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"I Shall Not Want Another Home On This Planet"
A Study of the Tradition of Elegiac Poetry in the Work of Three
New Zealand Female Poets: Ursula Bethell, Robin Hyde and
Katherine Mansfield

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the degree
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a discussion of the elegiac poetry tradition as it exists in English literature and how it impacts on the New Zealand literary tradition. The discussion centres around three New Zealand female poets; Mary Ursula Bethell, Robin Hyde and Katherine Mansfield and their participation in the elegiac tradition. The time period which encompasses these three poets reaches from 1915-1945, a period of intense growth and discovery in the literature of New Zealand, as it dissociated itself from the English model and redirected itself in a Pacific direction. Each of the three poets was influenced by the literary beliefs which were cultivated in New Zealand and exhibited this knowledge through their work. Mary Ursula Bethell and Katherine Mansfield composed personal elegies on the loss of companion and brother respectively, yet Robin Hyde composed a more formal elegy on Mansfield's death, though she had not personally known her. One theme runs through the work of Bethell, Hyde and Mansfield, the theme of exile. Bethell was the typical Englishwoman exiled in New Zealand by geography, but also by her education and her upbringing. Mansfield chose the life of an expatriate, yet this was no more than a self-delusion, when after the death of her brother she realised that the New Zealand of her childhood was no more. Hyde also fled to England, like Mansfield, yet her impetus was no more than a schoolgirl memory. She too, as in the case of Mansfield, produced her finest compositions when the idea of exile became reality. In some way, all three poets experienced the intensity of exile, from the known landscape whether of New Zealand or England, and transferred that yearning into their elegiac verse, as they became exiled from all that their loved one represented. For Mansfield, her brother's death ensured she could never go 'home' and yet provided the impetus for her New Zealand stories within which she challenged short story convention and wrote lasting memorials to both her country and her self. For Hyde, her elegy on Mansfield was an elegy to New Zealand and her reality without it. Bethell, after the death of her companion Effie Pollen, became exiled from her physical home in the Cashmere Hills, and, more poignantly, her garden. All three of the poets were faced with a universe which had been altered irreversibly by exile and in elegy attempted to describe and mourn that loss. These three women, though participating in a genre and a tradition which was undeniably male-oriented, expressed themselves as women within a tradition which through its very versatility accommodated both them and their grief.

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INTRODUCTION

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
 My working week and my Sunday rest,
 My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
 I thought that love would last for ever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;
 Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
 Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;
 For nothing now can ever come to any good.¹

Auden's moving elegy, one of his 'Twelve Songs' collection came into prominence this year with the release of a popular movie (*Four Weddings and a Funeral*). It provided a modern (it was composed in the mid 1930s) example of the innovation, insight and exploration which the elegiac genre has exhibited from classical times. Of all the poetic genres, elegiac poetry has always displayed an especially poignant expressiveness on the subjects of both love and death.

Elegiac poetry is more complex than the name implies. It is, obviously, a tribute to the memory, actions, and life of an individual who has died, yet it also encompasses other literary and philosophical components. There is an inescapable tension present between the expression of private love in a public forum, except in the case of formal elegies, where a person of public importance or recognition is commemorated in verse, of which one example is included in this study. Every elegist brings to the tradition their own mourning process and either attempts to reconcile themselves - and the audience - to the loss or else finds no consolation in the traditional healers, time and memory. It becomes increasingly apparent, that it is the memories of the dead which bring poetry to the living.

The elegiac tradition is one which is predominant throughout English literature with many poets using the form to exhibit both their skill and their love. By studying New Zealand poets, however, it was necessary to view and understand the literary landscape which existed in this country and which influenced the three poets discussed in this study; Robin Hyde, Ursula

Bethell and Katherine Mansfield. New Zealand literature harbours some interesting schools of thought and literary dialogues, with poetry theory being no exception and, indeed, nurturing one of the longest-running most debated argument in our literary history. The 'Curnow/Holcroft Myth' as it is commonly known, was first described after the three poets on which this study is based finished writing. Yet it is relevant to this discussion and, indeed, any discussion on New Zealand poetry, as it represented the first attempt to both describe and prescribe a New Zealand literature to both authors and audience.

The first chapter is occupied with an introduction to both the myth and the two creators of it, Allen Curnow and M.H. Holcroft. Both of these theorists played an important part in recognising that New Zealand, as a colony, could not rely entirely on English mannerisms and motifs. Through their eyes it was possibly for both composer and audience to evaluate the New Zealand landscape, isolation and environment in Pacific eyes. While English literature provided models and inspiration it could no longer be accepted as providing a comprehensive tradition to follow. There was too much happening in a Pacific context. Curnow, in his anthological role, not only collected together an interpretation of New Zealand verse which attempted to transcend fixed colonial interpretations, but in his introductions provided his own views on literature, views which through their insight helped poets to understand and, therefore, compose, and audiences to appreciate. Holcroft, in his three remarkable essays, wrote artfully concerning the climate and landscape which surrounded the New Zealander and which, on a more cultural level, shaped the lives of a few, but influenced the lives of many.

The second chapter provides a brief, but necessary, introduction to the genre of elegiac poetry itself, tracing the genre from ancient times to its more recent English adaptations. This chapter gives an insight into the tension which is an inherent part of this poetry and provides examples which might have influenced the poets in this study. I have briefly looked at the major figures, both male and female, who have used the elegiac 'mode'.

The third chapter concentrates on an aspect of the poets which greatly influences their contributions, yet has often been overlooked or ignored, their gender. Women poets, especially in the period in which these poets

were active, could often be ignored, or their contribution concealed behind their sex. Their poetry was often labelled 'domestic' or 'sentimental' as if these were qualities which played no importance in life, or in the lives of the critics anyway. Yet women poets described experiences and truth which related to other women and men also. In some ways this aspect of the study has been the most difficult, trying to re-read the poetry from a feminist viewpoint, which is probably not the way the poets themselves would have wanted their work read. Yet this re-reading has also been most rewarding. To attempt to offer a different definition of women's work, different from the mainstream male-oriented view which was on offer earlier in the century has certainly been refreshing and eye-opening.

The next three chapters deal with the analysis of the poems themselves, as well as the necessary information about the poets and their literary and personal backgrounds.

Throughout this discussion I have attempted to provide a coherent background to the elegiac genre and to the influences which the poets would have encountered while writing and living in a small and newly colonised country. The fact that all of the poets experienced a form of exile, which in some cases was reinforced by the loss of a loved one, has also provided another point of reference against which to view them and their work. While the work of female poets has often been isolated from the accepted mainstream, it is important to remember that poetry cannot exist in isolation, many conditions impact upon it, especially - it could be argued - the gender of the author and the landscape which she writes against.

But a history of New Zealand verse will bear witness also to changes in the wider social and political context; a national poetic tradition evolves as the country itself evolves.²

¹ Mendelson, Edward. *Collected Poems* by W.H. Auden. (Faber and Faber: London, 1976) 120.

² Sturm, T.L. ed. *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*. Jackson, MacD. P. "Poetry: Beginnings to 1945" (Oxford University Press: Auckland, 1991) 340.

THE CURNOW/HOLCROFT MYTH

Unique in New Zealand literature is the presence of two important theorists, two men who, through their exploration of ideas and cultural veils, enriched the understanding of a national literature and, therefore, a national identity.

While Holcroft and poets like Charles Brasch concerned themselves with expressing the physical character of their country, the environment, Curnow's especial preoccupation in his poetry was with the heredity, New Zealand's history.¹

A brief discussion of these two theorists and their ideas and comments on New Zealand poetry is necessary in any consideration of poets who have written in New Zealand and come under the combined influence of these theorists. Their importance was such that they were seen by critics and other theorists alike as adding to New Zealand's mythological landscape:

In order to interpret the peculiarly New Zealand experience - for experience cannot be raised into poetry before beliefs are evolved which endear the experience - a myth was created concerning a lonely island-desert, discovered by navigators and developed by baffled explorers, which was identified with New Zealand.

This myth was never widely believed in by New Zealanders; in fact, only a handful of *literati* were ever touched by it. This, however, does not detract from its importance, as myth-makers have always tended to be a social or intellectual elite and the people have followed by accepting the myth. Yet it may well be that the Curnow/Holcroft myth of New Zealand will never be accepted by the people.²

This 'myth' identified by Eric Schwimmer in *The New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* post-dates the poets in this study, yet originated from the same concerns which inspired both; the concerns of history, landscape and nationality. It is important to obtain an understanding of the existence and

extent of this 'myth' in the poetic climate as it was in the 1930s - the era in which two of the poets wrote - and subsequently. The presence of this 'myth' whether believed or refuted has provided New Zealand poetry with a crucible in which to initiate and appreciate verse. It may have been documented after the time period in which the three poets wrote, yet they were aware that the conditions which inspire the creation of a mythology often engages the vision of those inclined to poetry.

Allen Curnow inhabits a dual role in any discussion of New Zealand literature. He remains one of New Zealand's most influential poets, with a writing career which has spanned over sixty years. However, it is his role as editor and anthologist which has most profoundly influenced the course of literature in New Zealand. Curnow's comments on the various theories and concepts surrounding the formation and development of a concise New Zealand literary theory have sparked a debate which is still attracting participants and analysis. It was Curnow's Introduction to *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-1945* which first attempted to define comprehensively the conditions in which literature was being composed and read. He endeavoured to reveal, explain, and understand the history, isolation and unique landscape of New Zealand and, therefore, New Zealand literature.

He (Curnow) saw the development of national consciousness as beginning in 1923 (the year in which Mason's poems first appeared), changing from an essentially colonist's mentality to a national, and with and ahead of it he saw the poetry developing from its colonial childhood to maturity. This development encouraged the growth of a sense of national identity and the poets acted out their natures as poets in a quest for the essential character of the new nation, for its uniqueness.³

His poetry, when viewed in conjunction with his editorial ideas, can be seen as a response to - and illustration of - his own theories regarding the emergence of New Zealand literature.

Curnow was the first anthologist consciously to strive for an awareness of New Zealand literature, one which recognised many aspects of a slowly

emerging sense of New Zealand culture. New Zealand is unique and possesses a geography, landscape and culture which reflect and illustrate this quality. Literature was only one of the forms in which this individuality was being expressed yet, arguably, it provided a point of reference which could be easily assimilated by all New Zealanders.

The intellectuals were bringing up the rear, a long way behind most of their countrymen; but the fact that they had at last, somewhat reluctantly, and not without nostalgia for their cultural 'Home', accepted the facts of geography and history and had begun, as Allen Curnow wrote, to make 'a new discovery of their country', was a hopeful sign for the future. Whatever the ultimate status of the writers of the thirties may be, they have an important place in the history of New Zealand.⁴

While Curnow endeavoured to mediate between poet and landscape, providing a sense of realism, an introduction to identity, he also encountered an element of dissent. He soon found himself being criticised by a younger generation of poets for:

Statements like 'verse has begun to be recognised as purposive, a real expression of what the New Zealander is and a part of what he may become' led younger poets like James K. Baxter, Louis Johnson, Keith Sinclair, and Kendrick Smithyman to chide Curnow for prescribing a narrow nationalism as an essential test of value in New Zealand poetry.⁵

Curnow was not so much 'prescribing a narrow nationalism' as challenging the young poets to be aware of the audience which they were composing for. To attempt to write for the English reader as well as a New Zealand audience, Curnow dismisses as:

This knowledge of the English public the New Zealand poet cannot have in completeness. His incomplete knowledge of the mind of an English reader may lead him astray when he tries to write for New Zealand. To

be really sensitive to a language is to be sensitive to the people who use it[.]⁶

He emphasised the importance of language, something which not only provided a formula for his own poetic development, but which has provoked thought and consideration in poetry since. It was the essay 'Poetry in Language', published in 1935, which first indicated the level of concerns with which he was preoccupied, and indicated the future direction of both his poetic development and his editorial ambitions.

While Curnow's poetry was being composed and published in the 1930s, his criticism, and for that matter Holcroft's commentary, did not attempt to define the phenomenon that was literature in New Zealand until the late 1930s and early 1940s. Thus the 'myth' which was identified by Schwimmer only described the past - it did not prescribe a poetical direction for writers to conform to, yet it did provoke a seemingly unavoidable consideration of these conditions for future writers as they attempted to define a niche in New Zealand poetry.

M.H. Holcroft performs a slightly different role in the charting of the developing New Zealand literature. He published three influential essays on New Zealand; "The Deepening Stream", "The Waiting Hills", and "Encircling Seas", all of which attempted to commentate on the

nature of creative problems in New Zealand. In a comparatively new environment the problems are not related to traditions, to academic standards, or to the influence of groups and personalities: they go straight back to the land and the people, and beyond them to universal ideas.⁷

He was aware that in making the attempt to describe an emergent New Zealand culture and society that he was only one voice, there would be flaws in his argument and he would encounter ideas that would

merge one into another, so that he (the author) turns naturally from politics and morals to metaphysics and religion[.]⁸

He strongly believed, however, that the attempt should be made to illustrate the influences which shaped the conditions and future of New Zealand.

Holcroft was particularly insightful in identifying the raw material which was the *New Zealander* in the 1930s and 1940s, commentating on the social context which New Zealand participated in internationally as well as locally. Surprisingly few of Holcroft's many social and political comments, apart from those regarding socialism and communism, have dated markedly. It is his comments on the situation in New Zealand, and more importantly, regarding New Zealanders, which are of interest in this discussion. He ranges from such stirring insights as:

But the poets and thinkers, from whom all other writers derive a great part of their intellectual tone, must open themselves to those ultimate influences of space and time which are unacknowledged forces of the spirit⁹

to the astute observation that:

It is not the New Zealand mind I am seeking, however. Nor am I attempting to discover that elusive abstraction a New Zealand soul. What I am trying to decide is whether or not New Zealand is engaged in the task of shaping a soul.¹⁰

Holcroft spent a large amount of his second essay in the trilogy, "The Waiting Hills", on describing the awakening of poetry within New Zealand. This essay was published after the verse which is the focus of this study was composed (1943), yet it provides an interesting view of New Zealand poetry. Holcroft interpreted the role of a poet as both social commentator, a role which he, though no poet, identified himself with, balanced with the quest for personal independence. Holcroft, throughout his essays and editorials - he was the editor of the *New Zealand Listener* for many years - explored not only the social and cultural experiences which were available to the creative New Zealander, but also viewed the poetry and literature which was composed as an inherent part of that society and culture:

But the evidence provided by the published verse of a small number of poets suggests to me that men and women who shared the economic difficulties and the intellectual questioning's of the thirties found themselves closer than any previous group to the true vocation of poetry.¹¹

Both Curnow and Holcroft attempted to define a literary landscape within which New Zealand writing and authors could find a location. Curnow, by providing theories and definitions concerning language, gave writers an essential foundation for their self-expression, even if that meant, as in the case of those writers previously mentioned, that they disagreed with his concepts. Holcroft ensured an illumination of literary and social theories, not only for the creative elite, but arguably for those who needed it most, the New Zealand reading audience. In his role as essayist and editor he wrote in a forum which was easily accessible to the majority of the New Zealand reading public, which indicates that, perhaps, his sphere of influence was the greater of the two theorists. Regardless of this though, the effect of their combined theories on both authors and audience are inextricable from each other.

In his article entitled, "The Two Realities of New Zealand Poetry" published in 1965, Andrew Gurr reintroduces the idea that:

Most of the major New Zealand poets have been in a state of war for over a decade now. They split on the meaning of reality, the question of what is the ultimate nature of the goal for which they acknowledge themselves to be striving for in their poetry.¹²

These 'two realities' have already been briefly examined. There is the reality which Curnow embraced:

He (Curnow) contends that New Zealand poetry reached its manhood in the 1930s, in poetry which sought for reality in the peculiar character of the country, the individuality of New Zealandness¹³

while the opposing reality

proclaims that a more private reality, an individual truth,
is and should be the goal of the poet.¹⁴

Both of these realities have validity in the context of an ever-developing New Zealand literature. Yet, as indicated by the term 'war', there is enough disparity between the two concepts for the argument to impact upon the literature.

Reality is something which each poet needs to interpret and react either against, or toward, throughout the formulation of their own poetic style.

Fundamental to Curnow's poetry, as to his criticism, is the relation he observes between the poet, the poem, and the 'real' world, always connected but always emphatically distinct.¹⁵

The 'reality' of elegiac poetry, the eventual focus of this study, is more reliant, perhaps, on that thesis which suggests the quest for individual truth is ultimately the objective for the poet. Elegiac poetry, by its very nature, contains the very private reality of grief, loss and mourning. Curnow's doctrine is, however, also relevant to this more personal poetic genre, as the elegiac poems can also be seen as examples of his theory, as the majority of them were composed in the 1930s.

Out of the various concepts present in New Zealand literature; a harsh Antipodean (not Pacific) landscape, a still-colonial environment, geographical isolation and an historical past that was all too present, it was the concept of 'history' which was the most problematic for the theorists to embrace with any sense of ease.

The particular bias which nationalism, cultural dependence and all the other circumstances of post-colonial literature gave to this concept of the poet's need and the poet's function was, inevitably, a sense of particularity, a sense of place or history, of distinctive character in the national context[.]¹⁶

History, for the purpose of this discussion, can be defined as the methodical recording of events both public and private. In any record of events, however, there is the inherent probability of those events being deciphered in a variety of ways. In this respect, history can be viewed as an intellectual form of self-deception, within which are the presuppositions between fact and reality. It was the impermanent aspect of history which concerned and inspired the poetic psyche from the 1900s through to the 1940s. Mary Ursula Bethell, standing in her garden on the Cashmere Hills, looked out upon the mountains and was reminded of the brevity of her own life, that of her garden, and indeed of all that surrounded her. This was the scene, however, that provided her greatest inspiration and gave her a sense of time and place. History, then, was seen by Curnow, Holcroft and their poetic forerunners as a process, a progression which by its very nature, embraced its own limitations and brought about the eventual destruction of itself.

Combined with a strong sense of New Zealand's apparent lack of history, a new awareness was emerging, one that found little in the way of a national literature, while that which was present was difficult to assimilate into contemporary experience and, therefore, difficult to understand. It comes as no surprise then, that there was a perceived lack of New Zealand poetry, or perhaps, that which existed was slow in gaining recognition, and slower still in gaining acceptance.

While history proved a difficult concept to grasp with any degree of confidence, another concept was present which poets needed to examine in relation to their verse, the concept of knowledge. The inescapable tension present in elegiac poetry, that of private grief being expressed in a public form, encourages a brief discussion on the various concepts of knowledge; private, self, and public. Private knowledge has two levels of understanding. Firstly, it is knowledge about a certain person, most often one's own self - though it is conceivable that this type of knowledge may extend to include another person with whom the individual is involved. It is this extended idea of knowledge which is of primary relevance in the discussion of elegiac poetry. Poets who exhibit any degree of private knowledge regarding another person could be seen to be writing about their knowledge of that person as an extension of their own self-knowledge. This, in turn, poses an interesting question. Can the subject of the elegy be considered as an

extension of the self of the poet? If this is so, then is the poet attempting to immortalise both subject and poet?

Public knowledge is the thought and expression of emotion presented to the public, for the purposes of this analysis, in the form of a poem, for discussion and thought by the audience. It can also be defined as an individual's awareness of the surroundings and society within which they are inextricably placed.

Knowledge is not, however, purely factual. Knowledge is also concerned with elements of the imagination, emotions as well as morality. Both of these concepts, morality and imagination, by their very nature, contain an element of judgement, which indicates that any form of knowledge pertinent to another person must claim to include the thoughts, emotions and morals of that person.

The insistence on the recognition and inclusion of New Zealand's reality into its literature can be followed through the work of many poets since the 1930s. Both the poetry of Keith Sinclair, who incorporated a sense of the historical into his "Memorial to a Missionary", and James K. Baxter's quest for runes older than those charted by European time in "At Akitio", continue and expand the concept of knowledge already stated.

A sense of history and time, knowledge and identity was being sought for throughout the literature of the 1920s and 1930s, as a reflection of the quest occurring in the poets' lives and in the culture they were immersed in. Residence in New Zealand was not obligatory, however, for this quest to take place.

Katherine Mansfield's New Zealand stories and some of her poetry were located within a specific known landscape and revealed glimpses of a personal history which New Zealand now claims as its own:

It is by that 'kind of special prose', worked out in such delicate musical compositions as "Prelude" and "At the Bay" that Katherine Mansfield finally paid the debt to family associations and the hills and beaches around her Wellington home.¹⁷

Mansfield, though physically located half a world away from 'home', displayed an intimacy of knowledge, both geographical and historical, which reveals not only her ability to observe and illustrate events and people but also her identification with those characters and scenes. It is arguable that Mansfield's identification with New Zealand's history and landscape occurred most poignantly when she encountered the realisation that she could never go back, that she was not an expatriate but an exile. Her knowledge, then, is knowledge of where she came from and who she was, but it was also knowledge shaped by the irretrievable past.

Curnow and Holcroft each stressed the necessity for knowledge, whether it was self-knowledge or, more importantly, knowledge of the landscape, environment (social and cultural), geography and history of New Zealand, in order to be able to attempt to compose New Zealand poetry. This concept follows on from Curnow's plea for an increased knowledge of language and audience, yet it also hinted at a different degree of knowledge altogether. The implication for writers was the need to know one's own personal history and landscape before being able to compose public verse, verse which could be assimilated into the experience of the New Zealand audience, as opposed to verse which was primarily concerned with the poets' individual thoughts and emotions. Public verse spoke of tangible New Zealand geography and history, it was distinct and indigenous in a literary 'landscape' which, more often than not, did not belong in a Pacific context.

Spiritual powers, but root and rock to grip;
For islands, an intelligible hope¹⁸

New Zealand was, undeniably, a colony and as such contained a whole set of conditions which not only helped in the establishment of the colony but also in its growth and structure.

We use the term 'post-colonial', however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day.¹⁹

All of the poets in this study fall within the definition of post-colonial writers, as all of them were influenced by the tradition and cultures which

existed in post-colonial New Zealand. Mansfield is the only author who was actually born in New Zealand, but all the writers participate in the tradition which exists in their country of residence even, as in the case of Mansfield and Hyde, when she was no longer resident there:

In a few agitated years a handful of men and women produced a body of work which, in an intimate and organic sense, belonged to the country as none of its previous writings had done. They created the nucleus of a literature where there had existed before only isolated achievement.²⁰

The theory of post-colonialism does not have great impact upon this study if it is viewed only in terms of colonial attitudes towards New Zealand, or indeed, colonial attitudes toward literature. What is most important about the theory is that it has relevance when we are viewing the place women's writing and poetry held in literature in the 1930s, an awareness that the women themselves would have acknowledged.

There are parallels between the dominant post-colonial literature which not only assimilated, but practically destroyed any indigenous oral literary history, and the way in which female writers were continually marginalised in their own culture and, more especially, in their own literary tradition. The literature of New Zealand was already developing in response to the process of colonisation, yet within the literary structure another form of domination was occurring, male writers and theorists dictated not only the literature but those who participated in it. Women were viewed as another 'other' in a nation which was not quite national and a culture which was not quite identified as New Zealand. These writers were faced, as Curnow was perhaps the first to fully realise, with not only constructing a literature, but also reconstructing the past and bringing it into the present. It would be wrong to say that there was no sense of history in New Zealand, just that it was not a European history and was, therefore, not one the writers identified with or acknowledged:

Post-colonial literary theory, then, has begun to deal with the problems of transmuting time into space, with the present struggling out of the past, and, like much

recent post-colonial literature, it attempts to construct a future.²¹

Language was also important in this process:

Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established.²²

In New Zealand literature, as in all other post-colonial literatures, it is language which provides the author with expression. Women were, in effect, caught in the situation where their poetry was often relegated to such anthologies as *Kowhai Gold* which Curnow, among others, derided:

I doubt whether, in 1930, anyone could have assembled an anthology of 'contemporary New Zealand verse' which would have done us much more credit. But *Kowhai Gold* should stand as a warning to the journalistically minded who mistake magazine verse for a nation's poetry. There is nothing in the derivation of 'anthology' to justify such diligent scraping of a small pot's bottom.²³

The language which women choose must surely contain different shades of meaning as it represents their own unique experiences, as distinguished from men who also, presumably, have experiences which are separate from women's. It follows then, that even though the language which both genders are using is the same, the gender of the author will indicate which nuances they intend to express for their reading audience. If that audience was compiled primarily of men, it seems probably that the writing of women would be seen in less favourable eyes. This was, in fact, the case as women's writing became more isolated within the literary tradition in which it attempted to participate.

The isolation which New Zealand's female writers experienced was mirrored in their lack of published work. It was an isolation which, perhaps, reinforced their intimacy with New Zealand rather than further alienating

them. However isolated the colony felt itself to be, it continued to be affected by world events as well as local ones.

The economic and political circumstances leading up to the Depression provided the opportunity and the reality for New Zealanders to begin to view themselves in a national context. It was these ideas and, more importantly perhaps, the social conditions which existed, that were located in the verse of the period, and, therefore, the reality of the period. It was in this broader intellectual, moral, imaginative and uniquely Pacific atmosphere that the writers of New Zealand verse located themselves and their country.

The argument which Holcroft and Curnow examined in the 1940s, which reinforced the necessity of knowing the landscape to which the poet belonged before participating and commenting on it, reflects the new awareness:

It would not be correct to say that our poetry has had its true beginnings in the past twelve years, for a glance at the anthologies will show that neat and competent work was done in the earlier periods. But most of the earlier versifiers were like English birds fluttering with uneasy song above the dark green thickets of an alien forest.²⁴

Both Curnow and Holcroft recognised that the formation of a New Zealand culture and the recognition of a literary tradition were not mutually exclusive, that one needed the other if both were to survive.

Charles Brasch, in his editorial note to the first issue of the quarterly review *Landfall* saw literature as having an impact on life and that life had an impact on literature:

But the arts do not exist in a void. They are products of the individual imagination and at the same time social phenomena; raised above the heat and dust of everyday life, and yet closely implicated in it.²⁵

He dismissed the argument that literature is relevant to only a small percentage of the population and saw its role as releasing emotions which were present in society:

For although there is no subject with which the arts may not deal, this is the central theme to which they always return: human life as such.²⁶

Curnow, Holcroft and, to a certain extent, Brasch recognised that the predilection was to turn to introspection to find the material with which to write. They believed that if this were to happen, the resulting New Zealand literature would be overwhelmed with English motif, laden with anachronistic emblems and entirely out of place - and time - in a Pacific landscape, as Holcroft expands:

I am thinking, rather, of that exaggerated, almost egocentric, insistence on withdrawal into private experience which retarded the English poets of the thirties in their vain search for artistic security.²⁷

It was the responsibility of the poets and writers to respond to this concern while they themselves recognised that to do so would require their evolving in a Pacific consciousness within a distinctly European tradition.

The assertion that an individual interpretation of the landscape is a prerequisite for poetry does not easily allow for the poet's identification of that blend of both inner and outer landscape. It also allows no niche for the elegiac poetry which is the focus of this discussion to enter and inhabit. Behind this seeming peripheral questing about the landscape and background of those participating in New Zealand verse, lies the hidden question of how we are to interpret the literature and the verse if the background of the poet is unknown. It is not merely a question of placing the poetry into an environment, it is a question of enabling the audience to put the poet into a literary as well as a geographical landscape. Curnow hints at this when he states that New Zealand poets should choose between writing for a New Zealand and an English audience:

For whom are the New Zealand poets writing? Sometimes the poets speak to a public with which they are related only by a subscription to an exclusive English periodical, and the results belong neither to that public nor to the country of origin. And sometimes, very rarely, the appeal is to New Zealand as the poets know New Zealand.²⁸

Neither Curnow nor Holcroft saw the poet's inspiration coming from an entirely individual experience. Instead they saw New Zealand poetry as describing both national and communal truths. Elegiac poetry is in potential conflict with such a view as this. It is likely that both authors could foresee the need for the expression of individual emotion, yet in a marginalised capacity. The literary mainstream could not preoccupy itself with the individual when the emphasis surrounding the poets was almost entirely national. The poets who concentrated on such topics found themselves marginalised, anthologised and then, in all probability, forgotten.

In urging New Zealand poets to write for a New Zealand audience, Curnow is attempting to focus them upon what they know about themselves and about their landscape in order to close the distance between the 'home' of the exiled imagination, and the home of physical occupation.

¹ Gurr, Andrew. "The Two Realities of New Zealand Poetry" *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 1 (September 1965) 125.

² Johnson, Louis. Ed. *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook: Volume One, An Annual Collection*. "A Closer View of the Work of Four Poets: Hubert Witheford, P. S. Wilson, W. H. Oliver, Charles Spear." With a commentary by Erik Schwimmer. (A.H. and A. W. Reed: Wellington, 1951) 65.

³ Gurr 123.

⁴ Sinclair, Keith. *A History of New Zealand*. Revised Edition. (Penguin Books: Auckland, 1988) 282.

⁵ Sturm, T.L. *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*. "Poetry 1945-90: The Caxton Anthology, 1945" by Elizabeth Caffin. (Oxford University Press: Auckland, 1991) 385.

⁶ Simpson, Peter. ed. *Look Back Harder: Critical Writings 1935-1984* by Allen Curnow. (Auckland University Press: Auckland, 1987) 9.

⁷ Holcroft, M.H. *Discovered Isles: A Trilogy* (Caxton Press: Christchurch, 1950) 12.

⁸ Holcroft 13.

⁹ Holcroft 150.

¹⁰ Holcroft 21.

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- ¹¹ Holcroft 157.
- ¹² Gurr 122.
- ¹³ Gurr 122.
- ¹⁴ Gurr 122.
- ¹⁵ Sturm 397.
- ¹⁶ Gurr 124.
- ¹⁷ Bertram, James. *New Zealand Poets in Retrospect: Eight New Zealand Poets, no longer living, are placed in social and poetic context.* (Radio New Zealand Concert Programme, September 30 - November 10 1985: Wellington, 1985) 4.
- ¹⁸ Curnow, Allen. *Collected Poems: 1933-1973* (A.H. and A. W. Reed: Wellington, 1974) 127.
- ¹⁹ Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth and Tiffin, Helen. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (Routledge: London and New York, 1989) 2.
- ²⁰ McCormick, E.H. *New Zealand Literature: A Survey.* (Oxford University Press: London, 1959) 108.
- ²¹ Ashcroft 36.
- ²² Ashcroft 7.
- ²³ Simpson 34.
- ²⁴ Holcroft 157.
- ²⁵ Brasch, Charles. "Editorial" *Landfall* 1 (1947) 3.
- ²⁶ Brasch 3.
- ²⁷ Holcroft 155-156.
- ²⁸ Simpson 7.

THOU WILT NOT LEAVE US IN THE DUST - (In Memoriam, Tennyson)

Elegiac poetry has its distinct origins in both classical verse and literature. Pastoral elegies were a favourite form of expression for both Classical, Renaissance and Romantic poets, yet the poetic tradition did not remain static, as no poetic tradition ever does. It changed and adapted to the different poetic and cultural influences it encountered. In this chapter I shall make an attempt to trace those influences from the classical period and look at the conditions under which the tradition of elegiac poetry grew.

Elegiac poetry, as it existed in the classical period, did not limit itself to the meaning with which it is associated today, namely that of grief and mourning. For the classical poets and their audience, elegiac poetry was as much concerned with love as it was with grief. It is true that most of the love poetry written in Latin takes the form of the elegy, yet this is primarily because the poetry was written in elegiac couplets, a very popular poetic structure. Thus it is that the great Roman elegists, Ovid, Tibullus, and Propertius, were employed in composing love poetry.

Elegiac poetry did, however, retain its contemporary (and original) meaning. Latin love poets were undoubtedly known as elegists, yet there was a body of poetry and meaning which ascribed the more formal sense of lamentation to the elegy:

To put it very baldly, just as the sonnet was an aggregate form, in which practitioners defined their individuality against their predecessors, so with the elegist. After all, the elegy - and especially the pastoral elegy - had from ancient times been recognized as a form in which consciousness of tradition, repetition, translation, and imitation was inseparable from innovation and invention.¹

Poems which express lamentation and grief are, naturally, one of the most sincerely felt and appreciated of all lyrical verse. It is important to understand, then, that those poets who participated in the elegiac tradition could trace their origins back to a classical model.

As the tradition and literature of the elegy progressed through the Renaissance and Romantic periods the classical influences, naturally, became more distant and less important in regards to the structure and vocabulary of the elegy. With the advent of neo-classicism, however, the origins were once again unearthed and the impact which the elegy and various other forms of classical poetry experienced through the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was immense:

We may however affirm that in its more elaborate and considered forms the mournful elegy can be traced to classical sources.² —

There is an aspect of elegies, both classical and modern, which is important to acknowledge in any discussion of this poetic genre. There is a distinct tension between the articulation of personal grief in a public arena. This tension exists only if the expression of grief is distinctly private, in other words, if the poet is writing the elegy on his own impetus and is speaking for himself on the loss of a loved one. There are numerous examples of elegies where the poet is assuming a public voice, lamenting the loss of a public figure or war hero on behalf of the society he is representing. It is possible for a formal expression of loss to lie in the genre of eulogy rather than elegy:

An elegy has a natural tendency to become a eulogy, regret for the dead passing into the remembrance and celebration of his virtues. The tendency was strengthened by the Roman custom of pronouncing an *elogé* at the interment of any man of high birth or distinction.³

In this discussion both types of elegy, personal and formal, will be considered. Robin Hyde chose to write an elegy on Katherine Mansfield, a woman who she never actually met, while the elegies of Mansfield herself and Ursula Bethell are very private laments. It is the unavoidable tension inherent in this type of poetry which provides, perhaps, the impact and meaning which it possesses for the reading audience. Often the reader can feel placed in the unusual position of viewing the private pain of the poet, a person who is personally unknown to them, except through literature.

The pastoral elegy also had its origins in classical poetry, yet its emphasis was differently expressed. The way in which pastoral elegies differed was through the use of natural imagery and metaphor to impress upon the reader the cyclical structure of life and the renewal of seasonal growth patterns. As we shall see in the poetry of Mary Ursula Bethell, it was the pastoral elegy genre which she used as the model for her memorials:

The green has come back, the spring green, the new
green,
Darling, the young green upon the field willows.⁴

This form of natural poetry was not, of course, exclusive to the elegy, as pastorals occupy their own niche in both classical and modern poetry, yet it is important to be aware of the sub-genre when attempting an overview of the tradition as a whole. There are those poets who chose to imitate a pastoral form of elegy rather than another and it is necessary to acknowledge that both types of elegy possess a common ancestor as is skilfully portrayed by Curnow:

The ends of the earth are folded in his grave
In sound of the Pacific and the hills he tramped singing,
God knows romantically or by what love bringing
Wine from a clay creek-bed,
Good bread; or by what glance the inane skies ringing
Lucidly round; or by what shuffle or tread
Warning the dirt of miracles[.]⁵

During the Renaissance many diverse aspects of life and culture came under scrutiny from a wide variety of sources. One of the most important changes which occurred was a change of focus on the age-old concern of the physical distinction between life and death:

Other scholars write that death was no longer the focal point of life, that a wedge had been driven between the living and the dead.⁶

This was an important event, not only for the continuation of life in the Renaissance, but for the progression of literature which included, of course, the elegy. For with this separation between the living and the dead, the relationship which existed between them could be examined and renewed:

And because the elegist had a marked degree of freedom to improvise, to imitate, or invent, the elegy may be considered in some senses the quintessential Renaissance kind, in whose performance a high value was placed on those qualities especially prized in Renaissance theories of composition.⁷

While the Renaissance poets used the structure of the elegy to refine and improve their poetic talents, as it was the poetic genre most predisposed for this purpose, they were also discovering the various innovations and improvisations which such a structure afforded to both young and old poets. The subject of death was a highly emotive and serious one and as such was the perfect model on which to test their poetic skills. They were able to experiment with different kinds of language; many did not choose to write in the Latin which was so favoured, and instead wrote in Italian or English:

Formal imitation came with the Renaissance. It was first, naturally enough, attempted in Latin, and with remarkable success. It is still possible to read some of the Latin elegists of the Renaissance with pleasure - they were chiefly Italians, like Politian, it was rather long before the English Latinists did much - and at one time they were read with a passion of admiration. That is a fact of real importance in the history of European literature. It suggested the reflection: if Ovid can be imitated in Latin, why not in Italian or French? Why not in English?⁸

It is also important to remember that during the Renaissance period religion and the European church system were undergoing radical change as both were being reformed. It is not surprising then that religion played less of a part in the daily lives of Renaissance individuals, as well as diminishing in a ceremonial capacity as well. Just as Milton predicted the decline of the

clergy in 'Lycidas' it is possible to see the beginnings of the fall in Renaissance times. With even a slight movement away from the ceremonial relevance of religion in church rites, including funerals, a greater secular influence was felt. Elegists responded to these changing circumstances by reconsidering both their own place in the tradition and the way in which their subject would be received. The poet became aware of the immortality which touched both subject and author:

And just as death could be understood as a performance to be evaluated, appreciated, and admired, or condemned, so with reactions to it. As the elegy became an increasingly widely attempted form, this inexhaustible controversy became an inescapable context for most elegiac writing, and acquired, as might be anticipated, significant religious and political dimensions.⁹

This newly acquired knowledge or, perhaps, newly relevant knowledge meant that the elegists could become more secular in their thought and expression. The tradition they participated in was perceived as having less rigid guidelines with more personal responsibility placed on each author. The elegy became more individualised, both in the way in which the subject was treated and in the career of the poets themselves. For it was not only their lament which was to be remembered, they themselves became part of the poem and, therefore, part of the memory. Respect was offered and, more importantly, was seen to be offered.

The elegy became more individualised not only toward the lamented one, but for the poet also, a more personal expression of grief and loss appeared. Increasingly the poets were adapting the elegiac genre to their own special needs and style, as innovate they must in order to both further and maintain the tradition. It can be argued that with the advent of Renaissance sensibilities the elegiac poem became aware of its classical antecedents and because of this and the new secular atmosphere, the elegy developed a new awareness of itself and its defined place in literature:

But more sophisticated writers - ... Spenser, Sidney, Donne, and Milton - recognized that the elegist faced in

an especially well-defined way the problem of fitting words to the special requirements of an occasion and of arguing for uniqueness both for the subject and for the elegy.¹⁰

The elegy became an exploration of the relationship between the history of the dead and the present of the poet. It was this relationship which lent the authority of immortality to both poet and topic:

Elegy is a battle with and also an acknowledgment of time, and time appears in elegy in several ways. Primarily, time is transience, represented by the fact of death, both of the beloved and of the forms of Nature around. But time we know also to be a healer, and on this the poet has to tread warily, for the healing must be felt to be more than the mere passing of grief into indifference and forgetfulness. Time is a seemingly interminable interval before the lover and beloved are, in the conventional phrase, united in death - which may be a blessed reunion or at the least a cessation of sorrow.¹¹

Immortality was, and still is perhaps, perceived as desirable. To be remembered for past deeds, great compositions or even for something as transitory as good looks all provide a sense of worth or accomplishment to the dead. It implies that there is a form of vicarious living through the memory and knowledge of future generations. The Renaissance desire for immortality was a pressing one for poets engaged in verse composition. While there certainly remained the religious conviction that life after death existed, whether in heaven or hell, there is an obvious desire not to be forgotten in the earthly realm. It can thus be argued that for poets engaged in composing elegies and, of course, their subjects, an intimation of immortality was achieved.

There are many examples of both forms of elegiac poem, the pastoral elegy and also the more formal memorial poem. By looking at each it is possible to not only acknowledge the literary background which each poet has

encountered, but is also valuable in gaining an understanding of the genre itself.

Milton's 'Lycidas' as previously mentioned, foretells the decline of the clergy while also lamenting his personal loss. It is unquestionable that Milton was personally religious, yet throughout the poem the imagery harks back to familiar imagery used in classical verse. By mixing both religious and classical metaphor, Milton can be seen to be emphasising both his poetic origins and his belief that the development of the church had reached a climactic point, his allusion to classical models could then be seen to be more acceptable. Yet the gods present are not his. The overall tone of the poet remains religious and he blends with this his own personal lament:

Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,
Compels me to disturb your season due:¹²

Milton explores the dramatic situation surrounding the death of Lycidas in an attempt to find a reason for it, yet learns to accept that neither he, nor the classical gods, could have anticipated or prevented the tragedy:

Where were ye nymphs when the remorseless deep
Clos'd ore the head of your lov'd *Lycidas*?
For neither were ye playing on the steep,
Where your old *Bards*, the famous *Druids* lie,
Nor on the shaggy top of *Mona* high,
Nor yet where *Deva* spreads her wizard stream:
Ay me, I fondly dream!
Had ye been there - for what could that have don?¹³

After examining the Renaissance reaction to the elegiac tradition, the next important literary period to evaluate is that of the Romantics. It is in Romantic poetry that the two diverse meanings of elegy become inseparable. Through centuries of verse the term 'elegy' contained two themes; that of love lyric and that of lament. Yet it is apparent that at some point in time, the two themes became inextricable, or, perhaps, they always were. The elegy then provides a forum for multiple meaning. Grief is the loss of someone who held a certain place in the heart. It is possible to state that in order to experience grief, one must have (in some sense) loved the one who

has died. If we apply this idea to elegiac verse, the love/lament aspect of such verse does not, then, appear so disparate.

The Romantics performed their own adaptations upon the conventional literature which they inherited. The Romantic period, in both history and literature, contained such contradictory elements as revolution and democracy, introspection and vision. It was in this atmosphere of rediscovery and reaction that many of the Romantics attempted new directions with certain genres of literature they encountered. They discovered that there were many of the essential elements of Romanticism in elegiac verse; vision, yearning, originality and introspection to name but a few. The elegy can be seen as visionary, as it introduces a world where the loss of the individual is still fresh and obvious. The vision is often presented as chronicling a readjustment to the poets and, by implication, the readers universe.

Elegies embrace the vision of a new human condition, a new truth after the loss of one who participated in that universe. The elegist does not necessarily yearn for the lamented one, yet the impulse to yearn is inherent in the Romantic impetus lying behind the composition of the elegy. The reasons behind the death of a loved one are unique to each situation, in some cases it could have been a blessing after a long and painful illness, or in other cases a tragedy striking down one very young and active. Yearning can be interpreted as being filled with a variety of emotions; longing, compassion or even tenderness. It seems possible then, that poets could compose verse on the outpouring of tenderness toward a departed friend, or long for their physical presence.

Originality is a part of most poetic impulses in literary history, and the desire to enlarge upon an ancient tradition is one which should not be overlooked. Yet most poets were aware that:

After all, the elegy - and especially the pastoral elegy - had from ancient times been recognized as a form in which consciousness of tradition, repetition, translation, and imitation was inseparable from innovation and invention.¹⁴

There is, undeniably, an element of introspection inherent in most poetic accomplishments, however, when looking at such an intimate poetic expression as occurs in an elegy, the issue of introspection takes on a new importance. It can be argued that introspection in the elegy can be seen in conjunction with the public/private tension already previously identified. For to be introspective about grief entails looking inward and meditating upon the emotion found there, yet to compose poetry about that grief involves an element of composition. It can then be stated that to transfer that inner contemplation to a public audience involves some rearrangement or preparation of that base emotion in order that it can be comprehended and appreciated by those who are unacquainted with either subject or author. By touching on a few of the major poets (both male and female) and their elegies which were written and were available to New Zealand poets, I hope to be able to expand these theories through some poetic illumination.

Perhaps the first elegist which should be looked at is Thomas Gray. It was Gray's 'Elegy Written in A Country Churchyard' which provides the poetic link from Milton to the later eighteenth century Romantics. This elegy, however, departs from the combination which Milton embraced in 'Lycidas', where he mourned the loss of his good friend, yet also engaged in the act of prophesying the downfall of structures then in place, namely the Church. Gray, however, does not mourn a single subject, but casts himself in the role of foreseeing the end of the lives of all people:

In fact, it is not clearly an elegy at all, in the sense of a lamentation for the loss of one man, particularly a poet, cut off 'ere his prime', or a memorial for such a person.¹⁵

Yet this work provided an important reference for the Romantic poets, as Gray clearly showed true innovation and vision. He illustrated in a way which the Romantics could clearly appreciate, that an elegy need not rely on a conventional procession of mourners or funereal dirges, but that by touching on the conventions of the elegy an expansion of inner vision could be achieved. In this poem Gray encompasses the passing of all of humanity throughout his elegy, noting (importantly) that any reflection on whether or not the dead was lost before reaching their full potential - another important elegiac consideration - must be made with the knowledge that death can

occur at any time, in any place. We cannot choose when to die, nor is it a decision anyone of us could undertake to make.

The influence of Milton upon later elegiac poets was not confined to Shelley, and indeed was widely experienced throughout the Romantic period and beyond. Keats, along with other Romantics, elevated and expanded the elegiac tradition to both suit their own style and further the considerations of the genre.

There is, however, another poet whom it would be impossible to discuss the tradition of the elegy without mentioning. Milton provides a useful foundation upon which to place any inspection of the tradition, considering also the classical antecedents which were his influence. Gray's 'Elegy', however, served to show contemporary poets what could be accomplished when individual thought combined with humanity composed a lament. Shelley and Keats can both be seen as reacting to the conventionality of Milton, as they became proactive in their exploration of vision, introspection and yearning. It now remains to approach Tennyson and his contribution to the elegiac genre which the three women elegists in this study, and even contemporary reading audiences will be familiar with, 'In Memoriam.'

What words are these have fallen from me?
 Can calm despair and wild unrest
 Be tenants of a single breast,
 Of sorrow such a changeling be?¹⁶

Certainly the first notable aspect of Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' is its length, as it continues for more than 700 four-line stanzas. If any author could be accused of prolonging the emotions surrounding death for the sake of the poetic Muse, it is Tennyson. It is important to remember that Tennyson was composing verse in the Victorian period, and this is strongly reflected in both the formal structure and composition of the poem. Yet its very formality was part of its success, as it was both easy to read and appealed to the Victorian sense of appropriateness. Tennyson, undeniably, knew his audience and his role as a poet and elegist was defined by this knowledge. The fact that it is also possible to read the lyrics as short poems in their own right has allowed for its durability and contented importance in the literature of the Victorian period and especially in relation to the elegiac tradition.

Each of these poems and poets are illustrations of the components which make up the elegiac tradition. It is important to establish these antecedents before embarking upon the analysis of the poems I shall be considering, in order to be able to identify their participation in and exploration of the genre.

It is not, however, only male elegists who provided the contemporary antecedents for the three elegists in this discussion. The elegiac genre provided female poets, especially in the Romantic period, with an accommodating and acceptable outlet for their thoughts, emotions and expressions. By briefly looking at some female pioneers in the genre, a relatively complete overview of the predecessors of Bethell, Hyde and Mansfield can be attempted.

The women who chose elegiac poetry upon which to focus their thoughts, and sometimes their careers on, were seen to conform to the stereotypical portraits of women writers which were in place. Unlike Mansfield, Hyde and, to a certain extent Bethell, these women did not challenge the conditions which surrounded women's writing. Their only hope of publication and popularity lay in assenting to the patriarchal conditions imposed and enforced by the controllers of literature, the publishers and male critics. These conditions were often harsh, the ultimate penalty being non-publication, and any hint of scandal, something which was inevitably associated with women who wrote, proved the end of both career and reputation, both of which were fatal for women. Yet considering all of these hostile implications women wrote, expressing themselves and expanding the literature to include the impressions, emotions and words unique to women and their experiences. As most women chose to write on topics about which they knew, domesticity and love, these topics were generally derided by the majority of 'serious' (male) poets. Yet it was when exploring these known subjects that women found their voices. Death too, was a female experience and in Renaissance, Romantic and Victorian times, predominantly so. It was natural, therefore, for women to mourn publicly and to attempt to touch those readers who had experienced similar grief. The first female elegist to be looked at was the most popular female writer of 'sentimental' verse; Felicia Dorothea Hemans.

The myth of Hemans as 'holy' and 'sweet', which she herself had promulgated in her life and works, was thus already well established by the time of her death. On the one hand, a calculated self-projection on the part of the poet and, on the other, an invention of the age which needed it, such a myth profoundly influenced the history of women's poetry in the nineteenth century. Not only did it help to rescue the profession of writing from the scandals still associated with the names of Aphra Behn and Mary Wollstonecraft, but it also helped to promote, however apologetically, a seductively self-realising and self-admiring figure of the woman poet.¹⁷

Hemans is important because it was through her unfailing respectability that she managed to elevate the status of the female poet to the height at which it could attain serious respect and commentary. Other female poets were, however, limited both in representation and interpretation by their private circumstances. Hemans managed to veil her separation from her husband, a circumstance which could have profoundly affected her career, and established her name in poetry. Other women poets were not so lucky as can be seen in the history of one of Hemans contemporaries, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, also known as L.E.L.

L.E.L., though writing for the same newly conceived annuals as Hemans, led a distinct personal and literary life from her contemporary. Hemans' work showed little in the way of poetic evolution. From her first publication at the age of fourteen, her work matured little yet she still furthered the image of the women writer among a critical male world. Landon, however, showed a disillusionment with patriarchal duties and claims as her work progressed, exhibiting a scepticism which, had she included it in her poetical works, would have assured her of critical derision. It is important to note, however, that both Landon and Hemans, like Hyde and Mansfield, relied on their pens to produce the means by which to live. Their writing was not a product of leisure but of industrious work. By associating herself with a variety of men L.E.L. achieved a scandalous notoriety and the circumstances surrounding her suspicious death have never quite been resolved. If Hemans portrayed herself as angelic, the true angel at the Victorian hearth, then Landon found

herself cast in the role of the serpent as she finally married and travelled to Africa before dying apparently of poisoning.

Elizabeth Barrett-Browning published an elegy on Hemans in direct response to an elegy written by Landon. It seems as if the two women used the genre of poetry in order to correspond both poetic and female concerns to each other and the public audience. It is not uncommon for the elegiac genre to be used as a form of poetic exercise. As it is a well-recognised tradition with continually changing interpretations and innovations it is uniquely suited to this type of experimentation. Barrett-Browning can be seen to be perpetuating the myth which Hemans herself created:

But bring not near the solemn corse,
 a type of human seeming,
 Lay only dust's stern verity upon the
 dust undreaming;
 And while the calm perpetual stars shall
 look upon it solely,
 Her sphered soul shall look on them,
 with eyes more bright and holy.¹⁸

The predecessors of Hyde, Mansfield and Bethell, both male and female, inhabited strongly defined literary niches. The centuries of elegiac verse upon which the tradition took its shape and form was strongly influenced by a variety of conditions, one of the last of these conditions being female involvement. While poetry in general remained a recognised male arena, the women who were writing verse, both in Renaissance and Romantic times found themselves marginalised and cast into one of either two roles; harmless (the angel at the hearth) or poisonous (the fallen woman). Writing poetry under these conditions, and more importantly, writing about events and emotions which concerned women uniquely provided both a challenge and an obstacle for the women who expressed their need to write.

Be happy, crowned and living One!
 and, as thy dust decayeth,
 May thine own England say for thee,
 what now for Her it sayeth -
 'Albeit softly in our ears her silver song

was ringing,
 The footfall of her parting soul is softer
 than her singing!¹⁹

¹ Kay, Dennis. *Melodious Tears: The English Funeral Elegy from Spenser to Milton*. (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1990) 4.

² Thompson, J. A.K. *Classical Influences on English Poetry*. (George Allen and Unwin Ltd: London, 1951) 167.

³ Thomson 169.

⁴ O'Sullivan, Vincent. ed. *Collected Poems* by Ursula Bethell. (Oxford University Press: Auckland, 1985) 79.

⁵ Curnow, Allen. *Collected Poems: 1933-1973* (A.H. Reed and A. W. Reed: Wellington, 1974) 180.

⁶ Kay 2.

⁷ Kay 6.

⁸ Thompson 160.

⁹ Kay 5.

¹⁰ Kay 4.

¹¹ Smith, Eric. *By Mourning Tongues: Studies in English Elegy*. (Boydell Press. Rowman and Littlefield: Ipswich, New Jersey, 1977) 3.

¹² Campbell, Gordon. ed. *The Complete Poems: John Milton* (J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd: London, 1980) 42.

¹³ Campbell 43.

¹⁴ Kay 4.

¹⁵ Kay 40.

¹⁶ Bush, Douglas. ed. *Selected Poetry* by Alfred Tennyson. (Modern Library: New York, 1951) 158.

¹⁷ Leighton, Angela. *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart*. (Harvester Wheatsheaf: London, 1992) 8-9.

¹⁸ Frowde, Henry. ed. *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*. by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. (Oxford University Press: London, 1911) 251.

¹⁹ Frowde 251.

FOR POETRY MAKES NOTHING HAPPEN, IT SURVIVES.
(In Memory of W. B. Yeats, Auden)

Remember us for this, if for nothing else: in our generation and of our own initiative, we loved England still, but we ceased to be 'for ever England.' We became, for as long as we have a country, New Zealand.¹

It was not until the rise of feminist criticism in the Seventies that the disadvantage of women writers forty years before could be clearly seen, and especially that of Robin Hyde. ... But the change from Hyde's masculinist first novel to these fictions made her seem unstable and irresponsible to some, and as if she had a narrow, inward vision seeking idiosyncratic expression at a time when there was a healthy, natural realism available to her. There is a cruel irony in that charge, since much male writing of the Thirties and Forties was to have a narrower and more inward vision than hers, and she was capable of a far more generous realism than any male writer could achieve.²

The first quotation by Robin Hyde in 1938 embraced the reality as it intimately applied to both male and female poets, but especially as it related to herself. The generation of which she speaks is the generation which saw, lived through and remembered the Depression and which she thus describes:

but its stimulating effect on the thought and culture of rebellious young minds, in a silent country which at last learned to be articulate, was probably worth all the hardship involved. No New Zealand writer regrets the depression.³

The 'silent country' which she adroitly identifies could not only be the New Zealand of the Depression years, but also the New Zealand quietly inhabited by women writers. For it was not only Hyde who was herself hidden, but

the work of other female writers was often marginalised, and ultimately, unrecognised.

Poetry, like all literary composition, relies immensely on interpretation. It is conceivable that an intricate and subtle piece of composition could elicit a variety of responses from critic and audience alike. Yet it is remarkable that many different critics seemed able to reach remarkably similar views on their separate readings of women poetry:

diverse women poets drew, from diverse critics, a remarkably consistent response, apparently based on commonly held - though obliquely expressed - preconceptions about women and their poetry.⁴

The second introductory quotation is about Hyde and is intriguing as it attempts to clearly define both her vision and her own particular style, which has, undeniably, had an immense impact on verse in this country. Yet this quotation, perhaps, does not quest far enough. Evans describes the malady surrounding women writers forty years ago as a 'disadvantage'. It is a disadvantage to be wrongly misinterpreted, perhaps, but to be so merely on account of gender reaches beyond Evans' choice of words. It is an injustice in literature when work of merit goes unappreciated because of the gender of its composer, and does not receive the recognition it should. The critics and anthologists should be engaged in representing literature, not in creating the definitive interpretation of it.

This, then, suggests the climate which the three poets, Bethell, Mansfield and Hyde, composed in. It is impossible to determine or even predict what the knowledge of such a literary universe would have had on these women. Yet each of them would have been aware of the limitations, imposed by the self-appointed 'guardians' of literature, the critics and anthologists, and would have composed within that awareness. It is important to understand that the women concerned did not see their gender as being a barrier to effective and imaginative writing; the critics and, inevitably, the audiences did it for them.

The theme of exile is one which runs through the work of these poets, and especially through their elegiac compositions. With the death of their

respective loved ones, Bethell and Mansfield were confronted with a different universe in which to live and compose, a universe where their exile had gone beyond being self-imposed and become irretrievable. Mansfield and Hyde both fled New Zealand's restrictive literary climate and geographical isolation to forge their careers in London, forever the European centre of literature for the New Zealand writer. Hyde herself writes about Mansfield's exile, attempting to predict the situation which Mansfield created regarding her exile:

'I tell you my lord fool, out of this nettle, Danger, we pluck this flower, Safety!' That was her epitaph. People say K.M. ran away from New Zealand, but if you could see and understand her exact environs, you might sympathise with the belief that she ran away from a sham England, unsuccessfully transplanted to New Zealand soil, and utterly unable to adapt itself to the real New Zealand. They have cut down all the pine-trees in the street where she lived, in order to give her a memorial consisting of flat grass garden beds and a red brick waiting-shed. Running away from that sort of thing is the most understandable policy in the world.⁵

What was this 'real New Zealand' for Hyde and for Mansfield? Hyde has already identified, in the introductory quotation, that in the 1930s New Zealand stopped being 'forever England' and began the process of defining itself in relation to the world. There is certainly merit in Hyde's accusation of a 'sham England' for this was surely what she intended the reader to see Mansfield as escaping from, yet she is simultaneously identifying a true New Zealand which was already in existence. It is interesting to note that Hyde wrote this article in 1938, only a year before her death, when she herself had already left New Zealand and when she felt closest to the exile which Mansfield had endured. It could be argued that Hyde, like Mansfield, only identified this 'real New Zealand' after she had left it, as it was not only the geographical constraints which caused both authors to feel isolated, it was also the literary climate which dictated the publication and, therefore, the reception of each written work. These conditions take decades to change as can be seen through a review of the critics. In 1960 Curnow was still writing such cynical remarks as:

By incessant writing, incessant change, she fought to free her vision from its literary swathings - and in verse her worst enemy was the passionate crush on poetry with which she began. Her writing was near hysteria, more often than not, and she was incurably exhibitionistic: any moment we are likely to get the awful archness of her lines on 'Katherine Mansfield':

"Our little darkness, in the shadow sleeping,
Among the strangers you could better trust,
Right was your faring, Wings:"⁶

Mansfield and Hyde both, through their respective exiles, rediscovered themselves and their country, and, perhaps more importantly, the relationship which they each had with New Zealand. For Mansfield it was the land of her childhood, a childhood she could never return to except in her memories as she was now an adult, and the country she could never physically return to, as her childhood had so abruptly ended with the death of her brother. Hyde attempted to escape from herself by self-imposed exile from New Zealand. The idea which provided the impetus for her to leave was the wish she had made as a schoolgirl, to visit England. Yet when she arrived in England, after an erratic sojourn in China, where, among other adventures, she visited the front, it was to New Zealand that her vision returned:

And dreaming near, too vast for rage or mirth,
I see where woman-breasted ocean lies;
One hand for her horizons, one for earth ...
The green Pacific, with her waiting eyes.⁷

For Hyde and Mansfield it was the act of journeying, of seeking recognition in another place, other than New Zealand, which provided them with the recognition they so desperately sought here. By actively exiling themselves from the post-colonial New Zealand, they escaped the dominating culture and, more importantly for them, the dominating literature. By removing themselves to the centre of 'literature', the writing climate of London, and for Mansfield, the enlightened atmosphere of Europe, they attempted to distance themselves from a literature which allowed them, as women, no active role

in the formation and definition of literature. It was a characteristic of each woman, that anything less than active participation was not going to satisfy their lives, or their literature. Passivity was never going to be acceptable, in any country.

Bethell, on the other hand, exiled herself from England. It can be argued that, to a certain extent, she escaped the stigma which female authorship contained as she fitted an acceptable definition of a women poet. She began composing verse in her early fifties, after she had travelled the world and gathered a wide variety of experiences. She settled in the Cashmere Hills and established a garden. Her verses concentrated on this pastoral theme, one which was not only suitable for a female poetess, but one which she exhibited great skill, knowledge and sympathy for. Her exile increased in 1934 with the death of her long-time companion Effie Pollen. Yet Bethell's intense affinity with the landscape she found herself surrounded by the rugged intensity of the Cashmere Hills, and the breathtaking solemnity of the South Island landscape, all impacted strongly upon her verse and herself. Bethell identified herself as a New Zealand poet, yet brought a sense of the foreign to combine it with the known and created something purely New Zealand:

Beyond the blood-red rose-ungarrisoned footpath,
And the dun green flatlands where a few human lights
glimmered,
Wild indigo and magenta rainstorms invested
The dark recesses of the mountain ranges.⁸

It was this knowledge of who she was, a knowledge which she never allowed to be submerged by either literary aspirations or theory, and where she was, that distinguished Bethell from her contemporaries. Bethell enjoyed the longest poetic activity of the three poets in this study as she began composing in the late 1920s and finished only with her death in 1945. She defined and created her own niche in the post-colonial literature of New Zealand, and did so not only through her talent and poetic skill, but because she provided a view of New Zealand that had not been imagined before. She was an Englishwoman who did not yearn for 'home', but established her own wherever she found herself. It was this adaptability and vision which

insured Bethell against the opinions and preconceptions which dominated literature in New Zealand at that time.

By considering the availability of texts written by New Zealand female authors and poets there are strong indications of the position women held in the New Zealand literary scene. The poetry of both Bethell and Hyde had remained out of print for many years until the mid 1980s when an attempt was made to republish collections by both of these authors. Mansfield's short stories, however, have remained constantly in print, with her poems often included in anthologies, not because of their merit, but because of her undisputable reputation.

In many cases it seems that the life of the poet influenced greatly the way in which her verse was viewed. Hyde's idiosyncrasies and tenuous balance between her inner and outer world, led critics and theorists toward dismissing her poetic passion as, at its best, erratic and at its worst prey to 'sentimental posturing'. Bethell's gentle, yet inquisitive taste provoked a like inquiry into her verse. Mansfield, iconised to the average New Zealander through her powerful and influential short stories, remains above literary reproach, though her poems were never, for herself, an active concern. It is inevitable that an attempt is made to link the life of the writer with the art; in some cases this knowledge is invaluable in analysing and appreciating their work, especially it could be argued, in the case of elegiac poetry. Yet to universally categorise female poetry so shallowly intimates that the women do not simply produce their art, they enfold themselves inextricably within it.

Poetry is, essentially, an expression of personal experience, or an identification through individual vision and imagination of what different experiences could lead to. Female experience is, obviously, different from that felt or understood by men, yet it was in a male-dominated literature and culture that women attempted to write, to communicate their thoughts, emotions and vision, not only to a female audience, but to a wider community of thought, one which encompassed both male and female readers. It is relatively new to interpret poetry in terms of gender identification and to attempt to re-read the poems of women who have previously had their work relegated to an entirely peripheral position. Women have been marginalised not only in poetry, but in society as well

through religion, philosophical and scientific theories. This alterity or 'otherness' which women have experienced applies not only to literature, but to every aspect of public and private life. By allowing women power and especially the power of the written word, speech, and recognising their ability to own individual thought processes and vision, was seen to be removing those very qualities from men. Hyde has described a 'silent country', yet silence aptly describes the reality which New Zealand female poets faced in the years leading up to the 1920s and 30s. Not only the silence of female poets, but also the fact that there were few women critics to comment on poetry by either gender, indicates the complexity and enormity of the silence.

The marginalisation of women's writing must, obviously, be based on a theory of superiority, the male dominated literary culture determined that female poetry was not as skilful or relevant, perhaps, as that of men. It does seem, when viewing the literature and anthologies published before the 1920s and 30s, that such an assumption was widely prescribed to. The theorists, Curnow and Holcroft included, dismissed female poetic efforts, either claiming they were not 'true poets' or in thinly veiled misogynistic attacks as in this excerpt from Curnow's Introduction to *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-45*:

If she (Hyde) had found her appropriate discipline, or realised her need of it, New Zealand might have had a poet exceptional to the general rule of slight output and narrow range; for she found many and curious occasions for verse. As it is, the greater part of her published verse is theatrical rather than dramatic.⁹

Bearing in mind that Curnow wrote this before Hyde's last collection *Houses by the Sea* was available, in which even he recognised Hyde as discovering both herself and her country, it still provides evidence of what he signified as 'the general rule of slight output and narrow range'. With such poets present in his *Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-45* as Brasch, Mason and Glover, it can be presumed that the 'general rule' applied to those Georgian versifiers present in such anthologies as *Kowhai Gold*, an anthology which he roundly condemned. Of all the poets in this study Hyde was most consistently obscured, simply because she, unlike Bethell and Mansfield -

who was regarded as a short story specialist - did not conform to the myth which Curnow was actively in the process of creating:

There is no doubting the need of writers like this to get away from what they were doing; the problem for women, though, was not that their youthful work was worse than men's but that the model being offered as an alternative - the Curnow/Holcroft myth, in effect - was essentially inadequate to them at the time. Its technology was inoffensive enough, but its realist assumptions and the geographical colouring of its ideology implied a poetry of the outdoors, a life of activity and movement which was simply not necessarily true to the lives of the majority of women at the time.¹⁰

While women concentrated on the expression of their own emotions and experiences, they were effectively obstructed from entering the ideological and philosophical debate which was concerning the majority of poets and theorists. By creating a mythology, Curnow and Holcroft brought to attention theories and concerns which would have an impact on the literary community present in New Zealand. By attempting to describe and mythologise theories reflecting their unique views of New Zealand literature, they were aware that some poets would simply not identify or appreciate those ideas. The fact that most of the male poets could be included in the myth merely reinforced their sense of correctness, it mattered little and could be viewed as further reinforcing their myth, that women did not easily enter into their mythology.

Women's poetry, through not conforming to the mainstream male dominated theories and literature, was effectively marginalised. The impact that this has had on the interpretation of female writing in the time period under consideration - the 1920s to the 1940s - was far-reaching. It is only recently that any attempt at a re-reading of poetry in this period, and prior to it, has been made. Yet it is only by attempting such a re-reading that a valuable part of New Zealand's literary history can be retrieved and finally appreciated.

Remember this, of an unknown woman who passed,
 But who stood first high on the darkening roof garden
 looking down.
 My way behind me tattered away in wind,
 Before me, was spelt with strange letters.
 My mind was a gourd heavy with sweet and bitter
 waters.¹¹

¹ Boddy, Gillian and Matthews Jacqueline. *Disputed Ground: Robin Hyde, Journalist* "The Singers of Loneliness" by Robin Hyde. 1938. (Victoria University Press: Wellington, 1991) 358.

² Evans, Patrick *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature* (Penguin Books: Auckland, 1991) 138.

³ Boddy 347. "The Singers of Loneliness" by Robin Hyde. 1938.

⁴ Else, Anne. "Not More Than Man Nor Less: The Treatment of Women Poets in Landfall 1947-1961" *Landfall* 156 (Volume 39 (4): December 1985) 431.

⁵ Boddy "The Singers of Loneliness" by Robin Hyde. 1938. 355.

⁶ Simpson, Peter. ed. *Look Back Harder: Critical Writings 1935-1984* by Allen Curnow. (Auckland University Press: Auckland, 1987) 168.

⁷ Rawlinson, Gloria. Intro. *Houses by The Sea and Later Poems* by Robin Hyde (Caxton Press: Christchurch, 1952) 151.

⁸ O'Sullivan, Vincent ed. *Collected Poems* by Ursula Bethell. (Oxford University Press: Auckland, 1985) 19.

⁹ Simpson 59.

¹⁰ Evans 113.

¹¹ Rawlinson 142.

A HOME IN THIS WORLD

"Drive me away; ye are my people yet"
'The Exile'

The literary reputation of Robin Hyde, during her life-time, was founded principally upon her prose, her prolific journalistic and literary output ensuring academic recognition, yet for Hyde it was her poetry which she desired to be the foundation of her literary name.

It seems to me that if I am anything at all, I am a poet, a dreamer and a lover, and at one time or another none of these was an occupation to be despised ¹

It was not, however, until the posthumous publication of *Houses by The Sea* in 1952 that the unfulfilled promise of Hyde's poetry gained both critical and audience attention. Poetry was, undeniably, Hyde's literary passion, her novels and journalism providing the erratic income on which she survived. This is not to suggest that Hyde's articles and novels were written without care or attention. It was, however, poetry which fully engaged her passionate nature:

She was experiencing over these years a conflict between the journalism she had to produce in order to earn a living, and her deeper impulses towards writing prose and verse which would be of some literary value.²

In considering the collection *Houses by the Sea* there is the logistical difficulty that is inherent in considering any posthumous publication; the fact that it is impossible to ascertain if the compilation and direction of the poetry is what Hyde herself would have wanted. It was edited and introduced by Gloria Rawlinson who, while herself a well-known poet, was also a friend of Hyde's. While the work remains uniquely Hyde's, the selection of poetry for inclusion in the collection was not made by the author and when looking at Hyde's last posthumous collection, it is important to keep this in mind. All comments on the collection and the poems which were chosen for

publication have to be based on Rawlinson's decisions, as speculation on what Hyde would have wanted would prove not only unhelpful, but also inappropriate. The inclusion of letters written to Rawlinson by Hyde also presents information which would not normally be included and which would not have been included if Hyde had lived. Rawlinson uses her editorial role to add information which chronicles Hyde the traveller, but information which it is doubtful Hyde would have felt completed her poetry.

In *Houses by the Sea*, the reader can see Hyde reclaiming themes and motifs from her two earlier collections, and expanding upon them by incorporating into them the new vision, the new perspective which she had gained through travelling and her experiences in China. The images of wanderer, desolation, strangeness and death accompanied both poem and poet through her literal and chimerical journeys. She also, like Katherine Mansfield, returned if only imaginatively, to the New Zealand of her past for material and inspiration.

In later poems (many of them written in exile) composed from October 1936 to the time of her death, she comes to rely more on the physical environment and history and her evocative recollections of her country.³

It is undeniable that parallels can be drawn between Robin Hyde and Katherine Mansfield. It can be useful to be aware of the similarities,

The comparison with Katherine Mansfield is I [Bertram] suppose inevitable and can be illuminating in both social and personal terms. For here were two women writers, a full generation apart, who shared the same schools and youthful environment, made their own separate bids for sexual and artistic freedom, defied conventions and took all the risks that were so much greater for women than men. Both, despite crippling illness, won through to remarkable literary achievement, before meeting death in their early thirties.⁴

When a schoolgirl, Hyde greatly admired the work of Mansfield and this admiration remained as she matured, as both writer and woman. It was

sixteen years after the death of Mansfield at a point in her life where the events which led to her own death were taking place, that the formal elegy for Mansfield was composed. Hyde's elegy, unlike the other poems discussed in this thesis, is an example of a formal elegy. The poet had no intimate knowledge of the subject, indeed had never met the subject, yet chose to compose an elegy upon her death. Hyde wrote the elegy in England, the country which Mansfield, and Hyde herself, had striven to reach. For both writers, however, the fulfilment of the desire led to circumstances and emotions which neither could have predicted. Consolation, in some small part, was achieved through the memories and recollections of that "little land with no history", New Zealand.

'Katherine Mansfield' was included in the last section of *Houses by the Sea*, indicating the lateness of the offering, and through an exploration of its imagery, it reinforces the central themes of her poetry; themes of displacement, desertion and otherness. These themes and images are now seen through the eyes of a visionary in a confused and foreign environment, a description which could apply equally to both China and England. It became apparent that it was of no consequence where Hyde wrote, whether in Hsuechowfu or Bishop's Barn; she was that which exile can only illuminate, not extinguish, she was a New Zealander. In writing the elegy for Mansfield, Hyde was establishing herself closer to Mansfield, linking herself imaginatively closer to Mansfield, as both a New Zealander and an exile.

There is only one sentimental poem, that on Katherine Mansfield; and this is really about Robin Hyde, for it was she - not her predecessor - who could better trust the strangers.⁵

This remark by James Bertram in an article concerned with the reassessment of Robin Hyde illustrates clearly that any attempt at representing the work of a writer is subject not only to the critics, but also to the experience and views of that critic. Bertram knew Hyde in China, and his memories regarding her indicate the dubiousness of his impartiality toward her poetry.

There to her delight she met another New Zealander, James Bertram. He had been in China for some time;

he had interviewed Mao and Chou En-Lai and travelled widely with the Eighth Route Army...He remembered Hyde as a rather incongruous, unfashionable figure in a flapping coat and battered hat, limping through the bustling streets.⁶

This comment by Bertram is an interesting starting point in the analysis of 'Katherine Mansfield', as it reinforces the fact that all critics carry with them preconceived ideas towards literature, as well as, perhaps, their own personal memories of the writer. By labelling the poem 'sentimental', Bertram indicates that the tone of the poem is not to be classed as 'literary', the use of the word 'sentimental' implying the existence of shallow or softer emotions. Female poetry, especially of the type anthologised in *Kowhai Gold*, was often described as sentimental, prone to the gratification of tender emotion. By thus labelling Hyde's elegy, Bertram is attempting to remove any artistic merit away from it, he is consciously putting Hyde's poetry alongside the work of less important female poets as he links their poetry together through their shared gender, though they are not comparative artistically. His praise of her sequence *Houses by the Sea*, is approached similarly:

The sequence shows genuine psychological insight, and throughout it has a tenderness that is never forced, with little of the hard brightness that so often marred Robin Hyde's earlier descriptive writing.⁷

I wish to view the elegy in terms other than those used by Bertram. Hyde's formal elegy on the death of Katherine Mansfield is seen here in terms of an elegiac tradition participated in by three prominent New Zealand female poets. Hyde's elegy is of special interest in this study as it is a completely formal elegy, unlike either the Mansfield or Bethell elegies, which were composed from the pain of a direct physical loss. By writing about someone who she did not know except through her literature, Hyde is deliberately engaging in a particular literary exercise, consequently acknowledging the tradition which she is attempting to enter and exist in. For if Bertram's quotation illustrates nothing else, it illustrates the frustrations which female writers experienced when confronted with the deliberate marginalisation of their work, a frustration which, for Robin Hyde, proved to be fatal.

From the beginning of the poem, indeed from the first word, Hyde is acknowledging the links between herself and Katherine Mansfield; they are both women, they are both New Zealanders and they are both producing their best work on New Zealand, perhaps their best work ever, in exile. The exiles of Mansfield and Hyde, though different, for exile is only ever a solitary journey, provided the impetus and the circumstances for each author's recognition and exploration of New Zealand. The frustration and pain caused by the distance between exile and home is indicated strongly throughout the poem.

"Our little Darkness" the first phrase of the poem reveals much about subject and poet. The second word refers, perhaps, to the stature of women themselves both in a physical world and in a literary one. The darkness represents death, both Katherine Mansfield's known and Hyde's approaching. It can also be seen to represent exile, grief and loss - both of Mansfield and New Zealand - themes which feature strongly in her work. The darkness is, by implication, shared. Both Mansfield and Hyde 'inhabit' this darkness, it belongs to them both. It can be argued that Hyde is here reflecting on her own artistic death, as Mansfield herself did, but by introducing the word 'little' she indicates that the darkness is not frightening, it is almost a comforting description.

The next phrase, "in the shadow sleeping", implies the possibility of an awakening, from sleep and from death. The 'shadow' described here can be seen as the shadow of death, which is, perhaps, the most accepted literary definition. The possibility exists, however, of interpreting it in quite a different context, as the shadow of literary obscurity and, perhaps, also the shadow of exile, the separation from known to foreign. If Hyde's work was not critically recognised then it was indeed relegated to a kind of darkness, as, by implication, was she.

"Among the strangers you could better trust." Hyde is transferring some of the isolation and desolation which she felt she shared with Mansfield as fellow exile. Hyde discovered that often it was the stranger who could be trusted, yet she could not relinquish her fellow New Zealanders for they provided a sense of the known and with them she shared a collective identity. Yet she also discovered that it was possible to be a stranger in the

middle of one's own land. Essentially the "strangers" for Hyde were the Chinese, with whom she felt a deep affinity and the English, whereas Mansfield inhabited both England and France with success. To be a stranger meant, in the language of Hyde, not only the observation of the people around her, but the strangeness of self in relation to those people. To be strange was not a quality which Hyde attributed to others, but one which she possessed for herself. To be among strangers also implies a sense of isolation and exile.

Listening in street and stall I hear two words,
 Their word and mine. Mine is not understood,
 Therefore am I an exile here, a stranger,
 Eaten up with hunger for what I understand,
 And for that which understands.⁸

"Right was your faring, Wings: their wise hands gave you
 Freedom and song, where we had proffered dust."

Hyde, like Mansfield before her, challenged the standards set by society at the time, by attempting to forge a career in literature. Hyde's attempt to validate her literature and, indeed, all prose, verse, and articles composed by women, can be seen to be stated here in the words "Right was your faring." Women, too, had something to say and not only did they have the opportunity to write, they also possessed the right. The word "wings" implies the liberation which exile provided, yet exile contained restraints as well; insecurity, isolation and a loss of identity. Freedom, however, came with the ability to obtain insight and perspective regarding one's home, however distant. Mansfield obtained her "wings" in Europe, predominantly France and at the very end of her life the month spent in Fontainebleau, indeed, in all of the places she resided in after the loss of her brother, Leslie. Hyde comments on the lack of freedom Mansfield would have experienced in New Zealand, as it was still very much a young colony, "their wise hands gave you / Freedom and song, where we had proffered dust." The motif of "dust" is central and recurs throughout the poem. While France offered that essential for successful writing - freedom, New Zealand could only offer, "the powder of earth or other matter lying on ground or other surface or carried along by wind. Dead or the remains of the dead."⁹

"Dust is a thing of road and sheepfolds, rising
Where men and sheep are driven on to gate;

By placing the word "dust" at the end of the fourth line and at the beginning of the fifth, Hyde emphasises the desolation which Mansfield experienced in New Zealand, both artistic and societal, a frustration Hyde would have shared with her. But the meaning of the word "dust" shifts subtly through the poem. In the fourth line it represents the grains of a non-existent artistic entity. In the fifth line it evokes the opening scenes of Mansfield's short story "At the Bay"

The shepherd drew a pipe, the bowl as small as an acorn, out of his breast-pocket, fumbled for a chunk of speckled tobacco, pared off a few shavings and stuffed the bowl. He was a grave, fine-looking old man. As he lit up and the blue smoke wreathed his head, the dog, watching, looked proud of him. 'Baa! Baa!' The sheep spread out into a fan. They were just clear of the summer colony before the first sleeper turned over and lifted a drowsy head; their cry sounded in the dreams of little children.¹⁰

The road in Mansfield's story is soaked with dew, yet any New Zealand reader knows that dew gives way to dust rapidly in the summer months. The use of the word "sheepfolds" reinforces the link with Mansfield's work. The imagery laden in these two lines is reminiscent of the New Zealand summer, the hot dusty road, and the almost inevitable tangle of sheep. Yet it is not only men and sheep who are driven on to gate. Each of us, in our own way, passes through a gate, through life and into death. Passing through a certain gate means death for the sheep, and the shepherd himself is portrayed as old. It is interesting that through her elegy Hyde chooses to associate the images with that particular story of Mansfield's, a story which contains a young girl's first realisation of death, a girl which Mansfield modelled quite consciously on herself.

'We're not asked, Kezia,' she said sadly. 'It happens to all of us sooner or later.'

Kezia lay still thinking this over. She didn't want to die. It meant she would have to leave here, leave everywhere, for ever, leave - leave her grandma. She rolled over quickly.

'Grandma,' she said in a startled voice.

'What, my pet!'

'You're not to die.' Kezia was very decided.

'Ah, Kezia' her grandma looked up and smiled and shook her head - 'don't let's talk about it.'

'But you're not to. You couldn't leave me. You couldn't not be there.' This was awful. 'Promise me you won't ever do it, grandma,' pleaded Kezia.¹¹

"A wavering smoke, too faint and blown for signals,
Mica-bright staring crystals, love and hate,
A blindness in the eyes, a pain for feet."

The smoke recalls the 'blue smoke' of the shepherd, a smoke too insubstantial for signalling, a comforting smoke, a natural smoke. What signals would the smoke be used for if it were possible? Smoke signals are usually associated with cries for help, a call for attention. Could Hyde here be suggesting that her cries for help had not been answered for lack of the proper medium? Perhaps she is suggesting the essential nature of the smoke is sufficient just for it to exist in the words she uses. The imagery used in the next two lines is quite confusing upon first glance. The "mica-bright staring crystals" are most likely eyes, the main clue lying in the word "staring." Mica is a shiny mineral which reflects light, it can also be found in crystal form. If these staring crystals are the eyes of Mansfield, Hyde is suggesting that one represents love and the other hate. Yet in the following line she is describing none other than herself. She was pierced in the eye by a thorn during her visit to China, and she suffered from lameness. Perhaps, she infers the contradiction of exile, freedom but also isolation.

"Dust is the unthrown wrestler at our gate"

This line is most curious. Hyde is attempting to invest an inanimate substance (dust) with qualities of animation. It is "unthrown" implying an animate force could throw it, however, it also suggests undefeated. The image of the gate again appears, yet it is claimed by Hyde as belonging to

both her and Mansfield, it is 'our gate'. By again linking herself to Mansfield the dust becomes something which has application to both New Zealanders. By being undefeated the image retains potency. The word "wrestler" implies the capability for a long struggle. What is this gate Hyde and Mansfield are shielding themselves behind? Is it a barrier which represents the division between the writing of women and men? Is it the ocean division which exists between them and New Zealand? Or is it the barrier of the exile - the gate which exists in the mind of every exile.

"So wrapped in what they gave you, rest you, sweet:
Be tranquil, seagull conjured into swan:"

The image of being "wrapped in what they gave you" can be linked to a death-shroud, the burial cloth. It is an image linked with the 'they' of the stranger, as Mansfield, like Hyde, was buried in exile. As at the beginning of the first stanza, the image of Mansfield's death is strongest here with the indictment 'rest you, sweet.' The only false note is, perhaps, apparent in the use of the word 'sweet.' Mansfield through her uncertain mood swings and her frustration at being ill and her continual searching for home was particular and self-absorbed. The description of her as sweet, from one who never knew her, is one of the few false notes included in Hyde's poetical work. The image of transformation present in the two different bird images is quite unique. The seagull is a bird with strong New Zealand associations, in particular with Wellington; whereas a swan is a bird widely associated with England. By using the word 'conjure' Hyde may be describing a transformation from a displaced Wellington gull to a more refined English swan. Death for both Hyde and Mansfield was an escape to a form of tranquillity and serenity; for Mansfield it was an escape from her tiring illness, and for Hyde it was a release for her tired and bruised spirit.

"We have in mind who used you ill or well."

Hyde again uses the possessive 'we', perhaps implying the reading audience and the poet. Those who treated her 'ill or well' are also being remembered, fondly if they treasured Mansfield, or poorly if they abused her. Where does Mansfield's husband, John Middleton Murry belong within these two choices, I wonder? The tone has shifted slightly as Hyde is no longer speaking in terms of a restrictive 'our' but is discussing 'we', inviting the reading audience to enter the poem.

"The dark dust-taken hair slopes fallen back
 From mermaid forehead: once for all lie slack
 The winning fingers."

The imagery in these three lines of the elegy ranges from darkness to earth to ocean as Hyde lists the features which she associates with a New Zealand landscape. The darkness and the dust are placed together and are used in the only attempt at a physical description of Mansfield. Her hair has been taken by dust, a sure image of death, and the use of the word 'fallen' also implies her lack of life. The appearance of the word 'mermaid' in the next line evokes the sea. Not only does Mansfield possess a mythical "mermaid forehead" but this link with the sea can also be linked with an island. The link, however present, is tenuous as Hyde's main objective is to describe Mansfield and she is attempting to do so in a prescribed literary manner. She begins with her eyes, then describes her hair and forehead, then in the next line moves to her hands, in the best tradition of heroic portraits. Heroes were often portrayed in such a manner throughout Renaissance and Romantic literature, from the head down, and Hyde is according Mansfield the same honour. Her hands now lie idle, the artist's tools no longer creative; not only is Mansfield dead but her artistic talent is also. There is a sense of energy in those first two lines with the inclusion of the words 'fallen', 'taken', and 'back' words which imply movement and action. The energy noticeable lessens with the words 'slack' and 'lie'. There is a true sense of rest after an expenditure of energy, death after an agony of life.

"Rest you, in those arms
 Held out at Fontainebleau, rank flower and weed,
 Idlers and gossips, shapes of strife and heat
 Who find you marble cool to lean upon"

The phrase "the winning fingers" contains an implication of a triumph obtained. The fingers, the tools of the mind and heart, have won. They achieved through their motion the aim of the spirit. It was only the body of Mansfield that was lost, her art was victorious.

Mansfield met her death at Fontainebleau seeking, once again, a cure for her illness. It was in foreign soil she found peace, perhaps the only option for an

exile, as Hyde herself discovered. Hyde moves from the fingers of Mansfield to the arms of those who cared about her, the strangers who she could better trust. In the next four lines of the poem, Hyde is describing the physical whereabouts of the dead, Mansfield's tombstone. It is here that flower and weed alike, a direct reference to the inscription on Mansfield's marble, idlers and gossips find in the physical presence of her tombstone comfort and rest themselves.

The use of the word 'strife' once again conjures up images of New Zealand as it is found in the national anthem, "Guard Pacific's triple star / From the shafts of strife and war" Mansfield's praises of a 'little land with no history' have indeed been heard afar. The coolness of the marble juxtaposes nicely with the French heat and seems to provide a strength against strife itself.

"Deep underneath the seas is swung a bell
Of travelling note: oh, very far away,
Clear as you dreamed, gleam tiny bush and bay."

From France and the tangible, Hyde shifts the intensity of the poem to a distinctly New Zealand landscape and the intangibility of a dead woman's dream. The bell tolling in these last few lines is surely the death knell, not only for the woman but for the dreams of her country. The 'travelling note' marks not only the passage from France to New Zealand, but also the passage from life to death. 'Very far away', Hyde's voice is here lamenting the loss of her country, as Mansfield did before her. The poignancy of her observation adds a final touch of reality to the work. The images of lightness, found in the words 'clear' and 'gleam' alleviate the darkness which has lingered through the poem. By making New Zealand doubly remote, in distance and in size, Hyde is emphasising the isolation of the islands, yet by doing so highlights the importance which those same islands played in both her and Mansfield's lives. The 'tiny bush and bay' are described as gleaming, with light and substance. Of all the things that New Zealand offered, it was the landscape which was remembered:

Very early morning. The sun was not yet risen, and the whole of Crescent Bay was hidden under a white sea-mist. The big bush-covered hills at the back were

smothered. You could not see where they ended and the paddocks and bungalows began.¹²

"And after marble, dust fulfills a need."

After the permanence of a marble headstone, all that is left to contemplate is dust. The dust of the earth, the dust of the dead all mingle and provide life in the next cycle of growth. Perhaps the need fulfilled here was Mansfield's.

Hyde, like Mansfield and to a certain extent Bethell, was an exile. She shares with these two other women, a glimpse of reality afforded only by the presence of perspective. Hyde also was introspective, as elegiac poetry cannot avoid this special quality. Yet she used this self-examination to further her artistic capability, by examining self and surroundings from a foreign land. "The perspectives gained by absence intensified rather than initiated the impulse to explore the life and history of her country"¹³ Bertram comments that the elegy written for Mansfield was really written about herself, yet surely this is a comment which could be levelled at any elegist, including Mansfield herself. In attempting to write any introspective poem, a poem which delves into the emotions one has towards a subject, in this case a dead contemporary (Hyde began her writing career as Mansfield's ended) part of the poet will also be revealed. It is this which surely distinguishes the work of one poet from the work of another, for it is those emotions and the expression of them which provide the style and unique qualities which each poet owns and it is here that the individuality of both poet and audiences is acknowledged.

Hyde herself states that:

'For most of us, K.M. is New Zealand, and New Zealand is K.M.,' wrote Max Kenyon, well-known English critic. But though Katherine Mansfield was the most famous and best-beloved writer of the Antipodes, there have been others.¹⁴

It is certain that Hyde was including herself in those unnamed others, as she rightly should. By writing an elegy on the enigma which was Katherine Mansfield in the 1930s, before the wealth of published biography and analysis became available, Hyde is not only addressing herself to the dead

Mansfield, but is addressing herself also to the reading audience of which she had been long deprived. It was not until the posthumous publication of *Houses by the Sea*, that credit was duly given to the influence Hyde had wielded on New Zealand poetry.

Her actual place in the development of poetry in the thirties is also more central, and her achievement more substantial, than is commonly supposed. Only Ursula Bethell and Fairburn in the thirties produced poetry of comparable substance and quality.¹⁵

Hyde's elegy is the only formal elegy included in this study, as the other two poets write from a more personal involvement. By 'formal' I do not mean 'lacking in emotion', but merely that Hyde did not know Mansfield personally, and here elegy was an exercise in grief and introspection. If, as Bertram contends, the poem is more about Hyde than Mansfield, then for Hyde too, it is an exercise in literature.

¹ Challis, Derek. Introduction. *A Home in This World*. by Robin Hyde (Longman Paul Limited: Auckland, 1984) 94.

² Partridge, Colin. J. "Wheel of Words: The Poetic Development of Robin Hyde." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (5 July 1968) 94.

³ Partridge 97.

⁴ Bertram, James. *New Zealand Poets in Retrospect: Eight New Zealand Poets, no longer living, are placed in social and poetic context*. (Radio New Zealand Concert Programme, September 30 - November 10 1985: Wellington 1985) 21.

⁵ Bertram, James. "Robin Hyde: A Reassessment" *Landfall* (27 1953) 191.

⁶ Boddy, Gillian and Matthews, Jacqueline. *Disputed Ground: Robin Hyde, Journalist*. (Victoria University Press: Wellington, 1991) 67.

⁷ Bertram *Landfall* 188.

⁸ Rawlinson, Gloria. Introduction. *Houses by the Sea and later poems* by Robin Hyde. (Caxton Press: Christchurch, 1952) 143.

⁹ Fowler, F.G. and Fowler, H. W. Compilers. *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1924) 252.

¹⁰ Davin, Dan. Introduction. *Selected Stories* by Katherine Mansfield. (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1985) 202-203.

¹¹ Davin 220.

¹² Davin 201.

¹³ Sturm, T.L. "New Zealand Poetry and the Depression" *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (2 December 1966) 135.

¹⁴ Boddy "The Singers of Loneliness" by Robin Hyde. 1938. 347.

¹⁵ Sturm 134-135.

WHERE - WHERE IS THE PATH OF MY DREAM FOR MY EAGER
FEET

(To L. H. B. - Katherine Mansfield)

Oh, I want for one moment to make our undiscovered country leap into the eyes of the Old World. It must be mysterious, as though floating. It must take the breath. It must be "one of those islands..." I shall tell everything, even of how the laundry-basket squeaked at 75. But all must be told with a sense of mystery, a radiance, an afterglow, because you, my little sun of it, are set. You have dropped over the dazzling brim of the world. Now I must play my part. Then I want to write poetry. I feel always trembling on the brink of poetry. The almond tree, the birds, the little wood where you are, the flowers you do not see, the open window out of which I lean and dream that you are against my shoulder, and the times that your photograph "looks sad." But especially I want to write a kind of long elegy to you...perhaps not in poetry. Nor perhaps in prose. Almost certainly in a kind of special prose.¹

This extended quotation from the journal of Katherine Mansfield illustrates not only her depth of grief regarding the loss of her younger brother, but also indicates the drama within which she was immersed, a drama which encompassed Murry, England and, more importantly, Mansfield herself. She identifies her 'part', a role which included three main actresses; Mansfield the writer, Mansfield the New Zealander and Mansfield the exile. These three 'roles' needed to exist before the 'sacred debt' to New Zealand could even be considered, let alone accomplished. Mansfield also indicates her desire to write an elegy for her brother. She does not specify the genre of poetry for this work, though she did complete an elegiac poem to him which is the focus of this chapter.

It can be argued, however, that Katherine Mansfield did not stop there. Her short stories concentrating on their shared childhood can also be seen as elegies for Leslie Beauchamp. Could this be the 'special prose' of which she

spoke of? If so they are principally the New Zealand stories which, with the innovative narrative technique Mansfield employed, changed the course of short story writing and enabled the European tradition to enter a modern age.

If these stories can be seen as an extension of the single poetic elegy which Mansfield wrote for her brother, then perhaps these works should be included in this discussion of elegiac poetry? If these New Zealand stories were included, in particular the stories; 'At the Bay', 'Prelude', and 'The Doll's House', the whole focus of the discussion would be shifted, and not only in discussing the work of Mansfield. Consideration would need to be given to exactly what consists of poetry and what engenders the composition of prose. Could the elegiac theme be considered as comfortably existing in different genres, when it is most recognisably perceived in purely poetic terms. A blurring of the distinction between prose and poetry, especially problematic when dealing with prose like Mansfield's which is clearly laden with poetic rhythm and expression, would seem to be occurring and while modern interpretations might allow this, it is essential to remain true to Mansfield's prose and poetry and to treat them thus individually. It is quite conceivable that Mansfield intended her New Zealand stories to be a continuation of her sibling relationship and also to fulfil her 'sacred debt'. Yet to consider both stories and poetry in terms of purely elegiac doctrine would severely limit her artistic interpretation to the detriment of both genres.

The death of her brother in October 1915 so changed her life, her art and her exile, that it could be argued that from that point onwards, all her subsequent writing and her seemingly continual movement backwards and forwards across Europe were profoundly influenced by a chain of events set in motion by that tragic incident in a French forest. Leslie Beauchamp's important in the literary history of both Europe and New Zealand rests not on his desire to become a writer, but on his sister's all-consuming desire to write her country and her childhood into the life of which her brother was deprived.

A great deal has been written about how Leslie Beauchamp's arrival in England, and then his death in France in September 1915, acted as the detonator for her "Karori" stories, the staple of her last years. Some

of this legend was the creation of Katherine Mansfield herself in the months of her first stay in Bandol where she assimilated her loss and rebuilt 'The Aloe' in memory of him. Even more than her illness Chummie's death took her away from Murry, and some of the hysterical emphasis she laid on it can be seen as part of the wall she was beginning to set up between herself and the man who was still not yet her husband ... What is certain is that she made the memory of her brother into a ghostly mentor, the unique audience and addressee for her most celebrated stories²

This quotation from Gurr's *Writers in Exile* goes a long way toward illustrating the impact the death of her brother had on Mansfield. She yearned to bring the uniqueness of New Zealand and the passion which she still felt for this country to the attention and analysis of the 'Old World'. Yet that was not her true audience, as she herself realised. There was only ever to be one member of Mansfield's audience - herself looking through the eyes of her dead brother. Leslie Beauchamp's death was the event which ensured her irrevocable exile:

for she did not yet see - if she ever saw - that it was also her fate to be seldom content with the present of time or place; that only when the past had receded beyond any possession except that of memory would it become for her a time of happiness; that the future would remain hopeful only while it was still tomorrow; and that places were paradise only so long as they were elsewhere³

For with his death, the New Zealand of her childhood died, the exile became irreversible and with unmistakable irony, Katherine Mansfield the artist reached maturity.

Many factors contributed to Mansfield's journey of exile. The war years saw most of these factors come into play. In 1917 Mansfield was confronted with her first taste of illness when she was diagnosed with phthisis. She, along with the rest of Europe in 1917, watched as the political situation changed radically with frightening intensity and rapidity. Yet it

was her brother's exile from the New Zealand childhood he shared with Mansfield, by the occasion of his death in 1915, which both began and ended her journey. This was to be the exile which freed her memories, and provided her with the language and the ability to release the New Zealand memories which had so possessed her.

While it is clear that the memories which are interwoven throughout her short stories often indicate the depth of Mansfield's elegiac mood, it is her poem 'To L.H.B' which is the best and, possibly, the most poignant of her writing. The simple, almost stark, title of the poem, using merely his initials, an identification which she herself used in one of her many pseudonyms as K.M., links brother with sister. However much Mansfield dedicated herself to the lifestyle of the Bohemian which existed in pre-war England, her essential difference came from her place of birth and the childhood which she experienced there. She was still a Beauchamp, still a Wellingtonian, still a New Zealander.

"Last night for the first time since you were dead
I walked with you, my brother, in a dream"

From the beginning of the poem Mansfield sets the tone of her poem in the structure of a dream. It is set in the past, yet inhabits an apparent present as well. The act of recalling a dream involves both present, as it involves an audience, and past, since the experience of the dream resides in the past but Mansfield does not leave it there. By using two different tenses in the opening line, she brings the past subtly closer. The words 'last' and 'first' placed so closely together heighten the actual process which Mansfield is engaging in here, remembrance. Mansfield wants the audience to believe that she is remembering an event, the event of her dream, as well as the event of her brother's death. "For the first time since you were dead", she is here implying the beginning of many 'firsts' since his death. The readjustment of life and emotions which occur with grief are briefly indicated by implication. In her dream they once again enjoyed the walks they did when they were little and strolled through the garden at Tinakori Road and as they did later when he joined Mansfield in England.

He puts his arm round her. They pace up and down.
And the round moon shines over the pear tree, and the

ivy walls of the garden glitter like metal. The air smells
chill ... heavy ... very cold.

"We shall go back there one day - when it's all over."

"We'll go back together."

"And find everything-"

"Everything!"⁴

The dream of Mansfield's imagination is not meant to be interpreted merely on the level of a dream which occurred when she slept, or when she woke for that matter. The dream also represents the dream she entertained towards New Zealand, and the return of brother and sister.

"Give me your hand. You know I shall always be a stranger here"⁵

"We were at home again beside the stream

Fringed with tall berry bushes, white and red"

Her dream, like that of a true exile, takes place in the New Zealand she left behind. While her flesh lingered in Europe her thoughts and imagination took flight and inhabited the islands of her birth. These next two lines are setting the scene for the poem's main unorthodox message. The berry bushes with their differently coloured fruits are providing both atmosphere and sustenance, as well as bearing religious significance towards the end of the poem.

" 'Don't touch them: they are poisonous,' I said"

With valuable hindsight Mansfield is attempting to warn her brother of the potential danger laden in the fruit. She is trying to warn him about the other danger of touching things which could also be lethal. Leslie Beauchamp was given minimal training in the use of hand grenades, and was killed, along with his sergeant, demonstrating the weapon and how to use it. Perhaps Mansfield was warning him not to touch that which might be detrimental - difficult advice to consider when given in the context of a war.

"But your hand hovered, and I saw a beam

Of strange, bright laughter flying round your head,

And as you stooped I saw the berries gleam.

'Don't you remember? We called them Dead Man's Bread!' "

Her warning was to no avail as the hand belonging to her brother hovered, contemplating the availability of the berries. Within the poem, Mansfield

gives both herself and her dead brother a defined physical presence. Indeed, if it were not made clear from the outset, the death of her brother would seem to be merely spiritual. Of course, this is a dream and both the dead and the living coexist and seem to inhabit both time and space.

The atmospheric nature of the dream now turns from one of darkness (night) to brightness. The berries gleam, making them more noticeable and more inviting. The laughter is both strange and bright and is not identified as sound but as a visual image; it flies around his head as Leslie bends to pick the forbidden fruit. Could the image of the visual laughter be construed as Leslie's spirit leaving his body? Or is Mansfield linking the flying imagery to the freedom which he has escaped to? Perhaps the best reading of this unusual imagery is found in considering it as Mansfield attempting to visualise the departing human soul. It is interesting to note that it is only as Leslie bends to pick the fruit that it appears at its most alluring.

Readers familiar with Mansfield's writing, whether in journals, letters, or stories will recognise the means by which she herself accessed memory, the phrase 'Do you remember?' or in this case 'Don't you remember?'

"Do you remember Katie?" I hear his voice in the trees and flowers, in scents and light and shadow. Have people, apart from these far-away people, ever existed for me?⁶

By evoking her memory, Mansfield is declaring possibly her strongest expression of grief, for now there is no one who will remember, no-one except Mansfield, and for Mansfield the New Zealander living in a rapidly changing Europe, it was this which was hardest to bear.

I think I have known for a long time that life was over for me, but I never realised it or acknowledged it until my brother died. Yes, though he is lying in the middle of a little wood in France and I am still walking upright and feeling the sun and the wind from the sea, I am just as much dead as he is. The present and the future mean nothing to me.⁷

It is the reference to "Dead Man's Bread" which leads towards the main tension in the poem. The berries are identified as belonging to dead men, in a remembered phrase from her childhood Mansfield associates her brother with those anonymous dead, as he now is in reality, though she is attempting to both remember him and enable him to be remembered by those unknown to him. The reference can also be seen to be linked with the ritual of the Eucharist:

In the poem, she has him offering her berries - poisoned berries she remembered from her childhood, called 'Dead Man's Bread'. There is then a play on the Eucharist, the central Christian proposition on presence and absence. The bread of life for Everyman, the assurance of salvation, becomes in her brother's hands instead the assuring comfort of oblivion, the young soldier coalescing with the dark Christ of death.⁸

It is here that the dream sequence of Mansfield's poem ends as her brother calls out to her to remember both him and an event from their shared childhood, the naming of the forbidden fruit. The next section of the poem consists of six lines and the mood now shifts from dream to wakefulness, from the unconscious to conscious. Unlike the first section of the poem where Mansfield mentions the dream setting at the end of the second line, here she introduces the shift at the very beginning of the tenth line. The shift is made suddenly, perhaps to emulate the awakening process itself.

"I woke and heard the wind moan and the roar
Of the dark water tumbling on the shore."

Mansfield made no attempt to create a fictional persona in her poem, she very clearly identifies herself as not only author but also audience. Now Mansfield is awake, she can listen, instead of merely visualising sound as she did within the dream. The sounds which Mansfield is describing for her personal audience, her brother, echoes both a New Zealand atmosphere as well as a European one. By describing the physical world to one who no longer participates in it, Mansfield attempts to include him not only in memory, but in the present moment. Even upon waking, Mansfield still remains in the land of her dreams, where the 'wind moan(s)' and the 'dark

water' crashes on the shore. The atmosphere of the poem is once more placed firmly in darkness, indicated by the colouration and presence of the water.

"Where - where is the path of my dream for my eager feet?"

Mansfield was, at this point in her life, contemplating death herself, though I am reluctant to read a suicidal note into this line, or even into the poem itself. It is, however, interesting to realise that this was entertained by her, even if only briefly in 1915:

— Supposing I were to die as I sit at this table, playing
with my Indian paper-knife, what would the difference
be? No difference at all. Then why don't I commit
suicide? Because I feel I have a duty to perform to the
lovely time when we were both alive.⁹

Perhaps a more literary reading of this line would suggest that she wishes to revisit not only the dream, but the place of her dream. She visualises the dream as leading her to a place she desires to be, to once again inhabit the New Zealand of her childhood, and to know the innocence which she felt here.

"By the remembered stream my brother stands
Waiting for me with berries in his hands ...
'These are my body. Sister, take and eat.' "

It is in these last three lines that the strongest link to the Eucharist lies. Her brother stands again by the stream present in their shared childhood, though Mansfield is not with him. He stands alone waiting for her to join him, in the realm of dreams, and of death. He holds the means of death - the poisoned berries - and speaks to his sister in a deliberate biblical phraseology, echoing the words of Jesus at the Last Supper. The poisoned berries imply the poisoning of human flesh. The food which Leslie is proffering to be eaten is food which will ensure death, not life and the Christ which he is parodying is one of death, not eternal life. By inverting the meaning of the most important sacrament, the one which provides meaning to all others, Mansfield questions both reality and humanity's blind acceptance of it.

The essence of the Eucharist ceremony is that the presence of Christ takes place in the offering of bread for flesh and wine for blood. This process is called transubstantiation where the substance of the bread and wine are transformed into the flesh and blood of Christ for those who believe, as the sacrament is not offered to everyone. Christ performed this transformation in order that people throughout time would remember him; it is an act of remembrance in possibly the most physical form. There is also an element of sacrifice in the act of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of someone, even if that person is Christ. He sacrificed himself for the good of the people, in order that they would possess everlasting life.

The implications of representing her brother in the role of a Christ-like figure are numerous. The berries which Beauchamp is offering for Mansfield, and the reading audience, to consume represent the flesh of his body, not Christ's. Mansfield has already identified these berries as poisonous and the fact that her brother is offering the fruit for his sister to eat imply that not only is flesh poisonous, but that he is encouraging her to eat his poisonous flesh. Apart from the religious connotations of transubstantiation, the idea of eating poisoned flesh is not only sacrificial but also cannibalistic. By presenting the flesh in the guise of berries, Mansfield chooses to make the point obscure, and for those unfamiliar with the concept of the Eucharist, the imagery exists on one level only. It is Mansfield, however, who is being enticed to partake of the flesh, the flesh of her brother, who in her thoughts and writing she often merges into her self. The idea of Mansfield implying a metaphorical incestuous motif can also be read into her words.

Nobody knows how often I am with you. Indeed, I am always with you, and I begin to feel that you know - that when I leave this house and this place it will be with you, and I will never even for the shortest space of time be away from you. You have me. You're in my flesh as well as in my soul. I give others my "surplus" love, but to you I hold and to you I give my deepest love.¹⁰

Carrying out the full implications of brother and sister being presented as one, then it is also part of Mansfield's flesh being offered to herself. As

previously alluded Mansfield did briefly consider suicide, an impartial reading of these lines would suggest a hint of her own destiny, though it would not be red berries which cause her death, but the red blood that was the sign of the progression of her disease, and the blood of her Christ-like brother, like the blood of her self, was then truly poisonous.

Then why don't I commit suicide? Because I feel I have a duty to perform to the lovely time when we were both alive. I want to write about it, and he wanted me to ... I will just put on the front page: To my brother, Leslie Heron Beauchamp. Very well: it shall be done¹¹

The Eucharist commemorates both the presence and the absence of Christ, it is the ceremony of both remembrance and thanksgiving. Christ both exists and physically does not exist in the course of one ceremony. He is there in figurative terms, he commands the consumption of his flesh, yet he is not there literally as it is bread and wine which are consumed. The sacrificial elements of this ceremony have already been explored. It is, however, also the ceremony of remembrance. Along with the breaking of bread and consumption of wine, Christ blesses the food and it is this action of blessing and thanksgiving which has ensured the endurance of the ceremony as it is the remembrance of the blessing and-of-giving thanks to Christ.

Mansfield's brother is also involved in an act of remembrance. He is forever intertwined with his sister's memories of New Zealand, and the event of his tragic death releases Mansfield from entertaining any hope of returning home, as she now realised she had no home. The way in which Mansfield presents him, holding the forbidden fruit and waiting for her to join him, is also evoking remembrance. It is not just any stream he stands by, it is the remembered one, he is forever existing in the land of Mansfield's memory. In using the poetic form of the elegy Mansfield is also attempting to remember her brother to a more public audience.

The symbolism which Mansfield employs in these last lines takes the poem from the New Zealand dream to an inversion of the image of Christ sacrificing himself. Her brother was sacrificed in a war which did not threaten his remote country directly, and fighting for a country which was not his own, on foreign soil.

The elegy is written in a form close to that of the sonnet, with the first section of the poem consisting of nine lines. The second section of the poem consists of six lines which slightly extends the traditional fourteen line poem into a fifteen line work. The poem is not separated into two distinct sections by space, but is done so thematically. The first part of the poem is where the dream takes place, while the second part of the poem describes her awakening. Elegiac poetry is quite flexible in that it has no accepted form, it can be composed in blank verse, a rhymed sonnet or any other poetical variation which the author chooses. Part of the endurance of the elegy as a tradition through literature can be attributed perhaps to its flexibility. In all likelihood, like the love poem and the more formal epic or tragic poems; the elegy exists because it performs the unique task of commemorating the dead, and by doing so, it records the events of a life and the times in which that life existed.

World War I was not a fight for women, yet they too experienced the grief, pain and finally the victory. Mansfield was, perhaps, more adventurous than most women, as she found her way close to the front in France. Yet, she was not immune to the implications this massive event held for all that concerned her; New Zealand, literature and culture. It also held vast implications for her self on a more personal level. Her elegy marks a departure point in her writing experience. The destruction of the bond she enjoyed between herself and her brother enabled her to become free to fully analyse the relationship between them, and also the relationship between herself and New Zealand, for she identified them as one. With her brother's death, Mansfield explored her side of both relationships. The elegy records not only Mansfield's thoughts and desires towards her brother, but reveals the truth of her emotions towards her country. The one thing which distinguished her from those around her also grieving, was her origins and the absolute certainty of the knowledge that she could never reclaim her country physically. To go back without Leslie would be a form of suicide. Yet she could reclaim her country in a more 'sacred' manner, through the depiction of her (and Leslie's) New Zealand childhood.

The fact that her brother's death occurred fighting for a cause he was only remotely involved in, through the increasingly tenuous relationship between New Zealand and 'Home', provided the inspiration which Mansfield had

been searching for when she left New Zealand as an expatriate for London. With the death of her brother she left England for France as an exile and only found a 'home' at brief moments in her life after his death.

Mansfield's written work, whether poetry, stories, or her letters and journals contain the unique style which she possessed. It is perhaps, worthwhile to look briefly at the writing she composed around the time of her brother's death. Leslie died on 7 October 1915, the same month which Mansfield published a small story "The Wind Blows" (published on 4 October 1915) which lavishly and accurately described Wellington on a windy day. The brother and sister in this story go for a walk in the wind. The brother in the story is a direct reference to Leslie as he possesses the same familiar name which she first gave her brother, and then Murry, after his death, 'Bogey'. The rhythm of the story reflects the natural rhythms of Wellington on a stormy day, as well as the unity of brother and sister who are represented as one:

They cannot walk fast enough. Their heads bent, their legs just touching, they stride like one eager person through the town, down the asphalt zigzag where the fennel grows wild and on to the esplanade. It is dusky - just getting dusky. The wind is so strong that they have to fight their way through it, rocking like two old drunkards.¹²

In characteristic Mansfield manner, however, the story shifts without warning and the characters move from participating in that stormy day, to drifting on the steamer which was in the harbour, they are no longer children but are adults and are engaged in that familiar process of remembering:

"Look, Bogey, there's the town. Doesn't it look small? There's the post-office clock chiming for the last time. There's the esplanade where we walked that windy day. Do you remember? I cried at my music lesson that day - how many years ago ! Good-bye, little island, good-bye."¹³

Mansfield had not yet learned of her brother's death, and this story was of course written before its October publication, yet it is interesting to note that Mansfield can see herself and Leslie returning. The last haunting image of the story is the wind, the fact of its unrelenting existence. What Mansfield was intending the wind to represent is open to interpretation, it could mean grief which would accommodate it in an elegiac framework, or it could also suggest the futility which humans encounter when faced with the enormity and nature of fate.

New Zealand is an important feature in both works as are the geographical and atmospheric elements which Mansfield concentrates on; the wind and the ocean. The shift in time and position is also often used by Mansfield and is present in both works. It is symbolic that the only thing in the story which is not affected by the wind is the steamer taking brother and sister away, however Mansfield was able to capture the essence of that wind and bring it to life in her work.

It is a story of a different kind, oblique, episodic, with its shift in time level, and the move into interior monologue at the beginning of the second part. 'Don't forget' - how ironic her own admonition in the closing lines must have seemed when her brother died only days after the story appeared.¹⁴

The New Zealand stories, and especially the Burnell trilogy also reflect the elements identified in this quotation; slightly oblique and decisively episodic yet the rhythm has been modified and has matured along with the author. It was a year after her brother's death, at Bandol that Mansfield rediscovered the year-old manuscript of 'The Aloe'. From that point on Mansfield refined the narrative technique which she had previously been including in her stories. She also perfected the rhythmic cadences of her short stories, paying particular attention to the sounds of every single word and how they sounded when placed together.

¹ Middleton Murry, J. ed. *Journal of Katherine Mansfield* by Katherine Mansfield. (Constable and Co. Ltd: London, 1927) 42.

² Gurr, Andrew. *Writers in Exile: The Creative Use of Home in Modern Literature*. (Harvester Press: Sussex, 1981) 45-46.

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- ³ Davin, Dan. Introduction. *Selected Stories* by Katherine Mansfield. (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1985) vii-viii
- ⁴ Middleton Murry, J.. 34.
- ⁵ Middleton Murry, J.. 35.
- ⁶ Middleton Murry, J.. 36
- ⁷ Middleton Murry, J.. 36.
- ⁸ O'Sullivan, Vincent. *Finding the Pattern, Solving the Problem: Katherine Mansfield the New Zealand European*. (Victoria University Press: Wellington, 1989) 8.
- ⁹ Middleton Murry, J.. 36-37.
- ¹⁰ Middleton Murry, J.. 36.
- ¹¹ Middleton Murry, J.. 37.
- ¹² Boddy, Gillian. *Katherine Mansfield: The Woman and the Writer* (Penguin Books: Australia, 1988) 216.
- ¹³ Boddy 217.
- ¹⁴ Boddy 218.

I CANNOT BEAR THE PAIN

(Spring 1940, *Christchurch, August* by Ursula Bethell)

Now all is quietly disposed and ready
 And her soul steady;
 Strong Ocean-Master, Lord of living and dying,
 With her hour nighing,
 Prow heavenward, trim tackle, prayer availing,
 Send her fair sailing.

Basil Dowling "Extreme Unction: In Memoriam M.U.B."

On first appearances it may seem strange that Dowling used nautical, instead of garden, imagery in his memorial to Ursula Bethell, yet Bethell herself was a poet of both land and harbour and the God which she fervently believed in existed in both. For Bethell, the meeting place between land and sea - the harbour or shore - provided one of her most religious metaphors as she saw the harbour as a place where one could gain a safe resting place, or anchorage, after the journey of death.

Previously in the elegy, Dowling describes the preparations which Bethell undertook for her journey into the next world. The two things she takes with her are, ..."tokens of white flowers and friends"...indicating therefore, that the two necessities which she possessed in life are also to be extended to her death. The flowers represent her passionate love for the gardens she grew and admired, as well as her general admiration of nature as a reflection of God's creation, while the friends represent her need for company of a more human nature, the young people and writers with which she surrounded herself, and more importantly perhaps, the special friend whom she shared her life with.

With the death of Effie Pollen, Bethell's companion and close friend, in 1934, her poetic, private and to a certain extent, her religious universe altered dramatically. Every year, from 1934 until 1940, when, for some reason, she stopped, Bethell permitted herself to fully explore and occupy her grief, ..."You would be right if you said I should have learnt to "transcend" that grief - but I allowed myself to give way once a year,

thoroughly" ¹ These yearly "giving way(s)" are the subject of this chapter on the elegiac verse of Ursula Bethell.

Bethell, as perhaps a technically more accomplished poet than Mansfield or Hyde, brings an extensive texture and richness to her poetic vision and imagery with greater consistency. Unlike Hyde, who was only beginning to reach poetic maturity when her tragic death occurred, or Mansfield, whose poetry was not the genre in which she wanted her literary reputation founded and, subsequently, the publication of the Memorials have added little, if anything, to her artistic reputation.

Bethell's six memorials stand, undeniably, as a unique sequence in the history of New Zealand literature. The elegiac tradition is obviously not limited to the poets in this study, and many New Zealand poets have attempted and greatly contributed to the tradition, yet there is no other evidence of a female poet of Bethell's artistic merit accomplishing an elegiac sequence on only one subject. It is more appropriate to use the term 'memorial' when describing Bethell's sequence, as that is the meaning which she herself chose to express through her verse. The elegies were written around the date of Pollen's death each year, as a true memorial to the season and time in which she passed away. Throughout Bethell's six elegies for Effie Pollen, it is the seasons and nature which time and again draw Bethell from the contemplation of her life to the realisation of her grief and the seasonal triggers of fresh growth and flowers both comfort and remind.

In these memorials, as in no other comparative elegiac composition, the reader is made aware of the progression which Bethell makes from the painful contemplation of the loss of her loved one, to her gradual and no less painful reconciliation with that same loss. The themes which permeate the poetic style of Bethell are also found woven throughout her memorials; nature - both flora, fauna, landscape and wildlife - history, and a strong religious conviction inspire and direct the talent of Bethell frequently. It is these themes and the treatment which they receive through the memorial sequence which provide the substance of this discussion.

Bethell, like both Mansfield and Hyde, lived the life of an exile. Katherine Mansfield, though believing herself an expatriate, was confronted with the undeniability of her exile when her brother died and the New Zealand of her

memories was the only one in which she could creatively exist. Robin Hyde also went into a self-imposed exile, first to China, where she felt accepted, and then to England, where she then found herself in the unusual position of being exiled from both the China she had grown to love and the New Zealand she felt forced to leave. Bethell's exile, however, was not from New Zealand, it was from England, and like Mansfield, she too discovered the pain of being exiled from her home both physically and imaginatively after the death of her loved one. In her thesis Joyce Morton presents the view that Bethell's exile was more consciously achieved:

She has been criticised for her low estimate of culture in this country; but her attitude may well have been something of a pose, to detach herself from the elements of crudity in contemporary New Zealand work. She evidently liked to be regarded as an Englishwoman away from her proper home; and her friends say she spoke for a number of years of eventually returning to England.²

She spoke frequently among her friends of returning to England immediately after the death of Effie Pollen, yet decided instead to retreat from her garden in the Cashmere Hills and reside once more at 47 Webb Street. Perhaps Bethell finally acknowledged that for the exile, there was no going back.

Bethell was also distinct from both Mansfield and Hyde in another important, though less poetic, way. Unlike both Hyde and Mansfield, Bethell did not have to rely on the publication of verse or any form of writing in order to be able to live. Whereas both Hyde and Mansfield experienced the pressing need to be able to write to pay the bills and to exist on even the basest of levels, Bethell was able to contemplate and compose her verse at her own leisure, in between travelling, gardening and her many varied forms of Church duties. Presumably Bethell derived her income from a legacy or her parent's estates. It was such, however, that it allowed her the time and energy to achieve a depth and range in New Zealand poetry that was then unequalled.

I will just say this, that she was the first to tell the New Zealanders to pull down the blind, to shut out the view, the immensity, the distance, the isolation, which Pember Reeves and the others laboured in vain to make explicable and familiar. Pull down the

blind on all that, she said, and go back to just peeping out. It was bound to come. It comes of having houses and blinds, after just having whares and shakedown. New Zealand wasn't truly discovered, in fact, until Ursula Bethell, 'very earnestly digging', raised her head to look at the mountains. Almost everyone had been blind before.³

D'Arcy Cresswell's memory of Ursula Bethell's importance in New Zealand poetry, though much quoted, nevertheless retains an essence of the woman herself in his particular use of garden imagery. Another slighter, though no less important, comparison may be drawn between Bethell and Mansfield, the elegists whose subjects were more personal than formal and Hyde, who had never met her subject. Both the first-named poets experienced a period of creative inertia after the deaths of Effie Pollen and Leslie Beauchamp respectively. The grief which they experienced exiled them not only from their 'homes', but also from their inner 'home', the creative and imaginative fountain from which their poetry, their own unique vision, flowed. To remember this similarity is also to recall the expression of female experience which is so vital in understanding and appreciating poetry and, arguably, essential in leading toward a full and sensitive appreciation of the elegiac poem in particular. These periods of inactivity meant different things to each poet. For Mansfield it led to the writing of her story 'The Aloe', which was to be transformed into 'Prelude'. For Bethell it led to the composition of her memorial poetry and the beginning of her experimental sequence "By the River Ashley", which attempted to celebrate small episodes of her childhood and subsequent experiences in poetic form. It was not completed, however, and in its present state it provides an indication of the autobiographical direction she was taking. Both poets composed their elegies when residing in that purely transitional state of grief, where nothing exists except that which is no longer there, and both poets attempted to traverse that foreign landscape with imagination and vision, and with the irreversible knowledge that comes with the awareness of death.

Bethell, however, called upon her strong faith in God and creation, namely nature and the seasons, to restore her and inspire her in her life's work, whether with the Church or composing poetic portraits of the landscape she located herself within. The concept of time also held a certain fascination for Bethell as she attempted to reconcile the brevity of existence with the

permanence which nature enjoyed. Throughout her poems, and quite noticeably in the "Memorials", the theme of time; its passage, the seasonal regeneration, and the absolute dependability of its cyclical evolution, again draws Bethell's thoughts about the complexity of time into the subject of contemplation and influences her poems immensely. Her Christian faith also helped make her role of exile less difficult, as she was able to relax into an alien environment, with her strengthened religious vision of both landscape and history, a country with little culture and which exhibited the barrenness which comes with a widespread and yet small population.

The loneliness which can often be detected in the verse of Bethell, and which is overwhelmingly obvious in her memorial sequence, is explored and composed with the knowledge that the God in which she believes created all that is present in her universe, both that which pleases and that which bewilders. It is undeniable that while Bethell possessed a strong faith, it was able to be questioned and explored with the freedom of a mind expanded by wide reading, varied experiences and extensive travelling. Morton, however, documented her confusion when confronted with the inescapable reality occasioned by the death of her companion. "Yet for a time there must be loneliness and perplexity, most movingly expressed in the "Memorials"⁴

In any preoccupation with time, there must also be a preoccupation with the ending of time which occurs with the death of each person. Time can be argued as encompassing the progression of events between birth and death, yet life and the episodes which make up the composition of a single life is inextricably bound up with the knowledge of the ending of that life. The theme of death is one which has occupied the minds of all three poets in this discussion, as well as being a concern in every kind of literature. Just as the event of death is treated differently from culture to culture in both ceremony and grieving, so it is treated differently from one literature to the next. Therefore, arguably, women treat the event differently from their male counterparts in both reality and literature, as their treatment of many various themes throughout literature is different, because they are viewed through uniquely female experiences.

Ursula Bethell's religious convictions were an essential influence on her poetry. She was a deeply religious woman who found

Christianity a difficult and demanding part of her life ... In her poetry we feel that Bethell is continually struggling to find the peace and resignation of the committed Christian. Committed Christian she certainly was, but the moments of serenity and acceptance which she sought were not easily arrived at and did not always sustain her in moments of greatest anguish and pain.⁵

It is important to understand the religious significance of Bethell's imagery if we are to understand her work fully. From the first poem composed in 1935 to the last written in 1940, Bethell is embarking on a journey through all that is spiritually important to her in order to make some sense of the loss which she found herself faced with. Bethell's belief in God as the Divine Creator enabled her to view the landscape which surrounded her, and indeed the people which surrounded her, with compassion, energy and a spiritual awareness which went beyond mere Church doctrines. Bethell's faith, like her poetry, was very personal as she explored the idea of immortality through her verse with humour and compassion both in human and in natural terms:

So still it lay, it suffered an enchantment.
It was the dimly mirrored image of a grove laid up in heaven,
Or the calm mirage of a long-since-lost oasis,
Or the unflickering dream of a serene midnight
Dreamt by one falling into profound sleep.⁶

The immortality she found present in nature could also be applied to the realm of her poetry, as, by composing elegiac poetry, she attempted to immortalise both Effie Pollen as subject and Ursula Bethell as author. Here Morton describes the boundaries against which Bethell's faith was tested:

It seems as if Ursula Bethell never truly recovered her old resilience and boldness of spirit after this loss. "It means a complete shattering of my life; from her I have had love, tenderness and understanding - I shall not want another home on this planet."

The faith that she had made part of her life and thought, that had been alive in her emotional response to all about her, and against which she had pitted her virile intellect, with all those "petulant questions" asked of "the inscrutable", this same faith she clung to the

more desperately, and one may believe, with deeper understanding, but the note of buoyant joy and challenge is no longer found in her poems."⁷

The lack of "buoyant joy" and "challenge" notwithstanding, the verses which Bethell composed exhibited in great depth her explorations regarding both her religious faith and her poetic experimentation. The fact that the "Memorials" were the only attempt at versification after Effie Pollen's death in 1934 ensures their place in the literature of New Zealand. Even without this distinction the poems themselves are worthy of merit and able to be discussed in terms of their united sequence and, indeed, as individual poems.

Bethell drew on many sources of inspiration for her poetry, and, as discussed in a previous chapter, she also drew on the memorial imagery and emotion in previous verse as both inspiration and example. She has often been compared to Hopkins, though she made a very conscious attempt to avoid comparison with him, and other influences are also very noticeable. On first reading of "October 1935" and, indeed, all of the other memorials, the influence of Wordsworth is very strongly felt. His "Ode: Intimations on Immortality" is echoed throughout Bethell's sequence.

All six memorials are titled very simply, with only the date of composition serving as the title. "October 1935" for Bethell, is both time and place now that Miss Pollen has gone. The poem begins with explicit spring imagery. By repeating the word 'green' three times in the first line, Bethell is making it quite clear that this is the season of growth, freshness and new life, "The green has come back, the spring green, the new green,". It is repeated again in the second line, to further enhance the effect, "Darling, the young green upon the field willows,". These two lines burst with the vibrant colour that only spring can herald, yet as the poem progresses a sombre note is introduced by the juxtaposition of the past against the bountiful present, "Together, together past years we have looked on the scene." By repeating the word 'together' straight away, Bethell is emphasising the loneliness which she further elaborates on in the last stanza of the poem.

Both Morton and Hillock in their theses have commented on the inclusion of the riro bird present in the first three memorials and have attempted a comparison between the imagery and depiction of these three

representations of nature. While such a comparison may be fruitful as an indication of the progression of Bethell's grief, it is important to remember that each bird plays a different role and to examine those differences before drawing a comparison between the imagery.

In the first memorial, the riro is, arguably, the most poignant reminder of her lost companionship. Together they paused to wonder what the song of the riro reminded them of most, "of joy or of sorrow". Yet it is Bethell who has found an answer from that contemplation and discovered the answer only after the loss of her friend. While both were alive to appreciate the bird-song it was enough to engage in the act of wonder together. Then it was the act of listening to nature with a close friend which provided the answer they were seeking, the song then meant joy. Now when Bethell encounters the song of the riro, it is with the ears of someone alone and now the song represents sorrow. The riro, and the lushness of colour in the first stanza, indicate the beauty of God's creation, the renewal of life and the yearly birth of both pest - gorse - and pleasure - field willows -. Yet as Bethell subtly states, birth can also be considered a reminder of death. The poem is very personal in tone and texture, "and whether the trill of the riro / Reminded, we wondered, of joy or of sorrow" being obviously addressed to Effie Pollen, yet the reader is not excluded as the imagery is universal; even those not widely read can appreciate the presence of the (weeping) willow, and the parallel in the second stanza of human weeping. This implies that though these poems were not published in Bethell's lifetime, there is, on her part, an identification with her audience, an understanding which possibly derives from her pastoral poetic publications, that those with any appreciation of the changing of the seasons, the death and the rebirth of life, will understand the loss and confusion which occurs when this process is applied to a human life.

The last stanza focuses on the physical, and directly emotional aspects of the loss which Bethell has sustained. "You were laughter, my liking, and frolic, my lost one". While there are quite clearly echoes of Auden here ... "He was my North, my South, my East and West, / My working week and my Sunday rest,"⁸ which was written in 1936, Bethell is illustrating, for both of her intended audiences, that her loss goes beyond the mere regeneration of the seasons. Of all the stanzas in this poem, the sentiment in the final is the

most poignant as it is directly relating the emotions which Bethell is experiencing,

"I must dissemble and smile still for your sake,
Now that I know how spring time is heart-break,
Now you have left me to look upon all that is lovely alone."

While Bethell is forced to "dissemble" and present a mask to society and family that is not what she truly feels, she is also saying that it is by the deliberate obscuring of raw emotion that humanity is able to bridge the gulf which is created after the death of a loved one. By minimising her own grief, if only to the outside world, Bethell not only conforms to the social expectations of herself as a woman, but also attempts to contain the emotions which she is harbouring for expression in her poetry. This self-restraint, which Mansfield also experienced, anchors the poet more securely in the depth of her emotions, though those very close to Bethell knew how profoundly she was affected as this excerpt from a letter by her close friend Toss Woollaston shows:

I much regret that I am always unable to speak suitably when you tell me of your sorrowful memories, as today, and hope that my silence may never appear callous. My silence is awkward reverence, and my wish, that you speak rather than not of sorrows that are "better than laughter".⁹

All elegiac poems are introspective, yet Bethell uses her introspection to transfer her internal grief back into the soothing forum which nature provides, "Now you have left me to look upon all that is lovely, alone." The first memorial displays the absolute intensity of emotion which Bethell was experiencing after Pollen's death. As will be obvious throughout this discussion, this intensity is not consistent, nor could it be, with the unstoppable passage of time.

The second memorial "November 1936 (47 Webb Street)" is again only titled by time and place. For Bethell this is enough to introduce her subject, as the introduction of the season and year provides the memorial inspiration, so should it provide the title. While the first memorial was composed in October, the next four are composed in November, while the last memorial

is entitled "Spring 1940 (Christchurch, August) indicating that while the date of Effie Pollen's death was not forgotten, Bethell found herself more and more inspired by the seasonal reminder of that loss. Effie Pollen died in spring and it is spring that Bethell associates with loss and mourning. The season of growth, for one woman at least, holds a deeper, more tragic meaning.

Bethell, throughout her poetic career, is a self-contained poet, as illustrated in the personal vignettes she writes which are laden with description and atmosphere, but which reveal little about herself and, more importantly in the discussion of memorial poetry, little about those surrounding her. Even after reading and analysing the memorial poems to Effie Pollen, one has the impression that Bethell has told us more about Michael the cat than she has about her dear companion. "November 1936" is no exception. The grief which Bethell is still attempting to reconcile with her faith, is strong, yet contained.

The first stanza is blooming with floral imagery, as Bethell wreathes her home and memory with blossoms. "Today I trimmed my lonely dwelling place with flowers"... Bethell implies that she is no longer 'living' but merely 'dwelling' biding her time until she too, dies. This is reinforced as the imagery and structure of that first line also implies the laying of fresh flowers on a grave. It is her mind which is also seeking the nourishment which spring provides. In the first stanza Bethell moves quickly from the image of herself placing flowers in her home, to that time past when her companion did so. By their actions directly mirroring each other, Bethell can be seen to be attempting to merge herself into the lost self of Pollen. The struggle which Bethell faces to understand and accept the grief which has occurred with the loss of Effie Pollen is clearly present here.

The next stanza begins with a genus of the flowers, perhaps the same ones she has adorned her home with. Bethell pays minute attention to the location within the season of spring of the time which Effie Pollen died..."For Spring had spoken Summer". The brightness and promise of this season could not, however, prevent the intervention of death whom Bethell describes as a "new-comer". The act of placing flowers in the house has now become a ceremony, a ritual for Bethell, and one that lacks meaning, as Bethell openly admits that her heart was not in it ..."Heart with its treasure /

Not here; seeking the lost dear in her dim paradise."...Even though the object of her love is gone, Bethell explores the idea that although the love she possessed for Effie Pollen has travelled with her, she can also accept the reality of that love as still being present with her ..."And love is stronger / Than death's anger"... This emotion faintly echoes the last stanza of the first memorial and is the closest Bethell allows herself to all-encompassing grief. It is the concept of love after death first introduced here which goes on to provide Bethell with her greatest philosophical struggle in subsequent memorials.

It is in the fourth stanza that we once again meet the riro bird, who though apparent in the first memorial now has a different role in the second. When Bethell listens to the riro bird in the first poem she observes

The loved little bird is singing his small song,
Dearest, and whether the trill of the riro
Reminded, we wondered, of joy or of sorrow -
Now I am taught it is tears, it is tears that to spring time belong.

when comparing this with the second appearance of the little bird it is quite clear how its role has subtly shifted:

Now that our rain-bird, little grey bird, pipes again
Hid in the leafage,
And for my grieving
Links, oh I could think, a note of hope, of hope, into his plaintive
chain

now the song of the riro is woven with hope, instead of sorrow.

Bethell achieves a resolution toward the end of the poem, not for her grief, but with time, the orchestrator of her grief:

Because the years to months diminish, days to hours,
And love is stronger
Than death's anger
I have adorned today, alone, my brief abiding place with flowers.

Bethell is here acknowledging the healing power which time possesses. As she herself approaches her final dwelling place adorned with flowers, she goes through the motions of decorating her 'brief abiding place with flowers'. Time tends to blur the pain by the fluidity and movement of the seasons in the yearly cycle and in the penultimate stanza Bethell acknowledges this power ..."By and back, blends our bright summers with the summers that remain" ... the past is blended with the present and both will one day merge with the future. Bethell's vision combines the beauty of the natural world with an innate sense of the pain and loss which is undeniably fundamental to that world. In this memorial Bethell is fully exploring her own mortality and alludes to it frequently, both in the use of the grave allusion and in emphasising the progression of time which is not only a poetic preoccupation but a common human one.

The third memorial begins with the final image of the second, that of summer:

"Young summer, yet again young summer, and the flame
Of green, new lit, runs all about the boughs"

providing a sense of continuity from one poem to the next. Bethell, as in the opening lines of the first memorial, pays homage to the imagery and vision of Wordsworth, in the vivid lushness of her depiction of the colour green and the abundance of beautiful flower variety. While in the first memorial the appearance of the new green growth heralds the first anniversary of Effie Pollen's death and the fact that, for the first time, Bethell is looking upon the beauty of birth alone, the fresh growth in the third memorial signifies the seasonal regeneration of the pain which Bethell carries, "Heart pain, new stirred, wells up in deeper tide." Throughout her correspondence it is obvious that the loss that Bethell experienced was never totally far from her mind, yet it is in spring and early summer that this loss manifests itself in the growth and colours which surround her and which she now observes alone. It is obvious from her correspondence that although she often presented herself as alone, Bethell enjoyed an array of friendships with a wide variety of people, with Toss Woollaston being one of the most honest and direct:

I am sorry - I should hate to pretend to be helping you with prayer -
but I doubt if now I have definite enough religious conviction to be

able to pray, at any rate articulately ... However I can really sympathise for I do feel very sensitive to your suffering, and when you say you are heartbroken it pierces me too. And I am very sorry that even your garden cannot any longer be a joy to you"¹⁰

The second stanza includes another, more fleeting, reference to the riro of the first and second memorials;

"Pink chestnut, and white chestnut, laden may,
Laburnum swinging loose upon the wind,
Our riro flitting thither in the leaves."

It is significant that in the two previous memorials the riro was given voice, it was not only its presence which alerted Bethell, but the fact that its song was so distinctive and had previously given both women pleasure. In the third memorial, however, the riro does not sing; instead it makes a transitory appearance in the greenery. The riro is now presented as voiceless, its song does not remind of tears nor joy, it merely exists. With the appearance of this particular bird in three poems, it is believable that Bethell is discussing the same bird and not just speaking of a species of bird which visit the garden, giving a more personal note to the sequence.

The continuity that this provides is important when composing verse on the same subject year after year. While she looks to her garden for familiarity and inspiration in discussing the things which both women once shared, she is also providing continuity for the reader who can almost gain a comprehensive geographical picture of her surroundings. The detailed descriptions of the plants and flowers, as well as bird-life, add profoundly to the atmosphere she is creating. The fast movement of the bird, and indeed, the fire-like motion which she attributes to the spreading green throughout her garden, all serve to remind both poet and audience of the inevitability of time and the quickness of growth.

Bethell further illustrates this by moving quickly back through time at the beginning of the third stanza. By shifting from the winging bird in the present of the poem, she moves back three summers and again creates the scene which was present in the garden when Effie Pollen was dying,

and looked upon our garden in its prime
 Of freshest green, and all the roses gay,
 Then, on the glowing morrow, you were gone

The subtlety of the shift and the direct juxtaposition of dying and growth both contribute toward the effect of emptiness which Bethell strives to create. The loss, though not fresh, is still real and the renewal of the season can only initiate the flood of memories once more.

The next two stanzas move from the past forward into the present and also, in effect, move directly out of the garden. Bethell is not concerned with natural imagery here, instead she is exploring the metaphysical questioning she so loved. Her good friend and eventual biographer, M.H. Holcroft remembers her theorising vividly:

I do not mean that she was a philosopher. Her ideas had been acquired in wide and discriminating reading, and I remember no evidence of original thinking. But she was at home among ideas. She could take the shock of a new suggestion without a tremor of surprise, and almost always she could relate what had been said to the systems of established thinkers. Further, she could enter that dim region of speculation where ideas are still embedded in feeling, taking hints from warmth and temper of conversation, and sharing perceptively the excitement of another person's mind.¹¹

Death comes not only suddenly, but is indiscriminating, and while Bethell poses questions the answers to which are unknowable, she is aware of the exercise she is engaging in,

Hath not eye seen, dearest, what you see
 Now? nor ear heard - - oh was there even then
 For you a summons audible 'To-day, with me,'

For it is while Bethell is posing these questions, more for meditation than for answers, she is answering them herself. Effie Pollen's "bright eyes" see now what living eyes can never look upon. Ursula Bethell is now gazing upon what the eyes of the dead can never see again, the beauty and freshness of spring.

Left with all this, I lack what made it mine.
 If you lack nothing, I will not complain,
 I shall not wish you here again, with me, to-day."

Bethell concludes by exhibiting the first hint of spiritual acceptance evident in the poems so far. For if Effie Pollen is content, though Bethell herself is not, it is enough to not wish to change the circumstances as they are, even though Bethell poignantly acknowledges that it was Effie Pollen's presence which made her house and garden so uniquely hers. She is left with the physical substance but not the spiritual quality.

It is interesting to note that Bethell, when composing these poems, was not actually residing at Rise Cottage as, after Effie Pollen's death, she moved to 47 Webb Street and then moved to St. Faith's. She never gardened again. The garden and house which she decorates and inhabits exist only in her memory and her poetry. The loss of Effie Pollen was not only spiritual, it was also a loss of practical dimensions as H. C.D. Somerset recounts:

And then without any warning Miss Pollen died. Miss Bethell had come to depend upon her so much in the running of her house and in the day to day discussion of everything from her garden to her verse that she was indeed bereft....And so she left her beloved garden and went to live in two rooms in St. Faith's House."¹²

As time progresses there is an obvious shift in geographical detail in the memorial sequence. The first three poems are laden with garden imagery and the closely detailed portraits of both the plants and the inhabitants of Bethell's garden. The final three poems, however, are not centred in the garden at all. The fourth and fifth concentrate on the harbours of Wellington and Akaroa respectively, while the sixth poem establishes itself in Christchurch and is a direct reflection of the images which surrounded Bethell in the city. This shift away from garden imagery can also be interpreted as a gradual reconciliation with time and the loss of Effie Pollen from her life, as it was in the garden that the two shared, possibly, their closest moments. It is also spiritually significant that the next two memorials are located in harbours because, as previously mentioned, this image inhabits a special place in the vision of Bethell, as Hillock illustrates:

November 1938 finds the poet in Wellington where the memory is nudged by the harbour that the companion had 'loved so well' which is now an image which brings to mind the safe harbour that one comes to after death. It is often used by Bethell in poems where the soul is thought to arrive on another shore or in a safe anchorage after the passage of death.¹³

By considering this quotation it is possible to obtain a fuller understanding of the imagery used in the memorial on Bethell herself, composed by Dowling. "Prow heavenward, trim tackle, prayer availing, / Send her fair sailing." Dowling is indicating here that Bethell is now journeying toward that 'safe anchorage' where Effie Pollen also resides and the waiting which she long endured is now ended.

The language which Bethell uses in the last three memorials also differs from that in the previous three. Bethell had always been possessed of an extensive and exotic vocabulary, introducing such unfamiliar words to a New Zealand reading audience as; 'umbrageous', 'caravansery', and 'almoners' not to mention her passion for hyphenated words such as 'fire-formed', 'time-smoothed', and 'ocean-moulded' which occur all in one line! The attention which she pays to her surroundings in the final three memorials are careful reconstructions of the geographical and atmospheric locations of which she found herself in. The language contributes greatly to the tone of the poem as Bethell concentrates less on the emotion of grief and more on spiritual imagery, reconciliation and love.

'November 1938' begins with a characteristic Bethell description, "And now the Egyptian-blue harbour and the enclosing hills / and you not here beside me at the commanding resting place," which geographically locates both poet and audience in the natural harbour of Wellington. The experience of once again viewing the harbour encourages Bethell to go back in memory to the time when she was not alone, when her vision was shared with Effie Pollen and enriched by that experience. Here Bethell is lamenting the physical presence, articulations, thoughts and experiences of her lost companion, "Not here with confiding hands, bright glances, laughter, little sighs." Bethell shifts then from absence to presence as she proceeds to contemplate the beauty and condition of the harbour, admiring its stillness,

its quiet. This image of stillness is, however, deepened as Bethell juxtaposes the Wellington harbour with the 'familiar harbour', the place where souls reside after death. The sea is eternal, as is love, and this is contrasted with the brevity of existence illustrated by the death of her companion. The stillness of the blue ocean is also contrasted against the tempest which Bethell represents as death,

but we set forth that dark night in the September tempest together,
never again together, and pain was in your eyes
and fear in my heart not to be stilled with the soon-stilling storm.

This, however, poses the conflict of Bethell's imagery joining her with her companion in the storm of death and yet returning to live alone. She overcomes this in the next few lines,

for I must shortly send back to the familiar harbour
what had been you, never to voyage more, what had been you - what
had meant you, to see, to touch, to cherish, and to laugh at.

indicating that Bethell had travelled with her in her last few moments and watched her embark on the journey which we all undertake at some point, the journey into death.

The second stanza of the poem is one laden with religious significance and imagery. Bethell implies that the trip to Wellington was a 'pilgrimage', and by using a word which has distinctly religious connotations, Bethell is placing herself in the role of pilgrim, indicating that her journey is one of holy significance as she travels toward a future life. She is also emphasising that life is itself a journey toward its own end. It is the lost spirit of her companion which is her preoccupation in this last stanza, not the dust - or human remains - which she alludes to "Sitting beside your dust at the destined place of pilgrimage." It is the philosophical question of love which is Bethell's conflict here and how this can be resolved while maintaining her religious faith. Bethell is considering the philosophical aspects of not only the love she felt for Effie Pollen, but also the love which her companion felt for Bethell and the question of what has happened to that reciprocal love after Pollen's death. She contemplates first the idea that the love which Effie Pollen felt for her no longer exists in the universe, as "love released be

presently shed abroad from you." Then she proceeds to wonder that if that emotion still exists it should not be focussed upon Bethell but be freed to love again "that your love be not all lost in me, my darling, but something raised again." Bethell is pondering the purely spiritual aspects of the act of loving and explores, through both meditation and inspiration, the destination of love when the subject who loves, dies. If the love which Pollen felt for Bethell no longer exists, then Bethell meditates upon the love which she felt for Pollen, as it still exists in both memory and verse. This quotation from a letter by Blanche Baughan to Bethell expresses her interpretation of Bethell's dilemma:

More and more I feel that the thing to do with any love is, to offer it with thanksgiving back to its Divine Source, and so rejoice in it then it cannot die Abbe! ... Dear! we have enshrined it THERE - in a sense we have made it immortal that way. Rejoice in the fact of that love between you and her, which (as it seems to you) passed with her passing - but which still remains a fact. Doesn't it? Time ruins all bodies eventually: but it doesn't ruin value, beauty, love - it only ruins their forms.¹⁴

The final line "(Creator, pitiful Redeemer, love-reviving Spirit, make it so!)" is Bethell's plea to God that Pollen's love for Bethell be not lost since she has died, that it live again, be resurrected and the emotion exist once more. Yet, Bethell does not take the image further and propose a form in which the resurrected love should exist, or even to whom that love be applied. What is important in this last stanza is the conflict which Bethell acknowledges as existing when considering the presence of being loved when the one who loves you is eternally absent. In direct contrast to this is the struggle which Bethell herself faced when accepting the fact of Effie Pollen's absence and still loving her. John Summers presented this argument to Bethell in the way of offering her solace, yet it also provides a valuable look at his perception of Bethell's grief:

Do you never "know" that your Darling is sometimes very much with you, or would you perhaps think that a vain imagination without morbid longings (possessiveness)? I think the mind which trusts its own soul may sometimes invite a "rare and radiant vision" yet withal; more than a vision, because it is felt and its reality is drawn

more by this quality than by anything seen. At odd moments, to me, a mere stranger, she has seemed very real, surely then to you who knew each action, gesture, smile she should be able to come. Surely death does not destroy the bonds of love, surely those who have left us have their own way of still bringing their love to those who loved them in life, if we have trust in such things.¹⁵

'November 1939 (Akaroa)' moves from the Wellington harbour, to the harbour at Akaroa on Banks Peninsula, just out of Christchurch. This harbour also holds special memories for Ursula Bethell as she and her companion passed time there over a period of years. Effie Pollen was "the second daughter of a Wellington physician, the port doctor, and had grown up in Willis Street with a love of ships and the harbour."¹⁶ This biographical fact provides an even stronger link between the two women and both the Wellington harbour, which Effie Pollen had been familiar with through her childhood, and the harbour at Akaroa which the two women frequented together.

The memorial begins on an almost trite note of resignation, "Once again, my darling, it is come, the time you died," there is little of the passion and despair apparent here compared to the first few memorial poems. Time is working its healing power and Bethell acknowledges this in her choice of language and sentiment. Bethell moves from one harbour, the physical harbour of her contemplation, to that other harbour, Effie Pollen's "earthly bourne" - the goal of all those who attempt to reach a safe anchorage after their death, and then back to Akaroa. Bethell mentions here an "insistent task", a theme which she re-echoes later in this particular memorial. Overall, the memorial begins with a less emotional tone than previous memorials, hinting that Bethell is coming to an acceptance of her loss.

The imagery in this memorial owes much to Bethell's knowledge of and empathy with the writings of Wordsworth, even including one of his most famous poetic characters 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' slightly changed in form and role. In the second stanza, Bethell begins setting the scene for the appearance of this figure by creating a Wordsworthian landscape. In Wordsworth's poem, the role of the beggar was to remind the community not only of their good deeds, as they daily provided him with food, but also of their sense of duty toward human beings unlike themselves. Bethell's 'cone-

gatherer', who appears in stanza four, plays an interesting role in the genre of elegiac poetry, as he is the first person, apart from the subject of the poem and Bethell as author of the poem, to inhabit the memorial with action and presence.

Bethell places herself closer to nature in this stanza than she has done anywhere in the memorial sequence. She is "breathing as the trees breathe / Soft the sea-fresh air, and in the vivid oak," identifying herself strongly with the harbour, the landscape and the graveyard in which she is sitting. She is at one with nature, listening to the birdlife and experiencing the fragrance of the pine and manuka trees. While the location is not as ordered or familiar as her garden, Bethell gives the impression that she is more at home here than at Rise Cottage, especially now that her companion is no longer there.

Bethell progresses from a contemplation of the natural scene surrounding her to a consideration of the place where she is, the "old burial ground" which inevitably lead her back to thoughts of death. This memorial bears a strong resemblance to her earlier poem "The Long Harbour" where she also speaks of the graveyard at Akaroa:

It should be very easy to lie down and sleep there
in that sequestered hillside ossuary,
underneath a billowy, sun-caressed grass-knoll,
beside those dauntless, tempest-braving ancestresses
who pillowed there so gladly, gnarled hands folded,
their tired, afore-translated bones.

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

In 'The Long Harbour' Bethell can be seen to be advocating the approach of death, as she depicts residing in the ossuary as eminently desirable. In "November 1939" she expands the meaning of this to include her own

particular emotional situation. Even those who have mourned, as she is mourning, die eventually and turn to dust. They too, have vanished into that safe harbour where their loved ones dwell. Her sentiment is not strengthened by the vocabulary of the poem's last line, which seems to lack the emotive force necessary to the poem's conclusion. Hillock reinforces this view:

The images used in this poem have become subdued with familiarity and are observed in a detached way as the emotion of grief has faded into cliché phrases: 'My heart will ache for you until it also sleep.' It seems as if the agonies of the grief felt in the memorial of 1935 are only dimly echoed here.¹⁷

Bethell now introduces the 'cone-gatherer' who is blessed with natural provision, as the warm winds scatter the cones off the tree to provide him with winter warmth. He is as much a part of nature as the harbour itself, and Bethell looks upon him as such, instead of with the interest according to an individual. He is presented as innocent and impersonal, even though he traverses the graveyard on his way, he seems blissfully unaware of the gathering of humanity beneath his feet. As he leaves Bethell's view, he is surrounded by natural imagery, ensuring his continuing place among the landscape, he is inseparable from the landscape which he moves within,

Goes, with shouldered sack
Homewards the cone-gatherer. The birds, the trees
Subdue and fuse and lose their tunes in the sun's rays.

The final image in the stanza is one of the tide and ocean charting the perpetual movement of time,

Where the stealthy waves of the climbing tide turning over
Mark time, as life's appointment ebbs away.

Bethell, by using the word 'appointment', is bringing the image of a set task again into the poem. It is not only the tide which marks time, it is also the seasons and the creation and destruction of all life forms.

Bethell, though comfortable in her contemplations of nature, inevitably rejoins humanity,

Return I now to join a casual throng. No more
Rounding, alone, a coign of the sea-scalloped track
Shall I, surprised, perceive my dear.

By returning to society, she is forced to reflect on her loss. The companionship, the close friendship which she possessed with Effie Pollen cannot be revived in another person, yet neither the natural world which she seeks in order to be able to contemplate her loss in beauty and serenity, nor the humanity which she is also a part of, will ever compensate her for such a deep loss.

It is in the final stanza that Bethell expands upon the 'task' she has frequently alluded to before. She explores the idea that, perhaps, the grief which she has experienced over the death of her companion was the prelude to some form of accomplishment which she would then be able to complete.

To me, unworthy, once in punctual succour sent,
By the same sacred Will on sudden caught away,
You left me, darling, desolate - might it not be to find,
To accomplish in my solitude some unfinished work,
To glean some stormy harvest that remains? - oh rest,
Rest in your lucid haven. See, I am content.
Rest peaceful. The task ended, then I follow on -

Bethell turns her contemplative mood inward in this stanza, searching for meaning in the loneliness and despair she experienced with the death of her companion. Steadily, throughout the poems, Bethell's imagination and vision can be seen to embrace an acceptance of her grief and loss. Spiritually, however, Bethell is still struggling with acceptance and with the true reality of the loss quite poignantly expressed in this remembrance by John Summers:

And I have never forgotten her inner desolation, as expressed to me in a moving letter, after the death of Miss Pollen. It would be wrong, I think, and unjust to her memory, to describe her as a

woman who had found a secure place above the conflict of life. Her vision was wide rather than deep: she looked out to the mountains and the sea from her high place on the hills, and in her creative time she must have known a true exaltation. But she was also a woman, strong-willed and subtle, and I doubt if her inner life ever had the calmness she valued and wanted.¹⁸

The last memorial, composed in 1940, is the only poem which is set in the city of Christchurch where, in all probability, most of them were composed. The imagery in this poem can be seen to originate from many of the great Romantic poets: Blake, Wordsworth and Byron are all influential throughout the memorial. These influences, combined with an element of mysticism in this poem, create a finalé of truly lyrical origins. The sight of a green willow tree ignites the memory of Bethell once more, especially when juxtaposed against the Blakean imagery of Christchurch city:

This morning I saw suddenly a weeping willow green,
Beside the mechanic streets and grey, stone-heavy bridges
In solitude of grace above the sullen river
It stood, all green again.

This potently spring image, present in August significantly earlier than the previous memorial poems, once again draws the imagination and memory of Bethell back to her loss, as she is led to the memory of a shared vision of willows, seen through a mist of rain. It was then that she travelled with a companion and sought the mystery and uniqueness of spring out for herself, while now she finds it overtakes her suddenly in a grey city street. The imagery in the second stanza, while reminiscent of Wordsworth, also owes something to Byron's 'Manfred' in the use of such phrases as "Marvel! Apparition!" The idea of seeking spring, implies that it is such that it can be captured and contained, which is surely an unnatural metaphor to be applied to a season. Bethell exhibits elements of mysticism also by referring to the "Spirit of Beauty!" another Byronic echo, yet bearing in mind Bethell's Christian faith this is a surprising detour into an irreligious phrase. Even though she is addressing a Christian god, she is doing so under another name, as it is the same spirit which has heard her 'complaint' in times past.

What shall be done with Spring? Until this grief

Meet vaster renaissance, now for immortal symbol
 Here to sustain me, I may take your willow,
 Your bright tree of tears

The immortal symbol is the willow tree which represents not only the onset of spring, but also the presence of tears, as willows traditionally grow near rivers or lakes and the branches and growth appear to 'weep' over the water. Until her grief dissolves with her own death she will take the symbol of the willow tree as an immortal reminder of the eternity of growth and rebirth. It is now apparent that it is Bethell's imagination and intelligence working on the exercise of writing memorial poetry. Yet there is little left in the way of possessive emotion or the passion which was evident in the 1935 memorial. Yet, perhaps, this is Bethell's reconciliation with time, the allowance of time to dull the pain of loss as Hillock aptly illustrates:

The willow is explicitly taken as a symbol to sustain the poet in her mourning and she gives it the virtues of faith, hope and charity, yet it has not the close personal symbolism of the tiny rainbird in the first two memorials of 1935 and 1936.¹⁹

It is undeniable that of all Bethell's poetry, the 'Memorials' are the most personal, tapping the deepest of emotions and providing an invaluable insight into the mind and heart of one of New Zealand's finest poets. That insight is, however, limited by Bethell's self-imposed constraint. Despair is certainly evident in her early memorial poetry, yet it is controlled and channelled through the medium of poetry, instead of being accessed through the genre by the reading audience. While Bethell explores her Christian faith and various metaphysical questions about love, she does not identify the love which she felt for Effie Pollen with the love which she felt for Christ, nor does she suggest that her companion lives on in another world. Reconciliation, for Bethell the poet and the woman, is illustrated as a process and one which she struggles with and eventually does not complete.

It would be difficult to locate an exact point where Bethell finds herself reconciled with the loss of her companion as she does not eventually do so. After Effie Pollen's death, life is viewed as 'marking time' and Bethell chooses not to meditate upon the implications which are suggested by this, yet by composing the memorial verse she provides herself with the

opportunity to do so. One senses that the struggle she encountered, as a Christian, faced with the loss of such a close friend, not only tested her faith, but also redefined the boundaries of it. Rarely is a portrait of Effie Pollen attempted; rather Bethell concentrates on the shared vision which they both possessed, the vision of their surrounding nature and the places they went together.

Bethell reveals more of herself in those poems than, perhaps, elsewhere while exploring the many symbols which inspire her memory and inspiration. The sequence not only explores Bethell's progression as an elegist over a six year period, but also contains an accurate view of her general poetic progression as she concentrates on one subject only.

The subject, it could be argued, was in reality not Effie Pollen, but the loss which Bethell felt after her death. The memorials progress from considered expressions of emotion and passion to mere exercises in diction as in 'Spring 1940.' Never too far from nature, Bethell has incorporated natural imagery into her life and work in such a way that it is difficult to separate the poet from the poet's vision, as her introspection associates herself closely with her natural surroundings. The conflict which exists in Bethell's poetry between her close observations of natural scenes and her reticence when describing themes of a personal nature become most apparent in the memorial poetry. As a sequence and as individual-pieces of work they are fine tributes to a profoundly felt loss, yet viewed dispassionately, the poems become that which Bethell most wanted to avoid, mere chronicles of the passage of time.

¹ Bethell, Letter to Lawrence Baigent. Box 4 Literary Manuscripts. McMillan Brown Library, Christchurch.

² Morton, Joyce. *The Poetry of Ursula Bethell* M. A. Thesis. (Victoria University of Wellington: Wellington, 1949) 24.

³ Cresswell, D'Arcy. "Ursula Bethell: Some Personal Memories" *Landfall* (8: II.4 December 1948) 283

⁴ Morton 29.

⁵ Hillock, Margaret W. *The Poetry of the Numinous: A Study of Imagery in the Poetry of Ursula Bethell* M.A. Thesis. (University of Canterbury: Christchurch, 1981) 4.

⁶ O'Sullivan, Vincent. ed. *Collected Poems* by Ursula Bethell (Oxford University Press: Auckland, 1985) 25.

⁷ Morton 66.

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- ⁸ Mendelson, Edward. ed *Collected Poems* by W.H. Auden. (Faber and Faber: London, 1976) 120.
- ⁹ Woollaston, Toss. Bethell Correspondence, Box 14. McMillan Brown Library, Christchurch.
- ¹⁰ Woollaston Toss. Box 14. Bethell Correspondence.
- ¹¹ Holcroft, M.H. *Landfall* (8: II.4 December 1948) 286.
- ¹² Somerset, H.C.D. *Landfall* (8: II.4 December 1948) 280.
- ¹³ Hillock, 69-70.
- ¹⁴ Baughan, Blanche. Box 14 Bethell Correspondence.
- ¹⁵ Summers, John. Box 9. Bethell Correspondence.
- ¹⁶ Holcroft, M.H. *New Zealand Writers and their Work: Mary Ursula Bethell*. (Oxford University Press: Wellington, 1975) 12.
- ¹⁷ Hillock 70.
- ¹⁸ Summers, John. *Landfall* (8: II.4 December 1948) 287.
- ¹⁹ Hillock 71.

CONCLUSION

A poet's task was not simply to reflect 'reality' but also to determine it, to 'invent' New Zealand, to create the idea of New Zealand: 'The good poem is something we may in time come to recognise New Zealand by'. ... He (Curnow) fully recognised at several points the fact that individual poets must conduct their own dealings with the tradition and the contemporary practice of poetry in English as well as with their physical location. Further he clearly believed that poetry is always changing, even improving, and that the stage revealed in the anthology was not a static ideal but a necessary step from which a more personal and universal poetry would follow.¹

Elegiac poetry contains aspects of both the personal and the universal and, indeed, the undeniable integration of both concepts. The private reality of the grief and loss combines with the universal reality of the poet and their world, the reality that someone crucial to their lives is no longer. Mansfield, Hyde and Bethell composed elegies which reflected their personal realities, yet they were also attempting to contribute toward the universal reality which death prompts us all to consider.

Robin Hyde, through her exile from New Zealand and her recognition of this, discovered a reality which applied equally to Katherine Mansfield as it did to herself. By continually comparing herself to Mansfield in her elegy, she was not attempting to place herself - or her work - with the writer, but was attempting to reach beyond the fact of her art. She was associating herself with Mansfield on the basic level of origin. Though born in South Africa, Hyde was a New Zealander, and it was to New Zealand she returned in her best and most innovative work. Her final volume of poems was testament to her journey, not only from New Zealand to England via China, but from wanderer to exile. Her tribute to Mansfield contained elements of what she accomplished as a poet, but also of what she accomplished as a New Zealander. For all their similarities, Hyde and Mansfield retained one important difference. Hyde's exile was self-imposed, her journey from New Zealand was inspired, not by a sense of destiny, but by her own artistic

needs. She could not return because of her fatalistic instincts, which eventually saw her taking her own life. Mansfield, however, could not return because there was no New Zealand for her to return to. It was imaginatively destroyed for her with the death of her brother. Robin Hyde cast herself in the role of formal commentator on Mansfield's death, as Charles Brasch was to do on her own death, and through her elegy contributed more to her own myth than to her subjects. For Hyde was fully aware of the immortal nature of elegiac poetry, and its implications.

Katherine Mansfield's elegy on the death of her brother is the only poem in this study in which a woman poet writes on the death of a man. While this is not unusual when considering the role which Leslie Beauchamp has played in the development of his sister's literature, it is certainly interesting in terms of this study. While Hyde wrote on the death of a public figure and Bethell mourned the loss of her close companion, it was Mansfield who retraced the steps leading into the Wellington of her childhood. The loss of Leslie represents the loss of the last traces of Mansfield's innocence, her brother, her childhood and her country were no more. The elegy which she composed is the poignant expression of not only her brother's physical and spiritual loss, but the absolute loss of her country. Paradoxically it is this loss which enabled her to retain her sense of national identity. In the turmoil of war-stricken Europe she was different, she was independent, she was a New Zealander. It was this concern which dominated her best work, her sense of identity and its difference from the English and French cultures within which she was working.

Mary Ursula Bethell, provides the most continuous example of elegiac poetry. While she herself acknowledged that she allowed herself to indulge in her emotions once a year, Bethell herself a very religious person found herself confronted with one of her major themes, Time, wearing the robe of comforter and healer. Yet it is Bethell who most successfully denies time this final accomplishment. The death of her companion affects her still, right until the last line of the last memorial. While it is undeniable that Bethell the poet loses some of her expressiveness throughout the sequence with the final few poems losing some of the compassion and pain which was experienced in the first, Bethell the person retains the grief on a continual basis. Time, for her, was not the healer it promised to be, it proved to be merely a constant reminder of the distance she had to journey before being reconciled

with her friend. For Bethell, a woman of great faith and integrity, the passing of time, though lessening the emotion, did not ensure its removal. Time became not the consoler but the reminder.

For all three poets, the elegy released something within them, the expression of an emotion so fundamental and strong that its recognition within any audience was virtually assured. Yet the expression of the grief often did not lead to any answer or comfort. The components which encompass the form of elegiac poetry; immortality, expression, innovation, emotion and love did not ensure reconciliation with the grief which each experienced. Yet neither did the genre promise such a reconciliation. The elegy remained simply and most purely the private expression of grief and longing, the emotion which we all, at some stage, experience. Yet each woman, in their own way, expanded the vocabulary of grief, adding their own poignant additions to a tradition which was both ancient and new, both English and New Zealand, both male and female.

¹ Sturm, T. ed. *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*. Caffin, Elizabeth. "Poetry 1945-90" (Oxford University Press: Auckland, 1991) 386.

APPENDIX

To L.H.B.

Last night for the first time since you were dead
I walked with you, my brother, in a dream.
We were at home again beside the stream
Fringed with tall berry bushes, white and red.
'Don't touch them: they are poisonous,' I said.
But your hand hovered, and I saw a beam
Of strange, bright laughter flying round your head,
And as you stooped I saw the berries gleam.
'Don't you remember? We called them Dead Man's Bread!'
I woke and heard the wind moan and the roar
Of the dark water tumbling on the shore.
Where - where is the path of my dream for my eager feet?
By the remembered stream my brother stands
Waiting for me with berries in his hands ...
'These are my body. Sister, take and eat.'

Katherine Mansfield (1915)

Katherine Mansfield

Our little Darkness, in the shadow sleeping
 Among the strangers you could better trust,
 Right was your faring, Wings: their wise hands gave you
 Freedom and song, where we had proffered dust.
 Dust is a thing of road and sheepfolds, rising
 Where men and sheep are driven on to gate;
 A wavering smoke, too faint and blown for signals,
 Mica-bright staring crystals, love and hate,
 A blindness in the eyes, a pain-for feet.

Dust is the unthrown wrestler at our gate.

So wrapped in what they gave you, rest you, sweet:
 Be tranquil, seagull conjured into swan:
 We have in mind who used you ill or well.
 The dark dust-taken hair slopes fallen back
 From mermaid forehead: once for all lie slack
 The winning fingers. Rest you, in those arms
 Held out at Fontainebleau, rank flower and weed,
 Idlers and gossips, shapes of strife and heat
 Who find your marble cool to lean upon.

Deep underneath the seas is swung a bell
 Of travelling note: oh, very far away,
 Clear as you dreamed, gleam tiny bush and bay.

And after marble, dust fulfils a need.

Robin Hyde (1939)

Six Memorials

October 1935

The green has come back, the spring green, the new green,
Darling, the young green upon the field willows,
And the gorse on the wild hills was never so yellow,
Together, together, past years we have looked on the scene.

The loved little bird is singing his small song,
Dearest, and whether the trill of the riro
Reminded, we wondered, of joy or of sorrow -
Now am I taught it is tears, it is tears that to spring time belong.

You were laughter, my liking, and frolic, my lost one,
I must dissemble and smile still for your sake,
Now that I know how spring time is heart-break,
Now you have left me to look upon all that is lovely, alone.

November 1936
(47 Webb Street)

Today I trimmed my lonely dwelling place with flowers;
 Memories ask garlands;
 I see you, darling,
 Dispose deft-handed, your bright bunches in that happy home of ours.

Crisp iris, lily-of-the-valley, and the tasselled lime, -
 For Spring had spoken Summer
 When Death, new-comer,
 Took you at night-fall, dearest, even as at this time.

So I repeat the rites, with tear-dulled eyes,
 Of foretime pleasure;
 Heart with its treasure
 Not here, seeking the lost dear in her dim paradise.

Now that our rain-bird, little grey bird, pipes again
 Hid in the leafage,
 And for my grieving
 Links, oh I could think, a note of hope, of hope, into his plaintive chain.

Because their tender beauty is in tune with pain,
 Because their fragrance,
 As the seasons hasten
 By and back, blends our bright summers with the summers that remain,

Because the years to months diminish, days to hours,
 And love is stronger
 Than death's anger
 I have adorned today, alone, my brief abiding place with flowers.

November 1937
(Webb Street)

Young summer, yet again young summer, and the flame
 Of green, new lit, runs all about the boughs:
 Heart pain, new stirred, wells up in deeper tide.

Pink chestnut, and white chestnut, laden may,
 Laburnum swinging loose upon the wind,
 Our riro flitting thither in the leaves - - -

Three summers have passed by me since that hour
 When pain had blinded, darling, your bright eyes,
 And I stood by the casement where you lay

Dying, and looked upon our garden in its prime
 Of freshest green, and all the roses gay,
 Then, on the glowing morrow, you were gone -

Hath not eye seen, dearest, what you see
 Now? nor ear heard - - - oh was there even then
 For you a summons audible 'To-day, with me,' - - -

Left with all this, I lack what made it mine.
 If you lack nothing, I will not complain.
 I shall not wish you here again, with me, to-day -

For November 1938
(Wellington)

And now the Egyptian-blue harbour and the enclosing hills,
and you not here beside me at the commanding resting-place,
not here beside me, gazing, with your little exclamations of joy
at the beauty of the shipped harbour you had loved so well,
not here with confiding hands, bright glances, laughter, little sighs.
So still, today, so blue, so silent is the pleasurable sea -
but we set forth that dark night in the September tempest
together, never again together, and pain was in your eyes,
and fear in my heart not to be stilled with the soon stilling storm,
for I must shortly send back to the familiar harbour
what had been you, never to voyage more, what had been you -
what had meant you, to see, to touch, to cherish, and to laugh at.
(Dearest, these four years I have been consenting to live onwards alone.)

Sitting beside your dust at the destined place of pilgrimage
under the pine trees mournful in the warm wild north wind,
under the tapping cabbage-trees you were fond of, full in flower,
beside your dust, and the hill gorse golden over beyond me,
I vowed to your bright spirit, lost to me, not to the gathered dust,
that in some sort love released be presently shed abroad from you,
that your love be not all lost in me, my darling, but something raised again,
(Creator, pitiful Redeemer, love-reviving Spirit, make it so!)

November 1939

(Akaroa)

Once again, my darling, it is come, the time you died,
And on this quiet harbour once again I look -
Not that other harbour, not your earthly bourne,
But in this place where you had left me once
That I full-end, unhindered, an insistent task,
And went back solitary to our common home.

By the umbrageous guard of the old burial ground
I now rest solitary, breathing as the trees breathe
Soft the sea-fresh air, and in the vivid oak,
The scented pine and ancient manuka the random birds
Bestrew their notes, and take up little tunes,
The same we often listened to when you were here -

Hearts that once had ached for those whose sleeping bones
At first were laid beneath this grass, have ceased to ache
Long since, their fleeting semblances in turn
Lost like that wisp of cloud upon the rocky heights
I have watched dissipate, and now resumed in blue -
My heart will ache for you until it also sleep.

The old man gathering cones now wanders near
And gives me cheerful greeting. Individual grief
In all his charge of sepulture these many years
He could not know. The sun is warm today,
And windy storms wide scattering much fruits
Have furnished kindly warmth for him in winter's need -

The noon hour nears. Goes, with shouldered sack
Homewards the cone-gatherer. The birds, the trees
Subdue and fuse and lose their tunes in the sun's rays,
In the rising murmur of stress, recess on musicked shore,
Where the stealthy waves of the climbing tide turning over
Mark time, as life's appointment ebbs away.

Return I now to join a casual throng. No more
Rounding, alone, a coign of the sea-scalloped track
Shall I, surprised, perceive my dear, with eager pace
Coming to meet me, and with eager look of love,
And go companioned; nor may I ask to know
Such cherished company, such tender love again.

To me, unworthy, once in punctual succour sent,
By the same sacred Will on sudden caught away,
You left me, darling, desolate - might it not be to find,
To accomplish in my solitude some unfinished work,
To glean some stormy harvest that remains? - oh rest,
Rest in your lucid haven. See, I am content.
Rest peaceful. The task ended, then I follow on -

Spring 1940
(Christchurch, August)

This morning I saw suddenly a weeping willow green,
Beside the mechanic streets and grey, stone-heavy bridges
In solitude of grace above the sullen river
It stood, all green again.

Marvel! Apparition! - Before the all-wintery years
How often we had watched, in Spring, the purple-misted
Veils to a green haze dissolve about the willows,
Condense to a green rain.

Out to the pastures, then, we went to seek our Spring.
Now, in the city pent, Spring sudden overtakes me -
As in time past my joy, hear my complaint now,
Spirit of Beauty, hear.

What shall be done with Spring? Until this grief
Meet vaster renaissance, now for immortal symbol
Here to sustain me, I may take your willow,
Your bright tree of tears

Faith for the putting off of the vesture, and the fall,
Hope for the long nakedness, and last is charity -
The clothing of expectant boughs with amplitude
Of living green again.

Match Spring with vision, Spirit of Beauty, bring
With your persuasive love to the inward eye awakening,
Lest looking on this life to count what time has taken
I cannot bear the pain.

Mary Ursula Bethell

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