system demands – that one should deny oneself, one's personal history, one's nationality; that one should lower the knee to old Europe;¹⁰ that one should learn to patronise New Zealand artists if not sneer at them' (84). Similarly, at the beginning of 'First Return,' the protagonist Simon, like his creator Thompson, has adopted a middle class academic value system and suppressed all reference to his working class heritage. Christine, an old friend, comments on Simon's silence regarding his origins: 'There were vague hints of a working-class background, I remember that. A slightly haunted look. Sudden storms of anger out of a clear sky. But otherwise silence. No father, no mother, no past' (Selected Plays 34).

Thompson began writing this play when he was on sabbatical leave from his position as Junior Lecturer in English at the University of Canterbury and he completed the first draft whilst still in London (Selected Plays [Author's Note] 20). Likewise 'First Return' opens with Simon arriving at Heathrow Airport. There he is met by an old Kiwi friend, Christine, who tells him that many of the talented people they knew in New Zealand have emigrated: 'Judy illustrating children's books, Alan floor manager, I.T.V., Heather singing, B.B.C., David

⁹ In the Author's Note that introduces the published version of 'First Return' Thompson confirmed that 'much of the material [in the play] is autobiographical' (Selected Plays 19). The programme from the première also implies that the play is 'The Confession' by including a quotation from Oscar Wilde: "When we blame ourselves we feel that no-one else has the right to blame us. It is the confession, not the priest, that gives us absolution" (*The Picture of Dorian Grey*)' (Mervyn Thompson Papers. Macmillan Brown Library). Thompson references the quotation he has included in the programme but does not give the source he used.

¹⁰ Thompson's choice of subject for his M.A. thesis 'The Poetic Dramas of W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood: A Study of Four Plays' reflects the influence of the Eurocentre on his research at this time.

teaching French in Paris' (27). 'First Return' was written over twenty years after Mason began writing about the country of his birth, but the attitude of New Zealanders towards their own culture had changed very little in the intervening time. There is a pervasive opinion among these emigrants that their own culture is inferior. Christine, who is middle class and an academic, is the mouthpiece for their point of view. As far as she is concerned, Europe is 'the centre' of the civilized world and New Zealand exists on its farthest and most sterile margin: 'When you've lived in the back yard of the world you appreciate the front garden. [. . .] It's death back there' (28-29).

Simon is a dramatic representation of Thompson's experience of working class New Zealand. Christine represents 'the inner margin.' As the mimic of the colonizer, she relegates her own country to 'the margins' ('the backyard of the world') and marginalizes her own culture ('it's death back there'). To use Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's terminology, Simon is rendered 'silent' and 'silenced' (25) when confronted with the hegemony of the Eurocentre. Although he is not a 'native' in Spivak's strict definition of the term, as his own culture has been 'colonized' he can be identified as one of Homi Bhabha's categories of the doubly marginalized which include 'women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities' (936).¹¹

Simon eventually begins to distrust the culture of the dominant Eurocentre that Christine and her like so admire. In the end he rejects both her and the view of the world she represents. After booking a seat on the plane back to New Zealand, he tells Christine that Europe is 'not my history' (60). As the title of the play indicates, in order to re-discover his own identity, Simon has to cast aside the middle class mask he has assumed and make his 'First Return' to 'the margin' of the country of his birth and to 'the outer margin' of his working class roots.¹²

¹¹ Accordingly I will include the working class as a category of 'the outer margin.'

¹² Charles Brasch's verse play *The Quest* (1946) is one of the first New Zealand plays to examine a protagonist's willing return to New Zealand after his overseas experience. The central character, who is a Shepherd, speaks of his return, like Simon, in terms of a re-discovery of his own identity:

I have come to the end of doubt
And to the beginning of the knowledge of self,
I have described a circle round the earth
And reached my starting place (42).

There is compelling evidence to suggest that the stirrings of nationalism evident in Simon were affecting his creator at the same time. In a talk given at Massey University in October 1984, Thompson told his audience that 1971 (the year in which he began writing 'First Return') represented for him 'a kind of religious conversion' wherein 'I rediscovered New Zealand' ('Theatre and Working Class Politics' 20). In 1975, after the first production of the play in Christchurch, Thompson also confirmed to an Act interviewer that his own sense of identity, like Simon's, was inextricably bound up with the need to 'Return' to his origins:

I could make affirmation about myself and the land that bred me only if I could also bring myself to face the less attractive aspects of my nationalism – and myself. And this led me steadily back to my own peculiar neurosis, to a pretty scarred childhood on the mythical West Coast, to those ghosts of the past which had always haunted me ('Act Features "First Return"' 10).

After his 'First Return' to the country of his birth, Simon reaches a key moment of self-realisation as he faces the ghost of his mother: 'SIMON. (*Softly, looking at MOTHER*) [. . .] – I know at last whose I am, what I belong to, what I must *do*' (63). The dramatic image of Simon confronting the spectre of his mother can accordingly be interpreted as the metaphorical expression of the beginnings of Thompson's creative process. In rejecting the 'history' of the dominant Eurocentre, he rejects also 'The Kiwi Cringe' and assumes instead the position of Allen Curnow's 'islander.' Even though the playwright, in the mask of Simon, 'shudders' (to use Curnow's word) at the thought of facing 'the ghosts of the past which had always haunted' him, nevertheless, in the process of doing so he is 'feeling something at his own centre.' Along with the other artists who rebelled against the hegemony of the colonizer, Thompson realized that in order to become a writer with an authentic 'voice' he must 'place New Zealand at the centre, the only possible place' (Curnow, Four Plays 7-8).

This play, however, unlike Thompson's, has neither a specific New Zealand setting nor a working class point of view.

Thompson has been included in this thesis not only because he, like Mason and Baxter, rejected 'The Kiwi Cringe,' but also because he is the first New Zealand playwright to focus his oeuvre persistently on 'the outer margin' of the working class and to give the history of that class centre stage attention. Thompson's espousal of his father's political convictions also made him the first consistently Marxist 'voice' on the New Zealand stage. In coming to terms with his own national identity, he rejected the predominant attention given at the time to the history and society of the Eurocentre, re-discovering instead the largely unwritten history of his own class.¹³

Thompson, like Mason and Baxter, validates his focus on New Zealand society by constantly referring to autobiographical material. The process of re-tracing this autobiographical territory led him to place previously marginalized people and events from New Zealand history on the stage. The compulsion to face the 'ghosts' of his own past also prompted him to create a repeated portrait of the mother as she, in her son's words, 'sinks further and further into depression and mental illness' (*All My Lives* 12). The representation of this character, which forms a recurrent motif in Thompson's writing, also caused him to explore aspects of the female psyche which had rarely appeared in the national theatre. Similarly, the placing of his own dysfunctional relationships on the stage also spurred him to broach social issues which had seldom been aired before in New Zealand theatre.

¹³ As a Marxist, Thompson viewed Māori as but one part of the communal struggle of the proletariat against the evils of capitalism.

2 THE THOMPSON HOLOCAUST

I have already illustrated how Simon is a mirror image of the playwright who created him. Sebastian Black, in his introduction to Selected Plays, also emphasizes 'how closely the details of Simon's life are based on Thompson's own experiences' ('Four Plays in Search of a Theatre' 12). Thompson himself recalls that at one of the initial readings of the play in New Zealand the actors were 'cautious and embarrassed' because they were so aware that 'First Return' was 'largely autobiographical' ('Act Features "First Return"' 9).

In the same interview Thompson outlined that his technique as a playwright is to 'set myself up as a theatrical sacrifice, [. . .] to *unmask*' (10). I have already established that much of Mason's and Baxter's work represents thinly disguised dramatic masks of themselves. Thompson, however, goes further than this. The term '*unmask*' indicates that protagonists such as Simon are actual representations of the playwright upon the stage.¹⁴ Black confirms this when he identifies 'First Return' as an 'unashamedly confessional' work and goes on to record the audience reaction to the play: '[A]stonished that a playwright could so nakedly reveal his own past pains and sorrows' ('Four Plays in Search of a Theatre' 6).¹⁵ A comparison between Thompson's autobiographies and his plays reveals the same material being used in both genres, confirming that not only 'First Return,' but also the majority of Thompson's plays are constructed out of autobiographical material. Thompson recognizes his own self-obsession and acknowledges it as a

¹⁴ In this interview Thompson also expressed his dislike of dramatic masks, quoting Eugene O'Neill in support of his opinion: 'I can't bear masks, my own or anybody else's. As O'Neill once said: "One's outer life passes in a solitude haunted by the masks of others; one's inner life passes in a solitude haunted by the masks of oneself"' ('Act Features "First Return"' 10).

In an interview with Richard Corballis, Thompson also allied the '*unmask*' to the working class way of life: 'In working class clubs nobody gets up and pretends to be somebody else; people get up behind the microphone or whatever as themselves and take on characteristics as they need them and drop them just as quickly. And that's what my work's about; it's about direct contact with an audience' ('Interview with Mervyn Thompson' 77).

¹⁵ In The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre Phyllis Hartnoll and Peter Found comment that Expressionist theatre can be accused of being 'too personal' because of 'the concentration on the central figure, the author-hero whose reactions are "expressed" in the play' (152). Simon is an example of such an 'author-hero.' Hartnoll and Found also identify Strindberg as a 'forerunner' of Expressionism. Strindberg's experiments in 'A Dream Play' in which he endeavoured 'to reproduce the disconnected but apparently logical form of a dream' (193) is reflected in the nightmarish quality of 'First Return' in which the protagonist is haunted by the 'Demons' (Selected Plays 36) of his past.

combination of 'narcissism' and 'masochism' using the 'unmask' to promote the 'cause of truth' ('Act Features "First Return" 10).

It can be argued that any work of fiction must, by definition, distort the facts. It can even be argued that any autobiography, no matter how accurate the writer tries to make it, will be guilty of this to some extent. There is no doubt that Thompson's oeuvre, like that of both Mason and Baxter, takes the form of conscious self-dramatization. The compulsion to 'unmask,' however, means that Thompson's work cannot exist without his memories, no matter how distorted they may be.¹⁶

My research has provided overwhelming evidence to confirm that Thompson's main themes arose out of his relationships with his parents. His persistent re-visiting of key autobiographical scenes from his early life form idiosyncratic motifs which recur throughout his oeuvre. In pinpointing these I have come to the conclusion that they indicate areas of unresolved trauma to which Thompson is compelled to 'Return.'

Thompson himself recognized that his 'scarred childhood' was the cause of his 'own peculiar neurosis' ('Act Features "First Return" 10). The multiple repetitions of events, images and phrases in his autobiographically based work are

¹⁶ 'First Return' and Coaltown Blues, and even All My Lives to some extent, are dramatized versions of reality. Speaking of his first autobiography, Thompson himself even joked in an interview that he sometimes referred to All My Lives as 'All My Lies' (Dowling, 'David Dowling Reviews and Interviews Mervyn Thompson' 310). It is certainly true that Thompson the playwright takes poetic licence with the facts at times. For example, All My Lives records correctly that Thompson's first employment was in a hardware store (23), whereas both 'First Return' and Coaltown Blues make no mention of him ever having worked anywhere else than in a coal mine. Also, Coaltown Blues opens with the claim that 'On the Night I was Born' the first Labour Government was voted into power. Shortly afterwards, the Performer admits, '[i]t's all lies actually, I wasn't really born that night. As a matter of fact I had a fair old wait ahead of me yet. [. . .] But you've got to start somewhere. And Election Night, 1935, seems as good a time as any. The last hours of Forbes and Coates, the first hours of Me [. . .]. Fiction is not only truer than Fact, it's also more Symmetrical' (10). The statement is 'all lies' and he 'wasn't really born on that night.' The first Labour government was elected on 26th November 1935 and Thompson was born on 14th June of that year, so it is not true that he had 'a fair old wait' ahead of him. He was already five months old, so his father would not have gone to the hospital on election night as Coaltown Blues claims (7-8). Nevertheless, the very admission that one detail of the performance is 'Fiction' implies that the rest of the script is 'Fact.' Speaking in the first person, Thompson implies that he is recounting his own life story. Immediately after his statement about the relationship between 'Fact' and 'Fiction' the Performer states, '[b]e that as it may, here I stand. In a place I've *elected* [my italics] to call Blacktown, an isolated coalmining community on the West Coast' (10). Once again the suggestion is that there is 'Fact' behind the 'Fiction.'

indications of obsessional behaviour which is characteristic of this condition.¹⁷ I have already referred to the interview in which Thompson acknowledges his self-obsession and explains that it is composed of elements of ‘narcissism’ and ‘masochism’ (10). His personal diary expands further on the nature of this ‘narcissism’ by revealing how Thompson interprets the Narcissus myth: ‘Narcissus [. . .] he can love nobody [. . .] not even himself. He’s not been found worthy of love [. . .]. “He only loves himself” means “he hates himself” for the selfish person does not love himself too much but too little’ (Diary 31 December 1987). The self-confessed ‘masochism’ of Thompson’s theatrical technique can accordingly be interpreted as a form of self-punishment resulting from a lack rather than an over-abundance of self-esteem.

In ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ Sigmund Freud states that it is usual for the mind to protect itself by suppressing unpleasant memories: ‘There is no doubt that the resistance of the conscious and unconscious ego operates under the sway of the pleasure principle: it seeks to avoid unpleasure which would be produced by the liberation of the repressed.’ Freud, however, also observes that in some people ‘the compulsion to repeat also recalls from the past experiences which include no possibility of pleasure, and which can never, even long ago, have brought satisfaction’ (172). From this evidence he concludes ‘that there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle’ (173). If this psychological interpretation is pursued, then the frequent revisiting of painful childhood experiences represents ‘a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle’ and becomes an indication of emotional trauma which was never resolved.

In order to confirm this interpretation I will now compare All My Lives with the scripts of ‘First Return’ and Coaltown Blues; the obsessive repetitions pinpoint the areas of unresolved trauma. These psychic injuries are revisited by the playwright, in one form or another, throughout these three texts.

¹⁷ Apart from anxiety and obsessive behaviour, depression is another symptom of neurosis. Thompson’s diaries make reference to his depressions. The Daily Journal, for example, written in 1987, notes on 18 March ‘[d]epression sitting heavy’ and on 20 March ‘[t]he depression deepens.’

Thompson was born four years before the outbreak of the Second World War. This event coloured his early childhood, which was spent, when his family did settle, in the small coalmining community of Runanga on the West Coast of the South Island, where his father found employment in the local pit. The pattern of life for the Thompson family developed into an unending cycle of poverty, struggle and conflict. The father's reaction was to try to find a solution through gambling, in the hope that one lucky win on the horses would miraculously solve his financial worries. The drain on the family's already meagre resources aggravated the conflict within it and 'had as its consequence domestic battles of frightening intensity' (All My Lives 15).

All My Lives describes the frequent scenes of mutual accusation between the parents when 'before long both of them would be screaming at each other while the children retreated to a corner.' These conflicts at times culminated in physical violence on both sides when '[s]ometimes they would come to blows,' but more frequently the father would hit out in frustration at the taunting mother, who hurled accusations at him: 'You lose all your money on the horses.' The reaction of Mervyn, at this time his mother's only son, was to become her ally and her defender. This, in turn, would deflect the wrath of the father onto his son and 'my father would turn on me and start laying into me with belt or boot' (16).

In 'First Return' Simon's recollections of the rows between his parents in his childhood almost exactly duplicate Thompson's in his first autobiography:

MOTHER. (*To FATHER*) You smoke like a chimney, you throw
away money on the horses, [. . .] I can't pay the bills [. . .]

FATHER. Stop nagging [. . .] one day we'll win [. . .]

MOTHER. Go on, hit me you bastard, [. . .] –

FATHER. I'll bloody hit you all right.

He does. MOTHER falls to the floor (Selected Plays 40-41).

Shortly afterwards Simon, in trying desperately to stop his parents fighting, and to defend his mother, unwittingly turns the violence of his father against himself:

FATHER. You little prick. You always take her side. [. . .] *I'll
bloody well kill you!*

SIMON. (*Reverting even further into childhood and crouching on the floor in terror*) Don't hit me Dad. Don't tell on me, Mum or he'll hit me again. He'll take out his belt and he'll hit me again. He'll kick me under the table (41).¹⁸

In 1984 Thompson, then senior lecturer in Drama at the University of Auckland, wrote his first one man show, which he called Coaltown Blues. As in 'First Return' the theme was a recollection of his childhood and adolescence in Runanga, to which he gave the fictional name of 'Blacktown.'

In Coaltown Blues the Performer recounts the same details of the pattern of domestic violence that appear in both All My Lives and 'First Return':

I retreat with my sisters into a far and neutral corner as my parents circle round each other, ranging over the battleground of their differences [. . .]. Dad swings at Mum and she falls over in the middle of the big, bare front room, weeping raw and red, and I run towards her and am hit by a sweeping backhand (15-16).

The issue of domestic violence then, as illustrated by these strikingly similar accounts in three separate works, is indicative of one area of unresolved trauma.

In all of Thompson's autobiographical writing the most poignant figure to emerge as a victim of this cycle of violence and deprivation is the mother. Her son's portrait of her is obsessively re-worked. The lasting impression that he creates is of a woman not defiant, as she appears in her altercations with the father, but worn down by the insuperable odds of an environment which is stacked against her:

[S]he would cry silently over blackened stove (smoke twisting like eels into her eyes) or verdigris-stained copper (steam rising in watery

¹⁸ In this sequence, as Simon stands up to his father, the 'Demon' ROUGH hands him '*an obscene padded "Saveloy" – bright red*' (Selected Plays 41) which Simon then hands to his father. This is a reference to an old Music Hall joke, and, as Sebastian Black comments '[t]he comically ambiguous truncheon lived long before Freud explained it' ('Four Plays in Search of a Theatre' 13). This theatrical technique illustrates that Thompson deliberately referred to the working class theatre tradition in his work and at the same time illustrates his awareness of the Oedipal overtones in his relationship with his parents.

beads to make chains round her forehead). I would arrive home from school and see her at one of those sacrificial shrines, her shoulders heaving in dry sobs (All My Lives 21).

The same image of the depressed mother is repeated in Simon's recollection of his early life in 'First Return': 'I remember you crying over a blackened stove [. . .]. I remember [. . .] you were cleaning verdigris off the copper' (Selected Plays 43-44). The 'blackened stove' and the 'copper' with 'verdigris' accompanied by the 'eels' of smoke are re-worked again in an expanded memory from Coaltown Blues:

Already the copper, the monster with the verdigris smile, has left green teeth-marks on her neck and forehead. [. . .] And now the smoke from the coal range pushes its way back down the chimney, grey eels of it twisting in her eyes. Hopelessly she watches the surfaces she has polished smutch and scarify, and the sheets she has washed whiter-than-white smudge with soot. She kisses me, but with an abstracted look; a tear runs down the side of her mouth (13).¹⁹

The deep-seated depression which is evident in these snapshots of the mother resulted eventually in her suicide. The trauma that this unexpected event caused in her devoted son is witnessed by the number of times he returns to the subject. All My Lives recalls that on the day of her suicide his mother asked Mervyn as he left for work to '[b]uy the girls some new sockettes [. . .]. The others have holes in them' and gave him ten shillings (24).²⁰ The death came as a 'complete shock' because his mother had appeared to 'become calm' after the birth of a new baby boy and her son had imagined that after he had joined the workforce and been able to improve the family's financial position 'we were all safe now' (24). In 'First Return,' the circumstances of the mother's suicide are obsessively returned to no less than three times within the same play, in three separate sections, two in Act Two and yet another in Act Three (Selected Plays 44-57, 57-58, 65-69), so the

¹⁹ In his review of the printed version of Coaltown Blues Richard Corballis also points to the similarity between the description of the narrator's mother in Coaltown Blues and Thompson's description of Emma Lorraine Thompson in All My Lives ('Coaltown Blues, Mervyn Thompson' 115).

²⁰ The title of this chapter in the autobiography repeats the same phrase: 'Buy the Girls Some New Sockettes.'

death takes up twenty pages of the script. The third section, which ends the play, reproduces Thompson's last conversation with his mother in exactly the same details as the account which appears in All My Lives:

SIMON. Before I left for work that morning you gave me ten shillings, I remember that.

MOTHER. Buy the girls some new sockettes, the others have holes in them.

SIMON. You kissed me goodbye. (*Then, as a doubt rises in his mind*) Didn't you?

MOTHER. (*As she is taken away by GIRL*) Buy the girls some new sockettes. (*Non-committal, and with a grotesque smile.*)

In the same sequence the Fortuneteller predicts, correctly, that the event will take place when Simon is '[f]ifteen [and] [h]e will have just begun work' (65).

Thus a second area of unresolved trauma lies in the breakdown and suicide of the mother, an issue which is also bound up with domestic violence.

It is important to note also that the autobiographical narrative remains essentially the same in all the different accounts and that the salient details of traumatic events are often almost exactly reproduced in more than one work. Thompson always displays a compulsion to 'unmask.' The frequent revisiting of painful childhood experiences represents obsessive behaviour – to use Freud's phraseology 'a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle' – which is indicative of neurosis caused by unresolved trauma.

Despite these violent and traumatic interludes, however, both in the plays and in his autobiographies Thompson also paints a portrait of the gentler side of both his parents. Neither had much formal education, both having 'left school early, he at 14, she at 13' (All My Lives 11). Nevertheless, both were intelligent, well-read and acutely politically aware. A cameo appears in All My Lives of 'Dad the reader':

Narrowly but avidly he loved to work his way through books which celebrated class war and the struggle of the little man against his oppressors. Unlike the majority of his workmates, who were content

to read Zane Grey, Dad would emerge every Friday night from the library with arms full of works by Dos Passos and other writers of the Left. Most of all he read Russian authors – for in Dad’s history book Russia could do no wrong, [. . .] the USSR showed the workers of the world the way in the glorious revolution of 1917 (18).

In ‘First Return’ the same details of his father’s reading preferences are recalled by Simon: ‘[I]nstead of cowboy yarns you read Dos Passos and histories of the Russian revolution. Closer to home, you knew the history of the union movement, the fifty-one lockout and the Great Depression’ (Selected Plays 51).

This corresponds also with the characterization of the father in Coaltown Blues: ‘Dad buries himself on the works of Tom Paine and Dos Passos. Self-education for the coming struggle. Dark head down, pages flicking’ (37).

Karl Marx anticipated the ‘coming struggle’ that Thompson’s father is preparing himself for and predicted that the workers would one day destroy capitalism: ‘What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable’ (‘The Manifesto’ 260). Both of Thompson’s parents were committed supporters of the Left wing. As far as they were concerned, the political world was black and white. The Conservative Party, based on capitalist philosophy, was Wrong and the Labour Party, based on socialist philosophy, was Right. In Coaltown Blues the Performer confirms his mother’s extreme political views: ‘She hated Tories, my Mum. One of my earliest memories is hearing her swear that Forbes and Coates had been reincarnated – as the pair of magpies you had to pass on the way to the Co-op Store. There they were – perched malevolently’ (8).²¹

²¹ All My Lives recalls that one of Thompson’s most mortifying experiences as a child was his visits to the local Co-op store to buy the family groceries because ‘the Thompsons had the largest bill at the store’ and so the manager was always reluctant to serve him (15). The association of the store with the image of the magpie lays the blame for the poverty of the family on the capitalist system.

The metaphorical representation of the leaders of the Coalition Party²² as ‘magpies [. . .] perched malevolently’ is in accordance with Marxist philosophy which insists that capitalism steals from the working class. Marx wrote of how the hierarchical structure of industrialized society ensures that the proletariat is deprived of their rightful rewards:

Masses of laborers, [. . .] are organized like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy [. . .]. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved [. . .] by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself (‘The Manifesto’ 260).

This political viewpoint is illustrated by the stories that the parents tell their children in the same play. The father makes a similar point by recounting incidents from Trade Union history which illustrate Marx’s belief that the working class are ‘enslaved’ and deprived:

Everything we [the miners] ever got in this industry we’ve had to fight for [. . .]. Like a decent crib-time for instance. They [the employers] used to give us only fifteen minutes [. . .]. Till Pat Hickey called a strike. 1902 that was. Union got taken to the Arbitration Court and the bloody judge ruled that fifteen minutes was ample. Then he fined the union for taking longer and adjourned the court for an hour and a half for luncheon! [. . .] Even today we only get half an hour. And it’s crib not luncheon. Short word, short bloody break! (Coaltown Blues 15).²³

Thompson’s parents firmly believed that the problems of the family would be solved when the Left was voted into power. In Coaltown Blues Thompson

²² Forbes and Coates came to power during the Great Depression of the 1930s: ‘The government of the day was a coalition of the old Reform (or Conservative) and United (or Liberal) parties. When the great Depression hit the country in the early 1930s, these two parties joined together to guide New Zealand through the hazards of these desperate times’ (Tony Simpson 196).

²³ Not all New Zealand playwrights agreed with this point of view. Claude Evans wrote nine plays for the Canterbury Repertory Theatre Society between 1946 and 1961 which were very well received (McNaughton, ‘Drama’ 340). The most successful of these, Overtime (1955), portrays a close relationship between the central character Ted, a cabinet maker, and his boss Blaxton. In this play the unreasonable expectations of the Union representative Simpson in the end result in the factory closing down.

expresses in verse the reaction of the predominantly socialist population of Runanga (very thinly disguised as Blacktown)²⁴ to the election of the first Labour Government of New Zealand.²⁵

On the night I was born
 The people of Blacktown
 Gathered in the Public Square!
 On the night I was born
 Messrs Forbes and Coates
 Went up in flames like Savonarola
 [. . .]
 Hurray for Michael Joseph Savage!²⁶
 [. . .]
 My Father walked with the tread of a conqueror
 In Tri—i—i—umph
 Towards the Blacktown Hospital (7-8).²⁷

The hopes of the people of Runanga and of the Thompson family for a fairer share of the pie of national wealth, however, were dashed when the conservative party

²⁴ In his review of the printed version of *Coaltown Blues* Corballis refers to Blacktown as an 'alias' for Runanga and remarks that the portrait of 'Blacktown' 'is extraordinarily close to Mr Thompson's account of his home in his autobiography *All My Lives*' ('Coaltown Blues, Mervyn Thompson' 115).

²⁵ The first Labour government was elected in New Zealand on 26th November 1935. It immediately approved an annual holiday of seven days for relief workers and a Christmas bonus for the unemployed. This was followed by a raft of legislation designed to stimulate the economy and to create jobs. In 1938, largely driven by the Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage, the groundbreaking Social Security Bill was introduced, which ensured a free health system for all New Zealanders and universal superannuation at 65. In 1938 the Labour government was re-elected with an increased majority of fifty-six percent (Gustafson 456-7). By 1939 unemployment was down to ten thousand men (Tony Simpson 16).

²⁶ Michael Joseph Savage remains the most loved of all New Zealand Prime Ministers. For many years after his death many New Zealand homes had a photograph of the man they affectionately called 'Uncle Jo' hanging on the wall (Gustafson 457-458).

²⁷ The euphoria experienced by Thompson's father and the people of Runanga was reflected by working people all over the country. *The Sugarbag Years* gives testimony to a similar picture of election night 1935:

[T]he night of the election we had some of the men [the unemployed] in to hear the results on the radio. As the Labour victories piled up into a landslide it became a night of triumph and hope for them, beginning with the good news announced by Bob Semple [. . .] that they were going to get a Christmas bonus. [. . .]

For these men, and for others like them, it was about time (Tony Simpson 114). Another testimony reads, '*I was in Cathedral Square in Christchurch on the night that the results were coming through. [. . .] There was a feeling everywhere of profound relief; it was as if they'd come to the end of a nightmare*' (200-201).

was voted back into power shortly after the end of the Second World War in 1949. This event is described in Coaltown Blues as an ‘Appalling Demise’ (34).

All internal family problems, according to the parents in Coaltown Blues, had their origin in external political forces: ‘Dad’s version of reality [. . .] [was that] [p]eople were fundamentally decent [. . .]; what was wrong was the political *system*’ (38). In the same play, the final verse of the song of the title implies that it is the political ‘*system*’ which provides the answer to the question which is posed in the final lines:

Drink up little children
All the teachers say
School Milk is your proof
The Depression’s gone away
(But if that’s so)
Why is Mrs Murdoch’s
Face in such a mess
And why does Mrs Waters
Never change her dress (sic) (17).

The phrase ‘Coaltown Blues,’ which is both the title of the play and the chief musical motif within it, sums up the tragic consequences of poverty that the capitalist oppressor has inflicted upon the people of Blacktown. Support for a Left wing cause that is ultimately defeated is inextricably bound up with the issue of domestic violence, as the reference to Mrs Murdoch indicates.

In the last verse of ‘Pease Porridge Hot’ in the same play the breakdown of the mother is also placed in the political context of the Left wing defeat:

Dad on short time, Dad on strike
Dad on compo, sorry no bike
Bill at the co-op soars to the sky
Here comes the manager, wants to know why
Dad takes to gambling the little he’s got
Sunday dinner potatoes in a pot

This is followed in the next verse by the description of the consequence for the mother:

Mum by the copper stirs up the wash
 Mum by the sooty range weeps, splish, splosh,
 Mum cries all day, Mum cries all night
 Here comes the doctor: 'We'll see her right!
 Off to the looney bin, one two, three,
 Give her a jolt of electricity' (35).

In 'First Return' also, the image of the defiant mother who 'can't pay the bills' (Selected Plays 41) is superseded by the repeated image of the mother in mental breakdown, terrified of being taken away to the asylum – '[d]on't let them take me away, don't let them take me away' (43) – and being subjected to yet another course of electric shock treatment – '[t]hey're closing in, I can hear them, they'll put me in a van, not again, no! [. . .] They'll turn on the current' (47-48).

The final chapter in the mother's tragedy is recorded in the final verse of 'Pease Porridge Hot'. Here the ostensibly light-hearted treatment of a tragic ultimate consequence lends a deep irony to the lyric:

Mum shouts at Dad, Dad hits Mum
 Karl Marx is watching as she falls on her bum
 Mum is weeping, never can stop
 Send her away for another be-bop—
 Mum comes home again holding her head
 Swallows down her pills and then she is dead (36).²⁸

The lasting influence of these traumatic events is also evidenced by the fact that, as a writer, Thompson assimilates the points of view of the New Zealand world of both his mother and his father. In All My Lives he maps out the process by which he turned himself into a replica of his father, when, having left school 'with an IQ of about 140' (136), he went to work down the pit when he was nineteen (39),

²⁸ Thompson openly acknowledged the influence of the German playwright Bertolt Brecht on his work. In his autobiographical solo performance piece 'Passing Through' a photograph of Brecht was displayed among other items which illustrated the playwright's theatrical journey. The final stanza of 'Pease Porridge Hot,' for example, illustrates the influence of 'Verfremdung' in Thompson's drama. Corballis, reviewing the printed version of Coaltown Blues in Landfall, however, makes the point that the comparison with Brecht 'can only be taken so far' because 'there is an air of fatalism at the end [of the play] which is quite unlike Brecht' ('Coaltown Blues, Mervyn Thompson' 116).

where he differentiated himself from the other miners by reading works of Russian literature. The comments of his fellow miners at that time, which are dramatized in 'Passing Through,' could refer equally well to Thompson or to his father: 'Tolstoy down the pit! Everyone else down this godforsaken hole reads Zane Grey!' (138).

A similar process of the son becoming a mirror image of his father is repeated in Big George, an unpublished and unperformed play. In it the protagonist, Red, like his father before him, is a coalminer who lives and works in Blacktown. Red's father was a Marxist, described by his mate, Wally, as 'a good Red man' and a 'hairy Lenin' (36). So Red's nickname describes not only the colour of his hair, but also the political viewpoint he has inherited from his father.

At the same time Thompson's mother's view of her world can be seen to have had an equally influential effect on her son's writing. In Coaltown Blues the mother, on returning home from one of her stays in the mental hospital,²⁹ begins reading books on Auschwitz and compares her own life with that of the victims of the Holocaust:

We live in a world of horror and atrocity, and Blacktown's just another concentration camp site! [. . .] Oh this place, with its corrugated iron walls and corrugated iron soul [. . .]. But that doesn't stop the rain coming through. [. . .] It makes itself into little arrows and picks up soot and cuts the blackness into your throat (31).

In the above speech the key word 'soot' is re-worked into a metaphor which suggests that the environment has turned into a hostile weapon which is killing the mother. This imagery, allied to an allusion to the persecution of the Jews during the Second World War, reveals that the mother views New Zealand as an oppressive dictatorship in which the deprivation of her lifestyle is comparable to that of a concentration camp.

²⁹ Alistair Campbell's 'When the Bough Breaks' (1970) is a play with a theme of mental illness which preceded the first production of 'First Return' by four years. Campbell's play, like Thompson's, is heavily autobiographical and focuses attention on the emotional dynamic between a part-Māori poet, Matt, and his disturbed wife Kate. Much of the action takes place in a mental hospital. The theatre historian John Thomson views this play as a forerunner of 'First Return' (New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 62).

As a mature writer, looking back on his childhood, Thompson adopts the same imagery: 'As I peer into the mists of time we Thompsons resemble those photographs of Jewish children on station platforms clutching their baggage and awaiting transportation to Auschwitz and Belsen' (All My Lives 13). It is hard to imagine that any child growing up in New Zealand would adopt such an extreme allusion, unless he had assimilated it from a parent. The inevitable conclusion is that the mother of Coaltown Blues is Thompson's mother: the 'unmask' is at work again.

Thompson's view of the New Zealand world is thus revealed to be highly idiosyncratic, especially when it is taken into account that when he was growing up in the late 1940s and early 1950s, New Zealand viewed itself as a liberal democracy and New Zealanders enjoyed one of the highest living standards in the world.³⁰ Integral to the image of the concentration camp is the suggestion of being the victim of unanticipated catastrophe, a view of life which re-surfaces again in Thompson's work in the key metaphor of the blown-off roof.

All My Lives records this particular bolt from the blue that happened in one of the 'series of ramshackle things' that the poverty-stricken Thompson family called home: 'Our first house in Runanga was a huge, draughty place on a hill. One night, however, the roof blew off and we had to evacuate to take refuge next door' (13). This potent image of the blown-off roof, when it re-appears in the work of Thompson the playwright, assumes a whole raft of connotations which are in turn related to the areas of unresolved trauma which I have already identified.

In Coaltown Blues there is an entire sequence devoted to the childhood memory of the funeral of Stu Kennedy.³¹ Kennedy's funeral is yet another reminder to the

³⁰ Thompson explained in an interview that in his view there had always been poverty in New Zealand society, even though there were those who had chosen to ignore it: 'There was a myth that New Zealanders only knew poverty in the depressions of 1880, 1930 and 1980. But poverty is always with us. Poverty is only political when it hits the middle classes and the educated classes – and then they notice' (Cassels 8).

³¹ All the significant sequences in Coaltown Blues are accompanied by placards. Introducing this sequence the 'Performer moves left and reveals [a] new placard: 1942 STU KENNEDY'S FUNERAL.' This theatrical technique once again reveals the influence of Brecht upon

people of Blacktown that the capitalist system, as Marx observed, treats its workers as dispensable automatons:

[I]n calculating the cost of production of simple labor power there must be included the cost of reproduction, whereby the race of workers is enabled to multiply and replace worn-out workers by new ones. Thus the depreciation of a worker is taken into account in the same way as the depreciation of the machine ('Wage Labor and Capital' 265).

In Coaltown Blues the father is informed enough to prove to his son through statistics that working down the mine is actually more dangerous than fighting in a war because of the lack of safety measures: 'Now Blacktown lost five men in all [in the First World War]; *thirteen* were killed in the mines round here. It was safer at the front and that's the stone truth' (24).

When Stu Kennedy is buried alive, the father's concern about the lack of safety measures in the local pit and his belief that capitalism treats the workers as though they are dispensable, appears to have been justified. On the day of the funeral the children of Blacktown, from both sides of the Protestant/Catholic divide, are at loggerheads with each other. The Performer's Protestant schoolmates taunt the Catholic kids attending Kennedy's funeral:

Cathlick dogs stink like frogs
 And doan eat meat on Fridays
 Cathlick dogs worse than wogs
 Stink like fish on Fridays! (11).

This recollection in the play is from 1942 and the schoolmaster, Mr Shrimpton, admonishes his pupils for their unseemly behaviour at a time when 'men are dying to preserve our Freedoms' (12). After all this the young protagonist arrives home to find his father in a state of desperate grief at the loss of his workmate which he is attempting to alleviate by resorting to maddened physical activity: '[R]ipping into the air-raid shelter he started the day after Pearl Harbour was bombed' (12). His father adamantly dismisses evidence from the schoolchildren

Thompson's playwriting. It also reflects the episodic nature of the script, another characteristic of Brecht's plays.

in his community that wars are caused by either religious or racial differences, by referring to the Irish Catholic Kennedy as '[m]y mate.' When the schoolboy unwittingly recounts Mr Shrimpton's speech to his pupils 'that Mr Kennedy's death was an ennobling (sic) thing, a graphic case of a man laying down his life for his country and the war effort' (14), his father vehemently rejects the interpretation that Kennedy's death was caused by the fight for 'Freedoms' (12) of any kind as he 'explodes' into a furious summation of what lies at the heart of his political philosophy:

Nothing's changed since the *first* war. Fools of workers giving away their life blood – and for what? To make life comfortable for the very people they should be fighting. [. . .] And we're no better, down a black hole toiling away for the state when they haven't even got the human bloody decency to make the place *safe*! Too mean to put a pair of shiftmen on and timber up, so Stu Kennedy gets buried alive. [. . .] There's only one war here, boy, and that's the war of men against their masters. Stu Kennedy knew that as well as anyone' (14).

Before the father loses his temper there is a description of the depressed mother, who is close to breakdown, combating the hostile environment:

Inside the house Mum is fighting a different battle. Day after day she pits herself against her twin enemies, the coal range and the copper. [. . .] Against all the odds, this fragile beauty, my mother, creates in the place of poverty a semblance of gentility. [. . .] And now the smoke from the coal range pushes its way back down the chimney [. . .] Hopelessly she watches the surfaces she has polished smutch and scarify, [. . .] a tear runs down the side of her mouth (13).

Tension within the family caused by the funeral then 'explodes' (14) once again into a ferocious dispute between the parents: 'Dad jabs his cigarette into his wax vestas. With sinking heart I realise that the conflict is going to spread – and that sooner or later someone is going to be hit' (15).

Even when locked in combat, however, the parents still make reference to the class war and emphasize that the proletariat are on the losing side. The mother

recalls her own experience of the Great Depression, while at the same time taunting her outraged husband:

I should have known the first time I went out with you. During the Depression it was, children. [. . .] I'd had nothing to eat for three days and he bought me chocolates! Well of course I vomited all over the cinema floor. Chocolates! I needed potatoes! (16).³²

Looking back on all this the Performer recalls his seven-year-old self retreating into a surrealistic world summoned up by his mother's story: 'Dad is taking a freshly-dug King Edward potato out of a paper bag. "Um, sorry Muriel," he says as he hands it over. "I didn't have time to cook it"' (16).

The sequence reaches its climax in the midst of the domestic violence when his sisters are 'screaming,' Dad is 'shouting' and the young protagonist is emotionally detaching himself, as the Performer exclaims: 'That Night! [. . .] – a storm came up and blew the roof off!' (16). The dramatized image of the blown-off roof which itself 'explodes' (14) accordingly contains within it a microcosm of the areas of unresolved trauma in the writer: domestic violence and the breakdown of the mother placed in the context of defeat for the Left wing cause. It also illustrates the creative process by which the playwright transforms his autobiographical experiences into his art:

Well that's the way I remember it. In all probability the two events lie months or even years apart. But in my mind they remain stuck together like dog-knotted lovers, inseparable until some mad doctor comes along with liberating axe and chops them apart. The day they buried Stu Kennedy joins in unholy matrimony with the night we ran from our house and the end of the world seemed to have come (16).

³² The Sugarbag Years notes that in 1934 seven out of ten schoolchildren in Auckland had 'physical defects' caused by the effects of the Great Depression. In 1935 twelve Auckland clergymen of all denominations wrote indignantly to the government: 'Widespread malnutrition in a primary-producing country is nothing short of a national scandal' (Tony Simpson 15-16). At the height of the Great Depression it is estimated that about forty percent of all male workers (about 100,000) between the ages of sixteen and sixty-five were unemployed (15). The official totals do not include women (14).

This key speech from Coaltown Blues illustrates Thompson's dramatic technique in the autobiographical plays. The sequential reporting of his autobiographies is abandoned in favour of reproducing the impression that is made upon the subconscious mind. Both 'First Return' and Coaltown Blues create a surrealistic world of nightmare. The same speech concludes, for example, by emphasizing the horror of the night of the blown-off roof: 'O Blacktown, Blacktown, I had known terrors before – and not all that much in the way of Golden Weather.'³³ [. . .] But that night the rain came into the secret bedrooms of our hearts and sang a song none of us would ever forget' (16-17).

The metaphor of the blown-off roof, therefore, becomes a crystallization of this writer's view of the world. Not only does it summarize his neuroses, it also predicts impending catastrophe.

³³ Thompson makes reference to Mason's 'The End of the Golden Weather' here to point out the differences in their childhood experience. In his solo performance piece 'Passing Through' he refers to this yet again in response to seeing Mason perform 'Golden Weather': 'I can't help being reminded how different his class background is from mine' (Passing Through and Other Plays 147). At the same time Thompson comments admiringly on Mason's performance skills:

He stands on a bare stage. As a reviewer for the *Christchurch Press*, I sit in the auditorium. It's 1968, the Repertory Theatre is almost full. [. . .] Something's happening. My programme droops uselessly; my function as critic is being stripped away; I am being drawn into a world. [. . .] He's a magical performer, this Bruce Mason fellow [. . .] watching this man, in whom is contained a whole parade of characters, I am moved as never before in a theatre. [. . .] My programme falls to the floor. As I pick it up I tell myself: Bruce, you have shown me the way. You and Firpo. After all these years of funk and delay, I know that I must write – and not just tonight's review' (147-149).

B: 'O BLACKTOWN, BLACKTOWN ... I GREW UP IN YOU,
AND IN YOUR FACE ... I SAW THE FACE OF THE WORLD'

When Thompson was fifteen, two bolts from the blue coalesced in one horrific year: 1951. Both related to the unresolved trauma I have referred to in the previous section. In keeping with the metaphor of the blown-off roof, both wrecked the security of the Thompson family and exposed it to the vagaries of the outside forces. Hard on the heels of his mother's suicide came one of the bitterest industrial disputes in New Zealand's history. The confrontation, which the authorities insisted on calling a 'strike' but which the workers maintained was a 'lockout,'³⁴ lasted a hundred and fifty-one days during which the protesting workers had no income. Industrial action began with the watersiders but spread to Runanga when the miners came out in support of the dockyard workers, who had withdrawn their labour. In retaliation the National Government, led by Sid Holland, passed the Emergency Regulations Act which infringed the rights of the people involved.³⁵

The adolescent Thompson, as recalled by the mature playwright, observed the partisan stance of the press in support of the Government:

The Press writes the scenario.³⁶ The union leaders as Billy the Kid, shooting their victims in the back, that's Commos for ya.³⁷ Sid

³⁴ Sinclair explains the reason behind the terms used on both sides of the argument:

The unionists turned down the employers' offer and refused to work overtime. The employers placed the men on a two-day penalty. The men said it was a lock-out; the employers said it was a strike. The union refused to accept arbitration. The government was now able to make a stand on the principle of defending industrial law and order. Once again a state of emergency was proclaimed and some very severe emergency regulations were gazetted (Walter Nash 282).

³⁵ Sinclair spells out in detail how the Emergency Regulations Act stripped the men involved in the dispute of their democratic rights:

It was illegal to go on strike, to publish anything likely to encourage strikers, to give money to strikers or food to their wives and children. At the end of February [1951] the Waterside Workers' Union was deregistered, that is, struck off the list of unions registered under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. The 'wharfies' now had no union and no leaders officially recognised (Walter Nash 282).

³⁶ Thompson appears to be referring here to the Christchurch Press.

³⁷ Sinclair points out that in the political climate of the time the government was very hostile to members of the Communist Party:

It was a time of violent emotion [. . .]. The wharf leaders were generally believed to be Communists [. . .]. These were the days of the Korean War, of the Australian bill to ban the Communist Party, of Senator McCarthy. The Prime Minister said that the

Holland as the sherriff who guns Billy down. ‘Now thee-is’ – he waves the Emergency Regulations (sic)³⁸ – ‘is what’s called lawnordah. Serves you right, Billy, you wuz a renegade and now you has yore chips’ (Coaltown Blues 38).

The implication here is that the press has reported a complex political reality as a melodramatic script from a Hollywood Western. According to the media, the Government, representing law and order, is the hero, whilst the protesting workers, particularly those with a Marxist philosophy, are the outlawed villains. What the press has failed to report is that the Emergency Regulations are undemocratic and have been instituted by a Government which claims to be a democracy.

The people of Runanga, however, along with other workers like them, found themselves in no position to challenge the stereotypes that the media presented of them because the Emergency Regulations made it illegal for them to publicize their side of the argument. This whole sequence of events left open the wound of injustice in the township. In Thompson’s second one man show, ‘Passing Through,’ which he wrote and performed at the end of his life, he was still recalling these events bitterly forty years later: ‘1951. The Big Strike. The voices of striking miners not permitted to be heard. Their children not permitted to be fed. [. . .] That suppression still smoulders in the hearts of Coasters even today’ (169).

country was ‘actually at war’; he said that there was a ‘very determined effort . . . to overthrow orderly government by force.’ [. . .] The Minister of Labour, William Sullivan, said that it was not an industrial dispute but ‘part of the cold war, engineered by Communists to advance their cause and the cause of Russia’ (Walter Nash 282-283).

Sinclair also comments that the allegations made by the National government were propaganda: Many people blamed the disorder on Communists. And there were Communists among the leaders of some unions, including the waterside workers’ and carpenters’. [. . .] The best-known leaders of the watersiders, Harold (‘Jock’) Barnes and Toby Hill, were not Communists. They were able, aggressive, persistent, and they were very hostile to the government (274).

³⁸ The phrase ‘he waves the Emergency Regulations’ is misprinted. It is a stage direction so it should be italicized.

The 1951 dispute resulted in a crushing defeat for the Left wing cause. In Big George an old coalminer, Wally, blames the demise of Blacktown on the after-effects of this struggle: 'After '51 Tory government wrung us dry.' The bargaining power of the miners has been broken: 'Union's a dodo.'³⁹ The facilities are being eroded: 'Pubs are closin.' The overall consequence is to make 'the town fall apart' (36-37).

The same fate happens to Blacktown in Coaltown Blues. In the final sequence of the play entitled 'End of Blacktown' the Performer records the systematic loss of the town's facilities until it becomes a virtual 'Ghost Town' (42). The community is dispersed and along with it the protagonist's family when 'Dad remarries and moves away to Nelson. [. . .] There are no survivors' (43). Nothing remains to tell the tale of Blacktown.

As he swings the light of his miner's helmet over the audience at the end of the play, the Performer delivers this final line: 'O Blacktown, Blacktown ... I grew up in you, and in your face ... I saw the face of the world' (44).⁴⁰ In an early review of Coaltown Blues, Black recognised Thompson's technique of interpreting the cosmos in the light of his childhood experience of one particular place:

If I could fully understand even that small place, chart its rise and fall, solve the mystery of its people, their barbarity and nobility, frailty and courage, stupidity and sudden surprising wisdom, I would know as much about the world and its politics as anyone ('Blacktown Blues' 39).

³⁹ 151 Days which is subtitled the '[o]fficial history of the great waterfront lockout and supporting strikes' makes the point that after the dispute was ended 'the Government made further inroads on civil liberties and trade union rights. Some of the most vicious sections of the emergency regulations were written into permanent law' (Scott 205).

⁴⁰ Immediately before making this statement Thompson explains to his audience how, like Simon in 'First Return,' he attempted to flee his origins: 'I travel then. O yes. As far away as Christchurch – and Wellington – and Auckland; and London – and Paris – and Penzance! [. . .] But Blacktown will not leave me. It holds me with its black and glittering eye, condemning me for the rest of my life to tell its tale' (44). There is an allusion here to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' in which the 'ancient Mariner' of the title stops the 'Wedding Guest' and 'holds him with his glittering eye' to tell the tale of his ill-fated ship (194). By this allusion Thompson compares 'Blacktown' to the albatross in the poem: the weight that hangs about his neck 'condemning' him 'for the rest of my life to tell its tale.'

Thompson confirmed the accuracy of Black's observation when, writing of his playwriting technique, he remarked 'the universal resides in the particular' ('Playwrights on Playwriting' 14). Similarly, in a lengthy response to Richard Corballis' review of Selected Plays he expanded further on the relevance of this statement to his own work:

Most human beings at some stage in their lives find it necessary to come to terms with their roots, [. . .] but that doesn't stop them inferring New Zealand as a whole – and beyond that, perhaps, all colonial situations wherever they may be ('Letters' 528).

The statement also reveals Thompson's acute awareness that the country of his birth is a colonized culture. In an interview he explained how he experienced the stirrings of his own nationalism whilst on sabbatical leave overseas:

First was the London experience and my growing feeling that in some strange way the channels of my nationalism ran both narrower and deeper than those of the expatriates I met on every corner. I almost felt that the word "New Zealander" had been branded on my flesh ('Act Features "First Return" 10').

In All My Lives he relates how, like Simon in 'First Return,' he came to rebel against the dominance of the Eurocentre and to reject it as 'not my history' (Selected Plays 60):

Historically I became convinced that there had long existed a plot to deprive New Zealanders of their own past. We had been led to believe that we had no history worth recording or that such history as we had was dull and boring. [. . .]

But a sense of history begins at one's own back door (99).

Immediately after he returned from London Thompson set about writing a work which would refute the opinion that New Zealand's past was 'dull and boring': '[I]t was [. . .] a consciously "nationalistic" exercise. I wanted to show that New Zealand history was there to be found, could be dramatized, and was fun' ('Act Features "First Return"' 9). With the help of the Court Theatre Training School,

which met on Saturday mornings for tuition in acting (All My Lives 108), he devised 'O! Temperance!' which opened in December 1972 as a Christmas show. The play was the first of Thompson's works to be staged and it is the first of his historical documentaries, the other three being 'Songs to Uncle Scrim,' 'Songs to the Judges' and 'The Great New Zealand Truth Show.'

'O! Temperance!' marks a significant turning-point in the development of New Zealand drama, as it represents a totally new approach to play making. It was highly individual in the New Zealand theatre climate of the time because it stages the narrative of 'the outer margin' of New Zealand society. It was rare enough for events from New Zealand's past to be dramatized at all, but the history of the working class had been largely ignored by the official records.

The playwright hit upon his protagonist by a piece of serendipity. At the beginning of the project he wrote to the Christchurch *Press* asking them to publish requests for stories that might be useful. One of the replies came from a Mrs G.M. Page, the daughter of Tommy Taylor: 'I had never heard of Taylor before, but after thirty minutes with Mrs Page, whose adoration of her father knew no bounds, I knew that our play had found its hero' (109).⁴¹

⁴¹ 'O! Temperance!' is set in the area in which it was first performed and the material for the script was researched by the playwright and the students involved in the project. Thompson estimated that he spent 'over 100 hours' (109) collecting material in local libraries. The circumstances under which 'O! Temperance!' was written point to it being an early New Zealand experiment in Community Theatre.

The theatre historians Griffiths and Woddis record that '[m]any playwrights became involved with Community Theatre at one level or another in the 1960s and 1970s as part of a movement to take theatre out of theatre buildings and bring it to "the people."' They mention in particular Peter Cheesman's work at Stoke-on-Trent which 'evolved a whole tradition of drama-documentaries based on the local community' (72) and Anne Jellicoe's work with the Colway Trust which 'involved hundreds of local people in researching their local history and performing in the subsequent play' (73). In The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre Hartnoll and Found define Community Theatre as a 'form of play-making which involves a mainly non-theatrical community in the production of a script usually based on local interest' and that it is 'closely allied to political theatre' and often has 'a socialist commitment' (103). I take 'O! Temperance!' to be an example of Community Theatre in the sense that it is an attempt to bring theatre to 'the people.' It is also a script 'based on local interest' with 'a socialist commitment.'

An influential example of Community Theatre in the Southern Hemisphere was the Australian Performing Group, who, in a theatre built by themselves, The Pram Factory, put on group-devised work such as Marvellous Melbourne (1970), based on local stories. In an interview, however, Thompson claimed that he did not know about the experiments in Australia when he wrote 'O! Temperance!' (Corballis, 'Interview with Mervyn Thompson' 72). The Alexandra Musicals, begun in 1957 to celebrate the Blossom Festival and representing 'a sequence of original works

Thompson's plays are a vehicle for his political point of view as well as for the expression of his trauma surrounding the lost cause, and towards this end Taylor suited his purpose very well. The fact that Thompson (who lived and worked in Christchurch) had never heard of a man from Christchurch who had been the leader of the Temperance Movement and an Independent Member of Parliament and was so well-known that forty-five thousand people attended his funeral, convinced Thompson that Taylor was a clear example of suppressed history:

The name of the game is historical repression. The losers are written out of the history books and people like T.E. Taylor, a man of huge magnetism and presence in his day, are remembered only in oral history, the history kept alive by ordinary people. It is the tradition of oral history that keeps the 1951 Lockout still burning in the minds of many workers [. . .]. It is my belief that any public rekindling of 'non-official' or 'repressed' history of this type becomes a political act (Selected Plays [Author's Note] 71).

Thompson's view of history is always passionate and is obviously influenced by the traumas of his childhood and adolescence. It is significant that he relates Taylor's cause to his own experience of the 1951 'lockout.' He believed that there were many similarities between what had happened to the Temperance Movement during the first few decades of the century and what had happened to the working class supporters of the Left wing cause in 1951: the issue which 'had the power to split the country down the middle' (71) had subsequently been largely ignored and the point of view of the losing side had been wiped from the records. Thompson's political plays represent a conscious effort to uncover, to use Spivak's words, the previously 'silent' and 'silenced' (25) history of the proletariat. In 'Songs to Uncle Scrim,' which deals with the plight of the unemployed in the Great Depression of the 1930s, and in 'Songs to the Judges,' which deals with dispossession of Māori, he selected similar subject matter.⁴²

developed from regional history' (Harcourt 106), can be viewed as one of the earliest experiments in Community Theatre in New Zealand.

⁴² 'Songs to Uncle Scrim' and 'Songs to the Judges' are both examples of a dramatic form that Thompson devised whereby all the script is converted into lyrics. The music for 'Songs to Uncle Scrim' was composed by Stephen McCurdy and the music in 'Songs to the Judges' was by

As a playwright Thompson is inventive in persuading his audience to his political point of view. In 'O! Temperance!' he employs the subtle tactic of filling the stage with infectious vitality and creating the illusion that the audience itself is involved in the Temperance meeting. According to Robert Goodman, who reviewed a performance of this play at the New Independent in Auckland, this strategy is effective: '[T]he spiritedness, the ebullience. You may or may not believe in what they advocate, but you can't help admiring their single-mindedness – and their sincerity' ('Review of "O! Temperance"').⁴³

Added to this Thompson often adopts the same ploy that he had observed in the media during the 1951 'lockout': he presents a complex political reality as melodrama. The revenge is achieved, however, by reversing the roles. In Thompson's version 'the outer margin' of the working class become the heroes, whereas the bourgeoisie's instruments of authority become the villains.

This tactic is evident in Coaltown Blues where, according to Thompson, the Draconian measures of the Emergency Regulations of 1951 transform the people of Blacktown into heroes:

But what heroism when the *food* runs out! *Ten* desperate weeks into the strike that is. [. . .] Truckloads of fruit and vegies to be brought in from Christchurch across the pass. The Lewis blocked by snow, try

William Dart. In his Author's Note to 'Songs to Uncle Scrim' in Selected Plays Thompson writes that he coined the term 'songplay' 'much later' than the first stage performance of this play and he defines the characteristics of the dramatic structure he claimed to have invented: '[A] set of original songs grouped uncompromisingly round a theme, placed in a logical and coherent order to create a strong sense of narrative, and allowing for the establishment of character' (117). In fact Thompson's 'songplay' displays striking similarities with other plays in the working class theatre movement which include music as an essential component of the narrative, a notable example being Brecht and Kurt Weill's The Threepenny Opera. The work of Weill appears to be of particular significance in this regard. Weill wrote the musical score for Der Jasager (1930) in collaboration with Brecht, who wrote the libretto. The Marxist text of this 'school opera in two acts' is set entirely to music (Holden 1062). Howard McNaughton, in The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English, comments that Thompson 'evolved his own form of "song-play" for the ironic analysis of contemporary New Zealand identity' (363).

⁴³ An essential part of 'the spiritedness, the ebullience' is Thompson's use of songs from the Temperance Movement which frequently intersperse the dialogue of the script. In a similar manner Joan Littlewood's resounding success of the early 1960s, Oh, What a Lovely War!, uses soldiers' songs from the First World War as bridges to improvised sketches. Littlewood was also a committed communist. She made her name as Artistic Director of Theatre Workshop, a Company she founded at the Theatre Royal in Stratford, a working class area in East London.

Arthur's, that's just as bad, you'll have to use chains, but you can't beat determined men. [. . .] Even Constable O'Rourke helps unload and distribute the food – though it's against the law (39).⁴⁴

Undemocratic stratagems, similar to those used by the Government in 1951, are exposed in 'O! Temperance!' when a referendum is held to determine whether public opinion is in favour of the prohibition of alcohol. The Government of the day, led by Prime Minister Richard Seddon and manipulated by the capitalistic interests of the breweries, is prepared to adopt various dirty tricks in order to make the vote go their way. A woman Temperance worker protests: 'They will stoop to anything! Bogus signatures, free drinks as bribes, anything. Most of their signatures are got in the *hotels*.' Another Temperance worker points out that some canvassers are duping people who do not read the petitions carefully enough. When asked for signatures in favour of prohibition some do not realize that they are actually signing against it. Kate Sheppard's response displays the staunch sense of honour, belief in the just cause and faith in the happy ending that a heroine of the West would display in a Hollywood melodrama:

KATE. (*Calm, comforting*) Never fear. Our petition, honestly sought, will be larger than theirs. Our cause is just—it will triumph in the end (Selected Plays 87).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that in Coaltown Blues those who make a stand against the authority of 'the centre' are allied by name to the tradition of rebellion in the Celtic 'margin.' Those disputing with the bosses are represented by the fictional characters of the Irish Catholic Stu Kennedy, and 'Constable O'Rourke,' a policeman, will not betray his origins when placed in a situation whereby the government of the day removes the democratic rights of the proletariat.

⁴⁵ Thompson is not afraid to use melodrama, stereotype and sentimentality to persuade his audience to his point of view. He incorporates these techniques into an allusion to the working class tradition of the Music Hall. His habitual incorporation of music into his scripts is also another conscious attempt to ally himself to the traditional entertainments of the proletariat. In 'O! Temperance!', for example, his stage directions instruct that EMILY'S 'SON' 'sings – *absolutely straight*' a song about the stereotypical Angel of the House caring for a sick child while her husband is away being enticed by the Demon Drink:

Father, dear father, come home with me now
The clock in the steeple strikes two
The night has grown colder and Benny is worse
But he has been calling for you.
Indeed he is worse, Ma says he will die
Perhaps before morning shall dawn
And this is the message she sent me to bring
'Come quickly or he will be gone' (Selected Plays 79).

Thompson stated categorically, '[o]ne thing I'd like to be understood [. . .] is that as a working-class writer my work contains certain elements that may create discomfort in those from other class sites' ('The Song is Sung' 43).

In Thompson's plays, not only the Temperance workers but all working class dissidents, especially those with Left wing ideologies, become, to use his own phraseology from 'O! Temperance!,' 'Heroes and Heroines' (114).

'Songs to Uncle Scrim,' for example, is named in honour of Colin Scrimgeour, a minister nicknamed 'Uncle Scrim' who challenged from the pulpit the view of many of the clergy of the day preaching that poverty was inevitable ([Notes] 144).⁴⁶ When the unemployed rioted in Wellington in 1932, the palings of Uncle Scrim's church were used to smash windows in Queen Street. His response to this, which he broadcast on his Friendly Road radio programme, was that if it drew attention to the condition of the working people then it was the best use that the church had been put to in a hundred years (145). In Thompson's script this incident is translated into '*the fiercest song in the play*' in which the '[c]ast confronts the audience:

WHOLE CAST. O glorious Queen
Street,
The time of the riots,
I'll always remember that day.
The clamour, the crashing,

⁴⁶ Colin Scrimgeour was a Methodist minister who organized the Business Men's Relief Service, which distributed three thousand parcels of food and clothing and five thousand meals for unemployed men during 1929. He also gained a national reputation as a radio broadcaster. At the end of 1932 he established a non-denominational radio church, the 'Friendly Road.' Although he never joined a political party, on the Sunday evening before the 1935 general election his 'Man in the Street' broadcast was jammed because the Coalition government feared that 'Scrim' might urge listeners to vote Labour (Allen Davidson 465).

'Scrim' himself gives testimony to his social conscience in The Sugarbag Years:

I took the part of the unemployed [. . .] there are only three needs that people have – food, clothing and shelter. Now then in New Zealand, although there might have been a monetary crisis, there was no reason whatever for there to be a shortage in any of these three basic essentials. [. . .] The farmers were prepared to give their beef away so I started a chain of butcher's shops [. . .]. Boots were essential [. . .]. These fellows who went to work in the country [. . .] were working in sandshoes [. . .]. So we started up a series of boot repair shops. [. . .]

We were also gathering clothing [. . .]. I just simply set about forming up an organisation where there was a central clearing house so that everybody got their fair share (Tony Simpson 185-189).

Thompson commented in an interview that he believed that for the poor the Great Depression of the 1930s had never really ended: 'What history tells us about the end of the Depression and what we experienced on the Coast were two different things' (Cassels 8).

The sound of glass smashing
 The old inhibitions away (135).

The playwright, however, has ways of wreaking his revenge, to use the father's words from Coaltown Blues, on a 'political system' (Coaltown Blues 38) which invalidates his political ideals and ignores the history of his own class. In Thompson's dramatization of history the representatives of capitalism are eradicated from the stage. In 'Songs to Uncle Scrim' the response of the proletariat to the exhortations of Forbes and Coates to 'Vote for Us' is to burn them in effigy (139). In 'Songs to the Judges,' after the Judge attempts to rebut the accusation that the representatives of the State are 'fascists/Strutting the jackboots of/the law' (176) (yet another reference to Thompson's mother alluding to New Zealand as Nazi Germany) the Māori people drive him from the stage in fear of his life.

Thompson focuses particularly on periods in New Zealand's history when the government has resorted to undemocratic stratagems. In 'Songs to Uncle Scrim' the politicians Forbes and Coates (whom Thompson's mother had likened to thieving magpies) manipulate democratic law in order to suppress any dissenting point of view and by this means stay in power and continue to feather their own nests:

FORBES AND COATES. Jammed
 your radios⁴⁷
 (Just a small mistake)
 Vote for Us
 [. . .]
 Delayed the elections
 (Only for a year)
 Censored your letters abroad
 And made it clear
 To the world
 That rioting never happens

⁴⁷ This is a reference to 'Uncle Scrim's' broadcast before the general election of 1935, which was undemocratically jammed by the government of the day.

here
 [. . .]
 Lopped off your wages
 (Suffering helps the soul)
 Vote for Us (138-9).⁴⁸

In 'Songs to the Judges,' similar despicable tactics are exposed. The play exposes a plethora of undemocratic legislation that the State has inflicted upon Māori in order to deprive them of their rights.⁴⁹

In Thompson's version of history all representatives of 'the inner margin,' the mimic of the Eurocentre, are the enemies of 'the outer margin' of the working class. In 'Songs to Uncle Scrim' the racecourse is one of the playgrounds of the rich where, in an atmosphere pervaded by the '*smell of cigars and the New Zealand version of Empire,*' they articulate their vision of their country:

O we live in a land of Milk

⁴⁸ The derogatory view of Forbes and Coates which Thompson paints in 'Songs to Uncle Scrim' was shared by many people in the Great Depression. One testimony in *The Sugarbag Years* is a childhood recollection of a father's reaction to his dole payment: '*The old man would come in and drop the money in the centre of the table [. . .] almost as if he was chucking it away, [. . .] and would say things such as "You know if I could stretch these fingers wide enough I think I could get it round Gordon Coates' bloody neck."* [. . .] Gordon Coates was Minister of Unemployment' (Tony Simpson 31).

Another account tells how a crowd gathered outside a local hotel when they discovered Forbes was in town:

The crowd was angry; many of them were ragged and hungry and obviously there were a great many unemployed [. . .]. They demanded that their grievances should be heard and when Mr. Forbes appeared on a balcony at the hotel, resplendent in his evening suit, this incensed the crowd, who immediately started to abuse him. Some missiles were thrown [. . .] it gave a very good indication of the mood of the people towards the ruling government of the time (126-127).

Tony Simpson also records that when the election was due in 1934, conscious of their unpopularity, Forbes and Coates postponed it for a year, but this still did not prevent the sweeping Labour victory in 1935 (196).

The frequency with which Thompson returns to the historical territory related to him by his parents is testimony to his wholesale assimilation of their beliefs. In 'First Return' Thompson refers to his father's knowledge of 'the history of the union movement, the fifty-one lockout, and the Great Depression' (*Selected Plays* 51). Also, one of his 'earliest memories' is of his mother talking about Forbes and Coates (*Coaltown Blues* 8). The 1951 dispute, the Great Depression and the history of the union movement are the subject matter that the playwright selects in the historical category of his oeuvre.

⁴⁹ This 'plethora of undemocratic legislation' has been well researched by Thompson and the details he gives of it are accurate.

and Honey
 With Loyalty, Royalty,
 Enterprise and Money (129)

The implication is that mimicry of the Eurocentre rewards the bourgeoisie. A similar scenario is expressed in A Night at the Races, where the racecourse acts as litmus paper for the class war. The Milliner, representing the ‘Haves,’ views the race meeting as a showpiece of privilege: ‘Champagne breakfasts in the Members’ stand — beautiful men doing beautiful things with their money!’ (38).⁵⁰ By contrast the protagonist of the play, Murph, the ordinary working man who represents the ‘Have Nots,’ bets on the horses (as did Thompson’s father), in the hope that one lucky win will solve all of his financial worries and enable him to do what his wages make him unable to afford: ‘[K]ick the Black Death [the mortgage] off the doorstep ... Take the wife and kids off for a holiday’ (68).

Thompson’s plays persistently insist that the class war is a continuing and unresolved struggle in New Zealand and that the proletarian side of the argument has never been fully or fairly represented.⁵¹ ‘Songs to the Judges’ concludes with the Pakeha ‘Haves’ and the Māori ‘Have Nots’ separated into ‘*two distinct groups [. . .] staring uneasily across space*’ (Selected Plays 182).

‘Songs to the Judges,’ however, is atypical in Thompson’s oeuvre and places him in an invidious position. In all of his other works he writes as the mouthpiece of his own working class culture. There is no record of either his mother or his

⁵⁰ A Night at the Races was co-written with Yvonne Blennerhassett-Edwards. She had the idea for the character of the Milliner (Corballis, ‘Interview with Mervyn Thompson’ 94).

⁵¹ John A Lee’s Children of the Poor, first published in 1934, is one of the earliest and most graphic accounts of poverty in New Zealand. The novel opens with the statement

‘[t]his is the story of how I became a thief, and in time very much of an outlaw, running and skulking from the police. And this story may throw light upon the circumstances that made my sister a daughter of the streets, a poorly remunerated and therefore despised member of that oldest profession (7).

The book is dedicated to ‘*errant brats and guttersnipes. To eaters of left-overs, the wearers of cast-offs.*’

Thompson adapted Lee’s novel for the stage in 1990. In an interview he commented that he considered that the novel is underrated because of the author’s background: “‘Children of the Poor’ is one of our best novels. It’s about poverty and it has a working class background. But that is only acceptable in New Zealand if projected through a middle class lens. So John Mulgan is acceptable but not John A. Lee’ (Cassels 8).

father having any Māori connections. As a first generation New Zealander on his mother's side, brought up in a Pakeha community, he is now writing about a people about whom he knows very little.⁵² All of the historical documentaries are collaborative creations⁵³ and in devising this play Thompson once again tapped into a tradition of oral history: 'I spoke to Maori people [. . .]. What they told me of their lives, beliefs and aspirations was enriching, and I felt I had begun to understand a little of what it might be like to be a Maori in 1979' (Selected Plays [Author's Note] 147).⁵⁴ Considering his background, however, Thompson's claim that he 'had begun to understand a little of what it felt like to be Maori' sounds presumptuous. In analysing the raft of connotations that are associated in his work with the image of the blown-off roof, however, I have already emphasized how Thompson's father rejected suggestions that wars are either fundamentally religious or racial and insisted instead '[t]here's only one war here, boy, and that's the war of men against their masters' (Coaltown Blues 14). Adopting his father's philosophy, Thompson regarded Māori not as an alien

⁵² All My Lives records that Thompson's mother was Cornish and that she and her family spoke with a 'strange burr' (10). Coaltown Blues also instructs that the character of the mother speaks 'in a burr which is part Cornish' (13). Thompson's birth certificate states that his mother was born in Camborne (which is in Cornwall, England) and his father in Kaitangata. He was therefore a first generation New Zealander on his mother's side and a second on his father's.

In one of his last interviews, however, Thompson pointed out that he did have contact with Māori people when he was living on the West Coast: 'There was practically a whole rugby team made of Maori players. We used to be beaten by them regularly in my late teens. [. . .] We had a few Maori players in our own team, and I worked with three Maori people down the mines as well' (Corballis, 'Interview with Mervyn Thompson' 74).

⁵³ Brecht's plays were collaborative efforts and this led to accusations that he could not claim sole authorship for some of his scripts. Thompson faced similar questioning in Corballis' review of his Selected Plays:

Another problem posed by 'Songs to the Judges' is that it is, in Mr Thompson's own words, 'a community creation, hardly my own at all.' The last phrase is no doubt an overstatement; even if one wonders if 'Selected Plays by Mervyn Thompson' is quite the right title for the book that contains it. Mr Thompson's refusal to tamper with the text of 'Judges' (which, like 'Uncle Scrim,' is identical to the version originally published by Playmarket) perhaps signifies his awareness that the text is not really his to change (102).

It is worth noting also that during the 1970s and 1980s Caryl Churchill, a contemporary of Thompson's, was producing collaborative theatre at the Royal Court, writing plays with socialist themes.

⁵⁴ 'Songs to the Judges' is the only one of Thompson's scripts that is bilingual. "Ahi Kaa," "Gather Up the Earth" and "The Raglan Golf Course Dispute" are written partly in Māori. The lyrics of "Matakite land March" and "Ka Mate!" are written entirely in Māori. Ironically, others of the 'Songs' reveal the influence of Gilbert and Sullivan on Thompson's work. "We Think You Ought To Die," for example, is accompanied by the stage direction '[t]he song is sung with a kind of Gilbert-and-Sullivan Elan' (Selected Plays 155).

culture, but as a subgroup of the dispossessed working class with whom he could identify and empathize.

This attitude is evident in Coaltown Blues when Frank the Māori (the only indigenous character to be found in Thompson's plays other than in 'Songs to the Judges') is portrayed as just another of the workers in the mine engaged in the class struggle. According to Frank, a gentle soul who 'prefers a guitar,' the history of his race, like that of the working class as a whole, is made up of one continuous lost cause: 'Us black buggers always end up on the losing side. First the Maori Wars and now this! Them Jokers at the top, they just can't be beaten, eh!' (44).

Nowhere in Thompson's work is Frank's final sentence illustrated with greater theatrical effectiveness than in the final sequence of 'The Great New Zealand Truth Show,' where grotesque masked figures of the authority of '[t]hem Jokers at the top' bear down upon and intimidate the audience. Significantly, before they do so there is a reference to 'Nazi concentration camps' with one section of the cast '*raising their arms in a Hitler salute*' (Passing Through and Other Plays 53). Thus Thompson dramatizes his mother's point of view that 'the inner margin,' the mimic of the Eurocentre, operates as a dictatorship and that the deprivation of those on 'the outer margin' can be compared to conditions in a European concentration camp.

Although Thompson's political agenda never varies, the tone in which he presents his material does. In his later plays he becomes increasingly belligerent. In the last song of 'Songs to Uncle Scrim,' 'We Shall Come,' the unemployed, who have acted as passive victims throughout almost the whole of the script, are suddenly enlivened and come together with '*a precisely articulated sense of hostility*' which threatens revenge:

We shall swarm as swarmed
the locusts
That on Pharaoh's kingdom
fell,
And sling your politicians

And your damned police to
 hell (Selected Plays 143).

Similarly in 'Songs to the Judges,' which traces the dispossession of Māori not only of their land but also of their culture, the Māori attitude to the State changes from passive acceptance to violent resentment: 'The genial masks are/discarded' (166). Incidents such as a beer bottle being hurled against the Beehive wall (179) and a Māori protester spitting on the Pakeha court (173-175) (both of which had actually happened not long before the play was written (184-185 [Notes]) chart the increasing aggression of young Māori towards authority. This culminates in the penultimate song 'Point of No Return,' which predicts bloodshed:

They won't understand the
 writing on the wall
 Till blood not beer has its say (180).⁵⁵

Despite these shows of retaliation, however, Thompson always reverts to a portrait of the Left wing cause in ultimate defeat. As Black perceptively remarks, 'Thompson is unable to escape the pains of his private past' ('Blacktown Blues'

⁵⁵ As the narrative of 'Songs to the Judges' progresses Māori become more assertive. The Māori 'voice' begins in the fifth song, "Till You Came Along," and continues in "Gather Up the Earth" which refers to the 'blood' that was 'spilt at Parihaka.' The Māori verse in the song is taken from Anne Salmond's book *Hui* (161). The turning-point comes in song ten, "Once in a Generation" in which the lyric refers to confrontation between Māori and Pakeha at Parihaka, Maungapohatu and Bastion Point. Immediately afterwards "A New Kind of Song" registers a change in attitude among Māori with '[b]itter thoughts' in a people who used to 'smile' (166) and sing 'ten guitars' (167). "Three Times More Likely," which follows, points out that Māori are '[t]hree times more likely' to join a gang, be convicted in a court of law (168) and, once convicted, to re-offend (109). In his 'Notes' at the end of the play Thompson records that he based the lyrics on New Zealand's crime statistics (184). "Scales of Justice" makes a similar point about Māori being disadvantaged and also notes a higher rate of alcoholism, an eroding of cultural identity (expressed as losing contact with the marae) and higher unemployment (171), especially among the younger generation. "It's Coming" predicts increased hostility and division and the possibility of bloodshed (178) which is realized in the penultimate song which reaches the 'point of no return' (180) when the killing begins.

Six years before 'Songs to the Judges' Craig Harrison's *Tomorrow Will Be a Lovely Day* (1974) was put on by the Elmwood Players in Christchurch to celebrate their twenty-fifth anniversary. This play also deals with the Māori land issue and foresees the widening gap in living standards between Māori and Pakeha. Thompson directed the first professional production of the play at the Mercury in 1978. Harrison, like Thompson, predicts an increasing antagonism between Māori and Pakeha, culminating in bloodshed. 'The Whites of their Eyes' (1975) has a similar theme which includes an NZBC newsreader reporting the effects of increasing Māori aggression: 'Eight people were killed today when car-bombs exploded in Auckland and Wellington. Many more were injured and the blasts have caused damage estimated at many hundreds of thousands of dollars' (29).

39). In the penultimate sequence of Coaltown Blues, for example, the emotive cry of the miners is heard, reflecting the failure of their cause as the 'lockout' ends and they are forced to go back down the mine for even less money and with no longer any hope of improving conditions: '*A loud long cheer, dying slowly away to a universal, choking, cry of defeat*' (41).

In 'O! Temperance!' at the moment of anticipated victory, the Temperance workers realize that the referendum vote which appeared to be in their favour has, in fact, gone against them: '*Hands are linked and raised in a victory pose. But [. . .] the famous slide of New Zealand soldiers voting Continuance in London flashes up. The arms of the Temperance Workers drop away. [. . .] As the speaker advances they react with bewilderment [. . .]. The speaker is [. . .] not entirely devoid of sympathy for the shattered losers he addresses*' (Selected Plays 113).

All of Thompson's political scenarios ultimately focus on the '*shattered losers*' of the working class. The concluding passages of "O! Temperance!" grimly predict the overriding victory of capitalism:

How in the 1920's, the first of the great monopolies will be formed [. . .]. How the career of Sir Ernest Davis will show that in New Zealand the quickest way to a knighthood is to make money at everybody else's expense. [. . .] How year after year the breweries will announce record profits [. . .]. And how [. . .] Kate Sheppard [. . .] and all the other Heroes and Heroines of Temperance [. . .] will soon become only a memory [. . .] far-off voices, crying in the wilderness (114).

In 'We Shall Come,' the last song of 'Songs to Uncle Scrim,' Thompson borrows the words of a poem written by an anonymous worker in 1932 (Tony Simpson 134), who alludes to the Old Testament in his portrayal of the plight of the unemployed (Selected Plays 143). In presenting his 'Heroes and Heroines' as 'far-off voices, crying in the wilderness' Thompson makes another Old Testament allusion, which likens his own class to the Chosen People. Presenting them in

defeat, he at the same time prophesies the future victory of this representation of 'the outer margin'.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ 'We Shall Come' likens the unemployed to the 'locusts' that 'fell' on 'Pharaoh's kingdom' (Selected Plays 143), alluding to the Old Testament account of the plagues visited upon the kingdom of Egypt in order to make Pharaoh release the Jewish people from slavery. The reference to the 'Heroes and Heroines' of the Temperance Movement becoming 'far-off voices, crying in the wilderness (114), is another Biblical allusion, this time to the 'Book of Isaiah,' the prophet who foretold the coming of the Messiah. By these means Thompson predicts the overthrow of capitalism and at the same time asserts the superiority of the proletariat by speaking of them as the Chosen People.

C: AT THE 'SACRIFICIAL SHRINES'

I have already pinpointed one area of unresolved trauma in the breakdown and suicide of the mother, and illustrated how, because of his 'own peculiar neurosis' ('Act Features "First Return"' 10), Thompson returns obsessively to this subject which is inextricably linked to the memory of the blown-off roof. The emotional dynamic forged between mother and son in Thompson's early life forms the template for his most intimately-drawn characters of 'the female margin.'

Thompson expressed his devotion to his mother in Oedipal terms: 'I do know that ours was a blood-bond which caused terrible strife and that my love for her carried strong overtones of the sort of thing that has sons slaying their fathers at dusty crossroads. And all that follows' (All My Lives 20).

In his historical drama documentaries Thompson avoids delving into the inner world of his characters. In 'O! Temperance!', for example, he makes no mention of Kate Sheppard's emotional life and Taylor's private life takes up barely a page of the script (Selected Plays 106-107). When writing of his mother, however, Thompson is always tapping into raw emotion. This is indicated not only by the quotation above, but also by the recurrent passages which picture the poignant image of the depressed mother, on the verge of breakdown, at the 'sacrificial shrines' of the stove and the copper (All My Lives 21; 'First Return' 43; Coaltown Blues 33,35).

In his second autobiography, Singing the Blues, Thompson emphasizes how the closeness of what he terms his 'blood-bond' with his mother is integral to his creative process. Whilst working on the final draft of Coaltown Blues he experimented with cutting out some of the key scenes relating to the mother. It was only then that he realized the importance of this character to the play: '[T]he world of Muriel, the Mother in Coaltown Blues, I know better than anyone. Her pain I know, her intensity and her vision. [. . .] From now on she's back in the

centre of the canvas. Where she belongs' (29).⁵⁷ Clearly, then, not only the Mother in 'First Return,' but also Muriel in Coaltown Blues exemplify Thompson's predilection to '*unmask*': to present not dramatic masks but characters drawn from life on the stage.

When Thompson's mother spoke to him of her inner world she expressed the 'intensity' of her 'vision' in evocative images, such as the one of the Holocaust. It must be remembered, however, that for the most part she remained inscrutable to her son. On the day of her suicide, for example, she sent him off to work as usual, giving him no indication of her state of mind.

In 'First Return' the Accuser Demon⁵⁸ explains Simon's reaction to his mother's suicide:

In dying she chose her release, you understood that and accepted it ...
But somewhere there was a *darker* thought. You felt that she had betrayed you, denied you, cheated you. After all those partial abandonments in houses for the mentally ill, now she had deserted you once and for all — by becoming the putrefying corpse that now you see (Selected Plays 66).

The relationship between mother and son, already complex enough with its Oedipal overtones, is complicated further when the son feels that '[a]fter all those partial abandonments' the woman he worships has finally 'betrayed' him. A similar paradox of attraction and repulsion is demonstrated in Thompson's other works that explore sexual relationships between the male protagonist and other women. The emotional dynamic which was initiated between mother and son is

⁵⁷ It is significant that a photograph of the character of Mother lying in her coffin (played by Judy Cleine in the first production of the play at the Court Theatre in 1974) makes up the sole image both on the programme and on the front cover of the first printed version of the text.

⁵⁸ In 'First Return' 'the ghosts of the past which had always haunted' Thompson ('Act Features "First Return" 10) are turned into stage representations whom Thompson calls 'Demons' (Selected Plays 36). At the end of the play they act as a chorus, the 'menagerie,' and as Simon takes the role of the 'ringmaster' they all 'dance' to his tambourine (68). Georg Büchner, one of the first playwrights to place working class characters at the centre of the plot, in his unfinished but very influential play 'Woyzeck' also alludes to the working class characters as circus animals. 'Woyzeck' was first produced in 1913, seventy-six years after Büchner's death.

repeated throughout the playwright's life with all women to whom he is sexually attracted.

In All My Lives Thompson recalls how, when he was a young man, his affair with a married 'high school teacher' incurred the disapproval of his teammates and resulted in his being dropped from the rugby side (65). This translates in 'First Return' into a duplicate scenario of the 'schoolmistress [. . .] a dozen years older than you,' a married woman who seduces the virgin Simon and with whom he has an affair despite the disapproval of his rugby team (Selected Plays 52-54).

Like his mother, the 'schoolmistress' is already married, is older than Simon, and becomes the centre of his emotional focus. It is due to her influence that Simon 'deserted the hot cunt of the masculine world forever' (54).⁵⁹ In return for his devotion, this substitute mother bestows the comfort of her nurture: 'And it was so warm there, under the blind, bland glow of your attention. To lie on my back and gaze up at your firm, white breasts, smell your cool, female smells, touch your flesh' (55).

This 'warm' place where the woman bestows the 'glow' of her 'attention' appears to be one of comfort and security but turns all of a sudden into a place of pain and insecurity when the substitute mother, like his own mother, proves to be inscrutable and unpredictable. In a key incident, which becomes the turning-point in their relationship, Simon suddenly and without warning begins to relate the story of his life. Though the details of what he says are not revealed to the audience, obviously the mother figure dominates the narrative: '[F]or a moment it was like the floodbanks bursting! I could be *free*, carried off on a full tide out of

⁵⁹ There is an obvious sexual reference in this remark which implies that the homosocial world of rugby contains homosexual elements within it. This theme is explored in Big George where three of the characters, George (who gives the play its name), Frank and Vince, are all latent homosexuals. This play re-works part of the narrative in All My Lives and 'First Return' when the protagonist, Red, earns the disapproval of his rugby mates because of the closeness of his relationship with the team's Captain, George. Red is sympathetic to George's predicament in being sexually attracted to him, but in the end rejects the homosexual alternative in favour of a working class girl, Carol. Red is another example of the 'unmask.' When the play opens he is a coalminer living in a pub. In All My Lives Thompson records that he lived at the local hotel whilst working down the pit in Reefton and playing for the local rugby team (All My Lives 47-50, 62, 64-66). At the end of the play, because of the difficulties of his relationship with George, Red leaves Blacktown for Christchurch. After his difficulties with the 'schoolmistress' Thompson took the same course of action (66-67).

my doubt to some new land.’ Just as suddenly, in the ‘full tide’ of emotion, his lover arrests him: ‘No! You mustn’t tell me that, I don’t want to hear. Forget about your mother [. . .]. Leave the past where it is. You mustn’t be neurotic, that’s not what I want from you [. . .] no confessions. [. . .] Come and make love to me.’ Simon complies, but as ‘*[t]hey embrace fiercely*’ he becomes increasingly ‘*brutal*’ in his lovemaking ‘*in the face of rejection*’ (54-55).

In that moment Simon perceives that his lover wants him to appear to her only in the mask he has created of himself to fulfil her fantasies: ‘You wanted your own images of me and that is what you got. A young animal with a surprising brain’ (55). He is to be her sexual ‘animal,’ her ‘troglodyte’ (25). Recognizing instinctively that the subject of the mother is an area of neurosis, she is not willing to reveal to him her inner world or to enter into his. So, from Simon’s point of view, the relationship with the ‘schoolmistress’ repeats the emotional dynamic that existed between mother and son: Oedipal overtones accompanied by the ‘*darker*’ feelings that Simon experiences in reaction to his mother’s suicide, ‘that she had betrayed you, denied you, cheated you’ (66). In an atmosphere of growing distrust, Simon recognises that in the end he and his ‘schoolmistress’ never really communicated: ‘But you never spoke to me. And you never let me speak’ (55).

Learning this lesson well, Simon adopts a self-imposed silence in his relationships with the other women to whom he is strongly attracted in ‘First Return.’ Noticeably all these women are representatives of the middle class Pakeha settler society. The Accuser Demon points out that lack of communication was also a feature of Simon’s second affair and that silence became an integral part of the relationship: ‘[Y]ou spoke to no-one. Not even to the psychiatrist you went to when your first city love – the one with the private school education – hurt you into impotence’ (56). Christine reveals that Simon is repeating the same pattern by refusing to communicate with her on anything other than a physical level: ‘You swing without warning from impotence to a lust so desperate that I feel it will destroy us both — and wilfully exclude me from any other kind of intimacy’ (63).

The exposition of this male-female dynamic, which is broached in Thompson's first play, makes up the entire three Acts of his last play, 'Lovebirds.' Like the 'schoolmistress,' 'the first city love' and Christine in 'First Return,' the Judith of 'Lovebirds' is a representative of 'the inner margin.' All these lovers are from what Thompson termed 'Blandland,' which he defines as the 'aspiring middle class' ('Theatre and Working Class Politics' 19). A fundamental difference in class and attitude exists between these women and the respective protagonists, despite the latter's success and education. They are 'slumming it,' fantasizing about him in his mask as 'troglodyte.' Equally he fantasizes about each of them as the ideal woman. Simon says to Christine in 'First Return': 'Yes, our worlds are different. As a child I dreamed of standing alone outside a magic window in the snow. Looking in at the beautiful fairy tale princess who was at once, child and woman. [. . .] Well, you're the princess' (Selected Plays 64).⁶⁰ Similarly the Counsellor in 'Lovebirds' tells David that he has turned Judith into a 'demi-goddess' (Passing Through and Other Plays 98).⁶¹

Thompson paints a sympathetic portrait of the 'demi-goddess' from Blandland. In 'First Return' Simon acknowledges that the 'schoolmistress' was, in fact, his mentor: 'You taught me a great deal and I'll never forget it' (Selected Plays 54). He recalls especially how his lover educated him in the arts – '[Y]ou taught me about Eliot and Bartok and Chagall' – and then was selfless enough not to hold him back from further studies: 'And when it was time, you encouraged me to go' (55). In the same play, despite the differences in their philosophies, when Christine becomes Simon's lover, she also nurtures him like a mother. At one stage, for example, '*CHRISTINE holds SIMON, as one comforting the sufferer of a bad dream*' (57). In 'Lovebirds,' despite their constant wrangling, Judith '*sobs uncontrollably*' because, as the Counsellor explains, she loves David (Passing Through and Other Plays 84).

⁶⁰ Thompson makes an allusion to the genre of the fairy tale in this sequence. Black points this out in relation to the text of 'First Return': 'In the fairy-tale Simon is the penniless suitor in quest of the beautiful princess. [. . .] Love, unexamined and unexplained, is said to solve everything. With a kiss she could transform this "frog" into the Prince fit to share her kingdom.' Black then goes on to interpret Simon's affair with his 'schoolmistress' as an allusion to the fairy tale of Beauty and the Beast: 'Beauty and the Beast becomes female flesh and the troglodyte' ('Four Plays in Search of a Theatre' 12).

⁶¹ There are echoes here of Strindberg's 'Miss Julie,' a play about the attraction between a working class man and a woman of a higher status in society.

In the character of David, Thompson creates another ‘*unmask*’ of himself on the stage.⁶² In All My Lives Thompson writes that during his mother’s stays in the mental hospital he was ‘farmed out under Child Welfare’ (12). Similarly in ‘Lovebirds,’ David is an artist who, as a child, has spent periods in ‘welfare homes’ (Passing Through and Other Plays 68). David’s description of himself as an artist also reflects that of his creator: ‘Orphan kid become Artist-of-of-the-People [. . .]. All the brave causes, I was there’ (79)

In ‘Lovebirds’ the relationship between the central couple becomes increasingly violent as the play progresses. Murray Horton commented wryly of the play in performance: ‘Everything not nailed down is smashed (don’t sit in the front row)’ (‘Review of “Lovebirds”’ 31). There are suggestions in ‘First Return’ that the relationship between Simon and his ‘schoolmistress’ has the potential to develop into violence when Simon becomes increasingly ‘*brutal*’ in his lovemaking (Selected Plays 55). ‘Lovebirds,’ however, is much more extreme in its graphic description of a seemingly endless cycle of intercourse interrupted by scenes of physical and emotional abuse. David says of the relationship, ‘[a]ll we ever seem to do these days is battle each other or make love. There’s nothing between’ (Passing Through and Other Plays 75). At frequent times in the play the couple attack each other. Judith hits David with her fists (63) and pulls a knife on him (64). He, in retaliation, slaps her across the face (64), throws her against a wall and breaks her rib (65) and then hits her in public (69). As their confrontations become increasingly destructive Judith threatens to kill David along with his child and his former wife and the police intervene (72-73). When the play closes David is awaiting trial for having threatened to murder Judith (89).

The emotional dynamic in ‘Lovebirds’ is a repetition of the relationship that existed between Thompson’s parents, though it is expressed in an expanded and more extreme form. In both cases the relationship is conducted in an atmosphere

⁶² As part of the process of the ‘*unmask*’ also, it is worth noting that Thompson himself performed the role of David in some performances due to the illness of the leading actor.

of sexual jealousy amid accusations of unfaithfulness.⁶³ Thompson identifies 'sexual jealousy' (All My Lives 16), for example, as one of the key elements in the 'domestic battles' (15) of his childhood and says, 'both of my parents were extremely possessive, especially my father' (16). In others of his plays, the portrait of the warring parents, which is drawn from life, displays a similar dynamic. In Coaltown Blues the mother flings at the father: 'You fondled my sister in front of me when I lay in bed too weak to move!' (16). In 'First Return' the Mother displays no remorse for spending the night with a travelling salesman in a 'cheap hotel.' When the father accuses her of behaving 'like a whore' she defiantly describes the experience as 'a moment or two of freedom' (Selected Plays 44).

When 'Lovebirds' opens each of the lovers is already married to another partner and David is consistently unfaithful both to his wife and to Judith. As the relationship develops Judith, too, claims the right to have affairs which, like the Mother in 'First Return,' she expresses as part of her definition of 'freedom': 'What I want, David, is the freedom to make up my own mind! [. . .] – freedom to go where I like, see who I like [. . .] fuck who I like' (Passing Through and Other Plays 78).

In 'Lovebirds,' however, the language of recrimination is more extreme as physical passion is described in terms of gutter sex. Judith describes David's infidelities as 'a screw, a bit of tail, a bit of crutch, a bit of hare pie!' He, in retaliation, like the Father in 'First Return,' speaks of his woman as a whore: 'Fuck your man, have a giggle, wash your cunt and then off to another!' (71).

The explicit domestic violence and sexual language expressed in Thompson's scripts were highly unusual in the New Zealand theatre of the time and 'Lovebirds' represents its most extreme expression. Horton acknowledges this: 'What it [the play] depicts is definitely not "nice," in fact it's downright ugly. It uncompromisingly confronts audiences with an aspect of life that very few people

⁶³ Again on the theme of sexual jealousy Thompson directed a highly acclaimed production of 'Othello' in Christchurch in 1989 in which he played Iago.

are comfortable with, and a lot have never experienced' ('Review of "Lovebirds"' 32).

At the time of his death Thompson left an unfinished novel among his papers which is strikingly similar to the script of 'Lovebirds.' The protagonist of the novel (which is untitled) is called Stephen but the woman he has an affair with, as in 'Lovebirds,' is called Judith and their relationship repeats the same pattern of abuse that is to be found in the play. This Judith, for example, is in the habit of pulling a knife on Stephen (Draft of Novel 65, 79) and she threatens to kill both him and his child with it (111). He, in retaliation, breaks her rib (64-65).⁶⁴

The text of the novel is of great significance because it confirms what the play texts only suggest: that the template for the relationship in 'Lovebirds' is to be found in the emotional dynamic that existed between Thompson's parents. In the novel Judith's taunting drives Stephen to distraction and to physical violence, but as he succumbs to it he experiences a vivid moment of *déjà vu*:

Even as he'd hit her the doubleness had intruded, [. . .] like an exposure in a negative already laden with image. All through his childhood he'd seen it, the fury of his mother calling up the violence of his father. [. . .] What he had never known, however, not until this moment, was the exhilaration that came with the giving of the blow (96).

Both 'Lovebirds' and the novel tell the story of an obsessive affair which slowly dies over a period of thirteen or fourteen years (Passing Through and Other Plays

⁶⁴ The protagonist in the novel is yet another example of the 'unmask.' Like his creator, Stephen is a man of the theatre who writes and directs plays. When the novel opens Stephen's new play has been reviewed as one 'which represents nothing less than a watershed in New Zealand drama' (1). There are also references to productions of Marat/Sade (1) and an all female version of Waiting for Godot (29), both of which Thompson directed successfully (All My Lives 86-88; 'Theatre and Working Class Politics' 21). Stephen is working class. He 'followed his father into the Strongman coalpits' and his mother was sent into mental asylums for shock treatment when he was a child and eventually committed suicide (20). Stephen has an autistic son, Davey, who appears to be losing the words he learned as a baby and who displays obsessive behaviour such as flicking the pages of a book (6). One of the books Davey flicks the pages of is the Penguin version of 'King Lear' (48). Thompson had an autistic son, Matthew, whose school reports record his loss of words once known and his obsessive flicking of the pages of a book (Mervyn Thompson Papers. Macmillan Brown Library). The first financial success at the Court Theatre in Christchurch was Thompson's production of 'King Lear' (All My Lives 102-106).

79; Draft of Novel 208), during which time the man leaves his wife but the woman remains married. Judith is only prepared to stay with her lover for short periods of time, and, as her career burgeons, the man's declines. Thompson's diaries also reveal details of an obsessive affair which lasts for approximately the same length of time, with a woman who has the same characteristics of personality and lifestyle as the fictionalised 'Judith' (Daily Journal; Diary; 1988 Tour Diary). This relationship is also physically and emotionally abusive. One entry, for example, refers to an argument which included '[t]wo hours of recriminations' during which the woman refers to Thompson as 'a man who tried to kill her.' The frequent battles are interspersed with frequent lovemaking. (Diary 1 December 1987).

Also in this diary Thompson records an idiosyncratic look that appears in his lover's eyes, '[a] [s]trangely unfocused, blurry look – a shade reptilian' (Diary 1 December 1987). The unfinished novel also refers to this 'look' in the lover's eyes, and goes on to identify it in terms of *déjà vu*:

Where had he witnessed such eyes, strange and unseeing, before?
When the answer came he saddened and tried to push it away. His
mother's. In the hallway on the night those people came to take her to
Seaview Hospital, the asylum down the road in Hokitika, now closed.
When he tried to stop them picking up his mother's suitcase and
taking her to the door, she looked at his ten year old face without
recognition [. . .]. It had stayed with him, that image, and now it was
here again (Draft of Novel 79).

I make reference to this sensitive material only in order to establish firmly that Thompson views his lover as a reflection of his mother. The diary also reveals that the real lover, like the 'schoolmistress' in 'First Return' and Judith in 'Lovebirds,' is more than willing to have sex but assiduously avoids any form of intimacy. In 'Lovebirds' the Counsellor sums up the relationship between David and Judith thus: 'What you're seeking can't be found in a woman, David. You've turned her into a demi-goddess, but she won't give you passage to the inner

world' (Passing Through and Other Plays 98).⁶⁵ Thompson's diary quotes his lover speaking of her 'inner life' and saying 'I prefer to keep to myself. [I] [d]on't want to be known in the way you want' and he interprets this as the 'secret inner cavern' that exists in the woman which 'no-one can enter' (Diary 1 December 1987).

The idealised lovers who exude the paradox of attraction and repulsion are perpetrating the cycle of damage that has been initiated by the mother, as David illustrates when he recounts a 'dream' he has had at the end of 'Lovebirds':

Then a long way off someone approaches. A woman. Young and lithe and beautiful and bearing a gift or offering. The way she moves! I can't keep my eyes off her. [. . .] She comes closer. She smiles. Her hands rise to her face. The skin peels off. The face has become a skull, the teeth rotten and discoloured. Out of the cavities fat worms crawl! (Passing Through and Other Plays 74).

There are obvious similarities between this description and the reference to the 'putrefying corpse' of the Mother which appears on the stage in 'First Return' (Selected Plays 66).⁶⁶

The only time we are given any real insight into the causes of the mother's psychological problems is in Coaltown Blues. Though she does not confide to her son directly, he wakes in the night to '[a] streak of piercing white light under my door. Voices sliding through. Hushed. Intense' (32). Unseen, the boy overhears a conversation between his mother and her sister which tells him that the man he believes to be his grandfather is actually not his mother's father and that the reason for the mother's instability is that she was sexually abused by this

⁶⁵ Thompson's Diary also refers to counselling.

⁶⁶ In the unfinished novel the lover who represents both attraction and repulsion is also the representation of Death:

Within two months of the end of the relationship the lump came. It took the specialists a year to find its meaning, and only then after an exploratory operation. But in his heart he knew all along that it was serious. The announcement that he had cancer came as no surprise at all. It was in the neck and jaw and, unreachably, at the base of the brain. [...] Stephen's name for it was 'Judith' (192).

In the Mervyn Thompson Papers there is a letter from Diana Mason dated 1 January 1991 which expresses that she is 'devastated' to learn that Thompson has been diagnosed with cancer of the mouth and jaw just as Mason had been. Mason died on New Year's Eve 1982, so it would have been the anniversary of his death when the letter was written.

stepfather when she was twelve. He then hears his mother say that ‘she had married Dad at sixteen just to get away’ from her stepfather’s ‘disgusting dwarf body’ (34). Even more alarmingly it now dawns on her son that this moment of revelation calls his whole sense of identity into question: ‘I crept back to my bed. Nothing made sense any more. My grandfather was not my grandfather; Mum’s sisters were not her sisters; I was not myself: I could no longer be certain I was my own father’s son’ (34).⁶⁷

The devastating suspicion that he may be the son of the man he believed to be his grandfather changes the child’s whole perception of his world. Immediately afterwards ‘[n]ightmare’ music begins:

The world was full of dark secrets, and dwarves with keys standing outside forbidden doors, and young girls opening their mouths to scream but no sound comes and nobody hears. *Music intensifies*. And in this Terrifying Other World, coats reared up on nails behind doors and shapes neither man nor beast come crunching up the gravel path by moonlight (34).⁶⁸

The boy’s final reaction to the incident emphasizes the indelible mark that it left on his psyche: ‘[N]othing in your Waking Life [. . .] would ever be as Real’ (34). Thompson writes in his Production Notes to ‘First Return,’ ‘I have always disliked naturalism as a form’ (Selected Plays 22). The playwright’s preference for the surreal can perhaps be traced to the traumatic childhood revelation which

⁶⁷ The same scene reveals another skeleton in the cupboard of the family history when the Performer’s mother recalls to her sister that her real father was a headmaster from Penzance and her mother was a domestic servant in his house. When her mother became pregnant the headmaster ‘paid her off with a boat ticket to the colonies’ (Coaltown Blues 33-34). I have already noted that Thompson’s mother was born in Cambourne which, like Penzance, is in Cornwall.

In Singing the Blues Thompson explains that he experimented with taking out the scene in which the mother reveals the nature of the relationship with her stepfather and the circumstances of her birth to her sister, but that Laurie Atkinson considered that this made ‘the play that much less intense and moving’ and so he put it back in again (29). Penzance is one of the places that the Performer mentions visiting after the demise of ‘Blacktown’ in Coaltown Blues.

⁶⁸ In All My Lives Thompson appears to refer to his fears regarding his origins when he remarks, ‘[t]hey [his parents] had married young (he was 20, she was 16) and produced me soon after. (I have never been sure how soon after and hereby hangs a doubt)’ (11). The marriage certificate states that Thompson’s parents were married at the ‘Residence of Mrs James Thompson’ (Mervyn’s grandmother) on April 2nd 1935 in Kaitangata. Mervyn Garfield Thompson was born on 14 June 1935.

transformed his world into nightmare. As Christine says in 'First Return': '[F]or art read fixation on nightmares!' (33).

In addition, the image of sacrifice is vital to the portraits of both the mother and her son in Thompson's work. The mother labours at the 'sacrificial shrines' (All My Lives 21) of the stove and the copper because the cycle of abuse has been passed down through the generations. Her son, who worships at the 'shrines' of her memory, in turn becomes a victim. As a result of the psychological damage caused by this cycle, the concept of the mother as nurturer is perverted; comfort and security give way to pain and insecurity. In 'Lovebirds' David chillingly reveals that he finds in Judith's mistreatment a sense of homecoming: '[Y]ou're back in her arms again [. . .] it's not over yet, how glorious these chains, how comforting the sound of your abuse, I'm home, I'm home!' (Passing Through and Other Plays 80). Moreover, with daunting honesty, the unfinished novel admits that physical violence becomes for its victims a source of 'exhilaration' (96).

In order to exorcise this destructive dynamic, Thompson admits that he laboured to 'set myself up as a theatrical sacrifice' in order to tell the dark tale of 'Blacktown.' By means of a combination of what he terms his own 'narcissism' and 'masochism' and his use of the 'unmask' (Act Features "First Return" 10), he lays bare the psychology of abuse arguably much more deeply than any other playwright had done before on the New Zealand stage.

Placed in this context, Thompson's last play 'Jean and Richard' appears at first sight to be atypical. It can be interpreted, however, as an attempt to solve in a surreal world the problems that the playwright could not resolve in his own lifetime. The script was written when Thompson knew he was dying of cancer and was first performed just a few months before his death.⁶⁹ It is subtitled 'A Fantasy' because it envisages a love affair between Richard Pearse, said to be the

⁶⁹ There is an undated letter from Thompson to Diana Mason in the Bruce Mason Archive at Playmarket which speculates, "'Passing Through" may be my performance swan-song. In July and August I was operated on for cancer – a lump under my jaw, some more in my mouth. I've refused radiotherapy until the show is done. Accounts of the time left vary from 18 months to 3 years to "don't know." But I'm working on' (Bruce Mason Archive. Playmarket). 'Jean and Richard' was first staged at the Court Theatre 2 on 14th February 1992. Thompson died on 10th July in that same year.

first man in the world to fly, and Jean Batten, a solo aviator, even though these famous characters from New Zealand history never actually met.

In his Introduction to the published version of the play Thompson remarked that he saw many parallels between Pearse's struggle for recognition and his own:

As a writer and a theatre practitioner who has been forced to do most of his work outside the established theatres, I found it easy to identify with a man who had to make his way without much in the way of assistance. [. . .] Pearse struggled alone, invented alone, flew alone and died alone (Passing Through and Other Plays 102).

This statement suggests that the central characters may be metaphors for Thompson's own persona. Both characters, like Thompson, have difficulties in forming intimate relationships. Both are loners. Jean's most intimate bond is with her mother, to whom she makes a life-long commitment at the expense of all her other relationships. Both characters are talented innovators in their own field but remain, at the end of their lives, largely unrecognised and unsung by the world around them. At the end of the play both Pearse and Batten speak of 'dying alone' and Pearse of 'dreams' that have 'become naught' (135).⁷⁰

In the 'unmask' of 'Passing Through',⁷¹ the Performer admits to a 'terrible thirst for a happy ending' whereby, in a reversal of the perceived failure of his professional life, the '[p]laywright [is] triumphantly re-instated, his dreams for this country and its theatre realised at last!' (Passing Through and Other Plays 172). Similarly, in the Introduction to 'Jean and Richard' Thompson expresses his desire to 'take two tragedies and find in them, in the face of all contrary

⁷⁰ At the end of the unfinished novel the protagonist, like Thompson, is a man of the theatre who is dying of cancer. The last pages of the draft are addressed to the writer's autistic son:

I've been lauded and applauded in my time but it all comes back to the same thing. All that work, all that desire to change the world (or get it to see through my eyes) all that desperate jostling and persuading and battling for visibility, all those broken chairs and broken hearts, all those ostracisms and wild bravos – meaningless. Now my work seems no more significant than the noiseless flicking of pages as you fan up your little whistling wind and keep the world at a chosen, manageable distance. [. . .] So Davey, I'm not even a candle in the dark. Just a fool who pursued unreal dreams and an unreal vision of love (211).

⁷¹ Ralph Johnson remembers that parts of 'Passing Through' were performed by Thompson in a transparent mask (Personal Interview 4 July 2006).

evidence, a happy ending' (102). In the last scene of the play Jean and Richard (who, at the only chance they ever had to meet, would have been twenty-seven and fifty-nine respectively) decide to get married and as '[t]hey kiss gently' they are 'hoisted aloft' to fly away together '[i]n a rush of heavenly music' (136). Thus the play may be viewed as a wish-fulfilment by means of which Thompson achieves vicariously what he felt he had never had in his own life: successful union with the desired.

In 'Jean and Richard' a Female Critic sums up the mask that Jean Batten, known in her day as 'The Garbo of the Skies,' presents to the world: 'She is the female Narcissus, in love with the only thing she is capable of admiring: her own achievement, her own legend, her own reflection' (127). I have already referred to the interview in which Thompson spoke of his own 'narcissism' ('Act Features "First Return"' 10) and to the place in his diary where he speaks of himself in terms of the Narcissus myth. By using the same allusion Thompson suggests that he and Batten are soulmates, with very similar strengths and weaknesses. Like Batten, perhaps this playwright's greatest contribution to his chosen field lies in his vision and his innovation. Like her, perhaps his greatest weakness was his Narcissistic need to reflect obsessively his own image in the public gaze.

At the same time, paradoxically, Thompson's obsession to 'unmask' in conscious self-dramatization exists in conjunction with an equally strong compulsion to ally himself with the unsung 'Heroes and Heroines' of the proletariat, who 'become only a memory [. . .] far-off voices, crying in the wilderness' (Selected Plays 114). Pearse, like Thompson, was an innovator with poor working class origins who, with little formal training in his field, nevertheless displayed an outstanding natural talent. He, like Thompson, lived in conditions of poverty at the beginning and end of his life, his great achievement of being the first man to fly being overshadowed by the well-funded and widely-publicized efforts of the Wright brothers. In Pearse, as in Tommy Taylor, therefore, Thompson found a protagonist who suited his purpose very well: a representative of 'the outer margin' of the working class who had been forgotten because he was on the losing side.

D: CONCLUSION

Mason, Baxter and Thompson are all important contributors to the development of New Zealand drama in their rejection of the hegemony of the Eurocentre. There is a case for claiming that 'First Return' is New Zealand's first explicitly nationalistic play built upon the first attempts, such as Mulgan's, to identify an authentic 'voice.' An integral part of Thompson's growing sense of nationalism was his need to re-discover his own historical roots. This led him to begin to unearth 'the outer margin' of New Zealand working class history, which had previously been either neglected, or presented from an unsympathetic perspective. As a result, Thompson often drew his material from oral sources, and chose to celebrate previously unsung historical personalities, such as Tommy Taylor, on the stage.

Thompson's view of labour relations was pessimistic. Working class aspirations in his plays ultimately become part of a continuum of lost causes. The playwright may take his revenge by banishing from the stage the enemies of the proletariat, such as Forbes and Coates and the Judge in 'Songs to the Judges,' but the working class characters, whom he portrays as 'Heroes and Heroines' (Selected Plays 114), lose in the end. For Thompson the enemy is always capitalism, aided and abetted by a dictatorial Right wing government, which represents the bourgeoisie. This class steals from the proletariat, even to the point of depriving them of their democratic rights. According to Thompson, the solution lies in the socialist revolution, which he foresees at the end of 'Songs to Uncle Scrim,' when the unemployed are poised to overthrow the existing order (Selected Plays 143).

Thompson perpetuated the thematic revolution initiated by Mason⁷² and continued by Baxter as he expanded upon their various representations of 'the outer margin.'

⁷² In one of his last interviews Thompson pointed out the similarities between his work and Mason's and at the same time remarked on the difficulty of earning a living as a New Zealand playwright:

Bruce and I had the same problem; we're classic overreactors who wrote big cast plays at a time when little cast, naturalistic plays were the norm. So our work didn't get performed. But the writer has to survive somehow, so the writer goes out and performs his own work. Bruce had hardly any production – no professional productions of The Pohutukawa Tree, two of Awatea, none of Hand on the Rail or

As a Marxist, he is always acutely aware of the class war, and texts such as 'Songs to Uncle Scrim' exposed the schism between the lifestyles of the 'Haves' and the 'Have Nots.' There had been frequent previous portraits of the 'Haves' on the New Zealand stage. Thompson, however, emulated the work begun by Baxter (who also had Left wing sympathies⁷³) in his persistent portrayals of extreme poverty. In many ways Thompson's working class characters, in response to the hardship in their lives, display the Christian values of Baxter's inhabitants of the 'Just City'.⁷⁴ Unlike Baxter's alcoholic anti-heroes, however, Thompson's representatives of 'the outer margin' are hard working and sober 'Heroes and Heroines' (Selected Plays 114). The focus of Thompson's oeuvre was always on the doubly marginalized proletariat and he is, without doubt, one of the most influential exponents of working class theatre that New Zealand has ever produced.⁷⁵

In texts such as The Pohutukawa Tree and 'Jack Winter's Dream,' Mason and Baxter had referred loosely back to events in New Zealand history. Thompson's snapshots of that history were much more detailed and rigorously researched, as he brought to the stage previously unrepresented characters and situations from New Zealand's past. He viewed history as cyclical, so events of that past assume a contemporary relevance. 'Songs to Uncle Scrim,' for example, which is set in the Great Depression of the 1930s, functions also to make a commentary on unemployment and the widening gap between rich and poor in the 1980s.⁷⁶

Hongi. He wrote these plays, and not only were they big casts – largely male – but also Maori. The profession either didn't exist or wasn't of a mind to do the production. So he was forced, in a way, to pick up his suitcase and go out and do solo shows, the same thing has happened to me (Corballis, 'Interview with Mervyn Thompson' 88).

⁷³ Baxter's parents were both socialists. Their political belief is reflected in their son's middle name, Keir. He is named after J. Keir Hardie who founded the Scottish Labour Party in 1888 and became the first leader of the Labour Party in the House of Commons in 1906. Hardie was a socialist and a pacifist ('Hardie, J. Keir.' Encyclopaedia Britannica). Baxter shared the political beliefs of both Hardie and his parents.

⁷⁴ Both Baxter and Thompson use music in their plays as they explore working class themes. This technique is associated with the working class theatre tradition and was also espoused by Brecht.

⁷⁵ Unity Theatre, founded in Wellington in 1942, was one of the few that staged working class plays. Founded on socialist principles, in the early days its purpose was 'to present plays which are real and sincere in their presentation of life.' Playwrights such as Gorki, Sean O'Casey and Arthur Miller were staged at Unity. It closed in 1978. This theatre, however, remained atypical in the theatre climate of New Zealand.

⁷⁶ Other playwrights have used the theatrical device of ostensibly setting their plays in the past in order to make a commentary on the politics of their own times; notable contemporary examples are Arthur Miller's The Crucible and Timberlake Wertenbaker's The Love of the Nightingale.

Both Mason and Baxter had made groundbreaking attempts to explore what they regarded as 'the outer margin' of Māori culture. Thompson, in regarding Māori as a component of the proletariat and identifying himself with that class, presumed to speak on behalf of the Māori people, despite being Pakeha. His political stance was confrontational. In 'Songs to the Judges' he threatened his theatre audience as he spelled out in explicit detail how Pakeha law has callously and persistently exploited Māori. Although less conciliatory than Mason or Baxter on the issue of race, in 'Songs to the Judges' he, like Mason, also expressed concern about the identity crisis and increasing aggression of young Māori in a dominantly Pakeha culture.

A distinction needs to be made, however, between the historical drama documentaries such as 'O! Temperance!,' 'Songs to Uncle Scrim,' 'Songs to the Judges' and 'The Great New Zealand Truth Show,' which focus on the political world and reveal little of the personal lives of the characters, and his rarer and more intimate portraits of male-female relationships to be found in texts such as 'First Return' and 'Lovebirds.'

Thompson built upon Mason's work in relation to 'the female margin' by continuing to create major roles for women, which are hard to find in the theatre tradition of New Zealand. He expanded upon Mason and Baxter's repertoire of female characters by broaching sensitive issues which had seldom or never been seen on the New Zealand stage before. In his exploration of this doubly marginalized group, Thompson moved outside his habitual thematic restrictions to include sympathetic characterizations of women from 'the inner margin,' the mimic of the Eurocentre, which he termed 'Blandland.'

Thompson's approach was new to the New Zealand stage in its persistent reference to emotional and physical abuse in male-female relationships. In 'The Devil and Mr Mulcahy' and 'The Temptations of Oedipus' Baxter grappled with the subject of incest, but his portrayal of the harmonious brother-sister

relationships which illustrate this social problem are much gentler than Thompson's nightmarish account of similar subject matter in Coaltown Blues.⁷⁷

Thompson, like Mason, emphasized that violence is inherent in New Zealand society. In his largely autobiographical account of the sex war he explored the subject of domestic violence which until then had been seldom tackled. A generation earlier, as part of his thematic revolution, Mason broached this theme in his first play, The Bonds of Love. There are also implications of abuse in his portraits of the Atkinson marriage. In Mason's work, however, violence is either reported or implied. The abuse in Thompson's plays is much more explicit. In his work men and women attack each other on the stage, making his plays arguably among the most violent in New Zealand theatre. This aggression takes its most extreme form in 'Lovebirds,' in which the set is literally smashed to pieces by the central wrangling couple.

Thompson's thematic inventions, however, like those of Mason and Baxter, are offset by the structural debt he owes to theatrical models derived from the Eurocentre. As an academic and a teacher of drama Thompson was well acquainted with the history of theatre⁷⁸ and he deliberately incorporated the techniques of Expressionism, the working class theatre movement and Community Theatre into his own plays. He was also a theatrical innovator – the only playwright in this thesis to claim have invented, in the 'songplay,' an original dramatic form.⁷⁹ Thompson also displayed a flair for devising original ways of interacting with his audiences. In A Night At the Races the audience lays bets on the outcome of the script and in 'O! Temperance!' they are treated as part of a temperance meeting in order to bring them round to the play's political viewpoint.

⁷⁷ The text of Coaltown Blues views the key conversation between the mother and her sister through the reactions of the protagonist. The order in which the facts are revealed is not made clear. It is therefore highly likely that the boy at first suspected that he was the child of incest before he realized that the man he had assumed was his grandfather was, in fact, his mother's stepfather.

⁷⁸ Peter Holland and Michael Patterson in The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre trace a 'line of descent through Büchner and the expressionist playwrights to Brecht's "Epic Theatre"' (294). The influence of these dramatists on Thompson's work indicates that he is aware of this direct 'line of descent.'

⁷⁹ Thompson's 'songplay' achieved international recognition when 'Songs to Uncle Scrim' was performed in a prize-winning production by the Heartache and Sorrow Company at venues in London and Edinburgh in 1979.

According to Thompson, the working class are subject to unforeseen changes in fortune like the catastrophe of the blown-off roof. In Thompson's plays these sudden changes for the worse ensure that the working class remain within a continuum of lost causes which stretch back through the history of the proletariat. The Thompson family, being part of that class, are caught up in the process. Thompson explicitly incorporates his own life into that continuum, allying himself to the proletariat and at the same time welding together the political and the domestic facets of his oeuvre in the image of the blown-off roof: a metaphor which summarizes his view of the New Zealand world.

CHAPTER 4

RENÉE: THE GIRL WHOSE MOTHER WEDED CARROTS FOR SIXPENCE AN HOUR

A: 'IT'S NOT WHAT YOU WANT, IT'S WHAT YOU GET'

1 INTRODUCTION

Born in 1929 and the eldest of three children, Renée has Māori blood on her mother's side. She spelled out the details of her family history in an interview with Lisa Warrington: 'My great great great grandfather, David Lewis, was a whaler, and he married Koko Porohiwi, a Maori woman from the Mahia.¹ And then there is another Maori connection as well. So I say I am Ngati Kahungunu, but I'm also connected to Ngati Porou' (77).

Renée is the only writer in this thesis with Māori ancestry. Apart from this fundamental aspect of her background, however, there are marked similarities between her early life and that of her contemporary, Mervyn Thompson, who was born six years later. Renée had a parent who committed suicide: her father shot himself when she was four.² This traumatic event left an indelible effect on her psyche, coming as it did as a bolt from the blue and prompted by a motivation that she has never been able to decipher, as she explained in an interview with Peter Beatson:

¹ Porohiwi, the name of Renée's great-great-great grandmother's family, consistently re-surfaces in her work. In her novel *The Snowball Waltz* (1997), Porohiwi becomes a fictional small town. In her children's novel *I Have To Go Home* (1997) Porohiwi is the 'Home' of the title to which the protagonist longs to return. In the novel *Daisy and Lily* (1993) Porohiwi is Daisy's mother's surname. In the play *Te Pouaka Karae* (1992), Porohiwi is the name of the caves containing Māori ancestral drawings which provide the tourist attraction around which the plot revolves. In her latest novel *Kissing Shadows* (2005) Porohiwi is the family name of the central Māori characters and also a fictional location.

² The death certificate states that Stanley George Howard Jones was '[f]ound dead with a bullet wound in forehead' at Thorndon Railway Yard and is estimated to have died on 30 April or 1 May 1934.

My father left home one Saturday night, went to Hastings and bought a rifle, got onto a train, got out of the train at Palmerston North and was found between Palmerston North and Wellington with a glass and an unopened bottle of beer. He had shot himself with a .22 rifle. In spite of valiant attempts by the police it was never established that there had been any marital discord of any major proportion, and he was earning five pounds a week which was a reasonable wage. In spite of my repeated questioning of his family now that they're older and I'm older, nobody has ever given me a satisfactory explanation (31).³

Renée's mother, Rose, found herself at that time in the unenviable position of being a solo parent with three small children to rear at a time when New Zealand was not a Welfare State.⁴ Renée's parents on both sides were working class. Her father's death certificate states his occupation as a 'Farm Manager' from Pakowhai. In 'Poodle, Valerie Rose and Jimmy-the-Pumpkin,' an autobiographical account that focuses particularly on her early life, Renée writes that in Pakowhai the family lived in a 'little farmhouse cottage' (255) but that after her father's death she and her mother, along with her brother and younger sister, were forced to shift: 'We can't stay in the farmhouse now there's no man there to do the job the house goes with, so we take rooms in a wooden villa in Guppy Road, Greenmeadows, with Daisy, whose husband is in gaol and who needs the money, not to mention the company' (256). This was to be the first of frequent moves to other rented accommodation, all necessitated by poverty.

³ An article in Truth relating to the inquest has a sub heading 'Reason For Act Complete Mystery.' It states that Renée's father was '[f]ound lying at the foot of the railway embankment near the overhead bridge on the Hutt Road, Wellington, with a bullet hole in his forehead and a rifle resting between his knees.' The Coroner said at the time that 'all the evidence pointed to suicide but not the faintest trace of motive has been discovered.' Renée's mother is described at the event as '[a] sad, bereft little wife' as 'she left the stand to silently take her seat, and tears slowly trickled down her cheeks.'

⁴ In A History of New Zealand Keith Sinclair details how the Labour Government, first elected in 1935 and then re-elected in 1938, transformed New Zealand into a Welfare State during 'a tremendous burst of legislative activity 1936-8. [. . .] Soon after coming into office, the Government increased existing pensions [. . .]. In 1938 the Social Security Act again increased pensions' (278). Renée has commented how Rose, like many poor people of the time, kept a photograph of Michael Joseph Savage on the wall (Beatson 31) in honour of the improvement he made to her finances: 'The Labour Party had brought in a widow's pension for which she gave him sole credit' (32).

Renée remembers living in eighteen different houses when she was young (Williams 19).

Rose eventually did find work in a market garden, doing the backbreaking job of weeding carrots for the pittance of sixpence an hour ('Renée – New Zealand Playwright' 30). In 'Poodle, Valerie Rose and Jimmy-the-Pumpkin' Renée records that years later her mother and brother were still doing this poorly-paid work in order to eke out the family's meagre finances: 'Jimmy and Mum weed carrots for Bill Hetherington for sixpence an hour' (260). The attitude of people to Rose's adverse circumstances, however, was largely unsympathetic, partly owing to the fact that at the time a suicide in the family was a stigma:

[T]he response from people, apart from his [her father's] family, particularly his two brothers, was that it must have been her fault. [. . .] Her family except for one sister thought 'serve her right.' If she hadn't married out of the Church it would never have happened (Beatson 30).

Rose's response to the difficulties of her life was to isolate herself: '[S]he just withdrew and became a recluse in lots of ways, except for a fortnightly trip to the pub when she had the money' (30).⁵ As a result of her social withdrawal Rose's eldest daughter was thrust into the position of taking an active and responsible role in the outside world from an early age: 'I did the shopping. I took my brother and sister to school on their first day and I changed her library books' ('Renée – New Zealand Playwright' 30).

The circumstances of Renée's childhood and adolescence have had an overwhelming effect on her writing. Her oeuvre, like that of Bruce Mason, James K. Baxter and Thompson, draws heavily on autobiographical material. Like these writers also, she spent her early life in one particular locale in New Zealand. All of the houses Renée remembers living in when she was young were in or around

⁵ Two of Renée's works refer to a solo mother who has become a recluse being helped out by her dead husband's brothers. In her collection of short stories, *Finding Ruth* (1987), 'Oranges and Lemons' narrates how the mother's two brothers-in-law bring peaches so that she can make jam to feed Ruth through the winter. In another short story written for the *Waikato Times* in the first person, Renée comments that of the only four people ever to visit the family home '[t]wo were my young uncles' ('All Is Calm All Is Bright').

Napier, the town in which she was born. Renée continued to live in the Hawke's Bay region throughout her early married life (Williams 22-24). Her writing, however, does not display the same sense of identification with the local region that is to be found in these other writers and neither does she mythologize the landscape that she knew so well.

Renée, like Thompson, often draws her material from oral sources, but, unlike Mason, Baxter and Thompson's, her characters are composites. Pauline Swain described the creative treatment of oral history in Renée's novel Does This Make Sense To You?: 'The book's main character, Flora, and her two friends, Ka and Freddie, are fictional creations based on composites of the real women interviewed by Renée' (11). The one notable exception is Renée's mother. Renée confirmed in another interview that Rose still has a pervading effect on her life: 'My mother lives with me. I think of her a lot because she had a great impact on me' (Pollard 10). In 'Poodle, Valerie Rose and Jimmy-the-Pumpkin' Renée comments on her reaction when her sister, Val, referred to their mother being of such small stature: 'I think but don't say, but the Mum I knew was such a powerful presence, *is* such a powerful presence, in my life that physical size doesn't come into it when I think of her' (253).

Susan Williams points out that Renée's portraits of her mother have 'led to some of her most powerful creations' (7).⁶ In her interview with Warrington Renée in turn elaborates on how Rose has repeatedly re-surfaced in her writing: '*Wednesday to Come* came about because I wanted to write something about my mother. Iris isn't really like Mum, she's not as hard for a start, but it got somewhere close. I dealt with her more in a book of short stories called *Finding Ruth* [. . .]. There is a mother in *Groundwork* that's a little bit like Mum' (77).

In another interview Patricia Kay reported that Rose was the inspiration for Renée's most renowned play: 'Only Iris in *Wednesday to Come* was modelled on a real person. Renée wanted to pay tribute to her mother, who had a hard time

⁶ The only biography of Renée is to be found in the introduction to Susan Williams' M.A. thesis 'Dressing for Dinner: Renée's Literary Explorations of the Changing Roles Available to Strong Women in New Zealand Society.'

bringing up a family during the depression. But then Iris turned out to be more like herself' (8).

All these remarks point to the lasting effect that the memory of her mother has had on Renée's life and writing. The re-creation of this woman is a recurrent motif in her oeuvre. Renée, like Thompson, constructs a poignant image of a woman struggling to rear her family in conditions of demeaning poverty. The repeated reference to the mother who 'weed[ed] carrots [. . .] for sixpence an hour' illustrates that she associates her mother's lot in life with hard work for little return.

Renée, like Mason and Thompson, has been an academic achiever from an early age. Her straitened family circumstances, however, forced her to leave school in order to contribute to the family income. Despite being upset and angry, she left at twelve and found work in a woollen mill in Napier by lying about her age, saying that she was fifteen. The extra money she was able to give her mother (ten shillings a week out of the twenty-two she earned) made the difference that helped both her brother and her younger sister to go to high school (Williams 20-21). In her interview with Beatson Renée expands further on how the money she brought into the house helped her mother to cope financially: 'I just don't see how she could have managed without that extra actual cash in her hand each week.' She then goes on to refer yet again to the family's reliance on the money they earned from weeding carrots: 'My brother worked weeding carrots for sixpence an hour and paid for his high school clothes, [. . .] out of that miserable weeding money' (27).

The inescapable process of poverty being passed down through the generations meant that Renée's education was interrupted. She is, however, an intellectual and later in life she determined to give herself the education she had forgone. Like Baxter and Thompson, she completed her degree after first entering the workforce, but it took her much longer to gain the academic qualification because she had left school at such an early age. Consequently it was 'about 10 years' before she could 'reach the stage where [. . .] [she] needed to do advanced levels

for [. . .] [her] university degree' (McCurdy 64). She finally gained her degree when she was fifty (Kay 8).

Renée, like Mason and Baxter, displayed an early inclination to become a writer. At school her 'best' achievement was in 'writing' (McCurdy 61). Her road to becoming a full-time writer, however, was much longer than theirs. In an interview which took place in November 1984, she commented that she had been writing full time for 'about six weeks' (71). She was fifty-five at the time.

Renée also recalls in her interview with Warrington that her teachers recognized her dramatic abilities: 'When I was at school – I only had those few years of formal schooling – one of the things that happened every year was a concert [. . .] and half of it was a play, and once I got to standard four I was always in it, and I was usually the lead' (75). Like Mason, from an early age she displayed an enthusiasm for devising dramatic presentations of her own. A Christmas story, published in 1998 and based upon childhood recollections, recalls her assuming a directing role. The autobiographical content of the narrative is verified when Renée refers to her sister, Val, by name. Like Mason she enlists the co-operation of her sibling in her theatrical endeavour, but, unlike him, she manages to bring her sister on side as well as devising a practical means of assuring the attention of the audience:

We had a date down at the river where we were presenting a concert directed by me and starring Val as Mexicali Rose. We'd found a small clearing in the middle of a large patch of lupins, one end of which was slightly raised (the stage) and where nature had provided a couple of fallen willow tree trunks for seats. All audience members were in the concert so each item would be listened to intently and clapped at the end or they'd never get their turn on stage ('All Is Calm All Is Bright' 21).

By the time she moved to Auckland to complete her degree in 1977, Renée had had twenty years' experience of writing (stories, articles and reviews, mainly for local publications) and directing (amateur theatre in both Napier and Wairoa) (Williams 22-24). She first began to write plays when she had finished her degree

and was working as a teacher of English and Drama at Long Bay College. On 1 January 1981 (exactly ten years to the day after Thompson began First Return) Renée began writing her first play Setting the Table, which she finished in four weeks (30).

What Williams describes as a ‘watershed’ (25) in Renée’s life had happened even earlier than this when she attended the United Women’s Convention in 1975. Renée told Beatson that her espousal of feminism at that event was ‘just like being converted to a religion’ (36).⁷ Renée’s commitment to feminism permeates her oeuvre. Women are consistently placed centre stage and male roles are always secondary. She has very firm ideas about the function of women in her plays: ‘[T]here should be no time when their relationship to a man is the reason why they are on stage’ (Black, ‘Wednesday To Come/Pass It On’ 191). This is a deliberate reversal of the traditional balance between male and female characters in theatre, as Renée explained in another interview: ‘I am interested in writing good roles for women, about women we don’t see on stage but who are all around us. I am working for women as a lifetime commitment’ (Baxter and Tremewan 13). From the beginning of her playwriting career, therefore, Renée recognized that her particular experience of the female ‘outer margin’ was not as yet represented on the New Zealand stage.

At fifty, two years before writing Setting the Table, she had experienced what Williams identifies as a ‘mid life crisis’ (27), which proved to be a turning-point in her life. In an article published in Broadsheet in 1983, significantly entitled ‘Change of Life,’ Renée describes her reaction to her severe menopausal symptoms at that time:

I found that I wanted to be alone a lot of the time. I started to face the way my life was going. I turned 50 and thought about what I wanted

⁷ At the end of the Convention Margaret Mead urged the women who had attended to take positive action to promote the feminist cause, telling them to go back to their homes and do something about it. As a result Renée and her friend Bernadette set up a Women’s Centre in Wairoa (Williams 25).

to do with the rest of my life. Did I want to lie on my death-bed and think of all the things I'd wanted to do that I hadn't done? (10).⁸

The title of the article refers not only to the common euphemism for female menopause, but also to Renée's recognition, after over thirty years of heterosexual married life (Williams 28), of her lesbian identity. The end of the article makes reference to her decision to leave her marriage and take a female lover (11).⁹

To use Renée's phraseology, her 'lifetime commitment' to women is symbolised by her decision to drop her husband's surname. Once again it was the memory of her mother that influenced the decision:

I like to call it my first name. It's the name my mother gave me and, when I left my husband, I was thinking about what name I would use, and I didn't want to go back to my father's name, and then I thought I had a perfectly good name that my mother gave me (Payne-Heckenberg and Mitchell 21).

Just as her work focuses attention on the female, so, in eliminating her surname, Renée makes a gesture which removes the male influence from her own life and places the emphasis upon female influence, which has been passed down through the generations. The name Renée mirrors, in the writer's own words, 'my hero worship of working-class women' (Warrington 76).¹⁰

⁸ The thought in the final sentence of this quotation appears to have acted as a catalyst. Renée refers to it again, word for word, in two other interviews (Hall, 'Reinforcing Women's Rise' 11; Payne-Heckenberg and Mitchell 23). In both these conversations, however, she adds the words 'because I was too frightened' at the end of the last sentence.

⁹ Renée left her marriage in May 1981 (Personal Correspondence 1 Mar. 1999). She has identified that year as one in which a paradigm shift in her life resulted in heightened creativity:

I'd realised before I left [the marriage] that I loved Bernadette and I had also admitted to myself that a lot of the things that puzzled me about myself were now crystal clear because I had had a chance to talk with lesbian women, and I now had a chance to read things that I'd never read before. [. . .] Along with that went these great changes in my body [. . .]. So it was a year of big changes.

But along with that came a real flowering of my creativity. That was the year I wrote three plays (McCurdy 65).

¹⁰ The significance of the single Christian name has been remarked in other interviews also (Van Grondelle 19; Kellett 31; Rebecca Simpson, 'An Equal Slice to Come' 24).

The conversion to feminism made a fundamental difference to her writing. Added to this, the change in sexual lifestyle is frequently reflected in Renée's oeuvre. Williams points out the remarkable contrast between Setting the Table and the works that had gone before, remarking that the latter are usually presented 'from the position of a housewife and mother, and are generally banal, though they do display an irony and a fresh sense of humour which were to filter through to her work as a professional writer' (30-33).¹¹ In Setting the Table all the female characters are lesbians, though their sexual preference is implied rather than stated. Thompson, who first workshopped the play, complained at the time about Renée's reluctance to spell out the sexual orientation of her central characters:

During the rehearsals I tried to draw her out on the sexual lives of her characters but she would not answer. Their sexuality is not an issue, she said. If, for example, she were to present some of her characters as lesbians, then that would allow prejudicial members of the audience to 'explain away' *political* actions as *sexual* ones. No one, she insisted, was to be permitted to wriggle off the hook of the play's meaning; the sexual dimension of the characters were therefore to remain unexplored (Thompson, 'Another Life' 117).

In an interview with Williams, Renée stated that domestic violence is the central issue in the play (Personal Interview 12 Dec. 1997). Beginning with Setting the Table, the subject of male abuse of the female became a consistent thematic concern in this playwright's work.

Williams also makes the significant remark that '[t]he change in lifestyle accompanied a strong surge of creative activity which has continued unabated' (30). Renée's first nationally publicized and performed theatrical venture was a revue for Broadsheet entitled What Did You Do in the War Mummy? (1982). This was followed by two of her plays which were performed in the same year: Secrets (1982) and Setting the Table (1982). After that there was a consistent

¹¹ Williams notes that the articles in the scrapbook that Renée has kept from this period in her life cover a period of eleven years and are all concerned with domestic and local issues such as watching her son play rugby, helping her children with their homework and losing and catching again the family's pet budgie. The first article in the collection entitled 'My Son' is dated 7 March 1958. The final article in the scrapbook is about a hat parade and is dated 25 September 1969.

stream of productions which continued through the 1980s and into the early 1990s: Dancing (1983), Asking for It (1983), O It Ain't All Honey and It Ain't All Jam (1984 Made available by Renée), Breaking Out (1984 Made available by Renée), Wednesday To Come (1984), Groundwork (1985), Union Matters (1986 Made available by Renée), Pass It On (1986), Born to Clean (1987), Belle's Place (1987 Made available by Renée), Mercy Buckets (1987 Made available by Renée), 'Form' (1990), Jeannie Once (1990), Touch of the Sun (1991), Missionary Position (1991), Te Pouaka Karaehe (1992), 'Tiggy Tiggy Touchwood' (1992), Pink Spots and Mountain Tops (1992) and Heroines, Hussies and High High Flyers (1993).¹² Renée has also written radio plays: Sisters to Dragons (1994) and Diversions For An Idle Hour (1994) as well as My Name is Marama Kingi (1996), the overall title for a series of three plays Rugosa Roses Are Very Hardy, Dreaming In Ponsonby and Hard and Unfamiliar Words.¹³

Renée has been included in this thesis because she has aided the development of a representative 'voice' on the New Zealand stage by insisting throughout her playwriting career that 'the female margin' should be given centre stage attention. She has described herself as a 'lesbian feminist with socialist working class ideals' (Warrington 75). This definition succinctly summarizes the various aspects of 'the outer margin' which are the focus of her attention.

¹² At the time of writing (July 2006) Renée is working on a new stage play which has the provisional title The Life Wall (E-mail to the author).

¹³ The television scripts she has written for Country GP (1985) and Open House (1987) are outside the scope of this discussion.

2 'IT'S ASKING AND GETTING NO FOR AN ANSWER'

I have outlined the biographical facts of Renée's life in some detail because these experiences clearly provide a fundamental resource for the subject matter that is to be found in her oeuvre. As Sebastian Black has commented: 'Her perspective, partly stirred by her sense that to use an author's personal background is to reveal wider political truths, is both autobiographical and outspokenly working-class' ('Wednesday To Come/Pass It On' 191).

Wednesday To Come is transparently 'autobiographical and outspokenly working-class.' Renée's mother, widowed at twenty-seven in 1934,¹⁴ was a solo parent and a working class female with little formal education and no qualifications at a time when the Great Depression was at its worst.¹⁵ Her eldest daughter's most renowned play, Wednesday To Come, is set in 1934, which was also the year of Renée's father's suicide.¹⁶ Renée's earliest memories are of the Great Depression and she has admitted that her recollections of that time provided her inspiration for the play: 'I myself was the biggest resource for Wednesday To Come [. . .]. I lived through it and I saw my mother live through it' ('Renée – New Zealand Playwright' 29).¹⁷

Further similarities between the women in the play and Renée's own family circumstances are also couched within the text. The government policy of the time, of removing all unemployed males into rural relief camps, regardless of their marital status, has made the family like Renée's own, a single parent household.¹⁸

¹⁴ The death certificate states that at the time of his death both Renée's father and mother were twenty-seven.

¹⁵ An account in The Sugarbag Years earmarks 1934 as 'the depth of the Depression' (Tony Simpson 109).

¹⁶ From the time of its first workshop the quality of Wednesday To Come was recognized. In his review of Playmarket's third playwrights' workshop Ralph McAllister defined the play as already assuming an important place in New Zealand drama: '[R]est assured this is a fine piece of New Zealand theatre which in its breadth of social vision and comment will have a quite precise place in our theatrical annals of excellence' (19).

¹⁷ In keeping with her practice of utilising oral history as a method of research, Renée also spoke to as many women over sixty as she could find in order to supplement her own memories of the Great Depression as part of her preparation ('Renée – New Zealand Playwright' 29).

¹⁸ Tony Simpson states that in 1933, the year before Wednesday To Come opens, the government made it a requirement that in order to qualify for relief all unemployed men, whether married or single, had to go to rural relief camps (15). Later in the book another recollection observes '[a]

In Wednesday To Come Iris, like Renée's mother, Rose, knows that she is on the bottom rung of the economic ladder, labouring in menial work that barely pays enough to make ends meet: 'We can't keep us all on what we get from doing someone's dirty washing' (10).

As a result Iris' daughter, young Jeannie, like Renée, accepts that she has to leave school early in order to contribute to the family income. 'Haven't made a fuss about leaving school' (28), observes Jeannie stoically. Iris perceives that the thwarting of working class potential is something that has been passed down through the generations. She anticipates that her children's experience is about to become a replica of her own: 'I grew up when I was twelve. Took me six months. And nothing was ever quite the same again. It's going to be the same with Cliff and Jeannie' (38).

All of Renée's oeuvre is informed by primary principles which have their foundation in her experience of life: a hero worship of working class women (who, like Iris, find themselves in difficult political situations), a fervent espousal of feminism and a lesbian sympathy. Added to this is a political perspective that is always decidedly Left wing.

In an interview with Williams, the playwright underlined her conviction, which Black identified, 'that to use an author's personal background is to reveal wider political truths' by stating that in her opinion all plays should have a political as well as a personal dimension because all human beings operate in a political as well as a personal context (Personal Interview 14 Feb. 1999).¹⁹

rule insisted that no wives or families were to be in camp' (110). In the play Ted makes the comment that Iris' son, Cliff, who is unemployed also, will have to go to one of the camps in order to qualify for relief, even though he is only fifteen (Wednesday To Come 18).

¹⁹ Renée has repeatedly stated that all plays are political. Her interview with Claire-Louise McCurdy has her statement 'All Plays are Political' as its subheading (61). Sebastian Black's review of the printed versions of Wednesday To Come and Pass It On quotes Renée as saying 'everything that anyone writes is political, and . . . everybody is political whether by being active or passive' (191). Similarly, in an interview with Rebecca Simpson Renée said, '[y]ou can argue successfully that every play is political; they are all saying something about the world and what it should be' ('An Equal Slice To Come' 25).

In Wednesday To Come, as in the rest of Renée's oeuvre, women representing 'the outer margin,' become the heroines of the piece. The political situation in which they find themselves is viewed largely from the female point of view.²⁰ The political context of this play is the Relief Workers' Strike which began in Gisborne in 1934. In January of that year a group representing the unemployed set out from Gisborne to bring the hardship of their lives to the attention of Parliament.²¹ They had transport for most of the journey, but they also stopped at several places along the way, when they would march into the centre of town and

²⁰ Joanne Tompkins has pointed out that 'Renée writes strong stage roles for working-class women at key moments in working class history' (247).

²¹ In an article in The Evening Post which refers to the first production of Wednesday To Come in 1984, Merrill Coke researched back to another article which appeared in the same paper on 24 February 1934, which quotes the leader of the Gisborne Relief Workers' Strike, a Mr C Jennings, explaining that the marchers 'were not a "band of irresponsibles" as the public had been led to believe' and outlining the conditions which had fuelled their protest:

Every possible constitutional method had been adopted without avail, [. . .] we could not bear to see the suffering that our women and children were compelled to endure. In the outlying camps children are going about in sugar-bag trousers and the women are wearing underclothes made from flour-bags. In many homes there is no such thing as a mattress ("Wednesday To Come" Revives Depression Days' 27).

Before the Great Depression of the 1930s there was no State mechanism to deal with the problem of unemployment (Tony Simpson 14). Before that time each individual trade union gave what help it could to the unemployed within its ranks (134). Sinclair comments that New Zealand lagged behind the rest of the world in this regard: 'No legislation to deal with mass unemployment existed until 1930, long after Great Britain and other countries had made provision for it. Even then, the sound principle of balancing the budget, which, in the circumstances, seemed to have become a fetish, was incompatible with a humane policy' (A History of New Zealand 257). Between 1921 and 1931 export prices spiralled downwards by forty percent and the Coalition government could think of no other solution than to balance the books by cutting spending. Within three years public works spending was cut by seventy five percent (Tony Simpson 13). Sinclair outlines the details of the cuts in public spending: 'The Government cut pensions; it cut hospital and health expenditure; it cut education costs by raising the school entry age, lowering the leaving age, and closing two Teachers' Training Colleges; it cut Civil Service salaries; it cut down public works and thus added to the unemployed: but it balanced the budget' (A History of New Zealand 256). The resulting widespread unemployment caused the government to take action and in 1931 a relief scheme was set up, but payment was not high enough to maintain the health of a working man or a family. Within two weeks of setting up the scheme twenty three thousand men had registered and this rose to fifty one thousand just four months later (14). The introduction of the dole payment worsened rather than relieved the suffering of the poor because it brought down wages even further. The Public Works Department, for example, sacked all its workers and then employed them again at relief rates, so the men were doing the same work for a fraction of the pay (Tony Simpson 15). Other unscrupulous employers followed the precedent set by the government, causing the gap between the rich and the poor to widen. A story from The Sugarbag Years reflects this situation. A Mr. Hugh Williams, of Lansdowne, Masterton, who lived in 'an English-style manor house,' returned from a thirteen thousand pound spending spree on antique furniture to find that wool prices had dropped. Williams summoned the manager of his sheep station and told him his [the manager's] salary had been reduced and then he drove out to the station and told the workers that they would be given no wages but that they were lucky to still have a roof over their heads and three meals a day. Williams had driven to the station in a 'biscuit box' Austin to prove to everyone that he, too, was suffering financially. Meanwhile he had put his Rolls Royce on blocks in the garage (58).

hold a meeting with the unemployed of that area. One of the meetings was held in Palmerston North ('Renée – New Zealand Playwright' 31).

Wednesday To Come is set in a house which lies somewhere on the marchers' route between Palmerston North and Wellington.²² The central characters come into contact with the march when one of the only four females involved, whom Renée names Dot Harkness, comes to the back door of their house (23).²³

Renée's belief in the strength of the female bond is illustrated in this play by the idiosyncratic device of peopling the interior of the household with four generations of women from the same family. The eldest of these is Granna, whose daughter, Mary, also has a daughter, Iris, who is in turn the mother of Jeannie, an adolescent girl. Renée has said that placing an age range of females on the stage is part of her deliberate policy to have all aspects of 'the outer margin' of working class female experience taken seriously:

I felt that if people from another planet came to New Zealand and came to the theatre, they wouldn't know we had any children. The youngest an adult can get away with is thirteen [the age of young Jeannie] – so that's what I did. With Granna, the only old woman I'd seen on the stage, apart from comic characters, was the old woman in *The House of Bernarda Alba* and I wanted to make her that sort of character.²⁴ I wanted her to show that old women can still have a lot of energy (Payne-Heckenberg and Mitchell 25).

²² Renée's stage directions state that the play takes place in '[t]he kitchen and sitting room of MARY's house, which is situated about half way between Palmerston North and Wellington' (7). A memory in The Sugarbag Years states '[a]t Levin we stayed in one of the camps, went to Levin and had meetings, also at Otaki we had good meetings' (Tony Simpson 144). In Wednesday To Come Cliff comments that the marchers are gathering: 'Must be about fifty of them by now [. . .] While I was there they were handing out leaflets' (19). So the house could be located in the area of Levin or of Otaki.

²³ The Sugarbag Years records a testimony about female involvement in the Relief Workers' Strike: 'The women were marvellous, they could speak and put their case very well. I think there were four and two or one of them had her husband there too' (Tony Simpson 148). The number of women reported in other sources varies from this. Coke, for example, estimates the number of women on the march as two ('"Wednesday to Come" Revives Depression Days' 27), as does Renée ('Renée – New Zealand Playwright' 31).

²⁴ Renée refers here to the Spanish dramatist and poet Federico García Lorca who wrote 'The House of Bernarda Alba' in 1936 as part of his Trilogy of the Spanish Earth. The theatre historians Trevor R. Griffiths and Carole Woddis describe this play as being 'exclusively about women, in which the destructive power of the matriarch Bernarda Alba becomes a metaphor for sexual repression and restraints on liberty' (222). Lorca also challenges sexual stereotypes in

The seemingly disparate names of the four generations of women contain concealed within them a continuity of remembered female experience that has been passed down through the generations. As the plot unravels we learn that Granna, who was one of the first white settlers in New Zealand, has named her daughter after her friend Mary, a strong-minded working class girl who had the courage to protest about the appalling conditions on the ship that brought them both from Ireland to New Zealand. One of Granna's sudden and spasmodic reminiscences describes what happened: 'We had turns going up on deck – sailing they called it. First time I'd been on the sea. Oh, I was frightened [. . .] But I found a friend – Mary – older than me. She was a right one. [. . .] Stood up to the captain about the food' (Wednesday To Come 9-10).

We learn also that young Jeannie shares the same name as Granna when the old lady remarks to her great-grand-daughter, with whom she shares a close bond, 'I was Jeannie once' (32). The idea that females replicate each other's experience as names are passed down through the generations is summarized by Granna: 'Granna's me, Jeannie's me, it's all the same inside' (32). Granna and young Jeannie share similar experiences of life, as not only Wednesday To Come, but also the whole of the trilogy of which it is a part, illustrates. In the same way, when Granna speaks of her friend, young Jeannie immediately recognises that the Mary of the pioneer days is 'like Nanna,' who bears the same name (10). Christian names thus become a summation of a continuum of female experience, just as the name under which she writes signifies not only Renée's political stance but also the experience of life passed down to her by her own mother.²⁵

another play of his trilogy: 'Yerma' (223). Lorca was shot by the Fascists in 1936 (when he was only thirty-eight) in the early days of the Spanish Civil War. Though his grave remains unmarked he is one of the most respected of Spain's playwrights. Phyllis Hartnoll in A Concise History of the Theatre judges Lorca to have been 'a potentially great playwright' (225).

Renée admires Lorca and notes that he was shot because he was homosexual. She recognizes the influence that he has had on her own work (Personal Interview 29 Oct. 2005).

²⁵ Apart from having a plot which focuses on several generations of women who inhabit the same household, Wednesday To Come resembles 'The House of Bernarda Alba' in that it regards female experiences as cyclical. In the latter play Martirio, the twenty-four year old daughter of Bernarda, confirms this: 'But history repeats itself. I can see everything is a terrible repetition. And she'll have the same fate as her mother and grandmother' (411).

The political context of the Great Depression has already effectively caged these women within the four walls of their home. The set, accordingly, consists entirely of the household interior and the four central female characters leave their home only once, at the end of the play. News of the outside world comes to them only by means of their back door, which is a significant feature of the set. It comes not only in the form of Dot Harkness. Just as significantly, it comes in the form of Ted, the brother-in-law of Iris, who arrives with his dead brother, Ben, in a '*home made*' coffin (11), which is carried into the sitting room and remains in full view of the audience for the rest of the play.

Ben has committed suicide in one of the relief camps to which unemployed men were sent by the government of the day. This tragedy in the family provides the centre of the plot around which the action revolves. Renée has acknowledged that the memory of her own father's suicide acted as her inspiration: 'I suddenly thought about my uncle driving my father's body back from Wellington to Hastings because they couldn't afford a hearse' (McCurdy 68).²⁶

The trauma surrounding the suicide of the breadwinner of the household acts as a catalyst which throws into relief contrasting reactions of passivity and rebellion. All the men in the play are, for various reasons, passive. Cliff, Ben's son, for example, is paralysed by his overwhelming grief. He spends the whole of the action unable to respond in any way other than by playing the 'bluesy sound' of a harmonica (Wednesday To Come [Author's Note] 6).²⁷

The man of the household lying in his coffin evokes the dramatic representation of Renée's memory of her own father. As remembrances of Ben accumulate he is

²⁶ In Renée's latest novel Kissing Shadows the protagonist Vivvie Caird, who is part-Māori, had a father who committed suicide by shooting himself with a rifle underneath Thorndon rail bridge. At the inquest the father is said to be from 'Pakowhai in Hawkes Bay' (Kissing Shadows 169) and his death has been reported in Truth (3).

²⁷ In Cliff Renée purposely created a characterization to challenge the male stereotype which has traditionally appeared on the stage: 'I wanted to show a young boy who was emotionally affected in a way that is not generally shown on stage – a boy who wasn't able to keep a stiff upper lip, who had to jam the mouth organ in his mouth so that he wouldn't be crying all the time' (McCurdy 68). In The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck's fictionalization of the migration out of the Dust Bowl of America during the Great Depression, the harmonica is viewed by the poor as their instrument of choice: 'A harmonica is easy to carry. Take it out of your hip pocket, knock it against your palm to shake out the dirt and pocket fuzz and bits of tobacco. Now it's ready. You can do anything with a harmonica' (287).

revealed to have been a charming and artistically talented man, capable of binding others, including his son, loyally to him. Ben was well-known in the local area for his musicianship. His wife speaks of buying him a 'decent' harmonica before Cliff was born because Ben kept 'getting asked to play at concerts and all that.' In admiration of her husband's skill Iris remarks '[h]e could play all right' (16).

Ben, however, turns out to have been a dreamer. His affair with Molly Nairn, which comes into focus when she enters the play after hearing of Ben's suicide, is interpreted by Molly herself, not in terms of passion, but as an indication of Ben's reluctance to face up to reality: 'Ben was just wanting to escape. I knew he wasn't serious' (26). Significantly, Molly's judgement of Iris – 'I wouldn't be surprised if you drove him to it, not a bit' (27) – is very similar to what Renée remembers people saying about her own mother: 'A husband doesn't go out and shoot himself unless his wife has driven him to it' (Beatson 30).

Ben's brother, Ted, is one of the lucky ones who have jobs (Wednesday To Come 18) as did Renée's father at the time of his death. Although he has witnessed at first hand the appalling conditions in the relief camps, of which he speaks briefly – 'Tents, dirt floors, everything wet through. And cold – never felt cold like it' (17)²⁸ – his reaction to the inhumane treatment that has killed his brother is one of passive acceptance.

The inertia of the men is emphasized throughout the script. Williams points out that Ted brings in the wood and coal for the fire and then leaves it by the grate. She also notes that all Cliff does, apart from taking out a basket of washing at the beginning of the play, is to help his sister carry out the heavy kerosene tin of tea to the marchers, which the women have already prepared (91).

²⁸ In his Introduction to The Sugarbag Years Tony Simpson quotes a first hand account of the conditions in one of the relief camps, which was reported in the Auckland Weekly News:

The floors of the tents are earthen, uncovered by boarding, and on Wednesday many of them were dampened by rain soakage. The surroundings at No.1 Camp are very muddy. Men bathe in the drains, wash in a horse trough, and if it rains have to don wet clothing next day, for there is no drying room [. . .] Damp clothes constitute an ever-present problem at Aka Aka. The men work all day widening drains. Nearly always they are ankle-deep and knee-deep in water, and often waist-deep (15).

All this amounts to a subtext in which the men are surrounded by connotations of death – Ben lying in his coffin, Cliff rendered inactive by grief and Ted unable to retaliate to the circumstances of his brother’s suicide. Ted’s major activity during the action of the play is to go out and dig his brother’s grave (21).

As a counterpoint, the stage directions insist that all the women must be constantly engaged in the small but essential chores that are necessary to keep a house ticking over: ‘It is important that the life of the household goes on during the action of the play. There is washing and ironing to be done, washing to be folded, dishes to be washed, the stove to be tended’ (Author’s Note 6). This demonstration of the women’s work ethic, which continues throughout the action, makes it new to the New Zealand stage and illustrates Renée’s intent to write ‘good roles for women, about women we don’t see on stage but who are all around us’ (Baxter and Tremewan 13). The play was also unique at the time it was written in presenting the opportunity to bake scones on the stage.²⁹

The preparation of food is an important device for exemplifying the practical survival skills of the working class female. It not only expresses the rigorous work ethic but also demonstrates their generosity and self-sacrifice. The poverty of the family is immediately established with the arrival of Ted, when all the women have to give him after his emotionally gruelling drive is bread and jam. Dot remarks on the ‘thousands,’ like the family at the centre of the action, ‘who’ll go to bed tonight without a decent meal’ despite the fact that ‘[w]e grow enough food in the country to feed everyone’ (25). Despite their straitened circumstances, however, in response to the marchers’ request (via the character of Dot Harkness) for hot water, the women supply them with the best they have to offer – a kerosene tin full of hot tea and fresh baked scones with butter and jam – never saying a word about the fact that they are sadly depleting their meagre household supplies. The butter they use, which is obviously a rare treat in these times, is

²⁹ In an interview with Lisa Warrington Renée has explained her determination to change traditional stage settings in order to portray ‘women we don’t see on stage but are all around us’:

I felt it [the kitchen] was a place that needed to be used on stage. We’d had enough of Mayfair, and rugby changing sheds and Gallipoli and places like that. I thought it was time to have a place where it might be a brief, local power – but I mean mothers have tremendous power in the kitchen, usually, don’t they (85).

passed off by Mary as ‘just lucky – we got some cream given to us and I made some butter’ (25).³⁰

Like the female Christian names, the serving of food – in this case the scones – is part of a female tradition that has been passed down through the generations. It is part and parcel of their stoicism: a conviction that the ritualistic undertaking of small household tasks is an act of survival that will see them through adverse circumstances. Iris recalls, ‘I remember when Dad died we stayed up all night. About one in the morning Mum made some scones’ (19). Iris’ remembrance is also part of Renée’s past. In an article published in the Dominion in May 2005 to mark the twentieth anniversary production of Wednesday To Come the playwright recalled making scones when a parent died in the same way the women do in the play:

We had a coal range at that time and we were in the kitchen and the fire was going. [. . .] I just remember getting out the flour, the milk, the baking powder and all that, and making scones. Mum died around midnight, so that must have been around one o’clock in the morning. I didn’t think it was a grand gesture. It was an automatic thing. You knew people were going to come around and you had to give them something to eat (Cardy 137).

This memory is very firmly located in the kitchen. Most of the action of Wednesday To Come likewise takes place in a kitchen. This is all part of Renée’s determination to place the world of women centre stage:

Kitchens waver all the time between one lot of drama or another [. . .] And kitchens are definitely women’s world. There great struggles for survival are fought and lost (or sometimes won), there is

³⁰ A recollection from one of the protesters which is recorded in The Sugarbag Years gives similar details to those in the play of how the marchers were helped by working class people along their route:

People donated food for us on the way, all types, mostly plain ‘tin can’ stuff, kerosene tins full of tea and coffee and so on, mostly from ordinary workers who’d come out to the assistance of the unemployed [. . .] We didn’t worry much about butter; as long as we had the bread we were quite happy with that (145-146).

diminishment, anguish, joy, support, compromise (Renée, 'Theatre and Politics' 14, 17).³¹

The 'great struggle' that is 'fought' out in the kitchen of Wednesday To Come is the altercation between Ted and Iris as they pose the central philosophical question: whether a passive or rebellious response to the political context is the more appropriate. In many ways Renée identifies this as a gender issue, as the males adopt the former, and the females the latter, solution. Williams makes the point, for example, that the anger which Ted is unable to locate in himself, Iris finds in herself (87). 'I'm angry,' Iris exclaims, 'I admit that' (Wednesday To Come 26).

I have already mentioned that Iris is a composite characterization, partly based on Renée's own experience. She and the playwright have some emotions in common, as Renée confirmed in an interview: 'I was always aware that I had a terrible undefined anger which was never entirely absent' (Beatson 35). At the same time Renée acknowledges that the characterization of Ted is also based on autobiographical experience: 'I know dozens of Teds in my family' (Warrington 87).

Ted's attitude to the circumstances in which the family now finds itself is one of passive acceptance. Even when faced with stark evidence from the relief camp

³¹ This statement places Renée in the working class theatre tradition and particularly in the movement known as 'Kitchen Sink Drama.' Arnold Wesker was also part of this movement and Renée has remarked on her admiration of his work (Warrington 84). Wesker wrote a play called 'The Kitchen' which premièred at The Royal Court in 1959. In the Introduction to the printed version of this play Wesker affirmed his belief in the dramatic importance of the location of the title: 'The world might have been a stage for Shakespeare, but to me it is a kitchen' (93).

One of the earliest examples of 'Kitchen Sink Drama' in New Zealand was Kathleen Ross' The Trap which won the British Drama League playwriting competition for one act plays in 1950. This play, which is set in 'a working-class kitchen in the poorer part of town' describes the squalor and entrapment of working class women's lives. The theatre historian John Thomson particularly admires this script, commending 'a plot which makes serious comment on social life without resorting to a sentimental or melodramatic climax' (New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 38). Thomson goes on to note, however, that despite the quality of the play which describes '[t]he emotional ties which trap women into such repeated cycles of domestic misery [. . .] with an ease seldom equalled in New Zealand one-act theatre' it was '[n]ot until Osborne, Wesker and others had been accepted in England, and were beginning to be performed in New Zealand, that plays about ordinary domestic families and about ordinary everyday social conditions crept back into the amateur repertoires' (39). The Trap precedes Osborne's Look Back in Anger by six years.

that New Zealand has become a nation of 'Haves' and 'Have Nots'³² he, like his brother, resists facing up to a brutal reality. Ted tries to placate Iris' anger by putting forward the populist view that New Zealand is still an egalitarian society: 'Everyone's in the same boat' (15). Iris, in counterpoint, faces up to what Ted cannot accept: that this version of New Zealand is a myth.³³ Iris challenges Ted's comment with an alternative reality: 'Then how is it that some people get their washing and ironing done and other people have to do it?' At the same time she makes a judgement of the situation: 'Well, it's wrong' (15).

Renée emphasizes the energy of the women which contrasts with the inertia of the men. Williams notes that by a careful manipulation of the image of the hammer (86), she also predicts that the capacity for rebellion is being passed from male into female hands. Immediately after Ben's coffin is brought into the house Iris notices that the lid is nailed down and decides '[w]hat I . . . what I need is a hammer. Got a hammer Ted?' (Wednesday To Come 14). Ted is trying to convince Iris that New Zealand is still a land of equal opportunity and one of his placatory gestures is to suggest that she sit down and have a cup of tea in this time of crisis. Iris will do so only on condition that Ted goes out to his van and fetches his hammer for her (15). Ted by that time has realized that Iris intends to use it to wrench the lid off Ben's coffin and when he returns '*hammer in hand*' (16) he tries to persuade her not to. Significantly, the traditionally male implement, which can also be used as a weapon, is now being demanded by the female. The debate over the use of the hammer arises in the first act but lies dormant until the second.

³² Sinclair makes the point that Forbes did not believe that the unemployed should be paid a benefit without working in return: 'The Prime Minister, G.W. Forbes, formulated the principle of "no pay without work," for he believed the British "dole" to be demoralizing. The unemployed were put to work draining swamps, making roads – or golf courses – planting trees, and were paid a miserable sum' (A History of New Zealand 257).

³³ In A History of New Zealand, when referring to the New Zealand of the Depression years, Sinclair agrees with Iris' viewpoint:

[T]he ragged army of men 'on the dole' – as they called payments for 'relief work'; architects, teachers, carpenters, chipping weeds on the footpaths; malnutrition in the schools – and children stealing lunches; ex-Servicemen begging outside a pub; the queue at the 'soup kitchen'; a rioter running up a back street, screaming hysterically, 'The "Specials" are coming!' Such sights were daily testimony of how far away was the fulfilment of the New Zealand dream (258).

Ted brings in Ben's belongings from the van: a '*sugarbag*'³⁴ containing his brother's drenched and mud-stained clothes, along with a '*carton*' which he places '*on the floor*' (30). The different points of view between Iris and Ted come to a head over the most emotionally charged stage prop in the play, which discloses the real reason behind Ben's suicide. Iris puts the carton on the table (30) and from it Jeannie draws '*a piece of rope attached to a harness*' (31). Ted at first tries to remove the harness from view, but when pressured, he '*reluctantly*' identifies it and then adds the devastating explanation: 'Shortage of horses, someone had to pull the plough' (31).³⁵

When Ted first entered the play the women asked him almost immediately if he had found out anything about Ben's death. Ted was non-committal: 'Nothing much. The chaps in his tent said he got more and more depressed. [. . .] One day he just went out and hung himself. There was no note – nothing' (12). The women, along with the audience, now suddenly realize that Ted has known about the harness all along. When pressed by Iris, Ted concedes evasively that the men

³⁴ Tony Simpson calls his account of the Great Depression The Sugarbag Years because the sugarbag became a symbol of the time. One account records,

Conditions for many people were desperately hard. In all the towns and many country centres food and clothing were being distributed to the destitute. It [1934] was the year of the sugarbag. Every week you'd see the father of a needy family trudging to the centre with his empty sugarbag for his handout (109).

In the script of Wednesday To Come the sugarbag is used as a container for Ben's clothes (30) and for the bottles of beer that Ted brings in (41).

³⁵ The Sugarbag Years reproduces a Labour party poster of 1931 which displays a photograph of unemployed men dragging a chain harrow across a field. It carries the slogan 'Relief Workers Cheaper Than Horses' and states '[t]his government [led by Forbes and Coates] professes to save your country, but reduces your sons, your husbands, your brothers to the cheapness of horses' (76). When asked by Peter Beatson if such outrages as men being put in harnesses had really happened in the Depression, Renée replied, 'Yes they did. There were photos of them at the Downstage production. [. . .] And they were pulling ploughs and being made to do absolutely ridiculous, absurd things. It was just to keep them out of the cities – to keep the troublemakers out of the way' (31). The Oxford History of New Zealand gives details of how the unemployed came to be labelled as 'troublemakers':

In desperation some unemployed took their grievances into the streets, where protest erupted into violent rioting on a scale unprecedented in New Zealand history. In January 1932, after a deputation of women had been denied food, several hundred starving unemployed marched on Wardell's grocery store in Dunedin, smashed a window, wrecked a van and dispersed only when promised food. Unrest reached its peak in Auckland. On 14 August an organised protest march, called to denounce wage cuts and the Government's treatment of the unemployed, ran amok. When the 20,000 strong body reached the town hall chaos developed; an unemployed leader, Jim Edwards, was injured by a policeman's baton, whereupon thousands careered down Queen Street smashing shop windows as they went [. . .]. Forbes denied that the riots were an expression of genuine unemployed protest, but held that they were the work of a 'lawless minority' or Communist agitators (Oliver and Williams 223-224).

at the camp had 'said something about it' but that he '[w]asn't going to say anything' (32). Williams acknowledges that to be fair to him, Ted is only trying to protect the women the best way he knows (85), which, according to his lights, is to observe gender stereotypes by acting as the strong male cushioning the weaker female from too brutal a reality. Williams also points to Iris' dawning realization 'that the key to survival lies in first revealing and then dealing with the harsh reality that she lives in' (87).

Shortly after this incident Iris '*looks at the hammer, then takes it in her hand*' (Wednesday To Come 33), but it is only after Dot Harkness has re-entered to ask if the marchers can use the harness as publicity for the inhuman treatment of the unemployed in the relief camps, that she uses it to prise the lid off Ben's coffin. In doing so she discovers in her husband's 'poor shoulders [. . .]. Rubbed raw' (37) irrefutable proof that he has been treated as a human draught animal.³⁶ She also finds Ben's missing mouth organ.

I have outlined the stage business involving the hammer in detail to reveal how carefully the play is constructed to chart its passing from male to female hands. Williams recognizes that in picking up the hammer and using it, Iris is both literally and symbolically taking events into her own hands for the first time (86-87). Iris thus becomes representative of all women who defy stereotype and retaliate against the adverse circumstances in which they find themselves.

In the end, therefore, Wednesday To Come is revealed as a feminist text in which the traditional gender roles are reversed and women are shown to be the stronger, more aggressive and more rebellious sex. By the end of the play the audience has

³⁶ In his review of the first production of Wednesday To Come John Thomson accused Renée of inaccuracy at this point in the play. He refers to the Labour Party electioneering poster which displayed the photograph of 'men pulling a harrow at Petone' and goes on to remark, '[t]hat harrowing was one illogical extreme. But harrowing is one thing, ploughing on the Desert Road is quite improbably another. It is a pity that this incident has to bear so much weight' ('Wednesday To Come' 56)

Renée points out, however, that she based her text on a recollection in one of the interviews she conducted as background research for the play. She was told that at Waipukurau the men in the relief camp were set to work building an airstrip. The man she interviewed said that he had a relation who died on that airstrip: he had a heart attack while pulling a plough. The interviewee said that he had been back to the area to find the airstrip, but it was no longer there (Personal Interview 29 Oct. 2005).

come to realize that the four generations of women, who at first appeared to be confined within four walls and shielded from external political events, have, in fact, a long tradition of protest in support of the Left wing cause. When Iris is trying to make up her mind whether or not to let Cliff and Jeannie join the marchers, Granna reminds the household of her past: 'Jeannie went marching a long time ago' (Wednesday To Come 39). Mary in turn has experienced the Waihi dispute, when once again, as Granna reminds everyone, '[t]hey all marched away didn't they Mary?' (20).³⁷ The play ends with Iris continuing the female family tradition by allowing her children to join the march on Wellington, each with a mouth organ.

Williams recognises that the missing mouth organ assumes an important function in the play and that '[t]he conflict over the ownership of the mouth organ becomes symbolic of the claim of the female to a fair share in the "voice" or expression in society' (105-106). She quotes young Jeannie claiming her rights in support of this interpretation: 'You shouldn't have let Cliff have Dad's mouth organ when he's got one of his own' (Wednesday To Come 28). Williams also charts how this musical instrument passes from male to female hands, as Iris takes it from Ben, hands it to Mary, who puts it on the kitchen table, where it is finally picked up by young Jeannie, who, '*putting it in her pocket*' with the words 'Right – I'm ready' (50), closes the play (Williams 105-106).

³⁷ The Oxford History of New Zealand records the violent reaction of the government to the dispute at the Waihi goldmine in 1912. When the miners went on strike '[t]he police took a "particularly combative stance," calculating that a sudden sharp clash between strikers and arbitrationists would produce a quick settlement. Shots were fired, a policeman injured, and a striker clubbed to death' (Oliver and Williams 211).

In Wednesday To Come, Iris also makes reference to the striker that was killed during this incident and tells Dot how supporters of the Left wing cause were punished in the past: '[W]hen I was twelve I saw my mother and father and their friends run out of town simply because they tried to get better conditions for the workers' (36).

Other plays by Renée display a similar interest in, and knowledge of, the history of the Trade Union Movement. Union Matters, the overall title for three short plays written for schools at the time when Renée was Playwright in Residence at Theatre Corporate in 1986, displays the diminishing power of the Union Movement over time. The first play, set in 1888, explains, by citing historical examples, how the Union can help to improve the conditions of workers. The second, set in a shearing shed, shows how the Union can defend workers' rights. The third, set in an anonymous kiwifruit factory, warns that an apathetic attitude towards the Union can result in conditions for the workers being systematically eroded by an unscrupulous employer. The major thematic concern in Pass It On is that the Emergency Regulations, which were introduced by the government during the 1951 Lockout, robbed Union members of their democratic rights.

The central female characters in Wednesday To Come can be viewed collectively as a complex metaphor for Renée's own creative process. Their work ethic is a reflection of the playwright's own: 'Most of my life is work' (Warrington 82). Renée's earliest lessons in life, like young Jeannie's, were learned during the Great Depression from a mother who was in many ways similar to Iris.³⁸ Like young Jeannie again, Renée demands the right to a mouth organ, the symbol of her 'voice.' Her 'voice' as a playwright has also had to be taken from its traditional place in the hands of the male. Renée is New Zealand's first female professional playwright to live and work in the country of her birth. The stage business of passing the symbol of 'voice' between generations of women on the stage can also be interpreted as the metaphorical expression of Renée collecting women's oral histories passed down through the generations as material for her plays and so re-discovering 'the outer margin' of female working class history. Williams explains how Wednesday To Come fits into Renée's oeuvre as a whole:

She has [. . .] deliberately chosen to highlight injustices which, in her opinion, have too often been swept under the carpet [. . .] she often reveals to her theatre-going audience [. . .] aspects of a dark underbelly of New Zealand society which, until this point, they will probably have been unaware (56-57).

It is interesting to note that the truth about Ben's suicide is only revealed through a continuum of female actions that are passed on: Iris puts the carton on the table, young Jeannie draws out the harness from the carton, Dot fuels Iris' anger over the harness and Iris finally picks up the hammer. Likewise, Renée, by means of a remembered continuum of female protest, prises the lid off the 'coffin' of the 'dark underbelly' of New Zealand society, which has previously been largely concealed from view.

By the end of Wednesday To Come young Jeannie predicts enthusiastically to the household, '[w]e're [she and the other marchers] going to bring the plight of the

³⁸ The dedication of Wednesday To Come reads '[t]o my mother, Rose.' Renée often gives her female characters names that relate to women in her own past. In her novel The Snowball Waltz the protagonist is called Gertrude. Renée's grandmother was called Gertrude (Harris, 'Renée' 36). In Setting the Table, one of the central characters is called Rose.

underprivileged to public notice' and 'I'm going to change it. Or at least help to' (46). Black, in his review of the trilogy, remarks, 'her [Renée's] principal characters are always asking what they can do to change their lives and our world' ('Wednesday To Come/Pass It On' 191). Renée has revealed, however, that she views such reformatory zeal with dismay: '[E]very time I see a Jeannie [. . .] it always makes me feel really sad, because I know, and I've always assumed everyone else would too, that she fails' (Warrington 80).

All the plays in the trilogy are set in times of economic depression in New Zealand – Jeannie Once in 1879, Wednesday To Come in 1934 and Pass It On in 1951³⁹ – but the real tragedy of the central female characters lies not in the hardship of their lives, but in the fact that despite their strength, their energy, their hard work, their generosity, their self-sacrifice and even their rebellion, in the end their aspirations are not realized. The trilogy ends with young Jeannie, having been involved in yet another march to promote the Left wing cause (this time in support of the Watersiders in 1951), and, having been hit by a policeman's baton, '*staggering*' across the stage and summing up life in terms of compromise: 'It's not what you want, it's what you get' (Pass It On 58).

Jeannie's experience thus replicates that of her great-grandmother Jeannie, who told her as a young girl that marching, too, is all about compromise:

It's asking and getting no for an answer. And then asking a bit louder and a bit louder. And then – sometimes – if you're lucky – you get a little of what you asked for and then – it starts all over again. And you wonder – you do Jeannie – do they ever listen? (Wednesday To Come 40).

In Renée's oeuvre the patriarchy which condemned her mother to the back-breaking work of weeding carrots for sixpence an hour never does listen to the

³⁹ Renée's family history is related to these key events. I have already outlined the autobiographical inspiration for Wednesday To Come. Renée's grandmother, Gertrude, was born in 1880 and the playwright has surmised that '[s]ome of her experiences could have been the same as some of the characters' in Jeannie Once' (Harris, 'Renée' 36). Renée also had an uncle who was involved in the 1951 lockout (Kellett 31). Both these plays are therefore also based to some extent on autobiography.

aspirations of the working class female on 'the outer margin' of New Zealand society.

B: 'SETTING THE TABLE'

The central female characters in Renée's trilogy all display a philosophy of life which combines stoicism with the urge to rebel. Renée recalls that when she first began thinking about writing Wednesday To Come she went to Piha for a writers' week as a tutor, but came back with only five words as the foundation for the play: 'Large, small, pain is all' (Beatson 30). This phrase is first spoken by Martha, the half-Māori servant girl in Jeannie Once (40), which is set in 1879. It is then re-iterated by Granna (who was Once the young Jeannie) in Wednesday To Come (30), set in 1934. The passing on of the phrase is indicative of Renée's belief in the continuum of female oral history and also of her view of life experience as being cyclical.⁴⁰ In Wednesday To Come Granna summarizes her interpretation of her world in similar terms: 'Hard times back there – hard times here. Nothing's changed . . . nothing's changed' (10).

Setting the Table, the first full length play that Renée wrote, has a contemporary setting but displays a similar point of view. As in Wednesday To Come, the playwright places centre stage four strong women who inhabit the same house. These women appear at first sight to have progressed both economically and socially in comparison to the women of the Great Depression, because they are all skilled workers with full-time employment. Sheila is a nurse, Abby a teacher, Rose a potter, and Con a pay clerk (37). Despite the difference in their circumstances, however, all these women, like the women in the trilogy, display the urge to rebel in their various ways.

In Setting the Table, and in other similar texts, Renée insists not only that domestic violence is widespread in New Zealand society and affects all income groups, but also that it is a taboo subject.⁴¹ The women in abusive situations feel

⁴⁰ Perceiving this, Rebecca Simpson entitled her review of the first production of Wednesday To Come 'Suffering's Cyclical Nature' and commented '[e]vents being cyclical, 1934 is very close to 1984,' (37) indicating that happenings of the past have contemporary relevance.

⁴¹ In her interview with Beatson in 1988 Renée remarked on the resistance of audiences to accepting that domestic violence is a widespread social problem in New Zealand:

I didn't expect the fuss that happened when Setting the Table was produced. Even its first rehearsed reading provoked challenges from men in the audience about whether I could prove that women in Auckland were being beaten. [. . .] They

that they cannot talk about them and are conditioned to take the blame on themselves. The action of Setting the Table, for example, is instigated by Sheila, whose tolerance snaps after she has had to care for yet another female victim of male violence at the hospital where she works. Seeing this woman ‘badly bruised, ripped, bleeding and shocked [. . .] her breasts covered with bites’ (25), and having little faith that the attacker will be prosecuted – ‘a few – a very few – get jail’ (45) – Sheila decides to take retaliatory action into her own hands. The victim, who has been raped as well as beaten, has identified her attacker, and, as the play opens, we hear, offstage, the sounds of Sheila’s revenge on this man. A little later in the play Sheila demonstrates to Rose how she has tracked the rapist down at night, overpowered him, stabbed him with a knife, ‘dragged him to the nearest fence, tied him to it, pulled his pants down – Jesus was he frightened – he actually shat – tied a ribbon round his spout and put the sign round his neck. “This man is a rapist”’ (16).⁴²

In the trilogy it is the government, which employs the forces of law and order to carry out its policies, that is the enemy of the working class. In Jeannie Once Mary O’Malley has had to give up her career in the Music Hall⁴³ and emigrate to New Zealand in order to rear her lover Diccon’s son on her own (46-47) after he was wrongly convicted of murder and hanged in Ireland. In Pass It On the

wouldn’t question it now, but then it seemed to them that I was making a fuss about something that really only happened to a few women who probably asked for it anyway by answering their husbands back. When I pointed out to them that people who were working at Halfway House were dealing with people from right across the board in terms of income levels, they just didn’t believe me. They liked the script okay, but about two-thirds of the people who were there that night thought I was making exaggerated claims (28).

⁴² Not all the women in Setting the Table agree with Sheila’s solution but they all rebel against what they consider to be male abuse of the female. Sheila has been involved in a protest against pornography which painted out a sign above a strip club in K Road (36) and Rose has been in a protest against the Miss New Zealand contest (37). Both Con and Assy work in their spare time to help battered women and children.

⁴³ Renée, like Mervyn Thompson, deliberately makes reference to working class theatrical traditions in her plays. Like Thompson also, she frequently includes music as an integral part of her scripts. In Jeannie Once Mary O’Malley, who was once a Music Hall performer, sings Vesta Tilly’s famous Music Hall song ‘Champagne Charlie’ cross dressed in top hat and tails (53-55). Similarly, in O It Ain’t All Honey and It Ain’t All Jam, the central character, Gertrude Lawrence, appears cross dressed singing another famous male impersonator song ‘Burlington Bertie’ (7-8). Joanne Tompkins views the inclusion of songs such as these as vehicles for Renée’s feminist philosophy: ‘This boundary crossing that Mary’s cross-dressed acting signals is part of the feminist agenda of the play’ (246). Again like Thompson, Renée also reveals the influence of Gilbert and Sullivan in the music of her plays. In the penultimate scene of Jeannie Once, for example, there is a performance of one of the songs from H.M.S. Pinafore (59-60).

government has introduced the Emergency Regulations which deprive the workers of their democratic rights. In Wednesday To Come both Ted (13) and Dot (24) point out that the army has been called out in Palmerston North in response to the march, despite peaceful protest being within the democratic rights of the marchers,⁴⁴ and Iris remarks on the indifferent attitude of the government towards the suffering of the unemployed: 'Coates has already told us to eat grass' (32).⁴⁵ The fact that the government and its repressive state apparatuses constitute a patriarchy is implied rather than stated in these texts. In Setting the Table, however, patriarchy is clearly identified as the enemy. In this, her first play, the political context is one of open warfare between patriarchy (represented either individually by the aggressive male or collectively by patriarchal institutions) and the female 'outer margin.' The play which opens with Sheila knifing a rapist ends with an outraged husband and his 'mate' trying to knife and disfigure the female characters (49). The climate of violence is further underlined in the sub-plot, in which Con helps to run a 'Haven' for battered wives and children. After Sheila's attack on the rapist, however, the remainder of the main plot of Setting the Table consists largely of a debate over whether Sheila's solution of 'an eye for an eye' (45) is an appropriate response to male abuse of the female.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ted's remark, '[a]rmy had the guns out at Palmerston North so I'm told' (13) carries the sinister implication that the marchers were being threatened by the authorities. This is borne out in a testimony from The Sugarbag Years: 'Palmerston North was an interesting occasion. The representatives of the government were there. We had a big meeting outside the Masonic Hotel and they tried to create a riot scene there, with soldiers in the background and machine guns' (Tony Simpson 144).

⁴⁵ Mass unemployment caused acute social distress and the leaders of the Coalition party came to be hated by ordinary working people, particularly the unemployed. In The Sugarbag Years, Tony Simpson acknowledges that in such a climate stories can develop into very influential mythologies:

Many of my informants referred to an incident in which Gordon Coates is supposed to have told a deputation of workers to eat grass. There is no record that he ever said any such thing, and yet many people are convinced that he did say it and that they heard it with their own ears. Whether Gordon Coates ever actually said that or not is unimportant. What is important about it is what it tells us about the nature of communal myths [. . .] The tale of the workers and the grass is oral tradition. When taxed with it, others who knew nothing of it expressed no disbelief. On the contrary, they said it had most likely happened. Like most folk-belief it serves to crystallise an abstract and difficult experience (18).

In Wednesday To Come when Iris states 'Coates has already told us to eat grass,' Mary qualifies the statement with '[t]hat's what he's supposed to have said.' Iris, however, like the people Tony Simpson interviewed, has an absolute conviction that Coates was capable of making such a remark: 'He said it alright' (32).

⁴⁶ In December 1977, four years before Setting the Table was written, Broadsheet published the results of the first rape study to be conducted in New Zealand. It identified a pattern of 'low

Renée has said that, unlike much of the source material for the trilogy, Setting the Table 'wasn't autobiographical except in the sense that some of the debate was' (McCurdy 66). In her interview with Beatson she also adds that at the 1975 United Women's Convention 'I picked up some copies of Broadsheet and have been a subscriber ever since' (36). Broadsheet, begun in 1972, was then the major magazine in New Zealand with an outspokenly feminist perspective.⁴⁷ Renée joined the Broadsheet Collective in 1982,⁴⁸ but even earlier than this the influence of its feminist philosophy is to be found in her work.

In the Introduction to the section on feminism in their anthology Literary Theory, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan make the point that '[c]ontemporary feminist literary criticism begins as much in the women's movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s as it does in the academy' ('Feminist Paradigms' 527). Broadsheet was a major mouthpiece for the women's movement in New Zealand from the early 1970s onwards. Rivkin and Ryan also identify the primary concern of the feminist movement at that time: 'For the women's movement of the 1960s and early 1970s the subject of feminism was women's experience under patriarchy,

reportage, arrest and conviction rates for rape' (Rosier, Broadsheet: Twenty Years of Broadsheet Magazine 137).

⁴⁷ In 'Broadsheet 10 Years On' Sandra Coney, the editor, reports that the magazine developed from the women's movement but in the early days three men were employed. The parent group was the Auckland Women's Liberation and the first issue included contributions from this group as well as from Women For Equality, the first feminist group in Auckland. Other contributors included the Auckland Organisation of Women and Women Against the War. Broadsheet had men working on the magazine until mid-1974 when it was decided that it should become a women's only venture (12-14).

The December 1979 Broadsheet issue makes a passing reference to 'Renée Taylor' (McLeod, 'Womenspirit' 36). In the same issue a poem written under the name Renée Taylor has a first line which reads 'Lay bare your kitchen table' and ends

O Angry Women –
I, who have taken minute steps forward
and hourly steps back,
love you ('A Polemic Inaccessible Statement' 37).

This confirms that by the late 1970s Renée was becoming known in Broadsheet circles, that she was already thinking of the kitchen in terms of what she later described as 'women's world' and that she had already begun to identify with 'Angry Women' such as those she created in the trilogy and in Setting the Table.

⁴⁸ The July/August issue of Broadsheet in 1982 includes an article 'Broadsheet 10 Years On' with a photograph of the current Broadsheet Collective on the first page. Renée is on the extreme left, although the blurb of the photograph still identifies her by her married name as Renée Taylor.

the long tradition of male rule in society which silenced women's voices, distorted their lives, and treated their concerns as peripheral' (527).

This definition is well illustrated in Elsie's story, a monologue by a woman in her 50s which is the first play of *Secrets*.⁴⁹ Elsie's 'experience under patriarchy' is that, as a representative of 'the outer margin' that is both female and working class and because she has no qualifications, she has to do the menial job of cleaning lavatories, and she makes barely enough to live on (3). '[T]he long tradition of male rule in society,' is represented by Elsie's boss, Mr Foster, who 'thinks his shit doesn't stink' (2) and who treats his employee like the excrement she cleans up. As Elsie puts it, 'you know what they say, touch muck and you become mucky yourself [. . .]. I'm the living example of it. It's getting hard to tell the difference between all this and me, yes Mr Foster, I saw your lips curl when we were talking' (2).

In the words of both Spivak (25) and Rivkin and Ryan, Elsie's 'voice[s]' has been 'silenced': 'I'm the invisible woman round here, just the extension of the mop' (5). Her life has been 'distorted'; she is a solo parent who has had to leave her daughter at home for long hours while she went out to work and her daughter has committed suicide (8). Mr Foster treats Elsie's 'concerns as peripheral' so delegating her to the position of the doubly marginalized. When she forms a bond with a young woman who comes into the lavatories after trying to abort her baby with a knitting needle, Mr Foster's only comment is that his employee has displayed '[i]rresponsible behaviour' (6) because taking the girl to the hospital has made Elsie late for work. At the end of the play Elsie finally rebels against patriarchy by throwing the rubbish she has spent the whole play cleaning up back over the floor (10) and giving 'the fingers' (11) to Mr Foster and all he represents.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Secrets*, a double bill containing two short female monologues, was first performed in 1982 at the Maidment Theatre during the Feminist Arts Festival June 12-19 and then at the Mercury July 9-17. The performance at the Maidment was directed by Renée, and Elizabeth McCrae performed both monologues at both venues (Hall, 'Secrets' 46). In the Playmarket script used in this thesis and dated 1986 the two monologues by Elise and Sandra are supplemented by an additional play which consists of a dialogue between the characters of Gracie and Joy.

⁵⁰ Elsie's story also has its foundation in autobiographical experience. In a short story Renée recalls being expected to clean the long drop as a child: 'I was the oldest of three and I was a girl so I got to scrub the dunny' ('All Is Calm All Is Bright' 21). When she went to Auckland to

Williams has discussed at length how patriarchy, both collective and individual, thwarts the aspirations of the women in the trilogy so that none of them are able to fulfil their dreams (71-75, 87-92, 94-97). Texts such as Setting the Table take this view of the negative effects of patriarchy to even greater extremes by insisting that the male is also physically and sexually abusive towards the female as part of 'the long tradition of male rule' in society. Renée confirmed as much in an ironic observation she made in 'Theatre and Politics': 'Man's inhumanity to woman is so all-pervasive that it's not really worth commenting on. So hardly anybody does' (17).

'Commenting on' the issue of 'man's inhumanity to woman' forms a large component of Renée's purpose as a playwright, and is part of her intent, to use Williams' phrase, to expose the 'dark underbelly of New Zealand society' (57) and confront her audiences with issues which had rarely been aired on the New Zealand stage before.

Broadsheet developed a policy of printing articles which drew attention to the frequency of male abuse of the female.⁵¹ Con's involvement with the 'Haven' is the first sustained reference to the Women's Refuge Movement on the New Zealand stage. Broadsheet, however, had published articles on the 'safe houses' run by the Women's Refuge since their inception.⁵²

complete her degree she became a cleaner at Theatre Corporate and recalls being made to feel just as 'invisible' (Secrets 5) as Elsie: 'I was really cocking a snook at Theatre Corporate [. . .] because when I was working there [. . .] only a few people said "Hello" to me as Renée and the rest just saw me as an extension of the vacuum cleaner and stepped over' (McCurdy 67).

⁵¹ In Broadsheet: Twenty Years of Broadsheet Magazine Pat Rosier records that the magazine published '[m]any, many articles on various forms of violence against women and children' (136)

⁵² In September 1990 Broadsheet reported that the first Women's Refuge house opened in Christchurch in 1973 and seventeen years later there were fifty-one such houses in New Zealand (Rosier, 'A Place to Go' 15). Much earlier, in September 1976, another article in Broadsheet reported the setting up of Halfway House, the first Women's Refuge house in Auckland which opened in October 1975. In this article Julie Thompson comments on the tendency of the authorities to ignore the issue of domestic violence: 'There are no official statistics kept on the incidence of marital violence against women, partly because most of it is not reported and partly because those who do notice it – GPs and the police – do not keep records' (Thompson and Miles 19).

Setting the Table is set in Auckland and was written in 1981. A major thematic concern of the play is the tendency of the authorities to turn a blind eye to domestic violence.

In Mercy Buckets, a play written six years after Setting the Table, the issue of 'safe houses' is again central to the plot. In this unpublished and unperformed play the protagonist, Phoebe, a woman in her mid-thirties, befriends the nineteen-year-old Tiger and takes her in because Tiger's boyfriend beats her up. When Tiger arrives at Phoebe's home one day '[s]he [Tiger] has been badly beaten' (63) and later in the play '[t]he bruises have come out on her face and she is limping' (71). This time, by a lucky chance, Tiger has managed to escape even after her boyfriend has locked her in and taken all her clothes (72).

The plot unravels to reveal that Phoebe herself was once married to a man from a respectable and comfortably-well-off family who displayed violent tendencies: he has just died in a 'prison brawl' after he had been imprisoned 'for raping and assaulting an old woman' (65). Male abuse of the female is shown to be passed down through the generations when Elizabeth, the dead man's mother and Phoebe's mother-in-law, discloses that her husband started to beat her when her son was only a baby. When the boy was older and tried to defend his mother, he too took a beating. The son then in turn began to display aggressive tendencies. His mother says '[h]e was always quick tempered, and sometimes he'd break things.' Even before his attack on the old woman there were 'complaints' from the son's former girlfriends which implied violence' (73).⁵³

Clearly, Elizabeth kept quiet about all this abuse for many years. Similarly, in Setting the Table Sheila is appalled just as much by the raped woman's reactions as she is by her physical injuries:

[Y]ou know what really upset me most? She was ashamed. She was ashamed. Kept saying sorry when I was cleaning her up, [. . .] all caused by a fucking deliberate assault. She could hardly move – and she's grateful because I didn't tell her off! [. . .] She'd got herself raped, as they say (25).

⁵³ This play has reflections of Carolyn Burns' Objection Overruled (1982) which also deals with the subject of domestic violence being passed down through the generations.

In Mercy Buckets the battered wife, Elizabeth, displays a similar reaction: 'I felt so ashamed, so guilty. I didn't dare tell anyone' (73).⁵⁴

Renée first came to national public attention as a playwright in 1982 (the same year in which Setting the Table was first performed) when she wrote a Broadsheet revue, What Did You Do In The War Mummy?, to celebrate the magazine's tenth anniversary. The short twenty-minute piece that was originally written as the opening for a seminar (Rosier, 'Born To Clean' 42) was expanded into a longer show and sponsored by the magazine for a two week tour of the country (Coney 17).⁵⁵

The revue refers to the areas of social concern publicized by Broadsheet over the previous ten years.⁵⁶ These are summarized at the beginning of the script as 'the three Rs' and the third of these is rape (What Did You Do In The War Mummy? 1). The script then moves on to deal with incest, another aspect of the rape issue; women are shown to be at risk from all generations of the male sex: fathers, uncles, and even grandfathers (10). The issue of rape, including the subject of incest, is a major concern in Renée's work from the beginning and continues throughout her oeuvre.

In November 1979 Miriam Saphira,⁵⁷ a Justice Department psychologist, wrote a disturbing article for Broadsheet on the subject of incest.⁵⁸ Renée has

⁵⁴ In November 1978 Broadsheet published the findings of the first survey to be conducted on battered women in New Zealand. It noted that the women came from all income groups (Rosier, Broadsheet: Twenty Years of Broadsheet Magazine 138) and came to the conclusion '[s]ince there is a considerable stigma in being a victim, the victim herself is often too ashamed to seek help.' It also noted that the men, as in Renée's texts, offered no explanation for their violence and that the blame falls on the victim (140).

⁵⁵ The July/August 1982 issue of Broadsheet contains an advertisement for What Did You Do In The War Mummy? both written and directed by Renée Taylor and booked to play in Auckland, Whangarei, Hamilton, Tauranga, Napier, Palmerston North, Wellington, Nelson, Christchurch and Dunedin. The tour is advertised as being for '[w]omen only' (5).

⁵⁶ The subject of domestic violence is dealt with towards the end of the show when the lyrics of the sentimental ballad 'The Way We Were' are juxtaposed with a '[w]oman being beaten up while song is sung'. This is immediately followed by the '[t]une' of 'You Only Hurt The One You Love' with the adapted lyrics 'So if I broke your ribs last night/It's because I love you most of all' (10).

⁵⁷ Miriam Saphira wrote the article using her married name Miriam Jackson.

⁵⁸ The Broadsheet Collective debated whether the front cover (a photograph of a man with his young daughter accompanied by the blurb 'Is She Safe With her Father? Incest – the Last Taboo') would be too confrontational and cause readers to stop buying the magazine. The social

acknowledged Saphira's work as the inspiration for Sandra's story in her double bill of female monologues with the overall title Secrets. A comparison of the portrayals of incest victims in Renée's work, here and elsewhere, and Saphira's 1979 article reveals similarities between the characters Renée creates and the women that Saphira interviewed.:

I had no idea at the time of writing a one-woman piece, but then I thought of what Miriam (Saphira) was doing on the sexual abuse of children. I talked to her and she loaned me some books. And I wrote about that woman. A lot of the stuff I put in there was something I made up, but when I showed it to Miriam, she said that it was very like what some women do experience (McCurdy 66).

Saphira reports a conversation with a woman called Katherine who tells how the experience of incest affected her self image as an adult: 'How dirty and unclean I was [. . .] I had this terrible secret inside me all these years' (Jackson 17). In What Did You Do In The War Mummy? one of the effects incest has had on one of the women is 'I can't stand being touched' and 'I can't seem to make friends' (10). Similarly, Sandra in Secrets has a touch taboo and is socially isolated. Sandra has a fetish about cleanliness and spends the whole play taking precautions against 'the mountains of dirt' (12) that she imagines she sees.

Sandra's father told her that what he did to her was 'the secret' (14). Katherine likewise told Saphira that as a result of 'the secret' she detested the sexual expectation within marriage: 'Living with A MAN and being married to A MAN. The horror of my childhood came back [. . .] I had to make love in this double bed every night if he wanted to [. . .] after two months marriage I hated this obscene act' (Jackson 17). In Secrets, Sandra, likewise, reveals a distaste of her sex life with her husband: 'I didn't really like that part of it, after we married [. . .]. It was just like the secret' (19).

Saphira writes '[m]ost of the women I have talked to were first raped between six years and twelve' (Jackson 19). Sandra in Secrets says 'the secret' began with her father when she first went to school (19). Saphira also observes that women who

conscience of the Broadsheet Collective was revealed when this controversial front cover was printed: it was described by Coney as being not 'commercial' but 'politically necessary' (17).

grow up with 'the secret' find themselves in an invidious position. Firstly, although their mothers often know what is happening, they rarely support their daughters (Jackson 20). In Renée's play Missionary Position, written almost a decade later, one of the central characters, Dietrich, remarks ironically, '[w]hen I was young my mother loved me so much she turned a blind eye when my father got into bed with me' (39). Secondly, Saphira notes that even professionals can be very unsympathetic to the horrific experience of childhood that these women relate. Katherine says in her interview with Saphira '[a]fter I told him of my incest experience the psychiatrist said that maybe I had tried to seduce my father and that I had secretly enjoyed it' (Jackson 17). In What Did You Do In The War Mummy? the voice of the Counsellor expresses a similar point of view: '[H]ave you ever thought that, subconsciously of course, you encouraged him?' (10).⁵⁹ Thirdly, Saphira points out that 'several young girls became so disturbed at the rape by their fathers and stepfathers that they are placed in mental institutions or residential schools for the emotionally disturbed while the perpetrator remains in the home' (Jackson 19). Likewise, in Renée's second Broadsheet revue Asking For It, performed a year after What Did You Do In The War Mummy? in 1983, an incest victim is told by the authorities, '[w]e have decided to remove you from your home and place you in Social Welfare custody' (33). Fourthly, Saphira records that many of the women who experience incest in childhood 'drift into prostitution' because 'many raped daughters strongly believe that the only thing that any man is after is sex and that all they are good for themselves is sex' (Jackson 20). In Renée's unperformed play Belle's Place, Rita, who is a prostitute, reveals that some of her mother's lovers, whom she knew as 'uncles' have sexually abused her and that she, too, was placed in a 'Home' (81).

Warrington has commented that Renée's male characters, who are often abusers or betrayers, comprise two distinct categories: 'There are the authority figures

⁵⁹ Feminists are particularly critical of some aspects of Freudian psychoanalytical theory because they claim that it provides the justification for the attitude displayed by some professionals, such as the psychiatrist that Katherine visited. Renée outlines this in Asking For It when she refers to the case of Dora and she brings the characters involved to the stage. Sigmund Freud disapproves Dora's sense of disgust when Herr K '[a]n older friend of the family' makes sexual advances towards her. Freud interprets the advances as 'just the situation to call up a distinct feeling of sexual excitement in a girl of fourteen who had never been approached!' (15). Renée's script, however, by means of irony, makes it clear that she strongly disapproves of Freud's interpretation.

[. . .] [and] [s]imple, honest working men fall into the second category' (71).⁶⁰

Warrington remarks particularly on the former category:

More often than not, they are an unseen presence, a threat to the well-being of the women on stage. Such men as the father who sexually abused his daughter in Secrets (1982), and the oppressive Rev. Mr Wishart in Jeannie Once whose puritanical beliefs have succeeded in breaking his wife's spirit (71).

In concurrence with Warrington's analysis I have already illustrated how often the male poses a 'threat to the well-being of the women on stage'. The Reverend Wishart, as Warrington remarks, is a case in point. As part of the patriarchal institution of the Church, and a respected member of 'the inner margin,' he incarcerates the part-Māori servant girl Martha in the madhouse and drives his wife to the point of breakdown – all this without ever appearing on the stage.

This technique creates a sinister scenario exacerbated by two theatrical devices: the abusive act takes place off stage and it is usually euphemistically reported by the female – thus the horror is constructed in the imagination of the audience.⁶¹ Similarly, in the second monologue of Secrets Sandra recalls her church-going father's abuse of her mother:

Father couldn't stand flies, used to lock Mum in the bedroom if he found one in the house [. . .] wouldn't even let her out to go to the toilet, just read the paper and ignored her. And she would do it, and, I can see him now, he would get up, fold the paper, pick up the fly swat and go into Mum. Afterwards she would have to clean it all up and herself too (15).

⁶⁰ Betrayal is another form of abuse and unfaithful husbands abound in Renée's writing. Instances are to be found in Setting the Table, Belle's Place, Mercy Buckets, Jeannie Once, Missionary Position, Te Pouaka Karaehe and Heroines, Hussies and High High Flyers. Even Warrington's category of '[s]imple, honest working men,' such as Ben in Wednesday To Come, inflict this variety of pain on their wives. The exception to this is in Touch of the Sun where the two central characters, Lilibet and Mungro, discover after their mother's death that she has been persistently unfaithful to their father. In this script it is the husband who is betrayed and it is the female who is both the emotional and the physical abuser. Lilibet and Mungro recall their mother hitting their father with the poker (17). This text is also unusual in portraying female abuse of the daughter. Mungro remembers her mother shutting her up in a cupboard when she was a child (59).

⁶¹ In this respect Renée's work draws on a convention in the classical Greek Theatre where the traumatic event takes place offstage and is reported to the audience by the chorus and the characters in the play.

It is left to the audience to construe the image of the woman in her own excrement and what her sexually abusive husband did with the fly swat.

Another form of abuse is racial discrimination. I have already noted that Renée is the only writer in this thesis with Māori ancestry. From an early age she was subjected to racial prejudice. She recalls, for example, that on her first day at school one of the teachers remarked, '[p]retty little thing. Pity she's so dark' ('Outlook. Renée' 6). Drawing on personal experience, this playwright habitually presents women and Māori as being marginalized and abused by patriarchal institutions and she views this as another facet of the rape issue. Renée's first revue, What Did You Do In the War Mummy? is structured around 'the three Rs. The big three. RELIGION – RACISM – RAPE' (1) and outlines, by means of a bombardment of historical evidence, how these three categories represent the violation of both women and Māori by Pakeha men. By this means, therefore, both women and the whole of the Māori race are placed hand-in-hand as the representatives of 'the outer margin.'

A similar technique is repeated in her second revue for Broadsheet, Asking For It, where women and Māori are the victims of colonization. Once again the claim is supported by ample historical evidence. After the documentation of the case of Alice Smythe, who was accused of witchcraft (2-5), an offstage voice announces, '[w]ithin two centuries eight million women were killed by torture or burning' and this is immediately followed by a statement which links the circumstances of women with the circumstances of Māori under patriarchy – 'The mentality which could do this to women had no trouble following the same line with the people of another race!' (6). Next comes a sequence devoted to the dispossession of Māori land, allied to evidence of how Māori women were mistreated by the colonizing power. Any evidence of abuse of the female is dismissed and discounted by the patriarchal authority of 'the inner margin,' the mimic of the Eurocentre:

Some accounts of flogging and forcing women into prostitution, didn't take them [the accounts] too seriously. There was that case over

Kendall, that missionary fellow, accused of adultery. His defence was that it couldn't be adultery as these were only native women.⁶²

Colonization is thus identified as a form of rape.

As a counterpoint to the abuse perpetrated by 'the inner margin,' the mimic of the Eurocentre, in Renée's oeuvre 'the outer margin' – working class, Māori and lesbian females – are able to overcome their own prejudices to bond with each other. Williams has traced at length how the half-Māori servant girl Martha, in Jeannie Once, at first treated by the Pakeha women as inferior, comes to be regarded as a friend and an equal (64-69). Similarly, in Groundwork, Emma, who is Māori, has been a friend of Ellen's, who is part-Māori, since they were in a play together at school.⁶³ They, in turn, form a close friendship with Cindy, a Pakeha and a lesbian. Despite the differences in background and sexual preference, there are no barriers between them. Like the women in Wednesday To Come, these women all espouse the Left wing cause and there is no need for political discussion because they are all of one mind. In Groundwork Emma, Ellen and Cindy protest against the Springbok Tour and Emma and Cindy are injured in one of the marches (31). Once again the enemy is the male in the form of an aggressive patriarchal institution. As is often the case with Renée, this takes the form of a brutal police force acting as the instrument of an oppressive Right wing government.

⁶² Renée is particularly condemning of the hypocrisy to be found in the Church. In What Did You Do In The War Mummy? one of '[t]he big three' (1) R's of oppression is identified as religion. In Asking For It the church is shown to be complicit in the subjugation of women (2, 5) and in stealing Māori land (6). In Born To Clean the Church is homophobic (32) and when one of the central characters, Red, falls in love with a minister he has sex with her and then abandons her the next day (40). In Sandra's story in Secrets the father, who sexually abuses her, is a man of the Church. Similarly, Belle's father in Belle's Place is a Deacon (79), who incarcerates his daughter in a mental hospital when he finds out she is a lesbian. Belle first meets her friend Rita, who is a prostitute, after her father died in Rita's bed (82).

⁶³ The character of Ellen in Groundwork appears to be largely autobiographical. Ellen is part-Māori. Her mother is a solo parent who works in a market garden (18) and so the family is poor (10). Ellen's mother has become a recluse (8) apart from an occasional outing to the pub (16). Ellen has to take responsibility for doing household chores. She likes reading (5), at school is particularly good at English (7) and she is also in the school drama (8). In Groundwork Renée uses the phrase she overheard on her first day at school as a comment made to Ellen's mother: '[P]retty little thing, pity she's so dark' (17).

Groundwork was performed at the Depot, a property in Courtenay Place which Downstage initially used as a rehearsal area and for storage space. During the mid 1990s the venue developed into Taki Rua, the main outlet for Māori theatre at that time (McNaughton, 'Drama' 380). Te Pouaka Karaehe was performed there.

Nevertheless, Renée's texts suggest that the traditional relationship between the patriarchal institutions and those who have been traditionally relegated to 'the outer margin' is subject to change. In her plays Māori women are high achievers like herself. In Groundwork both Emma and Ellen have degrees (30). In Te Pouaka Karaeche the settlement of Porohiwi has been put on the map because Marama Porohiwi has turned the local caves into a tourist attraction and has herself become a famous guide, being awarded an OBE before she died (16), despite being originally kept at home to housekeep for her father (31). Her granddaughters are also high flyers. Wiki is a nurse (18) and Iri is applying for a job in the Beehive (19). In this manner, and particularly by means of the last example, the playwright suggests that those who have traditionally been on 'the outer margin' will one day be at 'the centre.'

Renée is particularly interested in part-Māori women who, like herself, have been brought up with little awareness of their Māori identity, as she emphasized in her interview with Warrington: 'I see a whole world of Māori experience that is not necessarily connected to the marae, and I think that there would be a huge mistake made if people assumed that was the only valid experience to be written about' (79). Renée had little connection with the marae in her early years. She explained in an interview that Rose refused to acknowledge the Māori blood of either herself or her own children: '[S]he was ashamed of it. She was living in a society where it was a shameful thing to be Maori; she didn't talk about it at all. It's only as I've got older and have researched her background that I've come to know about it and be glad about it' (Payne-Heckenberg and Mitchell 21).

As a result of her upbringing, Renée often feels that she inhabits a space between cultures, as she explained in another interview: 'Sometimes I feel alienated from the European world, and sometimes from the Maori world, because I sometimes feel inadequate in both of them' (Hall, 'Reinforcing Women's Rise' 11). Accordingly, she creates female characters who reflect this personal dilemma. Perhaps the most fully drawn of these is Martha, the part-Māori servant girl in Jeannie Once.

In Jeannie Once the only fact that Martha knows about her mother is that she was ‘from the Mahia.’ After her mother died Martha remembers her father telling her that ‘a whaling ship was no place for a child’ (30). At the beginning of this chapter I have referred to Renée’s great-great-great grandfather who was a whaler and who married a Māori woman from the Mahia peninsula (Warrington 77). Howard McNaughton recognizes the contribution that this character makes to New Zealand drama whilst at the same time acknowledging her autobiographical origin:

Jeannie Once [. . .] is of particular interest [. . .] for Martha, a part-Maori maid, a defiantly non-conformist, oppositional figure; even though raised in a mission, she refuses to be ‘included’ among the Christian community, and she is also engaged in a journey of self-discovery which reaches its highest clarity in a cave scene. In this, the character perhaps reflects the position of Renée herself (‘Drama’ 386).

There is the sense throughout Renée’s oeuvre of the need to re-discover a history of experience that has been lost, not just for part-Māori women like Martha, but for all women. The concern is expressed perhaps most potently in the image of Iris, taking the mouth organ from Ben’s coffin and speaking for all Renée’s working class heroines: ‘Who’ll remember us? We need someone, Ben – because it seems to me that everyone’s forgotten about us. And even if they do remember it’ll only be bits. We’re the ones they leave out when they write up the books’ (Wednesday To Come 38).⁶⁴

Renée’s fundamental purpose as an artist is to give ‘voice’ to the representatives of ‘the outer margin’ of females – particularly working class, Māori and lesbian women – who have previously been absent or infrequently represented on the New Zealand stage. Her titles suggest that this is work in progress. The metaphor contained within the title of Setting the Table implies, as Con explains, that the anticipated dinner is not yet served:

⁶⁴ ‘Form,’ a play written to be performed by schoolchildren in the classroom (45), emphasizes the importance of history in aiding the young to understand the country they live in. It also makes the point that the history of ordinary people that has been passed down orally is just as important and interesting as the facts about famous people that are to be found in history books.

Look, we're setting the table. [. . .] All those women we know about and the hundreds we don't. Well. They got the ingredients ready and cooked the dinner. And now we've got as far as setting the table. Oh I know it seems as though we'll never sit down to the dinner-party. Well maybe we won't. But we'll get the table ready. Us and all the ones we don't know about (51).

Similarly the characters in Wednesday To Come never speak the name of the day that is promised in the title; they have as yet only arrived at Monday (7). Implicit in these titles is the anticipation of the time when the traditional relationship between patriarchy and the female 'outer margin' will be subject to revision.

C: 'A WILD PATIENCE HAS TAKEN ME THIS FAR'

Renée's conversion to feminism took place in 1975, but by the time she began writing plays in 1981 she was already mixing with radical feminists, especially lesbian feminists in the circles of the Broadsheet Collective, and their influence is to be found in her plays from the outset. In an article published in Broadsheet Pat Rosier quotes Morrigan Severs on the input of lesbians in the Women's Refuge Movement: 'Lesbians were involved in refuge all over New Zealand in those very early days' ('A Place To Go' 19). I have noted that all the central characters in Setting the Table are lesbians⁶⁵ and that one of their number, Con, is working at a Women's Refuge safe house. Similarly, I have outlined in some detail the influence of Saphira's research on Renée's plots and characterizations. Coney records that Saphira joined the Broadsheet Collective after the incident known as 'the Split'⁶⁶ because she 'wanted to maintain some lesbian input into the magazine' ('Broadsheet 10 Years On' 17).

In her article 'Change of Life' published in Broadsheet in 1983, Renée not only identifies herself as lesbian, but also states her opinion of marriage: 'I realised that marriage was a health hazard and that I would never be really well while I stayed in it' (11). This point of view is reflected in her plays.⁶⁷

Williams, for example, has discussed how even Renée's most benign male characters (such as Alec in Jeannie Once) ultimately thwart the aspirations of the

⁶⁵ Lillian Hellman's play The Children's Hour (1934) is one of the earliest plays with a lesbian theme. Renée acknowledges her respect for Hellman's work (Personal Interview 19 May 2006). In her interview with Warrington she expands upon her debt to this playwright: 'I like Lillian Hellman [. . .] I really got a lot out of her plays in terms of structure and characters [. . .]. The Little Foxes was one I remember with great vivid clarity' (84).

⁶⁶ In 'Broadsheet 10 Years On' Coney, the editor, records that late in 1978 the four lesbians working on the Broadsheet Collective left the magazine and that the incident became 'shorthanded to "the Split."' Saphira makes the point in the same article that she tried to achieve a lesbian content of ten percent in the magazine, but that this proved to be difficult because '[t]here has always been a certain amount of tension about it' [and] '[p]olitically I'm quite at odds with most of the others on the collective.' Saphira, in 1982, believed that '[t]here's not enough in the magazine about violence, rape in marriage' (17).

⁶⁷ A notable exception to this, in a plot which is unusual in Renée's oeuvre, is Dreaming In Ponsonby. In this play, which was written for radio, the central married couple have a long standing relationship and their differences are reconciled in the end.

central women (72-75). Jeannie Once ends in anti-climax⁶⁸ with Jeannie reluctantly agreeing to marry Alec but recognizing at the same time that this will put paid to her hopes: 'It is not what we dreamed of but maybe we just need to find another dream' (61).⁶⁹ Renée has stated categorically how she feels about the compromise that Jeannie associates with marriage: '*Jeannie Once* ends with Jeannie saying she'll have to have another dream, and I think it's so awful that you can't have the dream you want. [. . .] And I feel like we should rage about it, and say why the fuck can't we have that dream, that was the one I wanted' (Warrington 82).⁷⁰

The poverty caused by the Great Depression has ensured that four generations of women occupy the same household in Wednesday To Come. I have already pointed out that the males in this play are surrounded by connotations of death and I am arguing that these texts predict the waning influence of patriarchy. Scripts such as Breaking Out and Dancing confirm this lessening influence as they focus on the female in the process of rejecting conventional marriage in favour of female bonding. For example, in Breaking Out, Ruth, after coming into contact with 'the outer margin' of the lesbian community represented by Jess and Alix, is no longer sure that she wants to remain in her marriage of twenty-two years (5).⁷¹

⁶⁸ Although ostensibly a well-made play, Renée subverts this dramatic tradition by avoiding denouement in the conclusion. The problems of the central female characters remain unresolved. Jeannie has lost her dream of becoming a dressmaker. Honoria has had a breakdown and never wears the dress that is being made for her throughout the play. Margaret May remains in the madhouse and we do not know if Martha re-discovers her Māori identity when she returns to the Mahia.

⁶⁹ Tompkins has pointed out that all the marriages in Jeannie Once are dysfunctional in one way or another: '[A]ll the marriages in the play are dreary, exploitative, and unhappy affairs (248).

⁷⁰ It is interesting to note that in Jeannie Once Renée adapts dramatic structure to enforce a subtext which questions the advantages of marriage for the female. Jeannie's attitude to marriage has remained ambiguous throughout. Even though she declares at the end of the play '[o]h we will be content, I know we will' (61) her statement has an air of forced gaiety. The final words of the script consist of a verse from a Robert Burns poem 'O Wert Thou In The Cauld Blast' (43) which has been passed between the female characters as a unifying motif throughout the text. The heterosexual love poem is used to represent the strength of the female bond. The text which is ostensibly structured in the tradition of the well-made-play breaks with that tradition to end in anti-climax.

⁷¹ In Breaking Out the protagonist Ruth also speaks of marriage in terms of a compromise which negates the self. When she tells her husband that she will '[p]robably' (36) leave him at the end of the play, she gives her reason: '[I]f you don't love yourself [. . .] then you've had it – you compromise yourself out of existence – [. . .] you have to want yourself – for yourself' (37).

In an interview Renée herself spoke of marriage in similar terms: 'The discovery, the admitting of my lesbian identity was not the reason I left my marriage. The reason I left was because I'd got sick of compromising, because I had got terribly damaged' (McCurdy 64).

Ruth lives in a 'small town' (20) where she and her friend are working to establish a women's centre, just as Renée had done with her friend in Wairoa after returning from the United Women's Convention. By the end of the play Ruth admits, 'for years I made valiant efforts to measure up to the unwritten rules about what a wife and mother should be' but that she 'couldn't ever do it properly.' She speaks of marriage as an imprisonment: '[Y]ou get twenty years for murder – marriage and kids are a life sentence' (36).

Ruth comes to articulate her true feelings after the two lesbians tell her how they have failed in their attempts at social conformity and are much happier with the lifestyle of 'the outer margin' than they ever were in conventional marriage in respectable Pakeha society. Jess admits 'I couldn't survive as me in the heterosexual set-up – but for years I thought I could.' Alix in turn adds, 'I came to myself through Feminism – worked all the time with women – loved it – met some lesbian women – one day knew that was where I wanted to be – had to be' (31). It is contact with 'the outer margin' of the lesbian community, therefore, that brings Ruth to self-realization. At the end of the play she tells her husband 'I've – woken up – and it wasn't a Prince Charming that did it' (36).

There is a strong sense in this unperformed play, with its clear autobiographical reference, that for some women the path to fulfilment lies in female bonding. The ideas that are expressed tentatively in Breaking Out, in terms of the need to re-write the traditional fairy tale, are expanded further in Dancing.

This play traces the life-long friendship of Josie and Lily. Both are dissatisfied in their long-standing marriages, but when Lily tries to leave her husband, Buster, (who beats her up from time to time (5)), he blackmails his wife into returning by claiming he will spill the beans that the friendship between Lily and Josie has a sexual dimension (9). This accusation is not true, but Lily has already admitted that she doesn't love her husband (8) and her strongest bond is obviously with her best friend. Lily returns to Buster for the sake of the children and abides by her

Renée's radio play Rugosa Roses are Very Hardy (1994) is about a marriage break up and another radio play Hard and Unfamiliar Words (1996) traces how a marriage falls apart, after the wife learns to become more independent.

husband's condition that she does not see Josie again. The friends are then separated for eight years (10) before they both decide to leave their respective husbands. Lily in the end paraphrases Renée's view of marriage as a 'health hazard': 'Like taking little slow sips of poison – knowingly – ugh!' (25). Eventually all the central female characters decide to set up house together, a solution which is described as 'a fairy-tale' (30).

In Dancing the desired 'fairy-tale' ending is allied to the image of the dance which forms a unifying motif in the script. The characters, who are all female, make the transitions between the various acting spaces by dancing the Maxina together. Same sex dancing becomes a representation of the women's rebellion against convention, which outrages the males and draws the attention of the media towards them.

All this takes place over a period of years, but by the time Josie's husband, Robert, dies Lily tells Josie 'I always loved you better than Buster,' to which Josie replies, 'I loved you better than Buster too' (26). In the end female companionship proves to be the preferred option:

The whole thing [the controversy over women dancing together] made us think about how women are stopped from enjoying each other's company. It's frowned on. All the things that are done in men's company are apparently okay but not okay if done in women's. It's not just dancing – but that symbolised it (17).

The original title of this play was Dancing With Ladies. In Heroines, Hussies and High High Flyers female bonding is also symbolized by females dancing together (17-18). Similarly, Belle's Place ends with same sex couples dancing together as an expression of their sexual preference (83-84).

In discussing Renée's exploration of the various aspects of 'the female margin' I return now to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's key question '*can the subaltern speak?*,' which she originally employed to describe the position of the doubly marginalized indigenous female in a white dominated society (25). It is perhaps inevitable that writers such as Renée, as the authentic representatives of such a

'*subaltern*,' once they do begin to '*speak*,' tend to idealize those who, like themselves, have been traditionally marginalized and vilified. Renée's own life, as well as her writing, embodies all the aspects of Homi Bhabha's wider definition of the traditionally 'oppressed' and 'silenced' representatives of the doubly marginalized: '[W]omen, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities' (936). She is the first New Zealand playwright to give persistent 'voice' to four facets of this 'outer margin' –females who are working class, Māori and/or lesbian. In this respect she resembles the early feminist poet and critic Adrienne Rich, who was born in the same year as Renée and who has had a demonstrable effect on her writing. Rich is female, lesbian and from an ethnic minority that has a tradition of being discriminated against: she is Jewish.

In an influential paper delivered in 1975 Rich spoke disparagingly of the effects of what she termed 'compulsory heterosexuality':

[T]he institution of heterosexuality has forced the lesbian to dissemble, or be labeled a pervert, a criminal, a sick or dangerous woman, etc., etc. The lesbian, then, has often been forced to lie [. . .]

Heterosexuality as an institution has also drowned in silence the erotic feelings between women. I myself lived half a lifetime in the lie of that denial. [. . .]

When a woman tells the truth she is creating the possibility for more truth around her ('Women and Honor' 36).

Renée also 'lived half a lifetime' without articulating her lesbian self, but once this '*subaltern*' did begin to '*speak*' she has laboured to articulate 'the erotic feelings between women' which have previously been 'drowned in silence.'

Renée's work displays a painful awareness of the powerful backlash that patriarchy can inflict on women who are 'labeled' as being lesbian. In Belle's Place, the protagonist, Belle, who is sixty, tells how she was incarcerated in a mental institution by her father (34-35) after he had seen her holding her girlfriend's hand (62) and how in the hospital those who were 'labeled' as

‘deviant’ were given a ‘test’: ‘They put you in with another one to see what you do. So of course you talk real rough to the other one, try to get her to see the error of her ways [. . .]. I did fine. But the other. She killed herself’ (35).⁷²

Belle speaks of the persecution of lesbians in a previous generation, but Rich, in a speech delivered in 1977, said that she believed recrimination against lesbians continues and is the more extreme because it threatens patriarchy: ‘Much as the male homophobe hates the male homosexual, there is a far deeper – and extremely well-founded – dread in patriarchy of the mere existence of lesbians’ (‘The Meaning of our Love for Women’ 224). The male dread of the lesbian is frequently portrayed in Renée’s work. Often this sexual preference, which is accepted as being part of the human condition by the female characters, produces a violent reaction from the males, accompanied by the term ‘dyke,’ which is wielded as an insulting weapon.

At the end of Setting the Table, for example, an enraged husband and his ‘mate’ break into the house of the female characters and threaten them with a knife. Once again the attackers are supported by a patriarchal institution. They have found the address after another ‘mate’ in the Traffic Department traced the women on the computer. The attack, which results in Con being hit by one of the men in the stomach and on the side of the head so that she falls to the ground, happens only after the women have been ‘labeled’ a ‘[b]loody lot of man-hating dykes’ (48-51). Even more chilling is the plot of ‘Tiggy Tiggy Touchwood’ where one of the central characters, Tig, who was once a schoolteacher, was driven insane when she was gang-raped because she is a lesbian. The men have never been charged because no-one in the community has been willing to identify the attackers (77-78).

Rich remarks that the ‘dread’ of lesbians is shown to be ‘extremely well-founded.’ I have already pointed out how Renée illustrates this in texts such as Breaking Out, where contact with lesbians persuades women to consider leaving their husbands. Once again in this script there is a violent male backlash. The lesbian

⁷² Similarly Spike in Born To Clean is placed in the madhouse for being honest about her sexual preference (43-44).

women have to boil a kettle as a 'weapon' to fend off the male threat of attack (12) and later their car tyres are slashed (25) after they have been 'labeled' as 'a couple of dykes.' The men, however, despite their aggressive macho behaviour, are shown to be very insecure sexually. Mac fears that Alix and Jess plan to seduce his wife (19) and Ruth's husband Paul grabs hold of Alix when he finds her comforting his wife. Alix, in retaliation, threatens to break Paul's little finger (22).⁷³

Despite the open warfare between male and female that is displayed in these plays, Renée's plea as a writer in the end is for the right of the individual to live as an accepted member of society with the partner of their choice.⁷⁴ Born to Clean charts the friendship of three girls called Amanda from their early schooldays. One of their number likes to be known by her brother's name, Spike. When Spike grows up she tells her friends 'I don't like boys. I like girls [. . .] I don't want to do it with boys!' (29) but her honesty is rewarded by their rejection of her (30). Eventually, however, the three are re-united and at the end of the play they decide that the strength of their friendship is based on the fact that they don't have to lie to each other (64). To re-iterate Rich's words, '[w]hen a woman tells the truth she is creating the possibility for more truth around her'.⁷⁵

⁷³ The lesbians in Setting the Table and Breaking Out retaliate against male violence. In Asking For It in the persona of the mother Renée states 'when people fight back they're usually called names. Like [. . .] bitch, dyke, feminist' (1). Another retaliation that the playwright makes to the derogatory connotation associated with the word 'dyke' is to create a celebratory 'superdyke' in her revues What Did You Do In The War Mummy? (6) and Asking For It (31-32). In an interview with Williams Renée said that the word 'superdyke' had never been spoken on the New Zealand stage before and that 'every time the character appeared she was greeted with roars of laughter and approval from the audience' (Personal Interview 14 Feb. 1999).

⁷⁴ In Heroines, Hussies and High High Flyers which was commissioned by Zonta and the Otago Early Settlers Museum to celebrate Suffrage year in 1993 and which played to matinees of schoolchildren, Renée makes a plea that all aspects of women's experience be accepted as being part of the human condition. She introduces the historical character of Amy Bock, who cross dressed and married a woman, with the statement '[t]here have always been women who dressed as men' (60). Over a decade earlier Fiona Farrell, in In Confidence: Dialogues with Amy Bock (1982), had re-created the character of this confidence trickster on the stage.

Perhaps the nearest Renée's plays come to displaying a general acceptance in society towards the lesbian condition is to be found in a passing reference which is made in a play written for radio Dreaming In Ponsonby. While the central married couple are wrangling John tells his wife 'you don't have to worry about Kate, she's not interested in men' (5). Kate is well-liked by both parties and her sexual preference is not an issue.

⁷⁵ Other plays, such as Belle's Place, which is set in 1988, before the passing of the Homosexual Law Reform Act, make it clear that society as a whole does not yet display the tolerance that is to be found among the central characters of Born To Clean. The title of Belle's Place refers to the house Belle keeps where gay people can go to be themselves away from the public gaze. When

'Telling the truth' for feminist writers such as Rich and Renée presents a problem because of the centuries of repression of the female point of view. In a groundbreaking lecture delivered in 1971 "When We Dead Awaken": Writing as Re-Vision,' Rich drew attention to the fact that in literature the world has traditionally been interpreted according to the male gaze (10-29). In another talk given in 1983 she recognizes that women writers now need to redress the balance: 'Women have understood that we need an art of our own: to remind us of our history and what we might be; to show us our true faces, including the unacceptable; to speak of what has been muffled in code or silence' ('Blood, Bread, and Poetry' 56).

In her poem 'Diving into the Wreck,' in the anthology of the same name (162-164), Rich expresses women's experience of a past that 'has been muffled in code or silence' in the metaphor of the sunken wreck which she alone is exploring. Renée concludes Setting the Table by quoting the last stanza of this poem:

We are, I am, you are
by cowardice or courage
the ones who find our way
back to this scene
carrying a knife, a camera
a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear (55)

Both Renée's female characters and her own creative process reflect the complex metaphor of this passage. On the one hand, like the women in Wednesday To Come, they stoically survive somehow the hardships of the political context in which they find themselves, even whilst recognizing that they are on the losing side. At the same time Renée is holding up 'a camera' to present the image of previously unrecorded female history on the stage. Sheila in Setting the Table

Belle's sister Laura comes to stay, however, Belle divides herself and her friends from her sister by laying down a rope which bisects the stage. At the end of the play the rope barrier is still intact, symbolising the divide between the gay and the heterosexual communities in New Zealand.

(literally 'carrying a knife') becomes, on the other hand, the representation of an increasingly violent female retaliation against the oppression of patriarchy. Moreover, Renée is painfully aware that all women can allude only to 'a book of myths' in which, more often than not, their 'names do not appear' – as Sheila also illustrates when she can only express a sense of failure in women like herself by alluding to the genre of the traditional fairy tale: 'So even my fairy tales don't have a happy ending? I mean to hell with the handsome prince etcetera but never to win – ever' (48).

Renée in New Zealand, like Rich in the U.S.A., is in the process of developing a new mythology, couched in images through which women can express their particular experiences of life. Like Rich, Renée and the characters she creates illustrate that this can only be achieved by mixing stoicism with rebellion. Rich summed up this blend of tolerance and remonstrance in the title of a book of poems written in 1981, the year in which Renée wrote Setting the Table: A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far. Referring to this phrase in an interview in 1984 Renée remarked that 'of all epithets' this one 'most accurately portrays' her 'own experience of life' (Van Grondelle 19).

D: CONCLUSION

I have already noted that Renée has defined herself as a 'lesbian feminist with socialist working class ideals' (Warrington 75). She has been included in this thesis because she is the first New Zealand playwright to write from a consistently feminist point of view. Throughout her oeuvre she focuses on the female perspective and expresses her belief in the positive effects of female bonding. Renée's intent, from the beginning of her playwriting career, has been to create 'very good parts for women' (Hall, 'Writing the Wrongs' 33). Although Mason and Thompson also wrote 'very good parts for women,' Renée was the first to produce a body of plays which concentrates attention entirely on 'the outer margin' that is female.

Although women are not numerically a minority, both Spivak and Bhabha categorize them as members of the traditionally 'silenced' and 'oppressed' members of the doubly marginalized in relation to the Eurocentre. When Renée first started writing plays she found that the suppression of the female 'voice' also extended to the New Zealand stage: '[T]here were hardly any plays about women' (McCurdy 65).⁷⁶

Renée, like the other playwrights in this thesis, identifies a two-tiered concept of 'the margin.' In relation to 'the margin' of New Zealand she, like Mason, Baxter and Thompson, habitually sets her plays in the country of her birth and concentrates on New Zealand social issues.⁷⁷ Although Mason (by means of his theory of '*the wild*' and '*the garden*') and Baxter (by means of his theory of the 'Just City' and the 'Unjust City') both, in their different ways, advocate the superiority of 'the outer margin,' both, nevertheless, produce some of their finest

⁷⁶ In 1984 Thompson pointed out that there were very few good roles for women in New Zealand drama, particularly in relation to political subject matter: 'I began reflecting on the structure of the theatre and the role of women in it. I realised that political plays, as they were written at the time [in the early 1970s] tended to be mainly male plays' ('Theatre and Working Class Politics' 21). Howard McNaughton quotes Bruce Mason as saying that The Pohutukawa Tree was written with the intention to write 'a great part for an actress' (Bruce Mason 27).

⁷⁷ Thompson's Brecht in Exile and Renée's O It Ain't All Honey and It Ain't All Jam are their only plays which are not set in New Zealand. The former is about the German playwright Bertolt Brecht and the latter is about the English actress Gertrude Lawrence, neither of whom ever set foot in New Zealand.

drama in their portraits of ‘the inner margin,’ the mimic of the Eurocentre. Renée and Thompson, by way of contrast, focus their attention largely on ‘the outer margin.’ In Renée’s play Jeannie Once, for example, the influential Larnach family, which represents respectable Pakeha middle class New Zealand, is mentioned only in passing (33-35) whereas the action focuses on the working class.⁷⁸

Neither Thompson nor Renée feels the necessity to borrow the mythology of the Eurocentre in order to validate their various portraits of ‘the outer margin,’ preferring instead to mythologize New Zealand’s own previously unearthed past. Writing a generation after the groundbreaking work of Mason and Baxter, Thompson and Renée find it less troublesome to reject ‘The Kiwi Cringe’ as the second generation of rebellious playwrights becomes more confident of their own national identity.

What distinguishes Renée’s work from Thompson’s, however, is the fact that she explores a much wider range of female working class experience than had previously been seen on the New Zealand stage. In Wednesday To Come, which is set in the Great Depression, two of the central characters are the thirteen-year-old Jeannie and her great-grandmother Granna. Granna is one of the rare examples of an old lady in New Zealand theatre not to be played entirely for laughs⁷⁹ and Jeannie was the youngest working class female to appear on the New Zealand stage at the time when the play was written. Renée is intent on presenting a wide female perspective of New Zealand history and on creating a

⁷⁸ Jeannie Once is set in Dunedin and one of the city’s most famous citizens is William Larnach (1838-1898), a wealthy businessman and banker who was elected to Parliament to represent the city in 1876. Jeannie Once is set in 1879 and in this year Larnach was awarded the C.M.G. (Scholefield 485).

⁷⁹ Renée remarked in her interview with Warrington how Granna is an original creation: ‘[Granna is] I think the first old woman to be presented on the stage in New Zealand in a way that shows her as a strong character. She’s actually necessary to the script – she’s not just there for comic or tragic relief’ (83).

Renée is particularly successful in capturing the female ‘voice’ on the stage. John Thomson, in his review of the first production of Wednesday To Come at Downstage considered Granna to be ‘a splendid invention’ (‘Wednesday to Come’ 57). George Webby, who directed that production, recalls one of the audience whispering to her companion, ‘That’s just how our Gran talks’ (George Webby Personal Interview 5 Nov. 2005).

mythology and a series of images by means of which all women can express their point of view of the world.

Renée pays much more attention than the other playwrights in this thesis to the physical and emotional abuse of the female by the male, which she highlights throughout her oeuvre. The subject of domestic violence, for example, which had been broached by Mason, Thompson and Baxter, is debated at much greater length in Setting the Table.⁸⁰ Similarly, the subject of incest, which Baxter introduced and Thompson considered in passing, is returned to persistently in Renée's writing.

Thompson is the first to place physical combat between male and female on stage and in his plays, as in Mason's, abused women give as good as they get. In Renée's Setting the Table and Breaking Out men and women also come to blows and she, too, portrays women as being capable of defending themselves. In Renée's oeuvre, however, the enemy is always patriarchy, which is often represented by an off-stage, threatening and potentially abusive presence. It is almost always the male acting either individually, or collectively within a patriarchal institution, which thwarts the aspirations of the female placed centre stage.

Although Mason, Baxter and Thompson all express sincere disapproval of the prejudice against Māori in New Zealand society, they all write about Māori rights as Pakeha. Just as Renée writes about the female perspective from personal experience, so she is also the first female Māori dramatist to represent 'the outer margin' of her own race.⁸¹ She breaks new ground in New Zealand theatre in her

⁸⁰ Domestic violence is just as much of a social problem in New Zealand today as it was when Renée first discussed the subject in 1981. Donna-Marie Lever reported on One Network News on 8 May 2006 that domestic violence is still on the increase. Three thousand cases of battered women were documented in 2005 and there has been a sharp rise in domestic violence callouts. She also commented that the forty-seven Women's Refuge houses in New Zealand are 'bursting at the seams' so that some women have to be located in hotels or even sent overseas.

⁸¹ Harry Dansey's Te Raukura (1972) and Rore Hapipi's Death of the Land (1975) are examples of plays by Māori playwrights which were performed before Renée began writing drama. Roma Potiki in the Introduction to He Reo Hou the first printed collection of plays by Māori playwrights (which was first published in 1991) notes that even in that decade although 'the environment for Maori playwrights and actors and theatre practitioners' had 'improved' it was still 'neither safe nor stable.' She acknowledges The Depot, which opened in 1983 and which became Taki Rua, as

portrayal of women who, like herself, being part-Māori, inhabit a no-woman's-land of cultural identity, being entirely at home in neither the world of the Māori nor that of the Pakeha.

Both Mason and Baxter had campaigned for gay rights but only a tiny minority of their characters are gay. Renée's work is groundbreaking in New Zealand theatre in this regard. Not only is a substantial proportion of her characters lesbian; in her plays they are often the central characters.⁸² Mason's Blood of the Lamb, first performed in 1980, is New Zealand's first play to place a lesbian relationship centre stage, but despite Mason's impassioned plea for tolerance, his central characters are isolated from the community in which they live. Moreover, Mason stretches the credibility of his audience, asking them to believe that no-one in their community, including the couple's own daughter, has surmised that the cross-dressed protagonist is a woman. It can be argued that in this respect Mason has written a play which is fundamentally flawed.

Renée's plays, however, portray the lesbian lifestyle as an option that is by no means atypical. Setting the Table, for example, which was written only a year after the first production of Blood of the Lamb, shows the four central characters living as lesbians in New Zealand suburbia and making an important contribution to the community in which they live. At the same time Renée's work persistently points to the backlash that is likely to result if women, particularly part-Māori and lesbian women, assert their democratic rights in defiance of a powerful patriarchy.

providing 'the main base for virtually all Maori productions in the Wellington region since its founding' (12). Renée has written plays for this theatre.

⁸² The theatre historians Trevor R. Griffiths and Carole Woddis emphasize that 'lesbian theatre [. . .] has always had a hard struggle to exist' (215). Even in 1991, when their Bloomsbury Theatre Guide was published, they pointed out that lesbian theatre had 'yet to break into the mainstream with any force' (216).

Judith Dale has also noted that Renée's central characters are often lesbians: 'Lesbian couples and characters are significant in many of Renée's plays: peripherally in Setting the Table, more fully in Breaking Out, covert in Dancing, thematic in Groundwork, and entirely dominant in Belle's Place' (175). Belle's Place has never been performed.

Other New Zealand feminist works, however, include lesbian characters. Examples are Hilary Beaton's Outside In (1982), Fiona Farrell's Bonds (1984), Stephanie Johnson's Accidental Phantasies (1984) and Lorae Parry's Strip (1986). In addition Rosie Scott's Say Thank You to the Lady (1985) has a lesbian love theme.

Renée is the first Caliban of New Zealand drama in the strictest sense of the metaphor devised by Mannoni. In Renée's interpretation, however, Prospero represents not only the authority of the Eurocentre but also the patriarchy of 'the inner margin.' Like Caliban, Renée challenges all Prosperos as she, in Mannoni's words, displays a 'will of [. . .] [her] own' and 'claim[s] to be a person in [. . .] [her] own right' (117), as she advocates the superiority of the individual components of the four-fold 'outer margin' that is female, working class, part-Māori, and lesbian.

A memory of Renée's own mother, which forms an important motif in her work and is quoted in the title of this chapter, becomes a metaphor for the various representations of 'the outer margin' in this playwright's oeuvre. In this image of the mother who weeded carrots for sixpence an hour, as in Renée's own writing, the focus is on the working class female, while the male is noticeable by his absence. The mother represents the work ethic of the working class as well as its history, which was, at the time of Renée's childhood, still largely untold. At the same time patriarchy, although offstage, poses a constant threat not only to the solo mother who is trapped in a life of hard work for very little return, but also to her daughter, who will one day realize her lesbian identity. Meanwhile, Renée, who like her mother is part-Māori, looks on, taking note of all these injustices which will one day be revealed in a Wednesday To Come.

In keeping with this aspiration, Renée's oeuvre challenges the traditional relationship between the Eurocentre and its mimic 'the inner margin' and those who have been traditionally relegated to a position of powerlessness on 'the outer margin.' In Wednesday To Come a skilful manipulation of the symbols of the mouth organ and the hammer predicts the waning influence of patriarchy. Renée also promises that women are in the process of assuming a more proactive role in society, and that their point of view will increasingly be heard, as 'voice' is passed from male to female. By means of titles such as Setting the Table and Wednesday To Come, Renée suggests that this work is still in progress and continues to ask

her challenging question ‘why the fuck can’t we have that dream, that was the one I wanted’⁸³ (Warrington 82).

⁸³ Even in a play written for young audiences, Pink Spots and Mountain Tops, the heroine, Annabel, who is in a wheelchair, wants to climb to the top of Mount Aoraki. She refuses to give up on the seemingly impossible dream and eventually does achieve it, even though in order to do so she has to be carried on the back (40) of a North Island Pink Spotted Purple Dotted Dancing Moa (5) who has flown a plane to take her there (38). As she leaves for the mountain Annabel appeals to Doctor Mendbones, who has tried throughout the play to thwart her aspirations: ‘I must go. I must follow my dream [. . .] It’s what I want’ (37). Significantly Annabel can only achieve her goal with the help, support and self-sacrifice of her best friend Milly.

CHAPTER 5

ROBERT LORD: THE BOY WELL HUNG

A: '[T]HE GRASS ISN'T GREEN. THE LAND IS BROWN. [. . .]
TIME MADE THE GROUND DRIER. TIME.'

1 INTRODUCTION

Robert Lord was born in 1945, so he is the youngest of the writers in this discussion. Lord, like Bruce Mason, came from a comfortably-well-off middle class family. His parents were both born in New Zealand. His father, Dick, earned a living as a banker, and his mother, Bebe, did not go out to work after she was married (Bebe Lord E-mail to the author). Due to his father's occupation, the family moved to various locations, which covered the length of New Zealand. Lord attended primary school in Hamilton and Auckland, intermediate school in Hamilton and secondary school in Invercargill (Bebe Lord E-mail to the author), where his father had been appointed manager of the Invercargill branch of the Bank of New Zealand (Stodart 25).

Bebe Lord emphasizes that they were a family of keen gardeners:

The Lords made gardens in every house [. . .] a roof garden in the Hamilton house, a stone terrace in Invercargill. They always collected native trees culminating in the extensive garden Dick and Bebe made in their Meadowbank, Auckland house when Dick retired. [. . .] Both boys¹ were very interested in garden making activities (Bebe Lord E-mail to the author).

An interest in literature was also a family tradition. Lord's great-grandfather on the maternal side, G.J. Garland, was a member of the Legislative Council, who

¹ Robert Lord's older brother is called Richard.

also wrote books on birds and kept an elaborate diary.² Dick Lord was also a literary-minded man who wrote poetry. Lord's mother recalls that her son displayed an interest in writing from childhood and that this was allied to a penchant for public performance: 'From the age of seven he was always writing stories at home, writing about people. He liked to have an audience for them' (Bebe Lord E-mail to the author).

Lord, like all the other writers in this thesis, was a natural intellectual and gained an Arts degree from Victoria University of Wellington after studying at Otago University for two years. He trained as a teacher at Wellington College of Education (Bebe Lord E-mail to the author) and then became a primary teacher in Petone (Cooke 25) in order to pay off his bond (Nonnita Rees Personal Interview 3 Dec. 2005).

In 1969, when he was twenty-four, he won the Katherine Mansfield Young Writers' Award (Beresford 46) with a short story entitled 'Mrs. Weeve' (Bebe Lord E-mail to the author). Lord's writing ability, therefore, like James K. Baxter's, was acknowledged at an early age. In an interview towards the end of his career, he told Rosemary Beresford that it was by means of the Katherine Mansfield Young Writers' Award that 'he discovered that he could write and, more importantly, that others liked what he wrote' (46).

Those who knew Lord in his early twenties recognized that his primary interests were writing and the theatre. George Webby, Nonnita Rees and Sunny Amey all met him for the first time at Downstage.³ Webby says that Lord was a young man who was 'obviously very interested in the theatre' and that, while training to be a

² Lord typed out his great-grandfather's diary, which is now housed in the Hocken Library.

³ George Webby says that after they first met he and Lord became 'firm friends' and that Lord then worked as a stage manager on several of his productions including Edward Albee's *A Delicate Balance* and Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (George Webby Personal Interview 5 Nov. 2005). Nonnita Rees, who worked at Downstage when it had just moved into The Star Boating Club, also recalls Lord being 'around the place.' At that time he was also in the first intake of her husband's newly initiated drama course at Victoria University of Wellington and he stage managed Euripides' 'The Bacchae,' which her husband, Phil Mann, directed (Nonnita Rees Personal Interview 3 Dec. 2005). Sunny Amey, who formed the first Company at Downstage, recalls meeting Lord at The Star Boating Club when she returned to New Zealand, after working in English theatre for twelve years, at the end of 1970. She remembers that Lord was 'very much part of that scene' and that he also stage managed for her (Sunny Amey Personal Interview 26 Nov. 2005).

teacher 'worked to a degree,' he 'really wanted to be a writer' (George Webby Personal Interview 5 Nov. 2005). Lord, however, like all the other playwrights in this discussion, found it very difficult to earn a living as a writer or in the theatre and, like Mason, Baxter, Mervyn Thompson and Renée, he worked at a variety of blue collar as well as white collar jobs. Besides teaching, he was also at various times an insurance agent, a journalist, an oil rigger, a car mechanic, a cosmetic salesman and a freezing worker ('The Author,' Moody Tuesday n. pag.).

He began writing plays in 1970 ('The Author,' Moody Tuesday n. pag.) after deciding that the theatre presented more opportunity than other genres for the New Zealand writer (Amey 7; Beresford 46). He was already working at Downstage, mostly on a voluntary basis, when the Chairman of the Arts Council, Bill Sheat, offered him two hundred dollars to take a holiday and write a play (Beresford 46). The result was 'It Isn't Cricket' (1971).

During the next three years Lord had a surge of creative activity, writing plays for both stage and radio and quickly establishing his reputation as a promising New Zealand playwright. 'It Isn't Cricket' was followed by his first radio play Moody Tuesday (1972), which won the Prix Italia in that year. Friendship Centre (1972) was also recorded for radio and televised in 1973. 'Balance of Payments' (1972) was first performed at Unity Theatre and 'Meeting Place' (1972) at Downstage. Nativity (1973) was put on at the Theatre Co-op in Auckland in the next year. Lord's first commercial success Well Hung (1974) was premièred at Downstage and in the same year Heroes and Butterflies (1974) was produced at the Mercury in Auckland.

In 1974 also, Lord was given a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council travel bursary (44). He had intended to spend six months in the U.S.A. and six months in Britain before he returned to New Zealand (Lord, 'Symposium of N.Z. Playwrights Abroad' 298), but his plans were changed when he went to a conference in Connecticut and discovered a theatre performing Well Hung.⁴ An agent offered to represent him and he emigrated to America (Beresford 46).

⁴ Lord left New Zealand in July 1974 (Coke, 'Ten Years On' 25) and travelled first to a playwrights' conference in Australia. Well Hung was being staged in Sydney and Lord met

Lord's plays display no attachment to any New Zealand landscape. On the contrary, his work is remarkable for its detachment. The playwright might tell us – in Bert and Maisy (1983), for example – that the setting is 'a small town in New Zealand' (6) but we don't know which town. Howard McNaughton in The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English writes that displacement is one of Lord's 'dramatic idiosyncrasies' which occurs in 'almost all' of his plays when 'the audience is deprived of a precise positioning of the action in time and place' ('Drama' 357).

This sense of detachment applies not only to his nominally New Zealand plays. Three of Lord's plays are set in the U.S.A. Two of these have settings in New York, where he lived for seventeen years. The Travelling Squirrel (1994) moves between places in Manhattan such as Central Park and an 'Upper West Side Apartment' ('Setting' The Travelling Squirrel n. pag.). Glorious Ruins (1991) also takes place in a variety of locations in Manhattan ('Setting' Glorious Ruins n. pag.).⁵ These scripts, however, give little sense of the precise urban landscape in which they are set. Similarly, China Wars (1987), which is located in a 'small town [. . .] in a remote corner of New England' ('Setting' China Wars n. pag.), gives the impression that the action could take place in any small town. The resolution to identify the individuality of a particular New Zealand location and to mythologize it is integral to Mason's, Baxter's and Thompson's oeuvre, and, whilst Renée's work displays a less intimate sense of the landscape of Hawke's Bay, where she spent her childhood, it is possible to identify her settings. This sense of specific location simply does not exist in Lord's oeuvre.

Arthur Ballet, then head of the office of advanced drama research at the University of Minnesota. He attended a Eugene O'Neill Playwrights' Conference in Waterford, Connecticut and then travelled across America. During this time Ballet brought Well Hung to the attention of the Artistic Director of the Trinity Square Company (Nicolaidi 4). Lord attended a performance of this production in Providence, Rhode Island, where he met Gilbert Parker, who became his agent. Parker then became instrumental in having 'Meeting Place' produced at the New Phoenix Repertory Company, one of the major rep companies in the U.S.A. (Carvello 28). It was this chain of events which persuaded Lord to stay in America (Coke, 'Ten Years On' 25).

⁵ In May 1975 Jim Carvello interviewed Lord and reported that the playwright had been living in America for ten months. The interview 'took place in a rambling, five-room, underfurnished apartment' which Lord was renting 'just one block from Central Park, Manhattan' (28).

This playwright, therefore, is very different from the other writers discussed in this thesis with respect to setting. Lord is much more interested in writing plays as vehicles to explore human interaction than he is in context. He writes with the deliberate intent of experimenting with different dramatic structures, as he confirmed in one of his rare interviews: 'I don't want to go on repeating myself. So one should be constantly trying different things' (Amey 9).

All the writers in this analysis so far have written at length and talked in detail about their childhood and adolescence, and this has enabled me to discuss how autobiographical circumstances have determined their points of view of the New Zealand world. Once again Lord is the exception. In the few interviews he did give he made little reference to his personal life. Both Mason and Thompson people their plays with characters drawn from life: in particular they create theatrical portraits of their parents. Baxter's semi-autobiographical novel Horse contains thinly disguised characterizations of his parents and both Baxter and Renée draw upon a strong sense of family history in their work. By contrast, autobiographical elements in Lord's plays seem at first sight to be non-existent.

What all this amounts to is that this playwright, for whatever reason, displays detachment. Webby, who taught Lord as a student and who worked with him in the theatre, observes, 'it was said of Robert Lord that he had no heart' (Personal Interview 5 Nov. 2005). Amey made a similar remark to Lord in an interview: '[I]t has been said that your plays are a bit cold and lack heart.' In reply, Lord made a highly significant statement about his creative process:

I think that one of the things I do in writing plays is I think I go through a long process of removing things. When actors work on my scripts it is never things that they leave out. It is always things that they add in terms of phrases and things. I write very spare scripts normally. Try to remove extraneous matter. I think it can mean, especially when you read them, that they appear terribly cold (7).

Lord's habit of 'going through a long process of removing things' means that his most important messages are couched in subtext.

Apart from a return in 1987-88 to take up a Robert Burns Fellowship at Otago University, this playwright remained for the most part in America until the year before his death. In 1991 he returned to New Zealand to take up the position of writer in residence at the Fortune Theatre in Dunedin (Beresford 47). He also wrote his most acclaimed play, Joyful and Triumphant (1992) in that year. This play had been commissioned by Circa Theatre, Wellington several years before (Welch 47)⁶ and the first production was a great commercial success. Lord, however, died on 7 January 1992 (Cooke 25), just over six weeks before Joyful and Triumphant opened on 20 February ('First Performance' Joyful and Triumphant 6).

Although Lord is, in many respects, very different from the other writers in this thesis, he has been included in this analysis because he, like them, writes about the intrinsic value of 'the margin.' Whereas Mason, Baxter, Thompson and Renée approach 'the margin' directly to illustrate their point of view, Lord affirms it more obliquely.

As I have already pointed out, the Canadian critic Dennis Lee argues that for the colonized the most valid expression may lie in silence, once the writer comes to the realization that 'your authentic space does not have words' (quoted in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 141). I have already related this comment to the short stories of Frank Sargeson, and in particular to 'That Summer.' In this short story the young protagonist resorts to silence when he is unable to express his emotions and articulate a minority viewpoint which he knows is socially unacceptable. The theme of Sargeson's story is latent homosexuality. Similarly, Lord's affirmation of the superiority of this representation of 'the outer margin' is to be found in the silence of his subtext.

⁶ As early as 1987 it was reported that Lord was working on a play that had been commissioned by Circa Theatre about Christmas holidays in New Zealand spanning a forty-year period. At this stage the play was called Boxing Day (Hannan 17).

2 THE '*DIRTY MARK*' ON THE TABLECLOTH

Joyful and Triumphant, Lord's last play, opens with Mum laying the table for Christmas dinner. The focus on the shared meal is a critical characteristic of this play, as the playwright emphasizes in his Author's Note: 'The setting and clearing of the table is a continuous activity during which the action of one scene builds on that of the previous scene. The interval comes between the fourth and fifth scenes (1p.m. and 3p.m.) during which the meal would be eaten' (10).

The entire structure of Joyful and Triumphant consists of the Christmas Day dinner celebrations of the Bishop family, spanning a period of forty years: 'The first scene takes place in 1949, the last in 1989; the other scenes are scattered in between' (Joyful and Triumphant Author's Note 10). All the scenes in the play 'take place in the dining room of the Bishop home' (10) and the action revolves around the central married couple. A significant proportion of Lord's plays, like Joyful and Triumphant, have the long-standing relationship of a married couple at the centre of the plot. 'It Isn't Cricket,' 'Balance of Payments,' Moody Tuesday, Friendship Centre, Well Hung, Heroes and Butterflies, Bert and Maisy, China Wars and The Travelling Squirrel all fall into this category.

Within the traditional family unit, Lord emphasizes a strict division of labour based on gender. In Joyful and Triumphant Rose, the daughter of the middle-aged couple, points to the rigidity of these conventions: 'Mum does most of the cooking. Dad looks after the garden' (50). These behaviour patterns are then passed down through the generations. Early in the play Mum teaches her daughter how to prepare Christmas dinner: 'I'll make a Spanish cream. You can do the silver, your father can dig the potatoes and perhaps you can make a lovely big salad with tomato roses and sliced egg on top' (16).

Food is of vital significance in this playwright's oeuvre as a whole. I have already drawn attention to the fact that Lord's family were keen gardeners. The playwright uses this characteristic of his background to develop food into a metaphor, which then becomes a vehicle for the social commentary that is

contained within his subtext. By means of this metaphor the playwright explores considerations of nurture within the traditional nuclear family. In the Lord play the conventional family unit is central to of his commentary on 'the margin' of New Zealand society. Manipulating the metaphor of food, the playwright questions whether the lives of his respectable middle class characters are as comfortable as they might at first appear to be. The anticipation of pleasure in food, especially food prepared from fresh garden produce, is undermined by subsequent events. In the end the meal fails to fulfil its promise.

In Bert and Maisy both the husbands at the centre of the plot are obsessive gardeners. 'The garden takes all my time' (25), remarks Grant. Bert, in turn, is constantly planning to expand his vegetable patch: 'I'm thinking of putting in parsnips' (32). Both men provide the women with fresh produce as an essential ingredient of the shared meal. When Shona and Grant come to visit, Maisy directs her husband, 'get Shon some brussel sprouts. [. . .] We've got plenty' (31). When Grant and Bert return from a 'gander' at Bert's garden, Grant speaks admiringly of its fertility: 'Got you some lovely brussels, Shon. They're in the kitchen. Bert gave you some beans, too. [. . .] He's got oodles of them. Rows.' (35). When Grant first enters the play he boasts about his own prolific crop: 'My 'matoes [. . .] Dozens of them. Huge. This big.' (25).

In the end, however, the meal fails to fulfil its promise. The anticipated pleasure from the fresh produce is spoiled when Shona turns out to be a dreadful cook. Maisy anticipates the promise of the food – 'I love a cauliflower cheese' (32) – but the dish is ruined when the cauliflower that Grant supplies from his 'bumper crop' is served with Shona's lumpy sauce (32). Shona continues to dangle the promise of pleasure from another meal: 'Tomorrow's dinner. I've gone to so much trouble. Roast lamb. All the trimmings. Potatoes. Pumpkin. Parsnip. Peas. And chocky cake for dessert. Double layer. Jam in the middle. I'm serving it with cream' (59). Bert, however, is sceptical of Shona's promise and reveals that he is relieved that he and Maisy will not be there to eat the meal because Shona 'must be the worst cook in the world' (57). This statement is confirmed by the fact that nobody in the community will buy the marmalade that Shona makes for the 'bring and buy' stall. Bert quips that the reason for this is

because Shona's food is lethal: 'It's not fit for human consumption. We put it in the bird-feeder once. Killed two thrushes with one spoonful' (87).

Bert is obviously exaggerating here in the interests of his own particular brand of dry humour. What is important is that, by means of the medium of comedy aided by the metaphor of food, Lord is creating a subtext which questions the assumption that the conventional family unit of respectable Pakeha New Zealand society ultimately nurtures the people within it. The spoiled meal is indicative of a promise of fulfilment which fails to materialize.⁷

Similarly, in Moody Tuesday, another play set in an unnamed New Zealand suburb (10) with two juxtaposed couples in conventional marriages, Alice, one of the housewives, measures the quality of a meal by the variety of produce that her husband provides: '[S]he has been known to serve ten different vegetables at a single meal, not counting salads. [. . .] And all grown in their very own garden by her husband Terry' (3). The seemingly healthy fare that Alice serves up to her husband, however, ultimately fails to appeal. Even though it includes one of the cabbages from Terry's garden (40), the food still does not tempt his appetite: 'This pie is hideous' (41).

Likewise, in Joyful and Triumphant, as soon as Mum lays eyes on Dad on Christmas morning she orders him into the garden to provide her with fresh produce as an essential ingredient for the shared meal: 'I want nice new potatoes and a lot of mint' (20). The entire structure of this play rests on the anticipated pleasure in a series of Christmas dinners. The long promised meal is finally served in Act Four. At the end of the Act '*DAD enters*' triumphantly '*holding a large platter containing the roast. MUM and BRENDA follow behind DAD with platters of vegetables.*' The promise of plenty is emphasized once again by Brenda, the sister-in-law, '*serving vegetables onto the plate*' and exclaiming 'I'm going to give everyone something of everything' (56). Immediately after this Rose asks her mother if she is 'feeling all right' (56). What the audience does not know is that the stress of cooking the Christmas dinner over a hot stove in a

⁷ A similar idea is to be found in August Strindberg's 'The Ghost Sonata,' where the food that is served at the family table has no nourishment.

'scorcher' (45) has caused Mum to have a stroke. The next time she appears in the play she is '*confined to a wheelchair*' and '*cannot speak properly*' (65-66).

On that particularly hot Christmas Day in 1968 when the temperatures '[m]ust be in the eighties' nobody actually wanted a traditional Christmas dinner. 'We're going to die if we eat a big meal,' says Rose, who has already suggested to her mother that she break with tradition and prepare 'something cold,' but her mother 'wouldn't hear of it' (45). In the end adherence to rigid behaviour patterns that are no longer appropriate kills Mum. Once again the anticipated enjoyment of food is undermined by the subtext.

By manipulating the metaphor of food, Lord questions whether these rigid conventions, which result in repeated behaviour patterns, ultimately bring health or happiness to the people within the conventional family unit. In the very first speech of *Joyful and Triumphant*, Mum is horrified to discover a '*dirty mark*' (13) on her best tablecloth. Viewed in this light the discovery of the '*dirty mark*' at the beginning of this play assumes a much deeper symbolic significance. The stage directions state that once Mum '*notices a dirty mark*' she sets about '*showing the spot.*' In like manner the playwright is '*showing the spot*' as he exposes the flaws in the nuclear family tradition of New Zealand suburbia.

In *Bert and Maisy* the dialogue insists upon the fecundity of the crop to such an extent that the contours of the vegetables become imbued with sexual connotations. The suggestion in this play that this is the playwright's intent is confirmed in 'Balance of Payments,' which, typically of Lord's plays, sets four characters in the interior of a house in an unnamed New Zealand suburb (28). In this play Max is the male half of the middle-aged married couple around which the action revolves. Max's life is consumed by his care of his vegetables. In conversation with his long-standing partner, Mabel, Max's first long speech reveals his obsession:

I went outside early and I had a look at the brussels sprouts⁸ and the broccoli [. . .] And I watered the parsley and dug up a couple of

⁸ This is the spelling of the vegetable as it was printed in the Australian version of the text.

carrots which I washed under the tap [. . .] And I ate the carrots as I mowed the lawn. I like doing that. Eating carrots as I mow the lawn. [. . .] Every blade. The whole thing. In its entirety. Why now it's as smooth as a baby's bottom. And after I mowed the lawn I spoke with Mrs. Brown. [. . .] Mrs. Brown asked me in for a cup of tea. [. . .] So I went and we drank tea together and she showed me photos of Arthur. Her son Arthur (30).

Max even dreams about his garden. His subconscious world is landscaped with giant vegetables:

I dreamt about the broccoli and the brussels sprouts and all growing up like on the packet and growing bigger and bigger until they were as high as the trees down the road. And I built a hut in them, a great big hut in them, a great big hut suspended between the broccoli and the brussels sprouts, swaying in the breeze (31).

The sexual connotation of these images, the phallus being represented by the vegetables 'growing bigger and bigger' and the vagina by the 'great big hut [. . .] swaying in the breeze,' is verified in the same speech when Max discloses that in his dream he was having sex with the next-door neighbour: 'I took Mrs. Brown and I took Mrs. Brown. Right there between the two sprouts. And we had a baby that looked like her Arthur' (31).

With hindsight Max's seemingly innocuous description of his enjoyment as he 'ate carrots' while he 'mowed the lawn' until it was 'as smooth as a baby's bottom' is thus revealed to be by no means as innocent as it first appears. The association of the phallic 'carrots' allied to the simile of the baby indicates a subtext which suggests a forbidden desire. Whether this desire remains a wish or reaches fulfilment is not resolved by the text. The specific sexual details of Max's dream are counterbalanced by an ambiguity about the true nature of his relationship with his neighbour: 'Mrs. Brown asked me in for a cup of tea' (30). The implication, however, is of a covert erotic relationship, the details of which remain hidden. We are no longer sure if Max's account of him and his neighbour having 'tea' together is not a euphemism.

Whatever the nature of Max's relationship with Mrs Brown, clearly his garden has become for him a place of sexual displacement. Likewise, the obsession Bert and Grant have with the fertility and contours of their vegetables can be interpreted as a sign of dysfunction within their respective marriages. In yet another play, The Affair (1987), which, as its title suggests, is about multiple partnering, Lord also indicates that both the male and female characters anticipate displacement into the garden as an inevitable consequence of the long-term relationship. When her partner, Frank, tells her, 'I want us to have a life together,' Robin, the central female character, replies, 'I'm not ready to grow rhododendrons' (81). This couple never marry because their relationship is also dysfunctional.

A pair of dysfunctional marriages comprise the plot of Moody Tuesday, where the meals that Joanna serves up to her husband, Arthur, are shown to be part of a pretence of domestic content that the couple presents to the outside world. Joanna is, in reality, having an affair with her husband's best friend, Terry. In this play the metaphor of food is employed even more clearly to express the physical repulsion that the unfaithful wife feels in the presence of her husband: 'His manners are disgusting. He shovels in food. No wonder I hate cooking for him [. . .] He's getting jowly. A sweaty, pudgy, jowly man' (39).

Joanna's true feelings about her husband, however, are never revealed to him. She says what she really thinks as a soliloquy into the thought microphone.⁹ Similarly, in Joyful and Triumphant Brenda, Mum's daughter-in-law, finds an effectively covert way of expressing her true feelings about her husband, when she takes up pottery after her children have left home: 'You can throw the clay, think it's your husband, strangle it, no one knows the difference and you still end up with an ashtray' (46).

The female in the long-standing relationship in conventional middle class suburbia in Lord's plays is often a confined creature. Her main function is to cater for the material comfort of her partner and her children. Often, like Lord's

⁹ This technique can be used by the playwright because Moody Tuesday is a radio play.

own mother, she is a housewife with no paid employment. The function of her partner, on the other hand, is, or has been, to hold down a job. In Joyful and Triumphant Lord explains, when introducing his characters, that Mum's 'life has been devoted to maintaining a decent home for Dad and the kids' and Dad '[h]as worked for the Road Services division of the New Zealand Railways all his adult life' (11). Similarly, in Bert and Maisy, Bert is a retired carpenter in his sixties (6). He and Maisy have been together for 'donkey's years' (15) and for all their married lives they have lived in the same house that Bert grew up in as a boy. Although Maisy 'works a few hours each day in a chemist's shop' (6), throughout the action of the play we only see her in the household interior, performing domestic duties. Bert and Maisy, like Joyful and Triumphant, is set in one room of the home of the central married couple.

The restriction of the setting limits the central married couple's social life and they are often portrayed as mixing primarily with one other couple. In Joyful and Triumphant the Bishop family's most frequent visitor is their next door neighbour, Alice.¹⁰ In Bert and Maisy the characters of the title are juxtaposed with Shona and Grant, Maisy's niece and her husband, who appear to be their only regular visitors. Shona and Grant are a much younger couple, still in their thirties (6), but their lifestyle is becoming a replica of the life that has been lived by Bert and Maisy. Grant is 'up-and-coming in the insurance world' and very ambitious to gain promotion so that he can buy a house in which he and his wife can raise a family. When the action begins, Shona and Grant are still in a flat which they think is too small for a baby (96) but by the end of the play Grant has been promoted and he and his wife end up buying Bert and Maisy's house. The characters in these suburban interiors place great store on the acquisition of material goods which bring them physical comfort. In Bert and Maisy Bert boasts to his new guest about the snugness of the amenities he has built up in his house over the years: 'The beds are great. [. . .] firm mattresses. Clean sheets. Fluffy pillows. Once I'm in I never want to get out' (10).

¹⁰ Joyful and Triumphant is atypical of Lord's plays in being written for seven characters. His habitual choice is four, often juxtaposing two couples.

Lord's subtext contends that the dysfunction within the conventional family is caused by their refusal to accept the existence of a spiritual dimension to life. Added to this is their own inability to provide each other with emotional or sexual fulfilment.

In Joyful and Triumphant the celebration of Christmas is viewed by the characters entirely in terms of material plenty expressed in descriptions of the elaborate preparation of a meal. On the one hand, Alice, the Bishop family's neighbour, for example, has spent 'all last August making the centre-piece' (38) for her Christmas dinner table. Its construction is outlined in the stage directions. It is '*made of pine cones (frosted with white paint) and dried flowers, and has small china animals glued to it*' (36). Alice explains how much time has gone into it: 'There's a great deal of work in it. You have to paint the snow on each petal of pine cone individually' (38). On the other hand, the spiritual dimension of Christmas is dismissed out of hand, though characteristically Lord's serious social commentary is masked by comedy.

The play opens with Rose preparing to go to Church on Christmas Day after she has already been to 'the midnight communion' the night before. Mum actively discourages what appears to be a religious leaning in her daughter: 'That's quite enough for one Christmas. You don't want people thinking you're a fanatic' (14). In fact, Mum needn't have worried because the real reason why Rose has become such a regular Church attender is because she and her friend Esme are each competing for the attention of the new curate, Mr Deaker. Rose loses and is left on the shelf while Esme gets her man. Even after 'many' (81) children, however, Esme still fails to understand that her husband has a vocation. The marriage eventually breaks apart because Esme has no comprehension of life's spiritual dimension. She 'never liked the life' because her husband 'was always out looking after the sick and needy' (82).

Throughout Lord's scripts the focus on material plenty, like the emphasis on the elaborate preparations for the Christmas dinner in Joyful and Triumphant, acts as a counterpoint to an emotional aridity in the relationships between the characters. In Bert and Maisy the tragedy in the central couple's lives is that their only son

has walked out on them for no apparent reason. Ever since he left so unexpectedly, 'He's never written,' remarks Maisy bitterly, '[and] [h]e's not going to.' The only way his father and mother can cope with their loss is to 'forget all about him' (35). For this reason they have removed all trace of the son from their home: 'There is an absence of photos which might normally be found in the living room of a family home' (6). The subtext suggests that the reason for the boy's departure lies in his parents' assumption that there can be nothing in life other than material comfort: 'It wasn't our fault [. . .] We gave him every opportunity. He always had a hot breakfast' (34).

In addition to spiritual and emotional lack, there is also evidence of a lack of sexual fulfilment. In Joyful and Triumphant, in a moment of candour, Brenda lays bare to Rose the inadequacy of her sex life: 'Wanna Do It? Grunt, groan, it's over. I'm asleep' (45). Such frankness is rare in Lord's plays, which usually couch the real issues in subtext while the dialogue confines itself to the trivial and the superficial. Knowing she has broken social taboo by being so honest, Brenda immediately apologises: 'Sorry, it's sordid but true' (45). Likewise, in 'Balance of Payments,' Max, when speaking of the pleasure of his dream garden, suddenly unveils that for him, too, his long-standing marriage has become a 'sordid' reality. His surreal world has become a place of escape: '[A]way from all the filth and dirt of home, above the dust and flies' (31).

Placed in this context, the '*dirty mark*' that Mum discovers on the tablecloth at the beginning of Joyful and Triumphant, which she later re-defines as 'a filthy mark' (15), contains within it suggestions not only of physical grime but of moral blemish. Just like Mum, the playwright treats the metaphor of the '*dirty mark*' as 'a filthy mark,' as he goes on to expose a 'sordid' reality concealed beneath the seemingly healthy lifestyle of respectable Pakeha New Zealand society.

The process of unmasking this 'filthy mark' is most obviously displayed in the script of Well Hung. This play is loosely based on the unsolved murder case which resulted in the conviction of Arthur Allan Thomas and was the subject of

much public attention at the time the play was written.¹¹ In one sense, therefore, the piece is a whodunit. A closer examination of the script, however, reveals that beneath the seemingly light-hearted treatment of the material there lies a moral judgement of the double standards of morality in conventional small town New Zealand. In Well Hung the townsfolk indulge in sexual games devoid of all spiritual and emotional meaning.

Anthony Taylor directed the first production at Downstage, which was ‘hugely successful’ (Sunny Amey Personal Interview 26 Nov. 2005). Taylor interpreted the script as a farce; there are certainly farcical components within it and the many revivals of Well Hung have generally adhered to this interpretation. Amey, however, who at the time of the play’s first production was the Artistic Director of Downstage, feels that the work was written as a ‘serious comedy,’ though she also remarks that she has never seen it staged as such. She confirms her interpretation by recalling Lord’s reaction to Taylor’s production after the opening night: ‘Robert wept because he felt the play had not been done as he wanted it done – it was a disappointing night for Robert’ (Sunny Amey Personal Interview 26 Nov. 2005).

In Well Hung the two central characters, Bert and Trev, are both policemen. Bert is an honest cop. When the play opens he is admonishing Trev for using the police station to make a private sale of his car: ‘That’s plain dishonest and, besides, it’s illegal. You’ll end up in shit street’ (1). Bert believes himself to be a happily married man, when, in fact, his wife Lynette is not only having an affair with Trev, but is also pregnant by him. The real reason why Trev wants to sell his car is so that he can pay for Lynette to have an abortion.

Trev is proud of his sexual prowess and boasts about the size of his penis: ‘[E]ight inches isn’t to be sneezed at’ (5). Apart from Lynette, the unmarried Trev has had affairs with several of the other married women in the town, but according to him,

¹¹ Arthur Allan Thomas was convicted for the murder of Harvey and Jeanette Crewe at Pukekawa in 1970. The conviction was the subject of much controversy. A television programme on the case in 2006 stated ‘no other murder comes close to how it grabbed public attention’ (‘A Tale of Two Rifles’). Well Hung opened at Downstage in January 1974. Thomas’ case was re-opened in January 1975. His pardon in 1980 confirmed that he had been wrongly convicted twice.

his sexual behaviour is not unusual: '[H]alf the married people in town are fair game for a bit on the side – not to mention the group stuff' (11). The sexual games of the townsfolk are the subject of everyday conversation between Bert and Trev. When Bert introduces the subject of 'old man Matthew's daughter,' Trev responds with a juicy piece of gossip: 'They reckon she's having it off with Andy Wallace. He's got a couch out in the shed behind his butchery' (14).

The immorality of lifestyle in Well Hung is expressed by Lord in uncharacteristically vulgar language. Trev explains his personal problem to Bert as 'I've duffed up this bird and we need to do something quick' (2). When Smart, the detective, enters to solve a murder enquiry, he gives his impression of the town: '[A] hot bed for lechery, a pit of iniquity, a veritable breeding ground for jealousy' (33). Smart then goes on to describe the sexual habits of the townspeople as 'the game of musical beds' (33). Smart's apparent respectability, however, is in turn undermined when he, too, makes a pass at Lynette (63). This general lack of morality is underlined in the text by the motif of the sex organs. Trev speculates on the penis size of other men in the town (16) as well as making reference to his own: 'I could get a hard-on just looking at her' (23). Allied to this is the sexual innuendo such as that centering around 'pussy' (20, 25).

The subtlety of this playwright's expression of his moral stance is summarized in the play's title. What appears to be a reference to the male organ (reflecting Trev's boast about the size of his penis) is, in fact, a pun which predicts disastrous consequences. Discovery of his wife's affair drives Bert into a state of such despair that he shoots one of the murder suspects in his charge. In response, Smart, this time displaying his professional double standards, cleans Bert's weapon of fingerprints and arranges to have the gun, along with the dead man's driver's licence, planted in the garage of a local resident, ensuring that blame will fall on an innocent man.¹² The full force of the pun only becomes apparent in the

¹² A programme televised in New Zealand in 2006 reported that the police had fabricated evidence in the Thomas case. The planting of evidence which incriminated an innocent man has recently been confirmed ('A Tale of Two Rifles'). In 1974, however, when the play was first performed, Smart's actions would only have been speculation on behalf of the playwright, putting on stage rumours that were circulating widely in society at the time.

turning-point at the very end of the play: 'There is a crash from his office and Smart opens the office door. Bert is seen hanging.'

What Taylor interpreted as farce turns out, in the end, to be a morality play which warns the audience that promiscuous sex goes hand in hand with sudden death. Thus sex and death, as in the title of the play, become inextricably entwined. Lord's subtext implies that a lack of spiritual, emotional or sexual fulfilment leads to disastrous consequences.¹³

I have already quoted Lord's statement that an essential part of his creative process is to go 'through a long process of removing things.' As a result malaise is implied, rather than directly stated and the play's moral statements are relegated to the silence of the subtext. I have also already mentioned that during Lord's childhood and adolescence he lived in various towns throughout New Zealand. This background provided him with an intimate knowledge of New Zealand suburbia. So his custom of setting his plays in an unnamed location can be viewed as a subtextual suggestion that he considers that this malaise permeates suburbia as a whole, and by implication the whole of respectable Pakeha New Zealand society.

I have also already pointed out that, although Lord's own family were comfortably-well-off, he worked in a variety of blue as well as white collar jobs. This work experience enabled him to interact with the working class. He populates his suburbia with men in both blue and white collar jobs. Grant, in Bert and Maisy for example, works in insurance, whereas Dad in Joyful and Triumphant, although he ends his career as 'manager of the Road Services depot in the town' (11), has had to work his way up from the bottom. His 'first job was labelling luggage' and he 'labelled luggage for five years before they put me on the ticket counter' (35).

¹³ Well Hung was a script that Lord consistently re-worked. It first appeared as The Body in the Park, Lord's second play for radio, written in 1973. Another version entitled Cop Shop was produced in Canada in 1978. It was then re-written as Country Cops which was directed by Jane Waddell at Circa in 1985.

Lord's characters, unlike those of Thompson and Renée, display little class consciousness within their own circle and his plays represent New Zealand suburbia as a white egalitarian society. In the Lord play the family, like Lord's own, is materially well provided for. None of his work gives any indication of material poverty. The counterpoint to this plenty, however, lies in a sense of lack which is expressed in the subtext. Lord's characters frequently voice the sense that something is missing in their lives, though they are often at a loss to say exactly what it is. Brenda, in *Joyful and Triumphant*, summarizes the experience of many in this playwright's oeuvre when she describes her life as '[d]isappointing' (45).

An early Lord play, 'Meeting Place,' opens with the images of landscape which I have quoted in the title to this section, but the whole of the action is taken up with the emotional interplay between the central characters, who, typically of Lord, comprise two males, Arthur and Paul, and two females, Mary and Ros. The opening images, therefore, are a theatrical device by means of which the playwright draws a parallel between the increasing aridity of the landscape and the increasing aridity of the human relationships within it. The subtext suggests that, just as over time the fertility of the land has deteriorated, so over time the human relationships within it have become increasingly barren.¹⁴

There was a time when after it rained the water would lie on the surface of the ground for days before it drained away. Now quickly the water disappears and the land dries out [. . .] the grass isn't green. The land is brown. [. . .] As I watch time passing I realise things. [. . .] Time made the ground drier. Time (15).¹⁵

¹⁴ There appears to be an allusion here to T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' particularly in relation to the idea of the Fisher King and the curse which has fallen upon the land, for which the remedy has yet to be found. Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* also displays an overwhelming influence of this idea.

¹⁵ An early expression of similar ideas is to be found in *Mrs Weeve*, the short story Lord wrote in his early twenties, which won him the Katherine Mansfield award. Mrs Weeve is an old lady whose communication with other human beings has completely broken down as the years have passed. The emotional aridity of her life is paralleled with persistent images of a dry landscape. Mrs Weeve has become agoraphobic and at the thought of the ordeal of going to the shops, she sees 'outside' that 'the brown grass was just moist with dew. No rain, no sign, and the water getting lower' (2). As she travels on the bus into town the arid landscape 'that seemed just a naked slice, or chunk, lying brown, scorching and scorched' accompanies the remembrance of a husband who had not 'ever loved her' (4).

A similar eroding is to be found in Lord's frequent portrayals of long-standing marriage. At the beginning of 'Balance of Payments,' Mabel speculates tentatively, although she does not really want to admit, that something has gone wrong between her and Max: 'Has this, have those, are the glorious years over? The golden years gone? Is this relationship [. . .] deteriorating? Has it deteriorated?' (28).

Similarly, in Joyful and Triumphant there are signs that the seemingly happy marriage of the central married couple has gradually changed for the worse. Mum becomes a frequent churchgoer after Dad retires, but her daughter explains that this is not because Mum is religious but because she can no longer stand to be in Dad's company: '[S]he goes. To get away from him. She never showed any interest in church until Dad got his gold watch' (23).

In Friendship Centre, which, in typical Lord fashion, is set in the living room of a suburban New Zealand house, the middle-aged housewife, Sarah, who is also in a long-standing marriage, opens the play by telling the audience how she is feeling: 'I might very well be bored. Bored to tears, bored to the end of distraction. I'm amazed life can be so boring. Tedious' (2). Jan, who is the female half of the second couple that comprises the plot, reflects the same state of mind: 'Maybe I'm bored. There's no excitement in my life. I'd like to feel like a pioneer. To go somewhere new' (12).

This repetition of the same words and phrases, passed backwards and forwards between the characters, is characteristic of Lord's dialogue. Added to this, as I have already noted, is the focus on the trivial. 'It Isn't Cricket,' for example, opens with a discussion about a toothbrush (1). The dialogue mirrors the lifestyle of the characters; it is superficial and moves in endlessly repetitive circular patterns.

The condition of being 'tired' and 'bored' results in a lack of motivation, which is sometimes extreme enough to be classified as depression. In Friendship Centre the middle-aged married couple, Sarah and John, lack the energy to move house, even though it is obvious that this is the best financial decision that they can

make. The suburb where they live is full of immigrants and house prices are falling. They could have made a profit if they had sold their house earlier. At the end of the play they still show no signs of a shift. 'Perhaps we've settled for less. [...] Without knowing it' (29) is all the explanation that Sarah can give for their lack of motivation. The suggestion is, once again, that something essential has been lost over time.

Into this state of inertia, without warning or apparent reason, violence can suddenly erupt. McNaughton comments on this characteristic of Lord's plays: '[T]he vagueness of the action's location brings into sharp relief the use of sudden violent or assertive behaviour' ('Drama' 358). In Friendship Centre Jan, the more enterprising of the two females, who aspires to be a pioneer and has plans to travel (10), suddenly 'slaps Nat's face' (21). Her former partner, Nat, has obviously coped with such outbursts in the past. Rather than protesting he normalizes Jan's behaviour as 'only a slap,' whilst at the same time admitting '[i]t's happened before' (21). The explanation that Jan gives of herself is simply: 'I get so angry' (23).

Jan's reaction is typical of the characters in Lord's other suburban settings; they appear to be unable or unwilling to communicate with each other on any meaningful level and lack the strategies to cope with any strong emotion.¹⁶ In Friendship Centre Jan makes a fleeting but perceptive comment about how the characters conduct their lives: 'People just carry on. They don't like it if they are stopped and have to look at what they are doing' (23). A clue to the reason for Jan's aggression lies in the different attitudes expressed by the two central female characters, who are in a similar situation. Whereas Sarah suspects that she has 'settled for less' (29), Jan at least knows 'I'll get angry because I want more' (25). The subtext once again implies a sense of lack but, in Jan's case, interprets the outbreaks of violence as being prompted by the *realization* [my italics] that something essential is missing from life.

¹⁶ The superficiality of conversation, allied to sudden outbursts of violence, is characteristic of Pinter's plays and feature in The Birthday Party. Lord stage-managed the version of the play which Webby directed. Webby says that Lord was 'very related' to this play and he thinks that Pinter influenced Lord's style (Personal Interview 5 Nov. 2005). In Pinter, however, the threat comes from the outside, whereas in Lord the threat comes from within the traditional nuclear family unit.

The subject of abuse within the filial relationship is a characteristic of Lord's playwriting from the beginning. His first play, 'It Isn't Cricket' opens with the married couple 'at home' (1). Within the space of a few lines the emotional abuse in their relationship is revealed, after Jason has called Viv a 'bitch' and Viv has called Jason a 'pig' (1). Typically, the characters are unable or unwilling to address the reasons for the undercurrent of antagonism that has developed between them. Jason passes off his emotional cruelty to his wife a few lines later with 'I was just being witty' (1).

The ever-increasing aridity that Lord portrays in relationships appears to traumatize his characters. Bert and Maisy's focus on rigid behaviour patterns and their conversation, confined to well-trodden trivia, are designed to cover up the deeply felt grief caused by the loss of their only son. This strong emotion, however, is relegated to the silence of subtext, and is signposted by the stage direction '*after a beat.*'

For example, '*after a beat*' Bert remarks admiringly to his young guest, 'You know something, Tom? You've got a God-given talent' (80). Bert, who is a retired carpenter, has just taught Tom to make a bird feeder. He boasts to his visitors Shona and Grant: 'I didn't have to teach him a thing. He's a natural. [. . .] Tom designed it, built it, painted it' (79). The stage direction '*after a beat*' indicates the unspoken moment in which Bert considers that Tom might become a surrogate son. From the beginning of the play the audience has known that Bert's only son has his father's talent for carpentry. As soon as Tom enters the house, Bert points to the workmanship in a footstool and a nest of tables and then refers obliquely to 'a lad' who made them (9).¹⁷

I have already commented that theatre people who worked closely with Lord in his early days as a playwright observed that his plays 'are a bit cold and lack heart' or that their author 'had no heart.' One explanation for this could be that

¹⁷ Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and A Delicate Balance also contain references to a lost son which reverberate throughout the plays. As in Bert and Maisy this loss has affected the dynamics of the traditional nuclear family unit ever since. Lord stage-managed A Delicate Balance when Webby directed it for Downstage.

Lord is portraying the respectable middle class as a brutalized society in which emotions have become so repressed that human beings become detached from themselves. The more extreme the detachment, the more violent the characters become.

Bert in Bert and Maisy might have submerged his emotions, but at least he is still aware of what they are. The outbreaks of violence in this play are accordingly very mild. Bert's most aggressive reaction occurs when Grant begins maligning his lost son; in retaliation, Bert pours the remainder of Grant's beer all over him (86).

In 'Balance of Payments' Mabel, the seemingly staid housewife, is revealed to be severely dissociated from her emotions and, accordingly, her violence is more extreme. Towards the end of the play she attacks her only son with one of her knitting needles and kills him. She and Max display total detachment when faced with the dead body. The play ends with Max speculating on the most effective method of concealing the crime: '[W]e could keep him in the deep freeze and bury him bit by bit' (9). As in Well Hung, Lord is writing here in the genre of black comedy.

Despite this structural experimentation, however, Lord's thematic concerns remain consistent and a basic theme is the question of happiness. Mabel introduces the subject when speaking to her husband at the beginning of the same play:

I am happy. And so are you. I know you are. Not that you have said as much. You never say. You are quiet, unspeaking, thoughtful. But you aren't unhappy. I hope you're not unhappy. Are you unhappy? I wouldn't like to think so. [. . .] Are you unhappy? (28).¹⁸

Mabel's persistent questionings and repetitions are indicative of an uneasy mind and they cast doubt upon the happiness of both her partner and herself. Others of

¹⁸ Speeches such as these in 'Balance of Payments' reflect Pinter's texts such as Landscape, where the two central characters display their failure to communicate by speaking monologue rather than dialogue in each other's presence.

Lord's characters are more direct. Viv in 'It Isn't Cricket' admits, 'I'm not very happy' (2). In 'Glitter and Spit' (1975 Act script) Megan voices the hopes she had when she married Daniel: 'I thought I was going to be happy' (21). At the end of the play her expectations have been dashed.

Lord's text, therefore, as well as his subtext, questions whether the traditional family structure within New Zealand society ultimately provides the happiness that everyone within it craves. Illustrating this, in Joyful and Triumphant Rose remarks pertinently as the family prepares for yet another Christmas celebration: 'Christmas is supposed to be a family thing. [. . .] Everyone's miserable' (27).

Rose's sobering observation has been anticipated symbolically from the start by means of the metaphor of the tablecloth. Mum discovers the '*dirty mark*' as she '*pulls a linen cloth from the sideboard drawer*' on *Christmas Day, 1949*. She points out to Rose that 'in 1860' her mother 'brought this tablecloth all the way from Shropshire without it getting so much as a smudge' (13).

The subtext suggests that over the passage of time something has gone very wrong. What was once unblemished, now reveals 'a filthy mark' (15). The images of aridity which appear at the beginning of 'Meeting Place,' combined with the metaphor of the tablecloth in Joyful and Triumphant compound a sense of loss: somehow the materially affluent New Zealand of the mid-twentieth century has failed to realize the pioneer dream.

I have already quoted Jan in Friendship Centre expressing the wish, 'I'd like to feel like a pioneer. To go somewhere new' (12). 'To go somewhere new' in relation to the pioneer implies a movement away from 'the centre' towards 'the margin.' This reference to the lifestyle of the past counterbalances the inertia of the characters in the present. Sarah relates the motif to abstract art: 'I always feel like pioneering when I look at an abstract, as if it's a new world' (19). Subtextually Lord comments that the nearest the characters in the play come to any 'new world' or any representation of 'the margin' is to see an artificial replica of it on a wall. Sarah's husband, John, speaks for many of the characters in Lord's plays when he expresses the sense that somehow the essentials of life have

been lost over time: 'Just think what it must have been like here a hundred years ago [. . .]. Everyone must have felt like a pioneer then. [. . .] I bet they didn't expect this' (17). The suggestion is that the pioneering zeal which drove New Zealand's ancestors from 'the centre' of the Old World to 'the margin' of the New World has somehow evaporated.

B: 'HAD MORE FUN THAN A BARREL FULL OF MONKEYS.
[. . .] "VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE."

Throughout his oeuvre Lord insists that the remedy for the malaise and the sense of loss that lies at the heart of the middle class traditional family is to be found in exploring the world outside 'the centre' of Pakeha suburbia and developing a relationship with '*the other*.' Characteristically, the playwright expresses his solution subtextually. Frequently Lord's central characters actively avoid contact with anybody of a different race, colour, creed or sexuality. Their refusal to break rigid patterns of behaviour brings with it a determined avoidance of the diversity of the outside world.

In Friendship Centre the images of war which flash across a television screen during the action of the play are either totally ignored by the characters or referred to only in passing. Jan, the most enterprising person in the play, makes an attempt to draw the attention of the others to the world outside suburbia: 'This war is so awful. Every time I turn on the tele there are pictures of it' (12). Her former partner, Nat, in response, refuses to admit the outside world into his reality: 'I've stopped noticing.' Seeing that she has broken a social taboo by making reference to '*the other*,' Jan immediately returns to the well-trodden trivia of accepted subject matter: 'Aren't rubber plants peculiar? They're very "in" at the moment. Everyone's got them. I believe they're very easy to grow' (13). Once again the subject of gardening is safe territory for conversation, and also an indication of dysfunction within relationships.

This play takes its name from a centre that has been set up in the community to encourage interaction between the growing immigrant community and Pakeha New Zealand. In Lord's hands the title becomes ironic. Far from being amenable to the idea of developing any kind of 'Friendship' which includes 'the outer margin' that is '*the other*,' the characters in the play have no intention of having anything to do with anyone who is not a Pakeha. The middle-aged couple, Sarah and John, live in an area which has a high immigrant population, but they never mix with their neighbours and they have never been to the Friendship Centre.

Moreover, their racial prejudice is exposed every time they speak of the immigrants, calling them 'natives' who 'can't speak English,' who 'don't understand our ways' and who have 'ruined the neighbourhood' (5). Only Nat ever goes to the Friendship Centre, but even then it is not to enter into the spirit of the venture: 'I don't know anything about it. I just go there for a shower' (12). Nat calls in for a shower after work because the towels are free (9).

Lord's disapproval of the insular attitude of suburban New Zealand, revealed through comments such as these, is illustrated in his subtext. In this play the characters make frequent reference to being 'bored' (2, 12, 15, 28) and 'tired' (1, 4, 8, 12, 14, 20, 21, 24, 28, 30), which, as I have commented, is symptomatic of a depression which has drained them of motivation and enthusiasm for life. No representation of 'the outer margin' enters this play. All such interactions are mentioned only in passing and take place offstage. The subtext suggests, however, that relationships formed at the Friendship Centre are more satisfying than those that exist between the central characters. McNaughton comments, '[T]here is a strongly implied contrast between their [the central characters'] superficial relationships and a [. . .] "Friendship Centre" down the road' (New Zealand Drama 114).

By way of contrast, in Bert and Maisy 'the other' enters the play in the form of Tom, a young man 'in his twenties' (6) whom Bert meets one day at the railway station. Tom is a Pakeha New Zealander from a middle class family whose father 'owned a sporting goods store' (64). Unlike the other characters, however, Tom has already rejected his upbringing in favour of contact with the outside world. Lord provides background information about his character: 'Tom has been moving around the world for some time. He is back in New Zealand between overseas jaunts' (6).

As soon as Tom appears he brings with him the capacity for change. In his directions for the setting Lord makes it clear that '[t]raditionally the front door of the house is seldom used' (6). Significantly, in the first speech of the play Bert, entering the house in the company of Tom, decides to break with the unyielding conventions that he and Maisy have espoused in the past: 'We'll use the front

door. [. . .] You're a guest and front doors are for guests. Of course I never use it myself' (7).

Tom's tastes and preferences engender a revolution in Bert and Maisy's lifestyle. Bert is 'a beer man through and through' (14) but Tom prefers wine (13). Bert and Maisy and Shona and Grant always drink tea; Tom prefers coffee (41). Even by means of these minor differences, Tom, as the representative of '*the other*' brings with him a rejuvenating energy expressed through the metaphor of food. While the other meals in the play fail to fulfil their promise, as soon as Tom sits down to eat the meal is a success. Shona comments on the '[g]orgeous casserole,' Grant says the meal is '[d]elicious' and Tom has eaten with such relish that he teases Maisy: 'Bet you thought I was going to take the pattern off the plate.' It is at this meal that Bert abandons his beer-drinking habits in favour of wine (41).

Such small shifts result in much wider-reaching consequences. Just '*a week later*' (55) Shona is 'shocked' (61) to find that catering for Tom's preference has caused Bert and Maisy to break the rigid patterns of behaviour that they have adhered to all their married lives. Bert begins to do the shopping after Tom runs out of coffee (57). At the very next meal Maisy reveals that the rule of strict division of labour based on gender has broken down altogether: 'Last night he [Tom] did some lovely chops and Bert mashed the potatoes. [. . .] I watered the vege garden' (61).

According to Maisy, breaking intransigent boundaries results in sheer enjoyment: 'Had more fun than a barrel full of monkeys.' Change, rather than being dreaded or avoided, becomes instead essential to happiness and fulfilment: 'Tom says change is important. "Variety is the spice of life"' (61).

Once this paradigm shift in attitude is achieved, prejudice can be overcome. Bert's initial reaction to Tom's preference for wine, for example, immediately exposes his prejudice against those of a different race, colour and creed. To Tom's factual statement that '[a] lot of people like wine' (13), Bert responds with the derogatory exclamation: 'Who? Eyeties! Frogs! Gutless wogs! What's it

done for them? Bugger all. A look at the world scene tells you wine drinkers have no stamina' (14).

Implicit in Bert's retort is the arrogant belief in the superiority of his lifestyle. In this climate overseas travel is frowned upon. When Tom mentions his plans to explore '[f]rom Calcutta to the Taj Mahal' and Shona lets slip that she has 'often thought I'd like to travel,' her husband Grant is horrified (43). Her sentiment only becomes acceptable when Shona qualifies her statement with 'not far' (44). For Maisy the concept of travel is '[n]ot overseas' but 'a camping trip once' and even then she complains 'I was bitten from head to toe.' The deep-seated fear of rubbing shoulders with the outside world is exhibited by Maisy when she interprets contact with *'the other'* as a recipe for failure in life: 'Travel's not for responsible people. It may be fine for n'er-do-wells' (44). The one person Bert and Maisy know who does travel, Sally, is mentioned only in passing and described by Maisy as 'a little odd.' Neither Maisy nor Bert has any idea where Sally goes (45).

Once Tom enters their lives and causes them to break with their own strict conventions, however, the world outside Pakeha New Zealand suddenly becomes a much more interesting place, representative of the '[v]ariety' that is the 'spice of life,' and once more expressed through the dramatic vehicle of the metaphor of food. Maisy, once so resistant to change of any kind, now shows an enthusiasm to try 'real haggis' (61), even though it is made from 'the liver and heart of a sheep' because Tom has assured her that it is 'quite tasty' (22).

Under Tom's influence Maisy herself becomes rebellious. She not only breaks her behaviour patterns by cooking Tom cakes on days when she has traditionally baked scones (71), but also, traditionally, the only admissible knowledge has come from within her restricted social circle. Shona speculates that the cake Maisy will choose to make is 'Maude's [Shona's Mum's] Coconut Swirl.' On the contrary, Maisy has ventured a 'Walnut Orange Surprise' from a recipe that comes from without: '[I]n the paper. Guaranteed never to fail' (76).

The upshot of all this is that Tom rejuvenates not only the couple's lives but also their home. He offers to paint the kitchen and the outside of the house. By then Maisy is confident enough in her own preferences to choose '[a] nice sunny yellow' (64) for the kitchen despite Shona's admonishment: 'There's only one colour for a kitchen and that's white!' (65). Flying in the face of convention once again, Maisy then opts for the unconventional '[p]ale lemon, mustard trim and a red roof' (74) for the outside.

The end result of sampling this '[v]ariety' that is the 'spice of life' is happiness. Laughter suddenly enters the middle-aged couple's lives. In response to Tom's jokes, they are 'in stitches' and Maisy realizes how much better she feels 'after a good laugh' (63). Shona comments on how 'happy' Bert is (64) and happiness brings with it a new-found vitality. In excitement at Tom finishing the roof, Bert comes '*[b]urstring in through the kitchen door,*' and, in her impatience to see the end result, Maisy breaks the house rules as '*SHE rushes out the front door*' (65). Maisy begins to display physical affection for the first time. When Tom comes down from the roof '*SHE embraces and kisses*' him. The ecstatic reaction ends on a high note of mutual celebration with Bert and Maisy singing and dancing to the tune that Tom plays on the piano (66).

Not only Bert and Maisy but Lord's oeuvre as a whole states consistently that the development of a relationship with '*the other*' is the solution that offers the possibility of happiness. Therefore, his subtext suggests, the lifestyle of respectable middle class New Zealand, which actively seeks to avoid contact with '*the other*' of 'the outer margin,' is the surest way to unhappiness.

The Garden Affair (1991), Lord's last radio play, is unusual in his oeuvre because it has a happy ending. In this play the central character, Iris, who is fifty-five and unmarried when the play opens, finds unexpected happiness with a male partner. Significantly, the bringer of fulfilment comes in the form of '*the other*' from a different cultural background. Iris meets and marries a Dutchman, Maarten, goes on honeymoon to Jamaica and settles down to a contented married life. The ability to break with traditional behaviour patterns has a liberating effect, expressed once again by means of the metaphor of food allied to the image of the

garden. In The Garden Affair it is the female protagonist who both creates and tends the garden and, as the title suggests, it is this project that initiates her relationship with her future husband. The ability to embrace change once again has its reward in the enjoyment of food. 'There's nothing like a new-pulled radish,' exclaims Iris enthusiastically, 'Unless it's a carrot' (2). The shape of the vegetables again houses sexual connotations. In this case, however, the garden is not a place of displacement; Iris has a very fulfilled sex life with her Dutchman (31).

If The Garden Affair confirms that fulfilment and happiness are to be found with '*the other*' of a different race, Joyful and Triumphant insists that it can equally well be found with '*the other*' of a different creed. Dad's happiest times in the play are not with his wife, but with Alice, the next-door neighbour. Yet in his description of his characters Lord states that Dad is '[a] passionate supporter of the Labour Party,' whereas Alice is '[a] true blue National supporter' (11).

After Mum dies, Dad and Alice take to going to dances together where they win 'the blue ribbon for general rhythmic excellence three years in a row.' As in 'Balance of Payments' the implication is of a covert erotic relationship, the details of which remain hidden. The fulfilling nature of this relationship is suggested further when Alice dies and leaves Dad 'everything' at the expense of her own children (86). The Garden Affair is atypical in Lord's oeuvre in that it appears to predict long-lasting happiness in relationship with '*the other*.' More frequently, as is the case with Dad and Alice, Lord portrays this happiness as being short-lived.

In Joyful and Triumphant Raewyn's happiness with a Māori boy is likewise only temporary. Raewyn, whom her parents regard as a problem child, is the most unconventional character in the play and also the most receptive to change and to new experience. When Raewyn is seventeen she falls in love with a Māori boy and becomes pregnant by him. Although Raewyn wants to marry her sweetheart and keep the baby, in the end the Bishop clan persuades her to finish the relationship and have the child adopted (41-42).

The Bishop family is just as prejudiced against Māori as the other characters in Lord's plays are against people of a different race or colour. Raewyn's grandfather, Dad, says his son 'should never have let him [the Māori boy] go out with her [Raewyn] in the first place.' For him the outcome is a foregone conclusion: '[T]hese mixed marriages never work' (42).

Later in the play, his own son, who is by that time a tourist bus operator, displays just as much prejudice against Māori as his own father had done twenty years earlier. In speaking of his own business he sums up Māori behaviour: 'I think most of them are a pretty poor lot. They don't know how to travel by bus. They leave bottles and papers and chips all over the place. [. . .] If I had to rely on all-Maori clientele I'd be out of business.' In response Raewyn comments caustically on the unbridgeable divide between Māori and Pakeha cultures: 'Any Maori who'd want to do business with you would need his head read' (89).

A similarly unbridgeable divide is expressed in Heroes and Butterflies, Lord's only explicitly political play, in which a country, which is unnamed and has an anonymous location, is engaged in a long-standing war with rebels which is destroying the economy. 'The outer margin' in this play is represented by Simpson, one of the rebels. Throughout the whole action Simpson remains on the periphery of respectable Pakeha society, only rarely entering the garden where the central characters live and then covertly and unnoticed (10, 17). In casting George Henare in the role of Simpson in the original production of the play, Lord's text becomes a statement on Māori-Pakeha relations in New Zealand. In similar manner, the representatives of '*the other*' in Lord's plays are persistently placed on the periphery.

In Joyful and Triumphant Raewyn's quest for fulfilment by means of a relationship with 'the outer margin,' as Rose observes, results in her absenting herself altogether from the Bishop family's Christmas dinner celebrations: 'She never comes for Christmas. She hates it here [. . .] She blames us. Well, she's right. The way we all sat round this table on Boxing Day [. . .] and decided what was best for her' (55). In the end, Lord claims, the only way to have a chance at happiness is to leave the rigidity of conventional small-town New Zealand

altogether. Expressed through the metaphor of food this is to absent yourself from the meal.

The happiness that Tom brings to Bert and Maisy can only be temporary because in the end Tom knows that, despite his ability to bring changes to their behaviour patterns, they are both ultimately committed to a lifestyle which excludes '*the other*.' Bert and Maisy want to turn Tom into a replica of their lost son and never stop for a moment to think that they are making the same mistakes again that they made with their own son. Even Grant can see that 'history' is about to 'repeat itself' (84) and Tom realizes this too when Bert suddenly has the idea that he can teach Tom to make '[a] footstool for Maisy' (88). At the beginning of the play Bert has pointed out to Tom a footstool that his son made for him (9).

The footstool represents the material comfort that will be Tom's reward at the expense of abandoning his plans to re-engage with '*the other*.' At the beginning of the play Tom talks to Bert of his dream of buying a Harley Davidson and continuing his travels: 'I've had my heart set on one [a Harley Davidson] for years. [. . .] I did Europe on a bike. And America. Now I want to tackle India' (11).

Tom's need to engage with the diversity of the outside world is, in the end, the stronger force, as presumably it was with Bert and Maisy's real son. Tom has already rejected the lifestyle offered to him by his own parents when he decided 'I didn't want to peddle jock straps and bicycle pumps. [. . .] I wanted to see the world' (83). Now Tom makes the same choice once again, though he tries to let Bert and Maisy down as gently as possible by offering to finish painting the house and telling them truthfully, 'I don't want to hurt you' (89). Nevertheless, Tom is forced in the end to leave. He couches his whole concept of the pursuit of happiness in a simple phrase: 'I want more.' Bert, having no concept of '*the other*,' has no idea what Tom is trying to say, as he illustrates by asking him 'More? What more?' Tom's response, '[m]y own life,' is incomprehensible to Bert: 'What does that mean?' (89).

Lord's portrait of the interface between those trapped in the uncompromising conventions of suburbia and those who are driven to break out of them is sympathetic and tinged with sadness. Shona and Grant are harsh in their judgements of Bert and Maisy's own son and Tom. Grant says, for example, that Bert and Maisy's son did not love his parents (88) and that Tom was only interested in money (75). These judgements, which put the worst possible interpretation on these parent-child relationships, are shown to be way off target. The tragedy of the situation is that two well-meaning groups of people suffer a breakdown in communication because of their diametrically opposed points of view of the world. One party is blind to the fact that there is anything beyond suburbia (Bert describes his own home as 'the real world' (94)); the other is compelled to seek out active engagement with '*the other*,' just as the playwright himself had done in his own life. According to Lord, the development of a relationship with '*the other*,' who embodies the '[v]ariety' that 'is the spice of life,' brings with it the possibility of having 'more fun than a barrel full of monkeys'. The alternative is a lifestyle deadened by convention.

The counterpoint to Bert and Maisy's brief glimpse of liberation is Shona and Grant's persistent resistance to change. This idea is expressed once again through the metaphor of food. When Maisy describes how to make a haggis, Shona immediately registers distaste: 'That's disgusting' (62). When Maisy hands Shona '*HER cuppa*' and Shona '*realises it is coffee*' rather than the customary cup of tea, '*SHE swallows it as if it were poison*' (78).

Shona and Grant simply do not understand happiness and when confronted by it they are uncomfortable. Shona's reaction to the sight of Maisy showing Tom physical affection and 'enjoying herself' is to tell Maisy to 'calm down' (66). When Grant comes upon Bert and Maisy '*singing and dancing*' to Tom's music he in turn views enjoyment as criminal: 'You're grown people behaving like hooligans' (68). Moreover, Shona 'can't stand it' when she sees 'Bert so happy' and she immediately predicts disaster: 'He'll be crushed' (64). Shona and Grant are so disturbed by Tom's influence that they offer him a bribe: '*[W]e'll pay you for your week's work and there'll be a bonus if you leave quickly and quietly*'

(sic) (75).¹⁹ The lamentable implication is that happiness and enjoyment are qualities of life which are frowned upon and misunderstood in the lifestyle of conventional small town New Zealand.

The consequence of engaging with *'the other'* may be heartbreak but life is poorer without it. At the end of Bert and Maisy Bert is devastated by the loss of his surrogate son: 'Whenever I think nests of tables I feel like crying' (94) but neither does his old conventional lifestyle offer him any consolation. In the last scene of the play Bert faces an old age of increasing aridity as the people who profess to care for him strip him of the few consolations he had in life. Shona and Grant buy his beloved house so that he loses both it and his garden. He then forsakes his independence when he bows to family pressure to go and live with Shona's mother; he and Maisy will spend the rest of their days in a house which doesn't even have a vegetable garden and where Bert detests the furniture and the décor (95-96).

A similar process is portrayed in Joyful and Triumphant, where Rose, the unmarried daughter who 'dreams of marriage and a life of her own,' in fact 'becomes mousier with the passing of the years' (11) when the relationship she yearns for fails to materialize. At one stage in the play Rose displays a desperate desire to break out of the unbending conventions that she has known since childhood. Like Bert, she has lived all her life in the same house, but she takes her brother, Ted, into her confidence one Christmas Day and tells him, 'I don't want to go on living in the same bedroom I've had ever since I was born. I want to pull back the curtains and see something new' (53). The desire to 'see something new' recalls Jan's definition of engagement with 'the margin' in Friendship Centre: 'I'd like to feel like a pioneer. To go somewhere new' (12). Rose expresses her needs in almost exactly the same phrase that Tom uses in Bert and Maisy: 'I need a life of my own' (51). Later in the conversation she repeats herself: 'I want a life, Ted. I do. More than anything' (52).

¹⁹ In the published version of Bert and Maisy the dialogue here is misprinted as a stage direction.

Like Tom and Raewyn, Rose sees the only solution in leaving home and building a life for herself away from her parents. She tries to move to Auckland (50). These plans, however, never come to fruition and at the end of the play the sixty-eight-year-old Rose is still looking after her ninety-two-year-old father. Even the achievement she was proudest of, her children's books about a character called Percy Piwaka, in the end comes to naught. Her once-famous books 'have been out of print for ages' and, by the end of the play, 'you can't even find them in the library.' Rose finally sums up her life as if she were already dead: 'Percy, like just about everything else in this house, is a thing of the past' (95).²⁰

Lord's last word on the benefits of developing a relationship with 'the outer margin' is to be found in the last scene of his last play. At the end of Joyful and Triumphant Raewyn is finally re-united with her long-lost son, who is part-Māori, has taken the name Hone, married a Māori wife and has two children. When Hone and his family finally sit down to the Bishop family's Christmas dinner, Dad remarks he has 'never seen people eat so much' (92). Yet again the metaphor of food acts as a vehicle for the playwright's social commentary. This display of increased appetite acts as counterpoint to the Christmas dinners that have preceded this one, where, because of the dysfunction within the family everyone lost their appetite and, as Rose observes, '[n]o one touched' (67) the food.

By way of contrast, at this meal Dad is able to overcome his racial prejudice, calling his grandson's family 'lovely people' (94), and echoing Maisy's delight at having 'more fun than a barrel full of monkeys' (61) when he says he hasn't 'had so much fun at Christmas since I can't remember when' (44). In their new-found happiness the family are finally able to enjoy their meal. In the final moments of the play Rose compliments Hone's wife on her baking: 'She's a very good cook. I loved her mince pies' (96). By means of the metaphor of food therefore, Lord

²⁰ This has echoes of Thornton Wilder's play The Long Christmas Dinner. Wilder's play opens with 'a long dining table [. . .] handsomely spread for Christmas dinner. The carver's place with a great turkey before it at the L. end.' The stage directions also summarize the action: 'Ninety years are to be traversed in this play, which represents in accelerated motion ninety Christmas dinners in the Bayard household' (5). At the end of the play the sense of decay which comes to pervade this interior is articulated by one of the characters: 'It's not only the soot that comes through the very walls of this house; it's the *thoughts*, it's the thought of what has been and what might have been here. And the feeling about this house of the years *grinding away*' (25).

once again, and this time finally, confirms his faith in the intrinsic value of relationship with 'the outer margin' which is also '*the other*.'

In hindsight the subtext of Friendship Centre now becomes more readily understandable. In this play, as I have already mentioned, contact with '*the other*' is studiously avoided. Sarah, the middle aged housewife, who has lost all her motivation and displays symptoms of depression, finally admits, '[p]erhaps we've settled for less [. . .] Without knowing it' (29). Sarah also makes it clear that she associates settling 'for less' with rigidity: 'What else can happen? I can't imagine any change, anything new' (24). Sarah's lifestyle of compromise and resistance to change is contrasted with Jan's wider horizons. Jan, the other female character in the play, aspires to 'feel like a pioneer' and '[t]o go somewhere new' (12). She is not so willing to accept the conventional Pakeha suburban lifestyle. Her most significant piece of self-analysis lies in the statement, 'I'll get angry because I want more' (25).

Tom and Jan represent two sides of the same coin. Tom expresses his concept of the pursuit of happiness in Jan's phrase, 'I want more' (89) and then acts on it. By leaving, he at the very least gives himself a chance of fulfilment. In choosing to stay, Jan condemns herself to a permanent sense of frustration which will inevitably expose itself in outbreaks of violence. Lord's message is unmistakable: to leave and engage with '*the other*' gives a chance of life, to stay in conventional middle class New Zealand is a form of living death.

C: 'IF I OBSERVE MYSELF CLOSELY I CAN SEE MYSELF
LIVING. [. . .] I CAN CLIMB RIGHT OUT OF MY BODY,
SIT SOMEWHERE ELSE, AND WATCH MYSELF SWEAT.'

Lord's most persistent and at the same time most subtle account of interaction with '*the other*' lies in his examination of the homosexual alternative. Almost all of the plays referred to in this chapter contain a gay component, even when the plot does not necessitate this. *Nativity*, for example, Lord's idiosyncratic account of the life of Christ,²¹ returns repeatedly to exchanges between Regent, the ruler of the State, and Maximillian, a high priest, which signal a gay relationship. During the key sequence in which Jesus is executed, the Regent is much more interested in Maximillian's appearance than in the affairs of State: 'Do come and sit next to me. [. . .] And you look charming. But then you always do look a picture, if only I had your profile' (16).

I have already mentioned, in the Introduction to this chapter, that Amey and Webby made the comment that Lord's plays lack heart. Both of them also confirm that Lord formed gay relationships (Sunny Amey Personal Interview; George Webby Personal Interview 5 Nov. 2005; George Webby Personal Interview 4 Feb. 2006). At the beginning of 'Meeting Place,' one of the central characters, Paul, who has a long-standing gay relationship, explains how he has detached himself from his emotions to become the observer of his own lifestyle: 'If I observe myself closely I can see myself living. [. . .] I can climb right out of my body, sit somewhere else, and watch myself sweat' (15). In a similar manner, as a playwright Lord's detachment from himself awards him the ability to portray the various aspects of the homosexual condition in a clear-headed and unsentimental manner.

In 1978 the lesbian feminist Adrienne Rich wrote an essay entitled 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,' which became very influential, particularly in the gay community. In this essay Rich points out that what she

²¹ In Lord's version Christ is married and his wife is pregnant (6). The story is modernized, so that some of the dialogue includes economic jargon (9) and Christ is not crucified but shot (17).

terms 'compulsory heterosexuality' is the template upon which the whole of society is organized and she challenges that convention.

The social climate challenged by Rich is the one in which Lord began writing for the theatre in 1970. His plays reflect a world in which heterosexuality is the norm. Lord's persistent questioning of the accepted social conventions of middle class Pakeha New Zealand, however, reveals that he, albeit less insistently than Rich, is challenging the regime of 'compulsory heterosexuality' even though the phrase was coined almost a decade after he began writing. Though an overwhelming proportion of Lord's subject matter deals with the heterosexual world, a persistent, but usually covert, element in his plays insists upon the existence of 'the outer margin' of the homosexual world.

One of the earliest pioneers of Gender Studies, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, writing in 1987, identified homophobia as a social attitude essential to the maintenance of 'compulsory heterosexuality':

[M]uch of the most useful recent writing about patriarchal structures suggests that 'obligatory heterosexuality' is built into male-dominated kinship systems, or that homophobia is a *necessary* consequence of such patriarchal institutions as heterosexual marriage (698).

Sedgwick's observations are illustrated in the predominantly heterosexual world that Lord creates where homophobia consistently accompanies any suggestion of the homosexual representation of 'the outer margin.' In The Affair, for example, Robin states categorically, 'I think homosexuality is disgusting' (97). In Moody Tuesday the gay representation of 'the outer margin' is even more savagely ridiculed. When Joanna and Terry, who are having an affair, meet secretly on the beach, they come upon '[a] young man' whose walk they describe as '[a]lmost a mince' (17). Joanna's homophobia immediately comes to the fore as she labels the young man a 'fairy' and a 'pervert' (18). She continues to repeat the same insulting names in relation to this character throughout the play (19, 30, 35, 36, 38, 46, 47, 48, 49). Terry, in turn, is equally abusive, likewise calling the young man a 'fairy' (37, 47) and a 'pervert' (46) as well as an '[i]mbecile' (18) and a 'poufter' (19).

Another early influential writer in the field of Gender Studies was the French historian Michel Foucault whose first volume of The History of Sexuality was translated into English in 1978. Foucault wrote that homosexuality had only been named as such in the nineteenth century.²² Whilst recognizing the power of the heterosexual majority, Foucault nevertheless emphasized in 1988 that the homosexual minority would somehow find a means of self expression:

There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses [. . .] of homosexuality [. . .] made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of ‘perversity’; but it also made possible the formation of a ‘reverse’ discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged (quoted in Jagose 82).

Lord’s plays provide such ‘a reverse discourse’ which seeks to ‘speak on its own behalf.’ ‘Compulsory heterosexuality’ in Lord is generally the main focus. The homosexual alternative of ‘the outer margin’ is usually given minority attention. The former is expressed in text, the latter often in subtext. Those in conventional society are given centre stage attention, whereas the seemingly powerless gay minority of ‘the outer margin’ generally conduct their affairs offstage. I have already pointed out in the Introduction to this chapter that Lord himself said that his playwriting technique was based on ‘a long process of removing things’ and that this could make his plays seem ‘terribly cold.’ This ‘terribly cold’ attitude can also be applied to the homosexual content of his work.

In High As A Kite (1978), for example, the homosexual side of the coin is given only a fleeting reference. In response to Pat’s enquiry about what happened to their friend Karen, his flatmate John replies, ‘[s]he fell in love with a Qantas stewardess and lives in Cairns’ (Scene Two 4).²³ Another character immediately

²² Michel Foucault specifies an exact date for the identification of homosexuality in Westphal’s article on ‘contrary sexual sensations’ written in 1870. Before this, he maintains, although homosexuality was frowned on in religious circles, it was also recognized as a temptation which might be indulged (quoted in Jagose 10-11).

²³ The Playmarket script of High As A Kite numbers each scene individually.

changes the topic of conversation to the safe subject of Scrabble, and Karen is never mentioned again. The implication is that there is a homosexual element in society which the characters choose to ignore.

Lord's subtext is at other times cautiously positive about the alternative option. In Moody Tuesday the young man that Joanna and Terry meet on the beach is called Rex and he turns out to be no angel. Rex attempts to blackmail the lovers by taking photographs of their secret rendezvous. At an arranged meeting by a pool in the Rose Gardens to buy back the photographs, Terry suddenly hits out at Rex, who dies when he hits his head on the edge of the pool (44-47). It turns out that Rex had a long-standing relationship with William, an interior decorator and the brother of one of the housewives at the centre of the plot. On hearing the news of Rex's death Terry, another of the central characters, reports that 'William was in such a state, a terrible state' (49). Though Rex and William remain peripheral to the action throughout, what we know of it suggests that their relationship, which is conducted on 'the outer margin,' is the only sincere and fulfilled one in the play.

Similarly, in China Wars, the heterosexual relationships which are the focus of attention are constantly at risk of failure, whereas the homosexual character has a black lover whom he has been with 'for years,' since 'they were young' (39). Like William in Moody Tuesday, this character is mentioned only in passing and does not appear on stage.

In 1981 Foucault also made the point that having to work within the heterosexual power structure forces the homosexual minority to find ways in which to subvert the dominant culture: '[W]here there is power, there is resistance.' Annamarie Jagose interprets Foucault's statement: 'Like power, resistance is multiple and unstable; it coagulates at certain parts, is dispersed at others' (81).

Though in texts such as High As A Kite and Moody Tuesday 'resistance' appears to be 'dispersed' by the fleeting nature of the references, Lord's oeuvre as a whole offers a 'multiple' representation of that 'resistance,' which is designed to challenge the assumptions of 'compulsory heterosexuality.' One of his subversive

tactics is to suggest that heterosexual attraction is an artificial construct by associating it with the genre of pulp fiction. In Moody Tuesday Joanna's description of her lover could have been lifted directly from the script of a soap opera: 'There my Terry stands. His medium length hair with its sophisticated grey streak is ruffled by the wind' (14). Equally in China Wars Hal's description of having sex with his new wife, when couched in the language of the same genre, makes the lovemaking seem artificial:

I grabbed her delicate, fragile, body in these strong masculine, hands. [. . .] I laid her gently on the bed and fed on the milky flesh of her inner thigh [. . .]. It wasn't long before my flawless technique brought her to a fever pitch of erotic desire' (30).

Lord's subtext asserts a very different reality. The audience realizes that Hal cannot form long-term relationships. At this moment his third marriage is falling apart almost as soon as it has begun.²⁴

Another challenge that Lord mounts to the regime of 'compulsory heterosexuality' is the suggestion that sexual attraction is much more flexible than it has traditionally been represented as being on the stage. Within seemingly heterosexual restrictions, homosexual allure not only exists, but is shown to be the stronger force.

In 'Glitter and Spit,' an as yet unperformed play, this allure is central to the plot as the play expands Lord's repertoire of manifestations of the gay condition by introducing the subject of cross-dressing. The central female character, Louise, is a former ballet dancer now confined to a wheelchair, who still has a wardrobe full of her former costumes. At first sight she appears to represent the 'Glitter' of the play's title. Louise's partner, Daniel, certainly represents the 'Spit,' as in the 'spit and polish' of the military lifestyle. He 'is a soldier involved in some mysterious

²⁴ In plays such as The Successful Life of 3 Maria Irene Fornes emphasizes the superficiality of American male-female relationships. Her characters speak in cliché, frequently changing partners and displaying an immature view of the world. After he emigrated to America Lord said in an interview, 'I've met a lot of writers, known and unknown. I've gone to a lot of workshop productions: I see two or three different plays a week' (Carvello "'Passing Through' Wellingtonian Hits New York Play Jackpot' 28). As Fornes is one of America's foremost contemporary playwrights Lord would almost certainly have been aware of her work.

capacity in the regular army. [. . .] He has a vast wardrobe of uniforms and each time he appears he wears a different one' (11).

Daniel meets Richard, the conductor of a small orchestra (11) in a pub and asks him to stay (13-14). From the beginning there are suggestions of latent homosexuality.²⁵ When Daniel dresses up in one of his military uniforms, Richard tells him that he looks '[d]ashing' as well as 'elegant' and '[h]andsome' (12). But when Richard all of a sudden decides to put on a tutu from Louise's wardrobe, Daniel responds with a rush of homophobia calling Richard 'disgusting' as well as a '[p]ansy,' a '[p]once,' a '[v]ile little pig,' a '[f]airy,' a '[p]oufter' and a '[p]oove.' In retaliation Richard 'throws himself at Daniel' and as 'Daniel lands on top' the pair fight in what the playwright describes as 'this somewhat compromising position' (16).

Such suggestions that this is a gay text appear to be scotched when Daniel and Louise's friend Megan decide to get married. The final scene takes place after the wedding when all the characters have been drinking and Megan is still in the regalia of 'full bridal rig' (20). The unexpected turning-point comes at the very end when the bridegroom decides that he, too, will dress up in a tutu (20), in which garb he accepts Richard's offer of a dance.

To employ Jagose's phraseology, this script is an example of 'resistance' that 'coagulates' into a 'multiple' challenge. Daniel, representing the 'regular army,' suggests by his very presence that there is a homosexual component in this already homosocial institution. In the fight scene between Daniel and Richard the conventional interpretation of homophobia is turned on its head. Homophobic insults are used not to repulse but to seduce. Moreover, homosexual magnetism proves to be the stronger force, particularly as it manifests itself just as the vow of marriage, the institution on which heterosexual society is based, has been made. The title of the play itself becomes an ironic joke as the 'Glitter and Spit' refers in the end not to the heterosexual bond between Daniel and Megan, which falls apart

²⁵ Latent homosexuality is a major theme in *Blood on My Sprigs*, a radio play written in 1973. Lord later adapted this script into a stage play and re-titled it *I'll Scream If I Want To* (McNaughton, *New Zealand Drama* 116-117).

at the seams, but to the homosexual bond between Daniel and Richard. The image of same sex dancing proclaims their partnership.

As is his custom, Lord delivers his message, which would not be acceptable to some of his audience, concealed beneath the light froth of comedy.

'Glitter and Spit' combines black comedy, black humour, farce and slapstick. It is Lord's most extreme example of emotional detachment. The characters on stage are constantly injured. Black eyes (16, 17), bandages (16, 18), legs in plaster (17), and accidents necessitating wheelchairs (11, 17) litter the action and provide the primary source of dark humour. The play ends with yet another accident. Daniel, amid homophobic taunts from the wife he has just married and promptly abandoned, decides to take down the Venetian blinds. After he has climbed on a chair to do this Megan, who has just called Daniel a '[p]ervert,' 'crosses to him' and 'grabs his legs.' In the final moment, 'Megan pulls on Daniel's legs. He topples backwards.' In the ensuing 'BLACKOUT' 'A SIREN IS HEARD' (21). The play ends, therefore, in the display of a fit of pique which turns into a destructive urge because the gay attraction has proved to be the stronger force.²⁶

If 'Glitter and Spit' is one of Lord's most dispassionate plays, 'Meeting Place,' by way of contrast, is his most intimate. Despite the contrast in styles, however, the 'resistance' to the regime of 'compulsory heterosexuality' 'coagulates' into the same message: the homosexual bond is the stronger force. Although this play appears to be based on two male/female couples, in fact the friendship between the two males, Paul and Arthur, and the two females, Ros and Mary, goes back long before the heterosexual bond. The title of the play refers to the 'Place' in which the homosexual pairings were initiated, though the facts of the 'Meeting' are never clearly established, as all four of the characters go through stages of denial and acceptance, so their account of what actually happened varies as their evasion persists.

²⁶ We realize eventually that every time one of the dolls in the play is broken, then another of the characters is about to be injured. By means of reference to the genre of puppet theatre the play displays a doubly constructed detachment: not only are the characters emotionally dissociated from each other, frequently mistaking one person for another (14, 16); the playwright, playing puppet master, is himself detached from his own creations.

Nevertheless, it is gradually revealed that, whether they choose to admit it or not, at their first 'Meeting' Arthur took Paul back to his flat and Ros met Mary at the swimming pool. In both cases the 'Meeting Place' has strong sexual overtones. Arthur keeps returning to the subject of his teddy bear (15, 16, 19, 20, 27, 28) and it appears that after he took Paul back to his flat to meet the bear, Paul suddenly attacked him. Paul's version is that Arthur was making sexual advances and that was the reason for his violent reaction, though he never says directly what happened: 'He made me so mad I nearly killed him. [. . .] We went to where he lived. [. . .] I felt threatened. [. . .] He went on and then I understood. I knew. He came near me and I hit him. [. . .] I'd guessed. I knew what he was on about' (23). Despite Paul's account of events, which appear to suggest that he is not gay, obviously his relationship with Arthur survived this incident and became long-standing.

On the female side Ros recalls in her first speech, 'I saw a woman changing into a bathing suit at the swimming pool. She noticed me staring at her and smiled' (18). It is only at the end of the play that Mary finally gives more details of the encounter, confirming that she is the 'woman' in Ros' recollection:

I remember you were staring at me at the swimming pool. In the changing room. You were watching me. I always feel vulnerable getting undressed. [. . .] I was aware of you watching. Later we started talking. One of us started a conversation on some pretext or other (28).²⁷

From the multiple snippets and repetitions of information we gradually build up a picture of what might have happened. At one stage Ros says that 'the woman' (whom we presume was Mary) said to her, 'I won't tell a soul, [. . .] your secret is safe with me' (16). The ambiguities in the play arise because the characters consistently avoid putting things into words, creating a subtext which suggests a social taboo on speaking about this facet of 'the outer margin.'

²⁷ There are echoes here of Pinter's Old Times.

Nevertheless, 'Meeting Place' remains Lord's most sexually explicit account of a gay relationship and his only play where physical contact between same sex couples takes place on stage. The females reveal their intimacy persistently throughout the script, holding hands (21, 25) hugging (22, 23) kissing (19, 27) and comforting each other (22, 24, 27). Mary's most detailed explanation of their first encounter takes place as 'MARY TAKES ROS OVER TO THE BED' (28). As the play ends 'ARTHUR BEGINS TO UNDESS PAUL. SLOWLY' (29) though Paul shows no response to what is happening to him.

Likewise, at the beginning of the play Paul affects emotional detachment in the phrases I have already quoted at the beginning of this section:

If I observe myself closely I can see myself
living.
I can stand outside of myself and observe.
I can climb right out of my body, sit somewhere
else and watch myself sweat (15).

Paul's first speech is expanded to close the play:

If I observe myself closely I can see myself
living.
I can stand outside of myself and observe.
I can reach outside and watch the body
living.
The more I observe the more the body seems
strange.
The more I notice the less familiar it appears.
The body still responds but the body
becomes a stranger.
I am outside (29).

'Meeting Place,' therefore, suggests that Paul's emotional detachment results from his denial of the strength of the homosexual bond. Although he says 'I never stayed with one person long' (18) obviously this is not true of his relationship with Arthur. In fact each member of the pair of same sex couples displays a similar obsession with their partner indicated by the fact that almost the entire

script is taken up with the fragmented accounts of their respective 'Meeting Place.'²⁸

Despite these scripts which emphasize the consistency and the strength of the homosexual bond, however, Lord remains very clear-headed and unsentimental in his portrayal of the various aspects of the gay lifestyle. In others of his plays he emphasizes that promiscuity is just as much a part of the homosexual condition as he shows it to be part of the heterosexual condition in scripts such as Well Hung. In The Travelling Squirrel, set in Manhattan, the character of Wally, which Lord describes in his Introduction to the play as '[a] garrulous gossip columnist [. . .]. Gay' ('Characters' n. pag.), has obviously had multiple partners; another character comments that Wally 'persists in falling in love' (79). When the play opens, Wally is obsessed with Daryl, whom he finds to be 'so gorgeous!' (13). As the plot progresses, Daryl leaves to have an affair with a woman but Wally very soon finds himself another liaison: '[A]n authentic Guardsman [. . .] tall, dark, dashing, terribly well connected and desperate to show me his Cotswolds' (93). The sexual innuendo in this script, illustrated here by Wally's comment about the 'Cotswolds,' reflects the style of Well Hung and is typical of Lord's portrayal of the libertine lifestyle. He judges both the heterosexual and the homosexual facets of this way of life to be emotionally sterile. Similarly, Glorious Ruins, another play set in Manhattan, displays a habit of multiple partnering which leaves none of the characters happy or fulfilled. The play was interpreted as a heterosexual script when it was first performed in New Zealand towards the end of Lord's career in 1991, but in fact it was written for an all male cast²⁹ (Jane Waddell Telephone Interview 10 Oct. 2004).

²⁸ Despite the fact that 'Meeting Place' is technically located in no specific time or place it still conveys a distinctive New Zealand flavour. At the beginning of the play, after the initial images of aridity, Mary describes a coastal landscape: 'I had enjoyed living by the sea. I liked watching waves and running down the beach. The house had gone. The trees had gone. The bay was still there' (15). The reminiscences of the women return to the coastal scenery. Rees recalls that in the rehearsals for the original production, in which she acted, the cast discussed references to a beach culture and came to the conclusion that the play was 'set in New Zealand' (Nonnita Rees Personal Interview 3 Dec. 2005). Bebe Lord also records that the Lord family took annual holidays in rented houses at locations such as Mount Maunganui (E-mail to the author 19 Jan. 2006).

²⁹ It is interesting to note that the Lord scripts which most emphasize the promiscuous gay lifestyle are set in Manhattan where the playwright lived for seventeen years.

Foucault, writing in 1981, commented that since the criminalization of homosexuality, paradoxically the variety of so-called 'perverse' sexual practices had, in fact, intensified:

[F]or two centuries now, the discourse on sex has been multiplied rather than rarefied; and if it has carried with it taboos and prohibitions it has also, in a more fundamental way, ensured the solidification and implantation of an entire sexual mosaic (quoted in Jagose 80).

Even Lord's seemingly innocuous scripts contain an awareness of this 'entire sexual mosaic' and the seediness it often entails. In Bert and Maisy Grant tries to suggest that Tom has picked up Bert at the railway station because that is the place for male soliciting: 'God knows what you did to entice Bert. [. . .] Don't think that I don't know about railway stations' (73). Though he lives an ostensibly conventional lifestyle, Grant seems to know how such transactions are conducted: 'Men's rooms, mirrors . . . [. . .] Sideways glances' (74).

While Tom's relationship with Bert is entirely innocent, other scripts not only refer to, but focus on, a sleazy homosexual subculture. Lord's first play to be staged, 'Balance of Payments,' displays his knowledge of 'an entire sexual mosaic.' An essential part of the black humour of the script lies in the fact that the seemingly conventional married couple, Mabel and Max, living in small town New Zealand suburbia, have an only son who is a male prostitute. Not only do Mabel and Max know about their son's occupation; they live off his earnings (31) and provide him with equipment to attract his clientele. When their son (who remains unnamed) enters the play, he tells his parents that he has been at the swimming pool 'waiting to see if anyone was going to make a pass at me' but that '[n]othing happened' due to 'business' being 'off lately' (33). Mabel chides her son that she has told him 'many times' that he should 'not wear your athletic support with that pair of briefs' (34), which she made for him. His father suggests that his son sell his favours elsewhere: 'I hear some of the boys make a pretty good living at the sauna' (36).

Allied to the gay lifestyle is an acute awareness of the danger of disease. Max and Mabel's son, on the advice of his mother, takes precautions: 'I washed with the green soap and dried myself with a tissue' (36). The black humour continues as it is revealed that male prostitution runs in the family. Cousin Gary has not fared so well; what he 'picked up' in the sauna, says Mabel, 'even Florence Nightingale couldn't have cured' (36).³⁰

Though once again the sobering message is delivered under the guise of comedy (the son's occupation being described as a 'decent, honest living' (34)), there is a patent awareness of sexually transmitted disease that can be virulent: '[W]e're lucky the whole family didn't come down with it' (36). As in Well Hung, connotations of death are associated with promiscuity: 'Wally's blind (again the sexual innuendo), Cousin Gary riddled with disease, and you're too scared to admit it to yourselves' (37). In the end this playwright's life is reflected in his art. He died of AIDS at the age of forty-six.³¹

Quite apart from the cynical detachment of portraits such as these, Lord's warmest portrayal of interaction with the homosexual representation of 'the outer margin' is to be found in his last work, Joyful and Triumphant. Throughout this play Raewyn explores relationships with various manifestations of 'the other': one of these is with Liz. Raewyn's father cannot bring himself to use the word 'lesbian' to describe his daughter's relationship (90) and Raewyn does not feel she can visit her parents now that she has taken a female lover (91); homophobia is still shown to be alive and well in small town New Zealand in the 1990s. Once again the gay relationship is conducted off stage. Raewyn does say, however, that setting up home with Liz has made her 'perfectly happy' (90).³² Sadly, like other explorations, such as Raewyn's with the Māori version of 'the other' and Bert and Maisy's with 'the other' that is Tom, the relationship does not last and happiness is short-lived.

³⁰ Black humour allied to black comedy is a characteristic of Joe Orton's playwriting. Entertaining Mr. Sloane, like 'Balance of Payments,' refers to a sleazy homosexual subculture associated with male prostitution. Moreover, in this play the murder of one of the characters by another is treated as an irrelevance, though in this script it is the parent who is killed.

³¹ Death Certificate of Robert Needham Lord. 10 Jan. 1992.

³² It is interesting to note that none of Lord's portrayals of gay relationships, no matter which facet of the 'entire sexual mosaic' they represent, contains any reference to the metaphor of food or the meal that does not nourish.

Whilst advocating the advantages of developing these relationships Lord also warns of the dangers involved. Jan's image of the pioneer lifestyle in Friendship Centre acknowledges that 'to go somewhere new' (12) involves both courage and risk. At the end of Friendship Centre, in response to his wife assuring him that he 'would have made a good pioneer,' John admits that it was fear that held him back: 'The thought scares me.' John has settled for a lifestyle where '[a]dventures are a thing of the past' (29). In the same play the motif of the pioneer way of life is used once again when Nat points out that to venture is to live a life of uncertainty: 'I suppose you're only a pioneer if you don't know what's coming' (12).

Throughout his oeuvre Lord debates the pros and cons of two contrasting ways of life and comes down on the side of the pioneer. In Joyful and Triumphant Raewyn absents herself from the Bishop family's Christmas celebrations during her time with Liz. Once again Lord's message is consistent: to sit down at table within the traditional nuclear family unit will result in a meal that fails to fulfil its promise; to leave and to explore a relationship with some variety of '*the other*' of 'the outer margin,' at least offers a chance of fulfilment and happiness. John says in Friendship Centre, speaking of the pioneer dream, 'Someone has to take the lead. Times will change' (17). Lord's playwriting can likewise be seen to 'take the lead' in New Zealand drama, particularly in his portrayal of gay relationships, in anticipation of change that is to come.

D: CONCLUSION

Lord appears at first sight to be out of step with the other playwrights in this discussion. A closer examination of his oeuvre, however, reveals that he is in agreement with the rest of the group. Not only does he set his plays for the most part in ‘the margin’ and focus upon New Zealand social issues, he also insists textually and implies subtextually the beneficial effects of interaction with ‘the outer margin.’ Moreover, in plays such as Joyful and Triumphant, he achieves a greater range of authentic New Zealand ‘voices’ both from middle class suburbia and from ‘the outer margin’ than any other of my chosen five.

All the playwrights in this thesis, in fact, display striking similarities in their judgements of New Zealand society. They all point to the limitations of the values and lifestyle of the conventional middle class Pakeha. Some of them even coin their own idiosyncratic terminology for this society. In Mason it becomes ‘*the garden*’ and ‘Kapok Castle,’ in Baxter ‘the Unjust City’ and in Thompson ‘Blandland.’ Whatever their terminology, however, all these playwrights are unanimous in reprimanding conventional middle class New Zealand for its racial discrimination, particularly against Māori, and its reluctance to re-define itself as a bicultural society. Mason, Baxter, Renée and Lord also censure the middle class for its homophobia.³³

Mason, Baxter and Lord characterize conventional Pakeha middle class New Zealand as materialistic, narrow-minded and spiritually arid. Thompson and Renée admonish the inhumane tactics perpetuated by its representatives, who misuse power to the detriment of minority groups on ‘the outer margin.’ All of these playwrights accuse this society of either individual or collective violence and all in doing so define New Zealand as inherently violent.

³³ Robert Lord’s plays also met with a negative response from some quarters. In an interview given towards the end of his life Mason recalls writing to Lord and telling him to ‘grapple these things [the adverse criticism] to your soul, they are a sign of your vocation. If you can get people really angry then you must be saying something to them’ (Interview with Elizabeth Alley 12 Aug. 1981).

Mason, Thompson, Renée and Lord all create sympathetic portraits of New Zealand women from both the Pakeha middle class and ‘the outer margin,’ although Thompson and Renée focus mainly on the latter category. Baxter is the exception in this regard. In his focus on male homosocial groups and ‘Man Alone’ mythology he creates very few sympathetic female characters, and the few that he does portray are almost exclusively from ‘the outer margin.’ When they are not exposing Baxter’s misogyny they tend to become mainly mouthpieces for his own point of view.

These playwrights all display misogamy to some degree – Mason, Baxter, Renée and Lord being particularly vehement in this regard. All question, though in varying degrees, the capacity of conventional marriage to bring happiness or fulfilment to the individuals involved. Mason, Baxter and Lord emphasize that the damage extends to the children of the family. All point to the extra-marital affair as a common feature of New Zealand society.

They also display a folk memory of New Zealand as a pioneer society. Baxter and Lord, who differ in so many respects, concur in their belief that the New Zealand dream has failed to eventuate. Mason, Thompson and Renée, however – particularly the last – hold out the ‘hope’ that the ‘new’ order of ‘Utopia, the perfect human society’ (Atwood 23-24) may one day yet be realized.

In their common belief in the benefits inherent in interaction with ‘the outer margin’ these playwrights show some variation in focus. Mason and Lord, whilst advocating the necessity of interaction with ‘*the other*’ nevertheless concentrate mainly on respectable Pakeha middle class New Zealand. Thompson and Renée, on the contrary, focus their attention almost entirely on ‘the outer margin’ and Baxter falls somewhere between the two. It must be remembered, however, that both of these groups are fundamental components of New Zealand society. Furthermore, together these playwrights run the gamut of ‘the outer margin’ as it was understood at the time and in doing so helped to bring about the metamorphosis that has taken place since ‘the turning-point of the mid-1950s’ (Harcourt 50).

CONCLUSION

The earliest surviving script of a New Zealand play, Kainga of the Ladye Birds, is the expression of a colonized culture. The immigrants of the new 'settler colony' have hardly begun to identify a national 'voice.' To employ O. Mannoni's metaphor, this was a society still dependent upon Prospero as master and protector. The dominance of the colonizing power is evidenced in the lyrics that the playwright, 'Grif,' set to the most patriotic song in the pantomime 'Zealandia the Free': 'New Zealand my country, where new chums from home/Find labour in plenty, wherever from home we roam' (19). The Anglicized lyrics still identify 'home' as the Eurocentre.

The first stirrings of a national dramatic 'voice' can be identified in Alan Mulgan's 'For Love of Appin' in which the playwright challenged the traditional relationship between 'the centre' and 'the margin.' Mulgan claimed that the New World offered the opportunity to create a '*new*' society where 'the old order can be discarded' (Atwood 31). As an integral part of reversing the traditional roles and placing his own culture at 'the centre' Mulgan incorporated New Zealand colloquialisms such as 'swagger' (9) and 'shakedown' (15) into his script indicating that English was being metamorphosed into New Zealand english which articulates the '*new*' egalitarian society. As Professor James Shelley perceptively commented in his Preface to Three Plays of New Zealand (in which 'For Love of Appin' appears) 'Mr Mulgan deserves our thanks for striking the match' (14).¹

Despite texts such as 'For Love of Appin' New Zealand drama continued to be Eurocentred and dominated in particular by English theatre. In 1932, however, the New Zealand branch of the British Drama League (B.D.L.) was founded and its annual one act play competitions provided the major outlet for New Zealand

¹ Mrs Buchan's opinion in 'For Love of Appin' that the working class have a better life in New Zealand than they do in the Eurocentre was by no means the majority view in New Zealand plays. Over a decade later Leslie Greener's 'O Traitor Pines' (1933) still displays the prejudice that there is a superior lifestyle at the Eurocentre. In this play a farmer's wife, although New Zealand born, is weary of her life and yearns to experience at first hand the charms of Europe that her visitors talk to her about.

playwrights. A New Zealand setting was not required for these plays, but was encouraged (Thomson, New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 13). Innovative New Zealand playwrights such as Eric Bradwell and J.A.S. Coppard wrote plays for the B.D.L. festivals.

Neither Bradwell nor Coppard, however, elected to set his plays in New Zealand and, interesting though their scripts may be, they still display 'The Kiwi Cringe.' Merton Hodge's resoundingly successful The Wind and the Rain is also a 'Cringe Play' and this playwright's mimicry of the Eurocentre did little to encourage budding New Zealand playwrights to attempt to identify a national dramatic 'voice.' The colonizing power continued to wield, to use Said's phraseology, 'an uneven exchange with various kinds of power' (7).

New Zealand drama was slower than the other arts to identify an authentic 'voice.' Allen Curnow's poem which claimed that New Zealand represents 'something different, something/Nobody counted on' (Collected Poems 79) was first published in his anthology Island and Time (1941) and Frank Sargeson's short stories, published in a volume significantly entitled Speaking for Ourselves (1945), appeared in the same decade. These works are the expression of a nationalist movement among New Zealand writers which began in the 1930s.² Roderick Finlayson's first volume of short stories, Brown Man's Burden (1938), which displays a sympathetic attitude towards rural Māori and questions the assumed superiority of the Pakeha, can be identified as one of the first depictions of the 'subaltern' who is just beginning to learn to 'speak' (Spivak 25). Bruce Mason's dramatic rebellion did not begin until the early 1950s.

Mason was the first New Zealand playwright to produce a body of plays which persistently challenged the traditional relationship between the Eurocentre and 'the margin.' Mason, like Curnow, wanted to place his own culture at 'the centre' which for him, too, was 'the only possible place' (Curnow, Four Plays 7). One of Mason's most important contributions to the development of New Zealand drama was to insist upon a re-definition of 'the margin.' He claimed that, rather than

² Frank Sargeson's first volume of short stories, Conversations with my Uncle, was first published in 1936.

being a sterile location, ‘the margin’ is a place with the capacity to make an essential contribution to the development of New Zealand drama in English. Flying in the face of New Zealand playwriting at the time, he rejected ‘The Kiwi Cringe’ and created a two-tiered concept of ‘the margin.’ Setting his plays in ‘the margin’ of New Zealand wherever possible, he at the same time advocated the superiority of ‘the outer margin,’ representing in his work all the groups identified by Bhabha as constituting the doubly marginalized: ‘women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities’ (936).

An essential component of these various facets of ‘the outer margin’ was Mason’s exploration of Māori-Pakeha relations. This playwright laboured to make the ‘*subaltern*’ able to ‘*speak*’ (Spivak 25) with an authentic ‘voice.’ It is perhaps inevitable that the first persistent interpreter of the ‘voice’ of the indigene in an almost exclusively white artistic culture should be a white writer. The debate continues over the success or otherwise of his efforts.³ Mason himself believed that the beginnings he made were there to facilitate the ‘*subaltern*’ to ‘*speak*’ for himself or herself in the future.⁴

When Mason first began writing plays, theatre in New Zealand was still Anglocentred and it was difficult for a New Zealand playwright who wrote about his or her own country to find an outlet for their work.⁵ In 1942 Unity Theatre

³ There has been some controversy over this issue. Playwrights such as John Broughton vehemently dispute the right of Mason to speak on behalf of Māori. In ‘Mihi’ the Preface to He Reo Hou (which includes a play by Broughton) Don Selwyn includes a quote from Mason emphasizing the necessity for a Māori ‘voice’ to be heard in New Zealand drama: ‘*Until writers of Maori descent, with the diverse range of their cultural perspectives, emerge, New Zealand Theatre would lack a dynamic presence, from the tangata whenua.*’

Selwyn acknowledges the efforts of both Mason and Thompson to include elements of indigenous New Zealand experiences into their work, whilst at the same time noting that both playwrights experienced some difficulty in this aspect of their writing: ‘[t]hey were the first to admit that it did not always sit well with them’ (7).

⁴ In an interview given towards the end of his life Bruce Mason pointed out that at the end of ‘Awatea’ he had established that Matt has the potential to be a writer and ‘at that point’ he ‘withdrew’ feeling that it was left to other Matt Pakus like Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace to ‘carry on’ and that it would be ‘presumptuous’ of him to ‘go any further’ (Interview with Elizabeth Alley 12 Aug. 1981). Rebecca Mason also pointed out that Māori writers such as Ihimaera say that they owe a particular debt to Mason for his encouragement in the early stages of their careers (Personal Interview 19 May 2006).

⁵ The lack of interest in New Zealand plays within New Zealand was not confined to Mason. The Tree, by Stella Jones, like The Pohutukawa Tree, was first produced in 1957. It had been awarded second prize in the Southland Centennial playwriting competition (Harcourt 102) and when it was

was founded in Wellington on socialist principles and became virtually the only theatre in the country to encourage New Zealand playwrights who were writing about their own experience of life.⁶ Mason's first plays The Bonds of Love (1953) and The Evening Paper (1953) were produced at Unity and were met with cries of outrage.

New Zealand audiences, however, still displayed virtually no interest in New Zealand plays. The Pohutukawa Tree (1957), for example, was commissioned by The New Zealand Players⁷ and was put on in Wellington but closed after seven performances.⁸ There were another two performances in Auckland and after that the play was not put on in New Zealand again for another three years.

In desperation Mason took to performing in any venue where his one man shows, with their minimalist requirements, could possibly be staged. At the end of his life he had performed the most popular of these, 'The End of the Golden Weather,' almost a thousand times, throughout the length and breadth of the country.

sent to the local amateur societies, they all rejected it. A London agent, however, accepted it and was prepared to pay the royalty to have it put on by a professional company in Bristol (Thomson, New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 45).

⁶ Mason acknowledged the debt that early New Zealand playwrights owed to Unity Theatre in those early years: '[I]t has helped to form the style of three playwrights, Miss Kathleen Ross, Mrs Marie Bullock, and myself' ('Wellington's Unity Theatre' 159). The first production of James K. Baxter's 'The Wide Open Cage' was staged by Unity and directed by Richard Campion. Mason wrote of the production in the Dominion: 'I will be quite plain and dogmatic and say that for me this was the most exciting night in the theatre this year' ('The Wide Open Cage' 17).

⁷ In 1953, after calls for a National Theatre in New Zealand had been consistently ignored by the Government, Richard Campion and his wife Edith, newly returned from three years of experience working with the Old Vic company in England, formed the ambitious notion of setting up a professional theatre company in New Zealand. The New Zealand Players were formed with the aim 'to provide varied and first class theatre; to encourage the development of playwriting, acting and theatre going in New Zealand; to play from Whangerei to Invercargill' (Harcourt 93). The New Zealand players survived for seven years.

Mason commented in an interview on the difficulty of sustaining an interest in professional theatre in New Zealand in those early years: 'The New Zealand Players had nineteen thousand members at their peak. At the time of their collapse they had only two' (Interview with Elizabeth Alley 12 Aug. 1981).

⁸ The New Zealand Players also initially rejected Jones' The Tree, but then toured it with their second company in 1959. It became one of only four New Zealand plays to be staged by them. The NZBC produced a radio version in 1961.

For close to thirty years Mason struggled, initially alone, to establish an authentic national ‘voice’ on the New Zealand stage⁹ and in the process laid the foundation for New Zealand drama to ‘develop’ as ‘a new individual’ dramatic tradition. As the country’s first professional playwright he was instrumental in the movement of New Zealand drama from amateur to professional status. Not only was he involved in founding Downstage, New Zealand’s first professional theatre, on two occasions he single-handedly saved it from closure.¹⁰

By the end of his career Mason had received international as well as national recognition and through works such as ‘The End of the Golden Weather’ had begun to persuade New Zealanders that plays written about their own country were worth watching. Largely as a result of Mason’s persistent advocacy of ‘the outer margin,’ by the early 1980s New Zealand drama expressed a much wider representative ‘voice.’

Unlike Mason, who always knew that he wanted to be a playwright, James K. Baxter always regarded himself primarily as a poet. Baxter produced two plays in the late 1950s, ‘Jack Winter’s Dream’ (1958) and ‘The Wide Open Cage’ (1959), but his playwriting career was confined almost exclusively to a brief but very productive period between 1966 and 1968 when he worked in collaboration with Patric Carey at The Globe. Baxter at that time found himself in a uniquely privileged position. He was being encouraged by an innovative director who owned and ran his own theatre and was willing to stage virtually any play that Baxter chose to write.

Baxter’s contribution to New Zealand drama was by no means as wide-ranging as Mason’s. His career as a dramatist was relatively short-lived. Moreover, The

⁹ Recognizing Mason’s difficulties in those early times Roger Hall described him as ‘a Man Alone of Letters’ (Black, ‘Bruce Mason’s *Every Kind of Weather*’ 87). Robert Lord in turn called Mason ‘the solitary struggler’ (Iona McNaughton ‘Lord Home from the Big Apple’ 16).

¹⁰ In 1965, after operating for six months and despite full houses, it was estimated that Downstage would collapse within a week unless a new show was devised for only one actor, for that was all the theatre could afford. In response Mason devised and learned ‘To Russia, With Love’ within a week for which he initially charged no fee. Houses were packed and the project saved Downstage from closure (*Bruce Mason Solo* 213). Mason performed a similar salvage operation in the same year with *The Waters of Silence*, which he translated from the French original and adapted into a solo performance piece. He performed it in French and English on alternate nights (Smythe 35).

Globe, although very influential in Dunedin, only seated forty in the auditorium and remained a small, albeit groundbreaking, amateur theatre. Baxter's work emulates Mason's, however, in the exploration of a two-tiered concept of 'the margin.' He is the only playwright in this thesis and the first in New Zealand drama consistently to portray the alcoholic sub-culture. In his portraits of alcoholic down-and-outs Baxter points to the poverty of this social minority and lays the groundwork for the focus on the working class which was expanded in the next generation of playwrights.

Baxter's 'The Wide Open Cage,' written and produced only two years after The Pohutukawa Tree, duplicates Mason's concern about the depth of racial prejudice against Māori in a dominantly Pakeha society. Baxter's plays, like Mason's, persistently urge New Zealand society to re-define itself as bicultural. Both these playwrights, breaking new ground by setting their plays in 'the margin' of New Zealand and at the same time advocating the superiority of 'the outer margin,' illustrate that the concept of 'the margin' is fundamental to the development of New Zealand drama. In the words of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, nationalist New Zealand playwrights 'assert[ed] themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their difference from the assumptions of the imperial centre' (2).

In the next generation Mervyn Thompson continued the exploration of the two-tiered concept of 'the margin.' The first play that Thompson wrote, 'First Return,' is arguably New Zealand's first nationalistic play. Thompson continued to widen the 'voice' of New Zealand drama by rejecting the history of the Eurocentre and focusing instead on the largely unwritten history of the proletariat on 'the outer margin,' persistently engaged in fighting Left wing battles that they ultimately lost.

Like Mason, Thompson was a multi-talented man of the theatre, not only writing but directing and acting in his own and others' plays. He had already established a national reputation as a director before he became a playwright. He helped to lift New Zealand theatre to professional status by founding the Court, Christchurch's first sustained professional theatre, in association with Yvette

Bromley, after his return to New Zealand from London in 1971.¹¹ He also established the Maidment Theatre in Auckland University and was Artistic Director of Downstage 1975-1976.

Thompson, however, like Mason, found it impossible to make a living by playwriting and he, too, took to the road with his one-man shows. Coaltown Blues, like 'The End of the Golden Weather,' was performed largely outside the established theatres, wherever Thompson found he could command an audience.¹²

Thompson, much more than Mason or Baxter, was a theatrical innovator. He enriched New Zealand drama stylistically by the dramatic form he termed the 'songplay' (perhaps influenced by the work of Kurt Weill) and by his investigation of Community Theatre techniques. He also experimented with various theatrical structures that had not been tested in New Zealand before in his attempts to bring his audience round to his decidedly Left wing point of view.

Thompson's work marks a turning-point as he sets about creating a national mythology, not only of the history of his own class, but of New Zealand drama as 'a new individual' dramatic form. 'The Great New Zealand Truth Show' makes reference to Baxter.¹³ Added to this there is a passing reference to 'The End of the Golden Weather' in Coaltown Blues, which is expanded in 'Passing Through,' when Thompson not only acts out part of Mason's script, but acknowledges this

¹¹ The Royal Court Theatre was founded by George Devine and Tony Richardson to put on plays which West End managements would not stage. Within five weeks after it opened in 1956 it had staged John Osborne's Look Back in Anger, and it became particularly associated with working class theatre and socialist politics, producing plays by English playwrights such as Arnold Wesker, Ann Jellicoe, David Hare and Harold Pinter and overseas playwrights such as Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett and Sam Shepard (Griffiths and Woddis 308-309). The Court in Christchurch is named after this theatre ('Act Interviews Yvette Bromley' 6).

¹² Just as New Zealand's first playwright James Marriott, 'engraver, instrument maker and optician' (Downes 12) could not make a living from playwriting, neither could any of my chosen playwrights. In a letter to Mervyn Thompson Bruce Mason said of his chosen profession: 'Above all, it does not offer us a living! But for the cushioning, the invisible mattress which Diana's profession has offered me, I would have starved to death twenty years ago and will still probably go to my grave a pauper' (Letter to Mervyn Thompson 14 Mar. 1981). Renée writes also that she has never been able to earn a living from playwriting alone (E-mail to the author). For a time Robert Lord lived off his earnings from Well Hung, but during his time in America he supplemented his income by typesetting (George Webby Personal Interview 5 Nov. 2005).

¹³ 'The Great New Zealand Truth Show' is prefaced by a poem that Baxter wrote about the magazine Truth (13). This poem is referred to in the script, along with a 'complaint' about Baxter's 'use of obscene language in a talk he gave to pupils of Te Awamutu College' which had been 'sent to the Minister of Education, Brian Talboys!' (47).

playwright as being also a ‘magical performer,’ claiming that Mason’s charisma convinced him that he, too, must become a playwright.¹⁴ In Thompson’s work, therefore, New Zealand drama ceases to look to the Eurocentre to validate its observations and focuses instead on its own culture.

Renée was born before Thompson, but when she began writing plays he was already established in New Zealand theatre. Renée, however, is fundamental to the development of New Zealand drama. Not only is she the first female professional playwright to live and work in the country of her birth; she is also New Zealand’s first representative of Mannoni’s Caliban and Spivak’s ‘*subaltern*’ in the strictest sense in which these metaphors were first employed in post-colonial texts. Mason, Baxter and Thompson, although sympathetic to the difficulties of Māori operating in a predominantly Pakeha society, nevertheless write of the indigene as ‘*the other*.’ Renée is the first New Zealand Caliban and ‘*subaltern*’ to speak with an authentic dramatic ‘voice.’ She breaks new ground by focusing on Māori women who, like herself, inhabit a no-woman’s-land, being entirely at home neither in the world of the Pakeha nor of the Māori. Renée’s own life experience encompasses all the categories identified by Bhabha as constituting the doubly marginalized: ‘women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities’ (936).

As an avid feminist Renée continues to expand the representative ‘voice’ of New Zealand drama by her focus on ‘the female margin.’ In particular she explores the position of working class women, Māori women and lesbians, often drawing attention to male abuse of the female. She is one of the first New Zealand playwrights consistently to create central characters who are lesbians, and an

¹⁴ The script of ‘Passing Through’ also contains a poem that Thompson wrote in honour of Mason’s contribution to New Zealand literature, which he first read at Bruce’s funeral. Thompson mythologizes Mason into a larger-than-life figure:

Larger and more absolute, you
Who created yourself
In nobody’s image but your own,
Stood proud as Lucifer
Defied the nobby gods,
Soared over what (without looking)
They called ‘the top.’

.....

In your name I blaspheme (165).

important aspect of her oeuvre is her campaign for gay rights. In this respect she has been a forerunner for gay and lesbian theatre. She has also been instrumental in the establishment of Māori theatre, writing plays for the Depot and Taki Rua.

Renée builds upon Thompson's innovative work.¹⁵ Although, like him, she is still dependent upon theatrical structures derived from the Eurocentre, she continues to pursue the documentation of New Zealand's past, being particularly interested in portraying New Zealand history from the feminine perspective and creating a mythology and an imagery which reflect women's experience.

At first sight Robert Lord appears to be out of step with the group of playwrights I have chosen to illustrate the metamorphosis that has taken place in New Zealand drama since 'the turning-point of the mid-1950s' (Harcourt 50). A closer examination of his oeuvre, however, reveals that, although more subtly, he is also an advocate of 'the outer margin' claiming that only by interaction with '*the other*' does the individual have any chance of finding happiness and fulfilment. Lord, like Renée, expands the scope of 'the outer margin' by his exploration of the various facets of the gay alternative.

Although he has not had many imitators, Lord has facilitated the development of New Zealand theatre in more practical ways. He provided an invaluable service to his own and future generations of New Zealand playwrights by having the idea of setting up Playmarket. Until that time he, along with all other New Zealand playwrights, had to type and photocopy their own scripts and send them to theatres which might be interested. Playmarket was established in 1973 and within a year it was acting as agent for the majority of playwrights in the country (McNaughton, 'Drama' 36). Playmarket also published plays and began to organize week-long biennial workshops.¹⁶ Renée's Wednesday To Come was

¹⁵ In the Introduction to Bruce Mason Solo John Roberts points out that in the next generation playwrights with a social conscience met with a theatre-going audience who were more prepared to listen: 'Those who followed Bruce Mason have found a public more receptive to the theatre's duty to illuminate and define our social experience' (x).

¹⁶ In an article published in 1984 Nonnita Rees outlined how the service that Playmarket provided had expanded rapidly since its inception in 1973: 'We are the major playwrights' agency, we run an advisory service for playwrights, we publish the magazine Act and the Theatrescript series of plays as well as our own directory of New Zealand plays. We organise workshops of new plays.'

workshopped at the third of these and this led to its first professional production at Downstage.¹⁷ Lord was also co-editor of Act, a magazine which Mason had established at Downstage in 1967 with the aim to foster a wider awareness of drama in New Zealand. Act published playscripts in some of its instalments, Lord's 'Meeting Place' and 'Glitter and Spit' being among these.¹⁸

When he returned to New Zealand in 1990 Lord bought a small cottage in Dunedin near the university and restored the house and garden. His last gesture to the New Zealand arts, and to drama in particular, was to set up the Writers' Cottage Trust so that Dunedin-based writers would have a place to live and work.¹⁹

Unlike the other playwrights in this discussion, Lord chose to work for much of his career in New York, the first New Zealand playwright to do so. His choice is perhaps indicative of the waning influence of the Eurocentre (which Renée also recognizes in her acknowledged debt to American feminism) and the increasing cultural influence of the U.S.A., the first of the former colonies to develop a fully-fledged national literature. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin predict, the suppression of national 'voice' by the colonizer cannot persist indefinitely:

[T]he alienating process which initially served to relegate the post-colonial world to 'the margin' turned upon itself and acted to push that

She also explained how Playmarket's newly-established services were essential to the theatre climate of the time:

The years 1971-74 were critical ones for the growth of New Zealand drama. By 1973 the groundwork for a sustained burst of writing for the newly established professional theatre had been laid. Those anxious for a theatre [. . .] with its own identity, saw plenty of hopeful signs, despite the still widespread belief (in the theatres themselves) that there was little writing of quality by New Zealand writers and that audiences would not come to see New Zealand plays (23).

¹⁷ The first six day workshop organized by Playmarket was held in May 1980 at the Victoria University of Wellington with Thompson as director-in-charge. Playmarket's dramaturg David Dowling co-ordinated a reading of the 101 scripts that were submitted. One of these was Greg McGee's Foreskin's Lament which was directed by Thompson with David Carnegie acting as dramaturg (Rees 28). At the end of the workshop Thompson summed up his feelings: '[S]uddenly it seems that one can feel oneself to be part of a tradition – our tradition. At one end we have that lonely pioneer Bruce Mason . . . at the other younger writers like Greg McGee' (29).

¹⁸ At the end of 1975 Downstage felt that it could no longer continue to publish Act (which was at that time edited by Mason) even though its quarterly publications had national coverage. Act was the only regular record of theatre in New Zealand. Playmarket took over publication in March 1976 with Rees as co-editor. Act, accordingly, has two quite different numerical references.

¹⁹ Rees administers the Writers' Cottage Trust in accordance with Lord's wishes.

world through a kind of mental barrier [. . .]. Marginality thus becomes an unprecedented source of creative energy (12).

The five playwrights in this thesis never formally allied themselves into a movement, though some of them interacted from time to time.²⁰ Of particular significance is the working relationship between Thompson and Renée in the early 1980s, when Thompson workshopped both Setting the Table and Groundwork.

More importantly, in their exploration of ‘the outer margin’ all five display common philosophical ground in their attempts to identify and articulate an authentic national ‘voice.’ They have all ‘push[ed]’ through the ‘mental barrier’ identified by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin and have utilized their position on ‘the margin’ to produce ‘an unprecedented source of creative energy.’ This has resulted in the transformation of New Zealand drama in the latter half of the twentieth century. Between them, not only have they produced a body of plays which have established New Zealand drama as ‘a new individual’ dramatic tradition; they have facilitated the movement of New Zealand theatre from amateur to professional status and have been instrumental in creating the framework whereby future New Zealand playwrights may find an outlet for their work.

The ways in which these five playwrights have expanded the ‘voice’ of ‘the outer margin,’ have led in the end, as Howard McNaughton remarks, to ‘a more complex probing of national identity’ (‘Drama’ 321). Women’s ‘voices,’ Māori ‘voices’ and gay ‘voices’ which have been traditionally ‘silent’ and ‘silenced’ in New Zealand theatre, have not only been facilitated to ‘speak’ (Spivak 25) through the groundbreaking work of my chosen five: they have now spawned theatre movements in their own right.

²⁰ In the Mervyn Thompson Papers which are housed in the Macmillan Brown Library at the University of Canterbury there are a series of letters from Mason to Thompson spanning a period from 9 May 1972 to 5 November 1982. The last letter responds to a remark that Thompson must have made in one of his letters to Mason: ‘You call me “prophet”; no, dear man; a tiller of the soil, a turner of the ground.’ Mason died on 31 December of that year.

All this has taken place over a period of less than forty years. In terms of the unifying metaphor of this thesis, Mason, Baxter, Thompson, Renée and Lord represent the young rocks of *The Pacific Ring of Fire* who, in their challenge to the colonizing power, have initiated a ‘transformation’ (Holmes 56) in New Zealand theatre: a metamorphosis into ‘a new individual’ dramatic tradition, albeit for the most part constructed of elements derived from the conventional theatre of the Eurocentre.

As Spivak observes, the traditional relationship between ‘the centre’ and ‘the margins’ is subject to change. Those who have been ‘silent, silenced [. . .] [and] oppressed’ may one day claim to be at ‘the center’ (25). The two-tiered margin that Mason identified is an important concept in this regard. As the nationalist movement among New Zealand playwrights gained momentum from the mid-1950s onwards it increasingly promoted ‘the margin’ as ‘the centre,’ whilst at the same time advocating the benefits of interacting with ‘the outer margin.’ Whether portraying ‘the outer margin’ or the respectable Pakeha middle class, however, the playwrights studied in this thesis developed ‘new individual’ dramatic forms which were distinct from anything that had been seen on the stage before.

Over time, ‘the margin’ as synonymous with ‘The Frontier’ represents ‘a line that is always expanding’ (Atwood 31). ‘The Frontier’ has now moved away from traditional stages with Jim Moriarty and Miranda Harcourt working on ‘the outer margin’ of the prison community, and marae theatre developing a new concept in theatrical structure and presentation. At the time of writing the new ‘Frontier’ appears to be the Pacific as modern Pasifika playwrights in turn articulate their previously ‘silent’ and ‘silenced’ dramatic ‘voice.’²¹

‘I have a theory’ said Bruce Mason in one of his last interviews ‘that English drama is fertilised from the periphery’ (Paske 15). That’s the story, Bruce.

²¹ At the forefront of this new development are playwrights such as Oscar Kightley, Toa Fraser and Victor Rodger.

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