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IMAGINING ECOLOGIES:  
TRADITIONS OF ECOPOETRY  
IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

BY

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## Abstract

New Zealand ecopoetry tells the stories of connection with and separation from the land. From the late nineteenth century until the present, opposing and changing notions of ecological loss and belonging have underlain New Zealand's long lineage of ecopoetry in English. Yet, from a critical perspective, such a tradition is essentially invisible. Scholars have tended to fragment New Zealand ecopoetry according to themes and time periods. But taken as a whole, the tradition not only provides local stories of human relationships with nature transformed by colonialism, it challenges some established conceptions of ecopoetry.

Discussions within the relatively new field of post-colonial ecocriticism reveal the importance of local writing. Scholars have emphasized that particular national histories especially in places of settler colonialism have "contributed to the hybridization and creolization of plants, peoples, and place in ways that profoundly denaturalize absolute ontological claims," (DeLoughrey 2014 325). This approach recognises that rather than a global framework of ecological change, experiences differ according to specific locations and across different timeframes.

With this approach in mind, the critical component of this thesis investigates the field of ecopoetry and maps New Zealand's ecopoetic lineage. It reports on close readings and analysis of contemporary ecopoetry by three New Zealand poets: Brian Turner (b. 1944), Robert Sullivan (b. 1967) and Airini Beauvais (b. 1982). It finds that New Zealand ecopoetry portrays particular tensions about understandings of nature and the human relationship with it. These tensions challenge in specific ways some of the homogenizing, Eurocentric conceptions that prevail in foundational work carried out in the field of ecopoetry since the 1990s.

The creative component is a collection of original ecopoems entitled *Anti-Pastoral*. These poems reflect on my own connection to land through farming over four generations of European settlement in New Zealand. Some poems focus on the degrading effects on people and animals of relatively recent shifts towards large-scale intensive farming.

In the critical component I ask: How do we define and depict New Zealand's long tradition of ecopoetry? How does that tradition speak back to and challenge

existing definitions of ecopoetry and of ecology? In the creative component, I ask:  
How do I, a Pākehā<sup>1</sup> poet and farmer, join that tradition?

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<sup>1</sup> With digital access to macrons, their use in Māori words is now commonplace. This thesis cites quotations exactly as they appear and many did not include macrons at the time of publication.

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**Critical Component: Imagining  
Ecologies: Traditions of Ecopoetry in  
Aotearoa New Zealand**



## **Introduction to the Critical Component:**

### **Ecopoetry, a critical moment and its relationship to shifting poetics in New Zealand.**

Ecopoetry is the term given to new nature poetry written in opposition to human denigration of nature. It arose from the mid-twentieth-century environmental movement during a time of protest and political activism. The word blends ecology with poetry in the same way ‘ecocriticism’ blends ecology with criticism. Ecocriticism is the study of the interconnection between nature and culture in language and literature. Ecopoetry is a particular type of poetry that empathises with the natural world and, as this thesis will show, relates different ways of conceiving the relationships between nature and culture. The coining of these two terms in the 1990’s demonstrates how the science of ecology moved onto the literary agenda at a time when “ecology was entering the popular consciousness as a deceptively simple proposition: everything is connected to everything else.” (Hass in Fisher-Wirth li)

While there is not a single definition of ecopoetry that all critics agree upon, all definitions tend to have some common denominators. These are that ecopoetry investigates the relationship between nature and culture, between people and the nonhuman world. It portrays nature with humility rather than a sense of superiority or domination, it pays attention to—and often foregrounds—the nonhuman world, a stance which adopts an ecocentric manner. This posture can be understood as the reverse of anthropocentrism, which foregrounds the human world and assumes that it is only in relation to human beings that anything else has value.

Ecopoetry neither subjugates nor idealizes nature, and often exists within a context of awareness of human-caused loss or denigration of nature. Ecopoetry values nature not as a resource for human exploitation but rather as an interconnected part of human life. It recognises what American critic J. Scott Bryson calls “the interdependent nature of the world” (2002 6) where nature is perceived as both essential for human survival and necessary in its own right. Ecopoetry may also adopt the Romantic idea that psychic wholeness is derived from connection with the unspoiled natural world, a notion that Jonathan Bate calls “ecology of mind” (252). In this, it recognises that the nonhuman world is beneficial, perhaps even necessary, for human mental wellbeing.

Shifting notions of nature and of the human relationship with it have led contemporary ecopoetry to evolve from a predominant polemic against degradation of the natural world to portrayals of nature as resilient despite human influence, or as struggling, alongside people, to survive in a technological age. At its core is the notion of interconnection, and more recently, entanglement, between human and nonhuman. In sum, contemporary ecopoetry often describes people as a part of, rather than apart from, nature, with interconnection existing at both physical and psychic levels.

If those are the general characteristics of ecopoetry, in practice its tenets are the subject of ongoing debate, especially in Britain and the United States where foundational critical work in the field of ecopoetry has been carried out. One school of thought argues that ecopoetry is distinct from traditional nature poetry because of the contemporaneity of its subject matter, that is, it is distinguished by a focus on contemporary environmental issues and an often rhetorical or message-driven element. Such ecopolemic aims to raise awareness of the value of the nonhuman world as a catalyst towards social and political action that might prevent further loss or denigration of nature. Ecopolemic often portrays nature as a victim of the actions of people in positions of political and industrial power. 1960s American ecopoet Gary Snyder, for instance, in his collection *Turtle Island* (1969), rebukes “[a]ll those Americans up in special cities in the sky / Dumping poisons and explosives” (“The Call of the Wild” 23) and “a robot in a suit who peddles a delusion” (“Mother Earth: Her Whales” 47). Ecopolemic was predominant in the second half of the twentieth century and dominated an initial phase of contemporary ecopoetry stemming from its genesis in the 1960s environmental protest movements.

Subsequently, however, ecopoetry has evolved into a more inclusive field of study, also encompassing environmentally oriented poetry that does not include a polemic element. Specifically, an alternate critical school of thought argues against the use of polemic in ecopoetry on aesthetic grounds, contending that poetry of perception is more engaging to readers and therefore more likely to inspire awareness of the need to value and protect the natural world. Jonathan Bate, for instance, says ecopoetry should “concern itself with consciousness” (266) rather than what might arguably be described as the consciousness-raising aims of some ecopolemic. Bate says that the “cause of ecology may not necessarily be best served by poets taking the high moral ground and speaking from the point of view of ecological correctness” (199). This school of thought contends that poetry descended from the Romantic tradition, with its

focus on the relationship between nature and consciousness, might also be included as ecopoetry. By challenging the predominant view of ecopoetry, it broadens the notion of the field of study beyond the confines of contemporary environmental issues and ecopolemic, leading to a notion of historical inclusiveness in the field that would stretch to 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanticism.

One way to distinguish some contemporary ecopoetry from historical ecopoetry, and from much historical nature writing, is its global, rather than local, ecological concerns. These include climate change, loss of species diversity, pollution, urbanisation and the threat of planetary environmental disaster. But in many cases, the themes of historical ecopoems—nature’s persistence, humanity’s interdependence with nature, loss of connection between people and nature’s cycles and rhythms, colonialism, deforestation, even species extinction—overlap with themes concerning contemporary ecopoetry. Because of these overlaps, some argue ecopoetry provides a lens through which to look back at poems written before it became a field of study, when readers “did not necessarily have an ecological perspective to think about them from” (Hass lii). As a concept, it provides a contemporary gauge to measure their ecological intent.

But if time offers one axis in considering how to define ecopoetry or use it as a lens, geography offers another. The importance of the local rather than the global is recognised by the relatively new field of postcolonial ecocriticism. When applied to ecopoetry, this approach challenges some of the above listed prevailing notions of ecopoetry. That is, some Eurocentric conceptions of global understandings of nature and the human relationship with it are in tension with Indigenous understandings of nature. And these tensions are particular to specific places and times. So, local ecopoetry, such as from New Zealand, reveals tensions between European and Indigenous comprehensions that challenge prevailing notions of ecopoetry, and of ecology.

In the critical component of this thesis, I will explore how ecopoetry that negotiates the tension between polemic and imagination, and between European settler (Pākehā) and Indigenous (Māori) comprehensions, is available in New Zealand. As background to this investigation, I will explore the ways in which New Zealand poetry in English has evolved towards a contemporary ecopoetics. I will argue that there is a critical gap in the delineation and interrogation of New Zealand ecopoetry. More significantly, I will argue not just for an ecopoetical tradition in New Zealand but for a

particular one: The tradition here differs from the way ecopoetry has evolved in Britain and the United States. The critical component of this thesis will delineate a New Zealand contemporary ecopoetry tradition via characteristics that scholars have noted about historical poems in New Zealand or elsewhere without having considered them as ecopoetry. It will argue that the particular relationships between culture and nature that have developed in this country have given rise to distinctive elements of its ecopoetry. More broadly, I will use these differences as a lens through which to look back at the field. These elements, which differentiate New Zealand ecopoetry from that written in other countries, provide us, I will argue, with new ways to comprehend our notion of what ecopoetry is, and what it can contribute.

The critical component of my thesis is divided into three parts. Part one will provide an overview of the genesis of ecopoetry in Britain and the United States and discuss its various definitions. I will argue for the evolution of ecopoetry towards a field that encompasses both contemporary and historical work. Part two will focus on New Zealand's long history of environmentally focused nature poetry. I will provide evidence of a lack of any clear or comprehensive delineation of New Zealand environmental poetry in critical discussions. I will argue that such poetry in fact provides New Zealand with a lineage of ecopoetry traversing more than one hundred years. This lineage, I argue, includes distinguishing traits that differentiate New Zealand ecopoetry from ecopoetry that has been defined in Britain and the United States. Part three will comprise case studies of the work of three contemporary New Zealand ecopoets. It will explore the different ways these poets conceive connections between culture and nature in settler colonial New Zealand. It will suggest that the tensions between Māori and Pākehā notions of nature and the human relationship with it expand existing comprehensions of ecopoetry.

## Part 1: Ecopoetry, a defining field of study

### 1.1 The history and genesis of ecopoetry and its connection to ecocriticism and the environment movement.

Can poetry save the earth?

—John Felstiner, *Can Poetry Save the Earth? A Field Guide to Nature Poems*

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), which documented the detrimental effects of pesticides on the environment and particularly on bird life, proved a pivotal point in what would come to be known as the environmental movement in the United States. This book was significant not only because it reported unintentional widespread damage to species but also because it showed connection between chemicals, plants, birds, and people. By exposing the flow-on effects of chemicals, as well as the spread of disinformation by American industry and officials, it brought to public attention two important aspects of what would soon become a pervasive concern about human degradation of nature. First, the science of ecology<sup>2</sup>—"that investigates the interrelations of all forms of plant and animal life with each other and with their physical habitats" (Abrams 71)—and second, those in power could not be trusted to protect the environment and the health of those, both human and nonhuman, whose lives depend upon it.

America's earlier history of conservation awareness had manifested in literature and the National Parks movement committed to what is known in that country as wilderness preservation. Ralph Waldo Emerson's 1836 essay "Nature" inspired fellow transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau to live apart from human society for two years in a cabin in woodlands at Walden Pond, Massachusetts, and to chronicle his "state of solitude in nature" (Clark, 27) in his book, *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854). Environmental philosopher and author John Muir petitioned for the 1890 National Parks Bill, leading to the formation of Yosemite and Yellowstone national parks. Nascent environmental movements included the Boone and Crockett Club founded by Theodore Roosevelt in 1887, the Sierra Club co-founded by John Muir in 1892, and the 1935 Wilderness Society associated with Aldo Leopold, whose *A Sand Country*

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<sup>2</sup> "Modern ecology [is] the science that studies the complex interrelationships of living things to each other and to their environments," Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p.16.



*Almanac* (1949) about the land around his home in Sauk County, Wisconsin, was influential in environmental ethics, wilderness conservation and wildlife management.

But *Silent Spring* was published at a time of burgeoning awareness that control of nature—previously generally regarded as a positive because of the benefits of agricultural food production—had reached a tipping point. Scientific knowledge about industrial and chemical pollution of the biosphere, depletion of forests and natural resources, extinction of plant and animal species and the explosion of the human population (Abrams 72) suggested that nature, as a result of human intervention, was failing and its failure was threatening human life. People began to tackle these problems through activism, which was seen as necessary to sway the opinions of those with commercial and political power. Writers, including poets, began to address these problems in their work. Scholars and critics began to approach literature with awareness that we had reached “the age of environmental limits” when human actions were “damaging the planet’s life support systems” (Glotfelty xx). They began to develop criticism and theory informed by ecology (Glotfelty, xvi).

One of these critics, William Rueckert, played a key role in the development of the literary critical field of ecocriticism and the naming of the field of ecopoetry. In an essay, “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” (1978), Rueckert asserted that writers “live by the word and the power of the word, but are increasingly powerless to act upon the word” because “(r)real power in our time is political, economic, and technological; real knowledge is increasingly scientific” (115). Focusing on the problem of how “to find ways of keeping the human community from destroying the natural community, and with it the human community” (107), Rueckert proposed a new method of literary criticism:

Specifically, I am going to experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for a human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live in of anything I have studied in recent years. Experimenting a bit with the title of this paper, I could say that I am going to try to discover something about the ecology of literature, or try to develop an ecological poetics by applying ecological concepts to the reading, teaching, and writing about literature. (107)

Metaphorically ascribing the biological definition of ecology—that is, an energy transfer system—to poetry, he compared poets to “suns”, poems to “green plants” (111) and poetry to a “renewable energy source” (109) whose “ecological purpose” (121) could be released into the classroom and community via teachers and students in

the same way that energy circulates in biological ecosystems. He suggested that the language of literature—as opposed to that of science and technology—might act as a catalyst towards changing prevailing paradoxical and damaging attitudes towards nature. He proposed “ecological readings” (119) of writing by selected poets and authors that would focus on their descriptions of positive relationships between nature and people, followed by teaching and criticism to disseminate the language used, in order to inspire reconciliation with nature rather than domination over it.

In keeping with the times, Rueckert styled the classroom as a subversive community in opposition to the status quo maintained by the established political order. He proposed readings of poetry that argued polemically for physical change in the relationship between people and nature, as well as readings that “refined ecological conscience and consciousness” (116).

In the polemical category, Rueckert recommended three collections: Gary Snyder’s *Turtle Island* (1969), Adrienne Rich’s *Diving into the Wreck* (1973) and W.S. Merwin’s *Lice* (1967). Each of these includes poems that protest against Western capitalist attitudes and prevailing industrial methods of agriculture. The protest poems project a bleak future for the natural world by focusing on nature’s annihilation and describing humanity (or in Rich’s case *mankind*, emphasis mine) as self-serving and destructive. Rueckert described these collections as about “the deep inner changes which must occur if we are to keep from destroying the world and survive as human beings” (117). His description suggests that extinction—of nature and subsequently of humanity—were central concerns.

Snyder’s *Turtle Island* was, Rueckert said, “a guide book” that “enacts a whole programme of ecological action” (116). In it, Snyder’s poems criticize Western, capitalist impulses towards control, supremacy and destruction of species and natural habitats. “Mother Earth: Her Whales,” for instance, casts a wide net of reproach:

How can the head-heavy power-hungry politic scientist  
 Government      two-world      Capitalist-Imperialist  
 Third-world      Communist      paper-shuffling male  
                  non-farmer      jet-set      bureaucrats  
 Speak for the green of the leaf? Speak for the soil? (53-7)

Written during the Vietnam War, the collection links American devastation in Vietnam with decimation of nature. “Call of the Wild,” declares: “And the insects side with the

Viet Cong” (50). This poem projects a pessimistic outlook for the future of the natural world as a result of human domination:

A war against earth.  
When it's done there'll be  
no place

A Coyote could hide. (63-6)

Rich's *Diving into the Wreck* is similarly combative. Rueckert described it as “about the ecology of the female self” and “men as destroyers (here of women rather than the biosphere, but for remarkably similar reasons),” arguing that “there is a demonstrable relationship between the ways in which men treat and destroy” (117) both women and nature. He asserted that Rich's poem “The Phenomenology of Anger” was about “how one woman changed and brought this destruction and suppression to an end, and about what changes must occur to bring the whole process to an end” (117). Styled as “a woman's confession” (30), the poem pronounces that a new way of thinking is necessary due to the impossibility of flight from male destructive impulses including atrocities committed during the Vietnam War. Its tone is pessimistic, finding harmony between people and nature only in an imagined world that might have been:

I would have loved to live in a world  
of women and men gaily  
in a collusion with green leaves, stalks,  
building mineral cities, transparent domes,  
little huts of woven grass  
each with its own pattern –  
a conspiracy to coexist  
with the Crab Nebula, the exploding  
Universe, the Mind – (30)

In this excerpt, Rich's vision of people in “collusion” with nature is framed as a world that only exists in the imagination.

Merwin's *Lice* also advances the idea of the need for new awareness of the importance of nature. Rueckert asserted that in it, Merwin “deconstruct(s) the cumulative wisdom of western culture and then imaginatively project(s) himself into an almost unbearable future” (117). For instance, in “The Last One,” the shadow of the last tree to be cut down grows and consumes the tree fellers and the rest of the human community:

Well the next day started about the same it went on growing.  
They pushed lights into the shadow.

When the shadow got onto them they went out.  
They began to stomp on the edge it got on their feet.  
And when it got on their feet they fell down.  
It got into eyes the eyes went blind.

The ones that fell down it grew over and they vanished. (87)

These three poetry collections, which make up Rueckert's selection of polemical ecological readings, project a common theme of people in power as decimators of nature.

Rueckert's selection of contemplative poetry dwells on poetry of perception, in which a sense of human wellbeing is drawn from the presence of nature. He uses the examples of Theodore Roethke's "Greenhouse," "The Lost Son" and "North American Sequence" and Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," which project themes of transcendental connection between people and nature's abundance. These poems suggest nature is important not for human physical survival but rather for mental wellbeing. In "The Lost Son" from *Words for the Wind* (1957) Roethke's speaker calls on nature to sustain him emotionally:

Snail, snail, glister me forward,  
Bird, soft-sigh me home.  
Worm, be with me.  
This is my hard time. (79)

Of Roethke, Rueckert asked: "Was there ever a greater ecological, evolutionary poet?" Of Whitman's "Song of Myself," from *Leaves of Grass* (1855), which declares: "I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked, / I am mad for it to be in contact with me" (29), Rueckert says: "There is a complete ecological vision in this poem" (118). These contemplative poems suggest Rueckert's call for individual communion with the natural world in order to raise awareness of nature's importance to the human psyche.

Rueckert maintained that connecting ecology and poetry could conceivably contribute to a better understanding of the ways in which people were damaging nature: "Perhaps, that old pair of antagonists, science and poetry, can be persuaded to lie down together and be generative after all" (107). He acknowledged that his proposal for an ecological literary criticism that might facilitate social and political action to reduce human environmental degradation was an experiment, the end results of which were uncertain:

Though few of us – maybe none of us – understand precisely how this idea can be used to the ends of biospheric health, its exploration would be one of the central problems which an ecological poetics would have to address. (111)

Rueckert's selection of polemical poetry suggested that nature's destruction was due to Western capitalist consumerism and patriarchal domination that could be opposed by protest against the established social and political orders. His contemplative selection proposed that changes to individual consciousness might benefit nature through greater awareness of the need to protect it. His comparison of poetry with an ecological energy transfer system echoed Whitman's concept of a poetry cycle resembling the water cycle,<sup>3</sup> yet Rueckert asserted that Whitman had "not yet resolved the disjunction between vision and action, knowledge and power" (118). This suggests that Rueckert's proposed purpose for poetry went beyond contemplating the link between nature and a sense of human wellbeing but rather extended to a vision of poetry as a motivation for community action, a notion that for some time seemed to support explicit polemic as the predominant view of ecopoetry.

Rueckert's 1978 proposal to marry ecology and poetry foreshadowed the field of study we now know as ecopoetry, although it was another twenty years before this term came into general use. His notion of an ecological literary criticism named 'ecocriticism'—from the word he coined in the title of his essay (Glotfelty xxviii)—gained momentum first.

It will be helpful now to define ecocriticism, before considering the various definitions of ecopoetry. Editor Cheryll Glotfelty, in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) says ecocriticism became a recognisable critical field by 1993. Before that, from the early 1970s, critics were "inventing an environmental approach to literature in isolation" (xvii) from each other in response to "the most pressing contemporary issue of all, namely, the global environmental crisis"

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<sup>3</sup> This concept appears in Whitman's poem, "The Voice of Rain," also from *Leaves of Grass*:

I am the Poem of the Earth, said the voice of rain,  
Eternal I rise impalpable out of the land and the bottomless sea,  
Upward to heaven, whence, vaguely form'd, altogether changed,  
and yet the same,  
I descend to lave the drouths, atomies, dust-layers of the globe,  
And all that in them without me were seeds only, latent, unborn;  
And forever, by day and night, I give back life to my own  
origin, and make pure and beautify it:  
(For song, issuing from its birth-place, after fulfilment, wander-  
ing,  
Reck'd or unreck'd, duly with love returns.) (399)

(xv). She cites milestones on the path to ecocriticism becoming a recognised critical field as the publication of *Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources* (1985) edited by Frederick O. Waage, the foundation of *The American Nature Writing Newsletter* by Alicia Nitecki in 1989, the creation of the first academic position in Literature and the Environment at the University of Nevada, Reno in 1990, the Modern Language Association special session “Ecocriticism: The Greening of Literary Studies” organized by Harold Fromm in 1991, and the 1992 American Literature Association symposium chaired by Glen Love entitled “American Nature Writing: New Contexts, New Approaches” (xviii).

Glotfelty says ecocriticism’s fundamental premise is that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting and affected by it:

Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman” (xix).

William Howarth describes ecocriticism as a mixture of four disciplines: ecology, ethics, language and criticism offering “combinations of theory and method that explore environmental literature” (71). Just as science seeks truth in data, ecocriticism seeks to observe and interpret signs and metaphors, which are “indicators of value that shape form and meaning” (77). Howarth’s view is shared by Abrams, who says that a common motivation shared by most ecocritical work is:

that science-based knowledge of looming ecological disaster is not enough, because knowledge can lead to effective political and social action only when informed and impelled, as it is in literature, by imagination and feeling. (75)

Ecocriticism thereby enacts the experiment proposed by Rueckert. That is, ecocritics read and teach literature from an ecological perspective, with an awareness of the global scale of human damage to the natural world and a belief in the potential for literature to change attitudes and beliefs through the power of the word.

While Rueckert’s essay suggested readings from poetry and prose, with a focus on the language of poetry, ecocritical work at least until the late 1990s concentrated on works of prose. American critic J. Scott Bryson notes that “within the new world of ecocriticism, scholars were largely ignoring the work of ecologically oriented poets and were focusing almost exclusively on nonfiction and some fiction, examining the works of Thoreau, Leopold, Dillard, Abbey, and other prose nature writers” (2002 1). Timothy Clark asserts that “ecocriticism as a recognisable school emerged mainly with

the study of a distinctive American tradition of non-fictional writing focused on ideas of the wild, writers such as Henry D. Thoreau, Mary Austin, John Muir, Wendell Berry, Edward Abbey and Annie Dillard” (25) Bryson recalls that in 1997, while the “very young field of ecocriticism was exploding onto the critical scene,” the “widespread” and “significant” trend towards poetry about ecological and environmental issues was “garnering almost no critical notice” (2002 1).

Indeed, ecopoetry, although not yet named, was being written well before the 1990s when it began to attract critical notice. Bryson recalls that an abundance of poems exploring ecological themes were written in the 1990s that were distinct from earlier nature poetry because they focused on global environmental issues that were previously unknown or at least not widely reported. Many of these poems were written in response to a preponderance of news items about such problems as overpopulation, species extinction, pollution, global warming and ozone depletion, Bryson observed (2002 1).

These poets revived the natural world as a subject—previously rejected by many as outdated—for contemporary poetry. Scientific knowledge of geology and natural selection had made historical nature poetry that anthropomorphized the nonhuman world or celebrated nature’s benevolence towards people difficult to take seriously (Bryson 2002 2). Terry Gifford, in *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* (1995), says that before the 1990s, nature poetry became a pejorative term because of the “sentimentality and escapism” (4) of Georgian poetry—a short-lived, early twentieth-century British pastoral poetry (*New Princeton Encyclopedia* 461). But, Gifford said, new ways of writing about and conceiving of nature—“those recent nature poems which engage directly with environmental issues” (3)—brought nature poetry back into favour. Gifford quotes reviewer Hilary Llewellyn-Williams from a 1990 “Special Green Issue” of *Poetry Wales*:

Poets need no longer apologise for writing about Nature. The new Nature poetry is more than merely descriptive: it deals with the tensions between us and our environment, our intense and often destructive relationship with it, our struggle to come to terms with the fact that we’re a part of the world out there and not simply observers and manipulators. (3)

Llewellyn-Williams’ generalized view ignores historical nature writing that was “more than merely descriptive” such as English Romantic poetry that drew a connection between nature and consciousness and in some instances protested the destruction of

nature. But her assessment encapsulates the popular, late twentieth-century notion that environmental poetry was a contemporary phenomenon.

Bryson dates the genesis of ecopoetry to the second half of the twentieth century when “a new form of nature poetry began to emerge” (2002 2). This, he says, was “produced primarily by such anti-romantics as Frost, Jeffers, Stevens, Moore and Williams” (2002 2) with a “new-sounding poetic voice [that] coincided with the growing spirit of protest that appeared in the mid-twentieth century” (2002 3). He connects the genesis of ecopoetry with the emergence of the Beat poets, most notably Gary Snyder who became a leading voice in the environmental movement. Other poets took up the ecological themes of these earlier poets and of prose works such as *Silent Spring* and set up what Bryson calls “the offshoot of nature poetry we are calling ecopoetry” (2002 3).

The lack of critical attention being paid to the abundance of nature poems about ecological and environmental issues motivated Bryson to compile an anthology of essays, *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (2002). In his introduction, he lists the handful of relevant ecocritical texts that informed him: *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature* (1996) by John Elder, *Notations of the Wild: Ecology in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens* (1997) by Gyorgyi Voros, *Sustainable Poetry: Four Ecopoets* (1999) by Leonard Scigaj, *The Song of the Earth* (2000) by Jonathan Bate, *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* (2000) by Terry Gifford and *Back from the Far Field: American Nature Poets in the Late Twentieth Century* (2000) by W. Quetchenbach. As the title of Scigaj’s book reveals, Bryson’s essay anthology was not the first to use the term ecopoetry. But it was the first to offer a critical examination of ecopoetry, which is one type of poetry that comes under the lens of ecocriticism.<sup>4</sup>

Bryson’s anthology and his subsequent *The West Side of Any Mountain* (2005) explore and attempt to define the field of ecopoetry. In 2002, he found this task elusive: “Any definition of the term *ecopoetry* should probably remain fluid at this point because scholars are only beginning to offer a thorough examination of the field” (2002 5). Eight years later, Charles I. Armstrong, in an essay titled “Ecopoetry’s Quandary,” (2010) concurred: “ecopoetry is arguably more the name of a problem, or ongoing discussion, than an established phenomenon” (242). The continuing

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<sup>4</sup> I say *one* type because ecocriticism may examine the language that shapes form and meaning in nature poetry that is not ecopoetry.



discussion by critics nevertheless provides adequate exploration to devise some parameters that can usefully be employed to delineate ecopoetry as a separate field of study from the wider and more general field of nature poetry, a useful distinction at this time of increasing concern about human-caused environmental degradation.

## 1.2 Ecopoetry, the question of technique.

the power of the word  
—William Rueckert, “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism”

Ecopoetry has its genesis in a desire for poetry to act as a catalyst for social action towards political change in order to protect the environment from further human degradation. As Rueckert suggested in his 1978 essay, the idea was that better stewardship of the earth perceived as interconnected systems of ecologies might be achieved using poetry, which itself could be likened to an ecological energy transfer cycle. This metaphor was reformulated by Gary Snyder:

‘Fruiting’ ... is the completion of the work of the poet, and the point where the artist or mystic reenters the cycle: gives what she or he has done as nourishment ... reaching into personal depths for nutrients hidden there, back to the community. (Snyder qtd in Bate, 247)

British ecocritic Jonathan Bate also applied the language of ecology to poetry to suggest poetry’s purpose as a vehicle for enlightenment:

The idea is that poetry – perhaps because of its rhythmic and mnemonic intensity – is an especially efficient system for recycling the richest thoughts and feelings of a community. Every time we read or discuss a poem, we are recycling its energy back into our cultural environment. (247)

If these ecological metaphors are used to contend that the purpose of poetry is to raise consciousness, then ecopoetry, by extension, intends to raise readers’ awareness about the value of the natural world—not as a resource but rather as an intrinsic part of human life—thus leading to its protection.

Indeed, ecopoetry is defined variously as poetry that expresses, examines, affirms and raises awareness of the ecology of the relationship between human and nonhuman. In 1995 Gifford described it as the “‘new Nature poetry’” which was “part of a wider social concern with the future of our planetary environment that has demanded a reexamination of our relationship with the natural world” (6). Scigaj in *Sustainable Poetry: Four Ecopoets* (1999) signalled that this “reexamination” focus on awareness of the need to work with rather than exploit nature when he said we might think of ecopoetry as “poetry that persistently stresses human cooperation with nature conceived as a dynamic, interrelated series of cyclic feedback systems” (37). Bryson furthered the notion of interconnection when he asserted that ecopoetry “takes into account environmental and ecological lessons we have learned (or are currently learning) regarding the interaction between human and nonhuman nature” (2002 7).

Bate said ecopoetry provides fresh ways of conceiving of our relationship with nature not only now but also in the future by providing “a way of reflecting upon what it might mean to dwell with the earth” (266). These critics generally agree, then, that ecopoetry’s purpose is to raise awareness of nature’s importance through our connection with it—as opposed to pre-ecological science notions of nature as separate from and a resource to be dominated by humanity. There is, however, debate about how this purpose might best be achieved. And this debate was prefigured in Rueckert’s call for two-fold ecocritical readings—polemical and more traditionally lyric—suggesting that both polemic and perceptive poetry were a part of his idea of an “ecological poetics.” Some critics assert, however, that a polemical or message-driven element is necessary in ecopoetry while others argue for a broader, more inclusive notion of the field.

Critics who argue for polemical content in ecopoetry contend that this is a fundamental characteristic that distinguishes it from historical nature poetry. Roger Thompson, who is at the extreme end of the argument for ecopolemic, holds that ecopoetry’s rhetoric distinguishes it as a twentieth-century term. Thompson describes the ecopoet as a “messenger of civic virtue” (37) and ecopoetry as “less about specialized, priestly incantations and more about accessibility to people whom the poet hopes to call to action, not simply contemplation” (37):

Whereas the nineteenth-century nature poet might self-consciously attempt to make the divine real through natural metaphors, and in so doing attempt to obscure the rhetorical act by calling it poetical, the twentieth-century ecopoet increasingly writes overtly rhetorical poems. The poem becomes the location of argument for social change and environmental awareness—not an argument embedded in conceptions of divine poetics and eloquence but an argument self-consciously rhetorical and openly persuasive. (36)

Neil Astley also contends that ecopoetry takes a rhetorical position on contemporary issues when he asserts it “dramatises the dangers and poverty of a modern world perilously cut off from nature and ruled by technology” (15). In his introduction to the British anthology *Earth Shattering Ecopoems* (2007) he argues:

Ecopoetry goes beyond traditional nature poetry to take on distinctly contemporary issues, recognising the interdependence of all life on earth, the wildness and otherness of nature, and the irresponsibility of our attempts to tame and plunder nature. (15)

Similarly, Bryson argues that ecopoetry diverges from historical nature poetry because it “takes on distinctly contemporary problems and issues” (2002 5). In support of this

view, he cites an excerpt from Gary Snyder's poem, "Mother Earth: Her Whales," which directly reproaches Japan:

The whales turn and glisten, plunge  
and sound and rise again,  
Hanging over subtly darkening deeps  
Flowing like breathing planets  
in the sparkling whorls of  
living light –

And Japan quibbles for words on  
what kinds of whales they can kill?  
A once-great Buddhist nation  
dribbles methyl mercury  
like gonorrhea  
in the sea. (47)

By taking a rhetorical position against whaling and ocean pollution, this poem reflects Thompson's notion of poetry as "the location of argument for social change and environmental awareness ... self-consciously rhetorical and openly persuasive"—his "call to action."

In contrast, Bate argues that the purpose of ecopoetry is not to *raise* consciousness but rather to "concern itself with consciousness" (266). He contends that polemical poetry does not achieve what he calls "ecopoiesis,"<sup>5</sup> which he defines as engaging "*imaginatively* with the non-human" (199). He therefore asserts—rather stridently—that ecopolemic is not ecopoetry at all. He presents, within a specifically environmental framework, the argument that poetry involving perception—that is, poetry that engages with how we feel about things, which may be referred to as our consciousness—engages readers more successfully than poetry of assertion—that is, poetry that merely provides an exposition of the world. By extension, he argues, poetry of perception is a more successful catalyst towards nature's protection than poetry of argument. According to Bate, the "cause of ecology may not necessarily be best served by poets taking the high moral ground and speaking from the point of view of ecological correctness" (199). Rather:

ecopoetics should begin not as a set of assumptions or proposals  
about particular environmental issues, but as a way of reflecting  
upon what it might mean to dwell with the earth. Eco-poetics must

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<sup>5</sup> Bate, in *Song of the Earth* (2000) explicates the derivation of his ecopoiesis from Heidegger's poiesis. It has nothing in common with R.H. Haynes neologism 'ecopoiesis' to describe "the artificial creation of a sustainable ecosystem on a lifeless planet" (OED).

concern itself with consciousness. When it comes to practice, we have to speak in other discourses. (266)

Bate reaffirms Rueckert's idea of "the power of the word" (115) but drills down to what sort of power is likely to be most effective to the ends of ecopoetry. That is, he argues that words used to perceptual ends, which engage with consciousness, are the specific source of poetry's engagement, rather than words used to rhetorical ends, which are successfully employed in other forms of writing and communication.

By way of example, Bate cites the same poem cited by Bryson, Snyder's "Mother Earth: Her Whales." But Bate contends it is an unsuccessful ecopoem because of its heightened polemic, which he describes as merely "an expression of a set of opinions" (199). He argues that the language of the poem contains "no relationship between vehicle and tenor; the medium for the message could as well have been a television panel discussion or a piece of journalistic prose" (202).

Bate contrasts Snyder's poem with "The Moose" by Elizabeth Bishop, which, he says, "is a poem of *wonder* in the face of the sheer physicality of the moose" (202). This poem describes an encounter between passengers on a nighttime bus ride from Nova Scotia to Boston, and a moose, which crosses the road forcing the bus to stop.

Towering, antlerless,  
high as a church,  
homely as a house  
(or safe as houses).  
A man's voice assures us

'Perfectly harmless ...' (qtd in Bate 200)

Bate says that the similes in this excerpt – the church, the house – show "the ineffability of large mammals" and the "insufficiency" of our cultural terms of reference. The description of the moose reveals "our dwelling place is the earth which we share, not the house which we own" (202). Of the following excerpt, he says, "Though awe-inspiringly 'Grand, otherworldly', the she-moose elicits not fear but 'joy', a joy that in connecting us to nature connects us to each other: 'we feel / (we all feel)' the same sensation" (202):

Taking her time,  
she looks the bus over,  
grand, otherworldly.  
Why, why do we feel  
(we all feel) this sweet

sensation of joy? (qtd in Bate 200-01)

Bate claims the weakness of Snyder's poem is "its didacticism about the rights of whales and of the species and native inhabitants of the rainforest" (201) while the strength of Bishop's poem is that "it is a poem which *knows* why we need wild animals" (201). Meditative poems such as "The Moose" that focus on the relationship between nature and consciousness—that is, a lyric subjectivity that suggests the way we view the world through perception—are poems that achieve what Bate describes as 'ecopoiesis' and are what he defines as ecopoetry.

Other critics, such as Charles I. Armstrong, agree that ecopoetry is more successful when it disengages from polemic. He contends that contemporary scientific knowledge about human degradation of the environment does not necessarily translate into poems that engage with nature in imaginative ways. He says that while poets can be inspired by ecological insights provided by modern science, this "does not mean, however, that poetry is easily converted into a vehicle for discursive truths about man's troubled dealings with nature – however laudable and urgent such truths may be" (242). Armstrong says ecopoetry is better served by imaginative writing, which can "combine excellent poetical craftsmanship with an attentive curiosity about the natural world" (242). Such ecopoetry, he says, "is, in glimpses at least, thrillingly responsive and acutely responsible to one of the most important challenges of our time" (242). He contends, furthermore, that ecopoetry is most successful as a catalyst for improving the outlook for nature when it engages with both contemporary environmental concerns and the imagination.

Rather than see ecopoetry, as Bryson does, as "a subset of nature poetry" (2002 5), that is, an offshoot that has emerged from that tradition but is distinct. Bate and Armstrong contend that ecopoetry is a continuation of nature poetry from the Romantic period. Armstrong cites British poet Alice Oswald's collection *Dart* (2002) as an example of ecopoetry that "effectively negotiates with the legacy of Romantic subjectivity" (241). It combines current ecological thought with the language of perception and imagination and a subjective connection to nature. Oswald's long poem integrates human subjects into the ecosystem of the River Dart in Devon, England, which it personifies:

and all day the river's eyes  
peep and pry among the trees

when the lithe water turns  
and its tongue flatters the ferns (11)

The poem metaphorically connects people with the river and its nonhuman creatures: “when my body was in some way a wave to swim in, / one continuous fin from head to tail” (23). It intertwines the river, its creatures and the humans who use it. The following excerpt appears beside the heading “boat voices:”

there goes a line of leaves, there goes winter, there goes the river  
at the speed of the woods coming into flower a little slower than  
the heron a little slower than a make-do boat running to heel  
with only a few galvanized bits and a baler between you and your  
watery soul (35)

Armstrong says this work “avoids being overtly prescriptive in the way favoured in American conceptions of ecocriticism” because there are “no straightforwardly prescriptive statements where form is bruised to pleasure sense” (241-2). He thereby asserts that poetry continuing the subjective and imaginative approaches of Romanticism is more engaging than poetry of persuasion and therefore a more successful form of ecopoetry. This outlook shifts the notion of ecopoetry from its narrow genesis as poetry of protest towards a view of it as encompassing poetry from a wider historical period.

The classification of ecopoetry as spanning both ecopolemic and traditional lyric including historical work is further complicated by some twenty-first century poetry. In their preface to *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, editors Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street introduce an additional category of ecopoetry that they term “ecological poetry” which “engages questions of form most directly, not only poetic form but also a form historically taken for granted—that of the singular, coherent self” (xxix). This often “experimental” poetry “tends to think in self-reflexive ways about how poems can be ecological or somehow enact ecology” and is “informed by a biocentric perspective and by ecological interrelatedness and entanglement” (xxix). In section 4 of this chapter, I will discuss an example of this approach which, by absenting the subjective ‘I,’ subverts the central role that human subjectivity generally assumes in poetry. But first, in the following section, I will discuss the ways in which ecopoetry extends beyond contemporary work to some Romantic nature poetry that was written in the nineteenth century before the form was conceived.

### 1.3 Ecopoetry and its relationship to Romantic nature poetry

that blessed mood  
—William Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey”

The differing views of ecopoetry, from Thompson’s notion of it as necessarily polemic to Bate’s contention that ‘ecopoiesis’ is only achieved with the language of perception, form different definitions of the field of study, in particular in regard to its relationship with the Romantic tradition. In this tradition, the terms “imagination,” “perception” and “consciousness” may be problematic, but they serve here to suggest an aesthetic strategy and intent, that is, a particular idea of Romantic poetry that we have inherited, which connects nature and human emotion. Bryson asserts that ecopoetry “while adhering to certain conventions of romanticism, also advances beyond that tradition and takes on distinctly contemporary problems and issues” (2002 5). Bate, on the other hand, argues that ecopoetry is “an afterlife of Romanticism” (252) and that Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth and John Clare should retrospectively be defined as ecopoets. Elucidating the arguments of these two main critics on each side of this debate will usefully illuminate what is at stake.

Bryson contends that ecopoetry is “a version of nature poetry generally marked by three primary characteristics” (2002 5). One of these is “an intense skepticism concerning hyperrationality ...that usually leads to an indictment of an overtechnologized modern world and a warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe” (2002 6). On this point, he is poles apart from Bate who focuses his definition of ecopoetry on ‘ecopoiesis’ which he describes as poetry of imagination and perception, rather than on Bryson’s notion of “indictment[s]” or “warning[s]” which propose the rhetorical or polemical element that Bate so strongly opposes.

Bryson’s other two characteristics, however, share some common ground with Bate’s wider notions of what ecopoetry might be. One of these is “an emphasis on maintaining an ecocentric perspective that recognizes the interdependent nature of the world” which “leads to a devotion to specific places and to the land itself, along with those creatures that share it with humankind” (2002 6). Bryson says ecopoets who write about themselves as part of or belonging to the world they are trying to preserve can no longer think of the environment as something separate from them. He quotes



American ecopoet Wendell Berry from his collection *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems, 1979-1997* (1999):

when we include ourselves as parts or belongings in the world we are trying to preserve, then obviously we can no longer think of the world as ‘the environment’—something out there around us. We can see that our relationship to the world surpasses mere connection and verges on identity. (qtd in Bryson 2005 25)

Bryson says Muscogee (a Native American tribe) poet Joy Harjo extends this notion by introducing the influence of memory on connectedness to the non-human world, asserting that by ‘going back’—that is, by remembering and telling stories—people can become less dualistic in their concept of self and nature. Bryson contends that the ecopoetry of Berry and Harjo suggests ways to oppose the “‘placelessness’ most Western people endure, often without any awareness of it” (2005 13), defining a “placeless person” as someone who “feels little connection to his or her surroundings and thus lives in ignorance of the interanimated nature of the world” (2005 13). It is a subjective view of self as a part of nature, rather than the traditional view of self as apart from nature, that Bryson contends distinguishes ecopoetry from historical nature poetry.

This concept overlaps with Bate’s notion of the importance of place in his idea of ecopoiesis, which he says occurs in historical nature poems. He contends that the relationship between “being and dwelling” (252) is central to ecopoetry’s awareness of “dwell[ing] with the earth... Stay true to the pull of the spot as opposed to the nation and you have a longing for belonging that is the essence of ecopoiesis” (212). He cites Romantic poet John Clare’s speaker in his “Sonnet: I Am” (1845) who reveals subjective connection to place by describing a sense of alienation and loss of identity. The poem was written when Clare was in unfamiliar surroundings after he and his family moved away from his home village of Helpston: “I feel I am, I only know I am, / I plod upon the earth, as dull and void” (1-2). Here we find Bryson’s notion of the subjective self as a part of nature, suggesting an overlap between ecopoetry as he defines it and this Romantic nature poem.

There is also an overlap—although this is not raised by Bate—between Harjo’s notion of the influence of memory on connectedness to the nonhuman world, and the ways in which Wordsworth’s nature poems connect their protagonist to natural places through memory rather than physical participation. Scott Hess, in his chapter “Nature

and the Environment” in *William Wordsworth in Context* (2015), says that in “I wandered lonely as a Cloud” (1807):

the true value of the daffodils and the narrator’s connection with them ... does not emerge in the experience itself, but only in the internalized act of imagination that follows, after he has in effect captured the daffodils in the ‘inward eye’ of memory. (209)

Only when the poet speaker lies on his couch “In vacant or in pensive mood,” do the daffodils “flash upon that inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude” (lines 20-22).

Hess argues that it is the “replayed memory” of nature “that defines and fills the vacancy of the narrator’s autonomous self” (209), just as Harjo reports that by remembering and telling stories, people can become less dualistic in their concept of self and nature. The concept of memory, then, as a bridge between people and nature described in Wordsworth and Harjo’s poetry, provides a bridge between Bryson’s concept of place in ecopoetry with Bate’s argument that ecopoetry extends to some Romantic nature poetry from the nineteenth century.

Bryson’s third characteristic of ecopoetry is “an imperative towards humility in relationships with both human and nonhuman nature” (2002 6). He argues this distinguishes ecopoetry from nineteenth-century nature poets such as Ralph Waldo Emerson who said, “Every rational creature has all nature for his dowry and estate. It is his, if he will” (qtd in Bryson 2002 6). Bryson says ecopoetry takes ‘visible steps beyond that tradition” (2002 3) of traditional Romantic nature poets, such as William Wordsworth and Walt Whitman. He quotes Robert Langbaum who in his essay “The New Nature Poetry” (1970) contends twentieth-century nature poetry “defines itself precisely by opposing, or seeming to oppose, the pathetic fallacy” (2002 3) and that “to feel in nature an unalterably alien, even an unfeeling, existence is to carry empathy several steps farther” (2002 3) than the nineteenth-century poets.

Bryson cites Whitman’s “Song of the Redwood Tree,” as an example of a traditional Romantic nature poem because it employs the pathetic fallacy and gives voice to trees that willingly yield to human endeavour: “For a superber Race / ...For them we abdicate—” (2002 4). The poem offers “a benign natural world that cares for the advancement of the human race” (2002 4). Bryson cites as an example of a contemporary ecopoem, Merwin’s “The Last One” (1967) which, in contrast, describes a bleak future for humanity following deforestation. In it, the shadow of the last felled tree consumes people and drives them away from decimated land: “The ones that were

left went away to live if it would let them. / They went as far as they could” (*The Second Four Books of Poems* 88). Bryson says Merwin’s trees are “emblematic of the numerous natural ‘resources’ myopically wasted and destroyed” (2002 4). The poem therefore reveals an altered poetics and worldview:

as writers attempt to address contemporary issues and concerns that earlier nature poets have either been unaware of or have not been forced to deal with. In the work of these contemporary poets we get a perspective on the human-nonhuman relationship that distinguishes them from their nature poetry ancestors and marks them as ecopoets. (2002 5)

In Whitman’s poem, in sum, the trees’ submission to humanity asserts that destruction of nature is a natural part of societal progress while in Merwin’s poem the disastrous consequences of deforestation denaturalise it and suggest codependency between people and nature. These poems reveal opposing characterizations of the human relationship with nature between contemporary ecopoetry and some historical nature poetry.

Bate, however, finds exceptions to this historical view of nature in the work of Wordsworth and Clare. He says that Wordsworth took a conservationist view in his prose work *Guide Through the District of the Lakes* (1820) by opposing the development of the region for tourism, providing an environmentalist context for his poems. He contends Wordsworth’s description in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) of “the beautiful and permanent forms of nature” (qtd in Bate 245) proposes that when we commune with nature “we live with a peculiar intensity, and conversely that our lives are diminished when technology and industrialization alienate us” (245). Bate finds ecopoetic elements in Wordsworth’s celebrated poem “Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” (1798), which describes nature’s positive effects on human consciousness because the memory of the view over the River Wye produces:

that blessed mood,  
In which the burthen of the mystery,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
Is lightened: (lines 38-42)

The following excerpt, which amounts to a quintessential statement of Romanticism, “turns to the psychological work which nature can do for alienated urban man:” (Bate 146)

And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense of sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,  
A motion and a spirit that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things. (lines 96-105)

Bate contends that Wordsworth, “(b)y turning from sight to sound and feeling, and thence to the temporal dimension of memory, connects his consciousness to the ecosystem” (147). This poem exemplifies Bate’s idea of ecopoetry as “the exploration of the relationship between external environment and ecology of mind” (252). In demonstrating a connection with nature—at a psychic level—in this historical nature poem, he shows that traditional nature poems do not always propose human separation from or mastery over the natural world.

Bate also cites the example of John Clare’s “The Mores” (1831) as a poem that empathises with nature rather than with human progress. This poem describes the plough as “blundering” (line 3), farmers as “each little tyrant (line 67) and exclaims: “And birds and trees and flowers without a name / All sighed when lawless law’s enclosure came” (lines 77-8). While this poem’s personification of nature might draw Bryson’s criticism, it nevertheless argues for conservation and portrays an “interdependent” nature where “birds and trees and flowers” are linked both to each other and to the human world. Yet, its opposition to Britain’s Enclosure Acts, which allowed communal greens and woodlands to be fenced off for private farming, is in some ways rhetorical, blurring the lines, somewhat, between ecopolemic and poetry of perception. It suggests that the distinction between the two can be challenging to fully draw.

Bate reads “The Mores” as evoking a diminishing sense of the poet speaker’s wellbeing as a result of the loss of familiar flora and fauna. The enclosure of land to which the poet formerly had access “changes the configuration of the poet’s mental space” (164) suggesting intimate connection between place, and by extension nature, and state of mind:

Moors, loosing from the sight, far, smooth and blea,  
Where swopt the plover in its pleasure free  
Are vanished now with commons wild and gay  
As poet’s visions of life’s early day. (lines 37-40)

By describing the damaging effects of human progress on both nature and mental wellbeing, this poem supports two of Bryson's attributes of ecopoetry: connection between place and subjective identity, and humility in its approach to the relationship between human and nonhuman. It reveals—despite Bryson's assertion that ecopoetry “takes on distinctly contemporary problems and issues” (5)—that these ecopoetical attributes can be found in nineteenth-century Romantic poetry. Moreover, the Enclosures Acts might be seen as an historical example of “hyperrationality,” which Bryson expressed concerns about only in regard to the modern world.

Despite disagreement between Bryson and Bate as to whether ecopoetry should contain polemic or be about consciousness, there is enough common ground in their notions of what constitutes ecopoetry to suggest a widening of Bryson's idea that ecopoetry is a “distinctly contemporary” phenomenon. Historical poems that propose the need to conserve and protect nature, and those that describe the beneficial effects of nature's presence on the human psyche within a context of awareness of its loss through human degradation align with two of Bryson's attributes of ecopoetry. The inclusion of these poems allows ecopoetry to adopt a more historically inclusive view. It allows ecopoetry to incorporate environmentally oriented poetry that was written before the form was conceived.

Recent anthologies of ecopoetry have in fact tended to be more historically inclusive than Bryson's definition would permit. The British anthology *Earth Shattering Ecopoems* (2007), for example, contains two chapters of historical poems that are described by editor Neil Astley as “forerunners of modern ecopoetry” (20). These poems are by “earlier writers whose poetry expressed their profound sense of connection with nature” (19), including the “wilderness poets” (19) of ancient China, William Wordsworth, Robinson Jeffers and Rainer Maria Rilke and “poets writing directly about the destruction of the natural environment in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries: Oliver Goldsmith, William Cowper, John Clare and William Barnes” (19). Astley lists the themes of ecopoetry as species extinction, pollution, deforestation, urbanisation, colonialism, global warming, planetary catastrophe, nature's persistence, conservation, humanity's interdependence with nature, and loss of connection between people and nature's cycles and rhythms. Some of these themes—global warming, planetary catastrophe—are twentieth-century phenomena and distinguish contemporary ecopoetry, but others—nature's persistence, the loss of connection between people and

nature's cycles and rhythms, even species extinction—overlap with themes in historical nature poems.

Other ecopoetry anthologies published in Britain and the United States also contain historical nature poems alongside contemporary ecopoetry. *Wild Reckoning: an anthology provoked by Rachel Carson's Silent Spring* (2004) includes poems by Clare, Wordsworth, Merwin and Harjo. *The Thunder Mutters: 101 Poems for the Planet* (2005), includes poems by Clare, Bishop and Snyder. In her brief introduction, editor Alice Oswald says while the poems “don't pronounce any one ecological message” their work is “putting our inner worlds in contact with the outer world” (x). The 628-page *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (2013) begins with an excerpt from Walt Whitman's “Song of Myself” (1855) and near the end is William Wright's “Chernobyl Eclogue,” (2009). In his introduction, Robert Hass cites the benefit of looking back at poems written when readers “did not necessarily have an ecological perspective to think about them from” (lii) and, to revisit them “with the new science and the conservation movement in mind” (xlix). Ecopoetry, he suggests, provides a lens through which to view poems written before its inception as an explicit categorization, such as historical nature poems including those from the Romantic period.

These anthologies include contemporary poems from both the polemical and imaginative camps. *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, for instance, contains the eco-polemic of Brenda Hillman—“We walked to campus on Watershed Day against / our national government. Water creatures are against war” (322)—and of C. D. Wright: “Welcome to Pecanland Mall. Sadly, the pecan grove had to be / dozed to build it” (567). It also contains perceptive ecopoems, which link the natural world and human consciousness, for instance by Adrienne Rich—“We want to live like trees, / sycamores blazing through the sulfuric air,” (440)—and of Mary Oliver: “the world offers itself to your imagination, / calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting” (418). The inclusion of poems using both techniques suggests a growing openness within the field to a broader, more inclusive definition of ecopoetry.

Ecopoetry, then, despite—or perhaps because of—continuing debate amongst critics, has evolved into a field that encompasses both ecopolemic and poetry of perception. Its underlying tenet is that it acknowledges and explores the relationship between human culture and the natural world and is in sympathy with protection of the natural world from human degradation. It recognises interconnection between human and nonhuman ecologies, such that the nonhuman world is important to people for both

survival and mental wellbeing. An ecocentric attitude (foregrounding the natural world rather than an anthropomorphic attitude that foregrounds humanity) also recognises that the nonhuman world exists for its own sake, regardless of the physical and psychic benefits it provides people.

Poems may contain eco-poetical elements no matter when they were written. Concerns about human degradation of the natural world, and a loss of physical and psychic connection between people and the cycles of nature, were being expressed in poetry in English before the term eco-poetry was conceived, in particular from the Romantic period onwards. As a field of study, then, eco-poetry provides a useful set of parameters with which to examine the ecological intent of poems written before and after its inception, as well as a basis from which to explore the eco-poetical elements of poems written when the understanding of nature and the human relationship with it differed from contemporary thinking. Some aspects of contemporary thinking about nature add another way of conceiving of eco-poetry, which will be discussed next.

## 1.4 Shifting understandings of nature and environment, and the human relationship with it

our porous skins  
— Forrest Gander and John Kinsella, “Redstart”

While, as Gifford argued “the best of the old writing about nature” tackled the tensions of relationships and responsibility, participation and power, the new global environmental concerns raised in the mid-twentieth century “demanded a re-examination of our relationship with the natural world” (5-6). Underlying these concerns was a debate about “the nature of ‘nature’” (Gifford 6). It was in this cultural context that the literary debate needs to be located and a particularly contemporary ecopoetics is arising that is also worth noting.

Polemical ecopoetry arose during the activist years of the mid-twentieth century when Western environmental problems were often denied by industry and politics. As conservation awareness increased, political environmental parties became established. The first ‘green’ parties were formed in Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand in the 1970s and 1980s (Rihoux and Frankland 259). The New Zealand Values Party, which was the precursor to the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand, was established early in this period, in 1972 (Dann 185). As concern for the natural world graduated onto more mainstream agendas, contemporary ecopoetry tended to shift from its polemical genesis towards more nuanced ways of perceiving the relationship between nature and culture, including a return to the Romantic concept of the beneficial effects of nature on human consciousness.

The idea of people as environmental controllers, which informed much polemical ecopoetry, gave rise to the term environmentalist, and was often applied to those who sought to preserve natural places from societal progress and consequent degradation. But the term ‘environment’ manifested the idea of separation between people and nature. David Mazel argues that environment is a term used to describe “the action of the entering and occupying humans: to have an environment is to have entered and remained” (140). He says that the word shifts attention from “the real actions of human beings and focuses it upon an abstraction that not only lacks agency and presence, but whose very conjuring is a mystification” (140). Mazel says the construction of an environment “is itself an exercise in cultural power” (142). He



proposes that ecocriticism theorize “the environment as a construct” (143), that is, the environment is not something there to be described but rather an idea created by discourse. Similarly, Harold Fromm says the notion of environmental problems views the environment as “a peripheral arabesque drawn around the ‘important’ concerns of human life” (38). The term environment, then, often describes an external, physical world assumed to be separate from human beings. It informs the dualistic notion of human degradation or a distinct natural world contained in much polemical ecopoetry. In contemplative ecopoetry this notion is often replaced by the concept of ecology, which recognises interconnection, and interdependence, between culture and nature.

However, such connection is often overlooked, according to Dana Phillips. He argues that we are so used to construing artifice as nature—to applying the term nature to ecologies that are partly or entirely human-made—that we can no longer tell the difference. “Culture,” he says, “has subsumed nature” (213) to the extent that “nature no longer seems to be necessary” (215). For instance, in a rural American scene, the rain, the sun, the corn, and the deer “perform differently in the ‘natural’ order” (216) because humankind has altered them: the rain and sun by changed weather patterns, the corn and deer by selective reproduction. The notion that constructed nature—that is, nature influenced by human intervention—is so familiar to us that it now constitutes what we think of as ‘natural,’ is explored in some ecopoetry. As will be discussed in Part 3 of this thesis, in a postcolonial context such as New Zealand, the representation of colonially constructed ecologies as natural is a source of tension between Indigenous and settler culture in ecopoetry.

The notion of nature as independent of humanity is an ideal that is increasingly hard to maintain as the extent of human influence on the planet becomes evident. Verification of such influence, and a trigger for a further shift in thinking, is Nobel laureate Paul Crutzen’s term ‘Anthropocene,’ coined in 2000 to emphasise the central role of humankind in geology and ecology. ‘Anthropocene’ is currently under consideration as the name of a new formal unit of geological epoch divisions to delineate a time of humanity’s significant impact on the earth’s geology and ecosystems, dating back to the start of the nuclear age or the industrial revolution. (Crutzen 23) Scientific data evidencing residual long-term effects of human impact on the planet has prompted new ways of conceiving of our relationship with the nonhuman world. In *Risk Criticism: Precautionary Reading in an Age of*

*Environmental Uncertainty* (2016), Molly Wallace says: “It might be tempting, now, to see ourselves, inhabitants of the Anthropocene, this new “Earth,” as in a hell without exit, destined to go down with the planet” (206). The fear of impending disaster prevalent in the “nuclear age,” she writes, continues now in the “second nuclear age” but “the term ‘nuclear’ appears to operate as a synecdoche for global environmental risk more generally” (2). Consideration of the term Anthropocene to delineate a geological era of human impact on the planet adds scientific weight to our recognition of the extent of human influence on the natural world.

Some ecopoets have turned to portraying nature that has its own agency, that is, that exists for its own sake rather than for the physical or psychological benefit of people, which both polemical and consciousness-oriented ecopoetry often argue or imply. American poet Forrest Gander and Australian poet John Kinsella, in their collaborative work *Redstart: An Ecological Poetics* (2012), propose abandoning defenses of nature predicated on the advantages it offers humans. In contrast, for example, with the sentiments of Wendell Berry’s “Dark with Power” in *Openings* (1965), which argues that humanity’s destruction of nature may lead to “the death of all things” (76) or W.S. Merwin’s “The Last One” in *Lice* (1967), which describes humanity driven out by the shadow of the last felled trees or Elizabeth Bishop’s evocation of nature as beneficial to the human psyche in “The Moose” from *Geography III* (1976)—“Why, why do we feel / (we all feel) this sweet / sensation of joy?” (155-7)—Gander and Kinsella assert in the joint prefatory note to their collection, “The destruction of habitat will only stop when people give up on the idea of getting something back” (ix). Their poetry continues traditional ecopoetic themes of empathy for the natural world and the need to value and protect nature but withdraws from basing that value on human needs. It achieves this by rejecting the authority of the subjective “I.” Land, they contend, contains cultural and natural histories that “I intuit only partially” (vii) and our own subjectivity is often “a veneer of connection and respect hijacked to validate one’s own presence and disturbance of land” (viii). Instead, they propose that the “writing of ‘nature’” (x) in poems might be “a means of resistance, a nonviolent confrontation with the limitations of self in dealing with the crisis so many of us have constituted” (x). *Redstart*, named after a bird species, contains a poetic vision of place shared between humans and other creatures with provisional ownership and varied histories of occupying communities. It undermines

the idea of people as central and separate from nature, suggesting rather that humanity is one small aspect of natural communities.

The long, collaborative title poem “Redstart” depicts humans and nonhumans “trying to cope” in a “damaged ecology” (37). It suggests that people, nonhuman creatures and inanimate aspects of the natural world alike are victims of the technological age. The following excerpt evokes the central theme: a struggle for survival shared by people and animals:

The rain has stopped (almost stopped) and  
from helicopters the corpses are invisible  
(almost invisible) the potholed road hellshine  
and migrant children playing  
with medical waste (floating) under a bridge  
while behind them in the city hived  
from spectacular greeds a migratory warbler  
(yellow-throated?) leaves its ghost-print  
on the double-pane glass of the tower and drops  
(eleven stories) if I’m not mistaken (58)

The explicit uncertainty present in this excerpt—the parenthesis and questions, the acknowledgement that a mistake is possible—suggests the unreliability of human subjectivity : “I intuit only partially.” The poem accomplishes its resistance to “I” by largely describing nature without a human protagonist:

trees on the hill dead as water dips below  
distance roots might reach, called  
down to zero where pull is drop  
on subterranean survey—hey, hey, rustle  
in grass, sleek bungarra, sand monitor,  
long-necked, open-chested prance,  
swatching with adhesive tongue, tail sweeping: goanna. (39)

When the human presence does appear, it is often described by the nonspecific pronoun “we.” In the following excerpt, a vague reference to humanity simply tails off.

Kingfisher  
swoops (in  
seminating gesture) as  
we “in our porous skins”

continuous with,  
indistinguishable from— (40)

In another excerpt, the notion of human understanding of nature is explicitly absent. The use of ‘no’ rather than ‘know’ implies a further lack of clarity:

And  
none no why, none claim  
to know why: plants with reddest  
breasts, birds with burnished leaves. (60)

The pronoun “we” seems to describe humanity’s irrelevance to the existence of nature:

*But though we have no criterion for how to see and are not sure what  
we are seeing, we are plunged into sensation. As into a novel pain.  
Though saying so yields no shred of information. (61)*

By resisting “I” and lessening the assurance of the human voice—and human knowledge, the “saying so”—the poem questions and subverts the central role that human subjectivity generally assumes in poetry. It destabilizes the conventional hierarchy by foregrounding nature and reducing the significance of humanity. This largely experimental work reveals one way in which ecopoets are representing changing relationships between culture and nature.

In this section, I have described the genesis and development of the field of ecopoetry since its formal categorization in the 1990s. I have outlined its various definitions formulated by foundational critics, showing where these definitions overlap and where they do not. From that investigation, I have devised some basic tenets of ecopoetry. I have concluded that ecopoetry exists both as ecopolemic and as poetry of perception in contemporary and in historical times, with its roots in British Romanticism. By examining anthologies published in Britain and the United States, I have shown the aggregation of historical poems into the recently delineated field. I have considered the ways in which changing concepts of the human relationship with nature have influenced contemporary ecopoetry, including a shift away from poetry evoking nature as beneficial to people to evocations of it as valuable in its own right. I have touched on the ways in which nature is humanly constructed in rural environments. In Part 2 of the thesis, I will use the basic tenets of ecopoetry, alongside a brief investigation of the history of some specific relationships between culture and nature, to delineate and explore the tradition of ecopoetry in English in Aotearoa New Zealand.



## Part 2: New Zealand Ecopoetry

### 2.1 The characterization and criticism of ecopoetry in New Zealand

occupation of the easier landscape  
—Charles Brasch, “Forerunners”

2017 Sarah Broom Poetry Award winner Hera Lindsay Bird—when asked to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of New Zealand poetry—characterized one weakness as “too many poems about mountains” (Green 2017). Her remark alluded to the prevalence of the landscape as a cultural marker in New Zealand poetry, a heritage challenged in her own work: “I just don’t think it’s real / to think of geese and feel so beautiful about yourself” (44), she writes in “Wild Geese by Mary Oliver by Hera Lindsay Bird” from *Hera Lindsay Bird* (2017). Her poem suggests that responses to the landscape—“always a part of the literary from the earliest examples of writing in New Zealand” (Stafford & Williams 828)—are redundant to her generation of urban-based twenty-somethings. (Although urban landscapes, also, of course, contain nature.) Nevertheless, her poetry, which abounds with images drawn from urban and media culture, at times returns to nature for metaphor —“I love you standing in the water wearing the river / like an invisible pair of shoes” (“Planet of the Apes” 53). It suggests the natural world as a benchmark of poetic imagery is difficult to abandon.

Poet James Brown finds, too, that New Zealanders are increasingly urban dwellers whose experience of the natural world “is unlikely to involve straying too far from the car” (9). But, he writes, in his introduction to *The Nature of Things: Poems from the New Zealand Landscape* (2005), that the “myth” of “the rugged individuals of the land exported by history” and the country’s “clean, green image” (9) conspire to maintain the landscape as a central trope in the national imagination. It remains, he writes, “an important presence in many minds, even if its physical reality is, for many, little more than a hindrance to the daily commute” (9). The natural world appears bound to remain an important theme in New Zealand poetry despite the pressures of urbanisation and literary challenges to its significance.

The landscape’s pervading presence in the national psyche, and its physical presence, has permeated this country’s literature since the nineteenth century. Consequently, New Zealand has produced an abundance of nature poetry. Despite this,

and notwithstanding a continuing narrative of the loss and importance of natural ecologies, there is little critical work that examines New Zealand poetry from an environmentally oriented perspective. Furthermore, no anthology focused explicitly on New Zealand ecopoetry has been published.

Critical recognition of ecopoetry in this country appears to be at a stage similar to that observed by J. Scott Bryson in the United States in 1997 when he “encountered a handful of anthologies containing contemporary nature poetry” which were for the most part “simply collections of poems rather than treatments of the genre” (2002 1). For instance, *The Nature of Things: Poems from the New Zealand Landscape* (2005) contains poems which consider the relationship between nature and culture and are clearly sympathetic to ecopoetry—Charles Brasch’s “Forerunners,” Dinah Hawken’s “Talking to a Tree Fern,” “Hope,” and “The Issue of Water,” and Hone Tuwhare’s “A talk with my cousin, alone”—alongside descriptive nature poems. In his introduction, Brown cites the gap between reality and myth when it comes to New Zealand’s widely circulated “clean, green image” which he describes as in reality “increasingly under threat”:

For a long time New Zealanders have been able to get away with some fairly casual attitudes toward the environment without overtly compromising the country’s unspoiled image. (9)

This would seem to suggest that the poems in the collection tackle the reality of the degradation of New Zealand’s natural places, and many of them do this.

However, Craig Potton’s scenic photographs on alternate pages support the traditional image of New Zealand as unspoilt and the many descriptive nature poems in the collection evoke the image, at least, of an enduring, pristine nature.

The closest, perhaps, to a New Zealand ecopoetic anthology is *Below the Surface* (1995), published to celebrate the Moruroa Pacific Peace Flotilla. The flotilla of yachts accompanied by the New Zealand navy ship *Tui* protested against French nuclear testing at Moruroa on 6 August 1995, the anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing. This was eight years after the Lange government passed the 1987 New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament and Arms Control Act. Royalties and publisher’s returns from the book were donated to the New Zealand contingent of 14 yachts and, as might be expected, the poems tend to be polemical. Editor Ambury Hall describes them as writing “that will strike a chord” and “speak for us in New Zealand

and elsewhere” (xi). Unsurprisingly, given the field was then in its infancy, Hall does not use the term ecopoetry.

Surprisingly, though, more recent anthologies elide ecopoetry as a defining category. *Manifesto Aotearoa: 101 Political Poems* (2017), for example, does not use the word ecopoetry at a time when the field has international recognition, even while including poems that specifically tackle environmental degradation. Editors, ecological author Philip Temple and poet Emma Neale, explain in their joint preface that the ‘Environment’ section in the 191-page anthology emerged from submissions in response to a call for “political” (14) poems on any subject. They note the responses highlight the relevance of the topics—the others are politics, rights and conflict—as contemporary poetic subject matter reflecting “who and where New Zealanders are today” (15). They define the environment section as “poetry of lament about the destruction and poisoning of our landscapes and our alienation from the natural environment” (15). This description and the word ‘manifesto’ in the anthology’s title suggests a narrow and conservative view of environmental poetry as necessarily polemic, but do so mainly without explicit referencing of the field of ecopoetry and never with that term as a means of categorization.

In writing about New Zealand poetry, work that might be characterized as ecopoetry tends to be categorized instead according to historical time periods or alongside other polemical poetry rather than by its environmental orientation. Ecopolemic is in sum less visible because it is often grouped with poetry containing other political themes. For example, the substantial, 624-page *99 Ways into New Zealand Poetry* (2010), categorizes New Zealand poetry from the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries under headings including poetic forms, contexts, features and effects, and identities. It groups polemical poems about nature with rhetorical poems on a broad range of subjects including industrial relations, anti-colonialism, feminism, politics and political correctness. The chapter “Pastoral Poetry” under the heading “Poetic Contexts” includes some poems with ecopoetical intentions. One of New Zealand’s first poets to write about the connectivity between people and nature, Ursula Bethell, is included in this section for her 1920’s garden poems described as “domestic pastoral” (206). Brian Turner’s *All That Can Be Blue* (1989) is here described as conveying “a spiritual quality” found in the combination of landscape and physical activity—a notion that is discussed further in a chapter headed “Spiritual Poetry.” However, the orientation of Turner’s collection towards ecological protection and a



sense of connection with nature in poems such as “Ozone,” and “Tangata Whenua”—“the country / rolls through me” (18)—is unspecified, as are Bethell’s ecological sympathies.

The “Political Poetry” chapter includes Anna Jackson’s recent ecological sequence “The pastoral elephant” from her collection *The Pastoral Kitchen* (2001) under the heading “Poetic Features & Effects.” The authors, Paula Green and Harry Ricketts, do note there that, “in promoting an ecological point of view” this sequence “might be labelled ecopoetry” (370). They describe “eco-minded Richard Reeve” (370) as having a “commitment to environmental issues” (190). But these passing references to the environmental orientation of these poets’ works is contained within more detailed discussions of other aspects.

A chapter called “Polemical Poetry,” which might lend itself to a fuller interrogation of environmentally themed work, includes Turner’s 2005 poem “Open Minds” which parodies political correctness, but not his ecopolemic, such as “Panoply” from *Taking Off* (2001). Dinah Hawken’s collection *It Has No Sound and is Blue* (1987) is included for poems tackling feminism and racial inequality but not for those ecologically oriented, contemplative poems that reflect on relationships between nature and culture, which are discussed in “Ecopoetry and the Imaginative Impulse” (Newman 2015) and “Thinking Like a Leaf: Dinah Hawken, Romantic Ecopoet” (Newman 2017). The single ecopoetic poem here is Ian Wedde’s “Pathway to the Sea” from *Castaly – Poems 1973-1977*, which is described as “a marvelously sustained ecological sermon on personal and civic responsibility” (378) but again within a discussion of other protest poems about a range of political and social issues.

Another important literary text, *The Auckland University Press Anthology of New Zealand Literature* (2012), also discusses the environmental aspects of poetry within broader themes. This 1162-page anthology traverses two hundred years of New Zealand writing and notes the centrality of the landscape. In the ‘Maoriland’<sup>6</sup> period from the late nineteenth century to the First World War, for instance, “the landscape, in particular, became a focus” (100) with deforestation a concern as writers remember

lost landscape as the rural economy gobbles up the native bush. There is an ambivalent attitude to progress, a celebration of newness and modernity while

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Maoriland’ refers to the period from the 1880’s until the First World War when New Zealand was popularly known by the term. In literature, it describes the time of the beginnings of a self-consciously New Zealand writing. See Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature 1872-1914* (2006).

at the same time an acute awareness of the cost. (100)

A chapter called “Settler Ecologies” includes William Pember Reeves’ “The Passing of the Forest” (1898) and Blanche Baughan’s “A Bush Section” (1908). These early settler poems, which typically support deforestation for human progress, nevertheless contain ecopoetic elements. Reeves’ poem acknowledges—ahead of its time—the interconnection of forest ecologies and Baughan’s suggests that nature’s loss strips settler culture of imagination. The anthology characterizes these poems as part of the evolution of the European settler attitude in general whereas an ecopoetical reading of these two poets would suggest that they are the forerunners of a nascent New Zealand ecopoetry. This absence is notable in an anthology that is designed to provide a comprehensive account of New Zealand literature.

In the anthology, a chapter “In the Garden” comprises an excerpt from Herbert Guthrie-Smith’s *Tutira: The Story of a New Zealand Sheep Station* (1921) and four poems from Ursula Bethell’s *From a Garden in the Antipodes* (1929), published under Bethell’s pen name Evelyn Hayes. The introduction to this section’s chronological header, “Between the Wars,” finds that “the ecology of settlement is seen with a more somber eye, as a sense of the loss of the Maori past is coupled with an awareness of the landscape’s degradation” (206). From an environmental perspective, Guthrie-Smith’s prose work was pivotal in denoting a shift away from a literary focus on nature’s absence to an ecocentric sense of connectivity with ecologies and awareness of their pre-European histories. Bethell broke this new ground in poetry. The anthology categorizes such environmentally oriented nature poetry as part of a wider history of New Zealand nature poetry. From an ecopoetical standpoint, these works signal the beginning of an ecological consciousness in poetry, which is significant in a country with a literary focus on the natural world.

The anthology’s section examining the period of Cultural Nationalism when Pākehā writers were self-consciously seeking to create a national literature includes Charles Brasch’s “Forerunners” (1948), which explicitly acknowledges European environmental degradation by describing those settlers as “conquerors, scarring it with vain memorials” and their “occupation of the easier / Landscape” as “shallow” and “rootless” (330). The poem depicts the speed and efficiency of European deforestation and suggests the notion of connection between the land and national identity. This section also includes Allen Curnow’s “The Unhistoric Story” (1941) which finds that the reality of meeting the needs of the British consumer market breached settler

expectations of a rural paradise, and implies that the land suffered as well: “The pilgrim dream pricked by a cold dawn died / Among the chemical farmers” (339). The anthology says such poetry “de-prettifies the natural world:”

There is no place for romantic contemplation or touristic aggrandizement of its singular beauties. New Zealand is an insecurely inhabited land, diminished by economic history and present circumstance. (311)

From an environmental perspective, these poems reveal an uncomfortable awareness of the effects of nature’s ruin on physical landscapes and settler psyches, and a distinctly New Zealand ecopoetic connecting the landscape to a sense of national identity.

The anthology includes polemic, anti-nuclear ecopoems: Keith Sinclair’s “The Bomb is Made” (1963) and Hone Tuwhare’s “No Ordinary Sun” (1964), in its section, “From Kiwi Culture to Counter-Culture.” Sinclair’s sestina provides a hopeful ending: “*Be kind to one another, kiss a little, / Our only weapon is this gentleness*” (564).

Conversely, the death of a tree at the conclusion of Tuwhare’s poem is a metaphor for the end of all life:

O tree  
in the shadowless mountains  
the white plains and  
the drab sea floor  
your end at last is written. (565)

The polemic within these poems is characterized in the anthology as evidence of two changes that occurred in New Zealand poetry in the 1960s: “the engagement of young poets with contemporary American poetry” and the enlisting of literature “in the cause of political action” (487). Ecopolemic, then, is characterized as one cause amongst many but not singled out as the foundation of the field of study we now know as ecopoetry.

The anthology’s sections “The Eighties” and “The Nineties” distinguish environmentally oriented poems in subsections called “Reading the Landscape” and “Postmodern Ecologies.” Again, the introductions to these eras submerge ecopoems within writing of “political issues” and “alternative voices” (703). More recent ecocentric poems such as Anna Jackson’s “Moa,” “Huia,” and “Takahe” from *The Pastoral Kitchen* (2001) appear in a second subsection called “Maoriland,” alongside Gregory O’Brien’s “For Te Whiti o Rongomai” which tracks the loss of both nature and the pre-European Māori way of life in New Zealand as a result of the transformation of forests and wetlands into farmland. These poems focus on two of the most concerning environmental issues facing this country at present—the loss of native

bird species and the environmental effects of agriculture. The anthology notes that in these poems, the political element is “implied, but far less overtly present than in previous decades” (941). In this it recognises —without stating explicitly—the shift away from ecopolemic towards a more perceptive ecopoetic lyric.

My point is that the field of ecopoetry does not appear to have entered the critical framework for such an accounting of this country’s poetic lineage, even in such a recent anthology. This brief survey of an important recent anthology suggests both the presence in historical and contemporary work of a New Zealand ecopoetical tradition, and simultaneously, that the absence of such categorizations in this anthology is symptomatic of the treatment of ecopoetry in New Zealand analyses generally. That is, while ecological intentions and changes in poetic themes and techniques over time are recognised, these characteristics are not registered within a single framework. Consequently, the development of New Zealand’s environmentally oriented nature poetry from the nineteenth century to a contemporary ecopoetics is relayed through a series of fragmentary critiques subsumed within broader categorizations, such as time periods. The notion of poetry in sympathy with the natural world as a distinct subject matter—or indeed, of belonging to the field of ecopoetry—is not on the agenda.

In summary, it appears that while there is ample evidence of a tradition of ecopoetry in New Zealand, ecopoetry itself—a recognised field and the subject of critical debate in Britain and the United States since the 1990s—remains largely unacknowledged in this country. One of the goals here, then, is to make a start on remedying this. In the following sections of this chapter, I will delineate a New Zealand contemporary ecopoetry tradition via characteristics that scholars have noted about historical poems without having considered them as ecopoetry, and through my own ecopoetical readings of historical poems. I will focus my attention on poems included in three anthologies which I have selected because of their importance at different times in New Zealand poetry. They are: *A Treasury of New Zealand Verse* (1926) which is New Zealand’s first anthology of poetry in English, *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1960) which is a significant anthology edited by Allen Curnow, and *The Auckland University Press Anthology of New Zealand Literature* (2012) which is a major text spanning the history of New Zealand poetry in English. I also reference *Earth, Sea, Sky: Images and Māori Proverbs from the Natural World of Aotearoa New Zealand* (2003), an anthology which provides insight into the Māori worldview that was absent from published poetry in English until the mid-twentieth century. There are

many other anthologies of New Zealand poetry where I might have looked for ecopoems, including those first anthologies of women's poetry. But time and space constraints have made the exploration of those works beyond the scope of this thesis. In the following sections of Part 2, I will examine the genesis of New Zealand ecopoetry and delineate the emergence of specific characteristics in the tradition. In Part 3, I will explore how New Zealand ecopoetry has developed in contemporary work in ways that are specific to this country. I will show that the specific characteristics of New Zealand ecopoetry align with a postcolonial ecocritical approach, which suggests the need for ecopoetry more generally to be characterized with more attention to the local.

## 2.2 The genesis of New Zealand ecopoetry and three defining characteristics

From where will the bellbird sing?  
— *Earth, Sea, Sky. Images and Māori Proverbs from the Natural World of Aotearoa New Zealand*

As Hass found when he considered the ways American nature poetry has developed towards an ecopoetics over 150 years, ecopoetry evolves according to local conditions, that is, political and social reactions to human impact on the natural world, and literary responses to it. He cites as influences on American ecopoetry such prose works as Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), John Muir's *The Mountains of California* (1875), Aldo Leopold's *A Sand Country Almanac* (1949), Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964). In America and Great Britain—where ecocritical interrogation of poetry was initially carried out—local conditions have led to the formulation of the definitions of ecopoetry with which we are now familiar.

In New Zealand, by contrast, the unexplored development of ecopoetry means that its local features have not been defined. Particular interactions between people and the environment, and the prose literature that has arisen, have shaped this country's ecopoetry and developed its distinguishing characteristics. This local variant of ecopoetry reflects New Zealand's distinctive relationships between nature and culture. The characteristics particular to New Zealand ecopoetry flow from the development of this country's literature within a specific set of circumstances. The country's evolutionary history, its geography and weather patterns, the ways in which migrants have interacted with the environment in these contexts and the unexpected consequences of human action "have produced very particular outcomes" (Pawson & Brooking 18). These outcomes have affected flora and fauna and also, of course, the relationships between natural ecologies and culture.

In this section, I will provide an outline of the concerns that characterize New Zealand ecopoetry, which flow from the ways in which the country has developed historically, geographically and culturally. I will discuss in broad terms the interactions that have produced outcomes that have influenced the development of a tradition of ecopoetry here. In the following section, I will argue more fully how these outcomes have led to a distinctly New Zealand ecopoetry.

The particular circumstances that have developed in New Zealand can be related, first, to the geological history of the country. Australian ecologist Tim Flannery describes it as “a completely different experiment in evolution to the rest of the world” where “birds occupied all of the major ecological niches occupied by mammals elsewhere” (55). New Zealand was the last major landmass in the world to be colonised by people before the modern era (Pawson & Brooking 49). “No other islands of similar size remained isolated for so long” and “[t]his remarkable isolation meant plants and animals evolved into distinctive species found nowhere else in the world. New Zealand became a land of birds, a land of ancient forest” (“New Zealand”). As a result, much of New Zealand’s early poetry that might be described as a nascent ecopoetry focuses on colonial eradication of the forest and the consequential loss of native bird life.

Second, New Zealand has a distinctive cultural history. Māori settlement around 800 years ago wrought ecological changes similar to those that occurred in other Pacific Islands, Australia and America where fragile environments were susceptible to extreme alteration following human habitation. Burning of forests for occupation and horticulture, hunting for food, and predation following the introduction of dogs and rats led to the loss of forest and birds. “Pre-European Māori, it came to be seen, had been involved in the loss of 50 per cent of both the primeval forest area and the late Holocene or postglacial suite of bird species” (Pawson & Brooking 36) by the time of European contact following James Cook’s first visit in 1769.

Dramatic as these ecological changes were (they were unknown to European settlers who arrived to what many perceived as a *terra nullius*), they were less extreme than the devastation that would ensue. In the first 100 years of British settlement from the early 1800s, the imperial drive to incorporate New Zealand into the capitalist world economy led settlers to modify and, in the lowlands, annihilate native ecosystems, replacing them with “functionally incomplete systems dominated by introduced plant and animal species” which would “trigger significant environmental problems within a generation” (Pawson & Brooking 89). The country was remade as a kind of rural hinterland of London, both culturally and economically (Barnes qtd in Pawson & Brooking 23). It was a process described by ecological historian Geoff Park as “one of humanity’s most dramatic transformations of nature anywhere” which “removed” non-human, “indigenous life almost entirely” (177).

This transformation shares some characteristics of migrant effects on environments anywhere but is distinguished by the speed and totality of change within New Zealand's unique ecosystems of birds and ancient forests. It is furthermore distinguished by having occurred so recently that it is almost within living memory. By 1920, the open country of New Zealand was "a highly modified landscape ... the plant cover of most low country was almost unrecognisable from what it had been in 1840" (Pawson & Brooking 104). Deforestation in concert with the country's weather patterns and its geography of central mountains and ranges led to flooding and soil erosion. Overstocking and the wilful introduction and subsequent invasion of rabbits degraded much South Island hill country. Possums, stoats and exotic plants, and the unintentional release of weeds and pathogens, devastated remaining forests and bird life. Drainage of wetlands eradicated native species creating what Park describes as "an imperial landscape ... of amnesia and erasure" (183). The export-driven expansion of farming transformed the New Zealand countryside and considerably homogenized it. "It was on this violently modified and ever more industrial terrain," writes critic Philip Steer, "that New Zealand literature took its increasingly distinctive shape" (85).

It is in this environment of ecological colonial violence that New Zealand ecopoetry in English has its genesis. The earliest examples parallel disquiet about the destruction of natural ecologies and wastage of resources—mostly by wealthy settlers who were spared the physical drudge of making a living from land clearance (Pawson & Brooking 137)—which led to political decisions in the late nineteenth century to protect some natural places from destruction. Fencing off areas to establish this country's national parks estate was in keeping with three characteristics of the prevailing colonial view of nature: that it was a resource to be exploited for economic improvement and recreation, that its scenic beauty was separate and compatible with its destruction, and that the loss of natural ecologies for capitalist expansion was a natural process. Colonial ecological violence is in tension with the intentions of ecopoetry and it was precisely on this terrain that New Zealand's first ecopoetry was written. Awareness of the particularity of New Zealand's unique nonhuman ecologies, and a view of nature as connected with human occupation rather than merely dominated by it—looking beyond a colonial ethos of "improvement and ruination" (Calder 139)—is the first of three distinguishing characteristics of New Zealand ecopoetry that I will more fully describe in the coming sections of this chapter.



The second characteristic of New Zealand ecopoetry flows from the development among Europeans of a sense of national identity connected to the country's landscape. British colonialism, while in stark contrast to conservation, had nevertheless brought with it an appreciation of unspoilt, natural places. New Zealand was perceived as a scenic wonderland of natural beauty. Areas perceived as untouched—despite Māori occupation—were considered exotic because of their difference to Britain, and desirable as objects of adoration and retreat. In 1874, the New Zealand Forests Acts, “albeit ineffective, was one of the earliest state conservation measures in the British Empire” (Pawson & Brooking 26). It was passed amid “the growth of disquiet caused by anxiety about the destruction of valuable resources and concerns for ecological and aesthetic impacts” (Pawson & Brooking 26). An extensive conservation estate, comprising some 30 per cent of the national land area—albeit mostly small islands and highlands “valued for little else” (Pawson & Brooking 26)—was set-aside as national parks, a higher proportion of this nation's lands than almost any other country (Park 177). Their formation was assisted by offers of land from Māori who sought to protect treasured natural places—taonga—from sale to European settlers, and by the 1890 Urewera District Native Reserve Act, which “is unique in New Zealand's history of preserving the indigenous” (Park 227), and which preserved both flora and fauna and, to an extent, an Indigenous Māori lifestyle. “By 1900, more and more people were valuing the indigenous as part of a growing identification with New Zealand as home” (Pawson & Brooking 26). This strictly European view existed alongside but oblivious to Māori concepts of connection to land through kaitiakitanga, “an obligation to safeguard and care for the environment for future generations” (Selby et al 1), and tūrangawaewae, places where ancestors are present (Salmond 310). Many poets during the ‘Maoriland’ era—from the late nineteenth century until about 1920—aligned a sense of wellbeing with connection to place and an often-sentimental view of nature. Preservation of New Zealand mountains and forests, begun by European colonialists to preserve indigenous flora and fauna, also protected their own sense of becoming Indigenous—a notion that Alex Calder disparagingly calls “Pakeha turangawaewae” (4)<sup>7</sup>—or “belonging through nature” (172). The natural world had become synonymous with a sense of belonging here.

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<sup>7</sup> Calder criticizes the validity of the notion amongst Europeans because, he says: “Turangawaewae, understood in the Maori sense of belonging, of having a place to stand, is not the same as the affection for place felt by Pakeha” (4).

The national conservation estate continues to play an important role in the psyche of New Zealanders who desire the continued existence of unspoilt, natural places available for recreation and ecological preservation. The separation of the estate from daily life has however “turned New Zealand into two landscapes” (Park 177): on the one hand, a homogenous environment of towns and farmland lacking indigenous plants and animals where most of us live, and on the other, national parks where our living is prohibited and non-human indigenous life is preserved. Both, Park says, “have equal power in shaping New Zealanders’ sense of themselves” (177). The conservation estate with its focus on protection of indigenous species of plants and animals influences not only “our growing regard for that flora and fauna” but also “our sense of who we are in a globalising world” (178). The idea that a sense of European settler belonging— notions of identity and nationhood—is connected to nature is an aspect of the relationship between nature and culture in this country. I will argue below and in the following chapters that this notion, and its development in a particular, local way, is a second characteristic of New Zealand ecopoetry which can be traced in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries in a more clearly ecopoetical context.

The third characteristic of New Zealand ecopoetry—which is also linked to the second characteristic of connection between nature and belonging—is tension between Māori and Pākehā notions of nature and the human relationship with it. British imperial colonialism devastated not only New Zealand’s natural ecologies but also its Indigenous population. (Pawson & Brooking 63) The colonial hunger for land and assertion of economic and cultural dominance over Māori was in part driven by the European subject position that construed nature as something external to the individual. This was in stark opposition to the Māori worldview of *kaitiakitanga*, the notion of guardianship of natural elements and places. The colonial ethos to conquer nature and transform so-called wasteland into productive farmland, combined with capitalist notions of property ownership, opposed the Māori worldview of nature and people entangled through spirituality, ancestry, and occupation. (Pawson & Brooking 65) In the Māori worldview, the land provides “the physical and spiritual basis for life” (“Story”). *Kaitiakitanga* is “an inherited commitment that links ... the spiritual realm with the human world and both of those with the earth and all that is on it” (Selby et al 1). These views stand in contrast to the European views of nature as expressed in nineteenth and early twentieth century New Zealand ecopoetry, such as William Pember-Reeves’ “The Passing of the Forest,” which laments “the bitter price of

progress—,” and Dora Wilcox’s “Onawe” which describes both the forest and Māori as “doomed.” The prevailing European view was of a natural world separate from people, either a resource to be used or scenery to be admired, but ultimately destined to make way for the superior terrain of human progress.

The Māori notion of connection with nature has been articulated in New Zealand for hundreds of years. Historian Arini Loader, of Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Whakaue and Te Whānau-ā-Apanui descent, reports that in the “nineteenth century Māori produced thousands of pages of written work ... written almost exclusively in te reo Māori” that “enables unparalleled access to the first literature of Aotearoa-New Zealand” (31). While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore writing in te reo Māori, it is important to acknowledge that Māori connection with and sympathy for nature was expressed in te reo Māori and orally at a time when Māori perspectives were absent from the New Zealand poetry canon in English. This absence resulted from increasing English-language dominance in the early twentieth century and “assimilatory ideology and government policy that severely undermined the health of the Māori language” (Loader 31). Nevertheless, Māori engagement with natural ecologies was powerfully expressed in other aesthetic domains, notably the carving and painting of meeting houses and oral narrative forms such as whakataukī (proverbs) (Selby et al 222-4).

Traditional Māori proverbs translated and transliterated in *Earth, Sea, Sky: Images and Maori Proverbs from the Natural World of Aotearoa New Zealand* (2003) reveal a prevailing theme of connection between people and nature through imagery and imagination. In their introduction, editors Patricia and Waiariki Grace write that the proverbs relate the Māori tradition of “interdependence among all life forms” and the “need to live in harmony with nature rather than attempt to conquer and rule it” (n.p.). Some speak directly to conservation:

If you destroy the flax  
From where  
Will the bellbird sing? (14)

Others speak of a spiritual connection with the land:

I look to the rock cliffs  
and see the faces  
of my ancestors. (72)

Māori ideology, as suggested here, is in direct contrast to Victorian notions of nature that justified environmental ruination for the sake of improvement and which, to some extent, continues today, as economic growth remains a contemporary political touchstone. These proverbs reveal a valuing of the natural world and awareness of the need to protect it—fundamental tenets of ecopoetry. But they also reveal attachment to place through genealogy and spirituality, notions that, I will argue later, extend the prevailing ecopoetical notions of a connection between place and self that develops through consciousness.

In summary, I argue three characteristics of New Zealand ecopoetry: awareness of local nature's fragility within a wider ethos of improvement and ruination; connection between nature and notions of nationhood and identity; and tension between Māori and Pākehā understandings of nature and the human relationship with it. These, I will argue, can be found in a nascent fashion in early nature poetry and traced into contemporary work. The next section of this chapter looks more closely at these characteristics as they appear in nineteenth and early twentieth-century nature poetry.

## 2.3 Improvement and ruination: illuminating tensions between progress and despoliation to look past them

Our small fond human enclosures  
—Ursula Bethell, “Pause”

New Zealand is an altered environment with a record of native biodiversity loss—forty-two percent of its terrestrial birds have become extinct since human settlement. (Woodhouse) Presently, more than a thousand animal, plant, and fungi species are considered threatened. (Department of Conservation) Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment Jan Wright’s May 2017 report “Taonga of an island nation. Saving New Zealand’s birds” finds that of 168 species “only a fifth are considered to be doing OK, and about a third are in serious trouble” (37). While it may be easy to pin this record of ecological disaster to a history of extravagant human predation and violent and unwitting colonialism, Calder argues it is misleading to think of early European settlers as environmental vandals:

Much like ourselves, they tended to be conservationists and developers both, and their legacy is not so much an awareness that the contradictions between those roles are so difficult to resolve in practice, but that we continue to act as if those contradictions had little real grip on us. (138)

Calder suggests that mental compartmentalisation of an idealised nature on one hand and nature ruined for improvement on the other, fits well with “fatalist assumptions about historical change in the plot of improvement” (138). Consequently, it is unsurprising that colonial and settler colonial era “narratives of ruination are a dime a dozen” and what is rarer is “writing that illuminates tensions between progress and despoliation in order to look past them” (138). By “past them” Calder references writing that suggests complex interactions between European settlers and place where people are both agents of change and changed through connection with nature, which reveals some measure of resilience. In this section, I will argue for the first characteristic of New Zealand ecopoetry: settler awareness of nature as connected with human occupation rather than merely dominated by it, despite a wider ethos of environmental ruination for economic improvement.

Geoff Park’s classic book *Ngā Uruora/The Groves of Life: Ecology and History in a New Zealand Landscape* (1995), for instance, tends to invoke the ruination plot, yet its narrative structure “strongly contradicts the tendency ... toward the invocation of an inevitable downward spiral” (Horrocks 2018 10). Horrocks argues

that by starting with landscapes ruined by ‘improvement’ and then turning to places positioned as “providing the information we need for efforts towards conservation and restoration ecology” (2018 11), Park “assumes the position of a Pākehā writer seeking not only reconciliation with Nature, but seeking to evoke a kind of (re)marriage of biculturalism” (2018 11) imagined as having “the potential to heal ‘Western isolation from nature’” and “the alienation brought about by colonial history” (11). In poetry, the contemporary ecopoetry of Airini Beautrais, which will be discussed later in this thesis, also moves beyond the ruination plot. Alongside poetic renderings of the ecologically damaging consequences of colonial ‘improvement,’ Beautrais positions herself as a Pākehā poet imagining a vision of ecological recuperation through a merging of settler and Indigenous methods of ecological protection and conservation.

At least until the 1920s, the predominant ecological concern in New Zealand literature was “the bush and its eradication ... largely predicated on asserting the settler’s separation from the ecosystems that surround them yet are doomed by their presence” (Steer 87). This contradictory mixture of “complicity and distance” (Steer 87) was in accord with Victorian notions of the sublimity of unspoilt nature and the conviction that human destruction of indigenous flora and fauna was “merely hastening a natural process” (Pawson & Brooking 143). Some political controls over deforestation were put in place in the late nineteenth-century mainly for economic reasons such as preservation of timber stands and protecting watershed, but also, with help from Māori, because of the desire to preserve natural ecologies for scenic recreation. In 1874, Premier Julius Vogel perhaps encapsulated a burgeoning European notion of the value of those protected areas when he contended forests were not only a resource but also affected “the ‘beauty, healthfulness, and pleasure-bestowing qualities’ of the nation as well as ‘its character and intrinsic value’” (Pawson & Brooking 143).

The Romantic notion of the beneficial influences of nature on human consciousness was thus localised in New Zealand. Poetry from the ‘Maoriland’ period frequently defines connection to place through descriptions of natural beauty, albeit in concert with a blinkered view of nature’s destruction. Mary E. Richmond’s “A New Zealand Picture” in *A Treasury of New Zealand Verse* (1926), for instance, reveals affection and connection with natural ecologies in Otaki, a town formed from the obliteration of forests on the Horowhenua coastal plain:

Otaki, that rollest in thy pride,

First among the rivers far and near,  
Little streamlet, flowing blue and clear,  
Ocean, with your strong imperious tide.

and

Each is touched with a peculiar grace;  
And the soul that loves and watches, best  
Learns the wonders of this happy place. (51)

Richmond connects nature and human consciousness—“this happy place”—in the manner of Romantic ecopoetry. A positive view of local nature binds the poet speaker to the settlement of Otaki and affirms her sense of wellbeing. Simultaneously, it separates the scenic from despoliation by finding pleasure and mental uplift in the nature that remains. Glenney Wilson’s “The Forty-Mile Bush,” in the same collection, finds in the forest—that was being decimated at the time of writing – sustenance for the settler presence: “Thy branches wave and beckon me in pity, / To seek again thy hospitality!” (55). Dora Wilcox’s “In London,” also in this collection, compares the “peacefulness” (36) of the New Zealand bush with London’s “grim grey houses” and “leaden skies” (35) and claims fidelity to this country with the speaker pronoun ‘our.’

Our Koromiko, whitens on the cliff,  
The honey-sweet Manuka buds, and bursts  
In bloom, and the divine Convolvulus,  
Most fair and frail of all our forest flowers,  
Stars every covert, running riotous. (36)

Briefly, the poem looks away from the abundance described in the above excerpt towards “the dead white trees ... ghosts / Of what has been, and shall be never more” (35). This fatalistic view is also expressed by Wilcox in this collection in “The Last of the Forest,” in which “the dead trees “cry, / Moaning a requiem, in their utter desolation, / For old worlds passing by” (63). And in “Onawe,” in which colonial superiority displaces both nature and Māori who are: “Doomed, doomed to pass!” because “within this fortification / Grows English grass—” (113). These poems, typical of the period, reveal an intense personal connection with nature as a source of wellbeing, yet see no other outcome than its destruction. Written in florid Victorian language evoking a sentimental vision, this kind of poetry has been debunked by Patrick Evans as “a sort of Disneyland of the mind that has no connection with anything in particular at all but looks well when put on the page” (45). It nevertheless describes, either in reality or in the imagination, the notion of an unspoilt nature

offering solace—a continuation of the Romantic notion of connection between nature and consciousness, which is one aspect of ecopoetry.

The sentimental fatalism of lament for the loss of native flora and fauna in poetry from the Maoriland period is accompanied in some cases by awareness of ecological connectedness. Conservationist poet Alexander Bathgate's "To the Makomako or Bell-bird (*Now rapidly dying out of our land*)," from the 1926 treasury, is in sympathy with the endangered bird despite naturalizing its extinction: "Thy doom is fixed by nature's law—" (141). The poem speculates that the bird's demise might be due to the unintentional effects of human impact:

Some say the stranger honey-bee,  
By white men brought,  
This ill hath wrought;  
It steals the honey from the tree,  
And it leaves thee naught. (140)

Bathgate's conjecture that introduced bees were responsible for the loss of bellbirds was incorrect but nevertheless reveals awareness of ecological connection. William Pember Reeves' "The Passing of the Forest" (1898), also in the 1926 treasury, similarly regrets ruination for the sake of improvement but can foresee no other outcome: "Ah, bitter price to pay / For Man's dominion—beauty swept away!" (58). Even so, the poem offers a view of nature as ecologically connected by considering the simultaneous loss of "the forest's labyrinth of life, / Its clambering, thrusting, clasping, throttling race," (57) and the loss of human connection with it: "Lost is the sense of noiseless sweet escape" (58). In these ways, Bathgate and Reeves' poems contain the ecopoetical elements of an awareness of ecological connections, however rudimentary, as well as awareness of the unintended consequences of human impact on the natural world, and, in Reeve's case, a Romantic sense of solace in nature.

Writing beyond nature's loss—"to illuminate the tensions between progress and despoliation and to look past them" (Calder 138) —occurred when dualistic Victorian notions of nature as either ruined or preserved were exchanged for a view of nature as connected with human occupation rather than merely dominated by it. A pivotal point was the publication of Herbert Guthrie Smith's prose work *Tutira. The Story of a High Country Sheep Station* (1921), which recounts the interaction of humans, animals and plants in one place over half a century. Rather than the settler parable reconciling improvement and ruination, Guthrie-Smith considers improvement from other than



economic perspectives and, Calder says, concludes that, “given time, the native will always reassert itself. He was talking about people as well as birds, trees and grasses” (150). Over three editions, Guthrie-Smith records not only the minute changes in the land but also his changes of mind about the nature of change. By way of example, the 1921 edition’s conclusion upholds the Victorian view of change as linear and irreversible, necessary but regrettable, whereas the 1953 edition includes a new chapter on the regeneration of the bush and is prefaced with a different kind of regret: “have I then for sixty years desecrated God’s earth and dubbed it improvement?” (xxiii). Alongside his enquiry as to whether change had not wrought improvement but rather devastation, Guthrie-Smith chronicled environmental transformation that occurred not through the linear master plan of so-called settler progress, but rather chaotically, what he called “the cumulative result of trivialities” (195). His work suggests that such transformation is complex and involves developing connections between people and place, which affect, and are affected by, each other. Calder describes Guthrie-Smith’s summation as

a long view that allows us to see the settlement of New Zealand by Europeans ... in terms of processes and tendencies that resist reduction to the cartoon binaries of colonist or invader, improvement or ruination. (156)

According to Steer, *Tutira* heralded the emergence of “an ecological sensibility founded on a complex understanding of difference and connection” (89). Although, as evidenced earlier, some Victorian poetry contained ecopoetical elements, the move away from the dualistic notion of ruination and improvement towards an acknowledgment of ecological connection over time incorporating the mutual influences of geology, plants and animals, and human—both Māori and European—marked the development of a nascent ecological consciousness in early New Zealand literature.

In poetry in English, Ursula Bethell’s collection, *From a Garden at the Antipodes* (1929), breaks this new ground. “Pause” recognises settler impact on the landscape as one of many changes that have been wrought. Calder, whose work focuses on the problematic way that narration of Pākehā identity determines history and culture, says “Pause” “is an expression of the misgivings that accompany the transformation of new-world environments” (137). When Bethell looks up from her garden she recognises that the Canterbury Hills have been shaped by the weather:

How grandly the storm-shaped trees are massed in their gorges

And the rain-worn rocks strewn in magnificent heaps. (9)

The impermanence of human endeavour, the “wip[ing] away” of “our small fond human enclosures” (9) is portrayed as one aspect of environmental change within a continuum of transformations over time. This recognition of ecological connection between human and nonhuman—of people as part of rather than apart from nature—provides this poem with an eco-poetical context derived from Calder’s ‘long view’ which looks past Victorian notions of homogeneity and erasure towards a more complex view of the settler place in environmental transformation.

In “Warfare,” from the same collection, Bethell contrasts the mountains and sea—and by extension the natural world—with her garden, which represents the human struggle to control nature. Her garden is described as “the confines of strife” compared with the “peaceful” sea and mountains “in repose” (37). Consequently, human attempts to control nature appear aberrant, in opposition to the Victorian notion of nature’s natural demise through human conquest and consumption. Rather, the nature in Bethell’s poem is composed despite human endeavour. While recognising settler attempts to dominate nature, this poem looks past that struggle to recognise an enduring natural world. And by foregrounding nature, rather than human endeavour, it is ecocentric.

In “Levavi Oculos” from *Time and Place* (1936), Bethell again looks up at the Canterbury hills and this time recognises that human impact—both Māori and European—has constructed the hills’ barren environment:

Wish not for these again their cloak and vesture,  
The rich and dark array, fire-burned and axe-felled  
By foreign tribes, (even ours, ours, the invaders), (21)

As Steer says, “Levavi Oculos” “deliberately embrace[s] the settler reader in its acknowledgment of ‘our’ invasive, environmental violence,” (90) making this poem representative of the relationship between narrative, nineteenth century colonial British settlement and the environment which is central to Steer’s work. Reading this poem from an eco-poetical perspective, that is, focusing on the ways in which it relates the relationship between nature and culture, allows us to see that Bethell finds in nature’s despoliation a narrative not only of ruination but rather a broader vision of nature altered by human impact but still enduring:

But at mid-day, the bare hills have a remote wildness,  
Like a young colt or filly, unrestrained  
and running lithely, never having known bit nor bridle, (21)

Although “bare,” the hills remain free from human domination. Furthermore, a perceived sense of their “wildness” provides consolation to a human sense of confinement:

How often, on dusty plain pent, have I lifted up mine eyes  
And found freedom, and found mind-liberty again! (21)

This poem portrays not only settler environmental violence but also notions of connection between people and the natural world at the level of consciousness, and of nature as resilient.

In summary, some New Zealand settler poems from the Maoriland era that focus on the eradication of the bush and the loss of native species follow the narrative of ruination and improvement yet contain the ecopoetical elements of sympathy for the natural world that is being humanly degraded, and some awareness of ecological connections between people and nature. While the earliest of these poems are fatalistic about nature’s demise, they nevertheless value nature for the human solace it provides, in the manner of Romantic ecopoetry. An ecological sensibility, evident in the poetry of Ursula Bethell, emerged when dualistic Victorian notions of improvement and ruination were replaced with a more complex view of the human/nature relationship. Instead of notions of human dominance over nature, Bethell sensed shared connections between people and nature. By recognising European settler impact as one part of the continuum of ecological change, she portrays ecological connectivity between people and nature at both physical and psychic levels. So, early ecopoetic elements in New Zealand poetry emerged from the country’s recent history of violent ecological alteration and evolved as the dualistic notion of ruination and improvement was exchanged for more complex ideas of ecological connection between culture and nature. While the genesis of New Zealand ecopoetry contains a narrative, it is not one of linear development but rather a gradual and sporadic shift in awareness towards recognition of more localised and complex views of the settler role in ecological transformation. Later in this thesis, I will explore how this heritage informs contemporary New Zealand ecopoetry.

## 2.4 Nature is connected to Pākehā notions of identity and nationhood

‘Tis a silent, skeleton world  
—Blanche Baughan, “A Bush Section”

While for British Romantic poets, the presence of nature is seen as having a positive effect on human consciousness, some Victorian New Zealand poetry portrays the presence of an eviscerated nature or a nature shaped by colonialism for human occupation as reducing imagination and producing a national identity lacking in artistic and cultural diversity.

The poem “An Old Chum on New Zealand Scenery” (1889), by William Pember Reeves and George Phipps Williams, subverts the concept, which arose in the second half of the nineteenth-century, of the ‘old chum,’ a European settler rich in colonial experience compared with the recently arrived ‘new chum’ who was perceived to be physically inept. (*Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*) By mocking the old chum’s “quaint vocabulary” (121), the poem, reprinted in *The Auckland University Press Anthology of New Zealand Literature*, states that the hardships of colonial life have stripped the early settler of imagination:

I have no imagination, and I cannot well describe  
More than what I see before me; (120)

In the poem, nature is portrayed as a series of obstacles to the ‘old chum’s’ physical and economic survival. In contrast to the eloquence typical of Victorian nature poetry, the narrator’s deadpan language lacks adornment and is rooted instead in practicality and physical hardship. He names varieties of plants and landscapes with non-descriptive, generic terms. ‘Scrub,’ for instance, describes all native shrubs and ‘swamp’ any wetlands. While the poem adopts a tone of class-based condescension in its comical descriptions of the pioneer’s clipped vernacular, it nevertheless draws attention to the unsuitability of florid language drawn from England to reflect the relationship between the early European settler and this country’s natural world. The narrator scorns the florid Victorian language which is irrelevant to his struggle to control, rather than appreciate, nature: “*Bush*, too, means the native forest; you will never, I’m afraid, / Hear a self-respecting bushman call a bush a leafy glade,” (120). By portraying the ‘old chum’ as so immersed in practicality that he wrongly views his lack of vocabulary as advantageous, the poem portrays a relationship between a reduced nature and New Zealand cultural identity expressed through local idiom. It

explicitly states that the toil of reducing nature has a reductive effect on language, and by extension culture. In this way it connects the effects of settler violence on the natural world with a notion of national identity as lacking in imagination.

Similarly, Blanche Baughan's "A Bush Section" in *Shingle Short and Other Verses* (1908), implies a connection between deforestation and imaginative sterility. The poem evokes the image of a train entering a deforested landscape as a sign of progress. However, grim descriptions of the violated land, which set the poem apart from the mawkish language of the other latter-day Victorians, depict a resultant haunting environmental desolation:

'Tis a silent, skeleton world;  
Dead, and not re-born,  
Made, unmade, and scarcely as yet in the  
making;  
Ruin'd, forlorn, and blank. (79)

Thor Rayden, "the taciturn, grave ten-year-old," (80) settler protégé—perhaps named for the Norse god associated with fertility—regards the desecrated land:

The sky is a wide black paddock, without any fences,  
The Stars are its shining logs; (84)

The metaphor reveals Thor's imagination is confined by what he sees—a paddock of felled trees.

Alan Mulgan's "Dead Timber," from *A Treasury of New Zealand Verse* (1926), also portrays nature's desecration as a dour part of nationhood: "There, on the hillside, is our nation's building, / The tall dead trees so bare against the sky" (59). These lines suggest that the only significant act of European settler society—"our nations' building"—is nature's erasure. While the poem teeters toward condemnation of deforestation, it withdraws into sentimental notions of nature's forgiveness and a "golden" (60) future, thereby affirming the colonial view of ecological devastation as a natural path to progress. But it does connect the barren landscape with a sterile culture:

Yet if some ask: "Where is your art, your writing  
By which we know that you have aught to say?"  
We shall reply: "Yonder, the hill-crest blighting,  
There is our architecture's blazoned way.  
This monument we fashioned in our winning,  
A gibbet for the beauty we have slain; (59-60)

By finding that the only creative act of settler society is nature's destruction the poem connects ecological ruin with the shaping of a national character devoid of artistic or literary culture.

"Dead Timber" and "A Bush Section" recognise connection between the natural world and human wellbeing, which is one aspect of ecopoetry. Steer notes that in both poems "(t)he sense of an intrinsic relationship between Pākehā identity and ecological nullity had begun to crystallise" (94). Critic Jane Stafford argues the viewpoint of "A Bush Section"—that of a child—"conveys the paucity of the settler experience." Thor, she says, may be "the hope of some future New Zealand society" but he is "constrained by a limited and pinched understanding of what he sees around him" (2016 61). While each critic recognises in these poems connection between nature and Pākehā national identity, it is worth noting, too, their ecopoetical tendencies. I am arguing that the role of nature in shaping a Pākehā notion of national character extends the broad ecopoetic notion of connection between nature and human wellbeing in a manner that is local and is thus a distinguishing characteristic of New Zealand ecopoetry. While this relationship between nature and identity fits the general ecopoetical connection of nature and a sense of wellbeing, it is particular because of its nascent concerns with the well-being of the national character rather than just with individual solace or disturbance.

From the 1930s to the 1950s, when the articulation of a sense of national identity was an important component of much New Zealand writing, the landscape became a central trope. Allen Curnow, in his introduction to *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1960), recounts his disenchantment with the literary legacies of colonialism and self-conscious attempts by poets such as Thomas Bracken to write a vision of nationalism. Curnow says, "the intimacy of the land we inhabit has yet to be learned" (51), suggesting the important role the land played in shaping a sense of nationhood. In his poem "House and Land" (1941), in the Penguin anthology, Curnow appropriates the nonhuman world as a gauge of the "great gloom" in "a land of settlers / with never a soul at home" (202). This poem evokes "stagnant" weather and a dog "moping under the bluegums" (201), which are exotic trees that reveal ecological transformation. Pākehā settler life is thus portrayed as lived in "a spirit of exile" (202) from the cultural refinement of Britain.

Other poems from this critical nationalist era sought to align settler imagery with the realities of local places by describing new relationships between people and

the land. Charles Brasch, for example, writes in sympathy for nature and proposes the need for a changed Pākehā attitude towards it. “Only in the wash of time /... can earth and man / Into understanding grow” (7-8), he writes in “The Land the People III” (1939), from *Collected Poems* (1984), and:

Not the conquest and the taming  
Can make this earth ours, and compel  
Here our acceptance. [...] (8)

Brasch’s “Sea-gulls among the Mountains” (1949), also from *Collected Poems*, recognises the ecological devastation of European settlement:

Cold dews of darkness can barely  
Moisten the gasping mountain pores.

They lived once, these now leafless ranges, (220)

And “The Ruins” (1957) describes a land devoid of trees:

These grasses I touch now,  
Knelt softly against the bruised face of the stone,  
And birds in early wide-eyed flight  
Skirted them as though making constant passage.  
Yet there is nothing here, nothing but the grasses, (44)

In an earlier poem, “Forerunners” (1935-49), Brasch recognises Māori as first settlers who “named the bays and mountains” (15), but portrays Māori as alive in memory only, and then just “mildly.” The poem does however suggest that the Māori relationship with the land offers a model for Pākehā settlers:

Behind our quickness, our shallow occupation of the easier  
Landscapes, their unprotesting memory  
Mildly hovers, surrounding us with perspective,  
Offering soil for our rootless behaviour. (16)

Brasch also critiques the brevity and impact of Pākehā settlement in “The Silent Land” (1945):

Man must lie with the gaunt hills like a lover,  
Earning their intimacy in the calm sigh  
Of a century of quiet and assiduity,  
Discovering what solitude has meant

Before our headlong time broke on these waters, (218)

Calder notes that Brasch’s poems repeat the colonial view of the land as devoid of Māori history and place names, suggesting, “Maori identity is the bolster of an unsettled New Zealand identity” on the condition that “Maori are lost from history” (172). He nevertheless finds that the poems propose an altered attitude in which “the

headlong advances of exploitative agriculture, commerce and industry should adapt to the slower rhythms of nature, and so unite two orders of time, the human and ecological, in this one place” (171). Brasch’s poems suggest that a sense of belonging can be achieved through connection with nature. This view moves beyond the portrayal in earlier poetry, such as Baughan’s and Mulgan’s discussed above, of the reductive cultural effects of a degraded nature. While those earlier poems recognised a link between a reduced nature and a reduced culture, Brasch’s work suggests that by connecting with the nature that remains, Pākehā will develop a sense of national cultural identity. In moving from a sense of erasure to a notion of adaptation within a constantly transforming environment, Brasch’s poetry resembles the shift away from a focus on nature’s spoliation to a broader understanding of ecological connectedness in the poetry of Ursula Bethell. And by emphasizing connection between nature and belonging, Brasch enlarges Bethell’s notions of the relationship between people and nature, introducing the idea of connection between nature, belonging and a nascent sense of a Pākehā national identity. This, I propose, is another characteristic of New Zealand ecopoetry, which, in subsequent chapters of this thesis, I will explore in contemporary work.



## 2.5 Tension between Pākehā and Māori notions of nature and the human relationship with it

We are stroking, caressing the spine  
of the land.  
—Hone Tuwhare, “Papa-tu-a-Nuku (Earth Mother)”

Specific to New Zealand when discussing the relationship between nature and culture is the triangular affiliation between nature, Pākehā and Māori. Although such triangulation between nature, settler and Indigenous people is not unique, it takes a unique form here. The particular concepts of nature held by Māori, and the Māori terminology familiar to most New Zealanders, contribute to New Zealand’s particular relationship with local ecologies. Pawson & Brooking note: “There is not nor ever has been one New Zealand. Rather, there is a kaleidoscopic complex of Māori and Pākehā identities in place, and the tensions that go with this” (18). Anne Salmond writes, “(a)s Māori terms increasingly shift into New Zealand English, and vice versa, European and Māori ways of thinking alike are being transformed” (313). Such conceptual transformation is reflected in Acts granting legal personhood to the Urewera ranges (2014), Whanganui River (2014) and Mount Taranaki (2017). Environmental, Indigenous and human rights advocate Tina Ngata (Ngāti Porou) says in *Mountains to Sea: Solving New Zealand’s Freshwater Crisis* (2017), that these Acts

recognise a shift in colonial systems of conservation and care towards perspectives that are rooted in Māori ancestry and centred in rights of care other than ownership. (28)

Adoption of Māori concepts is also being proposed in the agriculture sector. In “One World, One Health,<sup>8</sup> One Humanity – Whenua, Rongoā, Tangata” from the same collection, veterinarian and environmental advocate Alison Dewes, and Indigenous studies academic Paul Tapsell (Ngāti Whakaue and Ngāti Raukawa), state:

If we want to hold onto a nation represented by indigenous diversity of people, animals and environment, then we need to put Māori kin-community co-production and their world view at the forefront of every opening discussion.  
(82)

They say that Tipu Whenua, a sustainable agricultural consultancy developed in 2016, has “identified that any chance of One Health philosophy succeeding in an Aotearoa

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<sup>8</sup> “The One Health framework can be defined as the collaborative effort of multiple disciplines – working locally, nationally, and globally – to attain optimal health for people, animals and the environment” (Joy 174).

New Zealand context required meaningful inclusion of Māori values-driven science” (85). Such inclusion of Māori concepts into law and advocacy frame the ways in which approaches to the human relationships with ecologies are local and unique in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Historically, and contrary to the view of many early European colonists, pre-European Māori changed the environment through “widespread vertebrate extinctions and deforestation” (Pawson & Brooking 25). But, crucially, Māori relationships with local ecologies and the vital elements of nature—earth, sea and sky—are based on spiritual and genealogical connection leading to duties of guardianship, rather than European notions of control and domination. Such differences continue today, most visibly in Treaty claims over the use and perception of natural places. The 2014 deed of settlement between Whanganui leaders and the New Zealand government legally recognising the Whanganui River as a living entity—the first waterway in the world to gain this status (Salmond 293)—exemplifies how these cultural tensions overlap. Māori terms in New Zealand’s Resource Management Act (1991) and Local Government Act (2002) requiring councils “to take into account the relationship of Māori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral land, water, sites, wāhi tapu (ancestral sites) and other taonga,” are altering New Zealand law as the legal process is required to acknowledge “the persistence and creativity of a distinctly Māori register of value” (*Thinking Through Things* 2007, qtd in Salmond 313). Such Acts highlight emerging recognition and some acceptance by the Pākehā majority of New Zealanders of different Māori perspectives and also the extent of cultural differences regarding ecologies.

In concert with such tensions between worldviews is the historical domination of Pākehā voices in New Zealand literature. Texts up until the 1950s reveal the absence of Māori perspectives. This was due to English language domination from the turn of the twentieth century, the disruption of traditional Maori communities because of contest between Māori and Pākehā land use values and practices, and the loss of manawhenua, that is, the right of a tribe to manage a particular area of land and to maintain relationships with ancestral land (Forster in Selby et al 201). Publication of *Te Ao Hou* magazine by the Māori Affairs Department from 1952-76 provided a platform for early Māori writers in English including poets Hone Tuwhare, Rowley Habib, Evelyn Patuawa-Nathan, J.C. Sturm and Vernice Wineera (Te Punga Somerville 199). Tuwhare’s poetry collection *No Ordinary Sun* (1964) was the first

published in English by a Māori poet. In the 1960s, James K. Baxter used his public image to raise awareness of the Māori world in the Pākehā establishment. His poetry connecting Māori and nature was openly political and an agent for social change. But it was the Māori Renaissance from 1972 that led to major transformations.

This Renaissance is described by critic Melissa Kennedy in *A History of New Zealand Literature* (2016) as a significant literary movement that

asserted a separate nationalism within a bicultural nation, one with its own modes of expression, its own history, and its claim to represent a truly post-colonial Aotearoa-New Zealand. (277)

Its governing tenets, including “special status derived from priority in the land,” have “considerably influenced” (Kennedy 277) New Zealand literature and literary criticism. It also led to a major cultural change in New Zealand, particularly from the time of the 1975 Hīkoi (Land March) and the founding of the Mana Motuhake Party in 1979. The first anthology of Māori writing, *Into the World of Light*, was published in 1982, and in 1991 the Māori publishing house, Huia, was established. In descriptions of Māori connection to the land, novelists Whiti Ihimaera and Patricia Grace made terms such as *tūrangawaewae* and *tikanga* nationally known and understood. A further pivot point was Keri Hulme’s novel *The Bone People* (1983), in which “the unique Maori connection with the land is imagined as powerful enough to heal the modern-day ills brought by colonisation and modernization” (Kennedy 281). The 1985 Booker Prize winner located Māori spirituality in the land and in guardianship of nature.

But marginalisation of Māori literature continues into the twenty-first century, according to authors Whiti Ihimaera and Tina Makereti. In their introduction to *Black Marks on the White Page* (2017), they say that Māori, Pasifika and Aboriginal writing constitutes “a disruptive act” in “the worldwide literary landscape”:

still the page is white, and still the marks we make upon it are radical acts of transgression, of forcing others to see us in all our complexity and wonder. (8)

Highlighting a contemporary lack of Indigenous perspectives in literature, the editors refer to the 2016 Te Hā Māori Writers Hui in Wellington where “we talked about writing ourselves into existence” (13). The collection of “Oceanic” stories groups the work of Māori with writers from all over the Pacific, a writing community the editors describe as “the same waka when it comes to literature” (10). It embraces the notion of “border crossings” (12) between literature, theatre, film and digital platforms and

between literary genres—poetry, non-fiction, essay and long-form story—which, they say, “makes sense to an Indigenous Oceanic world view” (12). The collection includes, for example, Samoan and Cook Island writer Courtney Sina Meredith’s work “The Coconut King” which might be described as either a short story or a long poem.

Due to the long period of marginalisation of Māori literature, tensions between Māori and Pākehā notions of nature and the human relationship with it emerge in New Zealand ecopoetry later than the other two distinguishing characteristics I have noted above. That is, while perhaps evident in extra-literary ways earlier, such tensions are not manifested in literature until the Māori Renaissance in the 1970s. A collection of poems and short stories by leading Māori poet Hone Tuwhare, *Making a Fist Of It* (1978), includes several poems written in support of the 1975 Māori Land March in which such tensions are revealed. One of these poems, “Papa-Tu-A-Nuku (Earth Mother),” describes the land/human relationship as a human/human relationship:

We are stroking, caressing the spine  
of the land.

We are massaging the ricked  
back of the land

With our sore but ever-loving feet.  
Hell, she loves it!

Squirming, the land wriggles  
in delight.

We love her. (29)

This poem, in full above, epitomizes the representation in Tuwhare’s poetry of people as a part of nature and, crucially, of nature as a part of people. Such representations position “the self in a relationship of easy, close familiarity with nature, rendered in a way which may unsettle comfortable divisions between animate and inanimate” (335) observes John Huria, in his review of Tuwhare’s collection, *Deep River Talk: Collected Poems* (1993). Huria argues that “Papa-Tu-A-Nuku (Earth Mother)” “relegates the notion of ‘personification’ to the rapidly filling basket of Eurocentric redundancies. How can you personify a person?” (335). In a 1984 review of Tuwhare’s work, Bernard Gadd describes the importance of Tuwhare’s “Maoriness” (84) to his poetry. By way of example, Gadd reports Tuwhare’s use of “imagery of a pantheistic-like animation of the natural world” (84). Of Tuwhare’s poem “A Fall of Rain at Miti-Miti,” Gadd says it portrays “not a view of a Maori event but an experiencing of a

Maori event in a Maori way” (85). Gadd’s phrasing—typical of the time— couches cultural difference in terms of the unfamiliar other, emphasizing both the marginalisation of Māori poetry until the second half of the twentieth century and the differences between Māori and Pākehā worldviews that it exposed.

Māori embodiment of culture as inherent in ecology underlies tensions in poetry between Māori and Pākehā notions of nature and the human relationship with it. These tensions are, I propose, a third characteristic of New Zealand ecopoetry, which I will explore in contemporary work in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

## 2.6 Conclusion: A tradition of ecopoetry in New Zealand

New Zealand does have a tradition of ecopoetry in English, which until now has been unmapped and undefined. It spans more than 100 years of New Zealand poetry in English and has evolved according to the particular outcomes of the relationships between nature and culture since European settlement. Important influences are this country's unique geological history—particularly its evolution as islands of forests and birds—and the dramatic environmental and sociological impact of the comparatively recent arrival of colonial Europeans to a land where Māori had already lived for around 800 years. New Zealand ecopoetry in English has its origins in European settler anxiety about colonial eradication of natural ecologies, particularly deforestation and loss of bird species. Recognition of ecological interactions over time, including the effects of geological transformation and connection between people and ecologies, moved thinking away from the dualistic notion of ruination and improvement towards an understanding of shifting relationships between nature and culture. This unique genesis is a distinguishing aspect of New Zealand ecopoetry.

As Pākehā settlers sought to define themselves as New Zealanders, the natural world played a vital role in developing notions of identity and nationhood. Colonial recognition of the reductive effects of environmental devastation on a burgeoning Pākehā national character suggested some awareness of the need for a change in attitude. A continuing sense of connection between the nonhuman world and national character contributes to a particular Pākehā sense of identity in New Zealand's ecopoetry, in which landscape and indigenous species of plants and animals are easily converted to a sense of belonging.

Throughout its evolution, and especially since the inclusion of Māori perspectives, New Zealand ecopoetry in English has explored different notions of how nature is used, occupied and imagined. On one hand, it negotiates a Pākehā legacy of conquest, consumption and connection and on the other, a Māori heritage of *tūrangawaewae* and *kaitiakitanga*. The tension between these opposing cosmologies and worldviews is particular to New Zealand ecopoetry.

The three characteristics of New Zealand ecopoetry—a genesis in a shifting Pākehā focus from despoliation of nature to connection with it, the notion of the natural world as central to a Pākehā sense of belonging, and further tensions between Pākehā and Māori views of nature and the human relationship with it—will be

explored further in the following chapters of this thesis. Having unearthed these distinctions in colonial and early twentieth century ecopoetry, I will next explain how they have evolved and manifested in contemporary work.

## Part 3: Case Studies in Contemporary New Zealand Ecopoetry

### 3.1 New Zealand ecopoetry shapes the tradition

When Robert Sullivan writes, “the spirits soar in the wild wind around us, wind strong enough to break the wind mills / littering the field,”<sup>9</sup> he writes beyond the eco-friendly sustainability of wind power generation to a sense of wind mills as pollution. Spirits of ancestors that conceive the windmills as “desecration” inhabit the “wild wind” of nature in Sullivan’s lyric.<sup>10</sup> Sullivan portrays the wind itself as the spirits of ancestors and the duty of the living to protect those ancestors and the places they reside in from ecological encroachment, such as the “littering” wind farms. Thus, he expands Western notions of ecopoetry and ecology, such as Bryson’s description of ecocentric as “a worldview that ... views the earth as an intersubjective community and values its many diverse (human and nonhuman members)” (2002 13). In Sullivan’s poem, culture is embedded in the nonhuman world such that the elements of nature are conceived as part of the human realm.

In the following chapter, my analysis of Sullivan’s work and the work of two other contemporary New Zealand ecopoets does not only map New Zealand ecopoetry to the tradition through the conventional definitions, nor does it merely find examples of New Zealand’s local variant of ecopoetry to evidence a national identity within the field. It does both those things, but also, and more significantly, it evidences—by exploring the particular ways in which ecology is imagined in this country—the specific ways in which contemporary New Zealand ecopoetry expands our notion of ecopoetry and, in so doing, speaks back to and must be therefore seen to help shape the larger tradition.

In choosing the three case-study poets, I sought to find contemporary poets of different genders and cultural backgrounds who had produced a body of ecopoetry that was substantial enough to allow conclusions to be drawn about their work from close readings of a variety of poems. Some poets—Hinemoana Baker, Anna Jackson, Cilla McQueen, Emma Neale and Ian Wedde—have written ecopoetry within wider oeuvres but lacked the necessary quantity of ecopoems to form the basis of a case study. Hone

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<sup>9</sup> These lines are from “South Point, Hawai ‘i” in *voice carried my family* (2005 15).

<sup>10</sup> “How could the ancestors know such desecration / would arrive in this place?” (Ibid)



Tuwhare has produced a substantial body of ecopoetry and would have made a fine case study choice. But my selection was largely subjective, that is, I chose those poets whose work I wanted to spend time with, and I found Tuwhare's poems less appealing than more contemporary work. Dinah Hawken has written a substantial body of ecopoetry but was ruled out because her work was the subject of my Master of Creative Writing thesis. Brian Turner was an obvious choice as he is New Zealand's only poet who is known primarily as a conservationist writer. I was not familiar with his work and keen to explore it partly because I had recently completed the Rail Trail and appreciated Central Otago's distinctive landscapes. I was drawn to Robert Sullivan's poetry by its contemporary voice, political engagement with culture and ecology, and Indigenous retelling of colonial narratives. I had admired Airini Beautrais's poetry for some time, especially her political narrative collection *Dear Neil Roberts* (2015), and it was fortunate that her new collection, *Flow: Whanganui River Poems* (2017), was not only ecological but also substantial enough to form the basis of a case study. This part of the thesis comprises case studies of poetry by these three contemporary New Zealand ecopoets: Brian Turner (b. 1943) from Otago, Robert Sullivan (b. 1967) of Ngāpuhi descent, and Airini Beautrais (b. 1982) from Whanganui.

Each poet concentrates on a different geographical area and time period. Turner's work centres on remote areas of the Central Otago region in the south of the South Island from his early childhood in the 1950s until the present. It celebrates the outdoors as a place for recreation, reflection and a sense of selfhood. Sullivan's work centres on Karetu in Northland, and Auckland in the north of the North Island, within a wider view of New Zealand as part of the Pacific region. It evokes the history of Pacific Islanders as ocean navigators and original inhabitants of Aotearoa New Zealand about 800 years ago. Beautrais's collection centres on the Whanganui River catchment in the central North Island during the 150 years from the beginning of intensive European settlement in 1864 until 2014. It considers both the hardships endured by settler colonials and their legacy of environmental and cultural degradation. Each poet's work reveals that time, place, culture and political norms are important factors in the shifting ways ecopoetry reflects on relationships between culture and nature in New Zealand. Together, through an examination of their work, we can trace shifts in contemporary New Zealand ecopoetry in the period 1978-2017.

From each poet's work, I have selected samples to observe through the lens of ecopoetry. I have selected poems from throughout Turner's oeuvre published since 1978 and from throughout Sullivan's oeuvre published since 1990, and from a single, substantial collection by Beutrais published in 2017. Of the three poets, only Turner is critically acknowledged as a conservationist poet. Sullivan is critically recognised for his Māori or Pacific Island perspective and subversion of dominant Euro-centric postcolonial literature. The work of Beutrais, the author of three previous poetry collections, is known for her consistent use of the narrative lyric rather than by its focus on ecology. By using the field of ecopoetry as framework, I am able to gauge how the selected poems work as ecopoetry.

My investigation of the work of the case study poets helps to illustrate New Zealand's particular variant of ecopoetry. Certainly, as I will show in my analyses, the selected poems share the basic tenets of ecopoetry as defined by J. Scott Bryson. That is, they are in sympathy with the nonhuman environment, evoke the interdependence of nature and culture, lament human-caused degradation of nonhuman ecologies and warn of the potential for ecological catastrophe. At times, too, I will argue that they connect nature and consciousness in the manner of Romantic ecopoetry as defined by Jonathan Bate. As such, they work within the contours of ecopoetry according to its current definitions and examining them in this vein does map New Zealand to a tradition that has gone largely unexamined here. However, this thesis is more interested in the ways in which these poems also complicate and extend these foundational definitions of ecopoetry. New Zealand ecopoetry offers a specific, local understanding of the ways in which the human relationship with nature is comprehended, which differs from comprehensions of that relationship elsewhere. By exploring the work of three contemporary New Zealand ecopoets, I will illustrate the role that this country's ecopoetry plays in expanding current understandings of the ways that ecologies can be imagined.

They do so in ways that are in sympathy with the relatively new and rapidly developing field of postcolonial ecocriticism. This interdisciplinary field of study acknowledges that ecologies often framed by post-colonial settlers as natural are in fact constructed by human agency. It recognizes that culturally specific ways of comprehending relationships between people and nature disrupt and enlarge Western notions of ecological appreciation and encroachment. It comprehends that ecologically driven writing works differently in specific settler-colonial and post-colonial contexts.

The editors of *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches* (2015), for example, assert a need to decenter environmental studies away from “the perceptions and preoccupations of the privileged and the Global North” (2015 6) towards environmental conceptions that “complicate and clarify the historical power relations that underpin global ecologies” (7). They say that evidence of such differences can be found in narratives and mediations from local cultures which makes the analysis of literary and artistic works “essential for understanding the social, cultural, and political experiences of global ecological change in specific locations and across different time frames” (3). My analysis of the case studies in this thesis provides evidence of such experiences in New Zealand. It shows examples of the specific ways that the entanglement between nature and culture in settler-colonial Aotearoa New Zealand offers new ways of comprehending ecological preservation and encroachment and therefore new ways of defining and understanding ecopoetry.

The selected poems reveal changes in New Zealand ecopoetry over nearly forty years. Some of these changes are broadly reflected in global terms discussed in recent commentaries. American critic Lynn Keller, in her book *Recomposing Ecopoetics* (2017), argues that notions of solace in nature following the Romantic tradition—such as Wordsworth’s escape from “the fretful world” portrayed in *Tintern Abbey*—are no longer appropriate because such nature “is unavailable as first-hand experience to a great many people on the planet, who inhabit degraded landscapes or live in urban centres” (19). Furthermore, Keller says ecopoetry such as by Gary Snyder about the Sierra Nevada or Wendell Berry about farming in Kentucky that creates “an impression of a speaker privileged to observe life in the wild” (17) or that “presents nature’s ‘true gift’ as lying in its unchanged patterns” is “an insufficient poetic response to the radical instabilities of the environmental mess in which we find ourselves” (19). Rather, she endorses ecopoetry that

encourages readers to think in terms of a vast net of interconnection in which birds and other wild creatures cannot be associated with escape from human strife or human limitation, for those now shape all planetary experience in the Anthropocene. (20)

Her book discusses the work of poets whose

writing about place deliberately foregrounds awareness of global social and environmental transformations and often confronts politically charged issues of migrancy, travel, and tourism and of the ongoing social and environmental effects of colonial history. (177)

This returns us to the poetry of Turner, Sullivan and Beutrais, which I will argue reveals how notions of ecological loss and belonging are complicated by Indigenous and colonial histories in Aotearoa New Zealand. Specifically, then, in addition to mapping these poets' work to Bryson's three characteristics of ecopoetry, I will show how the three case-study ecopoets negotiate tensions between Pākehā and Māori (settler and Indigenous) comprehensions of nature and the human relationship with it. I will explore how such tensions centre on two themes: first, ecological loss and preservation, and, second, a sense of belonging, in some cases manifesting as a sense of nationhood.

The first underlying concern, ecological loss and preservation, manifests in Turner's work in reflections on the spoliation of remote landscapes in Central Otago from the effects of hydro and wind power projects, increased tourism and irrigated agriculture. Turner's project is to preserve the 'nature' that remains. His poetry portrays notions of solace from encroaching modernity through venturing into and meditating on the psychic benefits of Central Otago's remote landscapes. Thus, his work aligns with the Romantic tradition and the British/United States model of ecopoetry within a New Zealand setting. However, this approach is complicated by the fact that much of the 'nature' Turner admires was humanly constructed through the colonial project. For instance, the trout he seeks to protect from river diversions and farming effluent were introduced into New Zealand by European settlers in the late nineteenth century, displacing some native fish species.

In contrast, Sullivan's view of ecological loss and preservation focuses on the loss of Māori ancestors perceived to reside in natural elements, the loss of natural elements perceived as tapu (sacred), and the loss of kaitiakitanga—the ability to fulfil customary duties of environmental guardianship over particular places. These Indigenous conceptions of ecological loss and encroachment problemize and expand Turner's approach. They draw attention to the imposition of the Anglophile notion of solace in nature onto landscapes apprehended by Māori as inherently tied to the human world.

For Beutrais, recognition of ecological loss centres on both indigenous plant and animal species and the pre-colonial Māori lifestyle. *Flow* (2017) is empathetic towards both trout and the native fish species they supplanted, revealing the complicated entanglement of nature and culture in contemporary New Zealand. It portrays the achievements and failures of colonialism, describing towns and farmland

created by settlement as ugly and lacking indigenous plants and animals. But it also describes shifts in Pākehā environmental attitudes over time, changing from a focus on resource-driven degradation to a desire for preservation. Her poetry envisions future environmental recovery through the possibility of cultural reconciliation. It highlights the 2014 Waitangi Tribunal settlement between Whanganui iwi and the Crown, which accorded the legal status of personhood to the Whanganui River, thus incorporating Māori embodiment of the river into New Zealand law. By “conceptualizing both the legacies of rupture and the possibilities of imaginative recuperation and transformation” (DeLoughrey et al 2015 5), Beautrais’s work fits within the framework of the field of postcolonial ecocriticism.

The second concern underlying the three case studies, belonging and nationhood, is also integral to New Zealand ecopoetry in ways that show specific tensions between settler colonial and Indigenous cultures here. In Turner’s work, a sense of belonging derives from appreciation and occupation of colonially constructed environments. His poetry describes a sense of belonging through nature centred on emotional and metaphorical physical attachment to place arising from birthright, occupation and a lifetime of outdoor recreation. The presence of Central Otago’s remote landscape is, he says, “essential” (*Beyond* 1992 10), suggesting it underlies his sense of selfhood. His notion of being a New Zealander is expressed as a combination of exotic and indigenous species—“trout and hapuku”—which are—“what makes us us” (*Footfall* 2005 30). This narrative—founded on what Turner sees as “essential”—is open to interrogation within a postcolonial ecocriticism framework in which “scholars have emphasized that empire is constitutive to knowledge of place and its representation” (DeLoughrey 2014 325). Turner’s notion of belonging stems from a sense of attachment to a particular New Zealand landscape. It follows the country’s tradition of literary nationalism—which strove to assert a sense of settler belonging in a new land—and therefore exemplifies a particular kind of Pākehā approach.

Sullivan’s poetry implicitly problemizes approaches such as Turner’s by raising Indigenous conceptions of belonging. These centre on ancestry recorded in oral history and Aotearoa New Zealand as part of a wider Pacific homeland with its own spiritual epistemology. Sullivan expresses belonging to Aotearoa New Zealand and the wider Pacific region through the ‘Moanan’ perspective of a Pacific Islander and what he calls “culturally inherited ways of being” (Sullivan, thesis abstract). His poetry relates the centrality of genealogy to selfhood, and the importance of ancestry to community, both

in the past and in the present. Sullivan's work traces communal belonging through lineages dating back to first discovery and original habitation. The linking of belonging with community, lineage, ancestry (including spirituality) and original habitation is in opposition to Turner's narrative of individual belonging to a specific place, and, like Beutrais's work, can be usefully read within the frame of postcolonial ecocriticism.

Beutrais relates multiple narratives of history to portray culturally different stories and interpretations of belonging to place. Acknowledgment of her own limited comprehension of Māori notions of belonging—"the significance of the relationships between Whanganui iwi and the river cannot be adequately addressed by a Pākehā writer" (*Flow* 13)—suggests awareness of cultural difference. By embedding now commonly used Māori words and names into her English verse, Beutrais suggests that her own sense of belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand is attuned to connection with both Pākehā and Māori cultures. As I will argue further below, this connection is enlarged in poems that propose that the acceptance by Pākehā of Māori understandings of nature will provide increased opportunities for environmental protection.

It is important to state that Turner is New Zealand's most constant and recognized conservationist poet. He has been writing about the value of remote places and the need for their protection since the beginning of this country's environmental movement, long before ecopoetry became an established field of study. Over forty years, his angling poems have shifted attitudinally from portrayals of the excitement of trout fishing to empathy for trout and recently to despair at the continued degradation of their habitats. These shifts track increasing age and experience alongside changes in prevailing environmental attitudes. But since Turner's poetry was first published in 1978, there has been a cultural shift in New Zealand literature away from the dominant cultural nationalist approach of the early-to-mid-twentieth century towards one of awareness and understanding of the country's Indigenous heritage. In poetry, the work of Hone Tuwhare (1922-2008) signalled the renaissance of Māori perspectives and now the particular role of Indigenous culture is increasingly manifest. In light of current cultural norms, it may be easy to be critical of Turner and I am concerned not to do that. Rather, I want to acknowledge the ways that his work throws light on the differences between contemporary New Zealand ecopoetry that follows the British/United States model and that which can be read within the frame of postcolonial ecocriticism developed this century.

The different ways of perceiving ecological loss in Aotearoa New Zealand reveal tension between appreciation of so-called ‘natural’ environments that have in fact been constructed by colonialism and Indigenous people and non-human ecologies that have, at times inadvertently, been supplanted. The embodiment of ecology in culture—such as in Sullivan’s poems that describe spiritual desecration of landforms—raises tension between so-called environmentally friendly projects, such as wind farms, and their potential spoliation of places of cultural significance. Pākehā notions of, often individual, belonging through nature and of nationhood are in tension with a Moanan sense of belonging to the wider Pacific region founded on community, spirituality and ancestry.

These tensions bring into question terms such as ‘ecocentric’ and ‘nonhuman nature’ that underlie present definitions of ecopoetry. They raise questions such as, which ecologies and whose nonhuman nature? Rather than interdependence between people and nature, a phrase that currently underlies definitions of ecopoetry yet implies nature on the one hand and culture on the other, contemporary ecopoetry from New Zealand and other colonial countries increasingly portrays a wider sense of entanglement between nature and culture. It foregrounds what DeLoughrey et al describe as the ways in which “the history of colonialism necessitates the imbrication of humans in nature” (2015 1) because “postcolonial environmental representations often engage with the legacies of violent material, environmental, and cultural transformation” (DeLoughrey et al 2015 5). By problemising accepted notions of what constitutes nature, the relatively new field of postcolonial ecocriticism suggests new ways of thinking about how New Zealand ecopoetry aligns with and differs from formative definitions of the field of ecopoetry. This part of the thesis contributes to this approach by investigating the ways in which contemporary New Zealand ecopoetry, which is located within a particular cultural setting, expands current understandings of ecology and of ecopoetry in ways that may not occur elsewhere.

As explained in Part 2, New Zealand has its own unique flora and fauna, which have been “violently modified” (Steer 85) by comparatively recent European colonial settlement. Pawson & Brooking note that “relations between people and environments in New Zealand share many of the characteristics of such interactions elsewhere, when migrants arrive in new lands” (17-8). But “both the context for these interactions and the manner in which they have intersected with this context and each other have produced very particular outcomes” (18). The result of these particular outcomes for

New Zealand ecopoetry is a unique local variant. The ecopoems analysed in the following case studies provide examples of the kinds of narratives about life and culture that are “essential for understanding the social, cultural, and political experiences of global ecological change in specific locations and across different time frames” (DeLoughrey et al 2015 2). The specific role of Indigenous culture in this country and in this country’s literature makes New Zealand ecopoetry a significant contributor to such global understandings.



### 3.1.1. Otago poet Brian Turner (b.1944)

Otago-based poet Brian Turner is one of New Zealand's most celebrated poets. He published twelve collections of poetry between 1978 and 2016 and a volume of selected poems in 2019. He was the Te Mata Estate New Zealand Poet Laureate 2003-05 and received the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement in Poetry in 2009. He is recognized as an ardent conservationist as well. His essays and articles on sport, recreation and conservation published in newspapers and journals are collected in the 500-page *Into the Wider World: A Back Country Miscellany* (2008). His autobiography *Somebodies and Nobodies* (2002) traces his upbringing in Dunedin within a family also known for the sporting achievements of his brothers, New Zealand cricket international Glenn and professional golfer Greg. This book, as does his poetry, chronicles his introduction to the sports of hunting and fly-fishing and his growing attachment to the remote regions of Central Otago where he now lives.

Over more than forty years, Turner's poetic outlook has shifted from evocations of a Romantic attachment to nature as a place of solace to a sense of belonging and indeed nationhood derived from elicitation of physical and emotional connection with Central Otago's rivers and ranges. Escape from modernity to a comforting nature, evident in his early poems, turns in his more recent work to sorrow and despair at its continued loss to human spoliation.

Turner's extensive oeuvre is also situated within a time of changing cultural norms in New Zealand. His desire to preserve those nonhuman places that remain in Central Otago focuses on ecological loss in a particular time—the 1950s until the present—and a particular place, the remote regions of Central Otago. Within this time and setting, Turner's attitude towards conservation validates the landscape of low scrub and grassland that was most likely predominant at the time of Polynesian arrival<sup>11</sup> and the willow-lined rivers and trout fisheries that were constructed by New Zealand's relatively recent history of colonialism. Turner's sense of belonging through nature follows the Romantic tradition of ecopoetry in which notions of solace and selfhood are sustained by the presence of nature in contrast with those locations and

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<sup>11</sup> In "The Polynesian Settlement of New Zealand in Relation to Environmental and Biotic Changes" (1989), M.S. McGlone, talking about deforestation through burning by Māori, describes the Central Otago region as "naturally burnt" due to "stronger westerlies" leading to "dry, droughty conditions" which increased the "probability of devastating fires" before human settlement (120-1).

activities associated with modernity, such as towns and cities. In New Zealand this exemplifies a particular kind of Pākehā approach. Specifically, Turner's notions of nationhood and Pākehā Indigeneity follow New Zealand's cultural nationalist literary tradition, which sought to assert a sense of belonging in a new land. In a *Listener* article titled "Mine or Ours? A response to the recent open letter by Ranginui Walker"<sup>12</sup> (2003), Turner says:

I am indigenous. I say, stop the bigotry whereby one culture or another claims greater moral virtue and/or spiritual sensitivity. Recognise the worth and strength – and the reality of cultural hybridisation. Isn't this what just about all of us are, hybrids? (34).

Turner is speaking here about people, but his view of hybridity extends to the natural world. His poetry comingles introduced and indigenous plants and species into a notion of New Zealandness: "trout and hapuku ... makes us us" ("Toi-toi and Tussock" in *Footfall* 2005, 30). In the framework of postcolonial ecocriticism, however, this view risks joining the "homogenizing narratives that ignore the history of empire and its ongoing legacies of violence" (DeLoughrey 2014 321). Such a framework also considers how forms of dominance are naturalized. Pākehā dominance manifests in Turner's notions of Indigeneity and nationhood. His poem "Southern Tribesmen" from *Taking Off* (2001) asserts "we're here ... defines the meaning / of indigenous" (72). But by disregarding cultural difference, Turner's poem implicitly produces an attitude of monoculturalism, which is out of step with current cultural norms that acknowledge Aotearoa New Zealand as a multi-cultural country and recognise cultural differences between Pākehā and Māori.

The following sections of this chapter show how Turner's poetry works productively with the British/United States model of ecopoetry placed within a New Zealand setting. This reading finally suggests the limitations of this approach when migrated to the postcolonial or settler-colonial situation in New Zealand, where Indigeneity is so important.

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<sup>12</sup> Ranginui Walker (1932-2016) of Whakatohea iwi was an academic, writer and Māori advocate.

### 3.1.2. What kind of ecopoet is Turner?

For a time the sounds of Civilization  
came muted across the water  
—“Man in a Boat”

From his home in the small town of Otarehua in Central Otago’s Ida Valley, Turner routinely writes about the landscape that surrounds him. In twelve poetry collections published since 1978, he has built a reputation as a regional poet such that reviewer Michael Morrissey describes him as “on Central Otago automatic poetic pilot” (204). Poet and literary critic Harry Ricketts calls him “somebody with a message, coming down from the hills ... drawing our attention to a world in danger of disappearing” (RNZ 2008). In *99 Ways into New Zealand Poetry* (2010), Ricketts’ co-editor Paula Green says Turner’s work is “immensely concerned with how we treat our land and rivers” and how to “become guardians of where we come from,” which makes it both “poetry and a political act” (370). In the same text, Ricketts describes Turner’s work as valuing landscapes and outdoor, physical activities—cycling, fishing and tramping—“for themselves but also for a spiritual quality they impart” (202) suggesting the Romantic aspect of Turner’s work.

These attributes—regionalism, conservation, environmental agitation and psychic connection with nature—suggest that Turner’s work participates in the field of ecopoetry at both ends of the Bryson-Bates spectrum. That is, it ranges from message-based ecopolemic—the predominantly recognised mode of ecopoetry when the field first emerged in the 1990s—to the somewhat alternate notion that ecopoetry expresses Romantic ideas of connection between nature and consciousness. Turner’s work overlaps the two modes of the field by negotiating tension between polemic and perceptive lyric alongside shifts in poetic representations of the human relationship with the natural world.

Like much ecopoetry, Turner’s work expresses regret for the loss of nonhuman ecologies. For his poetic speaker, who, as Ricketts writes, is “as close and honest an approximation to himself, as he can manage” (*99 Ways* 339), these ecologies are the rivers, plains, hills and mountain ranges of Central Otago. Often, these places, familiar to Turner since his childhood, have been transformed by human progress during Turner’s lifetime. In this remote region, ‘progress’ takes the form of industrial and agricultural development: dams and wind farms for electricity generation, access routes

for increased tourism, and the conversion of sheep-farms to irrigated dairy farms. Over key decades in the development of the environmental movement and of ecopoetry, Turner's speaker describes these changes and his own changing attitudes to the human/nonhuman relationship. These attitudinal changes reflect shifts in the zeitgeist of the environmental movement as it moves from a period of political agitation and idealism to more mainstream, scientifically informed involvement in political agendas. Over this time, Turner's poetic subjectivity is marked by three attitudinal stages: descriptions of the paradox between the excitement of outdoor pursuits such as fishing and hunting and empathy for nonhuman species; a meditative connection with nature and an awareness of ecological connection and the need for conservation; and a sense of despair at the continued loss of nature despite increased understanding of the harmful effects of its commercial exploitation.

Turner's lament for the loss of the physical and psychic benefits of nature due to modernity suggests that his poetry fits rather readily into the tenets of ecopoetry defined by Bryson and Bate, outlined in the first chapter of this thesis. Indeed, it is possible to pick out from Turner's work examples to support these tenets and to hold him up as an example of a New Zealand poet whose work aligns with the generally agreed definitions of ecopoetry.

Such a close mapping to Bryson's take on ecopoetry can be usefully illustrated by brief comparisons of Turner's work with Gary Snyder, whom Hass, in his introduction to *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (2013), calls "an elder statesman of the environmental movement" (lvi) and of "ecopoetry," and who is a kind of American model for such tenets. Snyder's poetry focuses on his connection with remote regions of the Sierra Nevada mountain range in northern California where he lives, just as Turner's poetry focuses on the remote regions of Central Otago where he lives. Indeed, Turner includes Snyder with admiration in a list of American poets who produce "wonderfully rich poetic responses to the outdoors, explorations of how we experience and react to what we find there" (*Into the Wider World* 2008 311).

Bryson's primary characteristic of ecopoetry, recall, is "an emphasis on maintaining an ecocentric perspective that recognizes the interdependent nature of the world" (5-6). In "The Call of the Wild" from *Turtle Island* (1969), Snyder foresees the potential for human ruination of such remote places:

A war against earth.  
When it's done there'll be

no place

A Coyote could hide. (23)

Snyder's protagonist often finds solace in places described in America as 'wilderness.' A parallel evocation of human spoliation of nature is evident, for example, in Turner's "Ozone" from *All That Can Be Blue* (1989). In this poem, Turner recognizes interdependence between nature and culture, and the possibility of ecological catastrophe, when he describes the "everlasting blue" as possibly "on the roasting / way out" (10). The poem makes an explicit connection between humanity and the potentially ruinous effects of climate change.

Bryson's second attribute of ecopoetry, "Humility in relationships with both human and nonhuman nature" (6), is also evident in Turner's poetry. In "The Angler" from *Taking Off* (2001), the river "never gives tongue to contrition" (52) suggesting opposition to a human world where, by implication, there is cause for shame. Turner's poetry frequently employs the metaphor of the river speaking—for instance, "Now we can get on / with listening to the creek" (Southern Tribesman in *Taking Off* 2001 72) and "listen to the river's refrain" (Matukituki in *Just This* 2009 107)—a notion that connects him to the natural world through the sharing of language and, because he usually does not know what the river is saying, portrays nature as more knowing than humanity. The metaphor of language to represent humility in the human relationship with nature recalls Snyder's "Riprap" from *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* (1990) in which Snyder writes: "Lay down these words / Before your mind like rocks" and "In the thin loam, each rock a word / a creek-washed stone" (32). In Turner's "Listening to the River" from *Listening to the River* (1983) though, the comparison is less flattering to language, whose "syllables / roll like stones" yet "cannot / stop the whittling and the wearing" (7). Language, in these examples, evokes a sense of a nature that is more composed than human endeavour.

Evidence of Bryson's third tenet of ecopoetry, "an indictment of an overtechnologized modern world and a warning concerning the real potential for ecological catastrophe" (6) is often apparent as in "the greed / of the grasping worst" and "our Overseas Investment / Commission's treasonable / omissions" (73) in Turner's "Beyond Dead Horse Pinch and Red Cutting" from *Night Fishing* (2016). These phrases portray the remote Central Otago landscapes named in the poem's title as being in danger of ecological catastrophe from the forces of consumer capitalism

and political decisions concerning land ownership. They again bear comparison with Snyder, as in “Mother Earth: Her Whales,” also from *Turtle Island*—“How can the head-heavy power-hungry / ... Capitalist-Imperialist / ... Speak for the green of the leaf? Speak for the soil?” (48). Like Snyder’s poem, Turner’s indicts consumer capitalism as the opponent of ecological wellbeing.

Turner’s work also encompasses Bate’s definition of ecopoetry, the notion of connection between nature and human consciousness, “the exploration of the relationship between external environment and ecology of mind” (252). Turner’s debt to William Wordsworth can be traced in his early poem “Man in a Boat” from *Ladders of Rain* (1978). The poem echoes the influence of nature on human consciousness expressed in Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* (first published in 1799). Wordsworth’s articulates “the fretful dwellings of mankind” in opposition to “the calm / Which Nature breathes among the hills and groves” (I, 114) and Turner’s man in a boat comes to understand that the elements of the natural world—sun, sea, sky, clouds and breeze—are “good for the soul” and that “he would recover given the time” (38). As in Wordsworth’s portrayal of his childhood self in the boat scene in *The Prelude*, Turner’s protagonist experiences nature’s influence on consciousness from a rowboat:

For a time the sounds of Civilization  
came muted across the water  
till eventually they faded away entirely. (38)

The “sounds of Civilization” implies a clamorous world somewhere beyond nature, paralleling Wordsworth’s description of escape, “coming from a house / Of bondage, from yon City’s walls set free” (I, 106-7). Wordsworth’s nature affords “settling into gentler happiness” (I, 108) and Turner’s man “rowed home in the evening happy” (38). “Man in a Boat” appears to acknowledge Turner’s Romantic poetic inheritance and throughout his work the notion of escape from modernity to a comforting nature is an enduring, indeed, mounting theme.

### 3.1.3. Turner, belonging and Romantic ecopoetry

It's not picturesque,  
it's essential, almost grand  
and it aches  
—"Van Morrison in Central Otago"

In poems that describe Central Otago's rivers, mountain ranges, roads and farmland—both the public conservation estate and privately-owned land—Turner portrays himself as like, a part of, and inhabited by the land. This sense of connection to nature is interpreted as a notion of belonging and, indeed, of selfhood. It reveals the importance to Turner of the presence, and preservation, of Central Otago's remote landscapes.

Turner connects his subjective poetic self to nature through figurative physical and mental habitation by and of natural elements: rivers, clouds and land. In "High Noon" from *Bones* (1985), "the water pushes into my mouth, a thickening tongue" (45), suggesting that the river, and by extension nature, speaks through him. "October on the Otamita" from the same collection renders the water as blood: "Walking upstream it's as if the water's / flowing through me, jiggling my heart" (43). In "The River in You" from *Taking Off* (2001), "you sense the pull / that draws you back is the river in you" (51). Physical inhabitation by the river portrays the poet as a part of nature and nature as a part of him.

The latter notion is evoked in "Van Morrison in Central Otago" from *Beyond* (1992):

What's productive here  
is what's in your heart,  
sworn through your eyes,  
ears, the flutter of the  
wind in your hair;

the smell, the taste  
of air from the mountains,  
off flats where the river  
runs from somewhere north  
to somewhere south and the sky's  
forever. It's not picturesque,  
it's essential, almost grand  
and it aches (10)

In the above excerpt, “heart” and “aches” metaphorically reference not the physical body but the emotional centre. Turner explicitly states that the presence of natural elements is required for emotional health. He further insists on the “essential” nature of nature by connecting emotional wellbeing and physical revival:

You have to be here, you  
have to feel the deep  
slow surge of the hills,  
the cloak of before, the wrench  
of beyond. You know  
what, you know  
not. And that’s what  
makes it heart-stopping,  
articulate, hurtful  
like resuscitation. (10)

The simile “like resuscitation” projects a sense of mental rejuvenation and raises the Romantic notion of the beneficial effects of the presence of nature on human consciousness. As mentioned earlier, Bate describes this Romantic sensibility in ecopoetry as “the exploration between external environment and ecology of mind” (252) and Turner’s poem relates the beneficial effects of Central Otago’s landscapes to his “ecology of mind.” This is suggested figuratively by the reflections of his feelings or thoughts about his environment on the landscape, which seems to reciprocate, as in “Flight” from *Elemental* (2012), in which “the mountain smiled / all afternoon” (190), and in “Taieri River, Paerau,” from the same collection, when the clouds:

call to you  
by name, invite you to look to the heavens  
and ponder what’s visible in the fabulous sky. (145)

If the figurative notion of being on first-name terms with nonhuman elements invites a sense of reciprocity of feeling, in “Home Ground” from *Taking Off* (2001) it is the notion of physical possession by the land: “the land takes you in” (67), a familial act of welcome or embrace.

In other poems, belonging to nature is expressed directly, without the mediations of metaphor. One way is through declarations of love. “Landscapes of Central Otago,” also from *Beyond*, portrays tenderness for Central Otago’s landscapes evoked by Grahame Sydney’s artistic representations of them:

So familiar, enduring, and vast  
those never-ending spaces, landscapes  
leaning, expanding, receding, stricken



like the feelings some take for love. (58)

In this excerpt, Turner conflates his emotions with the images in the painting, suggesting that he views the landscape as sharing his emotional territory. The notion of reciprocity between poet and nature heightens the human sense of belonging in the nonhuman world. Again, in “Home Ground,” he makes his point about connections explicitly: the land is “somewhere called home ... and you know the meaning / of love’s in that” (67). By sharing with landscapes the emotion of love and being loved, Turner sees himself as both like, and a part of, the land.

In other poems, he also states outright the link between landscape and sense of self, as in “Hawkdun Summer” from *Elemental*:

And there are days when  
a breeze ruffles the valley’s grasses  
and the Ida’s a broad shallow sound,  
and there are times  
when time alone passes  
and a temperament you can’t deny  
accentuates the view  
of unquenchable blue. And that’s  
when you’re most  
like you. (198)

The sense of selfhood—of being “when you’re most / like you”—arises from proximity to Central Otago’s Hawkdun Range. Turner’s poetic self requires specificity of place to be complete, a notion recalling British Romantic poet John Clare in his “Sonnet: I am” (1845), which describes a sense of alienation and loss of identity after moving from his home village of Helpston: “I feel I am – I only know I am, / and plod upon the earth, as dull and void” (1-2). Central Otago’s distinct landscapes—its dramatic cloud formations, tussock-covered hills, wildflowers, schist formations, rivers and mountain ranges—are portrayed as comprising a part of Turner’s poetic speaker, whose sense of self is founded in part on his presence in the landscape.

So, while Turner’s poetry is founded in a particular New Zealand geography, the sentiments about that environment and his connection to it are in sympathy with the traditional Romantic aesthetic described by Bate. Turner’s sense of belonging to nature is generic, without a sense of what makes New Zealand ‘nature’ of particular significance.

### 3.1.4. Shifting views of solace and loss in Turner's angling poems

Like spent spinners our dreams at dusk  
fall back to the river  
—“Last Songs”

Like Dunedin poet Denis Glover (1912-80) who related to South Island landscapes through another outdoor activity, mountaineering, Turner develops in his poetry about fishing in Central Otago a masculine persona who is something of an outsider. His “back-country landscape is seen as tough, honest and liberating in contrast to the (city) world of humbugs, hypocrites and well-groomed phonies” (Ricketts *99 Ways* 202). Yet Turner's outlook is not beyond alteration. Shifting representations of the culture/nature relationship across changes in age, experience and societal norms in his angling poetry reflect changing environmental attitudes within a Pākehā settler-colonial context from the 1970s to the present day. The shift in both zeitgeist and attitude are suggested in Turner's essays in *Into the Wider World* (2008) in which he reports that in the “prolific” days of his youth no one “even considered putting a fish back. There was no need” (250), whereas in present times: “Now and then I kill a fish, if I want one to eat, otherwise I release it. In some rivers and streams, where numbers are low, I don't kill any” (323-4). His angling poems reveal this psychic change as well.

Turner's poetic speaker describes his connection to introduced trout and their Central Otago river habitats as communions. Over time, his representation of his relationship with this nature changes, suggesting a perceptive arc, somewhat like a narrative arc, with three distinct postures. The first is an exposition of the excitement of the sport of fly-fishing with some tension between the catching of fish and an appreciation of trout as part of the nonhuman world. The second constitutes an evasion of the act of fly-fishing although the poems are still centred on this activity. They focus rather on a sense of wellbeing afforded by the presence of the nonhuman world with the human protagonist portrayed as a participant in this world. The third shift is a move away from the earlier poems' Romantic imagery to practical language and sometimes ecopolemic that imparts a sense of loss of that natural world. This loss is brought about by human activities: irrigation, pollution and dam construction. Trout and the poetic angler are together rendered as victims of the toxic effects of modernity. What follows are discussions of Turner's angling poems that illustrate his shifting environmental attitudes over time.

The poem “Trout,” from Turner’s first collection *Ladders of Rain* (1978), reveals responsiveness to the natural world through descriptions of the camouflage colours and behaviour of the “magnificent trout, darkly / speckled, toffee brown” which “pumps like a bellow, slowly” in the water that “purrs over him.” Yet this poem evokes the excitement of trout fishing and a sense of competition between angler and fish. It ends when the trout:

takes the fly  
from the puckered surface.

Look out, trout. (56)

The phrase “Look out, trout” intimates excitement at the competitive skill of playing the fish on the line and landing it. It relates a sense of battle between the skills of the trout and his poetic angler, suggesting the thrill of the sport of fly-fishing.

In later poems, such enthusiasm for catching trout becomes tempered with increased empathy for their plight. “Jack Trout,” from *Ancestors* (1981) reveals tension between the catching of fish for eating and an appreciation of them as a part of the natural world, evoked by metaphors comparing fish and people. The phrase: “the slow heave of his breathing” evokes empathy and “the shocking murk / of pain,” suggests remorse and compassion in contrast to nature’s ruthlessness. The poem ends with a sense of sorrow and killing the fish is described as an act of compassion:

There is gravel in my boots,  
in my chest, as I hit him twice  
behind the eyes, once to  
decide his fate, and once  
for mercy’s sake. (169)

The gravel becomes a metaphor for the angler’s regret— “There is gravel ... in my chest, as I hit him”—and perhaps an element of shame—“for mercy’s sake”—at having caught and killed the fish. This poem raises yet does not answer the question of how people should feel towards animals that are to be eaten.

In even later poems, Turner’s focus shifts away from the catching of fish towards a sense of joy engendered by the presence of nature. This shift to a Romantic sensibility portrays nature in the service of the development of human subjectivity. Ostensibly about fishing, these poems are in fact evasions of fishing. “A Day in the Young” from *All That Can Be Blue* (1989) describes an outing in which the anglers give in cheerfully when the visible fish do not rise to their flies:

eventually I lob a stone  
and watch them scatter then

With smiles yokel-wide we wade across  
and move on. (29)

The lobbing of the stone suggests a carefree approach to fishing and pleasure in being at the river. This sense is heightened by the word “yokel” which transmits pastoral naivety. Turner’s use of this pejorative term reduces the anglers in opposition to the more sophisticated nature—because the fish are able to evade their lines—while the “smiles” suggests the primary benefits of angling to the human psyche in communion with nature.

In “The Angler” from *Taking Off* (2001), Turner turns to anthropomorphic metaphor to evoke his sense of oneness with nature. In this poem, it is the river, the river stones, the mountains, the sky and the breeze that receive attention rather than fish, which are not mentioned. The act of fly-fishing provides psychic renewal to the angler who is “working my cares out / as I work the kinks from the line” (52). The poem’s ending endorses not the catching of fish but rather the acquisition of an appreciation of the nonhuman world derived from the meditative qualities of fly-fishing:

the stones  
dance and sing of all there is to cherish  
if one takes the time. (53)

By assigning human action—dancing and singing—to the stones, Turner metaphorically evokes his appreciative sense of them. Such metaphoric language allows perceptive sensibilities to arise. It provides a way of speaking about subjective connection to nature that other forms of language—rational voice, logic, even ecological argument for preservation and protection—do not afford. As Timothy Clark writes, the poetic can undermine “the current paradigm of the person as a detached, rational subject facing an object world” (20) and

metaphorical language can transgress rigid, ‘literal’ demarcations between one thing and another to suggest levels of intuited interrelation that a more narrowly rationalistic and atomistic mode of perception would block out.  
(20-1)

Similarly, David Kidner writes that figurative language allows “a more accurate empathy with the natural world” (73). He describes “the other layers of selfhood” that embody “a relatedness which is symbolic rather than rational,” and which are displaced

by technological and rational capability. Turner's poetry exemplifies Kidner's insistence that poetic language can "render less rigid the distinctions between conscious and unconscious, mind and body, human and nonhuman" (76). Turner's poetic angler becomes subjective-man-in-nature connecting human and nonhuman worlds.

The third shift in Turner's angling poems occurs when the Romantic notion of solace and joy in nature is replaced or contrasted with a sense of despair. In "Lament for the Taieri River" from *Into the Wider World* (2008), the absence of metaphors and presence of assertions heightens a sense of disconnect between the poet and the river:

The Taieri River stinks from effluent.  
is soured by pesticides and fertilisers.

The flow is sluggish, low;  
shit and muck slosh into the river  
where cattle mill and piss and break down banks (364)

This excerpt uses technical words, "pesticides" and "fertilisers," and harsh but practical terms, "shit" and "muck," to describe the polluted river. By shifting from the figurative language that characterized his earlier work to the prosaic language of polemic, Turner suggests a shift from a sense of communion with the river to one of distance between him and it. In this poem, fishing is described only through reminiscence—"when, after coming home from school, / he 'could catch a fish on the threadline / within three casts"—and serves as a reminder of the river's unpolluted, Romantic past.

Similarly, metaphors located in the past serve to evoke a disquieting sense of irrevocability regarding the polluted state of the river in "Last Songs," also from *Into the Wider World*:

So I have grown to understand  
that all the great songs  
are last songs, all the finest moments  
are those that cascade through one's body  
  
and toss us among the rocks  
of our generation's experience, and that  
nothing bores deeper than the knowledge  
of loss. (318)

The "rocks of our generation's experience" suggests a lack of learned insight, and "nothing bores deeper than the knowledge / of loss" implies the pain of having known

the nature that is now gone. In this poem, trout appear only as “shadowy dreams,” which are themselves likened to old fishing lures:

Like spent spinners our dreams at dusk  
fall back to the river  
and drift away. (319)

But it is not only the trout and their rivers that have been lost. “Lament for the Taieri River” and “Last Songs” comprehend the loss of those places that afforded solace from modernity.

Turner’s shifting perspectives regarding solace and ecological loss in his angling poems trace, to some extent, changes in the environmental conditions in New Zealand, alongside Turner’s own changing attitudes. His poetry reflects these shifts through changes to language including metaphor and, later on, the prosaic language of ecopolemic. As environmental conditions deteriorate due to human activity, for instance the depletion of trout numbers and the decline of water quality, Turner’s poetic language alters, thus revealing some specific ways in which New Zealand ecopoetry reflects prevailing environmental conditions and attitudes over time.

### 3.1.5. Limitations in Turner's approach to solace and loss

When the trout rise like compassion  
it is worth watching  
—"The Stopover"

But for all of Turner's evolution in his thinking about the natural world, the examples he chooses to praise or lament inscribe the limitations of his notions of ecology and ecological loss. Trout—and deer, which also appear in his poems—are introduced species in New Zealand. This suggests the way Turner's vision of conservation is located within the time of his own life, in particular his memories of the remoteness of places in the 1950s and 60s when he grew up in Dunedin and explored Otago's inner regions through tramping, hunting and fishing (*Somebodies and Nobodies* 2002). He fixes a vision of ecological preservation within a narrow period of time and place on a landscape which itself was created from previous alteration—through earlier Māori occupation but primarily colonial settlement.

His notions of solace and ecological loss are focused on a landscape that was constructed by colonial transformation that in turn created its own ecological loss. "New Year's Day, 2004" from *Footfall* (2005), for example, sympathises with the motivations of early European settlers who changed the landscape. It begins by mocking those who criticize the planting of exotic trees:

the nor'wester  
noisy in the trees your forebears  
  
planted to satisfy a craving for  
the more familiar, only to be flayed  
  
by the latter-day know-betters, those  
who have still to get over it. Bah. (20)

Such valuing of colonially altered ecologies raises tension between the esteeming of constructed environments and those indigenous plants and animals that have been supplanted by these introduced species.

Turner's prose reveals that he is conscious of this tension. In his essay "Contemplative arts and pastimes" from *Into the Wider World* (2008) he takes a pragmatic approach, arguing that while trout have "contributed to the loss or depletion of some native species," "[i]f it were not for Fish and Game councils in particular, our

waterways would be in even worse condition than they are” (330). Turner argues that Fish and Game New Zealand represents anglers and hunters and aims to preserve trout habitats by protecting rivers and surrounding environments from further degradation (330). Still, this foundation for his argument is not as clear-cut as this. Environmental historian Catherine Knight, in *New Zealand’s Rivers: An environmental history* (2016), acknowledges that, “along with its predecessors, the acclimatisation societies, [Fish and Game] has been the primary applicant for nine of the 13 successful national water conservation orders to date” (115). But she finds that in the mid-nineteenth century, acclimatisation—the goal of introducing new species in the hope that they would acclimatise to the new environment—“had unforeseen consequences – both for the indigenous fish that inhabited rivers and for tangata whenua, who had for centuries depended on those fish for sustenance” (91). She says acclimatisation societies became concerned that “trout and salmon were falling prey to indigenous species and no means were spared in efforts to eradicate these” (102) including eels which were a Māori food source (103). Furthermore, restrictions on trout fishing to protect emerging populations and on fishing for whitebait, which were seen as food for trout, meant Māori lost access to customary fisheries, which “in some cases, had a debilitating effect on Māori communities” (101). Knight reports that in the twentieth century:

‘The protection of the habitat of trout and salmon’ became a matter that decision-makers must have ‘particular regard to’ when making decisions under the [Resource Management Act (1991)]. Indigenous fish, on the other hand, are not explicitly provided for under the act. (115)

The uneven political provisions, disagreement between Fish and Game and conservation groups calling to “exterminate all introduced species” (Turner 2008 330), and Waitangi Tribunal applications by Māori for redress for the loss of customary fishing rights, all highlight ongoing environmental tensions over introduced and indigenous species within New Zealand.

Turner supports the preservation of trout habitats for both environmental and psychological reasons. In *Into the Wider World* (2008), he says hunting and trout fishing promote an understanding of ecologies, the need for preservation and protection of rivers, forests, wetlands and shrublands (327). Fishing, he says, provides a means of escape from “the prevailing orthodoxy” and “strips away parts of what is unscrupulous in us, encourages more careful observation and reflection” (302). Thus, he asserts that trout fishing encourages conservation by fostering awareness of both



external and internal landscapes. His poetry evokes appreciation of fish and game that attract anglers and hunters to the outdoors leading, he argues, to a greater valuing of nature and improved human character. However, the indigenous fish species which trout supplanted—and the consequences of this usurpation on Māori—are absent from his poetry as they are from many Central Otago rivers. The limitations to Turner's ecological approach, then, stem from a focus on a recreation fashioned by colonialism at the expense of indigenous species and culture.

### 3.1.6. Turner, belonging and literary nationalism

my sense of belonging here  
rises defiantly out of the dark  
—“Southern Tribesmen”

If Turner laments environmental deterioration by fixing his vision of ecological worth within a particular place and time—and cultural moment—it is into this colonially constructed nature that Turner sets his poetic, subjective self as both the rugged, outdoor man and the Romantic man-in-nature. His poetry shares in what literary critic John Newton in *Hard Frost: Structures of Feeling in New Zealand Literature 1908-1945* (2017) calls “a long literary nationalism” that “underwrites six or seven decades of coherent activity” (13-4) until the 1980s and 1990s. This extends beyond the literary nationalist period, which is generally considered to be the 1930s and 1940s and includes the poets Allen Curnow, Charles Brasch, R.A.K. Mason, Rex Fairburn, D’Arcy Cresswell and Denis Glover, as well as fiction writer Frank Sargeson. Concerned with “framing a national identity in the settler world” (Newton 153), they were beset with anxiety over belonging in a country that seemed less like home than Britain. They may be described as portraying the viewpoint of expatriates rather than immigrants: “Alienation is the mood of settlers who don’t yet know where they stand—only that their place has been misrepresented, that their standing is shaky, that ‘standing upright’ belongs to the future” (Newton 221). While Turner’s work stems from this tradition, it also departs from it to some extent by suggesting a confident sense of belonging. Rather than mulling over arrival, or ‘landfall’—as Brasch in 1947 named what has become New Zealand’s longest-running literary journal—Turner asserts ‘footfall,’ the notion of firm imprinting and the title of his 2005 New Zealand Poet Laureate collection. In opposition to Brasch’s uncertainty—“distance looks our way; / And none knows where he will lie down at night” (“The Islands (2),” 1948)—Turner plants a firm foot: “my sense of belonging here / rises defiantly out of the dark” (“Southern Tribesmen” from *Taking Off*, 2001, 72). Yet despite its confidence, Turner’s work frequently shares the literary nationalist movement’s focus on monoculturalism.

Turner continues what Newton describes as the literary nationalists’ “feat of substitution through which the violence of colonial settlement takes place, not between peoples, but rather between Man and a hostile landscape” (173). In the South Island

this “expedient fiction” (Newton 173) suited not just the geography but also the specific colonial history of

a smaller initial Maori population, a costly period of warfare in the 1820s (both within and between iwi), and the overwhelming European deluge generated by the southern gold rush [which] led to the situation where Pakeha ascendancy was achieved in the South Island without military force. (173)

Newton writes: “By projecting the outcomes of this regional history onto a grimly Romantic landscape”—a remote yet readily admired terrain—“it was possible to write as if the landscape itself had set the stage for Pakeha occupancy” (173-4). Turner is not oblivious to prior Māori settlement and at times his poetry struggles with tension between a desire to preserve landscapes in the settler-colonial condition in which he finds them and compassion for Māori. “West Over the Maniototo” from *Elemental* (2012) evokes sympathy for Māori culture which it portrays as having “little evidence / of a hunger for conspicuous wealth” (42). In this poem, Turner appears to sympathise with Māori over dispossession of land by asking “whether superseded is only / another soulless name for disregard” (42). In “Otakou” from *Listening to the River* (1983)—named for the Māori coastal settlement in Dunedin where the Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840—Turner empathizes with local Māori chiefs “Karetai and Taiaroa” (19) by describing the wish to have seen:

their eyes dark with the twin lights  
of treachery and honour, and their words

deep and full and resonant with love  
for land they were bound to lose. (20)

Turner’s Central Otago is not quite the terra nullius that underlined the ‘South Island myth’ but acknowledgment of prior Māori settlement and dispossession is occasional in his work.<sup>13</sup> Generally, Turner’s poetic man-in-nature is either alone or with one or two other anglers in an environment otherwise devoid of people. The braided rivers, big sky and expansive, tussock-covered hills are available to Turner’s poet speaker, and vice versa, in ways that suggest—apart from the historical remains of early European gold rush settlements—a lack of human habitation. Just as introduced plants and animals become naturalized into this transformed environment, Turner naturalizes his Pākehā self there.

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<sup>13</sup> Turner writes, “it is not ignorance of the past that makes people unwilling to forever make amends, it is a belief that little of benefit is to be gained from it” (“Mine or Ours?” *Listener* November 29 2003).

### 3.1.7. Turner and a sense of nationhood

the country  
rolls through me  
—“Tangata Whenua”

The question of New Zealand nationhood as expressed through a sense of belonging to the land is a specific issue for ecopoetical writing in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the foreword to Knight’s *New Zealand Rivers*—which includes Turner’s poem “Rainbows in the Mararoa Gorge” (114)—Otago historian Tom Brooking observes, “rivers have come to contain deep cultural significance for many Pākehā as well [as Māori]” (7). Literary historian Alex Calder in *The Settlers’ Plot* (2011) uses the phrase “belonging through nature” (172) to describe “the affection for place felt by Pākehā” (4), which he says is a sense of belonging that differs from the Māori concept of belonging described by the concept of *tūrangawaewae*. Calder writes:

We Pakeha are at home here, we identify as New Zealanders, this is our place, we belong – and yet, without denying any of those things, there is another degree of belonging that we do not have that is available to Maori (or perhaps to the Maori side of you). (5)

New Zealand anthropologist Sir ‘Sydney’ Hirini Moko Mead writes that *tūrangawaewae* means, “place for the feet to stand, home” (401). But more than that, it represents:

one spot, one locality on planet earth where an individual can say, ‘I belong here. I can stand here without challenge. My ancestors stood here before me. My children will stand tall here’” (48).

In addition, *tūrangawaewae* is connected to notions of *whakapapa*, or “genealogy” (402). Mead says:

Whakapapa is a fundamental attribute and gift of birth. It is the social component of the *ira*, the genes. A child is born into a kinship system which is already in place and has been for many generations ... In short, *whakapapa* is belonging (47).

According to *Tūrangawaewae: Identity & Belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand* (2017), the term also connects people with the land:

Acknowledging *maunga* or ancestral mountains, *awa* or ancestral waterways, and *wāhi tapu* or sacred places make up a part of *tūrangawaewae*, each person’s sacred, special place where they feel they belong” (Cain, et al 57).

Writer Anahera Gildea, Ngāti Raukawa-ki-te-tonga, writes of the importance of whakapapa to a sense of belonging: “I do not exist solely as an individual, I am part of a tribe, a clan, a larger collective” (2). Calder describes a “syndrome” he calls “Pakeha turangawaewae” as “an oxymoron” because as well as describing a different sense of belonging from that of Māori, it posits belonging by Pākehā who “are not only relative newcomers and strangers but also beneficiaries of the historical marginalisation of Maori” (4). What Calder terms the problematical notion of “belonging through nature” (172) describes a Pākehā approach to nationhood of which Turner’s poetry is an exemplar.

In the title of his poem “Tangata Whenua” from *All That Can Be Blue* (1989) Turner deliberately appropriates the Māori term ‘tangata whenua’ in order to assert his notion of Pākehā Indigeneity. This risks elision of alternative Indigenous perceptions of belonging.<sup>14</sup> This assertion is in tension with the customary meaning of ‘tangata whenua,’ which is “indigenous people” and references Māori cultural practices and beliefs that locate whānau in traditional lands. Turner’s poem employs images of historical and present-day European occupation of Central Otago and the metaphor of habitation of his poetic speaker by nature—“the country / rolls through me” (18)—to assert his alternate sense of Indigeneity. In “Southern Tribesmen” from *Taking Off* (2001), sunset over the Hawkdun Range is the occasion for reflection on Pākehā belonging:

And because it’s there  
and we’re here to see  
it come and go, and then retire

that defines the meaning  
of indigenous. We hear lots about  
cultural sensitivity, about rights,

about atoning, about the need  
to apologise. Done. Now we can get on  
with listening to the creek

making music as the moon rises  
while my sense of belonging here  
rises defiantly out of the dark. (72)

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<sup>14</sup> Australian historian Lorenzo Veracini, in *Settler Colonialism: a theoretical view* (2010), cites settler indigenisation as one method by which “indigenous specific alterity becomes effaced” (46).

Pākehā belonging is Turner's acknowledged subject, but what is unacknowledged is the extent to which this elides other histories. Although Turner may seek to assert a sense of dual Indigeneity—as discussed extensively in books by prominent historian of Turner's own generation, Michael King<sup>15</sup>—the elision of Māori history in Turner's poetry risks a sense of substitution: that of one Indigenous culture for another. Turner's short poem "Toi-Toi and Tussock" from *Footfall* (2005) is written in memory of King and metaphorically connects him with both native and exotic species and a sense of nationhood:

You were toi-toi and tussock,  
trout and hapuku:  
what makes us us. (30)

What risks the notion of substitution in this excerpt is the word "us" which elides those who may not feel that trout are a part of their notion of nationhood because trout replaced Indigenous food sources. A sense of belonging and nationhood whereby Pākehā and exotic species are naturalized into the environment is in tension with Māori senses of ecological loss and belonging, which differ from Turner's representations.

Turner's work can readily be mapped to the British/United States model of ecopoetry as it has generally been described in definitions such as Bryson's, and to the alternate but also traditional view of Romantic ecopoetry proposed by Bate. His work, though, suggests that too close a mapping requires eliding the very particular nature of ecopoetry in New Zealand—such as the knowledge that much of New Zealand's contemporary landscapes derive from colonial construction, and that differences exist between settler and Indigenous concepts of the relationship between people and the nonhuman world and a sense of belonging. These differences will be explored and contrasted in the next chapter, which examines the poetry of Auckland poet Robert Sullivan.

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<sup>15</sup> King discusses the notion of Pākehā identity in *Being Pakeha: An Encounter With New Zealand and the Maori Renaissance* (1985), *Pakeha: The Quest for Identity in New Zealand* (1991), in which he states, "Pakeha-ness ... is a second indigenous New Zealand culture" (19), and *Being Pakeha Now: reflections and recollections of a white native* (1999).

### 3.2.1. Ngāpuhi poet Robert Sullivan (b. 1967)

Auckland poet and academic Robert Sullivan states his heritage on the blurbs of his seven poetry collections. His first collection, *Jazz Waiata* (1990), describes him as of “Nga Puhi and Irish descent.” His second, *Piki Aki!* (1993), lists his antecedents in the reverse order and specifically as “Galway Irish and Ngapuhi” (one word). His most recent sole-authored collection, *Cassino City of Martyrs/Citta Martire* (2010), drops his Irish lineage and enlarges his Māori genealogy to “Nga Puhi Nui Tonu and Kai Tahu” prefaced with “belongs to” rather than “descends from.” These small yet significant shifts in self-identification gesture to the importance of ancestry in Sullivan’s work. He says:

My poetry belongs to our people in that ... it is concerned with our ancestors, our ties and obligations to each other and to them, and how it aligns us for the future. (WaterBridge Review 2)

From a critical perspective, Sullivan’s poetry is recognised for its subversion of the dominant Euro-centric literature of post-colonialism rather than for its ecopoetic elements. Significantly, Sullivan is co-editor, with Albert Wendt and Reina Whaitiri, of two important anthologies, *Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English* (2003), and *Mauri Ola: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English—Whetu Moana II* (2010). New Zealand postcolonial theorist and critic Chris Prentice describes Sullivan’s magnum opus, *Star Waka* (1999),<sup>16</sup> as

a poetics of liminality that urges a rethinking of the relationship between the cultural politics of representation, cultural decolonization, and indigeneity at the interface of the postcolonial and the global. (111)

In *Striding Both Worlds: Witi Ihimaera and New Zealand's Literary traditions* (2011), Melissa Kennedy writes

*Star Waka* translates a Māori view into endlessly expanding and new contexts, which does not dilute or threaten Māori culture because it is secure in and confident of its foundations. (286)

In *Once Were Pacific: Māori Connections to Oceania* (2012), Alice Te Punga Somerville writes:

Sullivan’s poetry not only extends the scope of the Māori literary canon but also—significantly—articulates and challenges our thinking about the

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<sup>16</sup> *Star Waka* has been reprinted five times, translated and published in German and translated into French.

relationship between Māori, the Pacific, and Indigeneity. (59)

While critical focus has thus centred on Sullivan's continuation of the work of "his poetic predecessors Alistair Te Ariki Campbell and Hone Tuwhare" in "dismantling Pakeha literary hegemony" (Orr 167), his oeuvre is also imbued with ecopoetics. This is unsurprisingly given the centrality of the nonhuman world to Māori, which challenges the very definition of the ecopoetic, and ecology itself. In Sullivan's work, ecopoetics arises from the explication of a Māori worldview embracing obligations of guardianship over a nonhuman world tied to the human world through cosmology and ancestry. Ancestry, the habitation of land, sea and sky by ancestral spirits, and the obligation of descendants to provide those natural elements with guardianship and preservation, saturate Sullivan's poetry. His work focuses on "relationships with the land, and power or lack of it" and is "shaped by the traditional Maori view of the world that sees everything as alive, with its own life energy," including landscapes imbued with "family spirits" (WaterBridge Review 2). In his doctoral thesis, "Mana Moana: Wayfinding and Five Indigenous Poets" (2015), Sullivan identifies "relationships between people, times and locations" including "deified representations of significant natural features" (abstract).

This specifically Māori comprehension of entanglement between human and nonhuman worlds, in combination with explication of the inequitable power relations within colonialism, instills a focus on culturally different ways of perceiving the nonhuman world and the human relationship with it. In a poetry that is ecopoetic through its foregrounding of and sympathy for the nonhuman world, these differences reflect on the limitations of the definitions of ecopoetry set out from its origins in Britain and the United States. The basic tenets of ecopoetry centre on the notion of interdependence between people and the nonhuman world. They include humility in the human relationship with nature, the possibility of global ecological catastrophe (Bryson 5-6) and connections between nature and human consciousness (Bate 252). While comprehending interdependence between nature on the one hand and culture on the other, these defining characteristics nevertheless project a sense of dualism that is breached by Māori conceptions that human and natural worlds are entwined through cosmology, spirituality and ancestry.

Such Māori conceptions, as expressed in Sullivan's poetry, also change the way ecological encroachment is characterized. They comprehend ecology to include historical and spiritual elements, demonstrating that the notion of nature is far more



culturally imbricated than is presently accounted for in established understandings of ecopoetry. Such cultural imbrication makes Sullivan's work especially suited to being read within the relatively new field of postcolonial ecocriticism, which brings together postcolonialism—the study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism—and ecocriticism—“the study of the relationships between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty xix). The editors of *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities* (2015) describe

the foundational importance of postcolonial methods to the environmental humanities—a relatively new but rapidly expanding interdisciplinary field that seeks to bring together cultural, historical, social and scientific dimensions in ecological thought. (DeLoughrey et al 2)

In ecopoetry, awareness of the natural environment as “constituted and constitutive of human history” (DeLoughrey 2011 265) is beginning to permeate both poetry and critical writing, including critiques of the cultural limitations of the foundational discussions about, and anthologies of, ecopoetry. In “Planting Roots: A Survey of Introductions to Ecopoetry and Ecocriticism,” Australian poet Caitlin Maling asserts that the sole anthology of Australia ecocriticism *The Littoral Zone* (2007) “reframes what texts, and in turn, what landscapes can be considered ecocritically” (4). She says the selection of poems in *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (2013)—which is introduced by Hass as “150 years, of the ways American nature poetry developed towards an ecopoetics” (lxv)—echo “the ideas of American exceptionalism” or as *The Littoral Zone* editors CA Cranston and Robert Zeller put it, “the idea of a boundless nature” (4). Rather, she says, “the natural context of Australia is different” with its landscape “positioned against England, and in more recent years America” (4). Furthermore, Maling notes that Bryson's *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (2002) does not mention indigeneity, whereas the editors of *The Littoral Zone* (2007) “propose it as one of the most important areas of their text” (4). Cranston and Zeller quote Patrick Murphy who writes in *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature* (2000) that ecocriticism “has been limited by a focus on American and British literatures” and that “reconsider[ing] the privileging of [...] certain national literatures and certain ethnicities within those national literatures” is “one of the ways by which we can refine our awareness and expand the field” (58). They argue:

Although Australian literature is written in English, it grows out of different physical and cultural landscapes from that of North America; and different historical and social circumstances, including different, though comparable

relations between European and indigenous peoples (whose culture has been comparably appropriated in environmental discourse). (9)

*The Littoral Zone* takes its name from the shore where “the first contact between white and indigenous people occurred and where white explorers or invaders had to come to terms with an almost totally alien environment” (7). The title thus highlights the centrality of Indigeneity to the anthology and its acknowledgement of the colonial project, aspects Maling argues are absent from *The Ecopoetry Anthology* and Bryson’s book.

Sullivan’s poetry lends itself to the new critical framework of postcolonial ecocriticism by acknowledging culture as inherently connected to ecology. In contrast to Turner’s particular (and often unacknowledged) Pākehā approach to ecological loss, belonging and a sense of nationhood, Sullivan conceives ecological loss arising from a history of colonial cultural usurpation and the shrinking of space for the enactment of Māori comprehensions of nature and the human relationship with it. Sullivan’s work follows earlier poetic representations of tension between Māori and European worldviews in the poetry of Hone Tuwhare. Tuwhare’s poems, including his iconic anti-nuclear “No Ordinary Sun” (1964), reveal the ways in which “capitalist individualism exacerbates ... insensitivity to the materiality and interdependency of things” (Keown 2016 7). Sullivan’s poetry comprehends ecological degradation in New Zealand in terms of the loss of Māori culture—with its attitude of preservation and respect for the natural world—through the absorption of Māori culture into the dominant culture of colonial capitalism, in which nature is often viewed as an exploitable resource.

In his essay “Hone Tuwhare and Keri Hulme: Close Reading as Indigenous Wayfinding” (2017), Sullivan uses the term “Moanan frame of reference” (115) to describe the use by Tuwhare and Hulme—in her novel *The Bone People* (1983)—of Māori creation stories in connection with the natural world in opposition to colonialism and twentieth-century industrial projects. ‘Moana’ means ‘body of water,’ specifically the Pacific Ocean, and Sullivan’s term distinguishes the worldview of Polynesia, including Māori, from that of European, or Pākehā. Sullivan describes Tuwhare’s work as referencing the natural world within a context of Māori protocols that guide relationships between people and all elements of the natural world, because: “[i]n a Maori worldview, it is not possible to understand the human situation without recourse to the wider ecological environment” (109). Likewise, Sullivan’s poetry describes

Māori communion with natural elements. This ‘Moanan’ way of seeing requires an expansion of how ecopoetry is defined and characterized. In the following sections of this chapter I will discuss the extent to which Sullivan’s work fits into the British/United States model of ecopoetry and how it differs, aligning instead with New Zealand’s particular place in the rapidly developing postcolonial ecocritical approach to writing and thinking about ecopoetry.

### 3.2.2. How Sullivan expands the basic tenets of ecopoetry

We are vacuumed into this  
culture of menace to the land  
—“*Waka 16 Kua wheturangitia koe*”

Sullivan’s ecopoetry embraces but also expands the three basic tenets of ecopoetry. The first of these is the maintenance of “an ecocentric perspective that recognizes the interdependent nature of the world” (Bryson 6). Sullivan’s work expands the Western notion of interdependence between culture and nature in poems that embody culture as inherently tied to ecology through cosmology, ancestry and spirituality.

“Ocean Birth” from *voice carried my family* (2005), for instance, relates the notion of the “skyfather:” “Hold your children to the sky / and sing them to the skyfather” (37). The poem employs metaphors using the language of human birth to describe the geological formation of Pacific islands:

Rapanui born graven  
faced above the waves – umbilical  
stone; Tahiti born from waka:  
  
temple centre of the world;  
Hawai‘i cauled from liquid  
fire: the goddess Pele churning  
  
land from sea: born as mountains;  
Aotearoa on a grandmother’s  
bone – Maui’s blood to leviathan;  
  
Samoa, Tonga, born before  
the names of the sea of islands, (36)

The language of birth: “umbilical,” “cauled” and repeatedly “born,” figuratively portrays the creation of the islands—Rapanui, Tahiti, Hawai‘i, Aotearoa, Samoa and Tonga—in human rather than geological terms. This figurative language formulates a sense of Indigenous integration between culture and nature, through human embodiment of the natural elements: islands, mountains and sea. Furthermore, the Indigenous names for the islands—Aotearoa for New Zealand, Rapanui for Easter Island and, later, Moana Nui a Kiwa for the Pacific Ocean—claim original Indigenous connection with them. Sullivan also ties culture with nature through cosmology by

invoking the legend that Aotearoa New Zealand was pulled from the water by the Polynesian cultural hero Maui.

The poem also invokes the importance of ancestry to a sense of belonging to the Pacific region and its ecologies:

With the leaping spirits we threw  
our voices past Three Kings to sea –  
eyes wide open with ancestors. (36)

Through metaphor and simile, the poem connects Pacific ecologies with Pacific Islanders as well:

Pacific Islanders sing! till  
your throats are stones heaped as temples  
on the shores for our ancestors'  
pleasure. PI's sing! to remind  
wave sand tree cliff cave of the songs  
we left for the Moana Nui  
a Kiwa. We left our voices  
here in every singing bird –  
trunks like drums – stones like babies –  
forests fed by our placentas.  
Every wave carries us here –  
every song to remind us –  
we are skin of the ocean. (37)

Such figurative language suggests physical and emotional integration between nature and culture—"trunks like drums – stones like babies – / forests fed by our placentas." Repeated use of the pronoun "we" describes a sense of communal belonging, which extends the sense of belonging portrayed by the individual "I" or self in poetry following in the Western tradition. Bridget Orr writes, in "'Maui and Orphic Blood: Cook's Death in Contemporary Maori Poetry'" (2008), that this poem's final line, "we are skin of the ocean," invokes "an imagined community ... namely Pacific Islanders, past, present and future" (176). Alice Te Punga Somerville finds that this poem's metaphors evoke "the possibility that ahi kā is maintained through linguistic as well as physical occupation of space" (53). Sullivan's integration of nature and culture—an entanglement he suggests by invoking cosmology and ancestry and by figuring such entanglement in language—expands the notion of interdependence between nature and

culture beyond physical survival and a sense of wellbeing, which are familiar in ecopoetry that follows the British/United States model.

Sullivan's poetry also enacts and expands Bryson's second tenet of ecopoetry, "humility in relationships with both human and nonhuman nature" (6). In "Waka 57 El Nino Waka" from *Star Waka* (1999), Sullivan steps beyond dominant European cultural norms that portray climate change in science-based terms, by characterizing the land and the sea as culturally embodied. In this poem, the often destructive El Nino weather pattern is figuratively construed as "blood from our mother," the earth: "She bleeds internally," in response to "Lack of respect for the planet:"

The planet, as you are aware  
is not only our mother, but the mother of all  
living creatures here, from the latest computer virus  
to the greatest of the primates. She carries us  
through the universe. (64)

Sullivan's pronouns "you" and "our" speak to an audience acquainted with the Māori creation concept of the earth as culturally embodied, which contrasts with some Western understandings of the planet such as those informed by science. Sullivan also uses the language of human culture to describe the sea:

Among the compasses of navigators –  
star compass, wind compass, solar compass –  
a compass based on currents, such was  
the reliability of the sea. Today the sea  
is unreliable. Whatever the reason  
for El Nino – deforestation of North and South America,  
for example – El Nino has burst into the sea  
as rapidly as it has burst into our popular culture  
and our livelihoods: droughts and floods and storms  
around the rim of the Pacific, the great fluid  
of the compass a-bubble with this burst artery. (64)

By referencing "star," "wind" and "solar" compasses, Sullivan's poem looks back to the voyaging histories of Pacific Islanders, including the discovery of Aotearoa New Zealand, and then forward to "popular culture" evoking the Pacific Ocean as constant throughout time. Yet the metaphor of the Pacific as "the great fluid / of the compass a-bubble with this burst artery" proposes the unsettling effects of human-caused climate change on Pacific Islanders' relationship with the sea as a body—literally and metaphorically—of water entwined with a history of navigation and migration. The use of "compass" recalls the role of ocean navigation in Pacific Islanders' histories of

discovery and habitation. The poem describes the sea as an “artery,” an essential part of human physical survival and also references the heart, the emotional centre, suggesting that humility is deserved because the sea is as vitally linked to survival as our own organs. By characterizing the sea as a lifeline providing essential protection and guidance, Sullivan’s poetry extends beyond the notion of humility, exemplified, Bryson writes, in poetry that acknowledges “how little control we actually have over the wildness of nature” (6). Rather, Sullivan suggests the need for humility towards the planet generally, which he portrays as protective of humanity, and towards the Pacific Ocean specifically, which he embeds with historical and ancestral ‘ecology.’

Sullivan’s poetry is also aligned with Bryson’s third tenet of ecopoetry: “an indictment of an overtechnologized modern world and a warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe” (6). But Sullivan’s indictments of modernity extend ecological consequences to the cultural implications of technology, and his notions of ecological catastrophe are attuned to the effects of colonialism. “*Waka 16 Kua wheturangitia koe*” from *Star Waka* (1999), for instance, denounces the remodeling of the land by industrial technology:

where the power  
of the land powers  
a mechanical culture  
strange ships in the sky  
filled with radiation (20)

This stanza portrays Western culture as both “mechanical,” suggesting a loss of connection with nature, and “strange” to the Māori worldview. The poem condemns the ecologically damaging effects of colonial capitalism—“culture of menace to the land”—and also the ways in which Western culture dominates and subjugates Māori culture:

we are vacuumed into this  
culture of menace to the land  
we are told we would do this too if  
we had the technology  
and our people do it

to the land for people  
by people and this land  
joins the congress of scars  
on the planet a culture  
of urban decay and renewal

a culture of dead capitals  
sucking life out of new  
cities a culture that knows  
no bounds has only  
prophecies called strategies (20)

The phrase “prophecies called strategies” undermines the assurance of Western science by suggesting that what is thought to be known is only conjecture. A “culture that knows no bounds” suggests there are bounds which ought not be breached. The poem appears to warn about the potential for ecological catastrophe by proposing the erasure of nature by technological modernity: “a culture of dead capitals / sucking the life out of new cities.” Yet Sullivan’s focus on the word ‘culture’ and distinction between the technological world and “our people” suggests that the seat of ecological degradation derives from the domination of the culture of colonial capitalism over ecologically attuned Māori culture. The phrase “a mechanical culture” may refer literally to the machinery of capitalism or to the mechanistic philosophy underpinning western culture—a culture that sees things as the sums of parts, as a machine is. By using the word ‘culture’ here and later in the phrase “culture of menace to the land,” Sullivan suggests ecological degradation based on cultural difference. The words ‘mechanical’ and ‘vacuumed’ create figurative images of one culture being suctioned into another that is at once dehumanizing and unavoidable: “and our people do it / to the land.” Thus, the phrase “culture of menace to the land” explicitly blames capitalism for ecological degradation.

While this is not a new concept, Sullivan shifts the focus of earlier American ecopoetry. For instance, Gary Snyder, in “Mother Earth: Her Whales” from *Turtle Island* (1969) indicts “Capitalist-Imperialist ... male ... bureaucrats” (38) for planetary damage and Adrienne Rich’s “The Phenomenology of Anger” from *Diving into the Wreck* (1973) blames male domination for the subjugation of both women and the environment:

This morning you left the bed  
we still share  
and went out to spread impotence  
upon the world (29)

Sullivan’s poem is distinct from these American ecopoetical expressions of patriarchal capitalist domination, however, for its condemnation of Western capitalism perceived



as Indigenous cultural domination, which he portrays as leading then to ecological degradation. By linking cultural domination with ecological concerns, Sullivan's ecopoetry thus extends beyond American indictments against patriarchal capitalism.

Such negative effects of modernity on natural ecologies are similarly expressed by Sullivan in terms of the colonial transformation of Māori culture in "49 (*environment I*)," also from *Star Waka*. This poem employs the 1993 flooding of parts of the South Island township of Clyde following construction of the Clyde Dam for hydroelectricity generation to portray the effect of industrial progress on Māori culture. It imagines a future when waka-makers could also be submerged:

will the next makers of waka  
live in submarines  
so threatened by the mechanical heat  
of organised industry  
treated like residents  
of the Clyde Dam's precincts  
gold mines turned to sepia  
populations moved to hills by sermons? (53)

Waka are an important cultural signifier for Māori. The word means 'canoe,' 'conveyance' and 'kinship group.' In the poem "A Cover Sail," on the back cover of *Star Waka*, Sullivan suggests that the poetry collection itself is a metaphorical 'waka' conveying Māori culture through language: "STANZAS PEOPLED WITH STARS AND WAKA / AND SEA STROKING PAST TWO THOUSAND LINES." In the above stanzas from "49 (*environment I*)," Sullivan asks if waka makers, who are representative of Māori culture, will be submerged by Western culture—"the mechanical heat / of organised industry"—and live in submarines, an image suggesting not only isolation of Māori culture but also the impossibility of its meaningful existence. The poem links global climate change with the hierarchy of Western culture and power:

from the top  
Clinton to reduce the gas by 2011  
back to the ozone hole of 1990  
(wish I could turn the clock back

tell the younger me  
taihoa! but write more  
about home  
before he's dammed

into poems clutching reeds  
waka bobbing above) (53)

The water appears to represent colonial capitalism and implies the ongoing threat to Māori culture, including Māori literature, of submersion by Western culture. The submerged Māori poet could neither paddle the waka on the surface nor successfully write poetry while breathing through a reed. These metaphors suggest the submersion of environmentally friendly Māori culture into environmentally exploitative Western capitalism, thus connecting environmental exploitation with cultural domination.

In these poems, Sullivan suggests colonial capitalism is the cause of ecological degradation through cultural domination. Rob Nixon, in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), describes “slow” or “attritional violence” in which the effects of “rich-nation” (5) consumer capitalism—“climate change, the thawing cyrosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation” (2)—despoil environments and impoverish “poor” communities in “the global South” (4) by destroying local cultures through resource extraction and forcing local people into wage economies. Sullivan’s description of “our people” being “vacuumed into this / culture of menace” (“*Waka 16 Kua wheturangitia koe*”) evokes Nixon’s notion of “attritional violence” in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Overall, Sullivan’s poetry brings to the three tenets of ecopoetry a different way of looking at nature and the human relationship with it. “And so I bring a new lens, two, a pair of eyes / for the mission” (26), Sullivan’s speaker says in “The Great Hall” from *voice carried my family* (2005). In this poem, Sullivan is “seeking an alternative genealogy to that offered by the nation as memorialized” (Somerville 55). That is, the poem recalls different representatives of the region’s history apart from the figures of “Cook and Marsden, a WWI veteran, foundational figures of Canterbury” (26) that are reproduced in a stained-glass window described by the poem. Rather, Sullivan sees history through others’ eyes:

Tupaia’s, and another pair, Mai’s,  
two other pairs: Koa and Te Wheherua’s. Polynesian eyes  
on Cook’s several crews. (26)

As Somerville says, in this poem Sullivan makes a “quite deliberate, decision about perspective” because the poet is the agent who “‘brings’ the new perspectives rather than simply looking through them or considering them” (55). Furthermore, she says,

“the meaning of ‘eyes’ extends beyond mere perspective and becomes about witnessing and, perhaps surveillance” because the poem recalls that the “major features of New Zealand colonial-settler history may be fixed in specific and generic ‘stained-glass figures,’ but the witnessing of ‘Polynesian eyes’ is just as enduring” (55-6).

Ingrid Horrocks, in her essay “A World of Waters: Imagining, Voyaging, Entanglement” writes that Sullivan has

placed Tupaia and other Pacific voyage explorers at the centre of creative works that seek to bring the complexity of ‘a new lens, two’ to revisionary reimaginings of contact period and its legacies. (27)

While these critics are exploring Sullivan’s poetry from the standpoint of historical record, the “new lens” they reference may also be used to describe the fresh view his work brings to ecopoetry. Sullivan’s Indigenous perspective comprehends the relationships between culture and nature differently from those defined by the British/United States model of the field. It combines seeing the non-human world from a Māori or Moanan perspective—through structure, content, language and especially metaphor—with Māori scrutiny of colonial-settler treatment of that non-human world. It “bring[s] a new lens” to New Zealand’s long lineage of ecopoetry, which until recently has been seen as dominated by Pākehā voices.

### 3.2.3. Sullivan and Indigenous belonging

I am one last translation of the land  
—“Poems from Another Century, for Parihaka”

Indigenous notions of belonging to Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific region are a fundamental part of Sullivan’s poetry. It is therefore important to examine this aspect of his work more broadly before showing how his Indigenous sense of belonging is central to his poems that are ecopoetic.

In Sullivan’s poetry, a sense of belonging to place arises from cultural connection to the Pacific region through ancestry, community and oral history, rather than through the individual, physical occupation of a specific locale that underlies Turner’s notion of belonging. Sullivan’s poem “52” from *Star Waka*, for example, describes a sense of belonging to Karetu, the Northland region where Sullivan’s mother grew up. But belonging is not conceived from birthright or lived experience. Rather, Sullivan asserts connection to Karetu—which he metaphorically links to nature—through stories told by his mother: “I go back because of my mother / who planted Karetu in me” (57). The poem recalls that Sullivan is also connected to Karetu through original discovery and whakapapa:

my ancestors  
buried in the cemetery and the cave nearby  
whose waka navigated to the soil there (57)

Sullivan’s poem evokes a sense of historical cultural connection, which is in contrast to the notion of individual belonging through nature that is exemplified in Turner’s ecopoetry.

Sullivan relates a sense of ancestral connection to place in his poem “I/Eyes/Ay,” from *voice carried my family*, through his protagonist Koa, a young Māori boy who left New Zealand aboard James Cook’s ship *Resolution*, and who compares the strength of his ancestors with the ocean:

I want my father’s company  
afloat on waves so wide and deep  
all the stacked ancestors – feet  
to broad shoulders – couldn’t break them. (34)

With the phrase “all the stacked ancestors,” the poem figuratively relates the meaning of the verb ‘whakapapa’ thereby evoking the spiritual presence of ancestors and also their invocation via the skill of recitation. Sullivan juxtaposes a sense of the

strangeness of the Pacific to Cook's crew and their distance from home with Koa's innate sense of belonging via centuries of ancestral voyaging:

They've come  
a very long way they tell us  
often. We sympathise, sigh, watch  
  
their faces, time their damp sobs as  
they clutch blonde locks, then take hanks  
to examine in the comfort  
of our homes upon our return.

Their sailing technology is  
inferior, but we can learn  
so many things: fill our flax kits  
with good and evil. (34)

In this excerpt, Sullivan shows Cook's sailors as strange with their blonde hair—"we ... take hanks / to examine"—and strangers in a Pacific Ocean navigated by Pacific Islanders for centuries—"t]heir sailing technology is inferior"—a reversal of a Eurocentric view where Māori are portrayed as other. The poem evokes Indigenous belonging derived from historical ancestry, again in contrast with Turner's connection to New Zealand extending over recent colonial history.

In another poem, "Waka 56 A Double-Hulled Waka," also from *Star Waka*, Sullivan asserts historical connection to New Zealand beyond the arrival of European settlers through metaphors that engage with a sense of organic entanglement:

Maui's  
tuna of the meiosis, wrestling his  
descent, his own meiosis, the people. (61)

The above lines use the metaphor of cell division to acknowledge a line of descent from Maui who in the Māori creation story fished up the North Island (Te Ika-a-Māui) of New Zealand from the sea. Later in this poem, "The land fortified a thousand / years with our blood" (63) has a literal basis in pre-colonial Māori culture when "ancestors' bones, and their own umbilical cords and placentas, were literally 'planted' in the land from which their descendants sprang" (Salmond 326). The poem also acknowledges the Māori arts of tattooing and carving as important ways of preserving Māori culture:

Make moko in the wrinkles,  
warriors for ourselves, for our people,  
leaping from pits into bright daylight  
defying the culture of the death

of our culture. Spray out its narrative

with whakairo. (63)

These images propose a Māori sense of belonging to Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific region founded on historical cultural representations.

Furthermore, by integrating a sense of oral recitation in the structure of his poems, Sullivan proposes that belonging is preserved, or lost, through the communal tradition of language. Orr writes, “the incantatory end-stopped lines of *voice carried my family* reiterate the crucial terms of the poet’s identity as *iwi* member, not an individuated subject but a “voice” speaking a shared familial and Maori history and cosmology” (174). She observes that in “Ocean Birth” from *voice carried my family*, Sullivan foregrounds “the reworking of a traditional form, here the *mihi*” and “the importance of orality, the embodied voice of speech whose shadow at least poetry still retains” (176). She describes Sullivan’s poetic protagonist as “a self experienced not as singular, autonomous, and individual but participle and communal, guided and shaped by gods, ancestors, and family” (175). Sullivan’s use of the pronouns “our” and “we” propose a communal cultural connection to the Pacific region in contrast to Turner’s use of “I” to describe his individual, subjective notions of physical and emotive connection to the landscapes of Central Otago.

Sullivan also proposes the loss of a sense of belonging through the replacement of oral with written language. His poem “Voice carried my family, their names and stories” from *voice carried my family* portrays what Orr describes as a dichotomy between “the living speech or orature of traditional Maori culture and the deadening or embalming recording technologies of the West” (175). She says that Sullivan “simultaneously establishes the continuity and strength of the oral tradition but also suggests a historicity fading into pastness” (175). Loss of oral culture is evoked in this poem by the phrase “were spoken” which ends the first fifteen lines but changes in the final lines, as follows:

Inheritance, inheritors, were spoken.  
Tears at times were spoken.  
The narrator wrote the spoken.  
The readers saw the spoken!  
Spoken became unspoken.  
[Written froze spoken.] (11)

Orr writes that Sullivan's "choice of poetry—which retains an intimate relation to the oral and aural, to the embodied voice and to speech, to the orature so central to pre-European Māori culture—rather than the “frozen” language of “writing”—is the formal correlative of [Sullivan's] historical revisionism” (174). Furthermore: “Writing threatens to fix Pacific people in rigid and static modes of identity that are peculiarly susceptible to ‘identity theft,’ another of Sullivan’s major preoccupations” (175). Acknowledgement of the replacement of oral culture by the written word is one way in which Sullivan’s poetry suggests the shrinking of space for Māori culture within New Zealand’s settler colonial society and the consequent loss of a sense of communal identity.

Sullivan further portrays the loss of a sense of belonging through evocations of dispossession of land. “Graffiti,” the first poem from the sequence “Poems from Another Century, for Parihaka” from *voice carried my family*, posits the centrality of land to Māori selfhood through the simile of clothing: “Like the cloth / makes the man, so the land makes me,” and through the metaphor of language: “I am one last translation of the land” (61). The poem employs the image of graffiti to assert that the settlement of Māori land was illicit:

Te Whiti and Tohu Kakahi  
are of a long line, many acres,  
connected to the land. The newcomers  
have scribbled me over them,  
over land, everywhere. (61)

Te Whiti and Tohu Kakahi were pacifist prophets who protested against government land confiscations and whose settlement, Parihaka, in Taranaki, was invaded by government troops in 1881. Rather than Turner’s affirmation of selfhood through the presence of familiar natural places—an attitude that resonates with the British Romantic tradition—Sullivan’s poem relates the loss of a sense of communal belonging through the dispossession of tribal land.

### 3.2.4. Indigenous belonging in Sullivan's ecopoetry

Your talk sounds like magpies—  
all quardling oodling ardling wardling and doodling.  
—“Took: A Preface to ‘The Magpies’”

The preceding discussion, in providing a sense of how belonging manifests itself more generally in Sullivan's work, offers a basis for examining belonging more specifically in poems that are ecocentric in their concerns. By evoking Indigenous conceptions of belonging based on ancestry, historical cultural representations, lineage and oral history, Sullivan problemizes the Pākehā notion of 'belonging through nature' as portrayed in Turner's poetry and by extension the tradition from which Turner's work stems. Furthermore, Sullivan's poetry acknowledges the loss of a sense of belonging through the impact of colonialism.

To enter this discussion, it is worth a close look at Sullivan's poem “Took: A Preface to ‘The Magpies,’” from *Shout Ha! To The Sky* (2010). It is useful because the poem explicitly signals a sense of belonging based on cultural norms prior to European settlement by writing back to a poem by Denis Glover, who was working within the literary nationalist tradition from which Turner's work stems. Glover's iconic New Zealand poem “The Magpies” (1964) begins:

When Tom and Elizabeth took the farm  
The bracken made their bed,  
And *Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle*  
The magpies said.

The poem then recounts a European couple's loss of farmland to a mortgagee sale during the Depression. Sullivan's poem, however, recounts an earlier dispossession: the loss of Māori land through colonial settlement. “Took: A Preface to ‘The Magpies’” highlights the cultural gap between settler and Māori notions of occupation and belonging:

Our family were not understood.  
Not understood, the farmers said, shooing  
us down the dusty trail. Your talk sounds like magpies—  
all quardling oodling ardling wardling and doodling.

Do you mean korero, uri, arero, wairua, ruruhau, perhaps, sir? (25)

The last line of this stanza compares the incomprehensibility to European settlers of the Māori words, “korero, uri, arero, wairua, ruruhau,” and by extension Māori culture,



with the meaningless “*Quardle oodle wardle doodle*” of the ambivalent magpies in Glover’s poem, suggesting little interest on the part of the European farmers (and by extension, Glover, the Pākehā poet) in comprehending the Māori situation and plight.

Sullivan’s poem hinges on the word ‘took’ in the title, which appears in Glover’s first line: “When Tom and Elizabeth took the farm” and which Sullivan reads to mean they appropriated it. In his essay “A Poetics of Culture: Others’ and Ours, Separate and Commingled,” Sullivan says, “the word ‘took’ in the first line implies that it was taken rather than ‘given’” (11). (Glover, himself, seems more likely to have meant bought because ‘took’ can also mean ‘took over’ or ‘purchased’—but Sullivan seems to suggest that the word’s other denotation is nevertheless historically apt, and the very fact that Glover would not have meant to employ the double denotation is more or less Sullivan’s point.) In his essay, Sullivan says the phrase “Not understood” in his poem relates to Thomas Bracken’s<sup>17</sup> poem “Not Understood” (1879), which laments a loss of Christian values. Sullivan appears to use the term ironically to suggest a confiscation of Māori land was seemingly counter to Christian values. In “Took: A Preface to ‘The Magpies’” Sullivan explicates what he calls “the absence (I am tempted to say ‘erasure’) of explicit historical and political references in many works of NZ literature” which “are as political and historical, when we notice, as the inclusion of them” (10). Sullivan’s poem provides an alternative, Māori perspective to Glover’s poem, which describes the indifference of the exotic magpies to the hardships of farming during the Depression. In contrast, Sullivan’s poem describes the loss of Māori culture as well as land and native birds following European colonisation, revealing a Māori ecological consciousness. By writing back to Glover’s “The Magpies”—described by Wellington poet Bill Manhire as “the single New Zealand poem to have achieved a kind of ‘classic’ status” (12)—Sullivan raises the issue of the erasure of Māori culture through both land confiscation and New Zealand literature. Such erasure exists then in New Zealand’s long tradition of ecopoetry, of which this poem turns out to be a part, because Māori connection to the land is, for Sullivan, a part of the land’s ecology.

Sullivan’s poem enacts the erasure of language while also speaking the language. That is, it works one way if you don’t understand the Māori words (revealing them as indecipherable noise like the chatter of the magpies in Grovers’ poem) and

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Bracken (1841-98) is best known for authoring New Zealand’s national anthem, “God Defend New Zealand” (1876).

another if you do (their meanings—talk, descendants, tongue, spirit and shelter—reveal the affiliation of Māori to the land, to each other and to a willingness for conversation.) These Māori words signify connection to land based on oral and ancestral histories and a sense of home, in contrast with the commercial relationship to the land of Glover’s hard-worn settlers. In Glover’s poem, Tom and Elizabeth are forced by mortgagee sale to leave the farm, which is deemed worthless because the bank is unable to sell it. This is in opposition to the Māori valuing of the land—in Sullivan’s account—for its ancestral history, a sense of belonging and provision of home. Such difference between Māori and non-Māori notions of relationship with the land is described by fiction writer and poet Keri Hulme in her essay “Mauri: An Introduction to Bicultural Poetry in New Zealand” (1981): “The Maori relationship with the land is intense. Land is not an exploitable resource: it is *Papatuanuku*, earth mother” (302). By spotlighting the particular version of Euro-centricity of Glover’s celebrated poem—by in turn contrasting the meaning of the Māori words with the meaninglessness Europeans took them for and by highlighting a denotation of “took” that remained seemingly invisible to Glover—Sullivan reveals Māori belonging to the land as more complicated than Glover’s settler colonial sense of ownership or indeed Turner’s subjective notion of ‘belonging through nature.’ Sullivan represents land—ecology—not as a resource or as a place of solace but as inherently tied to culture through spirituality, ancestry and rites of occupation.

The loss of belonging through the dispossession of land is extended in *Shout Ha! To The Sky* (2010), which portrays connection with and disconnection from nature. “46 Spines of Smoke” employs a metaphor of ecological annihilation to express the notion of cultural eradication: “My family is a forest torn out of the ground” (66). “54 For Sure” also uses a metaphor of a tree to suggest cultural discrimination: “Our tree was too brown. Its roots were cracking the barracks wall / and the Māori were breaking the safe” (83). These lines suggest confluence between Māori and nature, here again represented by the forest, which was felled during European settlement. Colonial settlement is represented as a military force—“the barracks”—and Māori figured as thieves “breaking the safe,” thereby excluding Māori from entitlement to land and dispossessing Māori of a sense of belonging to it. “35 Biographical Data” relates the dispossessing effects of language on belonging and identity. The naming of this

country by Europeans as New Zealand<sup>18</sup> evokes in the poem's Indigenous protagonist a sense of being outcast: "Am I an exile? My country has been settled / by another race, become another place: New Zealand" (53). In these poems, Sullivan evokes the loss of physical and psychic connection between Māori and nature and ultimately from the country as a whole, through the settler colonial project. This starkly differs from Turner's notion of connection with New Zealand landscapes.

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<sup>18</sup> Veracini describes "name appropriation" as a "powerful dispossessory tool" of settler colonialism: "Naming, of course, is about and produces entitlement" (47).

### 3.2.5. Sullivan, spirituality and ecological loss

yet stars are  
ancestors

—“*Waka 16 Kua wheturangitia koe*”

Sullivan’s poetry, by explicating Māori, or Moanan spirituality, reveals the entanglement of culture and ecology in yet other ways. Specifically, his acknowledgment of connection between spirituality and natural elements expands notions of ecological encroachment, thereby complicating the notion of ecopoetry.

The one hundred poems in *Star Waka* are linked by the constraint that each must include a star, a waka, or the ocean, three vital aspects of Polynesia’s ocean voyaging history. Yet stars signify more than astronomical navigation points, as Sullivan and co-editors Albert Wendt and Reina Whaitiri explain in their joint introduction to *Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English* (2003):

The people of Polynesia carefully and meticulously recorded their whakapapa, or lineage, thus establishing and strengthening their links with the earth, the sky, the gods and each other. Polynesians also believe that when we die we become stars that help to guide the living across that huge body of water Te Moana Nui a Kiwa. (1)

In *Star Waka*, Sullivan asserts Pacific Islanders’ history of ocean navigation and discovery, which relied on connection between human and nonhuman worlds. He draws these Māori worldviews into the present to reveal tensions between them and comprehension of nonhuman ecologies as distinct from the human realm.

The numbering of the poems in *Star Waka* suggests not only “the precise mathematical foundation of navigation” but also “whakapapa” (Somerville 51) which involves counting through genealogies. Somerville says that by drawing close connections between Pacific migrations and whakapapa, “Sullivan reflects on Māori as ocean people: voyagers, navigators, travelers, deeply embedded in specific land because of, not despite, previous migrations” (52). Furthermore, by describing the maintenance of voyaging and navigation into the present, he “demonstrat[es] the understanding that ancestors live on through successive generations” (53). Somerville writes that in the following excerpt from the poem titled “i,” the “us” of the poem “exists across time” (53):

In ancient days navigators sent waka between.

Now, our speakers send us on waka. Their memories,  
memory of people in us, invite, spirit,  
compel us aboard, to home governments, to centre:  
Savai'i, Avaiki, Havaiki, Hawaiiiki, from where we peopled  
Kiwa's great sea ... (3-4)

Somerville's reading raises the centrality of ancestry to Sullivan's work, including the comprehension that ancestors reside in places and natural elements. Therefore, the environmental degradation of these places or elements not only affects physical and emotional connection to them but also erodes their cultural associations.

Another poem in *Star Waka*, "*Waka 16 Kua wheturangitia koe*," explicitly compares Western and Māori worldviews:

sun and moon  
are tagged for domination

yet stars are  
ancestors (20)

Western approaches to astronomy based on scientific discovery and the potential benefits of such exploration to humanity are contrasted here with Māori acknowledgment that stars embody spirits of ancestors. Stars, then, are embedded with culture. The poem begins:

Beloved  
sent to Hawaiiiki  
to become a star  
who guides (20)

Sullivan raises Māori connection to the nonhuman world via stars that represent the presence of guiding ancestors, yet whose light is diminished by industrial capitalism:

and stars look down on this and eyes  
of divinities  
look down on stars  
and eyes  
of the powerless look up

but only at night  
when machines  
lighten blackness  
when many stars  
are lost in the lightning

except in the papakainga

from tops of pas  
from middle of ocean  
from these places stars  
meant to be seen can be (20)

In these stanzas, starlight is lost to the artificial nightlights of modernity and is only visible in “the papakainga” (ancestral homelands) and “from middle of ocean.” Thus, the poem portrays the technologically driven power of modernity outshining the lights of stars—which are comprehended as guiding ancestors—and the natural world generally. The inability to see stars—due to light pollution—except from physically and culturally isolated places figuratively portrays the shrinking of the space for Māori culture in a technological and ecologically damaged Pacific region. The entanglement of the natural world and culture thus expands the definition of ecological encroachment beyond the physical disappearance of plants and animals or the personal sense of loss at the disappearance of nature that is familiar or produces solace. Rather, Sullivan portrays a sense of spiritual and communal loss. That is, the ecology here is not just the effects of industrial action on nature and consequently nature on human conditions but also the effect of cultural expression, such that ecology takes on not just physical and emotional connections but cultural ones.

Spirituality, even more explicitly, informs Sullivan’s portrayal of ecological degradation of specific terrestrial places. In “xviii Similitude,” also from *Star Waka*, ancestral inhabitation of particular landforms is betrayed by modernity:

sticking a pipe  
through Stonehenge –  
that’s what it is  
to direct that Mangere’s  
ancient stone fields  
have a sewage pipe  
cut through them

it is a violation of the lifeblood  
of its guardians  
to pour excrement  
through one of the few  
sacred areas left (22)

Likening the stone fields in Mangere to the globally recognised Neolithic monument in England in turn likens the significance of the ancient Māori site with that of Stonehenge to European culture. Sullivan’s poem focuses not only on the air, water

and seabed pollution caused by the nearby location of a wastewater treatment plant but rather on the “violation of the lifeblood / of its guardians” (22), a spiritual contamination. Again, the entanglement of ecology and culture expands the idea of encroachment. Similarly, “South Point, Hawai‘i” from *voice carried my family* (2005) portrays the uplifting presence of the spirits of ancestors at the site of early Hawaiian settlement in Hawai‘i despite the violation of this site by the construction of a wind farm:

We felt the spirits soar in the wild wind around us,  
wind strong enough to break the wind mills

littering the field. How they soared. We felt them.  
This spiritual harbour. We felt them more than the great heiau

lying in ruins, more than the native information centre  
with its statue of a woman in chains.

Here, the presence of spirits of ancestors is depicted as stronger than the physical presence of the windmills, and more affecting than the physical remains of the ancient temple, and the contemporary information centre. Indeed, the windmills are described as rubbish—“litter”—while the spirits of ancestors provide a “spiritual harbour,” a place of shelter.

How could the ancestors know such desecration  
would arrive in this place? Such sadness.

And yet their spirits soar here. They fly here.  
We flew here and flew, our minds and hearts flew. (15)

Such spiritual despoliation lies outside the usual measures of environmental pollution gauged by a Western worldview, which, although acknowledging violation of graveyards does not ascribe such desecration to places where no physical remains are present. “South Point, Hawai‘i and “49 (environment I)” are particularly environmentally confronting to a Western worldview in which wind farms and hydroelectric power dams are generally considered to be beneficial to the environment because they generate sustainable energy.

The distinction between Sullivan’s and Western views can be illustrated with a comparison with Turner. Turner opposes wind and hydro electricity generation projects but for different reasons. He condemns the development of hydropower schemes in Central Otago for their effect on trout habitats and on aesthetic grounds. In 2007 he

opposed a proposal by Meridian Energy to build a wind farm on the Lammermoor Range due to its visual impact. In his submission, which he recounts in *Into the Wider World*, Turner describes Central Otago and its environs as “his life’s work” and his poetry and prose as exploring “what it [Central Otago] does to one’s psyche” (353) which he describes as “a deep attachment and connection” (354-5). He says: “This is what we talk about when we refer to the spiritual, to a sense of belonging to particular places in particular regions” (355). Turner’s use of the word ‘spiritual’ to describe his sense of individual attachment to specific place differs from Sullivan’s sense of spiritual attachment through ancestral occupation and the concept of kaitiakitanga—guardianship—over places comprehended as occupied by ancestral spirits.

Sullivan’s cultural viewpoint necessitates seeing the ecological effects of technological encroachment as more wide-ranging than that of European scientific culture. The Māori worldview, as represented in Sullivan’s poetry, comprehends ancestral and spiritual entanglement with nature and reciprocal duties of guardianship between human and spiritual worlds. Such notions of ecology broaden the impacts of technological encroachment to include spiritual and historical connection to place, thereby extending and problematizing Western approaches to ecological advocacy. Sullivan, in sum, broadens the definition of ecological to include specific cultural understandings, which, in the Māori worldview, are inextricable from nature and place. Such a worldview expands, therefore, the parameters of ecopoetry, which takes ecology—the interconnections of natural systems—as its basis.

Sullivan’s work is the product of a later moment in New Zealand ecopoetry than Turner’s. It feeds into post-colonial ecocritical understandings, which have done a lot of work to modulate the tendency towards a mono-cultural point of view. Sullivan’s work sharpens our awareness of “the universal claims of some strains of western ethics” (DeLoughrey 2014 325), which appear in work such as Turner’s. It offers, in contrast, a communal cultural view of ecologies and elucidates Māori concepts that perceive colonial progress and development as culturally, and therefore ecologically, harmful (although Turner does perceive present-day ‘progress’ as ecologically harmful). It adds to the ongoing work of postcolonial ecocritical understanding, in which, “Now, more than ever, postcolonial approaches to the environmental humanities help complicate and clarify the historical power relations that underpin global ecologies” (DeLoughrey et al 2015 7). Sullivan’s poetry helps to undo the privileging of Western environmental philosophies by giving voice to specific



Indigenous perspectives in Aotearoa New Zealand, which reveal cultural tensions in approaches to ecopoetry, and ecology, in this country. Some awareness of these cultural tensions, as well as shifting Pākehā comprehensions of nature, will be explored in the next section of this thesis, which examines *Flow: Whanganui River Poems* (2017) by Airini Beautrais.

### 3.3.1. Whanganui poet Airini Beautrais (b. 1982)

Airini Beautrais has published four collections of poetry since 2006, the most recent of which is *Flow: Whanganui River Poems* (2017). This 181-page work contains one hundred poems about the Whanganui catchment, an area extending south from the Waikato locality of Horokino to the river mouth at the city of Whanganui on the west coast of the North Island. Beautrais's collection traces the catchment's geology, ecologies and histories of human settlement from 1864 until 2014, a 150-year period encompassing the breadth of New Zealand's colonial, ecological and cultural transformations.

Poems portray change within a settler colonial history, traversing Māori resistance to European settlement, the hardships endured by Pākehā settlers especially in battles with the land, the detrimental effects of environmental alteration, late-twentieth-century opposition to continued deforestation and present-day cultural interface between Māori and Pākehā. They shift between empathy for Māori and empathy for colonial settlers. Some poems condemn the degrading cultural and ecological effects of the colonial project while others recognize changing ecological attitudes amongst Pākehā, including Pākehā acceptance of some Māori environmental concepts. In *Flow*, the Whanganui catchment works as a microcosm of New Zealand from the nineteenth century until the present while at the same time retaining its own specific histories. Its stories of individuals and events are local but reflect a national history of cultural and environmental alteration.

*Flow* is divided into three sections. The first considers the history of the Whanganui catchment from 1864-2014 and intersperses historical accounts of European settlement with present-day reflections. It focuses on the violent impact of settlement on nature, Māori and on settlers themselves. However, like the robin “reappearing, disappearing, returning” in “Tributaries *Taumarunui to Piropiro*, 2014” (68), native fauna and Māori culture are present then absent then present again, suggesting the resilience of both nature and culture. The second section considers the transformed landscape constructed by settler colonialism. It recognises different ways of seeing. For example, “Map-making” describes a European surveyor's description of wetlands as “*Waste*” (88) while “*Kākahi Freshwater mussel / Echyridella spp.*”

laments the depletion of this Māori food source that the wetland sustained. The third section focuses on the river mouth and beach. It considers the unpredictable properties of sand and the failure of human attempts to control it, and by extension, to control nature generally.

The book deals with the complexity of this history on several levels. Structurally, Beautrais disrupts narrative by not setting historical and contemporary poems in chronological order. Formally, she employs a variety of poetic forms—including the ballad—and different points of view to portray multiple perspectives. And this refusal to provide a single through-line, in turn, carries into a complexity in the attitudes of these poems. They evoke the ugliness of present-day ecological transformation in the Whanganui region and lament the depletion of indigenous species and Indigenous culture—yet they acknowledge the complexities of the Pākehā relationship with ecological and cultural transformation. For instance, like Turner, they recognise the pleasures of angling but they also lament the native fish species that trout supplanted. Like Sullivan, they recognise the effects of colonial ecological losses on Māori lifestyle. But they also foresee the possibility of ecological recuperation arising from increased resonance between Pākehā and Māori conceptions of nature.

By describing the refracted lives of individuals and the shifting interface between Pākehā and Māori at a time of complex change, *Flow* suggests entanglement between culture and nature. In Beautrais's Victoria University doctoral thesis "Narrativity and Segmentivity in Contemporary Australian and New Zealand Long Poems and Poem Sequences" (2015), in which *Flow* first appeared, she likens the physical and social environments portrayed in *Flow* to "a beach strewn with debris after a storm" (147). This notion recalls Herbert Guthrie-Smith's conclusion in his 1953 edition of *Tutira: The Story of a New Zealand Sheep Station* that individuals, unable to "withstand the stream of tendency" are "drawn like water into the whirlpool, like dust into the draught" (xiii). Guthrie-Smith's notion is explicated in some of Beautrais' poems that portray individual European settlers caught up in the colonial process, and the often unintended, degrading environmental effects of their work. Alex Calder in *The Settlers' Plot* (2011) writes that Guthrie-Smith describes "a long view that allows us to see the settlement of New Zealand by Europeans ... in terms of processes and tendencies that resist reduction to the cartoon binaries of colonist or invader, improvement or ruination" (156). Beautrais's work aligns with Guthrie-

Smith's approach by portraying complex cultural and political tensions surrounding the construction of this country's present ecological environment.

In *Flow*, Beutrais suggests a generational shift in Pākehā attitudes towards nature and culture in Aotearoa New Zealand in the twenty-first century. On the one hand, her poetry portrays the remarkable feats and failures of Pākehā settlers—including her own ancestors—who deforested land and built the Whanganui region's first roads, dams, tram and railway lines. However, these poems remain alert to the unsustainability of the timber milling enterprise, the wearying physical and psychic effects of land transformation on Pākehā settlers, the creation of erosion and flood prone land and the loss of indigenous species. They also acknowledge histories of acquisition of Māori land. These, as Beutrais writes in her poem "Roads," "it has recently emerged, aren't entirely factual" (38).<sup>19</sup> These poems critique, and at times subvert, traditional European settler histories by evidencing—alongside the triumphs—the failures, and the degrading, often unintended, environmental consequences.

On the other hand, Beutrais's work is aware that this settler history—failures and feats—is only part of the river's story. It suggests awareness of significant differences between Māori and Pākehā notions of nature and the human relationship with it. Inclusion of Māori names for places, plant and animal species is a reminder of the significance of the river catchment to local iwi, and of the adoption of some Māori words and concepts by some Pākehā New Zealanders over the last 15-20 years. In her dedication to *Flow*, Beutrais highlights the significance of the 2014 Treaty of Waitangi settlement between Whanganui iwi and the Crown, which included "the world-leading step of according legal personhood to the Whanganui River" (13), a status based on Māori embodiment of culture as inherently tied to ecology. Going further, Beutrais acknowledges the longer—and stronger—claim of local Māori. In her dedication she recognizes her own cultural position, writing, "the significance of the relationships between Whanganui iwi and the river cannot be adequately addressed by a Pākehā writer" (13). She writes that six generations of her family have lived in the Whanganui region and she has "a strong personal connection to the river" (13). Yet in conversation at a public reading of excerpts of *Flow* at the Palmerston North City Library on 20 April 2018, she said she still feels like "something of an interloper," thus giving precedence to Māori as original inhabitants.

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<sup>19</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Beutrais are from *Flow* (2017) and will be cited by page numbers parenthetically in the text.

The complex issue of land and belonging in New Zealand is described by historian and anthropologist Anne Salmond in *Tears of Rangi: Experiments Across Worlds* (2017) as an “ontological collision, a clash between different ‘worlds’ or ways of being” (355). Salmond writes: “In New Zealand, as elsewhere, it is likely that the most intransigent obstacles to solving environmental (and other) challenges lie at the level of presupposition” (315). She says: “The ‘Order of Things’ is now inscribed in the landscape” in “ownership regimes based on ideas of property and trespass” (342) which have “displace[ed] other, alternative ways of seeing and organizing relations among people, and between people and the land” (343). These include Māori conceptions of whakapapa, ancestral connections and use rights of tangata whenua (326), which are in opposition to the Western tradition of a “Cartesian split between mind and matter ... a sense that people are detached from the ecosystems that make their lives possible” (343). Salmond nevertheless finds some resonance between Māori and Pākehā including “a willingness by a non-Māori majority in New Zealand to recognise the value of Māori conceptions” (410). She provides as an example of this resonance the 2014 Whanganui River Waitangi Tribunal agreement that Beutrais highlights in *Flow*’s dedication.

Like Turner, Beutrais reveals changing Pākehā environmental attitudes over time, although her work describes environmental activism and a sense of optimism in contrast with Turner’s eventual attitude of despair. Beutrais draws her family into poems about the tree top protests by the Native Forest Action Council that “point to changing Pākehā attitudes towards the natural environment” (2015 144). Her own ancestors are depicted as surveyors who facilitated the construction of the railway, which led to sawmilling and deforestation while her father, through his support of 1980s activists who prevented the milling of portions of native forests, represents a new attitude of environmental protection. Beutrais and her children are figured as beneficiaries of this shift from valuing nature as an economic resource to considering it worthy of preservation in its own right.

Beutrais’s portrayal of the interactions between nature and culture in a settler colonial landscape and her positive visions for the future suggest attitudes and approaches described within the framework of postcolonial ecocriticism. In the introduction to *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches* (2015), DeLoughrey et al, speaking about fiction, say:

Due to the ways in which histories of colonialism have displaced and

alienated people from the land, the imaginative and material act of ecological recuperation is often deeply fraught. Consequently, far from any idealized notions of harmony and balance, postcolonial environmental representations often engage with the legacies of violent material, environmental, and cultural transformation. (5)

Furthermore, the editors write, “discussions of narrative, visual and creative works from different regions can advance understanding of the specificity of ecological concerns as well as anticipatory visions for the future” (2). Beautrais’s *Flow* is an important addition to these works because it portrays some specific outcomes of colonial ecological transformation in Aotearoa New Zealand for people and ecologies. Furthermore, it steps beyond evocations of the violence of such transformations and imagines the possibility of future ecological restoration, an attitude that reflects the increasing social and political concern for environmental issues in this country presently. As DeLoughrey et al write: “Language and narrative ... are integral to conceptualizing both the legacies of rupture and the possibilities of recuperation and transformation” (5). In *Flow*, Beautrais brings to contemporary New Zealand ecopoetry a portrayal of settler colonial New Zealand as ecologically ruptured and a vision of it as capable of recuperation.

### 3.3.2. How Beutrais complicates the basic tenets of ecopoetry

The small and the slimy are fit for ignoring  
—“Trout  
*Oncorhynchus mykiss*  
*Salmo trutta*”

In Beutrais’s work, Bryson’s first tenet of ecopoetry, “an ecocentric perspective that recognizes the interdependent nature of the world” (4-5), is evident in portrayals of the loss of natural ecologies as a result of human endeavour. The settler colonial landscape in which Beutrais finds herself is most often portrayed in her poems as ugly and degraded. Her poem “Beachcombing along the tidal reaches,” for instance, describes the polluted foreshore where nature lives with human detritus. The marks of snails and crabs are visible beside “the bleached bones of last year’s bloated cow,” the sounds of “a phone” and “a persistent rumbling” (148). The beach is littered with the remains of botched human efforts to control nature: “concrete, tyres, laid out / in failed attempt to force the river’s shape” and “rotten slipways” (148). Beutrais looks across the Whanganui River estuary and observes “Taranaki set upon a warehouse / like a chunk of dirty polystyrene” (148). This poem serves as “a reminder of the conflicts between human endeavour and natural processes” (2015 147), which Beutrais writes is one of the themes of *Flow*. It portrays the interdependent nature of the world in a settler colonial setting as evidenced by environmental violence and transformation.

*Flow*’s opening poem, “Confluence *Taumarunui, 2013*,” for instance, portrays the result of interdependence between nature and settler colonial New Zealanders as a degrading modernity. This poem is set at the confluence of two rivers. The Ōngarue River where the speaker’s brother, Joe, fishes is “clean-looking” at “this time of year” because “there’s no run-off” (21)—a reference to nitrogen leaching from farmland. But the Whangaehu River that joins it is “*never* clean” (21). The poem portrays water as a commercial resource and source of tension amongst users:

It’s the end of a dry summer:

wine connoisseurs have been rubbing  
hands together, anyone with grass  
has been downcast. (21)

On the riverbanks are introduced willows, poplars, Japanese walnuts, cherries, corn; and one indigenous tree—but it is not whole: “half a tōtara” (21)—and pollution:

“disposable nappies, circles of bourbon bottles” (22). Joe is fishing for introduced trout, which are eaten with “wild greens harvested from New World” (22). He  
has taken to braining trout with a rock,

rather than knifing between the eyes, like he taught me.  
People will do all kinds of things to come down to earth. (22).

This violence against the fish in an attempt “to come down to earth” suggests that the degraded nature has had a degrading effect on Joe, a notion of interdependence at odds with the “interdependent nature of the world,” which Bryson argues “leads to a devotion to specific places and to the land itself, along with those creatures that share it with humankind” (5). Rather, this poem portrays an uneasy interdependence between people and nature because of awareness that nature has been humanly degraded. At the poem’s conclusion, Joe maintains, for now, his off-the-grid lifestyle, drifting off to sleep in his car. But even “the sound of water” is subject to exotic modification: “the poplar leaves slapping” (22). Such representations portray the notion of interdependence between people and nature within a settler colonial country as an absence of indigenous nature and the presence of nature that has been constructed by human agency.

Bryson’s second tenet of ecopoetry, “humility in relationships with both human and nonhuman nature,” is also evident in portrayals of ecological loss. Beutrais’ poem “Grayling Upokororo / *Prototroctes oxyrhynchus*” describes the extinct native fish species. Here is the poem in full:

Small, insignificant fish.  
Even your name is formless.

Null, extinct, extinguished.  
Even your form is homeless. (95)

This short poem highlights some features of the fish species that was displaced by introduced trout. In its plain, unadorned language and its brevity, the poem mimics the small size and plainness of the fish. This mimicry, and the lack of a subjective speaker, produces a tone of self-effacement through the paying of attention to the fish. The poem is ironic, showing us what we already know—that no species, no matter how small or plain, should be so ignored, the way grayling was when trout were introduced into New Zealand rivers.



Yet Beutrais's humility in portraying the extinct, native fish is complicated by the preceding poem "Trout / *Oncorhynchus mykiss* / *Salmo trutta*" which appears to celebrate trout. This 85-line poem employs rhyme and line-ending verbs that heighten representations of the colours and liveliness of trout, suggesting admiration for the species, such as in the third stanza, which describes the newly spawned fish:

Yellow sac'd alevin clustered in hiding  
colliding  
together, translucent, light-bending  
freckled and blending  
to stone-colour, matching  
each roll to the current's tug, latching, unlatching. (91)

The poem also appears to celebrate angling:

There is a beauty  
in marking a cluster  
each to his stone  
wet to bone  
in the pooling  
where the wide-spooling  
hook shimmers, dangling. (93)

These representations would seem to recall Turner's angling poems. However, Beutrais adds a layer to Turner's appreciation of trout and fishing by acknowledging in the tenth stanza the native fish they supplanted:

That which was here first is caught in the jawing,  
the gnawing  
of newness works to uncover.  
Seek to recover  
then fall to a culling:  
newcomers spread and their numbers keep swelling. (93)

"That which was here first" implies the native fish species including grayling that trout replaced. Earlier in the poem, the lines: "A weeding / of weakness, of small things" (92) suggest the dominance of trout over the smaller, native fish. The poem's penultimate stanza implicitly critiques the global culture of fly-fishing:

The small and the slimy are fit for ignoring  
the roaring  
of rapids calls to the rover.  
All the world over  
tales in the telling  
Keep travellers coming, each one of them calling. (93)

Beautrais implies that the practice of anglers coming from other countries to experience trout fishing in a New Zealand setting is an act of forgetting those ecologies—“The small and the slimy”—that existed in pre-European times. Like the “histories of human and plant diaspora and resettlement” which call “attention to our very assumptions about what is a natural landscape” (DeLoughrey 2011 266), Beautrais’s poem foregrounds the relationship between colonization and ecology in the context of New Zealand fish species. It reveals, as DeLoughrey suggests postcolonial ecocriticism does, “how globalization discourse employs homogenizing narratives that ignore the history of empire and its ongoing legacies of violence” (DeLoughrey 2014 321). Beautrais’s fish poems retain humility in relation with the nonhuman world while at the same time engaging with the complexity suggested by the fact that nonhuman nature has been constituted by human agency. While Bryson’s notion of humility is based on the idea of “how little control we actually have over the wildness of nature” (6), Beautrais shows that ‘wildness’ is not always what it seems. That is, trout running ‘wild’ in New Zealand rivers are in fact products of human intervention that have displaced ‘wild,’ or indigenous, nature. She thereby broadens, within the settler colonial setting, Bryson’s second tenet of ecopoetry.

Bryson’s third tenet of ecopoetry, “an indictment of an overtechnologized modern world and a warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe” (6), is evident in “Confluence *Taumarunui*, 2013,” discussed above. At the end of this poem, Beautrais explicitly predicts continued degradation of waterways and reduced access to unpolluted rivers when Joe laments: “‘I think I’ll remember these as the good old days’” (22), implying that even fishing in New Zealand’s waterways will soon become a thing of the past. But in the final poem of this first section of *Flow*, Beautrais offers an alternate vision that suggests the limitations of Bryson’s tenet. In “Huihui *Taumarunui* 2014,” Joe is again fishing at the confluence of the rivers. Summer is over and the rivers are swollen with rain. There are a jet boat on the ramp, kayakers in the Whanganui, a sports club called “*Home of the Eels*” (70). These descriptions evoke a sense of positive human participation in the rivers’ environs. The poem’s closing image is of a gathering together of nature and culture:

Ngapuwaiwaha marae,  
Ngahuihuinga community gardens,  
the old name for Cherry Grove.  
Huihui: to gather. Like water does. (70)

By naming in both Māori and English, Beutrais ascribes the cultural importance of iwi while also acknowledging dual cultural pasts. The final line of this poem “Huihui: to gather. Like water does” (70) depicts a sense of two cultures coming together through a shared history of place, a union linked metaphorically back to nature through Joe fishing at the confluence of the Whanganui and Ōngarue rivers. This confluence of environmental and cultural perspectives is enlarged in the next poem “Puanga” in which children are making a model of a river in a classroom that embraces both Pākehā and Māori language and concepts:

Over the radio, silence.  
Then the swish of piupiu,

tread of feet,  
pat of plastic poi.

Stillness. Silence moves  
across the airwaves.

A drum, a guitar strum  
breaks it. Girls open their throats.

The sound of lungs filling.

The loosing of tongues. (77)

The “loosing of tongues” suggests the sharing of language between cultures within an environment that comprises European and Māori artifacts. The radio is turned off while the children dance wearing “piupiu”—flax skirts—and swing “poi”—soft balls spun during Māori song or dance—which are made of the modern material, plastic. This poem begins and ends with the line, “The children are making the river” (77, 79), suggesting an optimistic approach to ecology. Its portrayal of a bi-cultural educational environment promoting ecological awareness and protection implies the possibility of ecological recovery as an alternative to Bryson’s warning of catastrophe in his tenet. This notion of ecological recuperation, which also requires cultural reuperation and connection, links Beutrais’s work to Sullivan’s. While Sullivan portrays ecological degradation flowing from cultural degradation, Beutrais raises the possibility of restoration flowing from positive connections between culture and ecology.

### 3.3.3. Beautrais, ecological loss and colonial transformation

And what can the land do but take cover?  
Like a lover you'll never get over.  
—"Kauarapaoa"

Beautrais's sense of ecological loss focuses on the colonial transformation of pre-European New Zealand ecologies. This approach aligns her work with recent writing that offers "new perspectives on how environmental change is entwined with the narratives, histories and material practices of colonialism and globalization" (DeLoughrey et al 2015 2). Beautrais expands Bryson's tenet of interdependence that "leads to a devotion to specific places and the land" (6) by portraying the widespread deforestation of the Whanganui catchment area by European settlers as ecologically degrading, and disastrous for many settlers as well,

Poems she sets in the past in "Catchment," the first section of *Flow*, are alert to the unsustainability of the settler forestry enterprise, the creation of flood and erosion-prone land, and the troubling impact of temporary forestry settlements on inhabitants. "Tree-oh! *Kākahi*, 1914" is a homage to bushmen's hard work but foresees a future without the need for their skills:

Mill No. 2 is all cut out,  
two years for No. 1.  
There'll be a strange peace settles here  
with all the bushmen gone. (42)

Many poems suggest the grimness of the situation. "Only dancing *Kākahi*, 1916," describes bushman David Jeffrey's attempts to murder his wife and children. "That winter *Ōngarue*, 1923" portrays the Main Trunk Line express train disaster in which seventeen people died as a result of a landslide on a deforested hillside. "Final Whistle *Ōngarue*, 1966" evokes a mindset focused on commercial exploitation as a bushman laments the end of the industry but derives satisfaction from the knowledge that "they've sawn every dip and ridge, left / nothing of value" (63). "Out of the ground / *Waimiha*, 1930s," is the only poem in this section that mentions birds and, in this poem, the rescued bird, like "the children's pets [that] all died" (49) seems unlikely to survive.

In poems she sets in the twenty-first century, Beautrais often portrays a ruined landscape. "Forgotten world *State Highway 43*, 2014," for instance, compares the hills with a bad haircut:

The hills look like they have undercuts,  
the sides shorn close, trees left on top,

where it's too steep to fell. (54)

“Kauarapaoa” portrays settled farmland as degraded to the point of deathly:

All over, loose exotic scrub:  
gum, willow, wattle, elder, poplar, broom  
... rends of slip-soil dull and drab.  
... a face of manuka sprayed dead.  
Sheep crawl amongst the sticks to feed  
on threads of green, wherever greenness lives.  
Across the road, like greying bones  
lie slash-piles of cut-over pines.  
And the naked peaks roll on forever  
like a lover you'll never get over. (120)

Each of this poem's three stanzas ends with the line “like a lover you'll never get over.” In the final stanza this line is preceded with: “And what can the land do but take cover?” (121), suggesting nature's limited resilience. The melancholic refrain evokes Beutrais's sense of the perceived beauty of the lost pre-European forest and the necessity of endless lament, a sense of sorrow rather than ‘devotion.’

In addition to focusing on the loss of pre-European ecologies, Beutrais links such historical losses with present-day attempts to control nature. In a series of sonnets in *Flow's* third section, “The Moving Sand,” she features stories and observations of the history of the Whanganui port and township interspersed with accounts of shipwrecks on the Whanganui bar between 1895 and 1939. These accounts suggest the ongoing strength and constancy of nature in opposition to human endeavour, exemplified in the final line of “Port Bowen,” named for the ship that ran aground on Castlecliff Beach in 1939: “Come into me, I'll have you, said the sea” (164). More recent attempts to dredge a port in the river mouth are portrayed in “Longshore drift” as further failed human attempts to control nature: “the sand piles up, the dunes come marching down” (166).

Yet, despite these evocations of nature's strength, other poems portray nature as unable to endure some forms of human encroachment. “Dead Port” explicitly warns against recent plans to dredge the sea: “We'll have decimated fish stocks once they're gone, / and an injured ecosystem to pass on” (169). This poem references the debilitating environmental effects of an earlier venture that exploited the seabed for

commercial gain: the Waipipi iron sand plant on the south Taranaki coast, which operated from 1971-87:

The seabed will be ruined,  
and any venture mothballed anyhow.  
Just look at Waipipi—what is it now? (169)

By evoking the poor environmental—and commercial—outcome of this earlier project, the poem warns against repeating previous mistakes. But another poem, “Shifting Sand,” suggests that, despite awareness of nature’s limits, attempts to control nature are ongoing. This poem portrays the language used in contemporary discussions about environmental alteration as somewhat hollow. It incorporates ecological jargon—“eco-thrifty,” “eco-design,” “carbon-wise”—in what appear as facile arguments against present-day seabed alteration. A sense of misrepresentation and confusion is evoked in such lines as: “‘Eco-thrifty’ means you invest upfront and save energy, / save money and help the environment,” “When you engage in eco-design you just observe / how does nature do it,” and, “Bad design is expensive, / monetarily and carbon-wise” (155). The accumulation of these assertions without supporting information or subjective interpretation appears to mimic simplistic claims that are frequently made, and which are often hard to make sense of. These two poems, “Dead Port” and “Shifting Sand,” present an attitude of skepticism towards the effectiveness of present-day efforts to control, mimic and protect nature. They suggest a continuation, in some quarters at least, of colonial attitudes of domination over nature, despite histories of failure and debilitating environmental outcomes—a continuation of ecological violence from colonial times until the present. Beutrais thereby recognises Bryson’s “interdependent nature of the world” and extends beyond his suggestion of “devotion to specific places and the land itself” with recognition of the degrading effects of human activity on ecologies, and on people.

### 3.3.4. Beautrais and environmental activism

I heard the chainsaw's grinding speech  
and over that, a kākā's screech.

—"Treetops  
*Pureora, 1978*"

Still, if Beautrais suggests some continuation of the colonial mindset towards control and domination of nature, she also celebrates changing Pākehā attitudes towards the environment over time. Two poems set in modern times at the end of *Flow's* first section, "Catchment," relate a desire for ecological preservation through activism located within New Zealand's environmental movement. "Treetops *Pureora, 1978*" projects the ecologically empathetic point-of-view of an activist who is lodged in a tree in the Pureora Forest in 1978 when the remaining section of native forest was tagged for commercial logging:

I heard the chainsaw's grinding speech  
and over that, a kākā's screech.  
At the same time, there came a swell

of song. It was a haunting sound,  
as if the kōkako could weep  
for all that came beneath the sweep  
of dozers as they bared the ground. (64)

The poem portrays the activists who hid in trees as courageous for risking their lives to save the native forest:

A trunk's impact could kill,  
  
depending on the way it dropped.  
It hit the earth, and he was thrown  
around. He made his presence known.  
It shook them up. The logging stopped (65)

Empathy for ecologies that live in the forest, as well as the trees and vines, underlies this poem's account of the successful action by the Native Forest Action Council to stop the logging. But Beautrais's portrayal of this initial success is somewhat reduced by recognition of the extent of deforestation and the difficulty of protecting native species in the patches of forest that remain:

the hardest push  
was working to restore the bush,

to stitch these fragments up again. (65)

Beautrais employs the ballad form, a form she uses for many of the poems in this section that she sets in colonial times and in the first half of the twentieth century. The speakers in these poems present changing environmental perspectives over time ranging from bushmen who celebrate the commercial logging of the forest to the activist in this poem who celebrates the forest's preservation. Repetition of the traditional form creates a sense of continuity and connectivity between the voices of the various speakers they foreground. In this way, Beautrais draws together these Pākehā viewpoints into a shared history of settlement and of place, creating a sense of complicity and shared responsibility for both environmental degradation and rehabilitation.

Another poem in the "Catchment" section, "Tributaries *Taumarunui to Piropiro*, 2014," strengthens a sense of continuity between Pākehā settlers and contemporary environmentalists. This poem describes the poet and her parents—it uses the 'Beautrais' family name—cleaning family gravestones, an action which connects her family to a history of colonial settlement and environmental degradation. While they do this work, the conversation turns to Beautrais's father's history of environmental activism. By juxtaposing actions that honour the family's settler past with discussions about environmental protection, Beautrais shows a generational change in Pākehā attitudes towards nature. Furthermore, by employing the Māori word *whakapapa* to describe her family lineage—"This cemetery / is as far back as we know our Beautrais whakapapa" (67)—she suggests her own generation's increasing familiarity with, and adoption of, some Māori words and concepts.

In this poem, Beautrais relates disagreement between Pākehā over the value of nature, via the voice of her father:

'They vindictively clearfelled, then replanted with pines,  
Douglas Fir, or whatever they felt like,' says Dad.  
'Whaddaya mean, *vindictively*?' asks my mum.  
'Every time we said "Why don't we protect this bit?"

they went in and logged it.' (68)

The conflict between environmental activists and forestry companies in the 1970s portrayed in this conversation suggests comparatively recent resistance to the protection of indigenous forests in this country. The poem goes on to portray the forest that remains because the activists prevented it from being logged as now shared by



people and nature. For example, it references the “Timber Trail,” a cycleway that uses the forest in a commercial and environmentally friendly manner. The line, “It feels like the bush will swallow us up” (68), suggests physical, and perhaps also psychic, envelopment. The poem’s concluding lines, “A robin follows us out, hiding in the manuka, / reappearing, disappearing, returning” (68) invokes the return and resilience of those native birds that were absent from the felled landscape and from the European settler consciousness portrayed by Beutrais in the historical poems in this section. The image suggests the recuperation of ecologies previously damaged by colonial settlement through the efforts of the descendants of those colonial settlers. By connecting the past with the present, Beutrais implies the importance of recalling past ecological destruction in present efforts towards repair. In doing so, she extends Bryson’s tenet warning of the “potential for ecological catastrophe” by envisioning rather the potential for ecological restitution.

### 3.3.5. Beautrais and ecological loss in a cultural context

your cup will never hold an eel again.  
—“Hīnaki”

As well as recalling the effects on nature of colonial deforestation and swamp drainage, Beautrais’s poems recall the impact of such destruction on the pre-colonial Māori lifestyle. In poems that are in sympathy with extinct or endangered species, Beautrais raises cultural complications regarding the circumstances of their declines. She signals this in the titles of six short poems that include the species’ Māori names alongside English and Latin names: “Grayling *Upokororo* / *Prototroctes oxyrhynchus*,” “Kākahi *Freshwater mussel* / *Echyridella spp.*” “Kōura *Freshwater crayfish* / *Paranephrops planifrons*,” “Lamprey *Piharau* / *Geotria australis*,” “Spoonbill *Kōtuku ngutupapa* / *Platalea regia*” and “Tuna *Longfin eel* / *Anguilla dieffenbachii*.” Beautrais thus suggests that Indigenous cultural associations are as crucial to the ecological and intrinsic significance of these species as are Western notions of their importance.

These titles in turn carry implications in the bodies of the poems. “Kākahi / *Freshwater mussel* / *Echyridella spp.*” ascribes farming, and by extension Pākehā colonialism, as culpable for a lack of mussels for consumption. Here is the poem in full:

The water low,  
the run-off thick  
the host-fish sparse,  
the shells sealed shut.  
Twenty-two sites,  
only one fit  
to harvest from.  
An empty sack. (85)

The low water and thick “run-off” point to the detrimental effects on freshwater quality of irrigation and nitrogen leaching from farmland. By assigning the Māori name “Kākahi” to the freshwater mussel, the “empty sack” from “[t]wenty-two sites” is suggestive of the harmful effects of farming on Māori customary fishing rights. In other poems, Beautrais brings home the connections between natural losses and cultural ones by suggesting the way that both are preserved more in symbol than

reality. “Hīnaki” invokes the pre-colonial Māori lifestyle, dispensing with an English translation of its title, which means eel trap:

Open O each end of the ovoid net,  
funnelled, bent back, dark with tannin stain,  
hung in a glass case over a model weir,  
though where the poles remain the traps are set,  
your cup will never hold an eel again.  
Amidst your star-weave, small stones still adhere. (108)

The lines “hung in a glass case over a model weir” and “your cup will never hold an eel again” make explicit the loss of a viable Māori food source, contrasting the elevation of the trap preserved as a cultural relic in a museum with the living Māori culture that has been undermined. Similarly, “Whio / Blue duck/*Hymenolaimus malacorhynchos*” contrasts the image of the blue duck on the New Zealand \$10 banknote with the duck in nature, which is as “Hard to come by” (87) as money:

The low guttural groan,  
the whistle. How they hone  
it, in clear water, pair  
judiciously. They wear  
a monetary hue.  
Hard to come by, that blue. (87)

This poem even more overtly than “Hīnaki” critiques a tendency to value symbol over substance, representation over thing. Just as the picture of the duck is a representation, money itself is merely a representation of value, suggesting, perhaps, a misplacing of value—the substitution of the valuing of capitalist consumerism, rather than the valuing of nature that sustained pre-colonial Māori culture.

In addition to acknowledging the effects of ecological losses caused by colonialism on the pre-colonial Māori lifestyle, Beutrais demonstrates empathy with Māori embodiment of culture as inherently tied to ecology. In “Flood” she gives voice to the river, permitting it to express its displeasure at Pākehā environmental transformation. She positions it as a poem speaker alongside the voices of flood-affected local residents:

Did you imagine I’d go wide as this?  
Lap up your streets?  
The lumpen stopbanks easy to dismiss (126)

Stopbanks along riverbanks to channel water away from homes and pasture played an important part in the conversion of wetlands to farmland in New Zealand. The word

‘lumpen’ in the above excerpt suggests both the uneven shape of the stopbanks and the coarseness of human attempts to contain the river, and by extension nature. As this poem progresses, the language used by the river becomes increasingly rancorous:

I pop the lids of sewers, make them spume,  
I enter every pleasant room  
all bitter; spewy, indiscriminate.  
Congeal all with my aggregate  
of silt and stick,  
of faecal slick,  
choke up your holds and leave you desperate. (128)

In the final stanza, the river grants the ability of land to provide for humanity but warns of the consequences of deforestation:

this young geology is supple-sewn.  
It answers to your blood and bone,  
but strip it bare:  
you must prepare.  
I’ll be the worst that you have ever known. (129)

In contrast with Sullivan, who portrays natural elements as both life giving and protective of Polynesian people, and Polynesian people as entangled with natural elements: “we are skin of the ocean” (“Ocean Birth,” *voice carried my family*, 2005 37) the river in Beutrais’s “Flood” is portrayed as detached from the catchment’s human inhabitants. It becomes antagonistic and violent towards them. It appears to resent the abuse it has received from European settlers, suggesting perhaps a lack of union between Pākehā and nature. By suggesting tensions between Māori and Pākehā comprehensions of and interactions with nature, Beutrais extends Bryson’s recognition of “the interdependent nature of the world” by showing the complex ways such interdependence manifests in a settler colonial country.

### 3.3.6. Beautrais and a vision of ecological recuperation

Huihui: to gather. Like water does.

—“Huihui

*Taumarunui 2014*”

If *Flow* brings to ecopoetry awareness of tensions between Māori and Pākehā notions of nature and the human relationship with it, it also suggests the possibility of burgeoning reconciliation. Beautrais portrays a generational shift in New Zealand towards a greater understanding of Māori concepts relating to nature at a time when Māori words and some concepts are a part of everyday speech and thought. Poems that mention her children, who would seem to represent the future, evoke a sense of changed Pākehā attitudes towards valuing nature in its own right rather than as a resource, and a greater understanding of Māori conceptions regarding nature.

A sense of resonance between Māori, Pākehā and nature as represented by the river and the stars is evoked in “Puanga,” which opens *Flow*’s middle section, “A Body of Water.” The poem alternates between the names “Puanga” and “Rigel,” the Māori and English terms, respectively, for the brightest star in the constellation of Orion, thereby foregrounding the Māori and European mythologies from which the names originate. The poem also references ‘Subaru,’ the Japanese name for Matariki, connecting Whanganui with its sister city Nagaizumi-cho in Japan, another Pacific culture. But it asserts the dominance, locally at least, of the Māori name over the others:

This is Matariki, or the Pleiades,  
or Subaru.

But in Whanganui,  
Puanga is the star  
we look for in the new year. (78)

And later:

From here, Puanga.  
From here, Rigel.

In the sky a hunter stands  
on his hands,  
both feet upwards.

In a tank a real eel.

The silver of īnanga. (79)

The “hunter” in the sky is the star cluster Orion, which takes its name in Western culture from the mythical Greek hunter. Juxtaposing the image of this “hunter” with the “real” eel in the tank and the īnanga—an indigenous species of New Zealand fish—contrasts Western preservation of the hunter only in myth with a pre-colonial Māori lifestyle in which eels and īnanga were hunted for food. It thereby raises the different ways culture interacts with nature, contrasting the Western name based on heroic myth with the importance of the natural world to Māori—fish as a food source and stars as navigation aids.

Still, Beutrais’s poem evokes a sense of burgeoning resistance to the present state of ecological degradation through bicultural education. In “Puanga,” “the children are making the river” (77). Their river model incorporates representations of indigenous birds and plants and aspects of Māori culture. The language of the poem includes Māori words that have become familiar to non-Māori New Zealanders in the last 15-20 years: piupiu (flax skirts), poi (soft woven balls on strings), harakeke (flax), whare (house), Matariki (Pleiades) (77-78). Within this bicultural learning space, Beutrais imagines the future protection of the natural environment through images of belonging and renewal:

A time to prepare new ground.  
Bared black of loam.

Where can we plant this tree?  
Where will it cast its shadow? (79)

Like the quotation from Australian poet John Kinsella’s *The New Arcadia* (2005) that prefaces this section, “Among the murk I will find things to worship” (73), it appears that Beutrais has found amid the ecological violence of colonialism a vision of hope for the future. With its ready incorporation of Māori words and concepts, the poem suggests that the incorporation of the Māori worldview is a future component of environmental preservation.

By recalling the divisions of the past, *Flow* arrives at a vision of the future. Postcolonial ecocritics “emphasize how experiences of environmental violence, rupture, and displacement are central ecological challenges across the Global South” (DeLoughrey 2015 2). However, they do so “while at the same time identifying possibilities for imaginative recuperation that are compatible with anticolonial politics”

(DeLoughrey 2015 2). By foregrounding in her dedication to *Flow* the granting of legal personhood to the Whanganui River—a status based on Māori embodiment of culture as inherently tied to ecology—Beautrais suggests that the integration of Māori concepts into New Zealand’s legal frameworks provides a way towards ecological restitution. Her poems, as we have seen, expand on this notion by suggesting such recuperation must occur also beyond such legal frameworks, that is, in everyday human activity. “Huihui *Taumarunui* 2014,” for instance, ascribes the importance of iwi while acknowledging dual cultural pasts and a sense of two cultures coming together through a shared history of place —“Huihui: to gather. Like water does” (70). “Puanga” proposes burgeoning resistance to present day ecological spoliation through bicultural education. From the dedication that frames this collection to the poems themselves, Beautrais suggests the possibility of ecological recuperation after the violence of colonial transformation through increased confluence—a word that means “a flowing together” —between Pākehā and Māori.

Beautrais’s work shows some ways in which New Zealand ecopoetry expands the basic tenets of ecopoetry as formulated by British and United States critics. Rather than interdependence based on notions of an unspoilt nature, her poetry portrays the interdependence of New Zealanders with a nature constructed and/or despoiled by colonialism. Her work complicates notions of humility in relationships with nature when some aspects of nature are humanly constructed and, indeed, have displaced indigenous ecologies, and may therefore be comprehended as undesirable. And her poetry moves beyond warnings of potential ecological catastrophe towards a vision of recuperation based on connection between Māori and Pākehā notions of ecological preservation, or perhaps more precisely, through a broadening of Pākehā notions of conservation by the adoption of some Māori ecological concepts. In these ways, Beautrais’s work reveals not just how New Zealand ecopoetry aligns with the field of ecopoetry according to its current definitions, but how, by complicating and expanding these definitions within New Zealand’s particular context, it speaks back to it.

## Part 4 Conclusion and Bridging Essay

### 4.1 Conclusion to the Critical Component

Approaches to the writing of New Zealand ecopoetry in English have transformed alongside ongoing transformation of the country's landscapes, ecologies, environmental attitudes and cultural positioning. The tradition here has grown from the distinctive ecological and cultural circumstances cultivated in a country of unique plants and animals, and a legacy of ecological colonial violence. This local variant of ecopoetry has developed distinctive differences from the generic notion of ecopoetry formulated by some critics in Britain and the United States.

Awareness of a wider context of cultural and ecological connection beyond the Victorian premise of ruination for improvement, such as in the poetry of Ursula Bethell, signalled the genesis of an ecopoetical consciousness here. Struggles between alertness to the psychically damaging effects of deforestation and a desire to find in nature a foothold in a land still thought of as 'foreign' led to a particular Pākehā sense of connection between nature, belonging and a sense of nationhood, exemplified in the poetry of Brian Turner. Belonging through ancestral history stretching back to first discovery of Aotearoa New Zealand, and evocation of cosmological and spiritual embodiment of culture in ecology, alongside reciprocal duties of ecological care and preservation between the living and the dead, inform notions of ecology and encroachment in the work of Robert Sullivan. From these differences between Pākehā (settler) and Māori (Indigenous) ways of seeing nature and the human relationship with it have grown tensions between notions of ecological loss and senses of belonging, which shape New Zealand ecopoetry.

The work of the three case study poets reveals the shifting ways contemporary New Zealand eco-poets have responded to these tensions over the past forty years. Turner, through a sometimes-Romantic approach evoking solace in a nature often constructed by colonial processes, aligns with the British/United States model of ecopoetry, but within a particular New Zealand ecological and cultural setting. Belonging through nature evoked in his poetry is of special importance in this country where Indigenous belonging is entangled with ecology. The ecopoetry of Sullivan and Beutrais reveals, within a New Zealand setting, some limitations in the basic tenets of



ecopoetry formulated by critics in Britain and the United States, notably by Bryson. Importantly, these two poets approach awareness of the colonial constructedness of much of New Zealand's 'nature' and the effects of the loss of indigenous plant and animal species, according to their own generational and cultural backgrounds. Writing from a 'Moanan' perspective, Sullivan evokes a sense of entanglement between nature and Māori such that culture is a part of ecology. His work portrays colonial erosion of a reciprocal protectiveness between Māori and nature. Writing from a Pākehā position, Beutrais acknowledges a degraded nature in a settler colonial setting. She imagines the prospect of recuperation based on a vision of connection between Māori and Pākehā concepts of ecological protection. Together, these three poets reveal changing and uniquely New Zealand ecopoetical responses to cultural and ecological tensions here.

The approach of the growing field of postcolonial ecocriticism helps us to see how New Zealand ecopoetry expands and complicates the basic tenets of ecopoetry by portraying Indigenous notions of ecological loss and encroachment that differ from Western notions guided by the science of ecology. New Zealand ecopoetry acknowledges Indigenous senses of belonging incorporating ancestry and spirituality, which expand Bate's Romantic notions of solace in and belonging through nature. It adds a cultural element to notions of ecology and therefore to ecopoetry.

Because of the importance of Indigenous culture in this country and its increasing representation in poetry, New Zealand ecopoetry provides significant examples of the ways in which ecological tensions manifest in a settler colonial nation. More than that, New Zealand ecopoetry suggests the critical importance of these manifestations as more than simply interesting local examples. Rather, they signify the ways in which local understandings of the relationship between people and nature complicate the ways in which ecopoetry has been defined by foundational critics of the field, such as Bryson and Bate. New Zealand ecopoetry provides particular perspectives that expand our notions of how culture is connected to ecology. Its ecological tensions, which centre on differences between Pākehā and Māori notions of nature and the human relationship with it, manifest in portrayals of ecological loss and of belonging, an integral part of ecopoetry in New Zealand.

New Zealand ecopoetry thereby offers important examples of "how writers from...settler colonial...regions have imagined and inscribed the environment, providing vital perspectives on how ecological transformation is entangled with

colonial expansion” (DeLoughrey et al 3). Understanding such tensions is central to the comprehension and resolution of ecological challenges in countries subject to the ecological violence of colonialism, such as New Zealand. Moreover, the shifting ways New Zealand ecopoets respond to this country’s ecologies in specific locations and across different timeframes provide clear evidence that ecopoetry itself must be adjusted for and respond to different cultural settings. They show that such particular responses are worth mapping not only because they describe a national identity of ecopoetry but because they expand some of the assumptions of the field.

New Zealand’s unique geologies, climate, flora and fauna and history of human interaction have led to particular cultural and environmental outcomes. These outcomes are reflected and engaged with in New Zealand’s unique, local variant of ecopoetry. In it, tensions between Pākehā and Māori comprehensions of nature and the human relationship with it are portrayed in ways that are not the case elsewhere, thereby providing a distinctive addition to our understanding of how ecological tensions reside and shift over time in settler colonial nations. By illuminating how the histories of colonialism are integral to understanding and imagining ecologies, contemporary New Zealand ecopoetry provides not only the familiar pessimism of much ecopoetry written in the Anthropocene but positive approaches towards current ecological challenges.

## 4.2 Bridging essay to the Creative Component

My interest in writing ecopoems began with awareness, through reading and my own observations, of the constructedness of New Zealand's rural landscape. On my family farm are massive stumps of kahikatea trees felled just over one hundred years ago. The farm, near the south-west coast of the North Island, has paddocks of low-lying peat that through drainage is slowly sinking. In summer, when the water is low, a network of roots is visible on the edges of drains. When the digger clears the drain, roots thick as branches are hauled onto paddocks. The remains of the primeval forest hold the rich humus, which now grows English rye grass and clover.

This land is typical of that examined by ecologist Geoff Park in his chapter “Swamps which might doubtless easily be drained” in *Theatre Country* (2006). The chapter title is a quotation from *The ‘Endeavour’ Journal of Joseph Banks, 1768-1771* edited by J.C. Beaglehole (1962). Park describes such drainage as “the linear logic of modern land law meeting and beating the chaos of nature” that “purposefully obliterates nature’s organic flow lines.” He says:

Nothing that meets the eye on a New Zealand coastal plain that has been the subject of a swamp drainage scheme is yet a century old. No plant or animal it sees, other than the odd raupō plant or eel in a drain, is indigenous. Yet the recognisable combination of trees, pasture and human structures makes it seem perhaps as if they are all that was ever here. (183)

The visible record of such recent obliteration on my family farm on the Horowhenua plain has contributed to my interest in writing poetry about ecological transformation, and in exploring how others have written about it.

The conundrum for me has been how to write poems about this environment and my experience of it. I feel a sense of belonging to this land where I grew up, where my parents lived and farmed for most of their lives, and where I have farmed since my father died in 2008. I looked for a similar poetic tradition in New Zealand but of the ecopoems discussed in the critical portion of my thesis, only a few deal with farming. I found New Zealand poems about farming that are not necessarily ecopoetical, such as Ruth Dallas’s “Deep in the Hills,” “Milking Before Dawn” (1953) and “Pioneer Woman With Ferrets” (1976), Kevin Ireland’s “Animals and Engines” (1974) and Brian Turner’s “The Initiation” (1978). Dallas’s poems celebrate farming in opposition to urban living, and do, to a certain extent, suggest the Pākehā sense of belonging to

the land that I feel. The other poems recall a past rural lifestyle or evoke a sense of horror at the treatment of cows (Ireland) and rabbits (Turner). All are more than forty years old. There seems to be a gap in New Zealand poetry about farming in the twenty-first century within an approach that recognises that the land is colonially violated, while at the same time sensing a connection to it.

What's usefully surprising is that my experience of farming is not what is normally thought of as ecopoetry, which often focuses on land, water, trees and native species. Before starting this thesis, I engaged with these aspects of the tradition by writing poems about the landscape. My poem "Biking to the Manawatu River," written for my Master of Creative Writing thesis "Ecopoetry and the Perceptive Impulse" (2015), aimed to evoke the sense of the land's transformation, primarily the lack of indigenous vegetation and the replacement of that abundance with random assortments of weeds, trees and human-made structures. "Beach," a poem anthologised in *Manifesto Aotearoa* (2017), portrays driftwood washed onto Waitarere Beach from the Manawatu River:

like washed up words,

the ones you wanted to use  
*pristine untrammelled calming*

but found were of no use

Even the beach is a transformed landscape due to the channeling of river water by stopbanks. When I began this thesis, I found myself writing poems about the rural environment closer to me, especially the connections between farmland, people and farm animals.

Farming is a constructed environment and farm animals, domesticated and bred for purpose over centuries, represent nature at perhaps its most humanly constructed. Yet farming represents human interaction with non-human sentience at physical and indeed emotional levels and speaks both to the situation of animals and ourselves. My poems do not arise from academic study of animal behaviour and welfare but rather from the experience of working with them. New Zealand animal studies writer Philip Armstrong in his book *Sheep* (2016) finds that "no other domestic animal fades from view, even as we use it, quite as completely as the sheep" (9). Despite their prevalence in paddocks, sheep—and cattle—fade from view in poetry as well. Tellingly, I noticed this only after I began writing about them.

The 2019 slaughter of New Zealand cattle infected with *mycoplasma bovis* revealed not only financial but also emotional tolls. Waikato farmer Henk Smit used the word “attached” to describe his relationship with his cows (Stuff 12 April 2019). Anna Peters of Ashburton termed as “heart-breaking” the slaughter of hand-reared cows, and her husband Peter said “one of us seems to be in tears all the time” (1newsnow 3 May 2018). University of Otago researchers are currently investigating the “emotional, social and psychological” impacts of *mycoplasma bovis* on New Zealand farmers and farming communities, following British research which identified feelings of “bereavement” amongst farmers whose animals with foot and mouth disease were slaughtered (Otago Daily Times 22 January 2019). Even catching and killing wild animals for food can be emotionally troublesome. As discussed in the critical portion of this thesis, Brian Turner’s poem “Jack Trout” from *Ancestors* (1981) evokes a sense of empathy for the fish hit “behind the eyes ... for mercy’s sake” (169). Turner’s poem raises yet does not answer the question of how people should feel towards animals that are to be eaten, a question I also raise in poems about cattle farmed for meat.

While central to the New Zealand economy, farming seems to be especially connected in this country to the national psyche. Until recently at least, many New Zealanders were in some way linked to farming, through other family members, childhood memories or farming themselves. Over recent decades, these links have reduced as farming has graduated from family-owned businesses to larger, sometimes corporate, enterprises. Even more recently, farming has come under public scrutiny for the disastrous effects on water quality of the conversion of dry land previously used for sheep farming to intensive, irrigated dairy farming, especially in the south of the South Island. Water ecologist, Mike Joy, reports that in the last twenty years, the number of dairy cows in New Zealand has doubled to six and a half million and milk output using external inputs—that is, food, such as palm kernel, and fertiliser from other countries—has quadrupled (*Salient* 2017). Such rapid intensification on land requiring irrigation has led to declining water quality in this country’s lakes, rivers and streams, which is one of this country’s major environmental challenges. As I write, submissions have been called on the government’s Action Plan for Healthier Waterways, which proposes restrictions on land intensification, regulation over farm practices and controls on changing land use to dairy. It appears that some limits regarding land use that have been reached are now being politically recognised.

While concern about water quality might seem an obvious focus for ecopoems, some of my poems attend rather to the effects of rapid intensification, and corresponding increased industrialization, on people and animals. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (2011), Timothy Clark describes the Romantic concern with “fragmentation of the ‘whole’ person by such phenomena as the division of labour, overvaluation of rationality at the expense of spontaneous bonds of feeling both between people and in relation to the non-human ... and the domination of the market economy as the sole reference for justifying human work and valuing things” (16). These phenomena, he says, were interpreted by “Romantic ecology” “as insidious modes of artificiality and the loss of contact with more balanced natural processes” (16). He raises “a profound concern with the nature of *work*, a crucial topic sometimes forgotten by modern environmentalists” (17; emphasis in original). Jonathan Bate, in *Romantic Ecology* recounts that John Ruskin (1819-1900) recognised “an intimate connection between the conditions in which we work and the way in which we live with nature” (51). In my poetry, I am interested in how such “artificiality” and “loss of contact with more balanced natural processes” affects people and animals in New Zealand farming.

My critical investigations into the poetry of Brian Turner, Robert Sullivan and Airini Beauvais has led me to consider the different ways that the human relationship with nature is perceived by Māori and by Pākehā, and to consider my own place on land that is important to me, and important to Māori before European settlement. As a Pākehā farmer, my attachment to place stems from a history of settler belonging. My ancestry traces from Scotland, Ireland and Jersey through four generations of farmers in the Horowhenua and Rangitikei areas, a relatively recent occupation compared to around 800 years of Māori habitation before European colonisation.

The creative component of my thesis consists of a collection of ecopoems in four parts entitled *Anti-Pastoral*. Poems about farming make up a large portion of this collection. I also look beyond the farm to surrounding ecologies and to family ties.

The first section, entitled “How Now?” comprises poems about farming. Some centre on the human relationship with farm animals and how this has changed in my lifetime—that is, since my childhood, growing up in the 1960-70s on a 70-cow dairy farm, to the present when dairy herds are ten times this size and animals have become increasingly commodified. The title poem of this section, “How Now?” compares the farms of my past, when dairy cows were named and known, with the present, when

cows are identified by digital codes. Another poem, “Undertone,” evokes the sense that these animals are accustomed to being treated as producers—of milk and calves—but not to the touch of human kindness. The poem “Drenching” evokes a sense of empathy for animals farmed for meat by recognising their own sensibilities. In “Calf Sale” the poet speaker is portrayed as a participant in the farming enterprise and culpable for the ways in which farm animals are commodified. This strategy aims to suggest the complexity of the situation. The poems, “Ode to mycoplasma bovis,” and “Anti-pastoral,” suggest that technology has altered farming and the sense of it as pastoral. The section’s closing poem “Singular Steer” acknowledges, momentarily at least, the life of the individual animal. I hope that the poems in this section evoke a sense of the resilience of farm animals and portray them with dignity, rather than merely as victims.

Within this first section are poems about farming which focus on the land. “Sponge and Slate,” for instance, reflects on the eroding effects of deforestation. “Drought, Horowhenua” centres on the pressures of drought—possibly due to climate change—on land, animals and people. The sequence “Unseasoned Campaigner” portrays the seasons not as times of joy as often portrayed by nature poets—for instance John Keats’s “To Autumn” (1820)—but rather as contributing to hardships in farming due to the strained, commercial nature of the enterprise. This theme is broadened into an exploration of how contemporary life creates tensions between the desire to protect nature and the expediencies of modern living in “Oh! Kee-o kee-o,” which portrays the accidental running over of a hawk that was the day before admired as an example of nature’s freedom. The sequence of three poems entitled “Good Intentions” suggests inconsistencies between the conscious intention to do well for the environment that so many of us have and the exigencies and practicalities of our pressurized lives in a technological age. They do not intend to offer solutions to these issues but rather to raise them and evoke their very real complexities.

*Anti-pastoral*’s second section, “Tender,” derives from my coming to terms with the deaths of parents and children leaving home. Poems in this section at times connect family with farming. My father lived at a time when farming involved much physical labour for instance, and the poems “This Life” and “There comes a time” suggest how such a life moulded his character. Like the individuals Herbert Guthrie-Smith describes in the third edition of *Tutira: The Story of a New Zealand Sheep Station* (1940), my father was “drawn like water into the whirlpool, like dust into the draught” (xxiii). He was often in tension between empathy for animals and the

necessities of farming. Other poems in this section are about growing children. “Empty Nest,” metaphorically connects the sense of loss when a child leaves home with the way technology conditions us to seek sustenance in language. “Ruahine” tends towards the Romantic by linking the loss of grown children with the loss of forests yet finds solace in both the land that remains and the growth of children to adulthood.

The third section of *Anti-Pastoral*, “Papaitonga Poems,” looks away from the farm to the colonial ecological and cultural transformation of surrounding ecologies. It explores tensions between Māori and Pākehā comprehensions of nature and the human relationship with it at the site of a former Muaūpoko village, which is now a Department of Conservation scenic reserve. Poems portray Lake Papaitonga Scenic Reserve from historical and contemporary perspectives, evoking a sense of the damaging effects of present-day land use on its plant and animal ecologies, and on its cultural importance. The sequence of poems, “The amateur geologist,” considers the effects of deforestation and drainage of the Horowhenua plains and foothills. This poem and “The Amateur Archaeologist” were inspired by the life and work of Pākehā farmer, G. Leslie Adkin (1888-1964), whose books map the geological and—to an extent—cultural, histories of Horowhenua.

*Anti-pastoral*’s final section, “Animal,” looks more broadly at the human relationship with animals. The poem “Climbers,” for instance, portrays the poet speaker fishing for the endangered fish that the poem celebrates. There I hope to avoid a didactic approach by suggesting a sense of shared responsibility towards endangered native fish species. Poems in this section generally portray people as poor guardians of a range of species, especially birds. The domestic birds ‘humanely’ saved in “Cockerels,” for instance, are shown to have devastating effects on the regeneration of native birds and trees within a bush reserve, again emphasizing the complexity of the human/nature relationship. The section’s final poem, “Swallows,” portrays the poet speaker surrounded with a flock of swallows, drawing the collection to a close with an image of nature’s vibrancy.

By recognising the constructedness of familiar rural landscapes, the loss of indigenous flora and fauna in transforming them and the cultural implications of those losses, *Anti-pastoral* follows the postcolonial approach of Sullivan and Beutrais, rather than Turner’s British/United States model of ecopoetry. However, I recognise that my own Pākehā sense of “belonging through nature” (Calder 172) in my attachment to my family farm follows Turner’s exemplar of Pākehā belonging to the



landscapes of Central Otago. By examining the local, and by paying attention to non-human species in order to evoke a sense of their importance, I hope through my ecopoetry not to reconcile, but to better understand New Zealand's complex and particular ecological pasts. In so doing, I hope that it contributes to broadening our notions of ecopoetry.

## **Creative Component: Anti-pastoral**



The carrion-stinking dog, who is calf of human and wolf,  
is chasing and eating little blood things the humans scatter,  
and all me run away, over smells, toward the sky.

—Les Murray, ‘The Cows on Killing Day’

Exhausted Sow, eye to the light made night  
With a forward ear, milk-drained, piglets  
Piled sleeping by her side, eternally confident,  
Her Self replete in their growing natures.

—John Kinsella, ‘The Fable of the Great Sow’



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## **I. How now?**





## Drenching

When the cattle come home from the sale yards  
in the blue truck that clatters up the drive  
they walk as in a daze. Some snatch at grass  
glancing through cracks in the concrete.

Drench them now while they amble  
easily into the race. Tomorrow, stomachs full,  
they will gallop away from you  
because you are a stranger to them

though in months, as each day you  
open gates to paddocks of fresh grass  
and in winter lay hay  
on the ground before them,

they come to you, warm breath  
on your skin. See them paw the soft peat,  
worry the old scents where you buried  
the drowned steer two winters past.

Until you send them on their way  
to be killed, they grant you the grace  
of their company, draw you in with flared nostrils  
that pause over the bones of their dead.

In the auction room

of the sale yards  
as the Charolais mob below,  
the men, mostly men, nod  
or raise a finger to bid  
the way a diner  
raises a finger  
to ask the waiter  
for the bill.

## Calf sale

The veal man shoos  
the four-day-olds,

legs too long for long bodies,  
hoofs still soft, turned in to ease  
their coming out of their mothers,

still searching with strong snouts  
for mammal warmth the way  
a human baby turns her open  
mouth towards the breast.

I buy four. Three follow  
my moving fingers to the trailer,  
suck air through rolled tongues,  
the last bundled in my arms.

The veal man herds his  
into the truck with the high,  
steel sides.

Another steel-grey  
truck on the road,  
inside, unseen cargo  
turning their heads in the dark.

Although I have no reason to,  
I feel superior driving my calves  
to the paddocks of plump grass,  
nursing their plain orphan hunger.

How now?

Afternoon, I stop on the causeway, watch  
a herd of Friesians, five, maybe six hundred,  
cross the floodplain, a slow, black train.

Milkers on farm bikes. In my dad's day,  
dairy farmers were called cow cockies,  
a name you don't hear anymore.

His Jerseys were a different breed:  
the brown cows of elocution lines,  
nursery rhymes. Each had a name

starting every year with the next letter  
of the alphabet. Ada the eldest,  
Happy to Melanie, my six pet calves.

Mum wrote the names on the sheet  
for the herd tester and she, always a she,  
spun the milk and stayed the night.

These high-boned Friesians flap barcodes  
on yellow ear-tags. One neighbour calls  
all his half thousand Sweetie.

It was a game, choosing names for cows.  
How some would come to be pronounced  
at the tea table: the kicker, the tail swatter...

I am getting to something

bigger than nostalgia. Those Jerseys I recall.  
These long lines of Friesians, how their hoofs  
lay down already fading scrawls.

The rig

has a bull's neck,  
is twice the weight  
of the steers in his mob.

Half-castrated, the testicle retained  
in his abdominal cavity  
is secreting hormones.

His blushed penis  
juts from the sheath.

The day I send him to slaughter  
he leads three steers  
up the ramp. The truck

has been improperly configured,  
metal stairs need extending,  
animals reloading.

Wiser now, educated  
to the cramped chamber,  
unaware his life and death

shadow a series of blunders,  
he breaks two galvanized gates,  
sends the drafter scuttling up the rails

who energises his electric prod,  
vows to *get rid of that attitude*,  
the testosterone pounding.

## Undertone

The heifer is used to being touched  
here, the vet says, pushing the half-metre-long

plastic probe between her labia.  
Static whitens the screen.

A dark, liquid orb  
cradles milky lightness.

The young cow stands motionless  
until the boy extends his small hand

towards her gently dimpled nose.  
She yanks away, bruises into steel rails.

## Good Intentions

We live in an age of untended consequences.

—Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society*

### 1. Trickle Down

Father always said farming was in my bones.

He hacked the gorse that stained the flank of the hill,

steel blade on stalks like striking stone.

I poisoned it. Summers: barbed bushes blunted, fell,

plots of dead grass collateral damage. Offspring grew sharp  
until the slope was flush as a side of lamb.

In the crease of the gully where the runoff swilled,  
the old kahikatea, a battler rooted beyond the fenced reserve

—unshorn sheep once packed its pool of shade—  
stands tall, leafless, lichen white, skeletal.



## 2. Enough

The sick calf is four days old,  
soaked in diarrhoea,  
too weak to suck.

Tired, careless, I push  
the tube down its throat,  
funnel the liquid in.

Next day, its body  
lies flat as shadow  
on the woodchips,

nostrils cochineal  
with electrolyte flooded  
from stomach to lungs.

I will say it died the way  
calves wrenched off their mothers  
sometimes do,

telling the truth of things,  
knowing the difference  
between enough and too much.

### 3. Oh! Kee-o Kee-o

Last night, cutting potatoes,  
butterflying chicken. A hawk  
framed itself in my kitchen window,  
its gentle rocking glide  
interspersed with lazy wing-beats  
so easy it was difficult to recall  
that it was hunting for carrion  
not flying freer than I felt  
hovering over my chopping board,

the way next morning I was framed  
in the windscreen  
behind the steering wheel  
hurrying to work  
and another hawk—or perhaps the same hawk—  
gripping road kill, slow to gain traction  
in air without height, hefting the possum  
with wing-beats  
inaudible above the clamour  
of the engine and Radio New Zealand's  
9am bird which unbelievably,  
I thought afterwards,  
was the mating  
kee-o kee-o  
of the swamp harrier,  
a sound nothing like  
the dumb thump  
against the bumper.

## Unseasoned Campaigner

### Winter

'Next year I'll be ready,' I say,  
splinting my shin on the shovelhead,  
jarring the blade on clay hard as tundra.

'I've heard that before,' says Winter.  
Takes a drag on a cigarillo,  
looks moonward.

'I'll have rye, fat and juicy, up to here,'  
I say, tapping my thigh, throwing  
another carcass into the pit.

He mocks with a cough, flips the butt  
at an emaciated ewe, shifts  
his weight to the other hip.

'Tootleloo for now,' he says,  
swivelling on boot heels,  
looking fit to skate on ice.

I sink to the shovel,  
cover the corpses  
with clay and gravel.

## Spring

Three old man pines uprooted  
across the back boundary, two  
steers dead in a slip, the main drain

flooding the pump shed.  
A crack signals another tree  
down. The power goes out.

Spring is in the garden wearing  
sensible shoes, brushes soil  
from her gloves, flourishes

a phone gallery: daffodils,  
new-born lambs. 'I planted  
red cabbage, gold kumara

and scarlet runner beans  
before the rain,' she says,  
cultivating a colourful grin.

## Summer

The day I cut the willow trees down  
because there is nothing else for the ewes to eat—

eyes stuck with dirt, udders empty, lambs tottering  
behind wrinkled as dried fruit—

Summer comes over the hill  
driving a water tanker, a sheet of dust flapping behind.

I know it is her because last night  
when the DOC hydrologist pronounced

the river dead, she told me her name and sighed  
when I said: 'That used to mean a good time.'

Water blows through the pipe, fills the tank  
in a rush. 'This one's on me,' she says.

'But it won't last with all these sheep.' She leaves  
like the land, at once generous and unforgiving.

## Autumn

sits on a grass hump unlacing her boots.  
Lank socks detach from elegant white feet,

toenails varnished ruby.  
I look towards the dam.

A duck deadstick lands. Crackle  
of webbed feet through water

rushes the silence. Her shirt hangs  
over raupo, jeans

a denim puddle. A cocksfoot  
seed-head buffs the belt buckle.

She steps into the shallows.  
Her face ripples like water.

She is a white shadow  
beneath the dark lid,

breasts dusky fish. Shedding  
my clothes, I slide

into a blanket of cold. On the bank,  
the sun warms our bodies, tussock tickles

bare limbs. Rye ruffles  
the paddocks. Like us,

the grass is having one last flutter  
before the long withdrawal.

## Sponge and slate

The countryside has been transformed from a sponge to a slate.

—Herbert Guthrie-Smith,

*'Tutira: The Story of a New Zealand Sheep Station'*

Granny Smiths' skins  
repel tap water  
in my kitchen sink  
as the shed's roof  
sloughs the rain off  
beside the broken guttering.  
It has been coming down all day,  
cut channels in the hard, green skin  
of the hills. Up north,  
a farmer has videoed  
a hillside sliding  
like slate off a roof,  
breaking in on itself  
at the seat of the gully  
where a flash stream  
scours the tin pan plain.  
The sudden current  
dissolves the earth  
like the brown sugar  
in my bowl,  
hoses the lax batter  
into the risen river.

The apples are cooked to a pulp  
beneath the sponge absorbing  
juices, percolating flavour.

I dig my spoon into the pudding  
topped with a scoop of ice cream,  
watch the country melting.

## Drought, Horowhenua

1.

The hungry cows  
have been standing at the gate  
all day. Every time I go outside

they follow along the fence line.  
They don't know they are not mine.  
They do know I am human.

Some are feeding calves. Every night,  
when I was breastfeeding  
I ate bread with tea.



2.

Yesterday, the Ohau River hit trigger point.

Level three water restrictions:

Irrigators off, sprinklers banned,  
gardens watered Tuesday and Thursday

7 to 9pm, swimming pools filled  
only with written permission, hosing  
of paved areas prohibited  
except in an emergency.

Consider: Cape Town, Theewaterskloof Dam  
drying up. At Day Zero, the city's taps  
will go dry. Water will be collected

from designated places. Will it be patrolled  
by armed guards? Will there be a black  
market in water, a market in grey water?

What if you spill your water?  
Someone steals your water?

The water thief goes to jail,  
receives water but you have none

which triggers the release of a bullet

that triggers bleeding

onto the pavement

washed down with a hose.

3.

Afterwards, he said it took balls  
to light the pyre, detritus of a week  
of shop packaging, box  
folded squarely into box,  
magazines, thick squads  
of newspaper climbing  
four sides of the pit.

At its worst, flames seared  
the brown-lipped grass,  
lifted in licks by sudden  
drafts from within. Shovel  
in hand, I said (to myself)  
I could bucket water  
from the swimming  
pool, cursed my 'balls,'  
stood alert until  
smoke curdled  
above a molten glow  
pulsing with heat and light  
the way blood fills and drains  
a reckless heart.

4.

The depth of the drain  
is surprising, visible now,  
empty sides flush with  
regenerating bracken fern.

Stand with silt  
sticking to boot soles,  
up to your armpits in fingers  
of Yorkshire fog,

a last cavern of coolness  
on the ancient dunes  
where English grasses  
have given up. How do the pines

retain their dizzy black, the conifers  
their rowdy yellow in this  
hollowing heat  
intense as migraine?

Even the rushes  
and Scotch thistles cling  
to colour, though the dunes  
are gaunt, ghostly,

sand slouching the way  
skin hugged the corpse  
of the miscarried calf  
until bones gave in.

5.

You wade through the lagoon,  
waist-deep in warm air.

The mallards, the grey ducks,  
the herons. Where?

6.

It's like some kind of transfiguration:  
Hebe Great Barrier Island  
turned green overnight  
—the way transfused blood  
pinkens anemic skin—  
each concave leaf  
plump, sated with life-shine  
not pale, drab, limp as I found  
it yesterday covered in leaves  
drained of life. Hebe Ruby, however,  
has not responded to my watering  
hand-delivered by bucket  
because the hose will not reach  
these outliers situated  
for their so-called hardness.  
Walking back to the house  
beside ancient dunes  
farmed for more than a century,  
I pass Acer Palmatum, aka Bloodgood,  
which has yielded to early summer heat  
with bold autumn red.

7.

Overhead, the skylark calls  
and you wonder if it is always  
this loud, this solitary

or just because the brown bird is stark  
against a sky so blue and hard  
you could skate on it.

We are in a holding pattern,  
those of us rooted deeply here:  
the tōtara, the bottle brush,

the high-flying skylark.  
It tilts and turns, creating contour  
in a sky without relief.

## Elegy

The kingfisher calls for rain  
but the rain does not come

although clouds gather  
over the Tararuas,

promise the coming  
of rain but the promised rain

doesn't come  
so the soil cracks

and hardens beneath  
clouds black as broken

promises that blacken  
the broken eye of the lagoon

that looks for the kingfisher  
but the kingfisher does not come.

Have a plan or you feel like you are losing control

Shift the horses in the evening  
when it is cooler.

Know there may be nibbles  
along fencelines, in dips.

Leave the gates open  
so they can find shade.

Make sure they have plenty  
of water.

Let them become resigned  
to losing weight and not

moving around much,  
drinking and not eating

the way Aunty Joyce  
accepted the sip cup

every hour but sometimes  
she could not swallow.

Uncle Maitland said, if she was a horse  
they would shoot her.



## Meat processing plant poem I: slaughterers

i.

The steers stand in the concrete yards  
resting one leg and then another.  
They receive water. Remnants  
of first winter coats lift from their backs,  
morning mist from lowland paddocks.

When the dogs bark and the drafter  
claps a long stick against the rails  
they walk obediently, single file, up  
the ramp into the electric head bale, drop  
to the white-walled room where the slaughterers work.

ii.

One cuts the tender throats.  
One hauls the chain.  
One sharpens the knife.  
One spools the rope.

Each washes the blood  
off a white apron,  
white boots, hands

in the windowless room  
from spring to autumn

where the only prayer  
is the shush of water.

## Meat processing plant poem II: not snow

There is nothing  
familiar here, nothing

resembling leaf, stone,  
cloud as mist over home

paddocks although it's white  
and cold. No light

but neon. In wide  
corridors, torsos slide

on ceiling tracks,  
muscles sheathed in fat.

In white overalls, white hats,  
men push vats

of guts,  
hearts like knots.

Cherry-ripe blood  
spreads a hot-embered flood

over the drained-of-colour floor  
that is white as nothing at all.

## Ode to mycoplasma bovis

In the drifting rain the cows in the yard are black  
And wet and shiny as rocks in an ebbing tide;  
—Ruth Dallas, ‘Milking Before Dawn’

Your name fills the mouth  
as you fill the cows’ lungs with lesions.

You were everywhere except  
this ‘pure’ place, now here you are

with your *multifactorial pathogenicity*,  
your *exposed membrane proteins*.

You enter ears easier than those sounds,  
make them stagger, fall,

brown their milk.  
O, how you sneak in through

the letterbox flap, slide smooth  
and streamlined right up

their cunts in semen straws,  
frozen embryos

we bred for resilience.  
You sire millions.

## Anti-pastoral: Biosecurity Act 1993, section 130

But they smell of the soil, as leaves lying under trees  
Smell of the soil, damp and steaming, warm.  
—Ruth Dallas, ‘Milking Before Dawn’

This is a restricted place.

Wash hands, soles of boots.

Drive through a disinfectant bath.

Sluice flat decks with Virkon.

Wear personal protective clothing (PPC).

Although you may be tempted

by the sight of romping calves,

their warm coats, earthy scents,

do not approach. On entry,

report to the farm manager.

Observe electric wires

each side of the boundary fence

to keep neighbouring cows at least two metres apart

to ensure there is no touching,

no nose to nose contact,

no exchange of breath.

## Singular steer

Singular steer, with strength  
to suck  
the rings off my fingers at  
four days old,  
shoulders through steel  
head bale.

Forelegs crease to concrete,  
hindquarters  
catch in high rails as a  
carcass raised  
to the meat hook.

From walking plank  
I pour endectocide  
withers through tail head  
killing hook worm,  
wire worm, mange,  
nits, lice.  
Wait for him to right.  
He stills.  
Lips merge a puddle  
of dribble.

Five times my weight,  
bone and muscle,  
head hard as an anvil. Hard  
to move.  
(I recall dragging a steer  
from the drain  
with a sling rigged from  
tow rope.)  
Hoofs lethal. A minute  
goes by, another.  
Blood rosies the rails.

I could say  
he is accustomed  
to pain: wrenched from warm  
udder, mothered  
to Peach Teats, borne

dehorning  
iron, castration ring.

I could say  
he declined  
the yank of that rope  
around his throat.

All I know is  
he kicked through,  
shuddered up,  
sauntered off,  
his moment of singular  
cattleness lost  
to mob blur, din and heat  
of the yards.



## **II. Tender**





## Tender

When my father said the rabbit  
was tough my mother promised  
to boil it longer.  
A shame to waste good meat.  
He told my sister it was chicken,  
said our pet lambs  
went back to their mothers.

Every time he found a burrow  
he tramped back to the shed  
for the spade, a length of wire netting,  
swearing like a sergeant.  
He would always come in  
from the paddocks  
shouldering the shovel or grubber

except the day he lifted from his pocket  
the kit spared  
from the hay mower  
by his Geneva Convention  
and held it out to me in cupped palms  
as trembling proof of his boyhood.

## Dehorning the calves

Most went willingly into the crate,  
urged by my father's voice.

Head-to-tail down the narrow race,  
slight bodies crushed  
between wooden boards,  
noses manacled with elastic rope,

the hot iron bit into their heads.

My stomach tensed when their spines arched,  
legs seized, mouths fell open  
retching tongues white as ghosts.  
Their shocked, guttural groans.

The shed stank  
of scorched hair and burnt flesh.

Every year, one or two could not bear it.  
Limbs flailed  
against steel rails, bodies  
bruised on concrete.

My father called them the wild ones,  
spirited, hard to handle,

the way he called me rebellious  
before I left  
then independent afterwards.

## Talking to my father

Most people called him Doug  
and he did,

held a shovel as though  
it were a limb.

Head on his shoulder,  
boot on its head.

Tree holes, post holes, drains,  
a swimming pool,

graves for chooks, dogs, steers.  
Trenches.

To cut square edges  
he used a spade,

called it  
a spade.

## This life

Today, he checks each hairy ear  
for a barcode, considers  
the roundness of rumps,

urges each up the ramp  
with warm milk words,

uses protective electric shock  
to prod them into smaller  
and smaller  
spaces.

His voice grows loud  
above the clang of their bodies  
in the truck's metal chamber.

He hoses out the yard, tries  
to wash the dirt away,

puts mineral blocks  
beside troughs  
for those that remain.

They lick the proffered salt  
the way their mothers

licked them into life  
with rough tongues.

## Parade ground

He told us to yank off sticking plasters,  
*let the air get to it*  
his anthem for any wound,

said his mates laughed  
through dysentery, bed bugs, hunger,  
the corpses absent from his yarns

though he banned guns from the toy box  
and *I'll kill you* shouted  
when one sister drank the other's fizz.  
*Kill* was for the cat's mouse,  
the mutton sheep.

When on the evening tv news  
the Vietnam War boomed,  
his cheeks filled red and round  
as poppies, his words wilted  
our petal ears, hung like ghosts  
with all the dead in the living room.

## Drought

After mother died, father said  
he'd get used to living alone  
the way rye grass in his paddocks

has to get by without rain.  
After weeks, he lost vigour,  
slipped at the gate,

said, I can get up by myself.  
I lifted him from behind,  
a hand under each arm.

He was light as dead  
rye that crumbles underfoot  
and lifts into air as ashes

sprinkled from the brink  
of the hill lift with dust  
from the land and disappear.

There comes a time

to cut down the last wind-break macrocarpa,  
trunk embedded with wire and the staples

he hammered in. He put an orange  
in my stocking every year, ghosts

of his boyhood without. After Mum died  
he was a ghost of himself. But I digress.

Straining that fence he was at his best:  
sure as a stay, strong as wind, straight

to the point. His anger  
casual as a handshake.

When he slit a sheep's throat  
he skewed its neck against bare shins.

He took me to Seed & Grain Co  
in my minidress to drink beer

with men on hay bales, sent me  
down the cattle track

where cold wind cradled my skin,  
said, don't let it beat you, as though

standing unflinching  
was all it would take

the way it was enough  
to stop a steer ten times my weight.



## Preserving

Red plums give up  
round plump bodies  
when I cut out their stones.  
I hear my mother's long-ago voice:  
'Don't overdo it.' The boiling  
and much else. In the photograph  
she is smiling behind glass, my memory  
of her steeped in absence. Now,  
even that faithless call sounds sweet  
as in preserving jars sour plums  
surrender to sugar syrup.

## Treasure

*Powelliphanta (species unknown)*

I have two shells inherited  
from my mother.  
She laid them beneath  
the maidenhair fern.

One is coloured rimu.  
Each whorl a tree ring  
drawn by seismograph,  
apex mother-of-pearl.

The other, kauri gum.  
Whorls as waves  
dulled by sand residue,  
underneath karaka green.

Turned upside down,  
each reflects the wide kitchen window.  
Even the small, caught light  
is ridged with years.

## Empty nest

Pita, the white-faced heron, flies back  
to the bird rescue centre each day  
even though he's old enough  
to be out in the wild, says Lyn,  
who hand reared him after his nest  
blew over in a storm,  
in the latest issue of New Zealand  
Geographic. She thinks he has  
a sight problem  
but I read slight problem  
and cannot see  
how returning for an easy meal  
is a problem, more a sign of intelligence  
like the city pigeons on page nineteen  
that have learnt to recognise four-letter words  
from four jumbled letters  
and to peck a screen for wheat  
when the words appear. I wonder  
what happens when the experiment ends?  
Will they peck road signs  
like Dead Slow or Tawa Left Lane  
or were the words in the lab  
more like the four-letter words  
graffitied at my daughter's school  
or on the Fire Exit sign she stole  
and hung above her door  
before she left for university  
or her words which I crave  
each morning before breakfast,  
tapping my phone.

## To a daughter in London

If you could see

the seed potatoes  
in a fresh dug  
trench, round

bottoms cupped  
in dark, rain  
wet loam

streaked with lime  
and potassium forked  
through, eyes

seeking light  
under light  
blankets

of soil, soft-curled  
leaves uncrumpling  
over mounds,

how on the other side  
of earth their  
fierce hearts swell.

## Ruahine

Poplars hold the steep slopes  
at the tops of the foothills. I stop  
to catch my breath. It's the view  
that holds me here, low hills  
around the old woman range  
clutching the purple spill of her skirt.

The ridge I biked made me sweat.  
All the way up, I felt regret for the lost forest.  
From here, I'll wind the road down to the plain  
then home to my partner making pizza for two,  
the sparse dining table, vacant bedrooms  
although I wouldn't be here without the road  
or if my children hadn't grown.

I hike up the gears, pedal down  
to the river and one-lane bridge. Even  
loss has its own joy. To see the hills  
across the bare land. To see them  
raise up so strong and clear.

### **III. Papaitonga poems**



## Solstice

*Papaitonga Scenic Reserve, 2018*

Driveways of grand houses  
overlook the lake, shiny in the sun  
as the pack of chewing gum  
I plucked from the supermarket shelf  
this morning. I crunch a sugarcoated capsule  
to the tacky centre, jandals slapping on soft tar  
as I observe a DOC worker pack  
diphacinone pellets, rat bait, into carry bags.  
The sweet scent of something dead.  
I wind railings barring cars and mountain bikes  
stapled with a photograph of an Australian water  
dragon: a pet, escaped or more likely  
deliberately released, another was caught  
in the reserve, its tail gnawed by rats. Chew the gum  
past buttercup flowers brushing the boardwalk,  
water so low the lookout and island appear  
bridged by willow weed, Scotch  
thistle, lupin, foxglove. Angel loves Sean  
tattooed into thick green paint. Where trees  
are thick enough to blunt the sun, rumbling  
and soon I see a tractor, a ploughed paddock, gulls,  
a peacock waddling across loose soil towards  
a corner overgrown with blackberry, six peahens  
perhaps descended from Buller's ornamental flock.  
Back at the car park, the DOC worker humps  
a bait station into the boot. I ask, 'Is it working?'  
as I work the last juice from the gum looking  
to spit it out but not finding a bin. She says:  
'They're feeding on those dead chickens someone dumped'  
in a voice that conveys nothing out of the ordinary  
like the spat-out lumps stuck to my rimu bedhead  
that in dim dusk and early morning light  
begin to look as though they belong.



‘The names are what’s important. The names. Don’t forget them’

Te Karamū, for the karamū trees  
Te Rere, for the swift water  
Te Kahikatea, for the kahikatea forest  
Te Karaka, for the karaka grove  
Whakamate, for the drowning.

## Philosophical proceedings

*Sir William Buller, 1894*

i.

It is not necessary to refer  
to miscellaneous transactions.

This charming place has come  
into my possession.

Lake Papaitonga  
I named it.

I liberated three tuatara,  
four South Island spotted kiwi.

Dubbed Demon Island, Kiwi Island.  
Pember Bay too

after William Pember Reeves  
paddled by it in my Rob Roy canoe.

ii.

The prettiest bits  
were enclosed in growth.

Every part of the railway  
is protected.

Sixty miles,  
a thick fringe,

the cutting  
dense with human bones.

The severity of the wound  
in open, rising ground

bright as Tararua snow.  
After only a remnant remained

it was still home to my two sons,  
still, to an extent, a beauty.

## The amateur geologist

i.

heaves off a backpack heavy with rocks,  
his shirt, boots, socks,

wades into water deep  
where the digger quarried for gravel,

lies on warm stones that excavate the spine  
facing low hills cloaked in slash, timbered

pine, paths carved through uneven rows,  
steep slopes eroding like cast-off clothes.

ii.

brings to light weirs in drains deep  
as the digger's reach, memories

of zig-zagged stakes,  
mānuka mattresses,

eels swimming  
towards hatching places

in streams tunneled through culverts  
flowing to the sea

where an eel entering a pipe  
swims an unlit pathway

towards a gathering place  
unseen yet foreseen.

iii.

unearths middens, burial grounds,  
miles from the shoreline

that brink of blue before the horizon  
where all he can see was sea

because dunes overlap,  
push the water back to the edge

of the tide, a line provisional  
as the juncture of shadow and light,

as the temptation to imagine  
he walked over water to get there

although it's only sea pulling back  
from shore, skin from bone.

iv.

navigates the flood-prone road south  
to a washout, prospect of a long delay,

ameliorates annoyance by recalling  
those two boys who waited for the mail,

hacks hobbled on the sand  
until 10pm when they saw the horses

swim the coach across the river mouth,  
stranded passengers looking for the boat,

the hotelkeeper drunk, the driver  
riding back for the mail

cursing Cobb & Co,  
the hotelkeeper, the river,

his white shirt growing dimmer in the darkness  
as his horse struck out for the further shore.

v.

falls into a body of water  
like slipping off the edge of a stair

into a hollow. Sinks into the depression,  
the margins of his mind scrabbling

for a foothold, a handhold, a belt to grab  
onto. Finds his feet in the mud of the lagoon

formed in a fortuitous hollow  
in the inner margin of the dune belt.

Like finding traction  
on a trampoline.

Thinks, how fortuitous to have landed  
with a spring in his step.

vi.

has an abundance of terrain to explore,  
much of it beautiful when observed

from the distance of time: bush  
on the inner plain and mountain foothills,

diversified herbage of coastal dunes,  
alluvial flats beneath native grasses.

Aims for that dark stretch of pines  
feeling sanguine despite cold seeping

through, rub on his back  
of rocks in the sack

but they won't weigh him down  
because he's here for the long haul.

## The amateur archaeologist

*G. Leslie Adkin (1888-1964)*

He's pulled to the past like a hound to a smell,  
darts between drafting lambs

and fossicking in middens, retrieves  
hooks and sinkers from dunes

so far from the sea it has no sound.  
Unearths a village at the lake's edge,

a moa hunter in the stump-ridden hills.  
Exhumes osseous remains, skulls.

Curates the smallest fishhooks, bones  
in tobacco tins, glues on labels,

records dates in slant  
fountain pen. Sketches a pendant fragment

from obverse, reverse and lateral perspectives,  
recalls its absences in broken pencil line.

Draws maps with spatial accuracy,  
each burial ground marked with a cross.

Lays twenty-four moa gizzard stones  
and a nephrite spiral sure to be an amulet

on the bedroom windowsill. Each night, hears  
clack of shellfish opening in stone-heated water,

rub of wooden pounds on pumice bowls,  
tip-tap of tattoo punches, chatter of cooks, spears.

With Presbyterian resolve, comprehends  
there are no spirits of the dead

yet takes a prudent approach—  
a god-stick either side of the bed.

## Huia

*Heteralocha acutirostris*

When Governor Onslow's son  
was born at Government House in 1890,  
Ngāti Huia gifted him the name Huia

and asked his father to protect  
the tapu bird so the grown child  
could see huia in the forest.

Governor Onslow gifted Ngāti Huia  
a Union Jack with the word HUIA  
in white across the red central bar.

Ngāti Huia raised the flag up above  
Raukawa marae in Ōtaki.  
They raised it up above

Kikopiri marae  
near Lake Waiwiri,  
a wing above the trees.



Horowhenua College Tramping Club  
*Papaitonga Scenic Reserve, 1973*

The sign said ambush.  
I stopped and read:

with fat Waiwiri eels,  
Te Rauparaha was lured,

slipped away, returned with warriors  
in sleek canoes, oily *rakau pākehā*.

*Three hundred twice told dead.*

In history class, I learned by rote:  
sealers, whalers, Cook, Grey.

Passed.  
That day, I paused.

The island grave as stone.

Surely it was teenage angst  
turned pukatea trunks to skin,

shadows arms and legs,  
to bone the roots I stumbled on.

## Nocturne

Pūpūrangi / *Powelliphanta traversi traversi*

Over moss and leaves  
your slow weave of star shine.

A possum asleep in the kahikatea  
above a litter of empty shells.

## Toheroa

*Paphies ventricosa*

Three sites at the mouth.  
The freshwater ecologist

pulls a clam from the sand  
its long tongue flapping,

tests for microbes  
it tasted, communicated.

Below the effluent pond  
and the unfenced farm drain,

Waiwiri Stream  
shakes and rattles,

each tributary a tattletale:  
turbidity, fecal counts.

The kaumātua prays  
for a clean harvest,

his voice unsteady.  
Waiwiri: trembling water.

Kohekohe

*Dysoxylum spectabile*

Named by Pākehā

New Zealand mahogany

the polished wood  
is red.

Flower panicles  
and seedpods

grow from trunks  
or branches

within easy reach  
of introduced pests.

Once, the dunes were  
covered with kohekohe.

Trees survive  
on Kapiti Island

which has been stripped  
of possums.

From Moutere, the country's  
largest sand dune,

I can see Kapiti  
where kohekohe forests

are an echo  
of what they used to be,

the name itself an echo  
like the sound

when I call it out  
across the shelterless dunes.

Kohekohe, you almost  
come back to me.

## Huia II

*London, 2018*

I saw two huia heads  
in the Natural History Museum,

two heads, huia,  
in the crowded museum in London

and a female huia, dead,  
in the same glass case as the dodo.



## **IV. Animal**





## Game: a pair of haiku

dawn the sixth of May  
gun shots explode like blossom  
a pair of mallards

each easy wing beat  
unknowable as falling snow  
pop

## Animal

### 1. Supplication

Climb the boundary fence to walk the dogs.

The hungry cows barrel down the hill  
bellowing, calling you, human,

to release them  
from the sand and dung

they have been standing on  
for days. Hides cling to rib cages,

two hundred thin necks lean  
into barbed wire.

## 2. Appreciation

The whale  
tangled in old net  
approaches the fishing boat

and when set free  
by the hands  
that may have snared it

rises out of the water  
not once  
but twice,

the sound  
of its huge body  
striking the sea.

### 3. Elation

Dusk.  
Sunlight rims  
ancient dunes,  
gilds the coastal plain.

Smoke plumes from the bonfire,  
adds substance to the thickening night.  
Sparks fly as bright insects  
into the extinguishing sky.

The huntaway circles  
the fire, paws skidding  
on short grass, turns,  
runs the other way  
around, back, returns.

## Climbers

Kāora, kōkopu and inanga  
are named galaxiids  
for silver stripes

and golden blotches  
on scaleless skin that shine  
like the unreachable stars

visible above the light  
of the fire over which I fry  
whitebait in butter.

Those that navigate the mesh  
of nets and screens set at the mouths  
of rivers and bends in streams

disport in swampy lagoons,  
scale waterfalls to cool pools  
and secret, nocturnal lives.

In spring tide and flood, they rise  
from logs, boulders and undercut banks  
seeking moist stream flanks.

Larvae washed to sea  
voyage ocean currents,  
grow slender as grass,

divine fresh water to wash the salt  
from their mouths, swim upriver  
to their streams

where I wait on the bank  
with my net  
and bucket,

a plastic precipice  
they climb, then turn milky white  
in unfathomable light.

All afternoon

high branch

blue gum

tui peals

bells

bells

low branch

kahikatea

chainsaw drones

on and on and

bird

saw

saw

bird

never in tune

all the afternoons

## Cockerels

Today, five, feathers shining  
as tinsel, and one dour brown hen,  
rake sheep shit in the yards.

From the bush  
beyond the grazed hill, a crow  
so familiar it seems native

to this fenced reserve  
where discarded cockerels  
and one hen mistaken for a cockerel

forge a flock. Pitiless,  
they will fight  
for the right to mate with her

in this patch  
of rekindling kahikatea,  
cautiously returning kereru, kākāriki.

They primp and scratch  
like gaudy heroes, dislodge  
grubs, seedlings.

Someone supposed  
this was a natural place  
to release the unwanted,

supposed it was the humane  
not merely human  
thing to do.



## Magpies on Koputaroa Road

Before long, you're around  
the last bend, heading  
towards the highway, past

the lone cabbage tree,  
flower-head torn off  
by the salt-laden westerly. I read

a kahikatea forest stabilized  
the dunes, kept the wind at bay  
when magpies were brought. They

sing their odd, untranslatable songs,  
quardle, as poets say,  
dawdle on warm tarseal. It pays

to ease off the throttle  
as you swoop around  
the corner, takes time

to rise in flight  
and contrition's no use  
to feathers on metal. It's hard

not to think even they  
don't have much chance.  
So many cars, so few trees.

Loss is difficult to bear  
but more so, loss of memory  
of loss—when anything

out of shape  
is smoothed into place,  
the only certain thing

the road, vanishing,  
as it wings its way  
across the plain.

## Swallows

*after Elizabeth Smither*

A quite ordinary farm morning: well-fed cattle  
wandered to new grass. Sky vacant.  
The quad bike pattered behind,  
my mind on an appointment in the afternoon.  
The dog doubled back to sniff a batten.

Without prior visual clue or sound  
we—me, dog, steers—were surrounded  
by a flock of swallows hawking insects.  
All of even size and speed.  
One so low it skimmed the ground.

In the midst of their three-dimensional rotation  
some like gyroscopes, the air  
became a living place, a crowded sea  
through which their teeming wings dove  
without apparent constraint or ration.



## Notes to Poems

The epigrams on page 161 are from Les Murray's poem 'The Cows on Killing Day' from *Learning Human: Selected Poems* (2003) and John Kinsella's 'The Fable of the Great Sow' from *The New Yorker* (January 8, 2012).

Lines 4 and 5 in 'Oh! Kee-o Kee-o' from 'Good Intentions' are from New Zealand Birds Online, found at: <<http://nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/swamp-harrier>>

The sequence 'Drought' contains found language from an 8 December 2017 Horowhenua District Council press release titled "Level Three Water Restrictions are now in place for Levin." Poem 3 was inspired by a 21 December 2017 Horowhenua District Council notification: "Total Fire Ban for Horowhenua."

'Ode to Mycoplasma Bovis' was inspired by Conan Young's Radio New Zealand news reports, "Cow Cubicle Dairy Farm Tested In Canterbury," 14 August 2017, found at: <<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/337046/cow-cubicle-dairy-farm-tested-in-canterbury>> and "Bull semen likely culprit as M bovis origin – researcher," 29 March 2018, found at: <<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/country/353635/bull-semen-likely-culprit-as-m-bovis-origin-researcher>>

'Philosophical Proceedings' contains found language from "The Story of Papaitonga; or A Page of Maori History," by Sir Walter Buller in *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand*, Vol 26, 1893, read before the Wellington Philosophical Society, 21<sup>st</sup> February, 1894, and from "Papaitonga – The Beauty of the South – A Lake of Charm and History" by James Cowan in *The New Zealand Railways Magazine*, Vol 7 Issue 5 September 1, 1932, 31-6 found at: <[http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Gov07\\_05Rail-t1-body-d12.html](http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Gov07_05Rail-t1-body-d12.html)>

The title of 'The names are what's important. The names. Don't forget them' is by Muaūpoko kaumātua Joe Tukupua quoted in Geoff Park's *Ngā Uruora, The Groves of Life: Ecology and History in a New Zealand Landscape* (1995): 218. The place names in the poem are from G. Leslie Adkin's *Horowhenua its Maori place-names & their topographic & historical background* (1948), Fig. 153. Lake Papaitonga showing place-names and sites.

'The amateur geologist' sequence was inspired by and contains found language from G. Leslie Adkin's *Horowhenua: its Maori place-names & their topographic & historical background* (1948), and Alice Te Punga Somerville's essay, "Culvert: the slipperiness of place" in *Pukeahu: An Exploratory Anthology* (2015).

The italicised phrases in ‘Horowhenua College Tramping Club *Papaitonga Scenic Reserve, 1973*’ are from *Te Hekenga: early days in Horowhenua, being the reminiscences of Mr Rod. McDonald*, compiled and written by E. O’Donnell (1929), and “The Story of Papaitonga; or, A Page of Maori History” by Sir Walter L. Buller, read before the Wellington Philosophical Society, 21<sup>st</sup> February 1894, found at: <<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicals/TPRSNZ1893-26.2.6.1.69>>

‘Nocturne’ was inspired by science advisor Kath Walker’s report that “an individual possum can eat 60 adult *Powelliphanta* over one or two nights” in “Recovery plans for *Powelliphanta* land snails 2003-2013” *Threatened Species Recovery Plan 49* published by the Department of Conservation: 8, found at: <<https://www.doc.govt.nz/documents/science-and-technical/TSRP49.pdf>>

‘Kohekohe’ was inspired by historian Anthony Dreaver’s report that “The first settlers in the district arrived 500-650 years ago, when moa were plentiful. The dunes were then covered with kohekohe” from *Levin: the making of a town* (2006): 2.

‘Toheroa *Paphies ventricosa*’ was inspired by “Waiwiri Stream: Sources of Poor Water Quality and Impacts on the Coastal Environment,” Manaaki Taha Moana Report No. 9 October 2012, found at: <[https://ref.coastalrestorationtrust.org.nz/site/assets/files/6048/cawrpt\\_2240\\_mtm\\_waiwiri-stream\\_final\\_opt.pdf](https://ref.coastalrestorationtrust.org.nz/site/assets/files/6048/cawrpt_2240_mtm_waiwiri-stream_final_opt.pdf)>

## List of epigrams (Critical Component)

- p. 15. 'Can poetry save the earth?' Felstiner, John. *Can Poetry Save the Earth? A Field Guide to Nature Poems*. Yale UP, 2009, p. xiii.
- p. 24. 'the power of the word,' Rueckert, William. "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, Georgia UP, 1996, p. 115.
- p. 29. 'that blessed mood,' Wordsworth, William. "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798." line 38.
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