
Embattled Fictions: New Zealand Literary Intellectuals and Their Controversies

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This thesis is dedicated to my niece Lisa, born in 2017, with love.

Abstract

This thesis analyses New Zealand literary intellectual culture from the 1930s through to the end of the twentieth century. The chapters focus on seven major literary figures, each of whom has produced a body of critical, autobiographical, and imaginative writing featuring intellectuals as major characters. This project aims to trace a history of a distinct literary figure I term the “embattled intellectual”. I am interested in how this figure is created through the oeuvre of an individual author and in how it evolves over time, and in relation to key variables such as gender and ethnicity. A period of seventy years brought many transformations to different areas of New Zealand life, changing the nature of the battles in which literary intellectuals found themselves engaged. While some concerns such as biculturalism, feminism, or environmentalism have emerged with urgency only recently, other themes like art, truth, or identity, without disappearing, have been subjected to major renovations. My representative authors are Frank Sargeson, Janet Frame, Lauris Edmond, C.K. Stead, James K. Baxter, Witi Ihimaera, and Ian Wedde.

A naïve or common sense approach to this cultural history would perhaps involve conflating the figure of the embattled intellectual with an actual person and assuming the work that they produce as their complete creation. My thesis, however, shows that the figure of the embattled intellectual is a more complex compound evolving through various sources including the authors’ imaginative fiction, critical and autobiographical nonfiction, and also through the public perception of the authors and their work. It is generally assumed that the figure emerging from critical or autobiographical writing must be the closest to the actual author while fiction is seen as an adaptation of views represented in the author’s nonfiction. A closer analysis, however, reveals more nuances, complexities, and exceptions behind these generic assumptions. Every genre offers different prospects and opportunities for the public intellectual. The formation of the figure of the embattled intellectual is a cultural and artistic act involving choices of one sort or another. By communicating their ideas through literary works, public intellectuals are able to participate in the work of culture, maintaining and moving cultural boundaries.

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Introduction

When I told my colleague, a university professor, I was writing a thesis on New Zealand literature, she remarked that it must be a very short thesis and that she hoped it was not a comparative study of Russian and New Zealand authors. This, she believed, would be too embarrassing for the latter. While my study is not comparative, it is bound to have been influenced by my cultural and linguistic backgrounds. I came to New Zealand from Russia in my early twenties—not as a traveller or a student—but with the intention to stay and live here. I had a degree in Russian language and literature, and the only New Zealand author I had ever come across was Katherine Mansfield (who, at the time, I thought was English!). After a few years in the country, I decided to go back to academia and I chose to do a PhD in New Zealand literature. This, to me, was the most logical path in my personal journey of discovering a new country through its authors, stories, motives, and characters in order to make myself feel at home in my new surroundings.

On my way to Russia to visit my family, I noticed, with some pleasure, that the plane which brought me to Moscow was named after an early nineteenth century Russian poet. This is something you are unlikely to encounter in New Zealand, I thought. Whereas sports figures are placed on a pedestal, Kiwis, as a rule, do not brag about their literary culture. While I was doing my PhD, I used to work a few days a week at the Auckland Central Library where there is an enormous collection of books and manuscripts, many of which are valuable New Zealand works. Yet, right up until 2017, the library did not have a permanent display of exclusively New Zealand authors. This was the state of affairs in spite of the fact that public inquiries about New Zealand fiction are common in the library, especially from tourists or new immigrants who, like myself, are keen to try to read something local. Ironically, the librarian responsible for the permanent display of New Zealand poetry and fiction in the library research centre comes from an immigrant family.

It struck me as odd at the time that a lack of awareness of New Zealand literature beyond the country's borders was paralleled by an internal ambivalence towards art and intellectualism. In Janet Frame's novel *The Carpathians* (1988), one of the characters daydreams about moving from the New Zealand countryside to a big city: Auckland. In her excitement, she exclaims that Auckland is "a place to live" and that it is "like New York". The protagonist, Mattina, is quick to point out that Auckland is "not at all like New York":

[I]t needs more poets and painters and composers and writers, so many to a square metre, much more than it has, all built into the city's plans, to waken and put to sleep again the volcanoes, to give depth and height to the buildings and the people, to explore the forest in the sky, to make known that a forest grows in the sky. (111)

Although not always seen as a priority, art and literature remain vital for any country's development, prosperity, and wellbeing. In a small and relatively young society like New Zealand, authors have felt strongly about the shallowness of the country's intellectual life and "high" culture, and have frequently debated possible remedies.

In "Fretful Sleepers" (1952), Bill Pearson describes 1950s New Zealand as a dull, puritanical, and conformist country with little artistic culture, where "being different" means "trying to be superior" (6). In his depiction of the New Zealand character, he especially emphasises the hostile attitude towards the notion of intellectualism and intellectuals. According to Pearson, the typical New Zealander distrusts his personal feelings, "is afraid of voicing any confident thought or unsanctioned emotion", "fears ideas that don't result in increased crop-yield or money or home comforts", and "suspects anyone who is sure with words" (seeing it as "either glibness or showing off") (10–11). Harshly critical, Pearson's essay made a powerful statement about the importance of art:

So there is an aching need for art in our country. Of course there is creation – in thousands of vegetable gardens and at carpentry benches in back sheds; the creative urge always goes to make something immediately useful or money-saving. But we need art to expose ourselves to ourselves, explain ourselves to ourselves, see ourselves in perspective of place and time. (12)

Along with issuing a call for artists and intellectuals to awaken society, Pearson stresses the importance of a public collaboration with them: "No artist can work without an audience willing to co-operate: if he is to be honest his audience must be honest; they must be prepared to speculate about themselves" (12).

In a similar vein, two decades after Pearson, Wystan Curnow speaks of the nature of New Zealand intellectual culture in his important article "High Culture in a Small Province" (1973). In his description of New Zealand, he accentuates the country's small size, recent history, relative classlessness, welfare state, homogeneity, and zealously egalitarian democracy, concluding that New Zealand, to him, "is a cultural province and always will be" (157). Among the major tendencies that distinguishes New Zealand's situation from other postcolonial settler

societies, such as Canada or Australia, Curnow includes a pressure to be versatile, and—in relation to this point—a pervasive amateurism felt by artists and writers. According to Curnow, the shallowness and relative recent history of the small isolated country’s culture demands versatility from a local intellectual who, as a result, ends up being an amateur in several different areas rather than specialist in any one, and fails to fulfil the more complex requirements of a high art. Like Pearson, Curnow finishes his essay speculating on the relationships that exist between authors and their public, which he finds are rather unhealthy in New Zealand. If Pearson advocated for bringing together the intellectual and the community, Curnow suggests its antithesis, defending an elitist perspective on culture. Seeing art and scholarly work as highly complex processes, he argues against the assumption that artists and writers should close the gap between themselves and their patrons and audiences. According to Curnow, the “psychic insulation” (156) and alienation of intellectuals is essential for the stability and richness of high culture.

In *The Long Forgetting* (2007), looking back at the 1970s, Patrick Evans notes how “living in New Zealand began to feel different from before” (15). According to him, with Great Britain entering the European Community in 1973, the link between the economies of New Zealand and Britain had weakened, leaving New Zealand “defrosted, its citizens socially, psychologically and economically exposed to the air, abandoned by the mother country to an indifferent and newly challenging world” (16). Evans compares the energies felt in New Zealand around 1970 to those that, a few decades later, would smash down the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union. After being a monoculture for more than fifty years, New Zealand, in the early 1970s, had begun “to thaw and stir” (16). The new Labour Government, winning the election in 1984, stimulated and supported this shift. Throughout the following years, as Evans puts it, “this strange, insulated, homogenised little society, protected from the world by distance, tariff barriers and (often) plain ignorance” (17), “this safe, smug little haven” (18) had been systematically and cruelly torn to pieces.

This major economic transformation was accompanied by changes in gender and race relations. From the late 1970s, the monolith of elite white male supremacy was actively challenged by feminist and Maori activists, enlarging the discussion over the New Zealand character and identity. In her article “Feminism and Sexual Abuse”, Camille Guy argues that throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, radical feminists had obtained a dogmatic hegemony in defining issues of rape and sexual abuse, followed by some distressing consequences. Guy specifically refers to the 1984 incident known as “the Mervyn Thompson affair”. Six unknown women attacked Mervyn Thompson, an Auckland University lecturer and playwright, chained

him to a tree, burnt his body with cigarettes, and labelled him a rapist. Even though Thompson denied accusations of rape and no formal complaints were laid with the police or university authorities, most feminists, according to Guy, readily assumed the man's guilt and uncritically accepted the charges made against him. Looking back on the incident in 1996, Guy pointed towards the narrow range of feminist responses to the incident at the time. In contrast to the radical feminist climate of late 1970s and 1980s, later feminist writings on sexual harassment, according to her, were better prepared to deal with the complications and nuances of similar incidents.

Likewise, from the late 1970s, the belief that New Zealand enjoyed "the best race relations in the world" had been confronted and questioned. In his autobiographical book *Being Pakeha* (1985), Michael King raises a question about what it meant to be a non-Maori New Zealander. At the time, King was well known in the country for his research on Maori culture and history. In his writing, he mostly adopted Maori perspectives and worked primarily with Maori sources with an intention—as he put it—to redress Pakeha ignorance of Maori culture. In the autobiography, King notes that a number of Maori critics responded negatively to some of his publications stating that such work should be done from within the Maori community. About two decades later, King published a second version of the book, *Being Pakeha Now* (1999), pointing towards a new pressing need "to explain Pakeha New Zealander to Maori and themselves . . . in terms of *their* right to live in this country, practise their values and culture and be themselves" (9). While commending King on his aspiration to study and articulate the Maori worldview, the scholar Lydia Wevers argues that the observations and explanations King offered were built on a historically privileged position. According to Wevers, "Being Pakeha is not about becoming indigenous, it is about the engagement we committed to a long time ago" (9). She is referring to the Treaty of Waitangi, which was signed in 1840 between the Maori people and the Crown, the provisions of which were found to have a new relevance and wide-ranging implications in the decade to come.

Speaking Truth to Power (2007), edited by Laurence Simmons, revived the discussion over the role of intellectuals and intellectual life in the twenty first century. According to Simmons, in contemporary New Zealand, not only is this topic still relevant but it gains extra urgency in view of modern world realities. While the knowledge economy and the fast growth of the media seems to largely contribute to intellectual debates, the absence of a strongly articulated left-liberal alternative to a dominant neoconservative agenda, along with the indifference of the average New Zealander towards the country's history, could, he argues, seriously threaten the democratic public sphere (1). In his book, Simmons brings together "academics, journalists,

writers, scientists, activists . . . people who provide a bridge between specialised areas of knowledge and the general public” (10) to speculate on the problem. As a general observation, he notes that very few contemporary New Zealanders, including university professors, feel comfortable with their role as intellectuals. To support this point, he quotes Bruce Jesson, who observes that in New Zealand the two words “intellectual” and “wanker” have often been a substitute for one another (6). Simmons suggests that this attitude stems from a British empirical tradition of putting experience before abstract ideas, which is modified by New Zealand’s pioneering tradition that favours action over thought. The book includes essays by Roger Horrocks, Andrew Sharp, and Stephen Turner, along with interviews with leading contemporary cultural commentators, including Brian Easton, Lloyd Geering, the late Michael King, Ranginui Walker, Sandra Coney, and Nicky Hager. Their observations and opinions are worth consideration.

As Horrocks puts it, to understand the short history of New Zealand intellectualism, one needs to start by examining its longer shadow of anti-intellectualism. In his essay “A Short History of ‘the New Zealand Intellectual’”, Horrocks pays special attention to eight key factors that significantly contribute to the notion of anti-intellectualism in New Zealand. He points to the country’s small population, isolation, “brain drain”, ruralism, pioneer culture, colonial attitudes, puritanism, and egalitarianism (34–35). To Horrocks, while each of these trends is not necessarily negative on its own—he sees egalitarianism as a positive idea—the multiplier effect that each trend has on the other makes New Zealand a special case scenario and more problematic in comparison with other English-speaking settler societies. Commenting on contemporary New Zealand, Horrocks, on the one hand, acknowledges the “many gains [made] over the years, such as the creation of an infrastructure for the arts in New Zealand” (66). On the other hand, however, he affirms that he can still feel the “dull heavy presence” of anti-intellectualism in his everyday life in New Zealand. Like Horrocks, Jesson tends to see the problem as deeply rooted in the way New Zealand society is organised and functions:

I have known plenty of New Zealanders who have been well-read, intellectually-stimulating, non-conformist, courageous and sometimes eccentric. They have tended to be marginalised, however. There is something about the structure and culture of this country that fosters the mediocre conformist. (Jesson; qtd. in Horrocks 66)

As a remedy for New Zealand’s provincialism, Horrocks emphasises the importance of international input and local production.

In an essay with the rather unflattering title “Public Intellectual is a Dog”, Stephen Turner brings up the paradox of anti-intellectual intellectualism and the contradictory position of the public intellectual in New Zealand:

They [public intellectuals] are afraid that the public they address will actually take them to be intellectual, and somehow different from ordinary people. Like the public themselves they are afraid of difference, probably for good historical reasons . . . Just talking about public intellectuals, makes you . . . a wanker rather than a well-rounded bloke. (85)

Turner argues that “the fact that the public intellectual in this country is actually a dog” is a not a bad thing: “The true intellectual is a kynic – in classical terms a dog – who doesn’t expect to be understood as an intellectual but, if at all, as a common person, a person of the people” (87). He criticised New Zealand intellectuals for their “self-imposed lack of critical freedom” in which he saw a reason the public might not need them: “A member of the public looking to a local intellectual for ideas about problems of nation, identity and place is like someone talking their sexual problems to a priest who has never had sex. The intellectual in this country, like the priest, wears a dog-collar” (88). Countering the institutionalised and institution-bound idea of the intellectual, Turner argues for the freedom of idle speculation, defining intellectual work as “an activity of questioning and reflection without limit”. Instead of equating the role of the intellectual with a certain kind of person (perhaps an academic, journalist, or IT specialist), Turner prefers to think of the “public intellectual” in a broader sense as a person engaged in a “critical intellectual activity with public effects or public import in a particular place” (93).

Criticism of “ivory tower” intellectuals, which has always had a strong presence in New Zealand, only increased with the rise of political activism at the end of the century. In her interview for *Speaking Truth to Power*, writer and activist Sandra Coney, who has been involved in women’s issues in New Zealand for over thirty years, said that she felt uncomfortable with the term “public intellectual” for its connotation of “being somewhat removed from ordinary society” (251–252). Instead, she prefers to see herself as a person who takes actions that “emerge from society” and does so “with the goal of bringing about social change” (252). Coney criticises academics in New Zealand for not speaking out publicly and not playing a role more akin to an activist: “I think there should be a commitment to share knowledge with the public at large . . . What I’ve seen over the years . . . is that academics are protective of their knowledge and use it often to further their careers rather than the public good” (252). In contrast with Curnow, who, in

his 1973 article, emphasised the need for an artist or intellectual to remain detached from society, Coney accentuates actual life experience and practical involvement as integral aspects of intellectual activity. “I don’t see how you can actually have important ideas and be separate from society” (254), she writes. “Testing your ideas against people’s actual lived experience is an important reality check, and I think there is a great deal to be learned from being in touch with issues that arise in people’s lives” (254).

Like Coney, Ranginui Walker, a Maori writer and academic, underlines the connection with community and an involvement in politics as essential constituents of a Maori public intellectual. Regarding a “purely” academic job as “a selfish, lonely pursuit – you don’t get enmeshed in community activity”, he sees his role as “the interface between the University [of Auckland] and the Maori community, and the Maori community and the general community” (230). In his interview with Simmons, Walker points out the differences between Pakeha and Maori cultures, and how, until recently, the Maori perspective was absent in New Zealand’s intellectual discourse: “Of course, being a Maori I had the inside understanding of the culture, and my world view was different from that of the public intellectuals and commentators” (230). To Walker, the role of a Maori public intellectual occupies “a complicated, unique space in New Zealand culture” (231). He stresses, for instance, that it is in the nature of a Maori intellectual as a bicultural person to write “objectively”—with two audiences in mind. While keeping out of national politics, Walker, as Simmons put it, earned himself a reputation of being “very much a political animal” (230). As with most activists at the time, his definition of politics is strikingly broad and general: “I think politics is the stuff of life, and if we don’t engage in it, at whatever level we find ourselves, then life is hardly worth living” (230).

In my thesis, I take a closer look at New Zealand’s literary intellectual culture from the 1930s to the end of the twentieth century. Following the example of Simmons’ book, I use the word “intellectual” broadly, including those writers or characters pursuing creative work as well as those professionally engaged as academic thinkers or commentators on the arts. My chapters focus on seven major intellectual figures, each of whom has produced a body of critical, autobiographical, and imaginative writing featuring intellectuals as major characters. I purposely chose authors who move between genres in order to investigate the public and private dimensions of their work and the way genre constrains or modifies their views and opinions. This thesis, as a whole, aims to trace a history of a distinct literary figure whom we might term the “embattled intellectual”. The figure of the intellectual is not identical with the actual person inhabiting that role. He or she is always, to some extent, an imagined or invented construct, who may be more or less close to the actual circumstances of the writer. I am interested in how this

figure is produced through the oeuvre of an individual author as well as how this figure changes over time in relation to key variables such as gender and ethnicity. A period of seventy years to the end of the twentieth century brought many transformations to different areas of New Zealand life, changing the nature of the battles in which literary intellectuals engaged. While some themes such as biculturalism, feminism, or environmentalism have emerged with urgency, only recently, other concerns like art, truth, or identity, without disappearing, have experienced major renovations. My representative authors are Frank Sargeson, Janet Frame, Lauris Edmond, Karl Stead, James K. Baxter, Witi Ihimaera, and Ian Wedde.

These authors, as dissimilar as they are alike, have been selected to introduce three generations of New Zealand literary intellectuals experiencing various events and shifts in the country's history. They also bring diverse practices and perspectives into play. The thesis starts with the iconic figure of Frank Sargeson, whose name has long been associated with New Zealand's literary nationalism of the 1930s and the so-called "beginnings" of New Zealand literature. The chapter on Sargeson attempts to unveil the paradox of him being a curiously "unpublic" public intellectual by exploring the relation between his early semi-autobiographical novel *I Saw in My Dream* and his later three-volume autobiography *Once is Enough, More than Enough and Never Enough*. By analysing narrative techniques, motives, and themes in these texts, I track the author's journey from the private to the public realm, while demonstrating how the notion of a mask is challenged in each narrative. Contrary to genre expectations, the novel, a "closeted" text, ends up being less masked than we may have assumed. Experimental in its nature, *I Saw in My Dream* expands and challenges the boundaries of Sargeson's earlier writing style, revealing a shrewd and sophisticated author, customarily hiding behind the mask of a neutral unsophisticated third-person narrator. The autobiographies, in a similar vein—though they come across as more "public", open, and direct—continue to remain subjective, selective, and fictional at the same time.

The chapter on Sargeson is followed by a chapter on the writings of Janet Frame, who is often seen as the former's protégée. Both writers shared a preference for seclusion and privacy over public exposure, and yet they became very widely known. In contrast to the rest of the selected authors, Sargeson and Frame stand out as relatively "unpublic" literary figures, who prioritised their responsibility to their art over social concerns. This notion, as my thesis demonstrates, changes considerably over the coming decades. In the chapter, I discuss the public image of Frame as a reclusive and "exceptional" figure. I look closely at Frame's autobiographical novel *Towards Another Summer* and her autobiographies, both of which portray a female writer as a protagonist, modelled on the author. I explore the relationships between the

author and her fictional proxies in connection with Frame's idea of personality, her views on the unreliability of language, and her belief in the subjectivity of language, as expressed in interviews, autobiography, and fiction. I look at how the differences in narration, including the temporal aspect of narration, affect the image and believability of the protagonist in the novel and the autobiography. Finally, I discuss Frame's ideas on truth and reality, revealing their consistency in her writing across different time periods and genres.

Frame's status as a public literary intellectual is wedded to the cult of "exceptionalism" that surrounds her. By contrast, the other female writer I will be looking at, Lauris Edmond, is closely associated with the rise of feminism in the 1970s. Both Edmond and Frame were born in the same year and published their autobiographies in the 1980s, recounting their eventful life stories and writing careers. Unlike Frame, I tend to read Edmond as a symptomatic figure of her time, a representative of many other female public figures of her generation who began their careers and gained a sense of independence during the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s in New Zealand. If the chapter on Frame only slightly touches on her take on feminism (in keeping with its status in her work), the chapter on Edmond engages fully with the representation and development of the feminist ideas of the time, such as issues of gender, the concept of intellectualism, and the notion of privacy. I demonstrate how these ideas shape the image of the female protagonist in Edmond's poetry and autobiographical prose. In place of a more traditional "white academic male" archetype of intellectual protagonist, Edmond offered a new kind of an "intellectual hero": a private family woman and a mother of many children who had sacrificed her domestic life for a public career as a writer. My analysis focuses on the theme of family in Edmond's poetry and autobiography, and the differences in its representation within these mediums. I argue that Edmond's writing is a therapeutic attempt to reinvent her own identity. By making the private realm public, she is able to connect her private and public selves in order to become a "whole" person.

The central chapter of my thesis introduces C.K. Stead as the preeminent public literary intellectual of twentieth-century New Zealand. Of all the selected authors, Stead has been given the most attention in this thesis. Not only was he personally acquainted with all the other authors I chose to study, but, as a prolific and influential literary critic, he has also offered many controversial yet insightful and challenging critical responses to their works. With this in mind, we may even call the time period covered in the thesis "the Stead era". While the chapter presents his views on Maori topics, it also contains his allegedly reactionary opinions on various subjects discussed in every other chapter of this thesis, as other writers are often defined in relation to Stead's writing and opinions. In the chapter on Stead, I discuss the tensions and

disagreements between the critic and a number of Pacific authors, including Witi Ihimaera, Keri Hulme, and Albert Wendt, with regard to history, identity, privilege, and discrimination. The second half of the chapter looks closely at how Stead approaches the same issues in his novel *The Singing Whakapapa* (1994). I argue that the differences in genre render similar ideas and opinions less provocative and incendiary in the author's work of fiction in comparison to his more controversial critical writing. While the question which of Stead's two faces—a novelist or a critic—is closer to the “real” Stead cannot possibly be answered, the author's reputation as a “reactionary”, originating primarily from his non-fictional texts, comes across as much too simplistic.

The chapter on Stead opens the theme of biculturalism in New Zealand that is continued in the following two chapters on James K. Baxter and Witi Ihimaera. If Stead made a name for himself as a critic of the new bicultural order, Baxter, by contrast, became known as one of few Pakeha authors who was highly regarded by the Maori community. Apart from his poetry and critical writing, the public image of Baxter is strongly associated in New Zealand with the counterculture community in Jerusalem. This makes him particularly interesting for this project. In the chapter on Baxter, I discuss his controversial reputation as a prophet and messiah, and the role of ideology in his writing.¹ I look at how Baxter's many personae—the critic, prophet, and poet—coexist in his critical writing and poetry, and how the figure of the protagonist is constructed. I argue that the image of the prophet is stronger and more definite in Baxter's nonfiction while in his poetry it is ambiguous and complex. In *Jerusalem Sonnets*, in particular, Baxter readjusts the biblical figure of a prophet, merging it with the role and characteristics of tuakana, an older and more experienced brother in Maori culture. Balancing the two worlds and actively engaging in dialogue with the others, Baxter's version of a messiah appears less commanding and assertive in comparison to a biblical prophet.

While Witi Ihimaera is by no means the only Maori literary intellectual, a few factors make him an ideal candidate for this project. Ihimaera is the first Maori writer to publish a book of short stories and a novel; he was the first Maori Professor of English at the University of Auckland. Besides fiction, his work also includes a significant body of critical writing, which is an important part of the selection criteria for this thesis, and one that other significant Maori writers, such as Patricia Grace or Hone Tuwhare, did not meet. Finally, in his novel *The Matriarch*, Ihimaera introduces a new type of a protagonist—a Maori public intellectual—who

¹ Work on Baxter was completed before the recent publication of his letters and the revelation that he claimed to have raped his wife. The effect of this on his standing will take some time to be worked through and is not addressed in this thesis.

bears a strong resemblance to the author himself. In Chapter Six, I draw attention to Ihimaera's use of the term "nonfiction" to describe the kind of writing that is, by its nature, direct, polemical, and confrontational. During the Maori renaissance in the 1970s and 80s, the author praised the aforementioned qualities as highly valued, while perceiving the impartiality of fiction as incomplete or weak. In this regard, I propose to interpret Ihimaera's novel *The Matriarch* as his attempt to advance his imaginary writing within the novel form by integrating elements of nonfiction into fiction. In the first half of the chapter, I discuss various critical responses to the novel, which highlight its ambiguities and controversies. I suggest viewing these textual contradictions as a result of Ihimaera's experiment in combining fiction and nonfiction. Aside from *The Matriarch*, I look closely at the author's nonfiction, such as his editor's introductions to the anthologies of Maori writing, to identify certain common topics in the ideas and techniques between them as well as Ihimaera's fiction.

Finally, the youngest of the selected authors, Ian Wedde, is a public intellectual from a "new" generation described by his contemporaries as "a leader among the generation of writers born in the immediate post-war period" (Simpson 579) and "the most respected New Zealand writer of his generation" (Ricketts 43). In this chapter, I explore how the ideas of social responsibility, art, identity, and truth are essential to Wedde's thinking and writing, and how they have been developed in the various genres he has worked with, particularly in his critical essays and poetry. In the first half of the chapter, I look at the concept of the "uselessness" of art in Wedde's critical piece "Does Poetry Matter?" By comparing Wedde and Stead's ideas on art, I suggest that the nature of their disagreement is generational and originates from their different views on the role of a poet in society. Unlike the strictly elitist Stead, Wedde, in his writing, tries to encompass a spectrum that includes both the demotic and the hieratic. The latter half of this chapter looks closely at three of Wedde's poems to illustrate this argument. I focus on how the author speaks to different public groups, such as the broader community in the poem "The Pathway to the Sea", a more particular "consumer" audience in "A Ballad for Worser Herberley", and a sophisticated intellectual audience in "The Lifeguard".

Several concerns have been considered while selecting the authors for study in this thesis. It was of primary importance that the author was a public figure and literary intellectual who has been a shaping force in New Zealand literary culture. He or she must have worked in different mediums and genres, including both nonfiction (autobiography and/or critical writing) and imaginative writing (fiction and/or poetry) featuring intellectuals as major characters. A career combining work in several genres, while not in itself an essential constituent of the public intellectual, nonetheless raises their visibility in that specific role. Finally, it was important to

include writers who are to be seen as symptomatic figures of their generation, representatives of other authors who, at the time, shared their perspectives and ideas while moving in a similar direction. Notwithstanding the above criteria in mind, there are, of course, many other New Zealand literary intellectuals that meet my conditions of selection. In addition to my chosen cohort, those who could have potentially been considered in this thesis include Robin Hyde, Allen Curnow, Bill Pearson, Maurice Gee, Maurice Shadbolt, Patricia Grace, Vincent O'Sullivan, Albert Wendt, Bill Manhire, Keri Hulme, and Fiona Kidman, all of whom are important voices in the context of twentieth-century New Zealand literature. Yet, in order to show different dimensions while avoiding overlapping thematic preoccupations, I had to narrow down my selection to suit the scope of this thesis. It seemed important, for instance, to include Baxter and Wedde, as both of them spent their literary careers outside the realm of academia and were able to bring other perspectives to the figure of a public intellectual, thus providing a contrast to University of Auckland scholars such as Stead and Ihimaera. For this reason, the figures of Curnow and Wendt, while clearly important, were excluded, as their inclusion would risk the introduction of an undue bias towards University of Auckland scholars, which may have been ideologically unwieldy and redundant. Apart from the key authors included in this thesis, however, some other authors still come across in relevant discussions. For instance, Chapters 3 and 5 on Edmond and Baxter have a number of references to Curnow, whereas Hulme and Wendt enter into discussion in Chapter 4 on Stead.

The methodological orientation of my thesis draws on Dorrit Cohn's writing on fact and fiction along with the theory, and practice of New Historicism as it has been influentially developed in the works of Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher. In each of my chapters, I look at compositions of fiction and nonfiction. This is bound to raise the question of the relationship between the two modes of literary production. While some scholars argue that there is no generic difference, others insist on a categorical distinction. In this respect, I have found Cohn's perspective to be a useful guide. In *The Distinction of Fiction* (1999), Cohn contests popular poststructuralist views that suggest that *all* narratives are fictional, seeing them as "the most pervasive and prominently problematic application of the word *fiction* ... weighted with considerable ideological freight" (8). As opposed to the poststructuralists, Cohn understands fiction in its constrained sense of a non-referential narrative. She argues that a fictional narrative "achieves something entirely alien to historical narrative" (9) and that it is "unique in its potential for crafting a self-enclosed universe ruled by formal patterns that are ruled out in all orders of discourse" (i). The existence of "indecisive", "indeterminate" texts where the line

between fact and fiction may seem particularly blurry to Cohn cannot serve as proof that there is no essential difference between the two modes. Instead, she states:

[T]hese ambiguous texts indicate quite the contrary: namely, that we cannot conceive of any given text as more or less fictional, more or less factual, but that we read it in one key or the other – that fiction, in short, is not a matter of degree but of kind. (35)

Cohn identifies three signposts of fictionality that allow one to distinguish fictional and historical texts on a narratological basis. The first involves distinguishing between levels of analysis (story and discourse). According to Cohn, in contrast to its centrality for the study of fiction, the story–discourse model remains insufficient and incomplete for nonfictional narratology. She argues that unlike fictional narratives, the discourse of nonfiction has very close ties to the level of reference:

The fact is that a text-oriented poetics of fiction excludes on principle a realm that is at the very centre of the historiographer’s concern: the more or less reliably documented evidence of past events out of which the historian fashions his story. It is this other relationship, between the story level and what we might call the referential level (or data base), that has riveted the attention of historiographers ever since it has become problematized by modern poetics. (112)

Cohn’s second criterion that distinguishes fiction from nonfiction concerns narrative situations (involving voice and mode). She argues that unlike fictional texts, historical narratives are unable to use narrative situations to perceive the thoughts and feelings of characters. In comparison to the narrator of a third-person novel, the historical narrator is “a real person” who “inhabits the real world” and “is separated from all other beings in that world, living or dead” (123). While the status of a homodiegetic fictional narrator might be similar to the status of a historian in a real world, the same restrictions never apply to the heterodiegetic narrator, who has the ability to penetrate the minds of other characters and describe experiences in which he or she does not participate. Finally, the third signpost, outlined by Cohn, relates the concept of the narrator to its extratextual origin and effect. Cohn argues that in contrast to nonfiction, where the narrator is identical to a real person (the author named on its title page), the separation between author and narrator remains “an option that could be fully validated” to a different degree in any fictional work. This option, according to Cohn, is “one of the factors that makes the reading of

fictional narratives a qualitatively different experience from the reading of univocally authored narratives” (130).

Besides the question of genre, another crucial aspect of my study relates to the concept of culture. The thesis, as a whole, is fundamentally concerned with how literary intellectuals have made culture and what this making entails. Taking into account the reasonably wide range of authors I have chosen to study, spread across different time periods, any definition of culture is likely to vary between them. For some of the authors, culture refers to a viable national tradition. For others, the question of culture is more concerned with negotiating its constituency by making room for previously marginalised groups, such as women or Maori. Given this diversity, it is important to elaborate on the definition of “culture” that I use in my thesis.

For the purpose of this research, I derive my understanding of the term “culture” from New Historical practice, as outlined by Greenblatt. In his influential essay “Culture”, Greenblatt considers how the anthropological concept of culture could be useful for the study of literary texts. With this end in view, he suggests approaching culture as a system that simultaneously embraces two seemingly opposite notions—constraint and mobility:

If culture functions as a structure of limits, it also functions as the regulator and guarantor of movement. Indeed the limits are virtually meaningless without movement; it is only through improvisation, experiment, and exchange that cultural boundaries can be established. (228)

According to Greenblatt, literature has been a powerful force in both constraining people to respect cultural boundaries as well as challenging and reshaping those boundaries. Great works of art, as he puts it, “do not merely passively reflect the prevailing ratio of mobility and constraint; they help to shape, articulate, and reproduce it through their improvisatory intelligence” (229). A full cultural analysis, according to Greenblatt, needs to make the most of these complex relations between a work of literature and the culture within which it was produced. As a starting point for a cultural analysis, Greenblatt suggests a set of cultural questions:

- 1) What kinds of behavior, what models of practice, does this work seem to enforce? 2) Why might readers at a particular time and place find this work compelling? 3) Are there differences between my values and the values implicit in the work I am reading? 4) Upon what social understanding does the work depend? 5) Whose freedom of thought or movement might be constrained implicitly or explicitly by this work? 6) What are the

larger social structures with which these particular acts of praise or blame might be connected? (226)

By downplaying the distinction between high and low art, in *Practicing New Historicism*, Gallagher and Greenblatt challenge an elitist hierarchical view on culture:

When the literary text ceases to be a sacred, self-enclosed, and self-justifying miracle, when in the sceptical mood we foster it begins to lose at least some of the special power ascribed to it, its boundaries begin to seem less secure and it loses exclusive rights to the experience of wonder. (12)

Instead of solely focusing on high art objects, Gallagher and Greenblatt opt for embracing and accommodating a variety of texts in order to “open the windows to the culture at large” (13). The New Historicists emphasise cultural intertextuality and read culture as a network of texts, where both literary and non-literary forms are equally valuable: “[I]t is to imagine that the writers we love did not spring up from nowhere and that their achievements must draw upon a whole life-world and that this life-world has undoubtedly left other traces of itself” (13).

In the tradition of New Historicism, my study aims to understand literary works through their historical context as well as to investigate intellectual history and cultural history through literature. I share the interest New Historicists have shown towards the relationship between a text and the political and social circumstances in which it originated as well as their non-hierarchical, more inclusive view on literature. For my analysis, I consider a range of materials from different genres without privileging literary texts over their non-literary counterparts. I do not accept the distinction between a primary text (a novel) and secondary or background material, such as an essay or autobiography, in favour of a common shifting field of intertextuality. Lastly, I tend to agree with the fundamental belief of New Historicists, which suggests that making culture is not a point one arrives at but an endless process. In a strict sense, however, my research cannot be called New Historicist as I work rather loosely within its tradition. In my thesis, in particular, I do not challenge the idea of the author in a way many New Historicists do. In the practice of New Historicism, the author is commonly perceived as a construct of his or her time period, a non-autonomous agent subjected to the multiple social, political, and cultural forces of their era. In my study, however, I tend to take into account the author’s possible intentions, seeing them as a dynamic participant in ideological shifts that occur during a given historical period.

In summary, the aim of this thesis is to map and consider New Zealand literary intellectual culture of the twentieth century through close reading and the analysis of the selected texts. The authors I am interested in—in addition to their literary work—have played the role of a public intellectual or have been perceived as such while also portraying intellectuals as major characters in their creative work. The seven chapters, each focusing on a separate author, engage with a number of ideas and questions that evolve around the constitution of the figure of the embattled intellectual and are essential for understanding the intellectual and cultural history that this figure embodies and represents, the role of public intellectuals in society, and the nature of cultural change. What does it mean to be a literary intellectual in New Zealand? What are the myths and controversies surrounding them? How is the figure of the embattled intellectual constructed? What are the external and internal battles that have shaped this figure? How do genre differences and choices affect their formation? What is the intellectual milieu in which public literary intellectuals are raised in New Zealand, and how do they develop, shape, or challenge it in return? These questions and controversies, which are addressed and discussed in my thesis, are all about New Zealand culture—where it happens and who makes it happen—about “embattled” fictions and figures who have reflected, shaped, and challenged New Zealand’s cultural boundaries.

CHAPTER 1

Frank Sargeson: The Making of a New Zealand Intellectual

The notion of publicity was never very congenial to Frank Sargeson. In *More Than Enough*, he declares that he has never seen himself as a public figure:

[A]bout being in what is called the public eye I had very mixed feelings ... my better feelings were all for those individuals who quietly and patiently worked with love and skill at tasks which, profitable or not in terms of money, were their own constant delight and satisfying reward. (122–23)

Preferring seclusion and privacy to public exposure, Sargeson cannot be considered a public intellectual in quite the same sense as most other authors in this thesis, apart from Janet Frame. Yet, his literary persona has garnered significant public recognition in the country. He is often credited with creating the conditions that gave New Zealand a literary culture. According to C.K. Stead, “he was probably more important to other writers than to readers” (“Frank Sargeson” 47). In “A Letter to Frank Sargeson”, published in 1953 in *Landfall* to mark Sargeson’s fiftieth birthday, a group of local authors celebrated him as a model and “symbol of his own lifetime” who “had broken down our isolation in the world of letters” (Ballantyne et al. 5). To Frame, he stood solely at the watershed of “an orchard” of New Zealand literary culture: “Remember the narrow channel you made, all alone, into that part of the land where everyone said nothing would grow . . .” (qtd. in King *Frank Sargeson* 9). For Lawrence Jones, Sargeson perfectly fits Baxter’s description of a New Zealand writer as “a cell of good living in a corrupt society” as well as Charles Brasch’s image of an artist as a conscious nonconformist standing outside his society (“FS and the GNZN” 73). This reputation appears to have solidified in the eyes of a younger generation. John Newton, writing in 2017, affirms “in the story of the invention of New Zealand literature, only Curnow’s role is as profound as Sargeson’s” (*Hard Frost* 264). He particularly highlights Sargeson’s embodiment of writing as an achievable vocation through his genuine commitment to the job. In this context, Newton proposes to see the author’s autobiography, not his fiction, as his major achievement: “Sargeson is the writer who genuinely does ‘commit the whole man’ to the job. It’s this that makes the autobiographies a key text – the ordinary account of the making of a New Zealand writer – for it’s Sargeson who proves that such a thing is indeed possible” (272).

This chapter attempts to unveil the paradox of Sargeson being a curiously “unpublic” public intellectual by drawing comparisons between two of the author’s texts: his early autobiographical novel *I Saw in My Dream* (1949) and the later autobiographies, particularly *Once Is Enough* (1973). Both narratives are bildungsromans, conveying the story of how the artist came to be the person that he is. They draw upon similar material: the events, people, and places of Sargeson’s early childhood in Hamilton and his adolescence in the King Country. In this chapter, I will argue that the genre affiliation of the two narratives is less distinct than it might appear as each of them blends both fictional and nonfictional elements and techniques. Later in the thesis, we will encounter other examples of genre blending, for instance, in texts by Lauris Edmond, Witi Ihimaera, and, in particular, Janet Frame, who presents the most pronounced example of such blending. While texts that blur the line between fact and fiction are not uncommon, the case of Sargeson stands out as particularly interesting for its potential to shed light on the author’s image and reputation in the country. I study the narrative techniques in both texts that demonstrate how the notion of a mask is challenged in each. Contrary to genre expectations, the novel, a “closeted” text, ends up being less masked than we might think. In the autobiography, however more open and direct, masks are not entirely dropped. For my analysis, I am going to consider some experiences of the real author, such as his trial for sexual assault, which is never openly addressed in his writing and was revealed posthumously in the author’s biography by Michael King. I will demonstrate how the trauma of conviction resonates through each narrative with a different outcome—the strong feeling of resentment in the early novel is replaced by a warmer and calmer tone in the later autobiography. The investigation of consistencies and differences between the novel and the autobiography will help to elucidate the central paradox of this chapter, bringing a better understanding of Sargeson’s persona as an embattled literary intellectual.

As the first fiction writer who stayed and made a literary career in New Zealand, the road was never going to be easy for Sargeson. Besides imaginative and financial struggles, there were many ongoing external battles that he had to engage with. A popular example includes his dispute with Monte Holcroft, who became the editor of the *Listener* in 1949, which led to the end of the author’s work for the journal. The argument originated from Sargeson’s belief that Holcroft paid him noticeably less for reviewing than his predecessor Oliver Duff. In his letter to Dawson, he complained about Holcroft refusing to print one of his radio reviews and about Holcroft’s insistence on Sargeson signing his reviews for the journal with his own name (qtd. in King *FS* 311). Unlike Duff, who was—as the writer put it—“immensely kind to me, generous with his appreciation”, Holcroft’s whole attitude “[was] probably ... coloured by his imagining

that I had collected certain advantages which he'd have liked to have had himself" (Sargeson to Beveridge, Part 2, 151). According to Kevin Cunningham, Sargeson's contributions to the *New Zealand Listener* were often only brief notes on current books, written, in his own words, "to pay the damn rates" (10). The spat continued in the *Listener's* correspondence column with Sargeson challenging editorial policy on reviewing fees and the anonymity of contributions. As King notes, most writers observed the incident from the sidelines, reluctant to become publicly involved (*FS* 312).

The choice of being a writer in a country with an underdeveloped writing culture seems to have had a peculiar impact on Sargeson's work, both thematically and stylistically. His financial hardship made him acquainted with a world of outcasts and misfits, whom he portrays in his fiction. Eventually, he became best known as a writer of short stories featuring men alone, drifters, casual workers, eccentrics, murderers, and suicidal individuals. He invented a literary language drawn from and representing his New Zealand subject: an unsophisticated and inarticulate down-to-earth Kiwi bloke. In contrast to the "simple" man who prevailed in his earlier short stories, a different type of protagonist emerges from his later writing, one with a stronger resemblance to the author himself.

Published in London in 1949, *I Saw in My Dream* is an expanded version of Sargeson's previous work *When the Wind Blows* (1945) and the author's first full-length novel. The first part of the plot, originally narrated in *When the Wind Blows*, conveys the story of Henry Griffins' puritan childhood in a New Zealand provincial town. The second part covers the young-adult experience of Dave Spencer (Henry's pseudonym) on a sheep farm. The coming-of-age novel is loosely modelled on James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (hereafter referred to as *Portrait*) while also directing a strong focus on local traditions. In his letter to Dawson in 1943, Sargeson mentions his intention to depict a colonial Stephen Dedalus, who would be "half-baked compared to the Dublin one", so Sargeson can "make the most of wonderful opportunities for self-ridicule" (*Letters* 62). The critical reception of the book was mixed and less favourable than the author would have expected. According to Jones, it "was not, as Sargeson had hoped, welcomed as the Great New Zealand Novel" ("FS and the Making" 171). Brasch highlights "the extraordinary vividness and actuality of much of the central section" and yet finds the book as a whole "unsatisfying as a novel" (qtd. in King *FS* 303). In his review, John Lehmann admires the atmosphere of the New Zealand countryside created by the author, particularly some individual scenes depicting sheep shearing or the Christmas party, and praises Sargeson's style: "lucid, flexible and consistent . . . a fine achievement, the reward of a patient craftsmanship rare in this country [New Zealand]" (159). He applauds the book as "the work of a genuine creative artist"

(160)—though he adds that “the book fails as a novel” (160). Other critics, like H. Winston Rhodes, suggest that the lack of critical appreciation for the book is a result of its experimental nature. In his analysis, Rhodes approaches the novel as a modernist work, arguing that its unity comes from symbolism, parallels, contrasts, and repetitions in interior monologue, rather than its action, plot, or drama (*Frank Sargeson* 115).

King sums up the consensus: the general criticism of the book comes from “difficulties readers had in matching up parts one (Henry’s story) and two (Dave’s story); and a feeling that this central character, Henry/Dave, lacked vitality” (*Frank Sargeson* 302). As Lehmann puts it, “as a thinking, suffering human being he [Henry] scarcely exists” (158). The problematic relation between Henry and Dave is noticed and discussed by Rhodes:

David Spencer . . . is scarcely recognisable as Henry Griffiths of the earlier part. . . . His whole being seems to have changed, or at any rate is in the process of change, and the carefully controlled method of narration does not make it easier to identify him with the callow, repressed and frantic Henry . . . (*Frank Sargeson* 109)

While the sexual orientation of the protagonist is never openly stated in the text, in the following analysis, I have taken the liberty of assuming that Henry/Dave is a homosexual character. I am aware that such an assumption would not have been made by a large section of Sargeson’s readership at the time but it seems to have been made by at least a section of his readers. I suspect that Sargeson intended the narrative to be double-coded in this way, invisible to most readers yet evident to those with eyes to see. The basis for my inference lies in the way the assumption of homosexuality clears up ambiguities in the text, especially the character’s rapid, mysterious transition from Henry to Dave, as pointed out by several critics.

In *Epistemology of the Closet* (1991), Eve Sedgwick defines the term “closet”, or what she also calls the regime of “the open secret”, as a set of conflicting and restraining rules about privacy and disclosure, public and private, ignorance and knowledge. She argues that homosexuality and heterosexuality mutually define each other and that the regime has been fundamental to lesbian/gay life in the Western society for all of the twentieth century. The closeted perspective of some of Sargeson’s texts had already been noticed at the time, mostly with negative implications, by the author’s contemporaries. Denis Glover found the novel “coy and artificial”, lacking “tension and muscular fibre” (qtd. in Newton, “Shepherds Who Call Each Other Darlings” 42). Likewise, Dan Davin pointed towards the author’s “special ambiguity”, preferring stories “working from a less idiosyncratic point of view on the NZ scene” (qtd. in

Jones, “FS and the GNZN” 79–80). In the 1990s, the rise of queer theory triggered a new interest in Sargeson’s personality and his literary works. The issues of gender and sexuality in Sargeson’s texts have since been addressed by a number of critics such as Kai Jensen, Simon During, Lydia Wevers, and Mark Williams. Published in 1995, 13 years after the writer’s death, King’s biography devotes considerable attention to Sargeson’s homosexuality, in particular revealing the fact of his conviction and trial for indecent assault in Wellington in 1929, previously unknown to the public. Mark Williams stresses the complexity and contradiction of Sargeson’s prose originating from “a deliberately subversive homoerotic subtext” (*Leaving the Highway* 25). According to Kai Jensen, “Sargeson’s whole literary practice demands to be read in the light of his closeted homosexuality” (69).

Written three decades after his first novel, the three volumes of Sargeson’s autobiography, *Once is Enough* (published in 1973), *More Than Enough* (1975), and *Never Enough!* (1975) were immediately received as significant additions to the work of a major author. King regarded them as Sargeson’s major writing achievements of the mid-1970s (*Frank Sargeson* 398). Cunningham called the book “perhaps the fullest examination we have of the making of a New Zealander” (415). He particularly paid attention to the author’s narrative shift from “walking invisible” in his fiction to “speaking in his own voice” in the autobiography, finding it ironic that a writer “as dedicated as Sargeson has been to the art of fruitful self-effacement should come to be remembered best for an autobiographical work” (410–11). Some other scholars, like King, stressed the unconventionality of Sargeson’s autobiography due to its resemblance with a work of fiction. As King notices, the memoirs were not written chronologically but, like fiction, “established themes, put them aside, returned to them, discarded them, and picked them up again” (398). Furthermore, he doubts the “truthfulness” of Sargeson’s account of his life “in the sense of a documentary depiction of events”, specifying, however, that “[t]here is little in the memoirs that is strictly untrue; they simply reconstruct decisions and events to give shape and meaning to the course his life had taken” (*Frank Sargeson* 398). In line with King, Stuart Murray points out the degree of myth in Sargeson’s autobiographical account of his trip to Europe by contrasting it with the more factual and detailed description of the journey in the author’s early unpublished text “A New Tramp Abroad”.

In the same way that Sargeson’s autobiography gravitates towards fiction, *I Saw in My Dream* relies heavily on autobiography. King, in particular, refers to a number of autobiographical anecdotes in the novel, including Henry’s unhappy first day at school and the incidence of playground fights (*Frank Sargeson* 30) or the protagonist’s adolescent passion for theology (*Frank Sargeson* 49) in Part 1. Likewise, Part 2 draws greatly on Sargeson’s memory of

Okahukura and his uncle's neighbourhood in the construction of the rural scenes. In spite of the novel's varied autobiographical references, in his public comments, Sargeson avoids any suggestion of a resemblance between himself and the protagonist Henry/Dave: "I remember when writing that [*I Saw in My Dream*], over long stretches I didn't think of myself; I thought of somebody I knew well when I was a boy who was even more extreme of what I seemed to be myself" (Sargeson to Beveridge 17). King points out that *When the Wind Blows* represented one of the author's first conscious attempts to distance his writing from his personal experience. He notices, for instance, that any actual evidence of Hamilton disappears from the text. Yet, King has no doubt that it is Hamilton that served as an inspiration for the protagonist's small home town ("A Conversation with My Uncle" 18). Unlike the later memoirs, which nearly span the author's entire life, the novel only covers and resembles some parts of it. In the autobiography, the formation of Sargeson as a writer is shown to be influenced by certain experiences and people, many of whom, however, are omitted in the novel. The writer's uncle Oakley, for instance, as Sargeson put it, "was being reserved for my best book when I had arrived at the time for its being written" (qtd. in King *FS* 291–292). According to Rhodes, "Henry does not have the good fortune to meet with anyone possessing a normally happy and open disposition who is able to understand his problems and help him to overcome his difficulties" ("The Moral Climate" 39). In his review of the novel, Lehmann notes that although the story was clearly made out of Sargeson's own experience, "Henry Griffiths is not Frank Sargeson; Sargeson is in the director's chair or behind the camera; Henry is an anonymous 'stand-in' who goes through the motions but hasn't much idea what it is all about" (159). Through the use of narrative techniques, omissions, and generalisations, Sargeson makes sure he creates the necessary gap between himself and his protagonist: "I felt the need of a suitable hero, and wanted if possible to avoid any suggestion that the author himself was the hero" (Sargeson, *Conversation in a Train* 60).

In his interview with Michael Beveridge, published in 1970 in *Landfall*, Sargeson talks about the masks that an author has to wear while writing fiction. He recalls that one of major problems he faced when endeavouring to write a novel is the constraint of first-person narration. The mask of an illiterate protagonist, in particular, while working well in short stories, sets enormous limitations as soon as he attempts a longer work. The solution he found to this challenge involved assuming the mask of a more educated person which, according to him, opened the text up towards more options and possibilities. Sargeson emphasises that the masks had never been completely dropped. Not only cannot one write maskless but one also cannot live maskless. To Sargeson, "it's the essence of being human that you are wearing a mask" and "if you get a maskless civilization you have no civilization at all" (Part 1, 17). While he agreed that

at least once in their lifetime, writers, of whom he said he was not an exception, come to wear a mask that is fairly close to them, any strong reliance on autobiographical material was seen by him as unprofessional and amateurish. In his last novel, *Memoirs of a Peon*, Sargeson prides himself on creating a distinct protagonist with no resemblance to himself: “What could be more of a mask, surely, than that of Newhouse in *Memoirs of a Peon*?” (Sargeson to Beveridge, Part 1, 16). However, in his review of the novel, Stead argues that the “mask” Sargeson assumed in *Memoirs of a Peon* is nothing more than a superficial implement: “Newhouse’s mind, his imagination, his preoccupations, his values, are all Sargeson’s, with much of its colour, its literary idealism, its fads and fancies” (“Sargeson’s Peon” 53). According to Stead, the dividing line between the protagonist and the author, which made Sargeson believe that he had evaded the trap of fictional subjectivity, lies predominantly in the character’s heterosexuality, which Stead, in his turn, finds far-fetched and unconvincing:

[I]t was here where his [Sargeson’s] imagination, if it can’t be said quite to have failed him, certainly faltered and turned back on itself . . . To represent a convincing heterosexual Casanova was beyond him . . . The men, on the other hand, are sources of endless interest and affectionate speculation. (“Sargeson’s Peon” 54–55)

While objectivity is, of course, relative, and any work of art, in the end, is inevitably limited by the vision and persona of its creator, Sargeson’s conscious attempts to enlarge the gap and distance himself from his fictional proxy in his earlier writing seems indicative of a number of things such as the time period, the nature of the author’s talent, and personal circumstances. As Stead notes, “one of Sargeson’s tenets at that time was that too much contemporary fiction was simply the thinly disguised reworking of autobiography, in which authors never escaped from their egos” (“Sargeson’s Peon” 53). Unlike a poet who is typically preoccupied with his own persona, as a prose writer in the tradition of realism, Sargeson is prepared to sacrifice his identity in order to understand and speak for “the other”. This is particularly evident in his short stories, which feature people from social groups and backgrounds other than his own. Furthermore, for Sargeson, as a closeted homosexual writer, a fictional mask creates a safer space to draw on his personal experiences in his writing. In *I Saw in My Dream*, while the same neutral mask of earlier writings still remains, its limitations are challenged through a number of new narrative techniques.

The story of Henry/Dave is narrated in the third person and most of the time, the narrator remains an impersonal observer, hidden under discursive shadows. He never introduces himself

to the reader or refers to himself in the first person. We can only hear his voice speaking of events, characters, and settings. His observations are typically impersonal, free from his comments or any direct interpretations. As he speaks using simple casual language, with informal abrupt sentences often starting with “and”, “but”, “well”, “so”, and “then” (much in the matter of Sargeson’s short stories), we can assume he is an unsophisticated person from a lower-class background:

And Henry didn’t know what to say, and the swagger was too busy eating to talk, but when Henry had nothing more to do he said, Are you out of a job? Then the swagger talked and eat at the same time, telling about the hundreds of miles that he’d walked, and how he couldn’t get a job. And when Henry asked him he said he hadn’t got a home or any people. (27)

According to Seymour Chatman, “by convention[,] neutral words for actions tend to suggest a conscious avoidance of narrator mediation” (168). The resemblance of Sargeson’s narrative style to a mere reportage provoked mixed reactions among critics. According to Lehmann, this technique robs the novel of its potential vitality: “Where everything is described so evenly and dispassionately nothing is felt to be of much importance” (159). Commenting on the sparseness of Sargeson’s prose, Williams ponders whether its origins come from the same puritan preference for plainness in living and worship that the author so zealously fought against. He argues that despite being a passionate critic of puritan values, Sargeson always remained a product of puritanism: “He simply directed his puritan-dominated character to anti-puritanical ends. In a sense, that despised background was the source and the enabling condition of his art” (“Frank Sargeson” 210). Rhodes, however, regards Sargeson’s technique of objective reportage as deceptive and misleading. He argues that like any other artist, Sargeson was “concerned with a private vision that touches external reality only at a number of points” (“The Moral Climate” 39). Sargeson’s neutrally reportorial language, however, turns out to be deceptive. Despite his apparent remoteness, the narrator makes the reader feel closer to the protagonist by inhabiting his perspective. Apart from mere actions, he is able to report the character’s dreams, thoughts, and feelings:

And going home with Cherry after it was all over he didn’t listen much to what she was saying, because he was thinking how many long days must pass before he could go to church with her again next Sunday. Until all of a sudden he remembered. He’d forgotten all about mother and father, yet tomorrow he would be going home. (21)

In the above example, Henry's thoughts are communicated in words that can be recognised as belonging to the narrator. In certain other occasions, however, it might not be clear whose consciousness is conveyed:

And very tired, limping, because one of his shoes was hurting, Dave was watching it all – while he still lived the afternoon he'd had away up on the hills. It *was* as good as a play, and just as exciting . . . And all the sheep (yes, all of them so far as you could tell), all the time being slowly forced down into the valley . . . (126; emphasis in original)

Although the protagonist's emotions and feelings are shared ("very tired", "one of his shoes was hurting", or "stood still, holding his breath"), most of the passage is still likely to be read as an objective narrative report from the point of view of a third person, observing the character from the outside. The narrator does not necessarily inhabit Dave's perspective when he says he is hurt as this can be simply concluded from the detail of his limping. In depicting scenery, however, the perspective shifts to the protagonist. Readers are only informed of what the character actually sees, which, in Chatman's terms, is a perceptual (or literal) point of view (151). In the sentence "And all the sheep (yes, all of them so far as you could tell) . . .", the parenthetical information within a pair of brackets particularly emphasises the subjectivity of the viewing protagonist. The description cannot be traced to the narrator's perspective: its origin lies with the protagonist. In the second sentence—"It *was* as good as a play, and just as exciting"—there is no introductory clause indicating that the comment belongs to Dave, and yet, we know it registers the protagonist's emotion in response to apprehending the scenery. The casual diction (not simply "good" or "exciting", but "as good as a play, and just as exciting") along with the special emphasis on the past tense verb form "was" suggest that the protagonist's perception is being directly represented. In a situation like this one, we can say that the narrator's voice slips into the protagonist's reflective language—a technique which Dorrit Cohn termed "narrated monologue" (*Transparent Minds* 494).

According to Chatman, "the indirect form in narrative implies a shade more intervention by a narrator, since we cannot be sure that the words in the report clause are precisely those spoken by the quoted speaker" (200). The opposite, however, is valid, as well. While encountering the thoughts and feelings of Sargeson's protagonist, it is difficult to wholly attribute their stylistic construction or semantic content entirely to the narrator. It is the protagonist who thinks and feels—yet his monologue is not recorded directly but "translated" by a third person. In a situation like this, it may not always be entirely clear whether and when the

transition between the perspectives of the narrator and protagonist occur. According to Cohn, one of the reasons that writers prefer the technique of narrated monologue lies in the ambiguity the technique creates by merging the perspectives of the narrator and the protagonist (495). She suggests that the third-person perspective of narrated monologue resembles “a kind of mask, from behind which sounds the voice of a figural mind” (495). This generates the impression that the narrator is communicating the protagonist’s feelings and thoughts, which he is unable to articulate himself.

The relationships between the narrator and the protagonist become more ambivalent in situations when the narrator switches from third-person pronouns to the direct and less formal form—“you”:

And if you woke up in the night and cried father came and carried you, and you slept in the bed between mother and father. And in the morning there was only mother, and the smell that was always hers, father’s place empty. (3)

“You” can have a generalising force in New Zealand speech (“you get up in the morning and you have breakfast”) but it also can be more personal, much like the way English speakers of a certain class use the pronoun “one” rather than “I”. In a similar vein, “you” in the novel tends to bring the narrator and the protagonist closer, suggesting a more intimate relationship between them, as if the narrator is no longer a detached chronicler but someone closely related to Henry. What kind of narrator is that—both distant and intimate, different yet not dissimilar? After all, he might even be Henry himself trying to establish distance from himself and look at his life as if he is someone else.

While frequently employed, the indirect narrative form is not the only way the protagonist’s thoughts and feelings are expressed in the novel. There are times when the narrator registers Henry/Dave’s mental processes in “stream of consciousness”, which is defined by Chatman as “free association” or “random ordering of thoughts and impressions” (188). Disjointed and incoherent, first-person italicized passages, typically free from introductory clauses, capture the natural flow of the character’s extended thought process:

the motor car was coming no please no time to cross in front no mother had to wear her glasses the motor car was oh please and mother and the wheels going up and down bump! band! oh! and blood no please no (21)

The passages that contain Henry/Dave's stream of consciousness have a number of important functions in the story. They serve as the unifying element that often brings together unlinked sketches of the character's childhood and adolescent years. These passages are also needed to provide more depth to the protagonist by revealing his deeper thoughts, fears, and trauma. Finally, these passages may also hint at Henry's implied potential and complexity as an artist.

Throughout the novel, the relationships between the narrator and the main character reveal an interesting dynamic. The indirect form of reporting the character's thoughts and feelings, with its characteristic merging of the perspectives of the narrator and the protagonist, is more common in the first part of the novel, while the first-person stream of consciousness passages are longer and occur more frequently by the end of the book. The idea of stream of consciousness complementing the main narrative is likely to have been borrowed by Sargeson from Joyce's *Portrait* in which the switch towards the protagonist's consciousness at the end of the novel signifies the emergence of the protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, as the "I" who will "forge ... the uncreated conscience of [his] race" (275). By the end of *Portrait*, the process of becoming is complete, the protagonist is now an artist, able and willing to speak for himself and his nation. In Sargeson's novel, despite the increasing frequency of the protagonist's quoted, rather than reported, speech and thoughts, the two perspectives continue interweaving throughout the book. Glimpses of the protagonist's wandering artistic mind compensate for the generally neutral and inexpressive narrative voice. There is no need for such compensation in Joyce's text with its rich and complex language and style. *I Saw in My Dream* ends with the main character finally saying "YES" to the life that he previously consistently rejected, which is another allusion to Joyce:

As he went up the path his sister-in-law was standing on the veranda, holding the baby up above her head, looking up at it and smiling.

Who loves you? she was saying.

And for a moment or two Dave stood still and watched.

Yes.

He wanted to do something too. In his own way. Something special –

yes

YES (269)

The presence of the baby must be emblematic of the continuity of life and the question "Who loves you?", with which the novel begins, makes the story trace a complete circle. A new chapter is about to start for Henry/Dave: "something... something special" is waiting for him in the

future. While the protagonist might not yet be certain of the details, he has learned an important lesson: to make something of your life, “[y]ou have to be the right me in the right place” (224). The repetition of “yes” harkens back to the famous ending of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, hinting towards the discovery of a vocation, which concludes *Portrait*.²

Compared to the rather experimental nature of the novel, the narrative style of *Once Is Enough* comes across as more consistent and traditional. Similar episodes of the protagonist’s childhood in a provincial town, followed by his adolescent years in the farm, are now all recounted in the first person. The long, complex, and less colloquial sentences reveal an educated, intelligent narrator. The contrast is particularly striking if we compare two similar accounts of the mother scolding her son for unsuitable behaviour: peeping at his auntie Clara having a bath (in the novel) and “inappropriate” letters to a friend (in *Once Is Enough*). Both women are outraged by what their sons have done and wish to teach them a lesson. While the attitude and behaviour are similar, there are differences in the way the incidents are narrated. In the novel’s episode, the narrator employs the protagonist’s perspective, reporting the actions through Henry’s eyes:

And it wasn’t long before they heard mother calling out from the kitchen door . . . And Henry his brother didn’t say anything, but he tried to leave off crying. He slid down the branches on to the ground and left Arnold up there. And mother was in the kitchen bending over the stove. She came straight for him, holding on to him while she hit him on the head with her knuckles. Her face was white and she was nearly crying too. To think I’ve reared such a boy, she said. And she hit him. After all the years I’ve tried to do my best for you, she said, to think I couldn’t bring you up *clean*. And she hit him again, and he got hit with her wedding ring as well as her knuckles. (*I Saw in My Dream* 15–16)

The presented point of view is perceptual, not conceptual. The narrator avoids expressing Henry’s thoughts or feelings directly, which seems plausible given that the character is unlikely to immediately produce any cohesive thought or understand his emotions at the time of the incident. Instead, Henry’s perceptions are conveyed subtly through language. For example, the use of “his brother” in relation to the protagonist seems unnecessary (as we already know Arnold and Henry are brothers); yet, it serves well to accentuate Henry’s feeling of offence and betrayal—how can his own brother do this to him? Possibly an expression of Henry’s mind, the saying may also be the narrator’s own comment on the situation—the distinction between the

² “... and yes I said yes I will Yes.” (Joyce, *Ulysses* 732)

two perspectives is never obvious in cases like this. Likewise, in the sentence “She came straight for him, holding on to him while she hit him on the head with her knuckles”, the repetition of “him” intensifies Henry’s sense of undeservedness. In the protagonist’s mind, Arnold should be punished—not him.

Like the novel, the autobiographical narrator takes the perceptual point of view of the protagonist to convey a similar episode:

I knew the moment I saw her [mother] that something was wrong: her mouth was drawn down, her cheeks were flushed, and it embarrassed me to suppose that she had been crying. She fixed me with the hurt stare which could only mean that she had caught me out in some serious wrong-doing, but I couldn’t think what it could be. I waited, and she said she had found some letters ... I tried hard to think what on earth the letter could be ... To read another person’s letter! It was a wicked thing to do, the sort of thing *I* might have done perhaps, but my mother – never! (*Once Is Enough* 104)

In contrast to the passage in the novel, the narrator closely records the protagonist’s contemplations of his experience. The emphasis shifts to the character’s inner world, his thoughts and feelings in response to the mother’s behaviour: “I knew”, “I saw”, “it embarrassed me”, “which could only mean”, and “I couldn’t think”. Like in the novel’s passage, however, it may not always be clear whose perspective is recorded. While phrases like “what on earth”, exclamation marks, or emphasis on “I” are likely to illustrate the immediate reaction of the protagonist in the past, it is the older and wiser narrator who makes connections and draws conclusions from his past experiences. Not only is he well aware of the protagonist’s thoughts and feelings, but he makes sure his own “mature” insights and opinions are expressed as well. The incident with the mother, for instance, is presented as a turning point in the character’s life, which is something he could not possibly know at the time of occurrence; however, the narrator knows: “But without my being in the least aware of it I was about to experience the determining crisis of my life” (*Once Is Enough* 104). While the episode is narrated from the perceptual point of view of the young protagonist, it develops the conceptual point of view of the narrator.

The generic distinction between the two texts, fiction and autobiography, implies a different kind of dynamic between author, narrator, and protagonist. In *I Saw in My Dream*, the mask of a third-person narrator functions as a buffer between the character and the author, assisting Sargeson in distancing himself from his semi-autobiographical protagonist. In the memoirs, such a buffer is no longer needed as all three of them—the narrator, the author, and the

protagonist—are now assumed to be the same person, even though they are not. While there is no evidence of a marked distinction between the autobiographical narrator and author sharing the same point of view, there may still be a division between the actual author and the implied author (Chatman 148). In the autobiography, the time gap distinguishes the narrator from the protagonist. While conveying his own story, the narrator may not always know or remember the exact thoughts and feelings of his younger self; so, now and again, he has to assume or even make things up. Most of the time, it is his retrospective voice that we hear—not the protagonist’s perspective from the past: “In a muddled sort of way I *perhaps* [emphasis mine] understood that my rage against him was a rage against myself” (*Once is Enough* 14). The more the narrator engages with the story, the more biased and dependent the image of the protagonist becomes. The differences in the way the two texts are narrated reflect the different stages in the lives of their protagonists. In *I Saw in My Dream*, the character is an artist in the making; in *Once is Enough*, the protagonist is an accomplished author.

While Henry/Dave’s artistic ambition only emerges by the end of the novel, from the beginning, it may be observed that he stands out as a complex and troubled character. Coming from a middle-class family, since his early childhood, Henry has been affected by strict puritan views and the values of his parents and the provincial town in which they live. On the one hand, Henry strongly resembles the archetype of a “man alone” (derived from John Mulgan’s *Man Alone* (1939)), a rootless drifter, who constitutes the typical protagonist of Sargeson’s short stories. On the other hand, he is better educated and more sophisticated, a rebel against puritan views, as the author was himself. He “mostly read old books” and he “read enough of that [Bible] when [he] was a kid... [he] got a sickener” (*I Saw in My Dream* 102). At the end of Part One, after a series of personal and professional misadventures, Henry discovers his father secretly spying on his auntie Clara undressing, which forces him to rethink the way he sees his family. He feels pity for his parent: “Poor father, he said” (81), which, for the first time, positions him as superior to them. In his interview with Beveridge, Sargeson said: “Once the boy understands that his father is involved in all the human frailties, the way is open for the healing of his traumatic condition” (*Conversation in a Train* 178). The ending of the first part, then, marks the beginning of a new stage in Henry’s development.

In the second part, the protagonist lives and works in the countryside and is no longer known as Henry. To the reader’s surprise, the central character is now known as Dave. The explanations behind the change of name and place remain, however, unclear and vague: “I was fed up with myself. I wanted a change. Only be a sport and keep it under your hat, Johnny. One day I’ll tell you all about it” (86). Despite his promise, Dave never reveals his identity either to

Johnny or to any other character: “You never told me before that you’ve got a mother, Dave, he [Johnny] said. You never told me anything about yourself, he said” (263). When Mrs Daley, a visitor in Dave’s house, recognises him as Henry, a sudden, nearly mysterious, incident occurs, sweeping away the house in a flood and killing its inhabitants. This event distracts the attention of the characters in the story and allows Henry/Dave to get away with his secret identity.

An aura of mystery over Dave extends into his relationship with Cedric, the prodigal son of the Macgregors. While the two never meet in the novel, Dave expresses notable interest in Cedric and his story. Not only has he “replaced” Cedric at Mr and Mrs Macgregor’s farm after their son disappeared but he is often compared to Cedric and even mistaken for Cedric:

And then Jerry’s voice quietly said, Eh, Cedric.

Hullo, Dave said. Is that you, Jerry? No, it’s not Cedric.

And they echoed him: Not Cedric.

It’s me – Dave. (189)

Scattered throughout the second part, Cedric’s “narrative” becomes one of the unifying threads of the story as it brings together and connects different characters. Everyone is curious and talks about Cedric—Johnny, the Macgregors, Andersons, Mrs Daley, Rangi—which makes him actively present in the narrative without actually being present. He is not a developed realistic character but more of an ethereal figure, who only enjoys a presence in the conversation of others. No one knows his location or even whether he is dead or alive. None of his many secrets are revealed by the end of the book; so, even the fact of his existence may be in question. Cedric’s role in the novel is symbolic. He is one of Dave’s counterparts, representing his dream of escape, freedom, and authenticity. The protagonist projects his own feelings, problems, and even possible solutions onto this figure. It is through Cedric that the idea of “the right me in the right place” is brought into discussion:

[I]f it’s question of place I’m the wrong me. You have to be the right me in the right place. Like Cedric. The right place is the wrong place if you’re the wrong me. And you have to BE the right me. Unless I could forget I could never change myself into the right me. (224)

The theme of repression, developed through the motifs of locks and caves, is integral to the story. Throughout the novel, the characters get locked up, are afraid to be locked up, or want to lock up others. Henry’s female acquaintance Marge is locked in a lavatory. Johnny, as a young

man, is put in prison for sexual indecency, which he later uses as a justification for wanting to lock up Cedric: “Well, Johnny said, they shut me up in that Borstal. So why shouldn’t Cedric have been shut up if it would have taught him a good lesson?” (236). Cedric’s cave is used as an allegory for the psychological cave: “If there’s a cave Cedric’s gone to live in it. Lots of people wish they could go away and live in caves. Be adult-educated, and read modern psychology” (211). The stories of Marge, Johnny, and Cedric all echo Henry’s own relationship mishap: the incident between him and a young girl who is his office colleague. Since Henry and the girl have to spend the whole day together in the office, they start getting to know each other and, very soon, Henry develops feelings for her:

He’d have all day to talk to the girl when she did turn up, yet he was impatient for her to be there. And while he was waiting, he soon discovered, he couldn’t even be contented enough to open one of his text books and settle down to do a bit of swot. And then when she did come he’d feel that pleased. (39)

At first, the couple appears to enjoy spending time together and there is even a sexual undertone to their developing relationship. When Henry goes and leans out the window, the girl joins him and leans out alongside him so they are “close enough together to be touching” (38). In this moment of first intimacy, Henry recalls a passage from the book that his mother left on his bed, assuming that this is what the two of them are now supposed to feel: “[B]irds flowers and the ‘shining creature’ a girl who said I have kept myself pure for you, and he said I for you . . .” (38). While Henry’s feelings for the girl are purely romantic, she comes across as more practical and down-to-earth. To Henry’s great surprise and disappointment, she is not a “shining creature”. The protagonist’s romantic love and sexual innocence makes the girl lose her interest in him quickly. She is glad not to have him as a boyfriend and teases him for not earning enough money to have a girlfriend, while she has many boyfriends at once. Her undivided attention is now drawn to the construction workers at the window, whose interests and expectations are more in tune with hers. Feeling upset and sour, Henry can’t think of anything better than locking the girl up inside the strong room. The effect this episode has on Henry is profound. Almost four months after the incident, he is so distressed that he decides to resign from his job. He is afraid that the girl will report him to the police who will lock him up for years:

oh oh property contracts torts CRIMINAL LAW oh no. It was printed there, a girl under sixteen, imprisonment with hard labor, they could LOCK YOU UP for years . . . And he

hadn't done anything, he hadn't. But say SHE said he had. Say yes she went out with that man or jockeys and blamed him instead . . . (56)

The job change, however, only brings temporary relief. The character's mental and emotional condition prove to be so disturbed that after the sudden appearance of two detectives in his office, he literally collapses: "But then it went all of a sudden too dark for him to see, and he heard a long drawn-out sound, like the sound of the fire-engine siren" (69).

Most earlier critics, like Rhodes, have interpreted Henry's misadventure as a result of his puritan upbringing and repressed behaviour. While such an explanation is valid, it struggles to explicate the nuances of the story. The absurdity of Henry's situation is particularly striking when juxtaposed with the similar yet different story of Johnny, Henry's counterpart. As a young man, Johnny was caught and locked up for having sex with an underage girl. None of this, however, has ever happened to Henry. Not only is he not chased by the police, as he feared but he has also not had a sexual encounter with the girl to be prosecuted. He never wishes to sleep with her; all he wanted was to keep her "pure". In this regard, Henry's story closely resembles the episode of locking Marge up in the lavatory: "Now, whoever would do a childish thing like that?" (61) The comparison between the accounts of Marge and Johnny highlights the ambiguity and obscurity of Henry's mishap. On the one hand, it can be read as a prank; on the other, its effects and consequences on the protagonist are suggestive of more serious implications. In spite of his nonsexual feelings towards the girl, Henry becomes immediately and deeply offended when, shrewdly, she accuses him of having a filthy mind: "You! The girl said. If you ask me, I reckon you've got a filthy mind. And it was too much. Accusing *him* of having a filthy mind!" (50)

By approaching the text as "closeted", as one which is constrained but nonetheless suggestive or perhaps even double-coded, we are able to see Henry's problem in a different light. The episode with the girl, in particular, can be read through the prism of the author's own sexual misadventure in his mid-twenties. Like his fictional protagonist, as a result of the incident, Sargeson changed his name and moved to the countryside to heal from personal trauma. The fact that in Sargeson's story there is another man—not a woman—can shed light on Henry's nonsexual interest in the girl, who is only there as a substitute for someone else. The character's stress and terror on being exposed and locked up might also be seen from the perspective of the author's own life experience. Unlike Henry, not only was Sargeson caught by the police and put on trial, but, pressed by his parents, he was forced to deny his sexuality and give evidence against a fellow homosexual. According to King, the episode became "the determining crisis of

his life”, resulting in “profound depression and self-loathing”, casting a “long shadow . . . on the remainder of his life” (95).

Emerging strongly in the novel, the shadow of past trauma gets dissolved in the author’s later texts, particularly his autobiography. The autobiographical narrator is an established New Zealand writer in his later years, recounting the story of his younger self. The opening paragraph captures him at his writing desk, disturbed by an image of New Zealand to which he cannot relate. The occasion triggers his memories and thoughts on what *his* New Zealand might be like: “From where I sat at my writing table, I looked out the window and saw nothing of my own New Zealand. Instead – but never mind” (9). The radio talk on literature only frustrates him further and so does a letter from a publisher. Finding himself unable to work, he decides on a trip to the King Country to catch a glimpse of “his own” New Zealand. While on the road, the narrator sinks into his “copious, scattered and confusing” (42) memories of his childhood mixing them with his observations of people he meets along way—the bus driver, little Scotty, the boy and his mother—as well as glimpses of nature, which he observes through the bus window: “Once we were in among the hills however, I had no more attention to spare for Scotty and his remarks. How could I have? Along a shallow uninhabited valley the fern and tea-tree had grown unmolested for years . . .” (41)

The opening scene highlights a number of the main directions of the autobiography, setting the tone for the rest of the book. First, the narrative is subjective and personal, both past- and present-focused. Assuming that there are many different versions of New Zealand, the narrator is only concerned about “his own”. Unlike the novel’s detached impersonal narrator, the autobiographical narrator is a full participant in the story’s action, engaged and personally involved in it. Second, the opening scene introduces the theme of travel that will gradually develop into the book’s key motif. The narrator’s journey is symbolic and multilayered. According to Jones, it fits into the utopian tradition of the “pilgrim dream” in New Zealand literature, manifesting in the images of the country as a pastoral paradise and a “just city”. For Sargeson, Jones claimed, his uncle’s way of life in King Country (implying cooperation with nature and peace with oneself) symbolised “New Zealand as it might worthily have been” in contrast to puritan and provincial “New Zealand as it is” (“FS and the Making” 73). In his analysis, Jones shows how different aspects of Sargeson’s world, such as people and places, are grouped around one or the other pole of what Jones calls “characteristic Sargeson dualism”: parents, police, and other authority figures versus the grandmother or the King Country uncle; puritanical Hamilton versus his uncle’s farm.

In his autobiography, Sargeson writes vividly of his relationships with other men, whether they are lifelong friends, such as Harry, his companion of 40 years, or brief encounters, like the Italian stonemason Carlo, in whose home the protagonist spent three days during his trip to Europe as a young man. He remembers them tenderly, acknowledging his fervent feelings, such as love, admiration, sadness, or excitement. When, ten years after their first encounter, the narrator accidentally meets Harry on the Auckland waterfront, he feels “the magic of the revived dream . . . It was destiny, it was fate – and rather than miss out this time I would prefer to die . . .” (*More Than Enough* 58) Likewise, his very first glance at Carlo made him experience “that infallible sign . . . an immediate quickening of the heart” (*Never Enough* 33). As Sargeson wrote in his review on Henry Lawson, “only a fine line may sometimes divide friends from friends who are also lovers . . .” (*Conversation in a Train* 124). The author’s homosexuality is no longer secret but acknowledged within the bounds of privacy.

While the theme of puritanism remains strong in the autobiography, the tone of resentment, closely related to it, is eliminated. John Horrocks defines “resentment” as a “psychological stance in which a person in an inferior or embattled position is consumed by feelings of anger, jealousy, or helplessness” (“Down Under” 32). Stressing a notably kinder and warmer tone regarding the autobiography, Horrocks talks about the two sides of Sargeson: an isolated and defensive figure challenging puritan values in the earlier stories and novels, and a generous, thoughtful, and observant author in the later memoirs. To add to Horrocks’s observation, it is still sometimes possible to recognise “an isolated and defensive figure” in the autobiography. While passing by Te Aroha, the narrator recalls how, as a young boy, he climbed up the mountain with a friend, and how, captivated by the panoramic view, the two boys had a conversation up there. Looking down from the top of the hill, his friend conjectured that his dead mother may have had the same all-seeing view on his life. The mere thought of the possibility of such surveillance provoked a very strong reaction from the young protagonist: “[I] was yelling out all the bad words I knew from the top of my voice. I stopped only to tell my friend that it served his mother damn well right if she was listening” (*Never Enough* 14). The protagonist’s anger in response to his friend’s words originates from his own hidden fears and echoes the resentment of Sargeson’s earlier fiction. In the autobiography, however, the anger belongs to the past and not the present. The sight of Te Aroha from the bus window floods the narrator with memories but not feelings. He recalls the past calmly and distantly, without experiencing the fury and outrage of his younger self. He feels “content to stay behind” (15).

As we learn by the end of the Part 1, the narrator’s plan goes awry and he does not arrive at his destination:

My journey, the route I had taken – it had all been a stupid mistake: I hadn't got anywhere near the one bit of New Zealand that I had claimed as very specially my own. What did it matter anyhow? I asked myself. My King Country uncle was dead . . . and to travel such a distance, just in the hope of seeing across the hills from a road bus the high corner of a farm that was now the property of strangers – how ridiculous! K. had said, Let the dead . . . (43–44)

It may be that the narrator cannot reach his destination: “Perhaps I only imagined I could see a corner of my uncle's farm. After all, after all forty years or so! It didn't matter” (11). Yet, despite rigorously condemning the idea of a trip as a ridiculous and stupid mistake, the narrator refuses to follow K's advice of letting the dead bury the dead. In the following two volumes, which feature travelling back in time, numerous trips from the past and present are depicted. By the end of the autobiography, the positive outcome of the narrator's journeys is eventually revealed. The narrator expresses his gratitude to M. for “driving me far into the country both north and south of Auckland city – and this was so that I might refresh numerous memories which would help me to write this present book” (*Never Enough* 142). While “New Zealand as it might worthily have been” is utopia and a dream, the book the narrator has produced as a result of his journey is real.

According to Newton, with his first volume of autobiography, Sargeson's “second” career in writing was launched. He liberated himself from the restrictions of his earlier style and created a new kind of fiction—wordier and sophisticated—but also lucid, confessional, and confiding. He was able to focus his vision towards the future and addressed a new kind of audience, who were “more generally mixed, more international in outlook, more relaxed about cultural elitism, (somewhat) more accepting of women, and (somewhat) less homophobic” (“Surviving the War” 94). If Sargeson's autobiography is the product of his “second” career, *I Saw in My Dream* marks the great ending of the “first”. A closer look at the novel's narrative techniques exposes layers of complexity behind a seemingly simple style of neutral reportage. By merging the perspectives of the narrator and the protagonist, Sargeson creates a form of ambiguity that enables him to talk about himself indirectly without fully exposing himself. Experimental in its nature, the novel expands and challenges the boundaries of Sargeson's earlier writing style, revealing a shrewd and sophisticated author, customarily hiding behind the mask of a neutral unsophisticated third-person narrator. Like his protagonist, the author is a New Zealand intellectual-in-the-making as well, beating his way from “unpublic” to “public”.

The figure of the intellectual emerging from Sargeson's writing, above all else, is a figure of a pioneer, a forerunner who marks the beginning of New Zealand's literary culture. That

special place was bound to determine a set of issues that the author had to focus on in his writing. In comparison with most other literary figures and public intellectuals I will be looking at in the thesis, social or political issues are never of the highest priority to Sargeson. Instead, the question of authenticity and finding “the right me in the right place” always remains at the core of his writing. He was the first writer who proved by his own experience that New Zealand could be the “right place” for a literary intellectual. In doing so, he figured out that the “right place” is only half of the problem as “the right place is the wrong place if you’re the wrong me” (*I Saw in My Dream* 224). In this respect, Sargeson’s whole oeuvre can be seen as a journey to find “the right me”, an authentic, honest “me”, who is at home both in his country and with himself. The same notion continues to resonate with the author of the next chapter: Janet Frame.

CHAPTER 2

Janet Frame: Fiction, Reality, and the In-between

In 2014, following the posthumous publication of Janet Frame's novel *In the Memorial Room*, C.K. Stead wrote a review in which he highlighted the resemblance between the book's fictional characters and real people—a resemblance that he found biased and offensive. Taking a strictly autobiographical perspective, he treated the novel as a roman-à-clef, claiming parts of it as “a literal recounting of Frame's experience” and “a vehicle for her personal grumbles and deeper anxieties” (173). Besides the similarity with factual events and circumstances, Stead found it “difficult to see . . . quite as ‘fiction’”, the protagonist's philosophical speculations too closely resembling “half-serious self-inspection by Frame in her own person” (174). Admitting that mockery and the unflattering portrayal of recognised people alone cannot be enough to condemn the novel, he claimed the work was “unsatisfactorily incomplete” on grounds of its lack of shape and uncertainty of direction. Lastly, at the end of the review, Stead expressed his doubt about whether Frame herself would have wanted the novel published (178).³

The autobiographical nature of Frame's work intrigues many of her readers who, like Stead, every so often become conscious of the extent to which the author may be drawing on experiences from her life. Ironically, as a writer of autobiographical fiction himself, Stead cannot be more aware of the complexities of the relationship between fiction and reality. When asked how much the characters in his autobiographical novel *All Visitors Ashore* took after real people, he replied:

Of course it is true that, to some extent, I drew on Janet Frame for Skyways and I drew on Frank Sargeson for Melior Fabro but they became fictional characters and went their own way in the novel. (qtd. in Gabrielle 17)

Like Stead, Frame too insisted she only used real stories and people as a starting point for her fiction:

Pictures of great treasure in the midst of sadness and waste haunted me and I began to think, in fiction, of a childhood, home life, hospital life, using people known to me as a base for the main characters, and inventing minor characters . . . later when the book was

³ Frame never offered *In the Memorial Room* for publication. It was published by Pamela Gordon, the author's niece, in 2013.

published, I was alarmed to find that it [*Owls Do Cry*] was believed to be autobiographical . . . (*An Angel at My Table* 148)

Stead and Frame are, of course, far from the only writers who blur imagination and reality in their fiction. While the issue is as common as it is complex, Frame seems to bring another level of complexity to it, which catches even a critic as sophisticated as Stead by surprise.

This chapter attempts to unveil some of the mysteries and controversies surrounding the public image of Janet Frame. If Sargeson can be regarded as a curiously “unpublic” public intellectual, Frame can be considered a surprisingly *public* private intellectual. Following the example of Sargeson, an old friend and mentor, Frame pursued an artistic vocation which would see her engaged in various battles, both similar and different to her predecessor. Like Sargeson, she needed to create the space and the terms on which she could be a writer in her home country. In this chapter, I will first look at the public image of Frame constructed through works of nonfiction by her and about her. I will then compare this image with the figure of the author emerging from her fictional writing. To establish this comparison, I will be closely looking at Frame’s following texts: her earlier novel *Towards Another Summer*, published posthumously in 2007, and the three volumes of her autobiography: *To the Is-Land* (published in 1982), *An Angel at My Table* (1984), and *The Envoy from Mirror City* (1985). It is normally expected that nonfiction writing, such as autobiography, be aligned with real facts, characters, and life events, while the world of imagination is more likely to be associated with fiction. I will demonstrate that in Frame’s case, the distinction between fiction and reality is impossible and unhelpful. The blurred line between the real and the imagined becomes a distinctive feature of both the author’s fiction *and* autobiography, and is a deliberate technique that she uses to convey her ideas on the subjectivity of reality. Generating both interest and confusion, this feature of Frame’s writing feeds the aura of mysticism around her, adding to the development of her public image that may have very little to do with her private self. The characteristic fluidity of facts and imagination in Frame’s texts corresponds with a similarly fluid notion of authorship. Instead of the singular authoritative figure of an author whose views and values unite different works into one univocal voice, in Frame’s texts, we see a variety of different “figures” of an author, none of whom could ever entirely represent or stand in for the empirical author.⁴

From the reader’s point of view, the singular authoritative figure of an author constructed through their experience of reading the text can also be closely related to their image of the

⁴ The approach was used by Maria Wikse in *Materialisations of a Woman Writer*.

author as a public figure, drawn from the writer's engagement with public issues and controversies. Views on public matters expressed through interviews, lectures, newspaper articles, TV, or radio talks tend to be seen as more reliable than fiction. They are easily accessible to wider audiences and become a lens through which an author's work is viewed. For example, Stead's political views, conveyed in his nonfiction, earned him a reputation as a reactionary in the 1980s. This affected the perception of his fictional texts in which, as I argue in my chapter on Stead, the same views lose their stridency and straightforwardness. Similarly, the prophetic rhetoric of Baxter's interviews and talks encouraged the public to perceive him as a prophet or messiah. In his poetry, particularly in *Jerusalem Sonnets*, the image of the prophet fades away, as I demonstrate in my chapter on Baxter.

Unlike most other authors in this thesis, Frame remained famously unwilling to give interviews or public speeches. She is not known for writing critical essays (like Stead or Baxter).⁵ She has not been involved in editing and introducing anthologies, like Ihimaera or Wedde. She has never been seen as a representative of other women, like Edmond, or belonging to a "new generation" of writers, like Wedde. Her characteristic reluctance to communicate with the public in a straightforward, nonfictional manner compounded a perception of her as an unreal, mystical figure, who is barely known by anyone, which derives from that myth of her as a marginalised individual in a repressive society (featured heavily in literary criticism in the 70s–90s). This image of Frame as an eccentric individual was reinforced after her TV interview with reporter John Sellwood, who introduced her as an "intensely private person with little tolerance for intrusion" (0.00–0.14).

Prior to this, in a letter to Patrick Evans, Frame's notorious literary biographer, Frame accused him of being "one of the Porlock people" (King, *Wrestling with the Angel* 419), referring to the unwanted visitor who interrupted Samuel Taylor Coleridge as he was writing his poem "Kubla Khan".⁶ In his turn, Evans described Frame as "a writer who courts invisibility: few of us have ever met her, and there are many stories of her avoidance of public appearances" ("The Case of the Disappearing Author" 15). He then recalled the story of Frame's sixtieth birthday celebration in Oamaru, the author's hometown, "where the centrepiece in a display of her writing was a letter regretting that she couldn't be [t]here" (15). In the same essay, Evans

⁵ The only critical essay Frame wrote was "Departures and Returns" (1984), which did not receive much attention from either the general public or scholars.

⁶ Evans later wrote a novel *Gifted* (2010) in which he drew on Frame and Sargeson for his major characters.

confessed that through all the years that he had been writing about her, he had hardly got to know the “real”, authentic Frame:

Over the years she [Frame] has turned me into a sort of critical paparazzo, faint but following, always trying for that special authentic shot as I stumble through the shrubbery of her life. It is supposed by some people that I have acquired some kind of special knowledge of, or intimate information, about her. But I haven't, not a word, and in fact we've never met, and barely corresponded, and everything I know is of second or third hand. (16)

Another work of nonfiction that vastly contributes to the myth of Frame's solitary disposition is Michael King's biography of her titled *Wrestling with the Angel*, which was published in 2000. On the one hand, the book was perceived as an “impressively detailed research [that] closely tracks Frame's life” (Rivers 33), portraying Frame as a woman who is “far more at home than has been realised: well-travelled and connected, and enjoying the support of wealthy American patrons” (Smellie 80). On the other hand, the same reviewers of King's biography repeatedly refer to Frame as “New Zealand's most reclusive author” (Smellie 80), who “expressly prefers seclusion to self-promotion” (Rivers 33). Harry Ricketts notes that Frame only agreed to collaborate with King on the condition that there would be neither analysis of her writing nor quotes adopted verbatim from her interviews with him. Thus, Ricketts refers to King as a “framed” biographer, “writing with his subject at his shoulder, and able at any point to produce the red pencil. Hardly ideal” (1653). He felt the version of Frame's life presented by King is not yet a full or complete story: “King's full account does not allow the reader to detect patterns in Frame's story beyond those she herself has highlighted in her volumes of autobiography” (1653). According to Rivers, the biography lacks emotional essence and colour as “our access to her [Frame's] voice is limited to extracts from the autobiography” (33). The idea of the partiality of King's text further bolsters Frame's enigmatic persona. At the end of his book, after revealing all the facts of Frame's private life that he could possibly get hold of, the biographer restores her image as an enigma, solitary and elusive:

Her face is most alive in the glow of the VDU where, via the Internet, electronic mail and her own word-processing facility, she rediscovers the world and engages with it, without the burden of social contact. (519)

The mystery of Frame has boosted her celebrity status significantly. According to Evans, Frame's public persona became a version "that is larger than the writing" ("The Case of the Disappearing Author" 19)—"not Frame herself, but Frame the hyperreal" (18):

When I first visited Oamaru nearly twenty years ago, I was struck by how publicly she [Frame] was known, how easy it was to pick up her stories about the family . . . how the Frame story had become a part of a popular romance, in other words, part of an oral tradition, a form of commerce among people. (19)

Not everyone, however, has been satisfied with the widespread public "version" of Frame. In an interview, the author's niece Pamela Gordon criticises Evans' portrayal of Frame as "someone who was gifted in a feral mad way", insisting instead that Frame's work was "a product of her discipline, ambition and education" and that she was "a self-directed, conscious artist" (Gates). In *The Settler's Plot*, Alex Calder confronts the popular image of mysterious "mad" Frame: "More fully than most, Frame lived a paradox of the writing life: she needed both isolation and discipline to communicate at a high level, and she managed her life in the concentration of that end, not merely as a reflex of shyness and anxiety" (258). According to Calder, in a similar manner to her predecessor Sargeson, not only did Frame prefer seclusion and privacy to public exposure but she also prioritised responsibility to her art over worldly matters.

It is worth noticing that neither of the two "versions" of Frame—"mystical" public Frame or Frame as a private artist—is likely to secure her image as a public intellectual. Some might doubt, therefore, whether she can be seen as a public intellectual at all. Was she ever concerned about politics and social problems? Based on her writing, we can assume that she was. Firstly, social and political topics such as feminism, biculturalism, and environmentalism all find their place in her texts⁷. Secondly, in her later years, Frame took the time and effort to readjust and promote her public profile and image as a public intellectual by writing the three volumes of the autobiography to retell the story that was previously only vaguely known from her autobiographical fiction or from second-hand narratives. Frame's life story, a story of a successful woman writer from a deprived family with periods of interment in mental hospitals, as she presented in her autobiography, has been regarded as a "political and useful tale" by feminist critics such as Gina Mercer (*Janet Frame: Subversive Fictions* 232). Prior to the autobiography,

⁷ A feminist analysis of *A State of Siege* (1966), *Living in the Maniototo* (1979), and *The Carpathians* (1988) was attempted by a number of critics, including Susan Ash (1988) and Maria Wikse. Bruce Harding looked at the representation of Maori culture in *A State of Siege* and *The Carpathians*. The theme of environmentalism is also evident in *The Carpathians*.

the only work of nonfiction in which Frame publicly wrote about herself was a short essay titled “Beginnings”, which was written in 1965 and published in *Landfall*, which largely supported her image as an embattled figure in the face of an inhospitable society.

While sharing certain traits with Sargeson (often seen as her “mentor”), Frame appears to be a person and a writer of a different generation—but one who builds on the project of cultural nationalism. In *An Angel at my Table*, among the poets who have influenced her, she mentions Curnow, Glover, and Brasch (67–8). In *Towards Another Summer*, the protagonist Grace quotes poetry from Curnow’s anthology—a book that she accidentally discovers on the bookshelf of her London host Phillip: “Ah, there was the *Book of New Zealand Verse!*” (132). According to Calder, in a mode of literary nationalism, Frame is “clearly occupied with what it means to have a home to return to and the problem of inhabiting it as an artist” (261). In this regard, when it comes to Frame’s view on the role of an artist or a writer, one should not disregard the importance of “home” in her writing and her characteristic concern with the relationship between self and place. Although sharing “Frame’s disdain for our [New Zealand] tendency to take a false pride in writing simply because it comes from New Zealand”, Calder admits that it is hardly possible for him to read Frame’s books “as if they were set just anywhere” (259).

Another important difference between Frame and the other New Zealand public intellectuals considered in this thesis concerns the medium in which she chooses to write. Frame’s image as a celebrity and public figure has been mainly constructed through several nonfictional texts including “Beginnings”, the autobiographies, King’s biography, and Jane Campion’s film (both of which rely heavily on Frame’s autobiography). Ostensibly “pure” genres of nonfiction, such as an interview or critical essay, require a greater degree of straightforwardness, clarity, and comprehensibility. Notably, of all genres of nonfiction, Frame chose the one that is closest to fiction to address a wider audience. On one hand, in proposing to tell the story of a “real” person, autobiography claims to be factually “true”. On the other hand, being largely retrospective, autobiography cannot avoid being creative, imaginative, and blurring the borderlines of the genre. While a more conventional author, such as Lauris Edmond, would follow the rules of the genre, adjusting her voice accordingly, Frame allowed herself a higher degree of freedom, playfulness, vagueness, and irony by merging aspects of the “real” and the “imaginary”. Not only did Frame deliberately avoid genres that might have potentially restricted her flexibility, she continued mixing facts and her imagination in both her “nonfictional” autobiography and her “fiction” novels to the extent that the distinction between the two no longer seemed relevant.

This feature of her writing made it particularly challenging for critics and commentators to find the “right” approach to her work, which only confirmed Frame’s public image and reputation as an “inaccessible”, “mysterious” author. For virtually two decades following Evans’ literary biography of Frame, which was published in 1977, the biographical approach, in which a literary work was addressed mainly as a reflection of its author’s life and times, dominated Frame studies. This approach fed the binary construction of Frame as a visionary individual in the face of a repressive society as, for instance, in Vincent O’Sullivan’s essay “Exiles of the Mind”. Such readings of her work were then countered by criticism that strenuously avoided biographical contexts. Gina Mercer (1994), in particular, proposed a new perspective on Frame’s work, focusing on the engagement with form and language rather than the relationship between truth and fiction. She criticised unfavourable reviews of Frame’s autobiographies and specifically the expectation of certain critics to find the “whole truth” in her works. Instead, Mercer suggests that we see autobiography as another “version” of Frame’s story, which includes her autobiographical essay, works of fiction, biography, or film adaptation of her full-length autobiographies:

In some ways it is highly appropriate that Frame’s life has given rise to so many versions. In her fiction she has repeatedly questioned the notion of a single truth/reality, and the way in which this myth of the single truth has denied the possibilities of others. So, if her life is the subject of various versions, or even versions of versions, that has a certain fluid aptness to it. (235)

Similarly, Jane Unsworth has questioned the effectiveness or the possibility of defining anyone’s writing as “autobiographical”. According to her, by emphasising the political importance of the female writer’s personal experience in Frame’s fiction, interpreters have undervalued or even denied its intellectual content, which further leads to a marginalisation of the author (24). As Unsworth observes, employing a variety of writing techniques, such as narrative shifts and speculations over language, Frame deliberately alienates the reader to prevent their involvement with the story—aping reality. According to Unsworth, by alienating the reader, Frame challenges the idea of a fixed truth demonstrating how the reality of individuals is entirely subjective, always dependent on a point-of-view, and thus can never be interpreted as neutral and unbiased. Unsworth sees this critique of the notions of objective reality as a primary focus in Frame’s writing (27). Conceivably influenced by Mercer and Unsworth, in his later essay, Evans regards Frame’s autobiography as “Frame’s version of herself” and “one of the masterpieces of modern

New Zealand fiction” (“The Case of the Disappearing Author” 19). Notably, Evans’ refusal to consider Frame’s autobiography as “complete” truth is strikingly antithetical to his earlier biographical approach towards her fiction. His desire to access Frame goes hand-in-hand with the desire to sustain her as inaccessible. In his public lecture (2000), Evans proposed to read Frame’s autobiographies for the fiction and her fiction for the biography:

[H]er fiction is where some aspects of her life may lie buried . . . [I]f the fiction is where the life is, the life is where fiction is. In other words, as I see it, when unprotected by the fiction of fictionality and obliged, by conventions of the genre of overt life-writing she is working in, to deal with ‘what really happened’, Frame writes as a novelist. (“The Case of the Missing Veranda”)

Taking into account the ambiguous nature of Frame’s texts resisting any simple categorisation, I find Cohn’s views on fact and fiction most helpful for my analysis. According to Cohn, “first-person narratives are not as a rule either written or read as semi-autobiographies or demi-novels. They are given and taken as one or the other, even when they are not taken for what they were given” (*The Distinction of Fiction* 35). In order to theoretically secure the referential nature of autobiography, Cohn suggests prioritising the importance of its speaker over its content: “For if the genre is defined by way of the reality of its speaking subject, then it remains no less real when the subject lies or fantasizes about his past than when he utters verifiable truths” (31). This approach allows Cohn to justify her refusal to comply with the notion that “autobiography is a [form of] fiction” while still sharing a postmodern scepticism about “the notions of stable identity, truthful introspection, unified selfhood, authentic memory, the translatability of experience into language, and the narratability of life” (31). From Cohn’s point of view, therefore, however ambiguous and blurred Frame’s narratives might be in terms of mixing fact and fantasy, it is still possible to classify them either as fiction or nonfiction based on “the ontological status of its speaker” by which Cohn implies their “identity or non-identity with the author in whose name the narrative has been published” (31–32).

I will now look more closely at Frame’s novel *Towards Another Summer* and her autobiographical trilogy *To the Is-Land*, *An Angel at My Table*, and *Envoy from the Mirror City*. Both the novel and autobiographies actively engage with the ideas of memory, art, home, truth, and reality. They portray a female writer as a protagonist, modelled after the author, referring to analogous events from her childhood in New Zealand (*To the Is-Land*) and her life as a writer in London (*Envoy from the Mirror City*). I will argue that the reading of Frame’s texts, based on the

reviewers' response to *Towards Another Summer*, has been significantly influenced by her public image as a recluse and a mysterious figure. I will then explore the relationships between the author and her fictional proxies in connection with Frame's idea of personality and the unreliability of language, as expressed in interviews, autobiography, and fiction, which corresponds with her belief in the subjectivity of reality. I will look at how differences in narration, including the temporal aspect of narration, affect the image and believability of the protagonist in the novel and the autobiographies. Finally, I am going to demonstrate how the consistency of Frame's ideas on truth and reality in her writing across different time periods and genres lays the groundwork for the formation of a curiously public private intellectual figure.

Written in 1963, *Towards Another Summer* was never offered for publication during Frame's lifetime. In the acknowledgement section of its posthumous publication, Pamela Gordon, Frame's literary executor and niece, thanks her fellow board members of the Janet Frame Literary Trust for "sharing the responsibility for the decision to offer this manuscript for publication" (205). She notes that the novel was "too personal" to publish during the author's lifetime. Likewise, in his biography of Frame, King refers to the text as "embarrassingly personal" (245). The forty-four year gap between the time that the novel was written and when it was first read by the public has significantly affected its perception. In her review in *The Guardian*, Rachel Cooke writes that she approached *Towards Another Summer* "somewhat cautiously, as if it might explode in my face". In 1963, Frame was at the beginning of her writing career, unknown to a wider audience. By 2007, three years after the author's death, she had become a celebrity, whose life story was well-known by the general public both in New Zealand and worldwide.

Following King, most reviewers of *Towards Another Summer* emphasised how personal the novel felt: "[i]t feels personal to me too, although I never knew or met Frame" (Taylor). The book was called "a piercing, poetic revelation", possessing a "visceral honesty all of its own" (Cooke) and "a private glimpse of reality" (Mantel). The connection between the author's life and her work is frequently emphasised:

Not even the most devoted of deconstructionists can ignore the fact that Frame's life is painfully and inextricably connected to her work ... So, it is useful, if not essential, to know what was going on in her world when she was writing, and perhaps doubly so in the case of a posthumous novel. (Cooke)

Typically, reviewers emphasise the likeness between the novel's protagonist and the author: "Grace Cleave, excessively shy and odd-looking to boot – like Frame" (Cooke) Catherine Taylor called Grace Frame's alter ego, and according to Hilary Mantel, "Frame calls herself 'Grace Cleave'". As a result, the novel has been read as a very personal story about loneliness, which has corresponded well with the public image of Frame as a loner and a recluse: "As an account of what it is like to be an overly sensitive and lonely single young woman, it is as true and as piercing as anything I have read in a very long time" (Cooke). According to Taylor, "[i]t's a book about the pact of solitude a writer often has to make in order to preserve any creativity at all".

Despite the widespread perception of the novel as a "true" personal story, it is also possible to read *Towards Another Summer* as a work of fiction. In her review, Kim Worthington takes a stance antithetical to critics "naively extrapolating biographical fact from the fiction". Instead, she suggests that the novel be regarded as "a self-deprecating comedy of manners, the tale of a social misfit" as well as "a display and celebration of creative prowess" ("Framing Herself" 7). Likewise, omitting any assumptions about the author's life in his analysis, Marc Delrez examines the text through its use of embarrassment "as a decentring strategy allowing [it] to work towards an exposure of so-called social normality" (579). According to Jan Cronin, "[n]o right-minded critic would claim that *Towards Another Summer* is non-fiction" (*The Frame Function* 170). The novel is not Frame's first and only work to resemble her personal life story. The use of autobiographical material is common in many novels by the author and has often led to the perception of her fiction as "true" and personal, with which Frame continually disagreed. For instance, Frame considered her second novel *Faces in the Water* autobiographical "in the sense that everything happened, but the central character was invented" (Frame to Alley 155). The same could also have been said about *Towards Another Summer* should Frame ever have decided to publish it. In this respect, it seems that the reputation of the novel as exceedingly personal stems from the author's refusal to publish her work. This reluctance towards publication, however, may not be the real reason behind the author's decision against publication.

While the question of whether and to what extent *Towards Another Summer* can be seen as "personal" is rather open, Frame's autobiography was both intended and received as personal, as was clearly suggested by its genre. Its first volume, *To the Is-Land*, was first published in the USA in 1982, close to the end of the author's writing career.⁸ According to King, the publication

⁸ The only novel Frame wrote after her autobiographies was *The Carpathians* (1988).

was extremely successful, turning Frame from “unrecognised and unhonoured by the community at large ... [to] a nationally known figure, a best-selling author and holder of one of the country’s [USA] highest civic awards” (451). In New Zealand, the sales of the book were unpredictably brisk and reviewers’ responses, in general, were highly positive. In the *New Zealand Listener*, Lydia Wevers wrote:

As her fiction is the work of a rare imagination, so her autobiography is a work of rare intelligence . . . many literary autobiographies concentrate on the development of a refined sensibility and an illustrious group of friends at the cost of a sense of the real life from which talent has drawn its material. But Janet Frame . . . recalls her past selves with such honesty that it seems to illuminate one’s own life. (qtd. in King 461)

While seeing imagination as an exceptional quality in Frame’s fiction, Wevers praised the author’s autobiography for her “sense of real life” and “honesty”. Likewise, in her conversation with Frame, Elizabeth Alley highlighted the writer’s “honesty” by giving the interview the title “An Honest Record”. Although this event was a rare occasion of Frame speaking publicly about her writing, which the title supposedly suggests, the interview came across as inconsistent and contradictory. For instance, while talking about the distinctions between the genres of fiction and autobiography, Frame insisted that she was “always in fiction mode”, looking at everything “from the point of view of fiction” (161). On the other hand, she repeatedly claimed her autobiography was a “true” story, “my story”, “ordinary me without fiction or characters” (158) while claiming that her fiction was “genuinely fiction” and “not quite true”:

And I do invent things. Even in *The Lagoon* which has many childhood stories, the children are invented and the episodes are invented, but they are mixed up so much with part of my early childhood. But they’re not quite, they’re not the true, stories. *To the Island* was the first time I’d written the true story. (Frame to Alley 155)

By claiming her autobiography was a “true”—as opposed to “untrue”—story about her “real” self, Frame simultaneously reaffirms the autobiographical nature of most of her fiction, as in its many parts, her autobiographies recall episodes from her earlier novels. In *Towards Another Summer*, although the characters have fictional names, most of the places (Fifty-Six Eden Street, Oamaru, for example) correspond with place names in the autobiographies. The families of a young female protagonist depicted in *Owls Do Cry*, *Towards Another Summer*, and *To the Island* resemble one another and have a lot in common, including the character of an epileptic

brother, the event of an elder sister's death, and the internment of the protagonist in a mental hospital. Janet Frame, the autobiographical character, shares characteristics and views with her fictional protagonists in a number of novels. For instance, in the second volume of the autobiography, the protagonist contemplates her fear of erasing herself in the lives of others:

I found that I had gentleness and everlasting patience with the sick and the old . . . I seemed to be a 'born' servant . . . I could erase myself completely and live only through the feelings of others. (*An Angel at My Table* 81)

The same idea materialises earlier and was developed in the fictional character Malfred Signal, who spends most of her life taking care of her sick mother, unable to pursue her true passion and interests:

All her life Malfred had felt as if she had been bound in someone else's dream . . . When her mother died, the realisation and shock of her freedom gave Malfred a desire to destroy, to strike out, in the spasm resulting from her suddenly cured paralysis. (*A State of Siege* 12)

Likewise, Wikse noticed the resemblance between the autobiographical Frame and the female characters in *The Carpathians*:

Like Mattina, the protagonist of the autobiographies is both an avid reader and traveller, while Dinny, as the imposter novelist also resembles the older Frame – the protagonist of *Envoy to Mirror City*. (70–71)

We may say that Frame, as an actual writer, is and is not each of her fictional proxies. Most of her protagonists represent a part of her but never the whole “real” Frame. While a fictional character is locked within the story and is thus limited, the identity of any living person is never fixed and finished. However, fictional characters are bigger than the author in a way that they are able to further explore hidden perspectives and unrealised possibilities of a real person by having a range of experiences that she cannot possess:

Mattina's memories of New York are not my memories of New York. But obviously they are chosen from a selection of observations that I made, but I didn't have the experiences that Mattina had in New York. (Frame to Alley 163)

As Frame puts it in her interview, the difference between herself and her character Greta in *The Adaptable Man* is that she—the actual writer—is only interested in gardening, as she is interested in everything, while the character she creates is, in fact, an intense gardener. By half self-replicating and half-inventing her fictional characters, the writer lives through various experiences, breaking the limitations of one single personality. The process of writing fiction broadens and blurs one's personality:

[T]he writer works within the limitations or framework of her personality, although the outlook and the view over the territory of time and space and human endeavour is endless. (Frame to Alley 158)

The complex relationship between the author and protagonist that Frame establishes in her fiction corresponds with her idea of personality and the notion of the unreliability of language, which are also in line with her views on the subjectivity of reality. To Frame, the concept of personality belongs to a different kind of reality in between fiction and reality, “beyond the real, the invisible beyond the real” (Frame to Alley 168), which makes the distinction between facts and fiction somewhat irrelevant. In this regard, Frame's creation of semi-fictional replicas of herself and her life can be seen as a part of her self-discovery and her attempt to understand the truth about the world. Within this process, the role of the language is crucial yet ambiguous. On the one hand, language is a tool of communication and a key to the development of personality; on the other hand, by setting limitations on communication, it hides and denies the existence of one's personality. In her interview, Frame refers to words as “instruments of magic” and the “most desirable property”. To draw on an example, in the story behind the title *To the Is-Land*, Frame demonstrates how words may not mean what they say and one has to gradually learn the depths of the language (Frame to Alley 155–6). The idea of the unreliability of language prevails in both Frame's fiction and her autobiography. In *Towards Another Summer*, Grace admits that her words are nothing but clichés that are unable to reveal her true self to the others:

Why can't he understand, Grace thought, that all my words are platitudes, that when I juggle and empty out a sentence there's nothing left, no sediment of thought or imagination lies in my speech. (190)

No matter how much they try, no other characters can get through the “language” barrier to reach the authentic, “true” Grace. The same insight about language comes up in the story of a dentist,

which is identical in *To the Is-Land* and *Towards Another Summer*. Before pulling her tooth, the dentist kindly asks the protagonist Janet (in the autobiography) and Grace (in the novel) to “smell the pretty towel” (*To the Is-Land* 40; *Towards Another Summer* 144). The sudden awareness that a harmless phrase might be accompanied by harmful action is highlighted as vital for a child's growth and development. The girl discovers that words can have hidden meanings, which leads her to an important conclusion about the untrustworthiness of language: one cannot rely on words; words deceive.

While opinions of Frame's characters are not necessarily her own, there is a consistency of her ideas on truth, reality, and language in her interviews, autobiographies, *and* fiction, which is representative of the generic blurring in her oeuvre. In her interview, Frame emphasises how important it was for her to write the “true” story of her life in her autobiography: “[T]he story of my life. My story ... ordinary me without fiction or characters” (Frame to Alley 158). A similar longing for truth and authenticity characterises her protagonists Janet and Grace. Janet identifies herself as the person who is “always searching for the ‘truth’” (*The Envoy from Mirror City* 72). Likewise, Grace is a “passionate seeker for Truth” who “would have the world without and the world within stripped of all deceit . . . carefully removing deceit layer by layer” (142). Whether one considers Frame's interviews, autobiographies, or fiction, it seems important not to anchor oneself to the literal meaning of truth. To Frame, truth is a complex philosophical concept, the definition of which is unconventional and has little to do with fact or reality:

Why should she not speak the truth at least once in her life? The need to tell Phillip and Anne, to stand in the big untidy kitchen and say, aloud, I saw a woman change to a bird, was so desperate that Grace did not know how she would be able to prevent herself from telling. (*Towards Another Summer* 104)

In her earlier career as a writer, Frame had said that she found it impossible to reconcile “this” and “that” world, and so she had to choose “that” world (“Beginnings” 31). Over time, the amalgamation of the two worlds, reality and imagination, becomes a characteristic feature of her writing. She no longer needs to choose one world over another as the two worlds do not oppose each other but are mutually inclusive. The fact that Grace's father is an engine driver does not prevent him from being a miner at the same time, as he claims in the song he sings:

[P]erhaps he was after all, a miner? Everything was so possible. Possibility was not a bag or box that could not be closed and sealed, it was a vast open chute which received

everything, everything; one could not choose or direct or destroy the powerful flow of possibility.

– There’s no such word as can’t! their father would say to them sternly, and although they tried to understand, to reason the matter, they could only grasp that he spoke the truth; they learned, also, that there was no such word as isn’t or wasn’t. (*Towards Another Summer* 146)

The amalgamation of imagination and fact affects a person’s identity. Both Janet and Grace struggle to fit in: “I found it impossible to equate all my dreams with what appeared to be a formidable unyielding reality” (*An Angel at My Table* 96). The way that people see Grace differs from how she sees herself:

Do I look like a writer? I should have straight black hair falling over my shoulders; my face should be pimples and pasty; my shoes should be split at the sides; yet I should look interesting. Do I look like anybody, like myself? (27)

Throughout the novel, Grace persistently claims to be “a migratory bird, not a human being” implying that one could be anything and that the notion of personality is fluid and its borders are blurred. While longing to belong and have an identity of her own, she continuously rejects the notion of fixed identity comprised of unchanged characteristics. Her definition of identity as a set of daily habits is nothing but ironic:

Her eyes were shining, her face was flushed. Oh how wonderful to possess an identifying characteristic! Late, early, tidy, untidy, I’m fearfully slow, I’m always ready on time, I’m so good with children . . . (47)

Despite similarities, autobiographical Janet and fictional Grace are not exactly the same person. While neither of them can stand in place of the actual writer, the differences in the way their stories are narrated cannot help but affect the image and credibility of each protagonist. *Towards Another Summer* is written in a limited third-person point of view, voiced by a covert narrator. Compared to autobiographical first-person narration, the presence of a third person narrator creates an impression of objectivity and neutrality. This impression, however, is rather misleading: even though the voice belongs to a third-person narrator, the entire story is only told from Grace’s point of view. The two other characters, the journalist Peter Thirkettle and his wife Anne, at whose place Grace stays for a weekend, are portrayed through her perspective

exclusively. While the main character's inner conversation, thoughts, and memories occupy a major portion of the narration, the reader is only able to form an "unbiased" opinion of the Thirkettle family through their brief remarks in conversation with the protagonist. In the same way, their inner worlds remain inaccessible for both Grace and the reader. The assumptions which Grace makes from her observation of the couple's life solely belong to the protagonist and tell us more about her than them. For example, when Phillip suggests that after the kids grow up, Anne should return to teaching so that he can devote himself to writing, the only response from Anne that is available to the reader is vague: "[w]e'll see about that", which is barely enough to form any definite conclusion about the character's feelings and views on the topic. Meanwhile, it is Grace's thoughts and assumptions in response to Peter's statement that take about half of a page: "Grace felt alarmed and afraid at his words . . . I don't want to return to teaching, she thought, trying to subdue her panic. I can't." (126). For a time, Grace becomes Anne; hence, her emotional response to Phillip's remark is as follows: "Phillip had been speaking to Anne. Yet Grace had been Anne. It was Grace whom Phillip addressed now" (127).

During the course of the story, Grace's monologues become longer and more frequent, taking up to a few pages or even a whole chapter (Chapter 19, for instance) with quotation marks often omitted. The absence of quotation marks is bound to create confusion and uncertainty about who is speaking. For example, it might be hard to say whether "she", suddenly emerging in the middle of Grace's monologue, refers to Grace or whether Grace talking about herself in the third person:

I like reading. Once the words are on the page they never change; when you open the book the print never falls out. She's learning to read; she's in the primers; she's going to be a school-teacher when she grows up; she goes to Wyndham District High School . . .
(154)

Grace's several long internal monologues can be read as her yearning to speak up so she can narrate her own story from solely her own perspective, particularly as we know she is a writer and is capable of doing so. Yet, the author prefers not to grant her protagonist the authority to narrate, watering down her voice with the voice of an unknown narrator, who is, nevertheless, subjective and unreliable. The fact that the narrator entirely embraces the protagonist's point of view, lacking a distinct perspective, diminishes the narrator's role to a mere formality and function. By using a third-person narrator to narrate Grace's story, Frame draws a line between herself and the protagonist as if to suggest that "Grace is not quite me". Meanwhile, the

protagonist's active presence in the narration makes her a more real, lifelike, and convincing character.

The narrative techniques that Frame uses in her autobiographies are essentially antithetical to those which are used in *Towards Another Summer*. The first-person narration gives autobiographical Janet Frame the authority and control that fictional Grace lacks. Most critics have interpreted Frame's attempt to create an autobiographical self in the autobiographies as her desire to gain control of her public image. The image of Frame as a feminist and public intellectual mostly derives from her autobiographies, where she takes the active position of a privileged interpreter in contrast to the more passive, third-person narration employed in her fiction. Both Ash and Mercer have viewed Frame's shift towards autobiographical narration as a conscious act that unravels the myths surrounding the author's persona, which were constructed by male biographers and critics. The attempt at creating an autobiographical self has been seen as particularly successful due to the seemingly simple and accessible format of autobiography, garnering the book more popularity among the general public (Mercer 225). Unlike Mercer, who regarded Frame as a consciously feminist writer, Wikse chooses to avoid such labels, remaining sceptical about whether being a woman and a writer is enough to make a feminist woman writer. Instead, she asserts that Frame's later texts can be considered ideologically feminist on the grounds that they "powerfully expose the problems that a woman who writes faces" (158). She highlighted that unlike Frame's novels, there is no opposition between the literary tradition of male and female writers composing autobiographies as the narrator has equally distanced herself from both (141).

By virtue of the time gap mentioned earlier, the protagonist and narrator of the autobiographies, who are formally the same person—Janet Frame—become two distinct characters: "[w]riting now, I am impatient with my student self that was so unformed, ungrownup, so cruelly innocent" (*An Angel at My Table* 25). The narrator is the grown-up successful writer Janet Frame recalling her younger self—Janet the protagonist. The past tense reduces the spontaneity and immediacy of the character's experience in the past. The author admits the impossibility of capturing a true, authentic experience and feeling from the past:

Many of my student days and experiences are now sealed from me by that substance released with the life of each moment or each moment's capture of our life. I remember and can relive my feelings but there is now a thirst for reason in what had seemed to be so inevitable. (*An Angel at My Table* 25)

The perspectives of the protagonist and the narrator may not always be in agreement when this happens; the older Frame “corrects” the younger self. For example, the use of brackets sometimes facilitates this correction:

The ignorance of my parents infuriated me. They knew nothing of Sigmund Freud, of The Golden Bough, of T. S. Eliot. (I forgot, conveniently, that at the beginning of the year my knowledge of Freud, The Golden Bough, T. S. Eliot, was limited.) (*An Angel at My Table* 27)

There is, of course, a profound difference between how the protagonist felt or thought in the past and how, at the time of narration, the narrator thinks she felt and thought in the past. In the autobiography, the narrator’s point of view dominates while the protagonist’s role remains submissive. We can only see the protagonist from the perspective of the narrator but we practically never hear her voice in the past.

Ash contrasts an “absolute distanced image” of the protagonist in Frame’s autobiography with an incomplete and developing character of the novel genre. She argues that while in her fiction Frame avoids encasing her characters in any authorial consciousness; in the autobiographies, she sets up a relation of transgression (being outside of the other) between the narrator and narratee:

The writing-I grants itself the privilege of all-encompassing knowledge of the self it creates through art. And from this vantage point, naturally, it can claim authority to finish off, to complete, that self. (34)

The completed submissive image of the protagonist in the autobiographies is in contrast with the image of Grace as present and disobedient, free to express herself and “be herself”. In *Towards Another Summer*, Frame’s emphasis on the consciousness of her protagonist, the extensive use of monologues with minimum narratorial comments and omitted quotation marks create a kind of character who is real and believable. In comparison to Grace’s childhood stories, narrated in her own voice with the use of exclamation marks and informal language, the memories of Janet Frame in the autobiography come across as less immediate, more orderly, and even-tempered:

I was four. We explored under the house and found it ‘good’ . . . Life in Wyndham was full of excitement! . . . Oh my mother was so brave and so swift! . . . You see it was my father who drove the train . . . (*Towards Another Summer* 75–77)

Mother and Father, then. Mother leaving school early to become a dental nurse . . .
Mother, a rememberer and talker . . . Mother, fond of poetry and reading . . . Father,
known as “Dad” . . . (*To the Is-Land* 14–15)

By the end of the first volume of the autobiography, there is a short chapter called “Imagination”, which begins with a passage where the narrator contemplates the nature of time, memory, and writing:

Where in my earlier years time had been horizontal, progressive, day after day, year after year, with memories being a true personal history known by dates and specific years, or vertical, with events stacked one upon the other, “sacks on the mill and more on still”, the adolescent time now became a whirlpool, and so the memories do not arrange themselves to be observed and written about, they whirl, propelled by a force beneath, with different memories rising to the surface at different times and thus denying the existence of a “pure” autobiography and confirming, for each moment, a separate story accumulating to a million stories, all different and with some memories forever staying beneath the surface. (*To the Is-Land* 178)

The two concepts of time are seen here as characteristic of different stages in life: time is linear during childhood and a whirlpool during adolescence. Time also becomes linked to literary genres. Autobiography demands horizontal, progressive time while fiction is more accommodating of a whirl of memories. The notion of “a separate story accumulating to a million stories” can be connected with an important metaphor of a “mirror city”, which appears later in the third volume. On the one hand, Frame challenges the idea of a “pure” autobiography, suggesting that her autobiography cannot belong to this category. On the other hand, she hints at the artificiality of her autobiography, still presenting events in a chronological order: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

Unlike in the autobiographies, in *Towards Another Summer*, memories of childhood intervene into the protagonist’s present outside a particular order. These are unwanted “dangerous memories” which “her past life keep[s] erupting and spilling on her” (98). For instance, fear-filled childhood memories of industrial school, where Grace’s father used to threaten to send her sister Isy, overwhelm her when she suddenly spots a building with the same name on a map of Winchley. Overwhelmed by images from the past, Grace starts walking towards Winchley Industrial School. On her way, she continues to recall her past school years, family conversations, her sister Isy and her death: her journey is both physical and spiritual.

Apart from an illustration of a “whirlpool” type of narrative in Frame’s fiction, which is opposed to the predominantly linear structure of her autobiographies, the example of Winchey Industrial School also demonstrates Frame’s view on the nature of truth and reality. The industrial school in Winchley is real in the sense that, according to the map, it exists as an object in the neighbourhood. Yet, for Grace, it is not real but only a replica, a shadow reminding her of the “real” industrial school from her childhood. The school from the past, once again, has no particular significance for the protagonist as an object in time and space. It exists in her mind as a symbol of her past trauma and her fears. These fears constitute what is “real” for the protagonist. They belong to the inner reality with only a partial, relative connection to the outer world of objects. Notably, Grace’s attempt to find the industrial school in Winchly ends up being unsuccessful. Unlike the map that she follows in the book, there is no industrial school in the town, meaning that the past is gone, the “real” destination that Grace thought she was approaching can never be reached.

As we saw, Frame’s autobiographical time and narrative differ from time and narrative in her fiction. Yet, now and then, in her autobiographies, Frame returns to familiar “fiction” devices, giving way to the symbolic—as opposed to realistic—mode to convey her thoughts. The analogous moments between *Towards Another Summer* and the autobiographies prove the consistency of the author’s ideas of truth and reality across different genres and time periods, verifying her words when she says she’s “always in fiction mode” (Frame to Alley 161). This consistency sets up a foundation for the formation of the curiously public private intellectual figure that we associate with Frame. It is a celebrity figure whose face is easily recognised by people who may have never read her. In *The Envoy from Mirror City*, there is an episode when the protagonist, with her new London acquaintance Ben, are walking down the streets in search of a chess set:

We went in search of a chess set . . . We both knew but did not say that the need for a game of chess had long ago delivered up its original impulse to become a symbol of those indefinable longings of one young man and one young woman, both aspiring poets, on an autumn afternoon in London. A game of chess would have anchored our longings, postponed our questions, for the time being ended our search . . . An onlooker might have wondered, “Why are that man and woman running through London on this autumn afternoon? What have they lost that they hope to find or who or what is pursuing them?”
(*The Envoy from Mirror City* 34–35)

Like the industrial school in *Towards Another Summer*, the chess set in the autobiography is only important as a symbol of inner reality. The episode of searching for something that cannot be found becomes a metaphor, a myth, thus losing its realistic significance. Facts are no longer important and can potentially be changed without altering meanings. Was it a set of chess or checkers? London or Ibiza? Did the episode even happen or was it all imagined?

Whether in her interview, fiction, or autobiographies, Frame keeps emphasising the very special role of imagination. This is something that she has valued and desired since her childhood:

It [imagination] was something to be treasured, and anyone at school who had imagination was always spoken of with awe. (Frame to Alley 156)

My life had been for many years in the power of words. It was driven now by a constant search and need for what was, after all, ‘only a word’ – imagination. (*To the Is-Land* 154)

It is important, however, not to be misled by Frame’s understanding of imagination. To her, imagination is not about the unreal or the surreal but things “beyond the real, the invisible beyond the real” (Frame to Alley 168), a place that she calls “mirror city”. It is not a mere fantasy but another level of reality: “an envoy” from a higher truth. In her third volume of autobiography, Frame expounds her views on truth through Plato’s allegory of the cave:

[W]ithin every event lay a reflection reached only through the imagination and its various servant languages . . . like the shadows in Plato’s cave, our lives and the world contain mirror cities revealed to us by our imagination, the Envoy. (*The Envoy from Mirror City* 10)

The reality of everyday events are merely shadows, reflections of meta-reality or the true form of reality, which can only be reached through the artist’s imagination. Empowered by imagination, reality steps up and becomes fiction.

Returning to Stead’s review of Frame’s *In the Memorial Room*, we shall admit the rightness of his remarks in relation to Frame’s wider oeuvre: indeed, many of Frame’s characters take after real people; the philosophical speculations of fictional protagonists and the writer, based on her ostensible nonfiction, tend to closely resemble each other. Although Stead saw this tendency as particularly problematic in Frame’s *In the Memorial Room*, the similarities are hardly exclusive to any of Frame’s texts. As we have seen, these features of her writing remain consistent over time and in different genres, indicating a characteristic blurring in the author’s

oeuvre and originating from her views on truth and the role of the imagination as an “the envoy from mirror city”. Among other things, these features fostered many mysteries and controversies around the author, widening the gap between the “public” and “private” Frame, making her what we can call a curiously public private intellectual.

Whether in her fiction or her autobiographies, it is probably best to take Frame’s account of her life with a grain of salt. Having said that, when the author insists that her autobiography is a “true” story, she is, perhaps, not misrepresenting her understanding of truth as a blend of facts and the imagination. Like Frame, the author of the next chapter, Lauris Edmond, rigorously insisted on the truthfulness of her story in her autobiography. Her reasoning, however, had more to do with politics than philosophy. While both women were trying to gain control over their respective public images by writing autobiographies, the controversies and challenges faced by Edmond were very different to those encountered by Frame. If the public image of Frame is closely related to the cult of “exceptionalism” that surrounded her, the figure of Edmond, in contrast, stands out as a representative image of other women of her generation.

CHAPTER 3

Lauris Edmond: Personal is Political

My chance encounter with Lauris Edmond's autobiography happened to be through its second edition. When I later came across the first edition, it took me by surprise to observe that unlike the version I had read, there were images of Edmond's extended family and friends accompanying the narrative. Looking at these images with great curiosity, I found myself speculating on how the people captured in the photos might have read the text. Complemented by photographs of "real" people, the same narrative struck me as even more private and personal. The line between fact and fiction can be blurred in the genre of autobiography; it was particularly (and purposely) blurred in the work of Janet Frame. In comparison to Frame, Edmond's autobiographical writing clearly gravitates towards nonfiction rather than fiction. Edmond's writing is less indeterminate or experimental and more clearcut, which, I believe, is indicative of her different perspective on what constitutes the truth. While the truth, for Frame, is a philosophical concept; for Edmond, it is a political category. By sharing her private story with the public, she, among other things, performs a political act, connecting her personal experience to larger social and political structures.

Literature has always been intimately tied to privacy—to the desire to communicate one's own story. The angle from which the story is told is reflective of the power dynamic in society. Surveying mid-century New Zealand literature along the lines of gender, John Newton has pointed out the near-total absence of female authors. He argues that for literary nationalism, "heterosexuality [was] a setting, an assumption, a way of knowing the world" (*Hard Frost* 147). Using statistical data and drawing parallels between writing and climbing activities, he demonstrates how in contrast to the first two decades of the twentieth century, when the number of women authors suddenly and significantly increased, the following literary period remained predominantly masculine. Among the factors that lead to a shift in relations between genders, Newton identifies three causal factors: the economic hardships of the early 1930s, the aftereffects of World War I, and a defensive masculine reaction to the first wave of feminism. In a situation when national literature takes "a markedly masculine turn", he states: "the practice of writing is re-gendered: women themselves disappear from literary publication" (115).

In 2017, when Newton's book was published, the author's perspective did not come across as new or unique. Following the reappearance of feminism in the sixties, a once contentious view about women writers having been unfairly neglected and excluded from literary

canon had become mainstream. In the introduction to *Yellow Pencils* (1988), a collection of poems by New Zealand women, Lydia Wevers indicates the steady growth and development of female writing throughout the second half of the century. She claims that while very few female poets were to be seen in the pages of *Landfall* in the fifties and sixties, the seventies and eighties were marked by a huge increase in the number of women editors, publishers, and published authors. Looking back on the previous anthology of New Zealand women poets, Wevers feels that her new collection represents a considerable gain in the quality and competence of writing.⁹ She argues that in “some important respects feminism has been about the move from private to public; from writing poems and stowing them in the cupboard, as Lauris Edmond has described her young life, to publication and professionalism” (xxi).

Lauris Edmond was one of twenty-eight female poets that Wevers selected for publication in *Yellow Pencils*. By that time, Edmond was already an acclaimed New Zealand author who had published several plays, one novel, and eight volumes of poetry (one of which had won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize). In the following year, she would publish her first volume of autobiography titled *Hot October* (1989), shortly followed by the second, *Bonfires in the Rain* (1991), and finally the third (in a year’s time), *The Quick World* (1992). This chapter will focus on her story and work, which I find representative of many other female public figures of her generation in New Zealand, who began their careers and gained a sense of independence during the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. Among these are women’s rights activist and politician Sonja Davies, children’s authors Margaret Mahy and Joy Cowley, and the Man Booker Prize winner Keri Hulme. I am primarily interested in Edmond’s engagement with feminist ideas of the time, such as issues of gender, the concept of intellectualism, and the notion of privacy. I will demonstrate how these ideas shape the image of the female protagonist in Edmond’s poetry and autobiographical prose. I will show that Edmond challenges the traditional elitist idea of an intellectual as a white academic male, offering a new type of protagonist: a private family woman and a mother of many children, who sacrifices her domestic life for a public career as a writer. I will then focus on the theme of family in Edmond’s poetry and autobiography, paying attention to the differences in its representation in different mediums due to specific norms of the genre. I will argue that Edmond’s writing is a therapeutic attempt to reinvent her identity. By making the private world public, she is able to connect her private and public selves in order to become a “whole” person.

⁹ The anthology Wevers referred to is *Private Gardens* (1977), edited by Riemke Ensing.

In *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, Peter Whiteford defines Edmond's poetry as "deeply, often movingly, and at times painfully personal", suggesting that it could "legitimately be read in close conjunction with [her] life" (160). To Ken Arvidson, Edmond's "personality and her poetry are inseparable. Memories of her will be metaphors of both" ("Lauris Edmond" 23). In her interview with Ricketts, Edmond divided poets into "intellectual[s]", like Allen Curnow, C.K. Stead, and Ian Wedde, and those who write "out of their own experience", among whom she mentioned poets like James K. Baxter and Hone Tuwhare. The former, to her, tended to prioritise form and technical skills over content, observe from the outside, and play games. The latter, in contrast, were emotional, compassionate, more focused on content rather than form and style, and, as a result, like herself, more personal. Edmond's sympathy was clearly with the latter: "I have no patience with poetry that's merely cerebral" (61), "the physical/emotional aspects matter more to me than the cerebral ones that fire Curnow and, now I think about it, Stead too" (65). In her earlier interview with Dowling, she claimed that she always prioritised real-life experience over the "second-hand experience" of literary sources. Poetry, to her, is more than "just an intellectual construction" (421).

Edmond's focus on personal experience aligns with the feminist argument that "the personal is political", which gained in popularity during the late 1960s and 1970s. The slogan underlines the connections between private experience, and larger social and political structures. In the introduction to an anthology of feminist literary criticism published in 1991, Robyn Warhol and Diane Herndl defined feminism through a set of beliefs largely shared among feminist scholars at the time. Among the beliefs they mentioned is the conviction "that the oppression of women is a fact of life, that gender leaves its traces in literary texts and on literary history, and that feminist literary criticism plays a worthwhile part in the struggle to end oppression in the world outside of texts" (x). On the other hand, they also pointed to and stressed a great variety of motivations, techniques, and experiences among feminist scholars:

From the outside, "feminism" may appear monolithic, unified, or singularly definable. The more intimately one becomes acquainted with feminist criticism, however, the more one sees the multiplicity of approaches and assumptions inside the movement. While this variety can lead to conflict and competition, it can also be the source of movement, vitality, and genuine learning. (x)

To Warhol and Herndl, the concept of gender, in particular, has remained one of most debatable terms in the area of feminist studies. A number of essays included in the anthology

offer an analysis of sex and gender that approaches gender as a system of expectations, pressures, and hierarchy imposed on men and women. A more literal separation between male/misogynist and female/feminist academics is supported by Annette Kolodny, who has used the metaphor of a minefield to describe the male-dominant academic environment for a feminist scholar: “Instead of being welcomed onto a train, however, we’ve been forced to negotiate a minefield” (101). Kolodny’s three “crucial propositions” for a feminist analysis are that “literary history is a fiction” and therefore can be altered; that we are taught to engage with paradigms instead of text; and that, as readers and critics, we must re-examine the biases informing our critical approach and judgement (102). While emphasising the difference in priorities and topics between male and female writers, Kolodny tends to pay less attention to a similar diversity between female authors, finding it rather unhelpful as it “render[s] us vulnerable to attack on the grounds that we lack both definition and coherence” (101).

In contrast to Kolodny, Nina Baym insists on rejecting the notion of one distinctly “female” language, emphasising that not all women are alike: “a difference more profound for feminism than the male-female difference emerges: the difference between woman and woman” (165). Similarly, Myra Jehlen suggests implementing a feminist perspective to study both men and women’s texts, rather than focusing exclusively on literature by women. Seeing gender as a figurative rather than a literal term, she proposes “that [the] interior life, *whether lived by man or woman, is female*” and that “the exterior life, on the other hand, is just as ineluctably male” (92). Based on her analysis of how this pattern works in a number of nineteenth-century American novels, Jehlen concludes that the genre of the novel “precludes androgynously heroic women while and indeed *because* it demands androgynous heroes” (93). This novelistic structure, to her, is representative of the “basic structures in our society,” as well as “the very forms and categories of all our thinking” (95).

Edmond’s perception of gender lies somewhere between the perspectives of Kolodny and Jehlen. On the one hand, like Kolodny, she exploits a biological approach to gender, for instance, while outlining some shared common topics between female writers, such as “writing a good deal about relationships, including family ones” (Edmond to Ricketts 62). In “Only Connect: The Making of an Autobiography”, Edmond emphasises her connection with other women of her generation, seeing herself as their voice and representative: “Other women’s experience offered parallels, but mine seemed a particular clear-cut, not to say dramatic example of what I was coming to see as a phenomenon of my generation” (414). Moreover, Kolodny’s image of a minefield, signalling an antagonism between men and women, makes for an effective metaphor for Edmond’s story of an embattled female intellectual, fighting her way in a hostile male literary

environment. Her recurring tensions with certain male academics, like Stead, particularly foster that impression. On the other hand, Edmond's views on the division between genders tend to get broader and more figurative in some of her other statements, which positions her alongside feminists such as Jehlen, for whom gender is a matter of culture rather than a biological fact.

In her interview with Ricketts, Edmond agreed that “masculine” and “feminine” ways of writing were “treacherous terms to use” (61). Defining the “feminine” way, she underlined “a sense of close relationship with my world, the physical world”, “a strong sense of belonging, of being close to the heart of what’s happening” (61)—characteristics rather similar to those she used to describe poetry “out of one’s own experience”. In “Only Connect: the Making of Autobiography”, Edmond suggests that female authors are more prone to searching for reasons and connections as they “write from the outside; they have no secure, given place and so must find it” while men tend to write “from the centre of a world in which they have an established position” (419–420). This definition highlights the marginalised status of women writers who have had to find their place within a literature that has been monopolised by dominant male culture. In the same way that Jehlen proposes that interior life is “female” and exterior is “male”, it is possible to say that Edmond is inclined to see “feminine” traits as private, personal, and peripheral, while “masculine” traits as public, academic, and intellectual. A number of male poets she mentions in the interview, such as James K. Baxter or Hone Tuwhare, do not fit the “masculine” criteria, while certain qualities of the female poet Fleur Adcock, on the other hand, are more likely to be identified as “masculine”: “It sometimes seems as though she has almost too much stylishness, but that’s living in England for so long” (Edmond to Ricketts 62).

According to Whiteford, Edmond's preference for life experience has sometimes been seen as “something of an anti-intellectual attitude” (160). The lack of literariness in her writing has been considered as a form of weakness by certain “intellectual” writers such as Stead:

If there was something lacking in Edmond it was that drive beyond self and subject towards art. She wrote very well, applied herself, was a highly intelligent, interesting and complex person who brought much life experience into her work; but she was not enough of the artist; was not sufficiently racked by the need to ‘get it right’. (“Lauris Edmond” 296)

Throughout the 1980s and 90s, in his critical essays, Stead continued challenging the notion of subjective truth in Edmond's work, which, as he put it, was “what the Women's Movement of that time used to claim women writers were especially good at” (“Lauris Edmond” 284). In his

analysis of the poem *The Lecture*, he exposes Edmond for not “being authentic . . . adopting a false voice, and her language betrays her” (“The New Victorians” 283). In “Honest Lauris, Honest Iago”, his review of *The Quick World*, Stead again brings up the question of the author’s truthfulness, declaring that, as a critical reader, he cannot help but disbelieve elements of her narrative. In his definition of good writing, Stead emphasises “accurate observation, truth to experience and to the facts, the right words in the right order”. According to him, writers like Edmond disregard all of these considerations as “relatively unimportant” (“The New Victorians” 277).

In his review of *Kin of Place*, a collection of Stead’s critical writing which includes his essay on Edmond, John Newton regards Stead’s opinions as “imposing and even intimidating” and Stead himself as an “irrepressible egotist”, a “symptomatic figure . . . harnessing [his] abrasive personal style to a settler nationalism in retreat” (“The Death-Throes of Nationalism”). According to Newton, by reinventing himself into a figure of the cultural right, Stead was “swimming against the tide” (“The Death-Throes of Nationalism”). Meanwhile, however reactionary his attitude may have appeared at the time, Stead’s “attack” on Edmond is not only indicative of the time period but can also be helpful in identifying and raising questions and challenges that the second wave feminists had to encounter and deal with. In “The New Victorians”, Stead emphasises that he had “never wanted to defend inequalities based on gender”, never felt sympathetic to the notion that “males not only are less sensitive than females, but that they ought to be”, assigning some “feminine” elements to his own fiction. What he claims to resist and, as he puts it, “many good strong independent women resist, [is] the rewriting of history, shifting Marxist class terminology into the area of gender, making men simply oppressors and women oppressed, and bringing that forward as a “fact” into the present” (278).

Unsurprisingly, Stead’s critique of Edmond’s writing is primarily focused on her use of language and form rather than the content of her work, which she, in turn, accentuates as the first priority. To Edmond, content is “personal” and primal while form is “intellectual” and thus secondary. While useful in the context of theoretical debate, the form–content dichotomy, however, tends to get more problematic in practice as the two mediums are highly dependent on each other. To replace old conventions, one can possibly start with a transformation of content, as many feminist writers of the second wave (including Edmond) have done, and yet, the job cannot possibly be considered completed without a subsequent change of form. This concern has been raised by Valérie Baisnée in her analysis of Edmond’s engagement with the genre of autobiography in *Women's Identities and Bodies*. Approaching the memoirs from a feminist

point of view, she points out that except as a maternal body, the body of a female protagonist has remained largely absent from discourse. While the situation is typical for the genre, which traditionally focuses on the spiritual growth of a male artist and leaves bodily experiences aside, for Baisnée, it creates ambiguities in female discourses for women in which, she claims, physicality is generally more important than its equivalent for men.

Edmond's reliance on genre conventions aligns with her view on autobiography as pure nonfiction. While Janet Frame, in her memoirs, mixes both fictional and nonfictional modes and refuses to follow the constrictions of the genre, Edmond, in contrast, rigorously insists on the nonfictional nature of her autobiography. As she explains in her preface to *Hot October*, a part of her first volume of autobiography is made up of real letters to her mother, only "slightly re-arranged and abridged" (VII). She clarifies that she has chosen to retain family names while altering the names of most of her friends. Likewise, the pictures of the extended family and friends accompanying her narrative accentuates the nonfictional nature of her work. In the "Author's Note" to the second and third volumes, Edmond chooses to be even more explicit, referring to the difference between the genres of autobiography and autobiographical fiction. She explains that the subtitle to her first volume "An Autobiographical Story" does not imply her narrative is made up and fictional as—to her surprise—many readers saw it; rather, it is "a way of saying that it was my version only of people and events in the story, and would differ from the view of other participants" (*Bonfires in the Rain* VIII). While insisting on her truthfulness, she emphasises the particularity of her own view, adding that other people "would tell the story differently" (*Bonfires in the Rain* VIII) and "would undoubtedly see events depicted here in their own way, not mine" (*The Quick World* VII).

Throughout the autobiography, Edmond repeatedly refers to her reading of history, literature, and philosophy, including those by feminist authors and activists: "Certainly it was true – well, wildly believed, and documented by Kate Millet and other feminist writers – that in the fifties there had been a worldwide movement of women back to the home after the relative independence they'd been given by the war" (*The Quick World* 206). Not only is she aware of the feminist ideas of the time, she also becomes actively involved with the feminist movement during her writing career: "I joined some women's groups. I gave talks about self-determination, harnessed my knowledge of existentialism, the philosophy of personal responsibility, I held forth" (206). It is inevitable that being a female author, feminist, and activist added new responsibilities to Edmond's role as a writer. Recounting her own personal story is, to her, aside from anything else, a feminist and political act, a way of claiming power as a female author. By

insisting on the truthfulness of her account, she, in a way, fights for a woman's right to speak up and narrate their own story.

In *The Long Forgetting*, Patrick Evans views the case of Edmond as “a classic account of the woman-writer-as-victim”, summarising her autobiography as “a story of struggle that makes clear the price she and her family paid for her artistic successes, which included the loss of her daughter” (159). The later split within Edmond's family, separating its members into those who took sides—either Lauris' or her husband's—reflects the extent and long lasting effect of that sacrifice. The family division coincided with the death of her husband, Trevor Edmond, and the publication of the second volume of the autobiography, written, as Baisnée put it, “over the body of the husband who died during its completion” (*Women's Identities and Bodies* 14). At the end of *The Quick World*, without mentioning names, Edmond reveals how two family members “suddenly – and then persistently – expressed such a rage towards me that it took me a long time to grasp the fact that it was happening and longer still to understand the reasons for it” (398). While the author omitted specific details, Stead, in his review, suggests that her children “might have felt [that] she had done less than justice to Trevor Edmond's good name” (“Honest Lauris” 50). To Stead, “Edmond's husband, had he lived, would have wished all their names, especially his own, might have been changed ...” (49). By questioning the ethics and reliability of Edmond's narrative, Stead, a white-male academic and a powerful figure in the New Zealand literary scene of the 1980s, contests her authority as a female writer. In a similar way, her son, Martin Edmond, challenges her narrative power by questioning her version of the story in a parallel autobiography, *The Autobiography of My Father*, which was published in 1992. This, once again, brings to the fore the issue of privacy and power in Edmond's writing.

As opposed to a public phenomenon, the private domain is personal and restricted, belonging to or for the use of one particular person or group only. The private matters that Edmond brought up in her writing include her relationship with the family, the details of her marriage, accounts of childbirths, and extramarital affairs. Looking back, Edmond identifies two major parts of her life as separate from each other. “Life Number One”, as she called it, consists of her experience as a housewife and a mother, living in the countryside and bringing up her six children. During “Life Number Two”, which follows, her focus shifts from home towards her professional development and literary career, in a short time bringing her fame and reputation as a New Zealand poet. We can say that the author's “Life Number One” is personal, private, and built on a “real”—life and a traditionally “feminine” experience, while during “Life Number Two”, she enters into the public, intellectual, and traditionally “masculine” world (“Only Connect” 414).

While Edmond's views on her domestic private life have been challenged and reshaped throughout her writing career, the theme of family remains the central motif in both her poetry and prose. Edmond objects to seeing "Life Number One" as merely "a matter of waiting around for "Life Number Two" to take over", regarding it as "vital, authoritative and comprehensive" ("Only Connect" 414). She acknowledges and glorifies happy moments of her family life, particularly those relating to her experience as a mother: "A second child was every bit as magical as a first, and this was itself an amazing discovery . . . It *was* true that I could have a million babies, cope with them all love them all" (*Bonfires in the Rain* 86–87). In her poem "Applied Astronomy", Edmond rejoices and celebrates the start of a new life, seeing it as a miracle beyond intellectual comprehension:

To answer the question posed by Mr Hoyle
was there one big bang or does creation
endlessly continue – I need not peer
among the midnight-shadowed stars; this tiny
creature proves both theories tenable . . . (26)

In the poem "Midwife", the process of labour and birth is compared to a grand performance, with the midwife being portrayed as a "maestro", "the chief performer, first violin, the star", whose talents and professionalism are compatible to those of an artist, a creator: "Now that's skill. That's style" (19). In poetry and prose, Edmond records her maternal feelings of love and protectiveness along with observations and insights into children's developing personalities. Her poems about children are often written in a form of address, creating a sense of intimacy, immediacy, and connection:

Child, creature, little anxious girl,
Your whole body frowns,
Your clambering hand
Grapple mountains. ("Piano practice" 27)

Dear girl, when you ride again
let it be over hills,
the cliffs not too close . . . ("Learning to ride" 28)

Aside from positive experiences, however, the motif of family in Edmond's autobiography contains some strong feelings of dissatisfaction and unhappiness. A part of it comes from her relationship with her husband Trevor and recurring doubts about her marital choice. Describing their time together on the eve of their marriage in a letter to her mother, she, for the first time, plainly articulates her uncertainties about them being a couple:

It's nice to see him, he's easy to talk to – in fact he seems exactly the same, but I don't think I can be ... we two – would never come to anything after all ... Perhaps we built up too romantic a picture of each other in all those letters saying 'All my love' at the end ...
(*Hot October* 222)

Not only did these doubts fail to recede with time but they grew stronger and became more elaborate in Edmond's discourse. Soon after the wedding, the narrator records her "first estimations of how separate we also are". The conclusion she arrived at is rather generic. While sensing their incompatibility as a couple, Edmond is inclined to identify the bigger problem in the institution of marriage itself: "The natural union with another family is not natural at all, but fraught with strange difficulties which I must solve alone, if at all" (*Hot October* 238).

In conjunction with her prose, Edmond's poetry also contemplates the notion of marriage. In the poem "A Reckoning", the portrayal of a marriage comprises idyllic images of a beach and a "walled garden". It is a dream, a utopia, an ideal world where it is "safe to quarrel" with "love coming down on us reliably as rain". Although it appears to be perfect at first glance, something is lacking in there and, to Edmond, it is authenticity—a genuine connection between two individuals—either lost or something that never existed: "our fears kept us close; pride too, / and the small events' unmerciful momentum". The fact that the poem addresses her husband appears to be an attempt to reach him, to find that connection: "You were my friend, accomplice in / the copious plotting parents are a party to . . .". If the marriage is a time of "jovial boredom" in which two strangers "stuck it out together", the single life, when there is "just a man and a woman", is a time of awakening. The single life is resourceful and creative in a way that it forces an individual to face reality, prompting development and growth. Part of this development involves understanding one's past and coming to terms with it. What kept the Edmonds together all these years? Where did the change come from? Was the separation inevitable and necessary? The central question formulated at the end of the poem concerns the nature of marriage as an institution:

Who were

the guardians then, and who, despite
that virtuous authority, the guarded? (45)

While the question is left unanswered, some hints might be available in the poem's imagery. To Edmond, the marriage lasted "until a door at last breathed out and cracks of guilty silence shot us dead asleep". She then mentions "the change of sky", implying something beyond the couple's control. While no one is to blame for what happened, it does not, however, make it any less difficult to accept. The very same question, with reference to the poem, is brought up again and expanded in her autobiography:

[I]t was clear that we had not made the common life that would survive the end of the family years . . . 'Who were the guardians . . .' (I asked in a poem called "A Reckoning") 'and who . . . the guarded?' While we were taking care of our children, how much were they protecting us from the selves we would eventually become? And, further, how much in all this was history, how much the inexorable processes in ourselves? We couldn't know. (*Bonfires in the Rain* 229)

Among the possible reasons for the failure of her marriage, Edmond identifies both public/political and private/personal causes. She "couldn't know" which of them came first, provoking the other. Did personal become political or was it politics invading the "private" sphere? It might have been a combination of both, in the end.

As with married life, the author's maternal experience, though glorified and celebrated, is not able to eliminate her growing sense of dissatisfaction:

I had occasional spells of deep melancholy that seems to have no cause . . . Sometimes at night I cried long and silently without relief. Was there a kind of loneliness in spending almost all one's time with small children, delightful as they were? (*Bonfires in the Rain* 100–101)

In both poetry and prose, the domestic theme reveals the author's fear of identity loss in the lives of her family and children: "I worried that I too had become a routine housewife, who simply reproduced predictable habits in a later generation" (*Bonfires in the Rain* 89). In "The Wheel Turns", a daughter's demand to have her own life prompts a mother's reflections about the loss of her own:

The baby's milky-weak, the seed is sown:

Sustaining, entertaining her's a whole endeavour,
A mother's love is bred into the bone.
Tired, she's never lonely – well, never alone
Though ties with older friends do tend to sever;
A child can make her mother's life her own. (33)

While referred to earlier in the autobiography, the narrator's frustrations about her family life remain largely unfronted and unexplored until what she calls the Opunake crisis, described at the end of the second volume, takes place. Sitting alone and watching her family playing cricket in the park, the narrator has a sudden revelation that marks the beginning of a dramatic change in her life and the life of her family:

And I saw with blinding clarity that not one of them thought there was a single thing to be done for me, in my turn. I didn't *have* a turn. I didn't exist, except as I helped them to exist. Without them I was nothing, and so they perceived me – theirs, useful, indeed necessary, loved of course, depended upon; but as a person with possible separate requirements of my own, not there. And nobody, not even I, thought this unbalanced or wrong. (*Bonfires in the Rain* 179; emphasis in original)

A sudden detached view of her situation, role, and place in the family gives her a new perspective that was earlier missing. The same distant retrospective view on domestic life is assumed in her poem "The Sums". Like "A Reckoning", the title accentuates the author's attempt to find answers and draw a certain conclusion about her past. From a greater distance, former experiences turn into "some shred of the rag of events" which is "blurred now". On one hand, this detachment makes her vision hazy and blurred. On the other hand, it allows generalisations and a more comprehensive view on her life. The use of details is symbolic rather than real. Traditionally seen as the heart of domestic life, the image of the kitchen is at the centre of her memories:

[I]t's kept for the moment when you go
mooching along the verandah and through
the back door, brass-handled, always ajar,
to where the floured apron stands monumental
above veined legs in a cloud of savoury steam,
mince, onions, the smell of childhood's Julys. (18)

The present tense emphasises the centrality and eternity of the concept of home. The back door is “always ajar” and home is always there. The words “brass-handled”, “monumental”, and the metaphor of a cloud foster a sense of significance, which, however gradually, diminishes throughout the poem, being eventually replaced with a sense of detachment and irony.

To Edmond, life is a mystery that defies any sort of rational explanation. In the following stanza, arithmetic calculations signify a realistic, rational, yet constrained and narrow-minded approach towards life. The speaker pictures herself in the kitchen, self-assured and knowing all the answers:

[T]here again you are quick-flounced and shrill
shrieking on a high stool the answers
to sums – multiplication, addition, subtraction,
all the mysteries known as ‘Mental’ – alchemy
that could transmute $48 + 17$ (when you got it,
yelling) to a burst of fire in the blood – (18)

Standing like a pupil “on a high stool”, the housewife answers questions obediently, enthusiastically, and automatically. Described as “quick-flouncing” and “shrill shrieking”, she seems both too busy and too involved to contemplate, doubt, or reassess. While the domestic world within which she operates is familiar and predictable, it fails to bring her peace and satisfaction. Words such as “blood”, “fire”, and ‘yelling’ make the kitchen scene appear overly emotional, and intense, as if the woman is on the edge, about to break down, or collapse. This tension is in contrast with a sense of relief that is introduced in the last stanza:

[I]t is still there, still finding its
incorruptible useless answers,
your life’s ruined verandah, the apron,
the disfigured legs that with a stolid
magnificence used to hold up the world. (18)

The present tense is now replaced with the past, positioning the narrator at a distance outside immediate experience, which gives her a wider and more comprehensive perspective on her former life. In time, the answers appear to be “useless” in Edmond’s poem, as if the speaker has accepted the impossibility of making sense of the “mysteries” of life by intellectual speculations. Though still nostalgic and tender, the outsider perspective diminishes the sense of importance the

domestic life used to have for the insider. The tone with which the house is described appears to be both ironic and tragic. While the home is “still there”, its verandah is ruined and “the disfigured legs” do not “hold up the world” any longer. The tragedy of the speaker is that in spite of her attempts, she is unable to go back and reconcile her old and new life. She is “always going home”, which is “forever being torn off”. It is only the notion of home that remains, not the real home.

The same motif of the impossibility of reconciling her two lives appears in the autobiography: “I wanted my new self but couldn’t bear to leave the old . . .” (*Bonfires in the Rain* 228). The techniques by which the author attempts to resolve the problem—making sense of her life—however, tend to be different in different mediums. Compared to her poetry, Edmond’s prose stands out for its more serious, authoritative, and analytical tone:

Marriage and my life within it had for many years been a complete whole, each person, each act, each mood and change simply an aspect of a single operation held together by love, conviction, certainty, a sense of being responsible, and dedicated to the good health of the whole; it was a complex contract that had grown denser as years passed, but did not loosen its grasp. (229)

While Edmond’s language remains intensely figurative in both poetry and prose, the type of metaphors and the way she articulates them tend to be different. In the sentence quoted above, which is long, complex, with multiple clauses, and only neutral adjectives, domestic life is described as a “complete whole” and “a complex contract”, both of which are effective conceptual metaphors. By contrast, in the poem “The Sums”, the analogous idea of the holistic and claustrophobic qualities of a domestic life are articulated in visual rather than conceptual terms through the metaphor of a house as a female body: “your life’s ruined verandah” (18). In the autobiography, the same metaphor comes across in the form of an anecdote, when, during a medical consultation, Dr Jordan informs the narrator that she has “a dry section” (*Bonfires in the Rain* 78). The narrator immediately assumes that he is talking about her body while, in fact, the doctor is referring to her house.

In comparison to her more subtle and crafty use of language in poetry, in prose, the narrator becomes exceedingly explicit and meticulous about the way she feels:

I often felt a kind of grief, not only for a person lost, and not only for the loss of the love and comfort of partnership, but for the defeat of faith. I had entered my marriage lightly enough, yet it had developed into my greatest act of faith, continually made. I would

almost have preferred to lose what I still admired and believed in, to walk away as if from a house that still stood, rather than to know it was fallen and could never be built again.
(230)

The author's focus shifts into an analysis and explanation of her feelings rather than their portrayal. The use of first-person narration makes the argument not only more personal but also more definite and authoritative: this is how the "I" perceives the situation. In contrast, the "you" in "The Sums" comes across as less defensive and categorical, inviting the reader to participate in and experience the speaker's journey. The purpose of poetic devices, such as the repetition of "each" or the metaphor of faith as a house, is persuasive rather than explanatory or decorative. Reason and logic enable the autobiographical narrator to make sense of her past life to justify her decision to leave her family, and pursue her career and ambitions. The author's inclination towards analysis and reasoning in her prose, however, runs counter to her proclaimed disapproval of intellectualism and the recurring motif of opposition between intellectual life and real life in her writing:

Virginia gave me a book called *The Death of The Family* which talked of a disintegrating economic unit, a Marxist view. I thought it is interesting to read, but the realities of change were messy and miserable. We were all in some way permanently scarred by them. (*Bonfires in the Rain* 228)

The mention of the book, which was written in 1971 by psychiatrist David Cooper, places the narrator's story in a wider historical context, implying that her personal story is not unique but representative of its time. Yet, to Edmond, Cooper's work is opposed to the realities of her situation. Intellectual attempts to understand and explain the experience of real life bring no relief to the narrator. The realities that she has to deal with are not only "messy and miserable" but they have also changed her "permanently".

Edmond's third volume of the autobiography, *The Quick World*, recounts her 'Life Number Two', while writing from "a completely private act" (*Bonfires in the Rain* 58) becomes her main occupation. She finishes her degree, works as a teacher and then as an editor, gives public talks, travels overseas, publishes books, makes literary friends, and builds new relationships and connections. The concept of home, which used to be the centre of her world, shifts, emptying space for her new self: "Home had always been the starting point and final destination for every journey, but what I now saw, with the quickly fading insight of the traveller, was a centre which already was not centre at all . . ." (*The Quick World* 54). While her

focus and priorities change, her new self does not keep apace. While quick and successful, Edmond's foray into the public literary world only complicates her issue with identity:

I was not one new person but many – writer, parent, woman experimenting with independence, editor – and now, traveller. Each seemed not to know how to connect itself to the others . . . (*The Quick World* 6)

The solution to this new problem that she encounters, she realises, would involve relating all her different experiences and facets of personality with each other:

[N]ot one thing but many, parallel rivers into which I plunged, taking quick intermittent runs from one to another and back again. They never come together, and I never tried to make them do so. Indeed, connecting the strands of a complicated experience is a matter of confidence in oneself which I was a long way from achieving. (*The Quick World* 54)

In the autobiography, Edmond recalls the advice she receive from her friend and writer Alistair Campbell, who, after reading some of her poems, reprimanded her for avoiding personal matters as topics of writing, such as her complicated family situation and her relationship with her husband:

'You aren't writing about what matters most . . . What about Trevor? You are unhappy about him, why don't you say so? . . . Real poetry is about the thing you can't say, can't bear', he said sternly. (*The Quick World* 57)

According to Edmond, the meeting was "a crucial encounter, of continuing value to me even long afterwards when I'd learned to shape and interpret his advice in my own way" (57). The opposition between her personal and intellectual spheres comes to the fore once again. To be a writer, as Edmond concludes later, means to be "obsessed with coming as close as possible to our experience, penetrating it, knowing it from the inside" (210). That is also to say that writing, to her, is not only private and personal but has a therapeutic effect. It is a way to solve personal issues, such as her identity crisis, by closely examining her past, searching for links, connecting her past and present lives together. Although Campbell referred to her poetry, Edmond's autobiography comes across as particularly illustrative of this idea. At the end of the third volume, she mentions how she suddenly comes to the realisation that "this new life of mine was in reality built out of old materials that was as deeply connected with the past as every other phase of growth" (199). While such a statement can be read as an expected positive outcome

from her life-writing journey, there are also certain limitations to her success that are worth addressing.

As a feminist woman writer and intellectual of her time, Edmond had to encounter and deal with a range of problems evolving from an established set of social gender roles. In this regard, her move from a traditionally feminine domestic world into masculine public space can be seen as a revolt against the traditional division of gender roles, an attempt to end the authority of men in the public arena. However, how true and accurate is this? At the end of the autobiography, contemplating her professional success, Edmond wonders whether her approach and attitude is “simply joining” rather than “making up”:

Indeed, if the second life I'd now been living for ten years or so was built out of rules and conditions I made up for myself, not those dictated by parents and teachers, how did it happen that I found myself not making up, but simply joining, occupations that had always been there? Perhaps all one did was to interpret experience, to be there, watch, be ready to recognise and understand the world, and take part in its carnivals, its crises. (*The Quick World* 198)

During her “second” life, she is remarkably efficient in replacing her old family network with a new network comprising colleagues and friends, regarding them as “new versions of the complex intimacies I had come to depend upon” (*The Quick World* 87). Contrasted with his liberal, progressive and flexible wife, Edmond’s husband Trevor comes across as a conventional man, “conservative by nature” (*The Quick World* 52) and “driven towards authority” (*Bonfires in the Rain* 226). After her separation with Trevor, ironically, most of the male literary figures with whom the narrator strives to build new relationships, share the same traditional beliefs and attitudes as her husband. One of these associations, Dr Beeby, is referred to as someone who “had not questioned, and did not intend to disturb the system of loyalties, affections, obligations, by which he had always lived” (*The Quick World* 81). And yet she feels “splendidly dignified, expanded, to have been permitted such intimate access to a famous man” (77). While the realisation of “the oppressiveness of the expanse of years between us” emerges after some time, her approach and attitude are soft, modest (to “teach” and “cure”), and even apologetic (she is *afraid* that she wanted to teach him) rather than radical or revolutionary:

But I too came to want recognition; I grew tired of the wondering admiration I'd practiced – and felt – in our first years. I wanted, I'm afraid, to teach him feminist

principles, to cure him of attitudes towards women's lower standing and value that he had held all his life. (82)

A strictly heterosexual masculine world, described by Newton as an environment where a woman is not able to survive and disappears from literary publication, was a setting and a starting point for female authors like Edmond, who have been navigating their way through the "minefield" of the public sphere, as Kolodny put it. The success of their outcome, however, depends largely on a definition of success. For feminist scholars like Jehlen, who saw the roots of gender inequality spreading out as far as into genre structure, authors like Edmond did not, perhaps, complete their task. For Edmond, though, success was more likely to imply other things such as reconciliation of her private and public life through the process of writing, the opportunity to "speak up" about what matters to her, and to be both private and public. In this regard, Edmond was successful and indeed established herself as a role model. Her courage, intelligence, open-mindedness, ability to connect to others, adjust, and find her place are worth admiring.

According to Greenblatt's definition of culture as a paradoxical combination of constraint and mobility, Edmond may be considered an example of a public literary intellectual striving to challenge and reshape existing cultural boundaries, enforcing new kinds of behaviour and models of practice in both her life and writing. Her peripheral position explains the controversy surrounding her figure. Being in the right place at the right time, she gained popularity and support among those of her contemporaries who related to her experiences and shared her views. At the same time, she could not avoid being the subject of moral scrutiny and criticism by conventional and traditional voices. In the next chapter, I will be looking at a public intellectual of the same generation who had sided with the opposite camp. If Edmond is commonly regarded as a liberal and progressive figure of the mid-eighties, Stead, on the contrary, earns his stripes for his supposedly reactionary views and opinions.

CHAPTER 4

C.K. Stead: Challenging Biculturalism

In 1991, the major English publishing house Faber and Faber asked C. K. Stead to edit an anthology on contemporary South Pacific short stories. Although “permissions letters had gone out, and had been signed and returned” (*The Faber Book* xv), at the last minute—and in unison—four authors (Albert Wendt, Keri Hulme, Witi Ihimaera, and Patricia Grace) decided to withdraw their stories. According to Stead, when pressed for reasons, Ihimaera pointed to the lack of mana in the editor. Likewise, Hulme articulated her distrust of Stead’s “expertise and experience in the matter of Polynesian literature (and New Zealand literature in general)”. She also mentioned “the extensive history of insult and attack that surrounds Karl Stead’s relations with Maori and Polynesian writers” (xv). The other two authors, Wendt and Grace, refused to comment on their decision. Meanwhile, behind what Hulme called an insult or attack, Stead saw nothing but “the application ... of the same standards of judgment applied to any work in English language ..., irrespective of the race of the author” (xv). His earlier reviews of Hulme and Ihimaera’s novels (which, according to Stead, might have been the cause of offence) had been considered by him “the proper stuff of intellectual debate” and Stead felt “not the least twinge of guilt or regret at having been frank in the public forum” (xvi). However, what may seem like a local literary spat—significant largely for the spectacle of egos colliding— may have been symptomatic of various fractures and fissures in postcolonial New Zealand.

The end of the twentieth century marked a period of major social, economic, and political change in New Zealand which was introduced by the Labour Government that had come into office following the defeat of Robert Muldoon’s National Government in 1984. Many of the new policy directions affected the Maori populace. As noticed by Michael King, for the first time in New Zealand history, all of the country’s major organisations started moving slowly but definitely towards meeting Maori needs and ambitions. Funding for Maori culture and language initiatives started to be seen and accepted as the government’s responsibility under the Treaty of Waitangi. According to King, by the end of the century, about a thousand Maori claims had been addressed and some compensation paid. For example, Tainui and Ngai Tahu have received reparation packages of \$170 million (*The Penguin History of NZ* 426). Yet, while considerable sums of money have been spent towards redressing historical wrongs, the establishment of healthy relationships between Maori and Pakeha communities in the present remained a far more complex goal to achieve. The size and the speed of the changes arrived as a shock to mainstream

Pakeha New Zealanders, many of whom resented being “blamed”, as they saw it, for historical wrongs and were offended by the kind of “special treatment” the Maori, it seemed, were suddenly afforded. Although the policy appeared to be benign in theory, it was likely to have been distant from the majority opinion.

As a result of these policy shifts, the relationships between Pakeha and Maori people went through a number of adjustments, making the Maori “a far more visible component of everyday aspect of the country’s life than they had been a generation earlier” (King 427). King even likens these changes to a form of social engineering. In such a situation, controversy becomes inevitable. King mentions that the National Government showed “some signs of wanting to retreat” (427) in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Meanwhile, within the largely liberal literary circle, Stead, previously known for his opposition to Vietnam and the apartheid, became identified as a critic of the new bicultural order. His opinionated statements about the Maori in the media and in his nonfiction led to confrontation with Maori authors, earning him a reputation in some circles as a racist: “I was accused, among other things, of being racist . . . The questions I’d raised were to do with difficult and delicate issues” (Stead to Kimber 54).

This chapter focuses on the figure of Stead as one of New Zealand’s most prolific—and controversial—twentieth-century public intellectuals. In my attempt to elucidate the nature of the controversies surrounding his persona, I will study and compare Stead’s opinions on Maori topics in his nonfiction and fiction. In the first part of the chapter, I will discuss the nature and results of Stead’s argument with Witi Ihimaera, Keri Hulme, and Albert Wendt with regard to history, identity, privilege, and discrimination. In the second half, I will look closely at how Stead approaches the same questions in his novel *The Singing Whakapapa*. I will argue that genre differences render similar thoughts and ideas less provocative and offensive in the author’s novel compared to his rather controversial critical writing. While the question which of Stead’s two faces—a novelist or a critic—is closer to the “real” Stead cannot possibly be answered, I will demonstrate that the author’s reputation as a “reactionary”, originating primarily from his nonfictional texts, is much too simplistic.

In his essay “Ihimaera: Old Wounds and Ancient Evils”, Stead takes issue with Witi Ihimaera’s representation of New Zealand history in *The Matriarch* (1986). “Looked at in detail this simple image of New Zealand history as a long slow rape is at best a half truth” (190), he claims. Yet he agrees that “history has rolled cruelly over the Maori race” and “in broad terms it [that historical view] has to be accepted” (190). The position of Stead, as reviewer, was rather ambivalent: on the one hand, he supported a revival of the Maori language and culture; on the

other hand, he found it “dishonest, patronizing, and fundamentally undemocratic” (191) to soften criticism and applaud “infant” (191) work for whatever reason.

As Suzanne Romaine notes, conflicting views of the past constituted “contested historical ground in Aotearoa New Zealand” (1). The crucial role of writing in validating history, communicated by westerners, neglected natives’ oral traditions, making the Maori view of the past “nonexistent, forgotten, or written over” (2). Unsurprisingly, Ihimaera’s effort to write a history from the Maori perspective based largely on myth and folklore rather than written accounts of the past was met with scepticism by certain Pakeha critics such as Stead: “*The Matriarch* also sets to rewrite some passages of New Zealand history from what I suppose Ihimaera would claim was a Maori point of view” (“Ihimaera” 193).

As a Maori writer, Ihimaera always believed that historical injustices must be acknowledged before they can be resolved. According to Romaine, he “want[ed] the Pakeha to remember what they want[ed] to forget” (4). For his part, Stead disagreed with the notion that he had ever wanted to disregard the past. “The past doesn’t have to be forgotten” (195), he emphasises in his review of *The Matriarch*. Criticising Ihimaera for “picking over old wounds and ancient evils”, Stead believes that the past is past, and “its rights and wrongs belong to those who lived them, not to us” (195). Instead of relitigating old battles, he proposes a future-oriented focus: “The sense of having been wronged can become, like alcohol, a way of life. The Irish seem to have lived for centuries off moral indignation. Is that what Ihimaera wants for his people?” (195)

Finding certain parts of *The Matriarch* “probably wrongful” (192), Stead accuses Ihimaera of factual inaccuracy. In particular, he regards Te Kooti, the Maori leader and founder of the Ringatu religion, dismissively “the Christianity-crazed Maori who ordained because he believed he was the Prophet”. Furthermore, he claims that Ihimaera’s heroization of the character is “intellectually puerile and imaginatively destitute” (194). Although praising “some rare but important moments” as well as “some touching details about Maori ways” (194), Stead ultimately considered the novel a failure on the grounds that its sententious political message set the novelist in the position of a warrior and the reader in the position of ally or enemy.

Indeed, political engagement and angry rhetoric against the colonisers grew into an essential feature of Maori writing in the 1980s. In his later work, Ihimaera criticises his earlier stories for being out of touch with the political realities of the modern-day Maori (“Maori Life and Literature” 50). In *The Matriarch*, the connection between the past and present are strong and alive, and the historical events appear vital to understand and solve contemporary issues. To Alex Calder, reading *The Matriarch* as a modern humanist novel can create an impression that

suggests the book “doesn’t quite work, doesn’t succeed ‘wholly’” (“The Matriarch” 80). While Stead advocated a separation of literature from politics, Calder considers the novel’s strong political message a necessary feature of the epic genre to which, according to him, the book belongs:

An epic has more in common with myth or drama or opera than with the traditional, well-made humanist novel. Epics do hang together, but what coherence they have is always a response to political and pedagogical imperatives as well as aesthetic ones and, in case of *The Matriarch*, to the strange conjunction of old epic values with the contemporary state of the novel. (81)

No less controversial was Stead’s response to Keri Hulme’s Booker Prize winning novel *The Bone People* (1985), published in *Ariel* in October 1985. As Margery Fee summarised, Stead was “unable to deny the novel’s obvious success both at the literary and the popular level” (12). Indeed, he highly reviewed the book, regarding it “a work of great simplicity and power” (“Keri Hulme’s *the bone people*” 181) and noted that its characters are “complete, convincing and fascinating” (182). In the review, Stead remarks that he had never doubted Hulme’s “powerful and original literary talent”, which he had already admired in her earlier stories and found it “abundantly clear in *the bone people*” (183). The concern Stead articulates, however, involves the basis on which the book was awarded the Pegasus Award for Maori literature. Although being disadvantaged by history, Maori authors, according to him, “now sell at least as well as, often better than, the most successful Pakeha writers. They compete successfully for government grants and literary awards. Why then a special award for a Maori writer?” (180)

By questioning whether Hulme, with a single Maori great-grandparent, qualified for the award, Stead challenged the author’s right to write and collect awards as a Maori individual: “She claims to identify with the Maori part of her inheritance – not a disadvantageous identification at the present time” (180). He underlined that both the language and form of the novel belonged to western literary tradition. Likewise, Kerewin Holmes, Hulme’s semi-autobiographical character who feels “by heart, spirit and inclination . . . all Maori” (Hulme, *The Bone People* 62), in Stead’s opinion, was “more Irish than Maori, word-obsessed, imaginative, musical, unstable, something of a mystic, full of bluster and swagger, charm, and self-assertion” (182). Furthermore, he found certain important Maori elements in Hulme’s book unconvincing, particularly the use of the Maori language and mythology, which struck him as “willed, self-conscious, not inevitable, not entirely authentic” (180). In his conclusion, he notes *The Bone*

People is “a novel by a Pakeha which has won an award intended for Maori”, adding, however, “the fault is not Keri Hulme’s. It is the conception of such an award, which is thoroughly confused, and in any case patronizing, suggesting that Maori writers can’t compete openly with Europeans” (180). Since Stead’s review of Hulme’s work, the two authors have never been reconciled.

A part of Stead’s offensiveness to Hulme comes from the language of race that he invokes while referring to the “blood quantum” ideology. It supplies a belief in the existence of races and brings up a number of controversial questions. How much Maori blood (or how many great-grandparents) does it take to be determined Maori? Can non-Maori people speak for the Maori? The issue is further complicated by people of mixed ancestry or those who have been raised in ignorance of their racial heritage. While some critics choose to dismiss Stead’s criticism as merely reactionary and anti-Maori, others, such as Romaine or Fee, have noticed and addressed the issues it has raised. According to Fee, Stead “is transmitting ideas about race and equality that have evolved over centuries, and have become, for most people, common sense. To dismiss them is to fail to learn from them” (12). Strong support from the minority community is seen by Fee as one of the essential requirements that one needs to fulfil when they claim to “write as [the] Other”. That is, according to her, the case with Hulme: “She is accepted as Maori by the Maori literary community and readership, and by many Pakeha” (16).

These disagreements on Maori issues worsened relationships between Stead and Albert Wendt, a Samoan poet and writer. In 1991, Stead wrote a column for *Metro* where he questioned whether the fact of Wendt’s appointment to professorship of English was reverse discrimination and, if so, what the consequences might be:¹⁰

I began to think about a discussion of Wendt’s appointment to Professorship of English which is our one designated Chair of New Zealand Literature, setting Wendt’s academic qualifications (he holds a second-class honours MA in history) alongside those of his principal competitors for the post, and asking what special considerations applied – was a positive discrimination made, was it openly acknowledged as such, was the university’s appointments committee fully and objectively briefed by the English department – and so on. Above all, was a right decision made? (“The Egregious Albert” 140)

Stead then contemplated “the ethical position of a professor in charge of courses in New Zealand literature whose own novels are texts prescribed for study in those courses, not just now and then

¹⁰ *Metro* is a monthly magazine focusing on Auckland issues, not a literary journal.

but every year” (140). Finally, he referred to Carson Creagh’s review of Wendt’s new novel, which Stead had initially been asked to write but did not do so, partly because of Wendt’s refusal to provide an interview. Ironically, Wendt’s criticism by Creagh appeared to be just as negative as Stead thought his review would have been, which led him to conclude: “There is a lesson in that for every writer. When you try to manage your own publicity it usually backfires” (142). In the final lines of the article, Stead issued a warning about the inclusion of the negatively reviewed novel in Wendt’s university course: “But then, does Wendt need to care? Should I risk the prediction that this new novel, *Ola*, will soon be set in one or another of those courses which are his responsibility as New Zealand’s first Professor of New Zealand Literature?” (142)

Stead’s discussion of Maori issues highlights a number of controversial questions including but not limited to history, identity, privilege, and discrimination. Firstly, he expresses disagreement with a Maori perspective on New Zealand history as offered by Ihimaera. Secondly, in his review on Hulme’s book, Stead invokes the language of race, making it a part of his offensiveness. This provokes a question of how to define minority group membership and whether one needs to be a Maori individual to be able to speak for and as a Maori. Similarly, the incident with *The Faber Book* triggered a related matter of whether a Pakeha, such as Stead, could speak for Maori and Pacific writers. Finally, in his argument with Wendt and Hulme, Stead debates the idea of special treatment, advantages, or immunity for Maori or Polynesian authors, seeing it as a highly questionable form of race-based privilege, which is likely to foster the dependence rather than the independence of a minority group.

Reflecting on these tensions in his article “C.K. Stead and the New Literary Order”, Mark Williams points out a profound shift in New Zealand culture from cultural nationalism to postcolonialism with a proviso that “both terms are inadequate to describe the complex and sometimes contradictory positions they denote” (697). It is in terms of this change, he suggests, that “we must understand Stead’s putative role as the arch-reactionary of New Zealand letters”. Behind “a local literary squabble” between Stead and Pacific authors, Williams sees issues of cultural power, culture formation, canonicity, and authority. According to him, Stead’s perception of culture and literature had “remained pretty much unchanged since the fifties” (698), and his position strongly aligns itself with the preservation of Pakeha male cultural hegemony in New Zealand. Williams points out that Stead’s works published in the 1990s were received “grudgingly, sometimes with passionate hostility” (696). Among those who “took largely negative stances” towards Stead, Williams mentions a number of New Zealand academics, such as Jonathan Lamb, Simon During, and Ken Ruthven. To Williams, the

withdrawal of stories from the Faber book only confirmed damage to Stead's reputation in the New Zealand literary scene:

[Stead's] power in the literary scene has declined considerably. Nothing demonstrated this more vividly than the editing and reception of his 1994 anthology When Stead compiled the second edition of *The Oxford Book of New Zealand Short Stories* in 1966 his authority was such that to be left out of the book was an indisputable sign of one's marginality as a writer. Nearly three decades later four authors decline to be included in a Stead anthology and consign the book to marginality. (696)

To Stead, the episode is seen as symptomatic of former tensions:

[T]he present state of the Pacific, and indeed of the world, where the disappearance of the single great power-bloc confrontation, and the consequent lifting of that pressure, has led to fragmentation, and the reassertion of older ethnic and tribal identities and grudges. (*The Faber Book* xvii)

He concludes that the whole situation may have been unlikely in a more robust society (xvi). Although in the beginning of the article, Williams regards his own position as ambivalent, his stance towards Stead has been observed to be more negative than positive. As he mentions, personal animosities and literary judgments have often been undistinguishable in New Zealand. Remarkably, Williams discusses Stead as a public figure, anthologist and, above all, a representative of literary authority whose power and influence has been "globally dispersed". The article is mostly built around the polemic between Stead and Pacific writers. Williams harshly criticises Stead's editorial abilities: "Having got this part of the anthology wrong, it seems to me that Stead couldn't get the rest right" (699). Williams adds:

It is clear now that no major international publishing house will again make the sort of decision that allowed Stead to edit the book in the first place. The Pacific will not again be entrusted to a "Third World Interpreter", of which Stead is a local example, like Rushdie and Naipaul, also hated in their native lands. (701)

While expressing grievances over the exclusion of certain significant texts by Maori and Polynesian writers in *The Faber Book*, Williams, intentionally or not, avoids any significant discussion of Stead's own literary achievements. Apart from a brief note about his novels receiving "reasonably favorable notice in Britain" (696), Stead, as a fictional writer, is barely

mentioned in the article. Interestingly, at the very end of the work, Williams stills gives credit to *The Singing Whakapapa*, which was published in the same year as *The Faber Book*, accentuating the difference between nonfiction and fiction: “But he’s also capable, after a series of indifferent novels, of bringing out a book like *The Singing Whakapapa*, which is neither cantankerous nor exasperated, but restrained in its complex engagement with history.” (702). In 1995, *The Singing Whakapapa* won the Montana Book Award for fiction and was praised for its impartiality by a few other New Zealand critics. According to Judith Dell Panny, while Stead’s articles and interviews have caused misunderstanding and even offence, *The Singing Whakapapa* demonstrates an author who has been impartial in portraying Maori characters (148). To John Thomson, the book offers “a disarming gesture to defuse the effect of Stead’s notoriously European outlook” (109).

In the novel, Hugh Grady, a sixty-year old retired librarian, tries to make sense of his own life by exploring his family story, his “singing whakapapa”. By doing so, he follows the earlier advice of his uncle Frank Mangold who “had directed him to the history of his own land at a time when all academic eyes seemed turned elsewhere, outward” (100). The starting point of Hugh’s project becomes the story of his own great-great-grandfather John Flatt—a missionary agriculturalist from England who witnessed Waharoa’s war of the 1830s and the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. Together with his assistant, the young librarian Jean-Anne Devantier, Hugh works with public archives as his primary documents, including the Select Committee of the House of Lords, papers of the Church Missionary, and Flatt’s official correspondence. His final goal is to write a book and rediscover the past by converting what really happened into a compelling narrative.

The importance of being truthful is continually emphasised throughout the novel. While giving evidence before a Select Committee of the House of Lords, Flatt offers truths “without decoration, plain and unvarnished”: “His answers were level and factual. No person and no policy was attacked or defended” (170). Adopting a similar approach to Flatt, and as stressed repeatedly, it is of great significance for Hugh and Jean-Anne to avoid holding an opinion or taking sides while recovering the past: “You become involved. There’s a temptation to take sides. But that’s no good. Only the truth’s interesting. That’s what we’re after.” (169). The truth then has to be based on facts which are not merely subject to belief but also things that can be observed empirically. The importance of empirical evidence is stressed through a continuous reference to primary sources. The documents, studied by the two researchers, form an important part of Hugh’s narrative: “‘Since my last letter’, Hugh’s great-great-grandfather wrote to the Rev Mr Jowett in September 1836, ‘war, bloodshed and cannibalism have raged in this part of New

Zealand.’” (67). The conveyance of truth can be unreliable. The factual truth Flatt offers to the committee remains only half-truth as no mention of Tarore is made: “His horse was discussed, but not his young friend Tarore. No mention was made of her, nor even that a death had occurred” (172). The facts obtained from public records alone do not satisfy the protagonist. Aside from official documents, Hugh and Jean-Anne substantially rely on Flatt’s private journal, as imagined by the author, suggesting a more subjective nonofficial perspective on events, including the personal events. To link up past events—both public and private—into a coherent story, they have to assume and reimagine things that they do not know for sure. The author’s interest lies in the hidden side of history, personal stories, secrets and family skeletons (which are typically ignored within any “real” history). Lydia Wevers has pointed out that the metaphor of Tarore’s missing heart is the key to understanding the story as well as the author’s concept of history:

Grady’s realization about where Tarore had been when she was caught and why she had been the only one of the party in such danger constitutes itself as the heart of the story, the missing piece that makes it make sense. So what does this say about history? History can lead you to the heart of things. In true narrative fashion, the point of this fiction remains metaphorical, but the missing heart is a metaphor pointing not to absence but presence; by discovering Flatt’s love for Tarore, Hugh fills the past with colour and emotion, humanizing the missionary also humanizes colonization; it is the passion between two people fiction and history celebrate. (“The Fact of the Matter” 3)

Accordingly, the version of history that is favoured by Hugh is local, non-judgmental, and focuses on emotion. There are faces and stories instead of facts and documents. The past is presented through present tense, which makes it vivid and alive, enabling a reader to feel that she or he is present at the time. Such history evidently owes more to fiction than to nonfiction.

An appeal to emotion remains crucial even during the onset of the dry impartial war narrative. There are a few lyrical and dramatic episodes in the war plot. The most powerful passages bear a connection to the murder of Tarore:

A body in a box. Brown’s. Not Brown’s body. Brown’s box. Much blood, dry now, or drying. Tacky, black blood. A brown body in Brown’s box. Dead. Heartless. That’s to say breast chopped open, ribs dragged apart, heart torn out. So a cavity – a big dark hole, a cage opened, the bar-beating bird gone, set free. Also, the back of the head removed.
(89)

Short abrupt sentences and repetition of the phonetic sound “b”: “body”, “Brown”, “box”, and “blood” help to build up tension and the dramatic atmosphere. Through the use of visual (“brown”, “black”, and “dark”) and tactile (“tacky”) imagery, the experience of death becomes more vivid and conceivable. “Brown” is both the person’s name and the colour, which is used to the best effect. The metaphor of the soul as a bird in a cage falls into place once the reader learns Tarore was Christian, so Brown must have believed her spirit would be taken to heaven. This allusion to Christianity may explain the absence of hatred or revenge in Tarore’s feelings. Yet, it hardly softens the graphic realism conveyed in the scene (“breast chopped open, ribs dragged apart” and “the back of the head removed”). The range of poetic devices used in the scene makes it intense and vivid.

Wevers has linked Hugh’s concept of the truth of history to that of Keith Windschuttle, an Australian academic who argued against postmodernist theory about the relativism of historical truth. Challenging the traditional view of European colonisation theory, relativists insisted on the impossibility of telling the truth; so, the past can only be seen through the perspective of one’s own culture. As a result, relativists believed that all history was politicised and no historical work could entirely avoid prejudices and political interests. According to Windschuttle, such a position has threatened the traditional role of the historian, which is “to stand outside his contemporary society in order to seek the truth about the past” (“Postmodernism” 41-42). This is how Stead sees his protagonist Hugh too: a historian in its traditional sense, outside society and politics.

According to Stead, “the true work of fiction” only starts “when the political posturing stops” (“Ihimaera” 194). Like Windschuttle, who accused a number of Australian historians of exaggerating the degree of racism present in the past, Stead had accused Maori authors, such as Ihimaera, of the politicisation of history. This leads one to assume that in his own novels, Stead would have surely attempted to stay as far from politicisation as he could while remaining actively involved in the political debate in his writing of nonfiction. Yet, is the deliberate avoidance of politics not itself a political stance? By demonstrating his strong disagreement with the attempts of postcolonial authors to rewrite and politicise history, Stead risked becoming tendentious or linear in his opinions. According to Selina Tusitala Marsh, “all writing is political. To assert that it’s not is political. If your politics is mainstream, it’s invisible. If it’s on the fringe . . . , then it’s ‘visible’ and suddenly political . . .” (“Witi Ihimaera” 291).

A number of scholars, including Panny and Wevers, have already pointed towards a range of echoes and biographical coincidences in *The Singing Whakapapa*, alluding to a history of Stead’s own family:

Hugh Grady's parents bear the first names of Stead's own parents, his mother is descended from a nineteenth-century Swedish seaman whose life story combines both the elements of Victorian melodrama and the oceanscape of a colonial and buccaneering Pacific, Grady is a character and voice always suggestively like that of his author's, slid sideways into another-contested-discipline. (Wevers, "The Fact of the Matter" 2)

Likewise, Hugh shares some of Stead's professional opinions. Both the author and the character were actively involved in the argument over Vietnam in the late 1960s, when, for the first time, Hugh's letter "in short sharp sentences" appeared in the *Herald* (104). Autobiographical elements constitute a notable feature in many novels of Stead, yet, facts and fiction, historical and imaginary characters rather interweave in these works. As with a few of his other books, *The Singing Whakapapa* becomes a palimpsest—written over real people and history. This sort of narration gives the author more freedom in retelling history: it is a free interpretation—not a documentary. The actual story, whenever it occurred, becomes swamped with new details added by each narrator—first by Flatt and Ethel Elena, Hugh's grandmother, both of whom kept diaries; then by Hugh and Jean-Anne, who read and interpret the aforementioned diaries as well as other documents.

There is a passage in the middle of the novel (Chapter 7) in which Hugh openly articulates his political opinions for the first and last time (at least with the same intensity). Like Stead in his nonfiction, Hugh disagrees with the recent change of perspective on New Zealand history. He refuses to acknowledge the shift seriously—perhaps because "the change had come too late to affect Hugh Grady" (143). In addition, the shift is considered foreign and therefore inauthentic, hostile to the New Zealand reality—a mainstream trend coming from overseas:

It was the big world that spoke. It was the international fashion-houses of the academic intellect. It was the Zeigeist. It whispered in the ears of sleeping young scholars who woke, as from a vision of Paradise, determined to be Good and to prove in their work that they were. "Show us the sins of your forefathers," the voice demanded. "Show us how they wronged Women and the Native race". (142)

Stead expresses a similar sentiment in his nonfiction from the same period: "We need to do our own thinking, instead of letting the larger world's current clichés about race and gender do our thinking for us" (Stead to Thomson, "What I Believe" 226).

If New Zealand history is an undiscovered garden, which is a metaphor used throughout the novel, the new popular perspective, according to the protagonist, makes of it "the stage set of

a conventional musical melodrama where cardboard-clad figures sang over and over the same three or four songs to the tune of ‘I am white and male and I wrong those who are brown and female’; or ‘I am female/brown/femaleandbrown and I am wronged/wronged/doublewronged by those who are white and male’ (143). The use of the phrase “conventional musical melodrama” seems odd though. One may wonder whether “singing whakapapa” is itself a “conventional musical melodrama” given that the title of the novel relates to music as well. It might be important then to draw a line between “emotional” and “sentimental” as Stead distinguishes them.

In the context of the novel, “emotional” appears to be an absolutely positive trait. It relates to the true feelings from a person’s heart. For instance, Flatt’s love towards Tarore can be considered far more emotional than sentimental. By drawing attention to his numerous refusals to discuss the girl’s death with anyone, the author implies that Flatt’s feelings are deep and not superficial. In contrast, sentimentality appears to be an easy way out, rather indicating the lack of true emotion. While emotionality does not oppose facts and only builds on them, sentimentality could reject intelligence, simplifying the situation. A “conventional musical melodrama” is sentimental; history, on the other hand, is “much more interesting when it [isn’t] sentimentalised” (*The Singing Whakapapa* 68).

While Stead considers the new postcolonial perspective on New Zealand history conventional, his own position, along similar lines of thinking, can be seen as mainstream since it represents and defends more traditional views, while confronting new alternative ideas. In a way, Stead’s perspective is sentimental as well. At the end of the novel, right after visiting his great-great-grandfather’s grave, the protagonist practically delivers Jean-Anne’s baby, all at once discovering that the newborn child is his own grandchild. This information is communicated by his lover Lydia, with whom he had not “exchange[d] a word for more than twenty years” (295). Such a happy coincidence is likely to appear melodramatic, especially when it is considered in conjunction with the stereo music that accompanies this incident, which entertains the protagonist driving alone under the stars in the final lines of the story:

It was almost midnight. He [Hugh] would drive out to the racecourse and walk once around the track under the stars, thinking about John Flatt, lying somewhere nearby in a grave now unmarked, and about the ‘singing whakapapa’ that had just issued its latest challenge to the universal silence which would always defeat it. Then he would put a tape on the stereo and drive home through the night. (296)

In the novel, like his critical writing, Stead continues to reject the notion of collective guilt about the past: “If Hugh carried from birth the sins of the fathers, so did everyone else, brown and white, female and male” (143). To the protagonist, the idea of universal guilt “belong[s] to the realms of theology and ideology, and to the preacher’s art”, for which he “feel[s] disgusted”. Morals and opinions are set against facts and knowledge: “Opinion was only the bad breath of the ideologues clouding the mirror; moralizing was a fog in the garden of his dream” (143). Similarly, “anti-racism” and “anti-sexism” are regarded as ideologies which should not have a “place in the design of an English syllabus” in Stead’s nonfiction (“The Egregious Albert” 142). The different outcomes produced by the same ideas in the author’s nonfiction and fiction are likely to depend on who articulates them. Is it the author expressing his own opinions or a fictional character echoing the same opinions? While we assume that the ideas in nonfiction “belong” to the author, we cannot be sure about fiction.

For much of his career, Stead was Professor of English at the University of Auckland and a figure of authority in New Zealand literary circles. Williams mentions “legends of his power” (695) in the country. Several of his books were published and received favourably in Britain. Unlike Stead, Hugh is neither an academic nor a public figure; he does not have a reputation abroad:

Hugh got a B+ for that course – the first of many. He was not destined for academic greatness, but his degree, when he finished it, was better than respectable. It took him into the library world where he prospered, and even made his mark as an historian of sorts, not in the professional class, but certainly not amateurish either – good enough to give occasional lectures to senior students of (Frank Mangold’s prediction had been right) New Zealand history, and to run a few tutorials. (56)

Contrary to the author’s public face, the character is revealed to be modest in his ambitions, a shy person, average rather than brilliant—an out-of-fashion retired historian. However strong his opinions appear to be, he is far from being a fighting man. At the time of writing the novel, Stead himself was a retired professor focusing on fiction. Yet, he continued to be actively involved in contemporary public discussions, including those with Ihimaera, Hulme, and Wendt, as mentioned earlier. By diminishing Hugh’s professional status, Stead softens the effect of his political opinions, which many have found offensive and inappropriate in his critical writing.

Most of Stead's reviews are written in the first person with an emphasis on his personal experience. This makes the presence of the author in his critical writing particularly emphatic and his voice exceedingly authoritative:

At the present date nothing I have seen written about *the bone people* could be described as "critical". ("Keri Hulme's *the bone people*" 178)

At no time did I really believe in the greatness of Artemis. Worse, I was never entirely persuaded that the novelist believed in it either. ("Ihimaera" 193)

Personal taste, for which there is no accounting, has some bearing on choices; but definitions set limits, so I will explain, as far as I am able, what I have allowed my terms to mean, and what they have seemed to require of me. (*The Faber Book* x)

In comparison to Stead's nonfiction, *The Singing Whakapapa* feels less imposing and judgmental. The novel's unnamed narrator enables the writing to get inside the minds of different characters and delve deeper into their reactions and feelings. It is also likely to establish distance from the opinions and ideas voiced by him:

There was something to be explained in that fact, by God there was, and that meant (Hugh thinking again as historian) grappling with it, not explaining it away, moralising it out of existence, as if it were enough to say their forebears, his own and Frank's, had blundered into this place (as they had), destroyers (as perhaps they had been), and there was an end to it (as there was not). (14)

Alone, confused, conscious of eighteen thousand terrible sea-miles between himself and arbiters who might be disinterested and fair, alternately angry, self-critical and unhappy, John Flatt was standing in the evening light on a small rough-hewn jetty in an estuary where river and sea met . . . (35)

Not only has the author crafted his narrative voice in order to avoid subjectivity but the main characters, Flatt or Hugh, in most cases, refuse to comment or interpret the events that they either witness or study. While witnessing the actions of the 1830s war directly, John Flatt only remains an impartial outsider. The unpleasant aspects of the war are described by him accurately yet calmly and nonjudgmentally: "the tribal alliances and antagonisms, the hatred and long-preserved determinations to revenge . . . There was little about it . . . that was glorious or noble or inspiring. It was mostly cold and cruel, duplicitous, heartless and violent . . ." (67).

In both his fiction and nonfiction, Stead touched on topics related to the Maori, which attracted negative response. In the beginning of the 1990s, when *The Singing Whakapapa* was published, the use of the Maori term “whakapapa” in the title of a Pakeha novel was considered by many as arrogant and inappropriate. In his conversation with Steve Braunias, a New Zealand journalist Geoff Chapple said that “people had told him, ‘Stead has no right to use that word.’” (qtd. in Panny 147). Panny points out Stead’s “lack of patience with political correctness and his irreverent attitude to the Treaty of Waitangi.” (147). The attitude of certain Pacific authors such as Vilsoni Hereniko is exceedingly radical: “Writers like Wendt, Ihimaera, Grace, and Hulme are setting the literary standards for the rest of the Pacific. It is their voices that indigenous Pacific Islanders want to hear: it is their vision and their art – not Stead’s Eurocentric reviews – that the world needs” (“Four Writers and One Critic” 63).

Yet, the European perspective does not necessarily imply a negative or one-sided portrayal of Maori people. *The Singing Whakapapa* demonstrates a balanced and complex view on Maori–Pakeha relationships. There is a mix of Pakeha and Maori characters in the novel; the latter are no less ambivalent than the former. The episode of selling land from the Tamaki Isthmus is an example demonstrating the selfishness and sordid motives of both sides. While the native population enthusiastically accepts payments from Europeans, knowing that the land has already been sold, missionaries close their eyes with the same enthusiasm at the illegality of the purchase. Just as Europeans are not that generous, the Maori are not that naïve. Throughout the story, the difference between civilised Englishmen and uncivilised natives gradually decreases. There is no real opposition between the two nations as there are no good or bad people, right or wrong opinions. When John Flatt returns to London, he misses the kind of relationships he had in New Zealand: “The ‘savage heathens’ ... had proved more savage and heathen than he had ever imagined possible; but they had also been more human, closer, more like kin” (128). Hugh gives credit to Maori oral history: “Flatt had vanished into the dustiest corners of the Pakeha record, and his grave was lost; Tarore had survived in the word-of-mouth which was Maori history, and here was her grave restored” (273).

There is a range of rhetorical questions about the concept of victory, defeat, and their causes scattered throughout the novel: “What is victory? What is defeat? What were the causes of the war-or-whatever which led to this victory/this defeat?” (141), “What is victory? What is defeat? What is strength/weakness? Success/failure?” (161). Recurring with minor variations in relation to a series of different events, both personal and historical, these questions create a motive which then acts as a unifying idea for the novel. Through contemplations on his family history, the protagonist expresses his thoughts on the interrelation of past and present, each time

adding to them new meanings and nuances. A striking example is the story of James Grady, Hugh's father. Before Hugh is born, Grady injures his arm in a farm accident, which leaves his limb forever paralysed. Recalling this misfortune, Hugh begins speculating on the consequences which may have followed had his father passed away that day:

Hugh thinks of how one part of the line might have vanished that evening in Kaiwaka, leaked away in a swampy field in the fading light; and that what would have replaced it, in the form of some other husband for his mother, would also have displaced himself and these children and grandchildren – which in turn would have meant (since the man his mother would have married must in real life have married someone else) further displacement of other lines – on and on, how far? (169)

What the protagonist states, although allegorically and indirectly, echoes Stead's ideas in his nonfiction. The past could have been different but it is unalterable. Even if he did want to change certain parts of it, there is no way to do so. When the story of Cecilia, Hugh's great-grandmother, is revealed, it brings the protagonist nothing but anxiety and "the feel of failure" (162). Carl Christianson, Cecilia's abandoned child and Hugh's grandfather, is dead at this point, which means that this knowledge cannot bring any relief to him. Thus, knowing the hidden truth about the past is not always worth it. Pointedly, the reaction of Carl's Swedish family and antecedents to the story about their great aunt's illegitimate child only comes as an embarrassment or "unwelcome surprise" to a couple of elders in the family, while the younger generation responds to it calmly and with a measure of warmth.

The author's concern with the past and the future continues developing through the theme of deaths and births. Symbolically, the novel starts with the burial of Hugh's uncle, Frank Mangold, where the protagonist reaches a decision to start exploring his family history. It ends with the birth of his own grandchild. Apart from Mangold's, there are other graves that come to mind as Hugh thinks about while tracing his family tree back to John Flatt. This theme reaches its climax at Tarore's graveyard, where, having been moved by the atmosphere of the place, Hugh literally "sings" his whakapapa by recalling his family graves, existing, abandoned or lost, such as Flatt's:

Graves. The Grave. Gravestones. We began with, or at, one; or among some – it was Hakaru (remember?) . . . Graves. Tarore's at Waharoa . . . Annie McDermott's and the young Norwegian seaman's . . . Annie's son Vincent . . . Carl Christianson . . . James and Ethel Grady . . . And John Flatt's grave, lost somewhere, untraceable . . . (269–270)

If the graves represent the past, births should stand for the future and the continuation of life. It is crucial, then, that from the very beginning of Hugh's journey into his family's past, he is accompanied by a pregnant young woman, Jean-Anne, who, by the end of the novel, delivers a child. There are other births as well: John Flatt's eldest son is the first New Zealand ancestor of the family, illegitimate children Carl and Jean-Anne. Standing by Tarore's graveyard, Hugh and Jean-Anne hear voices of children "laughing and shouting" (273). The message is simple yet essential to Stead's polemical view on the New Zealand's history. Let the dead bury the dead. Life goes on.

Meanwhile, in Stead's nonfiction, similar ideas often take a rather unexpected turn. The review of *The Matriarch* starts with an anecdote about Stead's—not Hugh's—great-great-grandfather, John Flatt, being both defender and opponent of missionary land purchases. The story aims to illustrate the reviewer's view of history which, as he argues, is more contradictory and complex than Ihimaera's family saga: "[A]lthough the Pakeha (Europeans) have progressively taken the land, they have always argued about the rights and wrongs of it . . . And though Maoris insist that for them the land has a spiritual value which the Pakeha does not understand, they go on selling it" (189–190). Saying this, Stead continues by making statements about the Maori, which many readers find overly opinionated, to illustrate his initial point on historical complexity: "Their (Maori) sense of its spiritual value is always sharpest once the material value has been realized – and that has always been the case" or "If there was one principle Maori culture always recognized it was the right of the strong over the weak" (190). Absolute statements, such as these, contribute to the offence caused by Stead's writing. They create an impression of the author being carried away by the fervour of his argument. He is a debater in such moments rather than a storyteller. Unlike in his critical writing, in *The Singing Whakapapa*, a similar point on old wounds not being ours has been developed in a subtler, softer way. By shifting away "from *real* history, which was, so to speak, in the public domain, in favour of his family history" (13), Stead seems to finally find a calmer and less offensive way to express his controversial perspective.

While writing fiction, an author engages in a complex relationship with a text. The ultimate result of this collaboration may or may not be in agreement with the initial author's intent. A textbook example is the intention of Leo Tolstoy to defend the traditional family in *Anna Karenina* by depicting the adulterous Anna slowly descending into despair and suicide. Contrary to the author's expectations, Anna's character became more likeable than was initially intended. As Stephen Greenblatt has observed, "Something happens to objects, beliefs, and practices when they are represented, reimagined, and performed in literary texts, something often

unpredictable and disturbing. That ‘something’ is the sign both of the power of art and of the embeddedness of culture in the contingencies of history” (“Culture” 230–31).

Stead’s literary career, I surmise, has followed a similar trajectory. Provocative, even insulting in his nonfiction, Stead is surprisingly calm and impartial in fiction. The same person, with the same views, is responsible for both kinds of text—but how do these views respond to the challenge of more complex literary forms? Stead, as an actual writer, is not identical to the author as a figure implied by his text.¹¹ This entails that we have different figures of an author emerging from his different works—fictional and critical. Which of the two figures is closer to the original “real” Stead? We may conjecture that the novel is an adaptation of the views represented in the author’s nonfiction, but even so, both are representations of views rather than a fixed portrait of the actual writer. In both cases, we still remain in the realm of representations. In other words, when Stead, aware of his reactionary reputation, insists that he has been misunderstood, we may or may not accept it as true: “It will be said I am racist, or at least anti-Maori. I will have to live with that, although I know it to be untrue” (*Answering to the Language* 284).

The “special” central position of Stead’s chapter in this thesis is hardly coincidental. Firstly, as a public intellectual, he seems to come across as both “typical” and, simultaneously, the unconventional. As the only “white male academic” in this thesis, he is more likely to meet the traditional criteria of a public intellectual. Unlike his “unpublic” predecessors Sargeson and Frame, he has had a history of engaging with public life, political concerns, social matters, and public affairs. Yet, in comparison with other politically outspoken and active writers, such as Edmond, Baxter, Ihimaera, and Wedde, Stead is the only writer with the unlikable reputation of a “reactionary”, which this chapter has attempted to question. Secondly, this chapter on Stead opens the theme of biculturalism, one of the central topics in this thesis, which will be continued in the following two chapters. If Stead is an author who, at the time, chose to confront and challenge biculturalism, Baxter and Ihimaera, each in their own way, became engaged in the no less important job of implementing and promoting it.

¹¹ “Actual writer” is an extratextual figure, a historical person, while ‘author’ here is intratextual.

CHAPTER 5

James K. Baxter: Poetry and Prophecy

My first English teacher in New Zealand happened to be Maori. I remember asking her for recommendations of local literature written by New Zealand authors. She was a bibliophile and an avid reader—yet extremely particular about what she read and very difficult to please. It seemed to me that a writer would have to be truly extraordinary to satisfy her literary taste. Most Maori and Pakeha authors, however exceptional I considered them, were not able to reach her standards. When I enquired about her opinion on James K. Baxter, my expectations were tempered, as I remembered her limited interest in any religion. To my surprise, however, she responded enthusiastically, stating that Baxter was the most famous person that New Zealand had ever produced, that any literate person would know of him, and that the Maori held him especially dear because he had set up a community at Hiruharama in Wanganui.

James K. Baxter was buried at Hiruharama, or Jerusalem, on 25 October 1972. It took his family nearly twelve hours to drive the body from Auckland to the Maori village located forty miles up the Whanganui River. The coffin was placed at the local marae and the tangi was performed by the elders of the Ngati Hau tribe, of which he had been made a member a few months earlier. Baxter's death was a public event: the news appeared on the billboard of the capital's morning newspaper (Broughton 69). As estimated by *The Dominion Post*, about eight hundred people, Maori and Pakeha, attended the funeral (McKay 290). According to Baxter's own will, the one-word inscription placed on his gravestone, was Hemi, the Maori version of his name:

. . . [I]f you are consulted
One day, Colin, about my epitaph,
I suggest these words – ‘He was too much troubled
By his own absurdity’ – though I’d prefer – ‘Hemi’ –
And nothing else . . . (*Jerusalem Sonnets* 469)

Needless to say, for a European to be buried on Maori land and according to Maori traditions, one must not only be an exception but exceptional. According to Hone Tuwhare, “[o]nly a few foreigners alien to a culture, men like James K. Baxter with the soul of a poet, can enter into the existential dimension of Maori life” (qtd. in Newton, *The Double Rainbow* 14).

More than three decades after his death, Baxter is still well-remembered in New Zealand:

There are a huge number of poems (many of them elegies) about him; he turns up in short stories and novels, in memoirs and autobiographies, in plays, in paintings and photographs, in film, in songs. There's at least one street which bears his name. (Manhire 14)

To Bill Manhire, however, as well as a number of other scholars, Baxter's legacy owes more to his personality and public image than to his writing. Recalling Baxter's funeral, William Broughton admits that he cannot remember any English speaker who alludes to Baxter as a writer. He notes that writing was always seen as only one thing among many that Baxter was known and admired for. To Broughton, Baxter is an example of a cult-figure "who [has] attracted to [himself] support, admiration and disapproval for reasons that stem as much from the impact of personality as from the impact of the writing" (69). Others, such as Alex Calder, have found that with the passage of time, Baxter has come to seem "more and more minor as a poet – too facile, too moralizing, too self-regarding, too romanticizing" ("Baxter Downriver" 170)—and yet, both Broughton and Calder are clearly describing someone who they regard as an extraordinary individual, a person of significance.

In 1968, Baxter maintained that he had a revelation from God to go and set up a community in Jerusalem "where the people, both Maori and pakeha, would try to live without money or books, worship God and work on the land" (qtd. in Calder 166). A Maori village and a Catholic mission in one place, Hiruharama perfectly represents the crossroads of Baxter's beliefs, becoming an ideal site for his bicultural experiment. This chapter builds on the previous chapter by introducing Baxter as a New Zealand public intellectual of European descent who, unlike Stead, actively supported and encouraged biculturalism in New Zealand instead of merely responding to it. While representing different attitudes and views on the topic, both authors are no stranger to controversy and remain well-known, which, I believe, stems from the multifaceted nature of their work as well as their status as creative writers and critics at the same time. In order to demonstrate this point in relation to Baxter, I will first examine the public perception of the author and his work and then look closely at some of his texts published between 1969 and 1972, the years known as the Jerusalem period. During this time, he wrote the poems and prose which he included in *Jerusalem Sonnets* (a collection of poems that was published in 1969), *Jerusalem Daybook* (a combination of verse with prose that was published in 1971), and *Autumn Testament* (published posthumously in 1972). Aside from writing, Baxter appeared in numerous talks and interviews. The major themes that concerned Baxter in those years were poverty, homelessness, capitalism, Christianity, prejudice, and racial discrimination against the Maori people. He believed that he had found the solution to these challenges lay in adopting Maori

traditions and their way of life. A Maori concept of a tuakana/teina relationship was proposed by him as a model for the reconciliation between the two races in New Zealand, with Maori as “tuakana” (an older or more experienced brother), and Pakeha as “teina” (a younger or less expert brother):

I think there might be something to be learned from things Maori. Maoris know how to live together. They practise the bigger collective unity principle. It’s highly civilised. That’s the essence of the marae system, and it’s why individual Maoris become so easily lost when they move away from it into the cities and towns. (qtd. in Watts 197)

I am interested to see what happens to the same ideas when they are expressed in different mediums and through different literary techniques as well as how the figure of the embattled intellectual is constructed. While critical writing is generally more explicit, focused on a message and clarity of definitions, poetic language is usually implicit, figurative, and more emotionally stirring. How do these general distinctions apply to someone like Baxter, who is both a poet and a critic? What does the role of a prophet bring to this already complex and contradictory combination?

The Jerusalem project has attracted much commentary in the media and in literature, sustaining controversy around Baxter’s public image. Barry Watts has accused him of being a maniac, wanting to establish his own religion, an escapist hiding from reality and responsibility, and “a medical mystic to the spiritually maimed” (197). In his interview with Baxter, Michael King introduces him as “bearded, bare-footed and saintly in his dedication to people”, “an unconventional and enigmatic figure” (“Poet Defends Scum” 60). Karl du Fresne, in his turn, proclaims Baxter to be “an institution of anti-institutionalism in New Zealand” and “a living example of his own ideals brought to fruition”:

He [Baxter] attacks the hard, middle-class core whose security is ‘totally dependent on their bank account’. He attacks materialism and could even be regarded as a rebel against the law-and-order system . . . He regards his commune as an escape from normality – a normality characterised by dullness, a perpetual worried expression and by domestic disorders. (187–188)

The perception of Baxter has been changing over time. Contemplating Baxter’s special role in New Zealand literature and culture, Gregory O’Brien notes that in the eyes of the next generation of local poets, his image becomes either “distorted and dishevelled” or “transcendental, saintly”

("After Bathing at Baxter's" 135). According to Iain Sharp, if in the 1970s it sounded provocative to say Baxter was "a bit of a phoney" ("Interview with Les Murray" 155), in the 1980s, it seemed to have become the opinion of many. Public discussion on Baxter's persona culminated in the 2009 publication of the book *The Double Rainbow* by John Newton. Unlike the earlier biographies by W. H. Oliver (1983) and Frank McKay (1990), Newton's study shifts focus from the life and personality of Baxter to the nature and scope of his Jerusalem project, placing it in a wider context of cross-cultural encounter in New Zealand. Without diminishing Baxter's role as an extraordinary individual and charismatic leader whose vision made the commune happen, Newton expands the frame, bringing into focus the collaborative dimension of the experiment by investigating the roles of Baxter's predecessors, followers, and inheritors. He proposes viewing the Jerusalem experience as "a kind of performance poetry", approaching Baxter's late poems mainly as documentary evidence.

While Newton's perspective on Jerusalem is largely historical, John Dennison draws special attention to Baxter's cross-cultural writing of a later period. He proposes reading Baxter's poetry as "distinctive articulations of Pakeha identity, grounded in personal engagement with te ao Maori" (36). To Dennison, the origin, language, and attitude of Baxter's cross-cultural poems differs significantly from "bi-cultural" or "bi-lingual" writing due to their implication of "movement and the unfulfilled tensions of reaching out and never arriving" (37). As an example of this specific feature, he shows how the figure of Maori Jesus works in Baxter's poetry as a trans-cultural symbol with dual cultural currency, representing "an orthodox re-visioning of Christ for Aotearoa/New Zealand" (40). He notes that unlike the European image of Christ, the Maori Jesus has distinctive fleshy and earthy features, dislocating him from the puritanical society that Baxter had continually attacked. As a result of such dislocation, Dennison argues, Pakeha identity became threatened and de-centred. The hierarchical tuakana-teina dynamic in Maori-Pakeha relations have been regarded by Dennison as "the most complete and schematic model of cross-cultural relations present in Baxter's work" (41). Noticing that the same model also appears in the author's prose of the same period, Dennison highlights the difference between its representations in prose and poetry. While prose characteristically requires a more explicit and systematic approach, in poetry, the same model "remains only implicit, informing metaphors, language use and structure" (41).

Another distinction between poetry and critical writing in relation to Baxter's work was drawn by C.K. Stead. According to Stead, critical writing requires a greater degree of clarity of definition, which is harder and takes longer to achieve; while poetry, and "especially poetry of the kind Baxter wrote" demands from the poet "simply to be [themselves]" ("James K. Baxter"

315). The simplicity is, however, deceptive: while clarity is achieved through hard labour in a critical article, in poetry, irrespective of initiative, one either fails or succeeds. According to Stead, it is not accidental that Baxter's public was more interested in his personality rather than his poetry. The charisma of a poet, he argues, is an essential component of good poetry: "Weren't even the best of the early Baxter poems rather pale by comparison with the drunk in the gabardine raincoat and galoshes who wrote them?" (315) The success of a poem, Stead concludes, depends on how fully a poet is able to express their whole range of personality in verses. Referring to Stead's idea in his later essay on Baxter, Gregory O'Brien clarifies: "Another way of putting this: the poet gains access, through his art, to the subconscious, whereas the Prose Baxter is speaking his conscious mind, usually immoderately" ("A Green Baxter" 275).

In the same article Stead contemplates a question on the role and place of ideology in Baxter's poems: "Doesn't a set of doctrines and beliefs which you yourself find at least false and possibly repugnant lie behind these poems? In your enjoyment of the poems aren't you ignoring an essential part of their meaning?" (317). He then draws a line between "what lies behind the poems" and "what is *in* them", proposing that Baxter's *Jerusalem Sonnets* "are not poems of doctrine but poems of experience" and that they "present rather than interpret" (317). This critical distinction allows Stead to disregard Baxter's intentions, personal views, and philosophy in his verses, elevating Baxter-the-poet over Baxter-the-prophet. This approach, however, is likely to contradict Stead's earlier idea of the role of the poet's personality in his poetry, provoking the question of whether the personality of an author can somehow be separated from his philosophy and system of belief.

If Stead chooses to overlook the prophetic message in *Jerusalem Sonnets*, Danielle Brown believes that the figure of a prophet in Baxter's later poems is evident, yet contradictory. According to Brown, although the public image of a prophet was likely to be initially imposed upon Baxter, he nevertheless accepted and actively complied with it in his writing. Brown argues that the authoritative privileged position of Baxter as a 'prophet' created a paradox in his poetry by supporting the vertical power structure in Maori and Pakeha relationships despite the author's simultaneous attempts to replace it with a more equal 'horizontal' relationship of difference between the two communities. While Brown's view on the role of a prophet as a source of contradictions in Baxter's poetry makes sense, it is worth noticing that the tuakana-teina model, employed by Baxter, epitomises a hierarchical relationship between the Maori, the elder brother, and Pakeha, the younger brother, and not a horizontal association, as Brown has claimed.

Over time, Baxter's own views on the nature of poetry and the relationship between poet and prophet has changed noticeably. In 1951, as a young man, he announced that it is "reasonable and necessary that poetry should contain moral truth, and that every poet should be a prophet according to his lights" (*Recent Trends in New Zealand Poetry* 18). Twenty years later, in an interview with John Weir, his perspective on the same topic seems less simple and straightforward. He corrects and softens but does not completely refute his previous opinions: "I think there was a touch of subconscious arrogance in my attitude at that time – again quite natural – a certain crudity" (Baxter to Weir 356). He then redefines his earlier position by specifying that "[o]ne can't inject a moral message into a poem" and that "a poem is a freer, more personal thing perhaps. It's not a message to the world at large. Not quite" (356). Later in the conversation, Baxter regards any propaganda in art as "probably illicit" as it makes art instrumental and not "just [a form of] honest communication" (357). He gives a first priority to truthfulness in poetry, seeing the process of writing as "a very subconscious process" and a poem as a mirror of reality and "one's own experience revealed". In this sense, he claims, "[a] Christian poet is in the same position as an agnostic one when he is writing" (357).

At first glance, Baxter's later reflections on the nature of poetry seem to be aligned with Stead's reading of *Jerusalem Sonnets* as "not poems of doctrine but poems of experience" (317), "presenting" rather than "interpreting". Whatever the author's intention may have been, Stead asserts his right not to be "concerned with what lies behind the poems" (317). Is this what Baxter implied when arguing against the injection of a moral message into a poem? Despite a certain affinity, the two perspectives on the nature of poetry are not quite the same. While Stead expressly indicates and highly praises the formal qualities of *Jerusalem Sonnets*, Baxter continues insisting on the priority of content over form and aesthetics. Discussing *Jerusalem Sonnets* in an interview with Weir, Baxter emphasises that he is not "concerned with their quality, only with saying something" (360). Later in the interview, he differentiates the prophet from the poet by saying that "the prophet will not be troubled whether his poem is good or not; but the poet will be troubled whether his poem is good or not" (361).

The emphasis on content does not, by itself, make a poet moral or religious. According to Baxter, "the moral element in the poem is in its truthfulness" (357). On the one hand, the statement can be interpreted in support of writing from one's own experience with no particular message, as Stead would read it. On the other hand, what Baxter implies may simply be that a Christian message comes naturally from a Christian mind when a Christian poet is being true to himself. In the same interview, Baxter states that "the practice of one's religion has a very subtle

effect on the way one thinks” (358) and that “truth, perhaps is prophetic in the sense that it will reveal relationships between man and man and possibly between man and God” (360).

Unlike the poet, both the critic and the prophet want to persuade their audience. Their techniques of persuasion are, however, different. It is customarily assumed that the critic would rather persuade the audience with reason and facts, while the prophet is more likely to appeal to their emotions, which, in this sense, aligns Baxter towards the role of a poet. A prophet figure, as a result, suggests a peculiar amalgamation of the roles of both a critic and a poet. Like critics, a prophet’s job is to reveal the flaws of society as well as address its faults and injustices. Baxter, according to Alan Riach, was a “theatrical speaker of discomfiting truths” (Riach “Physician of Society” 213). Neither the critic nor the poet, however, are obliged or expected to have the solutions to the problems society puts forward—while the prophet is. More than others, Baxter strives to convince, motivate, and move readers towards a certain point of view. He needs to make sure his public has learned the lesson and this is where the role of the poet becomes available. Poetic devices and techniques are supposed to help the prophet ensure the best and most efficient delivery of his message. The prophet’s engagement with the poetry, however, creates controversy. According to Baxter, a prophet is not supposed to look after form—the poet is. Tilting towards metaphors and allegories, poetry resists the didacticism of the prophecy. How do these three—the critic, prophet, and poet—coexist in Baxter’s poetry and prose? What are the dynamics of their relationship? Does one dominate the others; if so, how consistently?

In his article, Riach takes notice of a profound move in Baxter’s poetry: “from the immediacy of rage of the ballads . . . to the sustained, tolerant, ironic, exhausted, quizzical, compassionate tones” (“Physician of Society” 214) of the later sonnets. Riach regards the shift as “one of the most remarkable developments in modern poetry” (214), contrasting Baxter’s poems with the more consistent and austere poetry of Allen Curnow. To Riach, Baxter is “an imposing chameleon, form-shifting, a singular ego, assertive in one persona, reflective in another, raging and wittily scabrous one moment, then later, sadly resigned, but with endlessly resilient compassion” (214). To demonstrate the multifaceted chameleon nature of Baxter’s poetry, Riach compares his earlier and later poems. Additionally, I argue that Baxter’s voices of poet, critic and prophet, despite their sometimes differing tonalities, can coexist in the same text/s of the same time period, written in the same or across different genres. In his interview with Weir, Baxter likens writing poetry to a dialogue with an imaginary companion “to fill that solitude with another voice – two people, yourself and yourself as a poet” (356). I suggest that the same metaphor can work for prose and, whether in prose or poetry, there may be more than two voices joining a conversation. Baxter’s many personae of poet, critic, and prophet shift and intertwine

across his different genres of composition. In varying degrees, they can be found in his both poetry and prose, and often coexist in the same text. I will now look closely at Baxter's critical essay and poetry on Maori and Pakeha relations, which were written during his Jerusalem period, focusing on the similarities and differences in form, narrative technique, and character type to establish whether they affect the author's message and how that is achieved.

In January 1969, the *New Zealand Listener* published Baxter's critical article on the tensions between Maori and Pakeha in its opinion column "In my View". The essay structure is simple and well-defined, with a clear straightforward introduction, two body paragraphs, and a conclusion. The opening paragraph intimates a vigorous and forceful message. The first two sentences reveal the subject as the conflict between Maori and Pakeha traditions, and its negative consequences, in particular, for the Pakeha. The extent of the problem is highlighted through the use of some clichéd words, such as "tragic", which, to produce even greater effect, occur twice in the subsequent sentence: "The tragic meaning and consequences of this cleavage have been poorly understood. Tragic not only for the Maoris . . . tragic also for the pakehas . . ." (13). The author's perspective is directly presented and seems opinionated from the outset. European New Zealanders are both blamed and pitied for not being able to recognise and learn from a more advanced Maori tradition.

The absence of "I" and the use of passive sentences in the opening paragraph establish a certain distance between the narrator and his audience, which is characteristic of academic writing. Starting from the second paragraph, however, the distance tends to diminish as the language and narrative become more colloquial and personal. The paragraph conveys the story of John Waititi, the Maori educator, who is introduced as an acquaintance of the narrator: "John Waititi ... told me once a small anecdote ... When he was a little boy ..." (13). The mention of a real-life friend creates a more intimate space between the speaker and the audience. The narrator is not a mere commentator or an impersonal observer but someone who is personally involved in the situation. The emotional involvement is demonstrated through the use of emotive vocabulary, such as "indefatigable labourer", "booted him savagely", or "hugely swollen organisation" as well as Maori words and phrases that are naturally integrated into English: "Ko te Maori te tuakana. Ko te pakeha te teina ..." (13), "great tukutuku panels" (14). The extensive use of stylistic devices including metaphors, parallel constructions, and rhetorical questions makes the prose rich and convincing:

If, as seems possible, in fifty years' time no Maori is spoken in New Zealand except by university language students, no Maori elder is respected by his descendants . . . no

graveyard is remembered, no marae is used as a meeting place – what will be the losses and the gain? (13)

Geoffrey Miles' acute observation on how Baxter's prose is able to effectively combine "crispness of argument with an imaginative use of metaphor and symbolism" (19) is particularly true for this essay, where the voices of a critic, poet, and prophet are all clearly distinguishable. While the voice of a critic runs through phrases such as "psychological annihilation of the minority culture" or "the firm of New Zealand Ltd", Baxter's mode remains intensely poetic and metaphorical. His criticism is harsh and thorough; it is directed not just towards the Government and the corporate world but against the Church as well: "I said that, because it is true, in the Anglican Cathedral in Christchurch, when somebody had unwisely asked me to speak there" (13). But is it the critic or the prophet talking, and how do we know? While both the critic and the prophet are prone to reveal the flaws of society, their voices are not identical. Unlike critical writing, poetry tends to be personal and emphasises the individuality of the poet. Both the poet and the prophet are more likely to appeal to emotion, feeling, and imagination than mere logic: the second paragraph in the body of the work asks the audience to imagine the future where "no Maori is spoken in New Zealand". Unlike a poet or a critic, a prophet is never satisfied with only identifying and presenting the issue. He knows the answers and offers a solution. In his analysis of Baxter's essay "The Rich and the Poor", Peter Whiteford notes that Baxter's interest is never purely economic but rather religious: "[h]is discussion of social issues reverts to a religious solution (in traditional religious language, the solution consists in the exercise of 'corporal works of mercy') or is made manifest through deliberate religious symbols and images." (269). In the essay, the solution that Baxter offers for the Pakeha is to fully embrace their neighbouring Maori culture, supposedly socially and economically. Yet, based on the language and the tone of the final paragraph, we can say that it is the religious component of this adoption that interests him the most.

In critical writing, a concluding paragraph sometimes restates the argument, summarising the key points of the introductory statement. While the same pattern is present in Baxter's essay, it has a number of peculiarities conjured by the prophet's presence. The conclusion opens with a phrase in Maori that introduces the concept of the tuakana-teina relationship. In the following sentence, the narrator claims the statement to be an absolute truth: "I said that, because it is true . . . The Maori is indeed the elder brother . . ." (13) The narration then moves into parabolic mode. If we hear the voice of the critic in the introduction, the conclusion belongs entirely to the prophet:

But the teina has refused to learn from the tuakana. He has sat quietly among his machines and studied his account books . . . If I write angrily, it is because of the grief; because the kumara is invaded and tramped by wild pigs . . .(13–14)

The last sentence of the essay exhibits an interesting combination of subjectivity and forcefulness: “I think we may have destroyed what should have been our future” (14). Starting modestly with soft assertions like “I think” and “we may”, the author then uses the more cogent auxiliary verb “should”—not “could”—which changes the tone of the whole statement, making it assertive and categorical. Baxter-the-prophet possesses the entire truth; he knows what is ‘right’ for the others to do.

The major themes and ideas that Baxter developed in his critical writing are comparable to those he addressed in his poetry. Like the article, in his Maori poems of the Jerusalem period, there is a clear dividing line between Maori and Pakeha cultures. The first sentence of the article introduces the Maori as a “community of neighbours” and the Pakeha as a “society of strangers”. The same juxtaposition takes place in the poems “For Hone” (1969) and “Zion” (1969)—however, in a less explicit and straightforward way.¹² The antagonism between the two worlds is presented indirectly yet developed consistently in each poem through their imagery.

In “For Hone”, Pakeha society is constructed through the images of heavy passive objects such as “stone”, “sling”, “walls”, and “doors”. The adjectives that accompany them only intensify their lifelessness and immobility: “hard”, “heavy”, “padlocked”, and “rusty fast”:

Tuakana, I am a hard stone
Thrown from a heavy sling
Breaking through walls and padlocked doors
That time has rusted fast (“For Hone” 439)

In both poems, the night town settings deepen the isolation and loneliness of the Pakeha protagonist:

And in the cold night of the town
The gravestones are all shaped like women (439)

The moon has no tears – that high bright shield

¹² Both poems were published posthumously in 1979.

In the winter sky, riding above
The iron streets of Grafton – she lights me up the hill
To the Maori tree at the centre of the Domain (“Zion” 448–449)

The “cold night”, “winter sky”, and “iron streets” of the Pakeha world are contrasted with the images of the Maori world, which are characteristically alive and warm. In “Zion”, they are part of nature: the hill and the Maori tree. In “For Hone”, the coat, borrowed from his tuakana Hone, works as a symbol of the Maori world. Signifying Maori spiritual values and traditions in contrast to Pakeha’s materialism and individualism, the coat will keep warm the Pakeha’s heart and soul. Being warm is being human. The metaphor of a coat is common in Baxter’s poetry from his late period of work:

In my old coat I wander out to walk on the river bank and praise
The world . . . (“In Praise of the Taniwha” 513)

In the beginning of “For Hone”, the Pakeha protagonist is compared to a “hard stone thrown from a heavy sling”. After he wears the coat of his Maori friend, he becomes “a stone man walking”:

Tuakana, now I wear your coat
I am a stone man walking . . .
The coat will keep me warm when I lie down . . . (“For Hone” 439)

Wearing the coat, the protagonist is no longer a passive object, he is a man made of stone who is able to act for himself: walk or lie down in contrast to being passively “thrown”. The metaphor of a stone is common in Baxter’s poetry and can have both negative and positive connotations in different contexts. In “Poem for John Weir” the “stone men” are those “who have married their jobs” (493). They have a dead soul or no soul. In “He Waiata mo taku Tangi” the Pakeha soul is described through images of a blind old opossum and a dead cicada (506–507). In contrast, the protagonist leads a life “simple as a stone” (540) and “sharp stones” make his bare feet sore (“Autumn Testament” 541). It is possible that these two connotations are equally implied in “For Hone”. A stone man is both a dead soulless Pakeha and a simple man on his way to self-revelation.

According to Baxter, the Pakeha’s world is a world of material possessions. Contrasted with a “pocket full of money”, “a cigarette burn on the left side” of the Maori coat hints at the

material inequality between the Maori and the Pakeha as a result of European colonisation. Yet, for Baxter, poverty has a positive moral connotation rooted in the Catholic religious tradition. It is “*better* than a pocket full of money”. Living a simple life by using and owning as little as possible is the poet’s lifestyle choice and one of the major principles behind the Jerusalem project:

. . . God makes me poor
And drives me out to walk
On the road to Wanganui . . . (“He Waiata mo taku Tangi” 506)

Importantly, the hole in the pocket is a cigarette burn and not, for example, a hole made from overuse. The image of a cigarette burn recalls the process of smoking which, in Baxter’s poetry, is warming, comforting, and a social thing to do:

When the sweat dries out
We lie back and smoke, -
‘He pai te tikareti’ –
‘The cigarette is good’ . . . (“He Waiata mo taku Tangi” 509)

Both poems, “For Hone” and “Zion”, are examples of confessional poetry, drawing largely on the poet’s personal experience and written in the form of an address. In his study of Baxter’s letter poems, Riach links the genre of epistolary poetry to the practice of song and story in oral culture. He points out Baxter’s particular sensitivity to the relationship between oral and literary modes of practice. The oral tradition implies the immediate presence of a storyteller and an audience, who share between them the experience of a poem. In literary practice, in contrast, the writer is absent when the process of reading takes place, leaving the reader to perceive the poem in solitude. According to Riach, in Baxter’s poetry, the protagonist effectively combines the features of both the private and the public man (“James K. Baxter and Robert Burns” 55).

If the poet is more naturally inclined towards privacy and solitude, the prophet is a type of public man or public intellectual. Both the “private” poetic and the “public” prophetic voices of the speaker can be found in “For Hone” and “Zion”. In “For Hone”, the protagonist establishes an immediate confessional relationship with his addressee, tuakana, to which the reader is a witness. While as a form of address, tuakana is generic and can be used for any Maori elder, the title of the poem indicates a particular person— Hone—whom the poem addresses. Hone is not entirely silent. In the middle of the poem, he asks the protagonist in Maori: “Ko wai

koe?”, which means “Who are you?”, while the rest of the poem is constructed as the protagonist’s response to the question: “I am a hard stone . . . I am a stone man . . .” In contrast with the imagined silence of readers responding to rhetorical questions, this form of a dialogue provokes the engagement and imagined participation of the audience, which the public man seeks. A prophet like Baxter cannot be satisfied with simply expressing his thoughts and feelings. To Baxter, the act of communication and its outcome are important; he needs to ensure that he is heard and that the audience has learned a lesson. A similar motive may be identified in Baxter’s earlier critical writing.

A form of prayer is another type of addressee poetry that is frequently used by Baxter:

Lord Christ, have a mercy on
Buddhist, agnostic, Mormon . . . (“He Waiata mo taku Tangi” 512)

E taku Ariki, how long, how long
Till Your moon lights the heart of a Maori Zion . . . (“Zion” 449)

Te Ariki is the Maori appropriation of the Christian God, which sprang out of the Ringatu religious movement in the second half of the nineteenth century. In “Zion”, Te Ariki is born in a “broken whare” and his mother wears a “taniko band”. The milieu of the Zion poems symbolises the strivings of humankind toward a higher place, to be closer to God, the source of life. A “Maori Zion” is a spiritual homeland for the Maori and Pakeha alike. If the poem “To Hone” addresses a singular person, in “Zion”, the addressee is the whole Maori community:

‘Brothers, I am . . .
A stranger, my coming here
Is a coming in love . . .’ (449)

Since the protagonist speaks “to the Maori tree . . . where old bones are buried”, “brothers” also refers to ancestors, the tipuna. In the context of the poem, his talk does not seem to imply the participation of the addressee, it is metaphorical more than real. The protagonist’s questions to Te Ariki are rhetorical and the whole talk is entirely internal, indicating that the protagonist is nearer to a poet than a prophet. Yet, the prayer is not a monologue—it does not involve talking to oneself. It is a dialogue with God. In Baxter’s poems, communication always assumes a dialogue between an “I” and a “you”, and, therefore, is never a solitary activity. “You” may be referring to a singular or plural audience, right in front of the speaker with ears to hear, many years away in

time, or beyond the material world entirely—but this “you” exists, and thus this is a two-party conversation.

The form of address, as a technique, is used abundantly in Baxter’s larger and more complex forms of poetry, such as *Jerusalem Sonnets*. The poem recorded Baxter’s early experience in Jerusalem and is written in the form of letters to a friend, Colin. The original title is “Sonnets to Colin Durning”:

To give away cigarettes,
That’s the hard one, Colin! (462)

. . . you know, Colin,
What I mean when I say, ‘Te Kare’ . . . (464)

Highly autobiographical, the poem blurs the line between fictional and real addresser and addressee. Colin Durning, Baxter’s close friend and confidant in real life, was the first to read and keep a copy of the poem after it was finished, and eventually persuaded Baxter to publish it. The form of correspondence implies a conversation between two people and although Colin’s responses are not available to the reader, *Jerusalem Sonnets* does not appear to be a monologue. Throughout the poem, we are constantly reminded of Colin, the addressee. This creates a gap between the verses that have the potential to be filled. The fact that the poem only contains 39 of the 50 planned sonnets, as the narrator announces in the last verse, has a similar effect. Unlike the critical article that we have looked at, the narrator doesn’t possess the entire truth. The poem is not his final word; there is more to be added to it by both the protagonist and other people.

In the letter to Durning which accompanied the sonnets, Baxter underlines the subjectivity of his position with no claims of being objective: “. . . you will see how nevertheless they are all “I” poems! I think we don’t have to be ashamed of “I” – the thing is what the man knows except his own experience” (McKay 258). The emphasis on personal experience creates an image of the protagonist as a private man, a poet, rather than a public intellectual, critic, or prophet. Yet, despite its intimate tone, the poem is a letter—not a diary. Even in his deepest thoughts, the protagonist is never entirely alone; he is a public person and a people person, keen to share his experience with others, learn from them, and engage in conversation. He is focused on an outer world as much as an inner world. The outer focus of the poem aligns with the protagonist’s role as a prophet and supports the concept of communality, which is proposed by Baxter as an alternative to individualism.

Apart from the main addressee, Colin, there are a number of other characters with whom the protagonist engages in conversation. One of them is Mother Aubert, a Catholic sister, who started a home for orphans and the underprivileged in Jerusalem in 1885. The sonnet is written in the form of a dialogue between the protagonist and Mother Aubert, presenting two opinions on Maori issues in New Zealand. While the protagonist's view on the current situation is pessimistic, Mother Aubert holds a more positive and reassuring perspective:

'There is no work for the Maori in the towns' –
Nonsense! There is always work, if one can
'Be tidy, chase, well spoken' . . . (460)

Although there are two separate voices in the dialogue, the conversation starts and finishes with the voice of the protagonist, which makes his position clearly dominant. In the last line of the sonnet, the poet asks Mother Aubert to pray for Maori outcasts and addicts. While the poet's views remain gloomy, the conversation is not in vain, giving him a little faith he needs to carry on:

. . . 'The pa is all but empty,
Old woman, where you fought your fight
And planted cherry trees – Pray for the converts' great-grandchildren
Who need drugs to sleep at night'. (460)

The discussion with Mother Aubert, of course, only goes on in the protagonist's head. The addressee is imaginary and the dialogue is internal. Yet, there is nothing in the sonnet that can possibly indicate this. The dialogue is entirely taken out of context, and it is left to the reader to imagine where and under which circumstances it takes place. It is easy to do so, however, considering that the sonnet is a part of the bigger poem and does not stand alone. As if it is a play script, we can see nothing but the two people talking, which heightens the dramatic nature of the scene and, as a result, piques the reader's engagement.

Later in the poem, a similar kind of dialogue with a similar influence on the protagonist takes place between the protagonist and Father Te Awhitu, a Maori Catholic priest, who lived in Jerusalem during the same period as Baxter. Like Mother Aubert, Te Awhitu's words address the protagonist's uncertainties, providing him with some faith and purpose. Unlike in the sonnet featuring Mother Aubert, the conversation with Te Awhitu is framed by a particular setting. It

takes place in the protagonist's house. We know that the priest comes to see the poet and then leaves without his coffee:

Father Te Awhitu pays me a visit
Carrying a golf club; his words are clear enough
In spite of the stroke . . .
. . . the plate on the stove is slow
To heat up and Father leaves without his coffee . . . (470)

As Te Awhitu and Baxter knew each other, the conversation depicted in the sonnet may well have taken place in real life and its realism is highlighted in the text through the inclusion of contextual details. To make the dialogue more real and not internal and imaginary, information on the background is removed in the Mother Aubert verses. In both examples, the focus is on the conversation, its dynamic, and the effect it has on the protagonist.

The protagonist's relationships with Mother Aubert and Father Te Awhitu resemble the relationship between tuakana and teina, when an older and more knowledgeable sibling guides a younger and less experienced one. While Father Te Awhitu, a Maori male, is a tuakana in a more traditional sense; Mother Aubert, despite not being Maori, seems to fit into this role as well since the protagonist's conversations with her and Te Awhitu are paralleled and influence him in a very similar way. Although not Maori by blood, Mother Aubert had lived side by side with Maori people, sharing their troubles and aspirations. It is highlighted that she had never wanted to "civilise" the Maori people:

'Mother Mary Joseph Aubert, did you come here
To civilize the Maoris?' – 'No, my son,
'I came to make them Christian' ... (460)

Besides being Maori or representing Maori values and their way of life, as the example of Mother Aubert suggests, being a Christian is another important criterion for tuakana, which is met by both characters. Tuakana, as seen by Baxter, are sent by God and, therefore, represent God:

. . . He'll send me, in his good time, a tuakana
To work alongside me and instruct me in these matters (465)

Notably, the guiding style of both Mother Aubert and Father Te Awhitu is gentle and loving. They teach by example and not precept, through dialogue and communication. This is not a form of passive learning—the protagonist is engaged, keeps disagreeing, and asking questions. Yet, he remains content with his more inferior position as a teina. At the end of each sonnet, he learns his lesson and feels appreciative: “The Maori angel has put me in my place” (470).

For the protagonist, conversations with tuakana are one way to learn and connect with God. Another way presents itself in the form his exclusive conversations with God. Unlike his singular dialogues with each tuakana, communication with God starts from the beginning of the poem and develops consistently over its span. At the end of the first sonnet, the protagonist addresses God only to receive his silent laugh:

. . . ‘Lord,’ I ask Him,
‘Do you or don’t You expect me to put up with lice?’
His silent laugh still shakes the hills at dawn (455)

Later in the poem, God is softer on the character, though he does not talk or provide any instructions. They meet at night in the church during the prayer, after which the divine spirit follows the protagonist back into his house. In contrast to the first depiction of God as a sarcastic and cynical entity, he is now portrayed as a maternal, nurturing figure:

. . . He came back with me
To my own house, and let this madman eat,
And shared my stupid prayer, and carried me up
As the mother eagle lifts her fluttering young with her wings (459)

As the protagonist grows closer to God, God addresses the protagonist and reciprocates in conversation:

I had lain down for sleep, man, when He called me
To go across the wet paddock . . .
. . . and what has He to tell me?
‘More stupid than a stone, what do you know
‘Of love? Can you carry the weight of my Passion,
You old crab farmer?’ I go back home in peace (461)

The tone with which God supposedly communicates with the protagonist is a tone of superiority, implying the unequal nature of their association, stemming from the Christian tradition. The supremacy of God is emphasised by recurrent descriptions of the protagonist as inferior and insignificant. Every time the character encounters God, he refers to himself pejoratively as “a madman, a nobody, a raconteur” (455), “poor idiot” (465), and “more stupid than a stone” (461). We see a different image of him, however, in the company of other people and under different circumstances. For instance, he recalls how, on the streets of Grafton, he “was a king for a little while” (458) and the kids mocked him, calling him Jesus and Moses (466). These images, however, are examples of the public image of Baxter rather than the way he sees and portrays himself in the poem. In fact, the protagonist argues against and challenges the image of himself as a prophet:

One writes telling me I am her guiding light
 And my poems her bible – on this cold morning
 After mass I smoke one cigarette
 And hear a magpie chatter in the paddock . . . (460)

The images of Baxter as a “guiding light” and “leading poet”, however pleasing, are seen by the speaker as futile, unproductive, and arrogant—Satan’s temptations:

. . . Hatana, you have gripped me
 Again by the balls; you sift and riddle my mind ... (460)

Meanwhile, the role the protagonist sees himself obtaining is not that of a prophet in the Christian sense. Instead of preaching, he is directed to “learn Maori”, their ways of life, and their values through communication and sharing in the Maori church:

... [A]t the church I murmured, ‘Tena koe’,
 To the oldest woman and she replied, ‘Tena koe’ –
 Yet the red book is shut from which I should learn Maori
 And these daft English words meander on . . . (460)

Like the protagonist is happy to assume the role of teina with characters who assume the role of tuakana, he adopts the role of tuakana while teaching and guiding others. The example of Mother Aubert, a non-Maori tuakana, implies that Baxter, a European, is able to potentially fill that role. While the protagonist’s communication with God can suggest his “chosen” status as a

prophet in a Christian sense, the way he chooses to deliver his message reflects the Maori tuakana–teina model of relationships, implying teaching and learning through communication and sharing, rather than more traditional one-sided instructions imparted from a higher authority. This model of relationship is also reflected in the structure of the poem with its numerous communication techniques, such as the format of a letter, multiple addressees, and extensive use of dialogues.

As a public intellectual, Baxter always remained anti-mainstream, not aligned with his culture. To communicate his message, he tended to use and combine various narrative techniques, constantly shifting in tone and register, speaking as a critic, poet, or prophet. His extensive use of metaphor in both poetry and prose draws readers into sensory experiences, evoking emotional responses. Whether in his poetry or prose, Baxter’s habitual mode of thought is poetic and metaphorical; so, we may say that he is always, first and foremost, a poet. The fact that our emotional connection to a poem tends to be stronger than with critical writing tends to place poetry as a more suitable medium for religious prophecy. Yet, we can see that the image of the prophet is, in fact, stronger and more definite in Baxter’s nonfiction than in his verse. In critical writing, Baxter’s prophet is an effective communicator, a public man actively engaging with the audience, teaching and guiding others, as he believes he possesses the truth. Although certain features of a prophet are distinguishable in both his prose and poetry, in poetry, the image appears to be more ambiguous and complex. In *Jerusalem Sonnets*, in particular, Baxter readjusts the biblical figure of a prophet, likening it to the role and characteristics of tuakana. A traditionally European prophet becomes a Maori prophet. While Baxter prioritised content over form in his interviews, this tendency is likely to be more applicable to his essays than to his verses. In poetry, his message comes across as less explicit, presented through a delicate interplay of imagery and narrative technique, such as the form of address. The use of prayer in Baxter’s poems creates a special atmosphere of intimacy and closeness. Whether praying or writing a letter to a friend, Baxter is always developing a dialogue and he is never entirely alone.

According to Stephen Greenblatt’s understanding of culture, Stead and Baxter’s attitudes towards biculturalism represent two essential—yet opposite—cultural drives, namely constraint and mobility. By contesting and questioning the idea of biculturalism, Stead tried to warn his implied audience against its dangers. By connecting and engaging with the previously marginalised Maori culture, Baxter, in his turn, was involved in reshaping and expanding New Zealand’s cultural boundaries, which is similar to what Lauris Edmond did with women’s writing. In both cases, a comparison of the authors’ writing in two different genres highlighted

the essential differences between fiction (whether poetry or prose) and nonfiction (including critical writing), reinforcing the uniqueness of imaginative literature “in its potential for crafting self-enclosed universe” (Cohn i). In the next chapter, I will continue engaging with the theme of biculturalism in different genres by bringing into the discussion an insider perspective of a Maori author.

CHAPTER 6

Witi Ihimaera: Implementing Biculturalism

Mid-twentieth century New Zealand, still priding itself on having the best race relations in the world, had encouraged a nostalgic, polite, and passive Maori literature. Roderick Finlayson's stories about the Maori people, which featured themes of family, rural community, traditional past, and nature, had influenced early works by Maori writers, such as Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace. How was an individual to break out from this comforting Pakeha perspective on Maori? In *The Matriarch*, Patrick Evans has argued that Ihimaera shifted to the other thematic extreme: exclusiveness, disturbing scenes, violence, and anger. As a possible alternative to the nostalgic vein in Maori writing on one hand and an angry political mode on the other, Evans seems to have preferred the postcolonial standpoints of Patricia Grace, Keri Hulme, or James K. Baxter, all of whom, unlike Ihimaera, turned to a more experimental postmodern and "less politically correct mode that might admit difference, ambiguity, experimentation and verbal play" ("Pakeha-Style Biculturalism" 27).

By accentuating *The Matriarch's* violent scenes and angry rhetoric, it seems to me that Evans reduces the complexity of the novel to a single extreme preoccupation, overlooking its many other facets. For example, a number of other critics have singled out the various postmodern features of Ihimaera's writing. These include the ironic and distanced relationship between the author and protagonist in *The Matriarch*, as Judith Dell Panny observes, or Ihimaera's experimental use of different forms of myth-making in his later works, as detected by Hartwick Isernhagen. The many paradoxes and contradictions of *The Matriarch* led Peter Beatson to call the book New Zealand's "first real 'problem novel' as it contains no clear indication of how it should be read and interpreted. . . . The book contains moral paradoxes rare in both Maori and Pakeha literature" (33).

This chapter broadens the discussion of New Zealand intellectual life and the theme of biculturalism by looking at the figure of a Maori public intellectual in texts by Witi Ihimaera. Apart from the novel *The Matriarch*, which will be the primary focus of this chapter, I will also look at a few of Ihimaera's nonfictional texts, such as his editor's introductions to the anthologies of Maori writing. I propose to consider *The Matriarch* as the author's attempt to advance his imaginative writing within the novel by integrating elements and techniques of nonfiction into fiction. In the first half of the chapter, I will discuss various critical responses to the novel, each highlighting its ambiguities and controversies. I propose viewing these textual

contradictions as a result of Ihimaera's experiment in combining the two modes together. In my analysis of the novel, I will look at the relationship between the author and protagonist, the narrative structure of the novel, and the different audiences it attempts to engage with.

Published in 1986, *The Matriarch* came out after a decade of silence from the writer and differed radically from his previous works *Pounamu Pounamu* (1972), *Tangi* (1973), *Whanau* (1974), and *The New Net Goes Fishing* (1977), which he regarded as "apprentice pieces, inadequate, a consequence of a spontaneous art and intuitive process" (Ihimaera to Crane, 9).¹³ With *The Matriarch*, Ihimaera committed himself to "a more conscious art and a political process as an indigenous writer" (9). He declared that he "truly became a writer with *The Matriarch*" (9), which is often seen as his most radical, disturbing, and confronting work for Pakeha readers.

Ihimaera's political thoughts on New Zealand's racial history were shared, shaped and influenced by other Maori and Pakeha scholars actively writing and publishing around the same time. In 1984, Donna Awatere published *Maori Sovereignty*, a key text in the Maori protest movement, which is largely based on the author's personal experiences and involvement in New Zealand politics. It is concerned with Maori sovereignty defined as "the Maori ability to determine our own destiny and to do so from the basis of our land and fisheries" (10). Awatere critiqued the official policies of assimilation and integration in New Zealand, considering them damaging for the Maori people as a nation and stressed the importance of Maori culture restoration.

James Belich's *The New Zealand Wars* was released two years later. The book began as a doctoral thesis and later provided the basis for a television documentary series, challenging the traditional grand narrative of European colonisation, reshaping previous understandings of the Maori-Pakeha conflict and European expansion in general. It closely reexamines and reevaluates the major events of the New Zealand wars. Belich argues that not only had New Zealanders intentionally forgotten the wars but Maori military and political achievements had been belittled. He comes to the conclusion that "it is time for New Zealanders to face the past injustices and seek to solve, rather than conceal, the problem it has bequeathed to them" (310).

Claudia Orange's study of the Treaty of Waitangi played an important role in reshaping public attitude towards what is now recognised as New Zealand's founding document. The book was first published in 1987 and was followed by a number of shorter and non-academic versions.

¹³ In 2009, a second revised edition of the novel was published. As most of the critics engaged with the 1986 publication, I will continue to refer to the first edition.

The author takes a predominantly Maori perspective on the Treaty and the events that followed its signing in 1840. Like Belich, Orange closely studied records and documents in earlier histories. In particular, she examined the reasons behind the signing of the Treaty and the different meaning the document held for Maori and Pakeha people. She specifically highlights the differences in the translation and the way the Treaty has been presented and explained to Maori chiefs. According to Orange, while the Maori have understood the Treaty as a sacred pact, Europeans, as soon as their numbers exceeded the native population, chose to disregard the document as “an unavoidable nuisance . . . which would have to be accepted – for a time at least” (44). In 1877, Chief Justice James Prendergast notoriously referred to the document as a legal “nullity” (qtd. in Orange 59). Taking a Maori point of view, Orange examines a number of occasions when the Treaty was neglected in order to meet the needs of Pakeha, particularly in quarrels over land and fisheries. She highlights the continuous attempts of the Maori to stick to the Treaty as well as negotiate and dispute their rights and authority in the country. By the end of the twentieth century, general interest in the Treaty increased, pressurising the government to take action and address long-standing issues. In 1973, 6 February was made a public holiday to celebrate the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. In 1975, the Waitangi Tribunal was established to hear Maori claims and redress colonial injustices. The Treaty took on legal force by being included in a number of acts, such as the State-Owned Enterprises Act 1986, the Environment Act 1986, and the Conservation Act 1987 (79).

Like Awatere, Belich, and Orange, Ihimaera wanted to challenge official views on New Zealand history. Unlike them, he chose fiction to do so. Political fiction is a hybrid of both art and politics. While authors like Oscar Wilde advocated art for art’s sake, insisting that politics and art must be kept separate, historically there has always been a strong relationship between the two. According to Vladimir Nabokov, the nineteenth century Russian government regarded “anything outstanding and original in the way of creative thought” as “a jarring note and a stride toward Revolution” (13). To George Orwell, “no book is genuinely free from political bias” and “the opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude” (4–5). The broad view of politics as a set of beliefs and principles grew in popularity at the time that Maori activism was becoming more prominent in New Zealand. Like many public intellectuals of his generation, Ihimaera regarded himself as a political person and writer. He told Mark Williams: “Just as all literature is politics, so too am I not only a writer but a political person” (226). A similar point was made to Michael King: “But I say my work is political because it is exclusively Maori; the criticism of Pakeha society is implicit in the presentation of an exclusively Maori values system” (“Tihe Mauri Ora” 84).

A more specific definition of political writing has its roots in the ancient art of rhetoric and polemic. Unlike “true” art, political speech, whatever its contents are, is expected to have a clear persuasive message and must be rhetorically devious. In this manner, C.K. Stead criticised Ihimaera’s turn towards politics: “The Ihimaera of sensitive, lyrical, rather plangent evocations is gone. In his place we have the novelist as warrior, the novel as tīaha or mere, the reader as ally or enemy”. (“Ihimaera: Old Wounds” 191) Though rhetoric is rather a feature of both fiction and nonfiction, in fiction it is more likely to be understood positively while in politics it is often seen negatively. According to Stead, “the true work of fiction” only starts “when the political posturing stops” (191).

In his essay “Aspects of Contemporary Maori Writing in English”, Ken Arvidson highlights the purposive nature of Maori literature, which is, in his view, either educative or political. Maori radicals and activists, such as Atareta Poananga, have stressed the priority of ideology, political values, and vision over the craft aspects in Maori writing. By Maori literature, Arvidson and Poananga imply both fiction and nonfiction Maori texts, without taking into account the distinctions between the two genres, which has been seen as essential by certain scholars, such as Dorrit Cohn. Cohn argues that even though the borders between fact and fiction are commonly trespassed, the distinction between the two modes is indispensable and categorical. Cohn challenges widespread poststructuralist views that suggest that all narratives are fictional. Instead, she understands fiction as a non-referential narrative which conveys its unique kinds of truth. Most of the texts in this thesis, including *The Matriarch*, straddle the border between reference and imagination, fact and fiction. The existence of such texts, according to Cohn, doesn’t undermine the essential difference between the two modes that lie under their narrative structure.

In *The Matriarch*, the combination of fictional and nonfictional techniques is evident and deliberate. According to Cohn, the two genres are not the same for Ihimaera. In his entry to the *Te Ao Marama* anthology, he draws an interesting distinction between the two modes. The very characteristics that one could specifically associate with political writing, Ihimaera uses to define nonfiction in general: “Non-fiction, by its nature, is direct, confrontational, and goes straight for the jugular” (Volume 1, 16). While many people would associate nonfiction with claims based on evidence, balance, and a reasonable tone, Ihimaera describes the nonfiction texts he selected for *Te Ao Marama* anthology as “the strongest, most rhetorical, spirited, polemical, critical and passionate . . . writing from intellect, the heart and from the gut” (Volume 1, 16).

In his essay on rhetoric, Stanley Fish distinguishes a “serious man” from a “rhetorical man” as the two opposite attitudes to rhetoric. A “serious man” holds a central, single identity

and is oriented to discover reality which, likewise, is seen as single and homogeneous. A “rhetorical man” is an actor occupying different roles, constantly reinventing and fabricating himself. In the same way, he manipulates reality, which is public and dramatic. There is no single shared truth; everyone needs to explore and find a truth that works for them. While a “serious man” tends to see rhetoric in the negative sense; for a “rhetorical man”, eloquence and persuasion are essential tools to deconstruct reality. According to Fish, historically, these two types of attitude have continually engaged in battle and displaced each other, being unable to come to terms and reach an agreement:

And so it would go, with no prospect of ever reaching accord, and endless round of accusation and counteraccusation in which truth, honesty, and linguistic responsibility are claimed by everyone: “from serious premises, all rhetorical language is suspect; from a rhetorical point of view, transparent language seems dishonest, false to the world” (Lanham 196, 28). (Fish 209).

The two outlooks, identified by Fish, may suit the standpoints of Stead and Ihimaera. As a “rhetorical man” rather than “serious man”, Ihimaera tends to think of reality and truth, which are never objective constructs. It is about believing what you stand for is true rather than an endorsement of the ultimate veracity of those beliefs:

I believe that Maori people have every reason to be suspicious of the history that we are taught and which, to a certain extent, still determines the shape of our lives. Our duty is to confront history with our own. Indeed, there is no such thing as History. Rather there are many histories . . . (Ihimaera, “A Maori Perspective” 53)

Apparently, this relativist view influences Ihimaera’s understanding of nonfiction, which he regards as “by its nature” polemical and confrontational. Pointedly, the first volume of his *Te Ao Marama* anthology, comprising Maori creative works, is titled “Reflections in the mirror”, and the second, for nonfiction, is titled “Reality”. Reality is opinionated and so is nonfiction. Such a perspective is antithetical to Stead’s point of view, who stresses on the importance of avoiding an opinion or taking sides while recovering the past in a nonfictional subject, such as history: “You become involved. There’s a temptation to take sides. But that’s no good. Only the truth’s interesting.” (*The Singing Whakapapa* 169). According to Ihimaera, literary imperatives refract fiction; so, it becomes less opinionated—“reflections in the mirror” rather than reality. While introducing the nonfictional volume of the *Te Ao Marama* anthology, Ihimaera remarks:

“How can we truly assess the reflections in the mirror if we do not have the reality itself?” (Volume 2, 15). While the impartiality of fiction is a desirable and a positive trait for a writer like Stead, Ihimaera’s holistic perspective on literature would treat impartiality as an incompleteness or weakness which, however, could be adjusted:

In considering work for *Te Ao Marama* it became obvious that the holistic methodology could not be applied by simply staying with a ‘literary’ definition for writing. It became apparent that a further volume, comprising essays, extracts from biographies, comment, criticism and reviews was required to provide a context, a historical backdrop of the decade, for the literature. Therefore, a fourth volume features non-fiction writing. You cannot view the work of the times without placing it against the reality it has sprung from. (Volume 1, 15)

While in the above statement, Ihimaera specifically refers to the anthology, in the same way, I am inclined to consider *The Matriarch* as his attempt to advance his creative writing within the novel by integrating elements and techniques of nonfiction into fiction. Unless specified otherwise, throughout this chapter, I will continue to use the term “nonfiction” as defined by Ihimaera in the *Te Ao Marama* anthology.

Ihimaera’s engagement with politics has provoked criticism among both Pakeha and Maori populations. While Stead frowned at *The Matriarch*’s expository tone and overly rhetorical argument, some Maori radicals criticised the novel for its anti-Maori outlook and lack of political awareness. In particular, Poananga calls Ihimaera a collaborator, “a Maori Pakeha can feel comfortable with”, agreeable and noncontroversial: “Rather than viewing the Pakeha with cynicism Ihimaera makes them feel comfortable, linked and belonging to our cultural landscape” (Part 1, 26). Unlike the common perception of *The Matriarch* as a profoundly different work from the author’s early writing, romanticising and sentimentalising Maori life, Poananga sees the book following the same universal approach, a political consolidation with the Pakeha, implementing and promoting pro-white values and assumptions, which are hostile to the Maori.

Another of Poananga’s major concerns is related to Ihimaera’s portrayal of women, which, as a feminist, she finds overly negative and thus sexist:

Women in *The Matriarch* are doormats (wife) or witches (mother, grandmother). The Maori ones are witches, consumed with rivalry over men. They exercise power in a

negative sense; sex as power, violence to enforce it, manipulation and cunning to get their way (Part 2, 27).

Moreover, Poananga considered the use of the term “matriarch” offensive in the title of the book, which, she thought, had become disreputable, as well as the grandmother’s association with a spider, traditionally seen as a bad omen by the Maori. Poananga argues that Ihimaera’s misogyny does not originate from Maori traditions, as one might think, but is the result of the author’s colonised mind adopting the Pakeha version of the status of Maori women. Meanwhile, the position of Maori females in pre-colonial days, she insists, was different:

Maori women had a life which allowed them to express themselves, their abilities and desires in political, cultural, sexual, economic and professional areas. Reference to our oral traditions, waiata and whakapapa testifies to this immutable fact. (Part 2, 27)

According to Simon Perris, Ihimaera, influenced by Poananga’s critique, reviewed and developed some of his female characters in the later revised version of *The Matriarch*. In particular, the image of Hinenuitepo, a female mythical figure, the Mother Goddess, is subjected to significant changes from the malevolent and destructive goddess of death in the earlier passages to a more innocent and forgiving creature, the guardian of men’s souls in death, in the later revisions. Perris claims that Ihimaera’s treatment of strong women does not become feminist but rather “matrifocal, deriving from an iwi-centred kaupapa” (102).

Christine Prentice sees Poananga’s response to *The Matriarch* as an example of nationalistic reading, while Stead’s review, she claims, represents an international or Eurocentric perspective that prioritises the aesthetic quality of writing over its content. Both authors disagree with Ihimaera’s representation of New Zealand history; yet, Mark Williams comments, “[t]he question is, whose history is being misrepresented?” (qtd. in Prentice 554). According to Prentice, the two reviewers criticise the book for lacking what they expected it to contain. She argues that the opposition “nationalism vs. internationalism” is no longer relevant to the postcolonial settler context in New Zealand (554).

The Matriarch’s wholeness and unity has been questioned by most Pakeha critics. To Stead, the book lacks artistic unity as its style shifts “from conventional fiction, to expository prose, to rhetorical argument, to historical record” while the tone moves from “the grandiose to the banal” (192). In his *Metro* article, Michael King called *The Matriarch* “a magnificent near-success”. While admitting that the book is undeniably worth reading and a masterpiece in many

respects, he feels that it still does not wholly succeed: “Ihimaera’s vision is not sufficiently penetrative to unify the many disparate parts into a single work of imagination” (170).

While both Stead and King have pointed out *The Matriarch*’s organisational flaws, John Beston focuses on the book’s unifying principles, acknowledging that a novel as big and rich as Ihimaera’s work inevitably faces structural challenges. The first principle, according to Beston, is the motif of the visit constructed via Tamatea’s multiple trips to meet his relatives and to Venice to establish the truth about his mysterious grandmother. The second principle is the intense scene on the marae, which is stretched out over the novel. Finally, the third principle is the recurrent reference to Verdi’s operas, associated with certain characters, connecting them, their aspirations, and their failures over generations. Although the three organising points, identified by Beston, seems to work well to make the story line cohesive, he finishes his review still wondering whether “Ihimaera has too much material for one novel” (86). Humbly, Beston suggests that the novel may have benefited from being split into two separate volumes: one about Riria, Wi Pere, and Te Kooti, and the other focusing mainly on the relationship between the matriarch and Tamatea.

Alex Calder pithily summarises the responses to the novel in a phrase: “WOW STOP BUT” (“The Matriarch” 79). He notes that he had no “buts”, suggesting that “those reviewers who felt the novel doesn’t quite work, doesn’t succeed wholly, may well have been reading the wrong kind of book”. According to Calder, the key to understanding Ihimaera’s complex work lies in the specifics of its genre. He insists that *The Matriarch* belongs to the genre of epic and “it isn’t like most other novels” (80). On the one hand, it shares a number of similarities with old epics by Homer, Virgil, or Dante. It employs from them its specific relationship between the anonymous collective teller of the story (“it is the meeting house who speaks”) and the audience, who is addressed not as an individual, which is more customary to a modern reader, but as a citizen. On the other hand, as a modern novel, *The Matriarch* is no longer able to embrace the old traditions of epic so completely as to recover the harmony and unity of a world in which we believe in gods and heroes. Instead, modernist attempts at the epic form, for instance in Pound’s *Cantos*, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, or Williams’s *Paterson*, have offered an incomplete synthesis of the old and the new, and this is what made these works so intriguing. For these reasons, Calder suggests bricolage as the most suitable analogy for the structure of the book: “it borrows from everywhere to make something new from the ruins of the old. It speaks to us as an epic, but an epic which is concerned not with restoring the past but piecing together a future out of the hopes of the past” (84).

Melissa Kennedy, like Calder, regards the attempts to interpret Ihimaera's work in terms of singularity and unity inadequate, pointing to the novel's particular nature demanding a different approach. Unlike other critics, she refuses to see Ihimaera as an individual who is always driven by cultural politics. Instead, Kennedy juxtaposes the novel's historicism, determined by its political message, with what she calls the "ahistoricism" that emerges most notably from the novel's references to Verdi's operas. She regards the purpose of references as twofold. On the one hand, they align the cultural politics of Ihimaera with the nationalistic political views of the Italian composer. On the other hand, the author's extensive embedding of opera places the novel in close quarters with spectacle or performance, which, according to Kennedy, predicates a mimetic, "imaginative" or "ahistorical" reading of *The Matriarch*. Highlighting the extent to which the opera informs the novel's structure and storyline, often underestimated by critics, she suggests interpreting it in a way that one would interpret music:

In general, music's commentators are very wary of mapping concrete meaning onto form: aural composition may connote abstract senses but it cannot denote anything specific. Indeed, it is questionable whether music can communicate anything at all, an argument held by Pierre Boulez, who is renowned for his aesthetic purism. (77)

From a Maori point of view, history is myth-inclusive, which makes oral history, family records, and folklore an integral part of all historical discourse. In *The Matriarch*, Ihimaera merges written history, that is, dates, places, historical characters (Te Kooti, Wi Pere, Whina Cooper) and events (Te Kooti Retaliation, 1975 Land March), with tales from the Maori oral tradition, which can be fantastic in nature. In his review of the book, Jean-Pierre Durix refers to the distinction between fairytales and the fantastic by Roger Caillois. For Caillois, while magic is normal in the fairytale, which reflects a mindset from the Middle Ages, in the fantastic genre of the later romantic period, marked by the rise of science, the supernatural appears as a break in universal coherence. Durix then points out the distinctive paradox of Ihimaera's novel and, according to him, New Literatures in general, where the two dissimilar and originally antonymous mindsets—old traditional and modern Western—begin to intermix without apparent tension. While not necessarily dismissing or entirely rejecting modernity, the fantastic element in the novel provides a substitute for Western rationality. Metissage, as a consequence of belonging to a complex multicultural society has made it possible for both the protagonist and the author to equally identify with the two worlds of the Maori and the Pakeha. According to Durix, while appearing paradoxical to an outsider, this combination seems to be utterly natural to

an insider (13–14). To summarise, in their responses to *The Matriarch*, most critics have highlighted opposing notions and elements with regard to both the book's content (politics and feminism) and form (style, tone, narrative, and genre). These contradictions have been seen as a sign of the novel's failure by certain scholars (Stead, Poananga, or King) or as its specific nature by others (Calder, Kennedy, or Durix).

Since his early stories, Ihimaera's writing has tended to contain strong autobiographical elements, which have led him to constantly mediate between facts and his imagination, fiction and nonfiction, compelling him to make decisions on whether to stay true to life or adjust life to fiction: "I used to sometimes wonder whether or not my life was conforming to the dictates of fiction, just naturally, or whether or not there was something in me which was wanting me to make my life become like my fiction is" (Ihimaera to McLauchlan 9.54–10.12). This feature of Ihimaera's writing is strong enough to persuade his readers that he comes from personal experience even when he does not. When, in order to show the threat urbanisation poses to Maori values and traditions, the author made the protagonist lose his father in *Tangi*, the book was still perceived as a very personal work to many readers (Ihimaera to McLauchlan).

In *The Matriarch*, a thin line between the author and his protagonist has been noticed by a number of reviewers, such as Beston or Stead: "Tamatea Mahana . . . closely resembles the author and clearly draws upon some of his family history" (Stead 191). While the similarities between the author and his character turn the book into "a gross piece of personal mythologizing" (192), to Stead, the idea of personal mythmaking is unlikely to appeal to Ihimaera, who, after his early writing success, took a long break to avoid creating a role model and stereotype of a Maori writer: "I've intentionally gone out to marginalise myself . . . I realised then that I was creating a stereotype in the minds of those various students that the work was intended for. I stopped writing." (Ihimaera to Williams 228).

The closeness between the author and the protagonist starts from sharing the same ancestors, such as Te Kooti and Wi Pere, the two major historical figures in the novel. Moreover, their position within the family and the world in which they live is identical. Like Ihimaera, Tamatea is the eldest son of an eldest son, the one who received special treatment from his Maori grandmother. Born and raised as Maori, he lives in a Pakeha world, holds a Pakeha degree, is married to a Pakeha woman, and is more articulate in English than Maori. In his interview with the author, journalist Gordon MacLauchlan suggests that Ihimaera has more in common with him than he has with a great majority of Maori, which can equally be said about Ihimaera's character. In his response, Ihimaera strongly disagrees, insisting that unlike the Pakeha, he has "an experience which goes back and is involved with roots" (12.16-20). The same idea is

reflected in the novel's story plot. Unlike the man alone type of character with no roots and place to go, Tamatea's self-discovery involves returning to his family, so that in the end, family duties overcome his personal interests.¹⁴ Gradually and eventually, the protagonist's individuality dissolves into his grandmother's: "He [Tamatea] is the Adored of Artemis," the nobleman said. "He is unto her image and *the price that must be paid*" (454).

Autobiographical elements, however strong, constitute only a part of Tamatea's character, while throughout the novel, simultaneously and intentionally, the author keeps distancing himself from his protagonist, merging nonfiction with fiction. In her review, Panny points out the ironic relationship between the writer and his protagonist in *The Matriarch*. As an example, she refers to certain episodes where Tamatea "behaves churlishly and arrogantly to his grandfather's adopted son and to his cousin Sammy". To Panny, in a traditional Maori society such behaviour will not be accepted as "it is giving that is respected. To take without giving is not tika, not right" (4). She concludes that Tamatea "has a great deal to learn as an adult", regarding him not as a hero but rather a postmodern type of antihero, a fallible character, with a proviso that, unlike in postmodern fiction, Ihimaera's characters tend to take themselves seriously, valuing their responsibility towards their ancestors and the Maori community.

The ironic distance between the author and the protagonist can be seen in the portrayal of Tamatea. Throughout the novel, the descriptions of the appearance of the characters are generous and vivid. For example, the grandmother's beauty is repeatedly highlighted. She is described as a very attractive woman, enigmatic, with a Madonna smile: "Nobody who knew her can deny her beauty... She is beautiful beyond beauty itself, and it is a beauty which has been crafted from a deep sense of intelligence and wisdom" (210). While some family members, such as Tamatea's father Te Ariki, uncle Alexis, or aunt Roha, inherited her looks and nobility, the protagonist's appearance is a subject of his sister's scorn and ridicule:

"Well, you certainly don't look like your grandmother", Te Ariki said . . . "Too black", Teria agreed . . . "Too ugly", my second sister, Erina, sai. . . . "And those lips", my third sister, Vanessa, chimed in. "You'd be able to make tyres for at least ten Hondas from those smackers". . . . And the bumpy nose", said Teria . . . "You could do somebody damage with a nose like that. Why, it's positively dangerous to traffic!" (40)

¹⁴ The term used to describe an archetype in New Zealand fiction, originating from the novel "Man Alone" (1939) by John Mulgan.

Tamatea's recollections and discoveries of his grandmother constitute an important part of the novel. Considering the protagonist's intellectual pursuits and academic career, it is logical to assume *The Matriarch* is written by him: "[t]he novel pretends to be written by Tamatea – he remembers, reconstructs what his grandmother has told him" (Calder 81). Yet, it is never directly stated that Tamatea writes a novel or has ambition to do so; nor are there literary reflections on the process of writing and writing techniques, which are common for metafiction. By refusing to make his fictional proxy a writer, like himself, the author intentionally widens the distance between the protagonist and himself.

In the story of Tamatea, the shift from first to the third person narration indicates another gap, i.e., between the protagonist as a child and the protagonist as an adult. By referring to his younger self as "he" and not "I", the protagonist-narrator stresses the distance between himself now and back in the past:

His grandfather, father and uncles had become silent. He wondered why his father did not intervene. His heart was pounding with fright. His body was stinging from the blows.

(131)

This device is common for the coming-of-age novel, depicting the progressive development of its main character. While the narrative about the protagonist's childhood, though in third person, is still likely to belong to Tamatea, there are scenes and episodes in the novel that are narrated by distinguishably different voices.

The fact that Tamatea is not the only narrator of the story but one voice among many creates a major gap between the protagonist-narrator and the novel's implied author. The absence of a single authoritative voice creates a reasonably complex narrative structure with tension and controversy. The narrator may not always be easily identifiable and some stories are narrated more than once. For instance, the story of Te Kooti is narrated twice: at first, presumably, by the matriarch, and then again by Wi Pere, who writes about his personal interactions with the man. The letters of Wi Pere (304-307) are examples of nonfiction writing that Ihimaera integrates into his fiction. Unlike other historical documents (mainly by European scholars) the author works with, the writing by Wi Pere is quoted verbatim. Since it is already opinionated and shares the novel's perspective, there are no changes required. There are uncertainties around who narrates the first story. It may be the matriarch, which would explain the rhetoric: emotionality, the use of "us", exclamations and rhetorical questions, and insertions from Maori and Italian. The story, as a result, comes across as subjective, personal, and persuasive:

The Pakeha called them fanatics, these Hauhau. But it touched a chord in the Maori heart, that of aroha kit e iwi, love of the country, and who among us could not resist the tangi, the weeping for our Aotearoa, and for those of us who had already been slain by the Pakeha in our lands of the Taranaki and Waikato? (79)

Meanwhile, the same story reveals an abundance of minor details: exact dates, abbreviations, and direct quotes from Pakeha historical records (78), which are too long and comprehensive to be remembered by heart. It is more of an official document than a story a grandmother would tell to her mokopuna:

On 26 September 1865, twenty-six Military Settlers arrived from Hawke's Bay and built a stockade at Kaiti; on 27 September 1865, this force was augmented by thirty members of the Hawke's Bay C.D.C. under a Captain La Serre. (81)

Besides the roles of the narrator and complier or "weaver" of the story, the role of the witness to change needs to be mentioned. According to Calder, "[f]or much of the novel, it is not Tamatea, not the matriarch, it is the meeting house that speaks" (81). The same analogy with a marae is used by Ihimaera in relation to the *Te Ao Marama* anthology:

Te Ao Marama is a marae where our writing will stand, to reflect the times, and to show others a little of what we were like during a crucial decade. We share our dreams, passions, anger, humour, concerns, hopes and vision, showing the complexity that has become our world, and the vigour in which the iwi have moved into that world, revealing our achievements, our failures, and our lives as Maori. (Volume 1, 18)

The notion of a single narrator is not adequate to a novel whose compositional principle resembles that of a collage. Instead, *The Matriarch* employs the same structure as the anthology: multiple separate narratives constructing a collective voice. The parallel between the editor of the anthology and the novel's implied author might be helpful: while responsible for selecting and combining texts together, the editor does not necessarily share the ideas behind each narrative. As a result, the distance between the author and the protagonist-narrator in the novel widens. Notably, however, the situation where the narrator is not easily identifiable does not arise in nonfiction – each story within the anthology is assigned to a different author. In *The Matriarch*, the controversy arises as a result of merging the two genres together.

Much of Ihimaera's struggle as a fiction writer comes from straddling the two worlds, Maori and Pakeha. In *The Dream Swimmer*, he comments on the different role of an author in Western and Maori traditions:

In the English novel tradition the novelist takes life and shapes it into fiction according to structural, narrative, stylistic and other dictates of the convention from a beginning through a middle towards a single ending. In our tradition life takes the novelist and forces him or her to accept the tribal, holistic, exponential and organic nature of our narratives. (313)

Considering the less important role of an author in Maori tradition, the concept of authorship might be hard to apply to a novel like *The Matriarch*, which is constructed by multiple voices and resources, for example, the incorporation of historical documents, like the letters by Wi Pere, into the novel. In this sense, Ihimaera's own habit of rewriting (he revised and republished a number of his works, including *The Matriarch*) as well as his issues with plagiarism in some of his works are telling.¹⁵ The concept of authorship, implying an individual writing alone and being fully responsible for what is created, is a western and relatively recent invention, nonexistent in many other cultures colonised by the West, where an oral tradition continues to have considerable force, which can shed some light on the struggles of the protagonist and the author to fully integrate into Western conventions.

The novel starts with a prologue in which the grandmother recites a whakapapa to her mokopuna. By tradition, this practice goes back to the creation of the world, connecting Maori people with their ancestors by providing a sense of identity and belonging to the place and confirming the right of Maori people to live on and own the land:

E mokopuna, we ruled here for over a thousand years. This was our land. This was our life. It is your life and land now. It has been yours even before you took your first breath. It came to you beyond the time of men and gods to the very beginning of Night and the Void. A thousand years and further back, mokopuna. We had eternity in us. (6)

"Then came the Pakeha" abruptly finishes the prologue. Concise and upfront, the sentence forms a new paragraph and gives it extra emphasis. While the prologue as a whole works well in introducing the main theme of the novel which is about Maori people, their history and the land, the closing sentence supposedly hints at its main conflict which is between Maori and Pakeha.

¹⁵ Ihimaera's 2009 novel *The Trowenna Sea* was accused of plagiarism. In a written statement, the author admitted his fault and apologised for not attributing the material to the original source.

As in his early writing, *The Matriarch* predominantly focuses on Maori people, their way of life, concerns, and struggles. It deals with Maori characters in recognisable Maori settings. Though the main language of the novel is English, now and then, the author switches to Maori, assuming that the reader does not require a translation. In his interview, Ihimaera comments on his attitude towards both languages: “The relevance of the times means, in my case, writing in English. But the purity of the tradition would mean that I would have to go back to writing in Maori” (Ihimaera to Jussawalla 232). The majority of characters, with only a few exceptions, are Maori. The exceptions seem to be deliberate and hence are worth noticing. In a predominantly Maori world, who is Pakeha?

Apart from the two family members, Thomas Halbert, the Anglo–Saxon father of Wi Pere, and Regan, the protagonist’s wife, there is a nameless Pakeha journalist who stands out due to his special role as an observer and interpreter of the events in the Marae. Although in brackets, his commentary turns out to be a consistent and important part of the narrative of the story. His function is to provide rational explanations on the mystical events that he witnesses in the marae, which every so often he is unable to fulfil. Having no understanding of the Maori language, traditions, and history, every now and then he makes remarks and gives explanations which are mostly too profane and naïve to satisfy an insider, such as a well-informed Maori reader. Yet, they bring the Pakeha perspective into the novel to make it work for a Pakeha audience: “But I have missed out the most extraordinary incident, the journalist said. I guess it will never, ever, be explained. On reflection I think it was entirely coincidental, but who knows?” (77).

A separate group of Pakeha characters consists of the protagonist’s acquaintances supplying him with the information that he is in search of, among whom are John Lawrence, a historian from Gisborne Museum and Art Gallery (67), a nameless City Librarian (83), and Cecile Robinson, a specialist in fencing (428). The presence of the Pakeha mediators, information providers, and collaborators is reasonable since the author works with the Pakeha written historical records. Like the journalist, they are minor characters with limited personal characteristics and clearly assigned roles. All of them are supportive of the protagonist and of the Maori in general.

Unlike the Pakeha mediators, the European casualties of the Matawhero retaliation are purposefully personalised. Briefly, we get to know their names, age, what they were doing on the day, and the details about how they were killed:

Trooper John McCullough, 28, was in the fields bringing his cows in to be milked. . . .

“Jane! Jane!” he yelled to his 25-year-old wife. He knew she was in the kitchen preparing

breakfast. . . . [He] was shot dead while he was getting over his stockyard rails. . . . A volley rang out and little black holes, scorched around the sides, puffed in the blouses of the two women and the infant. (166)

The names and facts that Ihimaera uses are taken from the Pakeha historical records of the Matawhero ‘massacre’, which explains its prime focus on women and children, innocents of the war, and highlights the cruelty of Te Kooti, the rebel and murderer. The author neither skips nor softens the unpleasant facts recorded by the Pakeha. Quite the opposite, he intentionally uses fictional techniques to accentuate the merciless and purposeless killings, adding to the story the details about mundane things that the victims were performing on this day, such as “bringing his cows in to be milked” and “preparing breakfast” or highly imagistic detail about “little black holes, scorched around the sides”. Fostered by the genre of fiction, the emotional and imaginative component adds to the horror of war in Ihimaera’s narrative. If taken out of the book’s context, the descriptions of death and cruelty are more likely to serve against Te Kooti. To change the perspective from Pakeha to Maori, Ihimaera has to switch from “fiction” to “nonfiction”, to be able to explain his position clearly and persuasively. Firstly, he uses the word “retaliation” instead of the customary “massacre”; secondly, he claims the event is a part of a religious war started by the Pakeha themselves:

All dead, and to what purpose? To serve the vanities of man or God? And who among you is ready to cast the first stone and to say, Te Kooti is to blame? All religious wars have been marked with similar killings, whether they be during the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the Huguenot exile, or, in our own times, in the Anglo-Irish conflict, Iraq-Iran wars, and the Arab-Israeli struggle, so don’t protest to me about the Te Kooti Retaliation. (170)

Notably, the author addresses the Pakeha audience using the personal pronoun “you”. It alters between “you Pakeha” and “you, the Crown” (241) in certain other cases. According to Calder, the Pakeha audience in *The Matriarch* are addressed not as individuals but as citizens. In a similar way, there are no individuals among the Pakeha characters the matriarch or the protagonist directly confronts. The Prime Minister and the first secretary, the two Pakeha officials present in the Marae, are described impersonally. The confrontation in the marae is between the Maori themselves—not between the Maori and the Pakeha:

Some of the people were openly hostile to the elders who had made the decision to shut your grandmother out. “Haven’t they already done enough?” someone sitting next to me said. “Must we divide ourselves against each other in this manner? If anyone should remain outside it is *him*,” he said, pointing at the Prime Minister. (441)

According to Suzanne Romaine, the hostility between Maori groups is a part of the novel’s conflict: “The Maori world is not monolithic any more than the Pakeha world is. The Maori world, at least as it is portrayed in *The Matriarch*, encompasses several worlds, and the tension between them is part of the novel’s problematic” (12).

It is widely assumed that *The Matriarch* appears confrontational to Pakeha audiences. Yet, there is no real conflict between the Maori and Pakeha characters apart from the “nonfiction” stories of Te Kooti and Wi Pere, which have been integrated into the main narrative of the novel. This may justify Poananga’s point that the book is not radical enough and pleases the Pakeha rather than challenging them. In his interview, Ihimaera names “the Pakeha in power, not the Maori male in power” as the matriarch’s real enemy, mentioning that “she has to fight through that patriarchy before she is able to confront her real enemy” (Ihimaera to Meklin 360). Within the story plot, the conflict between the matriarch and the Pakeha is implied but not developed. Instead, the confrontation between the Maori and the Pakeha originates from the author’s rhetoric.

A range of stylistic devices that Ihimaera uses in *The Matriarch* to persuade and engage with his audience are similar to speech-performance techniques. They make his writing highly opinionated, emotional, and passionate:

For most assuredly you, Pakeha, began taking the land from us as you were signing your worthless Treaty. You, Pakeha, began taking away our culture. You said at the time that we were now one people, he iwi Kotahi tatou. What you really meant was that we now belonged to you. That was why we went to war. (74)

There are repetitions and parallel constructions (“you, Pakeha”, “began taking the land”, “began taking away our culture”), personal pronouns (“you” and “us”), judgemental words (“worthless”), and Maori language (“he iwi Kotahi tatou”), forming a sense of exclusiveness. The author creates a strong ethical appeal, too: “You said at the time that we were now one people”. This demonstrates first person plural narration and the exclusively Maori perspective.

By actively integrating rhetorical devices that are common in speeches into a fictional narrative, Ihimaera wishes to avoid ambiguity and impartiality. He firmly attempts to make his

writing opinionated and more real, which has a correlation with subjectivity, spirituality, and passion. While nonfiction might be presented either objectively or subjectively, Ihimaera deliberately adds emotions and sentiments to the facts and numbers that he obtains from historical documents: “Oh, but the muddle!”, “What a military two-step! What a quadrille!”, “What a to do, what a performance!” (240). In his interview, Ihimaera regards himself as a sentimental person and he does not mind his writing being sentimental: “Sometimes it comes out all sentimental. And I cannot help that. I love it. I wanted to be sentimental because if it wasn’t that it would not be the true reflexion of the people that I love” (Ihimaera to Merata Mita 8.57–9.13).

Although highly inclusive and diverse content-wise, the *Te Ao Marama* anthology had a strict entry criterion: the contributors had to have Maori ancestry: “If the writer has Maori ancestry, his or her work has been considered regardless of content” (Volume 1, 17). No Pakeha authors were included in Ihimaera’s collection—not even writers like James K. Baxter or Michael King—whose writing may have offered a Maori perspective. The editor’s decision not to include Pakeha writers in the anthology is political in the same way as *The Matriarch*, according to Ihimaera himself, is a political novel. By contrast, the author’s later anthology *Where’s Waari?* (2000), focusing on the construction of Maori identity by New Zealand twentieth century authors, presents a mix of Maori and Pakeha texts. The tone and style of the editor’s introduction is noticeably different from his introductions to *Te Ao Marama*:

Some of my friends still remember how I was so outraged about the perspective of the story [*The Whare* by Douglas Stewart] – I saw it as demonising Maori – that I threw it out of the window and got caned by the headmaster, Jack Allen. However, my reading of the story is not the only reading. Will you read it the same way as I did, I wonder, or will you see more redeeming characteristics in it? (10)

In the introductions to *Te Ao Marama*, we see an author who is serious, formal, and upfront; in *Where’s Waari?*, in contrast, he is flamboyant, accepting, and ambiguous. The title, originating from a children’s game, sets a tone of lightheartedness from the start. The use of informal language, questions instead of statements, and “I” instead of “us” mark a shift towards a more experimental and accepting approach. Ihimaera, as a writer, can easily switch between being serious and being playful. He is political and upfront, while introducing *Te Ao Marama*; on the other hand, he is experimental and accepting in *Where’s Waari?*. In his nonfiction, the author is more likely to stick with one or the other mode and thus is more easily defined. The novel genre

gives Ihimaera a chance to combine various elements, swinging between genres, modes, and narrators within the same text.

Containing several narrators, *The Matriarch* tends to address many different audiences simultaneously. The novel is inclusive of non-Maori readers, both Pakeha and international. Featuring exclusively Maori people, the book's "fictional" portion is more likely to be written for a Maori audience, like the author's earlier writing. It shows the Maori world, people, relations, and tradition from within. Meanwhile, the Pakeha is the narratee in the book's nonfictional portions, where the politicisation of the Maori–Pakeha relations primarily emerges. The journalist's commentary on marae events brings the Pakeha "rational" perspective into the Maori novel. Similarly, the novel's references to the Bible, western mythology, and Verdi's operas has an explanatory function only for a more educated and culturally aware reader. By describing the unknown subject in terms familiar to western audiences, Ihimaera attempts to make the novel accessible for a non-Maori reader. As Kennedy notes, such practice is not unique and has been used by other postcolonial writers: ". . . instead of describing South America by employing the physical description, local language, and glosses common to the 'ethnographic' fiction . . . [Alejo Carpentier] calls on a system of familiar European literary, artistic, and cultural references" (87).

Bearing in mind the many different audiences *The Matriarch* attempts to engage with, it turns out that Ihimaera's expectations of an ideal reader are profoundly high. They are expected to be fluent in several languages, culturally aware, and sensitive to both Maori and Western heritage, like Ihimaera himself or like his characters Tamatea, Wi Pere, and the matriarch: "Although Maori was her [the matriarch's] first language her uncle sought tutors to teach her English, French, Italian and Russian" (*The Matriarch* 426). After studying the different responses to *The Matriarch*, Kennedy concluded that many of Ihimaera's references remained meaningless for the majority of Maori and Pakeha readers:

The Old Testament, European mythology, Venice, opera, as well as the Maori aspects, including language, myth, tribal lore, local history, protocol, and oral traditions, are significant and enriching for those readers who can access them, but for those who cannot, they encumber and obscure . . . most readers will find themselves excluded at one point or another. (88)

There is an anecdote that Ihimaera likes to recall about being asked who he wrote for when he tried to publish his first collection of stories *Pounamu Pounamu*. He had stated that his audience

was Maori and received a response that stated the Maori did not read books (Ihimaera to Williams 220). This is a paradoxical situation which seems to be still relevant for *The Matriarch*, where Ihimaera's expectations of an ideal reader are higher than before. In order to reach many different audiences, the author, literally as well as metaphorically, switches between languages: "I think my work operates between a wide range of polarities. Sometimes it's lyrical, other times it's theoretical, it's frankly all over the place now – which brings its own critical dilemmas. I spiral in and out, backward and forward, I like working the centre and the boundaries, like the spiral" (Ihimaera to Crane 12). However unrealistic the author's expectations of an ideal reader may seem, his endeavour should also be understood as educational, an attempt to enlighten both Maori and Pakeha audiences to create a new type of reader, who is no longer monocultural.

Being the first published Maori author and also a professor of English is a great privilege and achievement which also comes with a heavy weight of responsibilities and expectations. Ihimaera's novel *The Matriarch* is a grandiose project and an ambitious experiment. By integrating elements and techniques of nonfiction, the author has attempted to advance or "embattle" his imaginary writing. The battle he wanted the novel to engage with was against monoculturalism and exclusiveness. Like the author himself, the novel strives to be multifaceted, flexible, adaptive, and bicultural. It tries to sit in between two worlds, speak many languages at once, and address a range of different audiences. By no means, is this an easy task and a convenient position to be in. *The Matriarch* had many paradoxes and provoked criticism from both Pakeha and Maori reviewers. The author's response to some of the criticism, which involved rewriting and republishing his work, is an interesting phenomenon which, among other things, demonstrates a new kind of relationship between the author and their public. It shows the versatility, agreeability, and mobility of Ihimaera as a public intellectual. Using the terminology of Fish, he is a "rhetorical man", an actor who occupies different roles, continuously reinventing and fabricating himself. The last chapter of this thesis considers another author, Ian Wedde, in a similar attempt to overcome exclusiveness and monoculturalism by navigating between the demotic and the hieratic registers.

CHAPTER 7

Ian Wedde: Ecology of Literary Language

In the introduction to his collection of essays and talks “Making Ends Meet”, which was published in 2005, Ian Wedde outlines some key features of his generation. In contrast to the “frugal” generation of his parents who believed in social and cultural progress and the notion of “bettering” through education, Wedde describes the generation of the 1960s and 70s as “unfrugal”, “ungrateful”, and “especially profligate with respect to culture” (9). In a departure from their elders, the younger generation, he observes, tends to see themselves as classless, non-elitist, and exclusive. They identify the nature of culture within societies as inherently institutional and reject the idea of culture as a sign of privilege or the exclusive domain of the “cultured”. To Wedde, this new outlook reorients cultural institutions towards “the task of supporting, representing and reporting on the diverse cultures that were actually in play within society” (9).

As a poet, critic, autobiographer, and fiction writer, Wedde has been actively involved in reflecting, developing, and shaping this generational change through his writing. Almost every commentator on his work has underlined this point. In his 1979 essay “From Wystan to Carlos”, C.K. Stead labelled Wedde as a representative voice of the younger generation. According to Mark Williams, “Wedde is to be seen as one of the chief means by which post-modernism, as Stead understands the term, entered New Zealand” (“Hungry Generations” 68). In “The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature”, Peter Simpson describes him as “a leader among the generation of writers born in the immediate post-war period” (579). Harry Ricketts refers to Wedde as “the most respected New Zealand writer of his generation” (43). In a 2013 interview for the New Zealand Herald, Michele Hewitson half-mockingly introduced Wedde as “a public intellectual, after all”.

This chapter introduces Wedde as a public intellectual of a “new” generation, who chose to reject the strict elitist views and binary thinking of their elders in order to engage with the public in a more practical and efficient way. It explores how the ideas of social responsibility, art, identity, and truth are essential to Wedde’s thinking and writing, and how they have been developed in the various genres that he has worked with, including poetry, critical essays, and autobiography. In his critical work as well as his poems, Wedde often uses a personal register, fashioning a figure of the intellectual very much like himself. In the first half of the chapter, I will briefly look at the public perception of the author and his work. I will then discuss and

compare some of the ideas of Wedde and Stead on art, poetry, and politics. I will argue that the nature of Wedde's disagreement with Stead is, to a certain extent, generational and originates from their different views on the role of the poet in society. In the second half of the chapter, I will analyse three of Wedde's poems in order to delineate the continuum between the demotic and hieratic registers that his work occupies. I am interested in how the author speaks to different publics, such as the broader community in the poem "The Pathway to the Sea", a more particular audience in "A Ballad for Worsler Herberley", and a sophisticated intellectual audience in "The Lifeguard".

In contrast to writers like Frank Sargeson or Janet Frame, who would rather emphasise the writers' responsibility to their art, Wedde regards himself as a "social", "public" author, and his work as political: "Most of my poems are concerned with how we live, how we should live, and are political in these senses" (qtd. in Simpson 578). Discussing the role of the poet in an interview with Ricketts, Wedde outlined the poet's responsibility "to be awake to what it is that you're doing" (54). Lauris Edmond referred to Wedde as both a "cerebral" poet, like Allen Curnow or Stead, and, at the same time, a "social poet" and a "public writer" (Edmond to Ricketts 66). Unlike Stead or Curnow, who built their careers in universities, Wedde decided against academia, regarding his choice twenty years later as "the best decision I ever made". University life, he believed, would have "lock[ed] [him] into endless ways of getting overcomplicated, and lock[ed] [him] out of opportunities for opening up" (Wedde to Dowling 179). He has worked as an art critic for the media, curated several exhibitions, and was the Arts Project Manager at the Te Papa Museum in Wellington. Wedde's attempts to engage with a wider audience demonstrate his ideological preference for the "real" world with its practical affairs over the ivory tower of academia. While turning his back on academia, Wedde has disagreed with Roger Horrocks when the latter defined his generation as "deliberately anti-intellectual" (Wedde to Ricketts 57). The situation when a writer, like himself, is also a critic, he considers it to be "quite a good situation to be in" (56).

In the introduction to *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1985), Wedde discusses the differences and the relationship between hieratic and demotic languages and cultures. By the term "hieratic", he refers to language that is "received, self-referential, encoded elect, with a 'high' social threshold emphasising cultural and historical continuity". "Demotic", on the other hand, describes language "with a spoken base, adaptable and exploratory codes, and a 'lower' and more inclusive immediacy" (25). According to Wedde, the relationship between the two is "ecological – a reticulation of nourishment", as he believes "we need the hieratic depths, which need the demotic inputs of newer cultures" (28). That is to say, a good poet, according to Wedde,

strives for both, the intellectual and the popular. In his interview with Dowling, Wedde stated that he did not see “why literature can’t be complex and at the same time quite widely read” (Wedde to Dowling 179). Yet, a number of commentators have seen Wedde’s writing in rather contrasting ways. Lauris Edmond admitted that she had her doubts about Wedde and wondered “very much whether he’s a popular writer” (66). In the *New Zealand Listener* (2017), Wedde was introduced as an author of “the most complex poetry” who “has never been an easy poet to jump straight into” (Wood). Ian Sharp has described Wedde as one of the most intellectually complex poets in the country:

There’s a strain of oafish reductivism in New Zealand culture . . . against which Wedde stands as a kind of corrective. His subtle, inquisitive intellect gives him an appetite, unusual on these shores, for complexity and complication. Dissatisfied with pat answers, he likes to open up possibilities and investigate options. (“How to Write” 172)

In his public talk “Does Poetry Matter?” (2009), Wedde speculates on the social role and functions of poetry and art. He argues that besides the unpractical side of poetry, commonly used as a reason for its insignificance, there is another more comprehensive way in which poetry is useless, which lies in “the poem’s unreliability, its potential for disobedience”:

Often we seem to be in a situation where the poet is asserting one thing while the poem appears to be doing another, or where the poet is ordering language to mean one thing while the language has a contrary mind of its own about what it wants the poem to mean. (80)

The instability of language, “the metaphor’s tendency to disobey its master’s and mistress’s wishes” (80) is part of what makes poetry “useless” and, at the same time, becomes “one of poetry’s great virtues, and one of the reasons it does matter” (78). The critical awareness and ability to identify and play with this “old trap” of poetical ambiguity makes poetry, according to Wedde, matter even more.

Wedde’s idea of the virtuous uselessness of poetry is not unique and has been previously noted by other authors. In his essay “From Wylan to Carlos”, Stead, in quite a similar way, emphasises that “. . . the truth of imagination is less vulnerable, more durable, more comprehensive, subtler – in fact truer – than the truth of politics, morals, philosophy, or whatever removable, abstractable, restatable ‘content’ the poet as a moralist, or as realist, chooses to load into his vehicle” (144). Judging by this statement, we can say that, in the most fundamental

sense, the views of Stead and Wedde on the nature of poetry and art are cast in the same mould. To Stead, the poem is “open” when it is “never quite completing the statement, never closing the account, never letting that gate clang shut on the imagination of the reader” (153). Using Wedde’s terminology, we can say that the poem is “open” when its “uselessness”, its natural “tendency to disobey”, is recognised and accepted by the poet.

In “From Wystan to Carlos”, Stead not only distinguishes Wedde among other poets of his generation but he also acknowledges the closeness between his own and Wedde’s way of thinking by quoting him in the epigraph of the essay:

[I]t would seem to be a truism that . . . what creates the artist-writer is not the ideas (experiences, perceptions) he has nor the fact that he has them but the fact that he gives them form in writing . . . The butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker (after all) have ideas and experiences too. (qtd. in Stead 139)

Although appreciating Stead’s praise of his work, Wedde found Stead’s “open” form theory “rather distracting really” (Wedde to Dowling 165). Firstly, he disagrees with Stead’s definition of “Sonnets to Carlos” as “open”; secondly, he doubts the effectiveness of Stead’s idea about an “open” form as such: “. . . the whole open and closed thing seems to me a rather piffling sort of argument in the end. I don’t believe that any writing happens, however free, without some sort of diagram, structure, that moves you along” (Wedde to Dowling 172). Wedde then suggests different ways in which the same poem can be perceived as “open” and “closed” at the same time, concluding that “at a certain moment it [the poem] begins to tell you what to do, and whether it’s open or closed is beside the point, you’re simply in it” (167). Later in the interview, discussing his novel *Symme’s Hole*, Wedde returns to Stead’s argument for a second time, but only to stress on its unproductivity once again: “If you want to talk about open form, that novel was, but it was also the most perfect closed form by the end as well” (170).

Wedde’s reluctance to make use of open form theory is not because he believes the idea is wrong but also because he is sceptical about its utility. The actual nature of Wedde’s disagreement with Stead is, to some degree, generational and, I believe, stems from their different views on the role of a poet in society. Although they share some fundamental beliefs about the nature of art and poetry, the two writers assume different standpoints when it comes to specifics. In one of Sharp’s 2017 essays, he declares that he had “always felt chary of identifying Wedde as one pole in the binary opposition that Stead’s ‘From Wystan to Carlos’ title suggests”. Wedde, to him, “has always resisted tidy categorisation” (173). In his critical writing, in

particular, Wedde had developed a habit of re-examining the processes of categorisation by questioning the institutional nature of culture. In the beginning of “Does Poetry Matter?”, for example, he disputes the categorising process pertaining to what we consider significant or trivial, seeing it as a complex cultural phenomenon with an inevitably political tincture, which prompts us not only to distinguish brands of cultural capital but also to identify ourselves. In comparison to the rather simple distinction between a poem as political commentary and a poem as a work of art used by Stead, Wedde’s deconstructive approach, among other things, makes his views on political writing more complex and contradictory: “I like writing that is political because it is completely useless. I also like writing that is political because it is committed and activist, and wears its cause on its sleeve” (qtd. in Johnston, “Twenty Contemporary NZ Poets” 56).

In comparison with Stead, Wedde is particularly cautious about keeping the right balance between the roles of critic and writer. In an interview with Ricketts, he issued a warning about the danger of being both a critic and a writer at the same time:

If you argue constantly back from your own practice as a writer towards your theory as a critic, then naturally you’re going to be begging the question every time you open someone else’s work to look at it and make an opinion. But equally, the other way, if you constantly write out of some critical concept then you’re going to be imposing on your own. (56)

That said, Wedde readily admits the advantages of a situation when a writer is at the same time a critic: “I think they can feed each other but they have to be as open, one to the other, as possible and where that happens, it can be very useful” (56). By being open, Wedde implies being “contentious rather than an apologist”, not becoming “mortgaged to criticism” and “involved in a particular idea”, which is, to him, the case with Stead (Wedde to Ricketts 57). According to Williams, Wedde tends to engage with history “without resorting to prophecy or rhetoric”, finding a balance between “formal adventurousness and direct engagement with the politics of survival that so presses upon him” (71). As Wedde himself states, he “seldom tells, [he] enquires” (qtd. in Simpson 578). An image of an artist who is open, curious, not possessed by a certain idea, or one who resorts to prophecy fits in particularly well with Wedde’s concept of the virtuous uselessness of poetry.

“Does Poetry Matter?” finishes with the author looking briefly at three cultures – Bangladeshi, Arabic, and Maori – where poetry has “a dominant or overarching role in cultural

ecologies” (85). The move from admitting the uselessness of poetry to describing situations where poetry actually matters is contradictory and yet it effectively illustrates Wedde’s view of the roles of a poet and a critic. To Wedde, the question of whether or not poetry matters, like any philosophical question, can only have “comparative, not absolute, answers” (85) and “it *matters* [emphasis mine] that there isn’t a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer to the question” (88). According to Williams, “for Wedde, the individual ego is less central and authoritative and he sees language and tradition as ideally communally owned” (“Ian Wedde’s Relocations” 141). Wedde’s engagement with “other” cultures and diverse cultural situations, in particular, helps him to achieve the complexity that he strives for in both his critical work and poetry. In contrast with Stead’s strictly elitist and high modernist sense of tradition, Wedde’s attitude towards tradition and writing appear wider and more comprehensive.

In the following analysis of Wedde’s poems, I will demonstrate how the author attains the broadness and comprehensiveness of his writing by navigating between two extremes – the demotic and the hieratic. Written at different phases of Wedde’s life and career, the three chosen poems engage with social and ethical issues such as ecological problems in “The Pathway to the Sea” and “The Lifeguard” or Maori and Pakeha relationships in “A Ballad for Worser Heberley”. All three poems are examples of social, talking poems, or poems of address, which directly engage the audience. In each poem, we will encounter a different persona of Wedde that he chooses to present to the world on a particular occasion. The analysis will reveal how, depending on the audience the author wants to engage with, Wedde is able to adopt various roles. In “The Pathway to the Sea”, he is a political activist calling the public to action. In “A Ballad for Worser Heberley”, he is a public speaker at a private family function. Finally, in “The Lifeguard”, he is a philosopher who addresses social concerns and engages with the audience at a more complex metaphysical level. While none of these personas are identical to the actual author, all together, they constitute the image of Wedde as the New Zealand public literary intellectual of a “new” generation, aiming at engaging with a wider audience and finding the right balance between different worlds.

The poem “Pathway to the Sea” was written in 1975 with the intention to confront the plan by a transnational collection of corporations to build an aluminium smelter at Aramoana in Otago. It is narrated in the first person by the protagonist digging a field-tile drain in his garden to prevent water runoff, which is currently bogging the foundations of his old shed. The images of “‘faecal matter’ bubbling up from clogged overflow traps” disturbs the narrator “and some others too” (57), forcing them into action. If not fixed in time, the runoff could cause overflow in the sewage system, seeping into the water supply and affecting human consumption. Although

not explicitly mentioned in the poem, the title implies the possibility of the drainage reaching the sea, thus hinting at larger scale environmental risks. The specification that the “shit” is in fact “our shit” (58) entails the sense of social responsibility. The pronoun “I” at the beginning of the poem soon transforms into “we” and “us”: “then we started digging fast, we went at it, we went down four feet . . .” (61). The emphasis of the poem, therefore, is on mutual endeavour, on collaboration between people as opposed to isolated individual activity. Throughout the poem, the importance of collaboration is outlined in a number of ways, including the title of the poem, as the sea can also be understood as a metaphor for a collective space, merging and mixing together individual “pathways”.

The poem shifts between a range of pronouns that include “I”, “we”, “they”, and “you”, helping the narrator to establish borders and define the community that he associates with. While wishing the government ban the smelter, the narrator is rather cautious about the idea of state intervention with respect to the issue of drainage. To him, the government may only introduce additional complications instead of solving the actual problem. He fears, for instance, that council inspectors would “. . . get to look at other aspects of how we choose to live which might strike them as unorthodox or even illegal . . .” (58). To demonstrate the gap between the people and the government, he brings up another environmental issue concerning the use of forests. The narrator advocates using demolition timber, which the government, striving for quick solutions and profits, does not support. This leads to antagonism and animosity between the two sides: “. . . but the structures stay put ! & the inspectors would say ‘Down with them’ – well, down with them ! . . .” (59). In addition to the authorities, “they”, as opposed to “we”, includes the deserters who abandoned the drainage project soon after joining: “some quit, some hid, some developed rheums . . . they defected, deserted, they offered their apologies, they fucked off . . .” (62). While expressing resentment towards those who gave up on the project, the narrator does not attempt to force them to stay. For a while, he carries on, working on his own, so that “we” becomes “I” again: “I plied my lone shovel, bucket, grout, mattock, axe & spade, baling out the boggy trench as the ‘drainage problem’ halted right there . . .” (63). It is important that his outlook does not become pessimistic, and soon after, his goal is accomplished. Such detail strongly emphasises the principle of free will, in opposition to forced engagement, which is essential for the community.

“The Pathway to the Sea” is dedicated to the American poet A. R. Ammons, to whom Wedde is likely to owe both his interest in the relationship between man and nature as well as the alternately comic and solemn tones to address the issue. Apart from the pronouns “I”, “we”, and “them”, the poem actively uses the pronoun “you” to engage with the reader directly. In most

cases, “you” is accompanied with the word “citizen”, which, in different contexts, might be read either as ironic (“you gotta use new timber, citizen” (58)) or as demanding response and action (“you don’t want your children’s children paying your blood-money, citizen” (67)). By the end of the poem, after the announcement that “they” are going to build an aluminium smelter at Aramoana, the intense repetition of “you” indicates an impending emergency as if the narrator demands an immediate decision from his addressee: “. . . you want to keep your structures up, you want elevation, you’re ready to do your share, you’ll dig your field-drain & you’ll keep your shit out of the water supply . . .” (68). There are situations where, as a citizen, “you” cannot remain silent and avoid taking sides. “You” have to make a decision, choose between “them” and “us”. To the narrator, the case of the aluminium smelter is one of those situations. In the final lines of the poem, for the first time, the word “citizen” accompanies “we” and not “you”: “. . . but then we know, don’t we, / citizen, that there’s nowhere / to defect to, & that / living in the / universe doesn’t / leave you / any place to chuck / stuff off / of” (68).

The poem elaborates on the idea of co-dependency between humans and nature. The problem of drainage can affect human life indirectly by upsetting chickens, whose coops become wet. As the narrator observes, “chickens with dry feet lay more eggs because they’re happy” (61). By keeping the chickens happy, people, therefore, will benefit, and vice versa. The same logic operates with trees and plants. The culmination of the poem (“it’s here the story really starts”) is the blossoming of a small pear tree, which without the drain “would never score a single shrivelled product” (66). Soon the tree is joined by other trees, forming a garden: “the other two grew straight study & slim, sunlight entered their hearts...” (66). The concept of co-dependency between people and nature is supported by the personification of nature, which is portrayed as equal, rather than subordinate, to humans. The poem encourages us to learn from and collaborate with nature. The demolition timber is compared with a “tough lover”, a partner “who keeps you up to the mark, whose head eyes language hands loins en-gage you, give you elevation, with whom you ride up the up & up . . .” (59–60). As a result of the builder’s interaction with the material, both sides experience transformation: “what gets built has bent the builder as well as his nails & nerves” (59). More difficult and demanding in comparison to an “easy” new timber, the demolition wood can teach the builder to appreciate, compromise, and collaborate. In the same way, birds “beating on in the mutual updraughts of each other’s wings” (59) become a symbol of the collaboration and teamwork that the poem glorifies.

According to Teresa Shewry, Wedde’s poem builds on “the idea of directed involvement in environments and projects shared with others” (250). By the term “involvement” Shewry implies understanding the sea as a commons, an environment shared by human and non-human

inhabitants including “fish, bird, waves, and winds . . . specific artists and poets” (248). The publication of “The Pathway to the Sea” was accompanied by similar initiatives and environmental projects by a number of other artists and activists. Ralph Hotere, one of New Zealand’s most important fine artists at the time, created a cover for the first Hawk Press edition of Wedde’s poem. The social activity around Aramoana forced the abandonment of the smelter proposal. Yet, the collaborative engagement of artists and writers with Aramoana continued for some time. During the 1980s, Hotere produced the Aramoana series of paintings, which Wedde referred to in his poems “Off/Of (for Ralph Hotere)” (1984) and “Letter to Peter McLeavey: After Basho” (2005).

Most of Wedde’s social poems are talking poems, or poems of address, allowing the poet to engage directly with the public. The type of audience he chooses to speak to varies from one poem to another. In “The Pathway to the Sea”, “citizen” is an example of an abstract aspirational audience. In “A Ballad for Worser Heberley”, Wedde, in contrast, addresses a more particular consumer audience. The poem was written in 1990 for the specific occasion of a family reunion as a gift to the Heberley family whose ancestor, James Heberley, had been the protagonist of Wedde’s novel *Symme’s Hole*, which had been completed four years earlier in 1986. *Symme’s Hole* is written in the popular folk genre of a ballad using a stanza with rhyming second and fourth lines. The poem consists of three parts, where the second part is a self-contained story narrated by Heberley. In the first and second parts, the narrator is a guest in the Pipitea Marae, speaking to the Heberley family, whom he addresses as “my friends” (25). The ballad starts with the narrator recalling the time when, as a kid, he went fishing with his dad, Chick Wedde. His memory is vivid and detailed, as he captures the colours, the smells, and the “cruel” sandfly bites:

I remember the pohutakawa’s summer crimson
And the smell of two-stroke fuel
And the sandflies above the Waikawa mudflats
Whose bites as a kid I found cruel. (25)

From the start, Wedde is particularly specific about locations, referring to places by their names: Waikawa mudflats, Whekenui tides, Arapaoa’s flanks, and so on. While the public in the marae, who the narrator addresses, are likely to relate to Heberley by descent, it is important for him to establish his personal connection to the protagonist, which he finds in the beaches and the sea that, as New Zealanders, they “share”. The sea in the ballad, as in Wedde’s many other poems, including “The Pathway to the Sea”, holds a special place. In his essay “Lost at Sea”, Wedde

discusses the sea as a metaphor for identity, common in literature, and in New Zealand literature in particular: “A lot of poets have written about the sea, about looking into its distance or drowning in its nearness, but they were really writing about identity too – national or self, it’s much the same” (33). The ballad’s double narrative mirrors the structure of *Symme’s Hole* with its parallel stories of James Heberley and the late twentieth century researcher investigating Heberley’s story. While the stories of Heberley in the novel and the ballad echo each other, aspects of the genre establish some obvious differences. In the ballad, for example, the narrator explains how he learned the story of Heberley by simply saying that, as a boy, he “caught” it from the sea when fishing. The use of the supernatural, common in folklore, saves the author the need for a detailed explanation:

I feel a weight upon my line
no hapuku is here
but weight of history swimming up
into the summer air (26)

The transition between the two narratives remains the only “magic” element in the ballad. The story of James Heberley is rich in factual details and names, which indicates it is an actual history—not a made-up narrative. It starts on the exact day that the narrator first arrived in New Zealand, the name of the ship, and the place of his arrival:

In 1830 with a bad southerly abaft
soon after April Fool’s Day
on big John Guard’s Waterloo schooner
though Kura-te-au I made my way. (26)

Heberley describes himself as a “sad young bloke with a sad history at my back” (26). An orphan without home, he did not have much luck back in Europe, where “the rich ate kippers or if they chose, devilled eggs . . . And if you pinched an unripe greengage from their tree they’d see you in the gallows . . .” (27). His life at sea as a whaler introduced further hardship, though eventually it brought him to New Zealand, the place where, at long last, he found his “great good fortune”, acquired a new name, a new life, a new home, and a fresh identity:

My name and my life I owe that place
which soon I made my home.
From that time, when Worser Heberley went forth,

I didn't go alone (28)

New challenges come his way, however, with the arrival of Colonel Wakefield, one of the initiators of organised colonisation in New Zealand:

I summered there in the mild weather
and in autumn I went a-whaling
from the boneyard beach we called Tarwhite
where Colonel Wakefield's Tory came sailing (28)

The term "Pakeha Maori" is associated with pre-colonial times in New Zealand history, when power relations (and numbers) were still in favour of Maori, and the first European settlers, such as Heberley, had to adjust to the natives' way of life. Wedde has meditated on the concept of "Pakeha Maori" several times in different mediums, including the novel *Symme's Hole*, poetry, and critical writing. In "Bungy Whakapapa", his review of Alex Calder's edition of Maning's *Old New Zealand*, Wedde underlines "the combination of rugged independence and self-interest, cultural malleability and even empathy, and colonial joining . . ." in Herberley's personality (263). Unlike in the review, the image of Herberley in the ballad comes across as more romanticised, less complex, and ambiguous, as the protagonist clearly positions himself with the Maori, and not the colonisers:

And I guessed from the moment I saw their rig
that we had best take care:
not the Maori, nor Worser Heberley's mob
stood to gain from this affair. (28)

There are a few lines in the ballad, however, where the shrewdness of Herberley's character may still be implied:

Worser Heberley was never a fool,
else I'd not have lived that long . . . (28)

. . . and I, James Heberley, stayed close
to see what I could learn . . . (29)

The change of name from Worser back to James, when he is around the Colonel, in particular, can be interpreted as a suggestion about the ambiguity of Heberley's position, his inclination to

play a double game and benefit from both sides. These conflicts, however, are left unresolved in the ballad.

In “Bungy Whakapapa”, Wedde recalls a story of how after his public talk on the “Pakeha Maori” “as a potentially misleading concept outside his historical moment”, he had a conversation with a descendant of the famous “Pakeha Maori”: nineteenth century artist J.J Merrett. The mokopuna pointed out how the term “Pakeha Maori” had a special meaning in his family life and described a set of values that, so the family believed, distinguished them from their other Maori kin, who chose to relate differently to their Pakeha ancestry. To Wedde, this point was “such clear evidence of cultural choice and self-determination, rather than of racial determination, in the construction of a sense of identity” (260). In the ballad, the story of Herberley is presented in the situation of a family reunion, for people who, like Merrett’s descendant, chose to identify themselves with the protagonist. The presence of the audience influences the way the story is narrated, which parts of it are emphasised, and which parts were dismissed as irrelevant or less important for the occasion and the genre.

If the ballad demonstrates Wedde’s readiness to compromise the complexity of the issue in order to meet the expectations of the public and the genre, his poem “The Lifeguard” (2013) stands out as an example of complex philosophical poetry requiring a certain level of background knowledge from its audience. The poem works closely with a set of mythological archetypes to explore questions related to the meaning of life and the nature of being, while also addressing some pressing issues in the modern world, such as ecological problems. It consists of 385 couplets split into nine parts and is written in first person in the form of internal monologue. An indefinite generalising “you” at the beginning of the poem includes both the narrator and the reader, which creates a higher level of intimacy and engagement with the audience. The narrator pictures himself in a state of “restless dissatisfaction”, tortured by some painful memories and the thought that “nothing ever comes back once it’s gone”. The forest-clearing archetype, as the setting, implies the timelessness and universality of the situation:

You have to start somewhere
in these morose times,

a clearing in the forest, say,
filled with golden shafts of sunlight

and skirmishes . . . (278)

The forest is commonly seen as a symbol of the unconscious, the unknown, and death, while the clearing, in opposition, stands for consciousness, life, and truth. On both sides of the protagonist, there are the duelling lifeguards of the West and East, sunrise and sunset. They are figures from Greek mythology, Polyphemus and Narcissus, whose stories are retold in Parts Four and Five. The one-eyed cyclops Polyphemus, the lifeguard of the West, suffers from his unrequited love for the mermaid “who punishes him with catastrophic hope” (288). His counterpart Narcissus, the lifeguard of the “vain” East, wastes away with love for himself, “repeating himself in the ripples that wash back and forth from the pool’s edge” (291) in the same manner in which Echo, whose love Narcissus is not able to reciprocate, is “fated to repeat the clichés of conversations she’d have joined in if she could” (293). The cyclops might be seen as a symbol of masculinity, rationality, and power, traditionally associated with the West, while Narcissus, his counterpart, embodies the femininity and feeling that the East is often associated with. The male–female dichotomy in the opposition of the West and East continues to work in a more specific New Zealand context. In the Maori tradition, the rough waters of the West coast are called *Tai Tamatāne*, which translates to “male sea”, while the white sand tranquil eastern bays are known as “*te ngaungau o Hinemoana*” meaning “the gnawing of the sea maiden” (Keane).

In his essay “The Light and Dark of Culture” (2005), Wedde discusses the concept of binary opposition in Western culture. Taking a postmodernist perspective, he questions the modernist polarisation of thinking and feeling, material and spiritual, rational and sublime, science and culture, suggesting that there is more complexity and ambiguity to these binaries. If there were a difference between thinking and feeling, he wonders, how would you explain their convergence in situations of aesthetic equilibrium? In the opposition of the impractical artist and the rational scientist, where would you position the “Renaissance man” who “does flying machines as well as sculptures”? (267). Rather than focusing on polarities and territories, Wedde suggests exploring connections, borders, and flows, preferring comparative ways of thinking to self-contained modalities of thought. In “The Lifeguard”, he, in particular, enacts this approach. Each lifeguard has something the other lacks; they are “leaning their sunlit heads together, brothers in arms, the lifeguards of rising and setting, empty of hope and full of it . . .” (296-297). The two of them can never meet, but if they did, as the protagonist wishes, it would be in the clearing, described as “a middle ground” between the two worlds:

There’s always a middle ground,
a light-filled clearing in the gloomy forest,

where all the non-returners accumulate,
where arguments conclude,

horizons cease to recede
and a different silence falls . . . (280)

In the centre of the clearing stands a giant kauri, Te Mahuta Ngahere. This is the tree of life, which connects heaven and the underworld, as well as all forms of creation—a common archetype in the world's mythologies:

But the ancient of ancients, Te Mahuta Ngahere,
his head dreadlocked

with epiphytes and trailing vines,
his forehead suppurating

from knobby cankers, irritated bees
Whining from his armpits

and guano compacting
in the cracks of his girth –

the father of the forest's oblivious
to the trivial diurnality

of creatures in the clearing
he's made for himself . . . (294)

The tree of life represents eternity and immortality. In the poem, it is personified as a human being with a head, forehead, and armpits. Referred to as “father” and “ancient of ancients”, it has lived for four thousand years and will not “bother to hope for anything that is repetitive” (295). This is the kind of wisdom that the protagonist strives for in his thinking, a vital truth which is unnoticed and lost in the subjective reality of everyday life.

Throughout the poem, the mythological elements merge with the realities of the contemporary life: “Julia Roberts embracing orangutans”, “the pizza marinaras of fast-food

joins”, “scooters powered by palm oil”, “mass-produced podcasts”, “your credit card’s PIN number” (282–286). The issues that bother the narrator switch back and forth from timeless and universal into concrete, tangible, and pressing. One of his biggest concerns is the state of the environment in the modern world and the future of humanity. The idea of the environment as a shared space between humans and the nature, contemplated earlier in “The Pathway to the Sea”, is brought up, once again, here:

The pool we entered blithely
with cameras held aloft

was someone’s drinking water
but we didn’t know that

and didn’t care (284)

In Part Three, sitting by the bay, the narrator is haunted by the “glowing mirage” of “extruded aluminium sheets”, which brings to his mind the image of a lifeguard, who, for a long time, “has not been in labour” and “is idling at the tide-mark”:

This is what happens when you
let your lifeguard down, mistaking him

for the agent who only ever told you
what you’d already decided

to believe . . . (285)

The lifeguard, as well as in the title of the poem, serves as a metaphor for consciousness and the common sense meant to protect humanity from harm and self-destruction. By the end of Part Three, the narrator joins other bathers to “tip” the lifeguard who then starts yelling at the wind:

Bewildered by my own dismay,
I join them as we plod

like Galapagos turtles

towards our denouement,

tipping the lifeguard a generous
percentage of the fee

we've earned simply by turning up again.

And then it starts:

the clattering sound of
time's backwash up the beach

and the lifeguard's klaxon
yelling at the wind . . . (287)

The episode combines some contrasting moods and motives, such as fear, humour, and hope, which are characteristic of the poem as a whole. Alike “The Pathway to the Sea”, in order to act, the protagonist has to be a part of the community; so, the pronoun “I” transforms into “we”. The comparison with Galapagos turtles appears to be noble and dramatic as well as humorous. The contemporary capitalist touch of “tipping the lifeguard a generous percentage of the fee” adds some lightness and humour to the allegory, which is then replaced once again with a serious mood and tone as the protagonist hears “the clattering sound of time's backwash up the beach”. The lifeguard's klaxon aims at making people aware and so does the poet and the poem. The question of whether the alarm will be heard or is a waste of energy—like “yelling at the wind”—remains open.

The narrator's observations on contemporary realities most of the time make him feel depressed and uneasy. He questions his “crazy optimism that has been the bane and blessing of my life”, wondering how one can stay positive when “things go from bad to worse” (282). Throughout the poem, his focus gradually shifts from the external world into internal reality and a sense of self:

Like most people I know,
I've also wanted to save the world

or at least that clearing in it
where I find myself at a standstill . . . (296)

The clearing becomes a metaphor of the protagonist's mind:

. . . as if my head had become
a clearing in the forest . . . (297)

In an interview for the Auckland Writers and Readers Festival 2010, Wedde defined happiness as “not worrying about things that aren't worth worrying about . . . not letting them get to you” (1.08–1.17). By calming his mind, freeing it from unnecessary and trivial pursuits, the protagonist is able to get closer to the understanding of the meaning of life and the nature of being:

. . . On the other hand,
if I listen carefully enough

to the sound of my own listening,
I might eventually hear something.

The hum of longing seems to fade at last
into a kind of aural impasto,

thick and bland, without apparent surface
but also without depth . . . (297)

To the narrator, “the sound of my own listening” opposed to “the hum of longing”, clears the way for “the sound of consciousness” (298)—a special kind of silence that the narrator associates with meaning and truth:

This is not the silence that follows
the mediocre band's finale

or the silence
in the helpless lifeguard's mind

when that upraised arm out at the breakers
drops from sight

and the surf's arrhythmic roar
pours into salty gullies behind the dunes.

This is a silence you may not hear,
the silent silence . . . (280)

In Part Seven, the author questions the nature of the silence, wondering whether it is “a kind of oxymoron, since there can be no silence where its opposite doesn't equally prevail” (298). The poem capitalises on dualities: day and night, light and dark, clearing and forest, and the two lifeguards. In each of these pairs, one cannot exist without the other. In the same way, the poem suggests that a vital truth, symbolised by the silence, will stop making sense outside of “the busy world”, however, indifferent they may seem to one another:

. . . It's the busy world
that sits outside my window

as if across a table
with wine and food on it.

Indifferent to the buzzing in my ears,
asking only that I listen and respond,

the world tells me stories . . . (299)

In response to the world's “sad” stories, the narrator calls out the two lifeguards, inviting them to share a drink with him: “Does anyone ever tell you how lost we are without you?” Despite the poem's pessimistic overtones, the episode reveals the author's positive determination to keep trying, as “it's never too late, though you're not going to believe that” (300). A few decades earlier, in his interview with Dowling, Wedde revealed his similar attitude and thoughts:

I've never been so worried in my life, and that has to do with looking at children . . .
many people must feel this. It's getting harder and harder to justify the present. And yet
I'm not sure that the way to handle it is to worry. If everyone who said they were worried
about it actually set to work to find out a little more about it, become more aware, then
certain actions would happen. (181)

The ninth part of the poem, which is the last part, is dedicated to Wedde's great-grandfather Heinrich August, who arrived in New Zealand with his partner Maria Reepen. In his autobiographical memoir *The Grass Catcher*, Wedde mentions how his great-grandparents "came ashore together or separately in 1875 (Heinrich certainly jumped ship), married in 1876 and raised a large family in Wellington" (127). In the poem, Heinrich sings a love song to Maria, whose eyes are "turned inward" and "flooded with silence" (305). He remembers witnessing a similar kind of silence when, together with Maria, they enter a new world:

I think I heard something
like that silence once . . .

. . . I saw it was a new world

I'd entered, with Maria's hands
like resting terns on the rail

and her pale hair blowing forward
the way we were sailing . . . (305–306)

In the poem, the city and the sea are the two worlds that are opposed to each other, like the East and West. First European settlers came to New Zealand from the West and then they founded cities. Life on board, guarded by one-eyed Polyphemus, is rough and full of hope for a better life. The city life, watched over by Narcissus, is vain, idle, and repetitive. The silence Heinrich and Maria encounter while landing in New Zealand resides in the border between the two worlds, the sea and the city, represented by the coastline. The poem ends with an image of the coastline, from where the tide takes "the city's filth", which incorporates both ecological and philosophical implications of the poem:

. . . The tide sighs out
taking the city's filth with it

and we all wait for it to
breathe in again

across a brief silence, a kind of airy clearing

that almost goes unnoticed . . . (306)

In his 2005 essay “Bad Language”, Wedde explains how after his early brilliant start in the 1960s as a Young New Zealand Poet, he got irritated and bored with poetry and stopped reading and writing it for about ten years:

I was bored with the mundanity, with the banality, the deliberate low-keyness, the deliberate understatement, with the avoidance of rhapsodies and ecstasies and the avoidance of big emotion, the avoidance of the operatic. I was bored with thin irony and I was bored with the minimalism of emotion. I was bored by good taste . . . (221)

During this period of frustration and disappointment, due to his museum work, Wedde started engaging with a considerable amount of policy language. Although badly written and containing, at times, “no thought at all”, official language still appeals to the poet more than “literature” as, at least, “it was attempting to deal with stuff that was going to matter a few more moves down the track to a lot more people” (222). The uselessness of poetry, among other things, was what, at the time, drove Wedde away from it. In the same essay, he distinguished two kinds of poetry – individual, where the poet speaks for himself, and communal or official, where the author takes on the role of a choirmaster leading the audience and speaking for the people. While none of the opposites, on their own, were able to bring him a complete satisfaction, Wedde eventually found the right balance between the two extremes in poems by Horace: “And reading Horace, his combination of formality, the commonplace, and the great themes of death, love and greed, I realised I could do that [poetry] again” (226). The essay finishes with Wedde’s declaration of love for the ordinary and the commonplace, which “got [him] going again”. The place he then knew he was aiming towards was “a middle ground, / a light-filled clearing in the gloomy forest” (“The Lifeguard” 280). This is a special place where opposites meet and “true” poetry resides; where, by nourishing each other, the demotic and hieratic registers form an ecological relationship which is mutually beneficial.

Conclusion

Earlier this year, I attended a seminar run by the Department of Sociology at the University of Auckland titled “Should Academics Be Activists?” The panel discussion was a part of a series of seminars dealing with social concerns such as climate change, poverty, and white supremacy. A surprisingly good turnout (in comparison to previous events) confirmed how relevant the question remains in contemporary academia. The focus and direction of the debate, however, veered away from the title and description of the event. None of five panel speakers, who were professors and students from the Department of Sociology, expressed an opinion that in any way queried the assumption that academics should be involved with political and social activities. University staff and students were expected and encouraged to be more political and more proactive. The modern public intellectual was assumed to be an activist; so, the discussion naturally revolved around more effective and efficient ways of engaging and collaborating with the public.

Since my discipline is not sociology but English, I attempted to envision how the same topic might develop in a panel discussion in my department. I anticipate that the general direction of response would be similar with, perhaps, a greater variety of responses. “Public intellectual” is a broad term that incorporates people from various backgrounds who reflect on matters of public concern and provide a bridge between their specialised field of knowledge and a general audience. The public intellectuals I have considered, aside from their critical writing and public engagement, were also fiction writers or poets. In reflecting on the journey taken in this thesis, it seems appropriate to return, in closing, to the question of how literary intellectuals have balanced their roles as public intellectuals and activists to their responsibility to art. How much politics can art sustain? What is at stake? Since none of these questions are new, it is always useful to carefully reflect on how things used to be in order to develop a better understanding of the current configurations and their alternatives.

If we could travel seventy years back in time to a secluded one-roomed hut at 14A Esmonde Road in Takapuna, where “a truly New Zealand literature had its beginnings”¹⁶, it is likely that we would be exposed to different ideas, struggles, and aspirations, and we would

¹⁶ This is an excerpt from a comment by David Ballantyne used as a plaque at Sargeson’s home, which is now a literary museum. The full quotation states: “Frank Sargeson (1903–1982) lived at this address from 1931 until his death. Here he wrote all his best-known short stories and novels, grew vegetables and entertained friends and fellow writers. Here a truly New Zealand literature had its beginnings.”

encounter a different kind of New Zealand literary intellectual. We might see Frank Sargeson working quietly and patiently in his garden and his young tenant, Janet Frame, adjusting to her new life out of a mental hospital. Despite all their differences, the two writers had certain characteristics which seem less common today. Firstly, they shared their strong preference for privacy and seclusion over public exposure. Secondly, as writers, they would never prioritise their political and social concerns over their responsibility to art. Sargeson and Frame were certainly not activists but they were vitally concerned with critiquing the kind of society New Zealand had become, and, over time, they became very well known for their dissenting views.

The seven writers I have considered in this thesis span different generations, come from varying backgrounds, and carry disparate experiences, bringing diverse creative practices and perspectives into play. Yet, by looking at them separately as well as in comparison to one another, it is possible to identify some common patterns, shifts, and trends. The aim of this thesis was to track the history of New Zealand literary intellectual culture from the 1930s until the end of the century and to map the construction of the figure that we call the “embattled” intellectual. The figure of the embattled intellectual is not identical to the actual author for several reasons. Authors are not just the producers of their work, they are legal persons as well as figures inferred from the text—what we call, in narrative theory, an implied author. The word “author” has slightly different meanings in each of these contexts. To complicate the picture further, the embattled intellectuals of my thesis are all actual authors who, from time to time, write on matters of public interest, write autobiographically, and also write literary works featuring intellectuals who tend to be figures very much like themselves. By writing across genres in this way, they develop a multifaceted persona, like a celebrity, and so the public perception of the embattled intellectual becomes a part of the compound as well. The primary questions my thesis was concerned with evolved around the constitution of the figure of the embattled intellectual. What are the external and internal battles that shaped this figure? What components is this figure made up of? How do these components relate to each other and work together? The answers to these questions will enable us to reflect on larger questions about the role of public intellectuals in society and the nature of cultural change—how it happens and who makes it happen.

As we have seen, the seventy-year period brought many transformations to New Zealand life, altering the nature and relevance of the battles public intellectuals encountered and engaged with. While some ideological preoccupations, such as feminism, biculturalism, or environmentalism, have only recently emerged with urgency, others—for example, the notion of anti-intellectualism—have proven to be deep-rooted and more enduring. The concept of anti-intellectualism is particularly specific to New Zealand in comparison to older countries and

cultures. For Charles Brasch, Russia “symbolized the possibility of the arts and literature being accorded a central role in society, a role he felt they were largely denied in New Zealand” (Eaton and Edmond 181). Russia’s embattled literary intellectuals have faced imprisonment and exile. What have New Zealand’s intellectuals risked? The public indifference towards high art and culture has shaped the image of a local intellectual as an outsider, a non-conformist, an individual who never truly fits in. However uncomfortable this position may be, the “outsider” intellectual possesses the advantage of critical freedom, which is often seen as an essential component for intellectual activity.

While university may seem to be an intellectual’s natural environment, the institutionalised and institution-bound idea of the intellectual has never been particularly strong in New Zealand. Most writers considered in this thesis, in spite of being rigorously engaged in critical thinking and writing, were not academics; more often than not, they experienced a complicated relationship with academia. Sargeson and James K. Baxter became writers and public intellectuals while living and working on the margins of society. Their negative attitude towards academic learning and the institutions associated with it is well known. In a similar vein, Lauris Edmond identified herself with authors writing from their own experience—as opposed to intellectual or cerebral writers drawing from the “second-hand” experience of literary sources. C.K. Stead and Witi Ihimaera held university positions, although neither spent their entire career as academics. Stead opted for an early retirement in order to become a full-time fiction writer. Before taking up a position at the University of Auckland, Ihimaera had an established career as a diplomat. Ian Wedde, who is seen as one of the most intellectually complex writers of his generation, decided against academia and pursued a career as an independent arts writer and bureaucrat, and took up a position as an Arts Project Manager at the Te Papa Museum in Wellington, partly to be able to engage with a wider audience. The preference of the “real” world with its practical affairs over the ivory tower constitutes another common characteristic of the New Zealand public literary intellectual.

The elitist view of art and literature as a complex and demanding process that requires full-time attention from an artist or a writer evidently faded away as the century progressed. The detachment from society, which was important and precious for writers like Sargeson and Frame, was no longer seen as healthy or necessary by the end of the millennium. Instead, practical involvement in politics had become an integral part of intellectual activity. To an extent, this new tendency can be seen in Edmond, Baxter, Ihimaera, and Wedde—to each, writing was only one of many hats to wear. The case with Stead, however, appears less straightforward. On one hand, he vigorously defended the more traditional “outsider” role of a writer, seeing a separation

between art and politics as an essential requirement for high culture. On the other hand, due to his own active involvement with political debates, it is difficult to decontextualise his works of fiction from his political leanings.

Another significant transformation began with the shift in gender and race relations in New Zealand from the 1970s. The exclusive elitist view on arts and literature gave way to the new ideas of diversity and inclusion, expanding discussion over New Zealand's character and identity. The traditional image of the New Zealand literary intellectual as a white male individual was challenged by writers from previously marginalised groups and cultures. In the works of Ihimaera and Edmond, we encounter a Maori man and a private family woman as New Zealand literary intellectuals. The new type of protagonist offered by Baxter and Wedde is a Pakeha striving to overcome exclusiveness and monoculturalism by navigating between different worlds and extremes, such as Pakeha and Maori cultures or demotic and hieratic registers. The flexibility, adaptiveness and ability to engage with different kind of audiences, "other" cultures, and diverse cultural situations all constitute a new skill set required from the public intellectual of today. In the place of an elitist and high-modernist sense of tradition (associated with Stead), emerges a non-elitist and communal attitude towards art, culture, tradition, and writing.

Besides external battles, transformations, and shifts, there have always been internal contradictions and struggles that influenced and shaped the figure of the embattled intellectual. The naïve view would be to see this figure as a biographical person and the work that he or she produces as their entire creation. My thesis, however, has demonstrated that the figure of the embattled intellectual is a more complex compound, comprising different "versions" of the author associated with the different genres that they engaged with. In the process of creating a piece of writing, the author's intentions are challenged and transformed by genre conventions; so, the final outcome is never exactly what it was meant to be. The different genres suggest different relationships between the authors and their personas, which my thesis has considered and explored. It is generally assumed that the figure emerging from critical or autobiographical writing is the closest to the original, "real" author. Fiction then is seen as an adaptation of views represented in the author's nonfiction. A closer analysis, however, has revealed more nuances, complexities, and exceptions behind these generic assumptions. The comparison between Sargeson's novel *I Saw in My Dream* and his autobiography demonstrates how, by reading between the lines, the attentive reader is able to extract more information and learn more about the author from his fiction than his nonfiction. For Sargeson, as a closeted homosexual writer, a fictional mask in *I Saw in My Dream*, among other things, created a safer space to draw upon his personal experiences in his writing. The story of the author's conviction and trial for indecent

assault was not a part of his autobiography, yet there are hints and clues to it in the fictional story of his protagonist Henry Griffins. By merging the perspectives of the narrator and the character, the author was able to maintain a certain level of ambiguity, which allowed him to talk about himself indirectly.

In comparison to other genres of imaginative literature, in poetry, the gap between the author and their persona is significantly less obvious. Since poetry primarily focuses on expressing feelings and emotions, it is more reliant on the personality of the author and their ability to express themselves fully in verse. Edmond's poetry demonstrates a situation in which the poet wishes to minimise the gap between her "real" self and her poetic persona. By bringing together the two different "versions" of herself—the public and the private—Edmond has been able to reinvent her identity and become a "whole" person. In doing so, she acted as a feminist, since for her, "feminine" had a strong association with the private and personal, while "masculine" was connected to the public and the intellectual. By sharing her private story with the public, she performed a political act, connecting her personal experience to larger social and political structures. In comparison to more experimental poets, like Wedde, Edmond's engagement with poetry was largely conventional. While her aspiration was to drop the mask, Wedde played around by juggling them. In the chapter on Wedde, we saw how in his poetry the author adopted different personas in order to address a wider range of audiences. In "The Pathway to the Sea", the speaker is a political activist calling his audience to action. In "A Ballad for Worser Herberley", he is a spokesperson at a family function, whose role is to entertain and gratify, rather than challenge, his spectators. In "The Lifeguard", he is a philosopher engaged with complex ethical and metaphysical questions.

A career combining work in several genres, while not in itself an essential constituent of the public intellectual, was one of the criteria for the selection of authors in my thesis. The relationship between fictional and nonfictional narratives have been addressed and contemplated in each chapter in relation to different authors. Every genre offered different prospects and opportunities for public intellectuals. One could think about this in a naive biographical way—as something that just happens as a concomitant of writing and living—but my thesis has revealed that the formation of the figure of the embattled intellectual has been a cultural and artistic act, involving choices of one sort or another. Besides simply increasing the visibility of the public intellectual in their role, a multifaceted career surrounded their public image with conflicts and controversies, influencing the perception of their work. Different genres supported different representations or "versions" of the same author. Instead of a fixed singular image of an author, in each chapter, we observed their many faces and facets. Complementing, challenging, and

conflicting with each other, they ensured the ability of the New Zealand intellectual to remain eclectic, flexible, and adaptive.

In due course, the border between fact and fiction has been challenged by many writers, including those in my thesis. Generally, fiction refers to plot, settings, and characters created from the imagination, while nonfiction refers to factual stories focused on actual events and people. However, the difference between the two modes is often blurred as the two frequently crisscross. Autobiographies and critical texts can include fictional techniques, while novels and poems claim to be able to convey their own kinds of truth. Since both genres select, interpret, and aggregate information when presenting it to the reader, one can say that there is no essential difference between the two modes, both of which are bound to be, to a certain extent, always subjective. While it is true that a literary work of any genre always belongs to the realm of representations, for the purpose of my thesis, it was important to set and clarify the boundaries between the two modes. In this respect, Dorrit Cohn's views in regard to the narratological theory of fiction were particularly helpful. In my thesis, I adopted Cohn's understanding of fiction in its constrained sense of a non-referential narrative rather than a narrative in general. Cohn argued that fiction has a unique ability to deliver outcomes entirely different to nonfictional narratives. In *How Literature Works*, Kenneth Quinn stated and elaborated on a similar idea:

The way we read a poem or a novel differs from the way we read an article in a newspaper or an encyclopaedia. We prepare ourselves to think harder, more imaginatively – more responsively. The structure of words which makes up a literary text not only has meaning, it is meaningful in a special kind of way; reading involves exposing our minds to an unusually complex use of words; in that structure there has, somehow, been captured, waiting for us to release it, something of the writer's understanding of life. (12–13)

Unlike fictional texts, genres within nonfiction are closely tied to a level of reference and therefore tend to be seen by the unreflecting reader as more trustworthy and reliable. They are also more accessible to a wider audience and often become the lens through which an author's work is viewed. In comparison to novels and poetry, which are less overt, more complex, figurative, and emotionally intense, critical and autobiographical writing tends to be more explicit, focussed on the message and clarity of definitions. As my thesis has demonstrated, these qualities of nonfiction have been able to aid or help glue the compound figure of the embattled

intellectual, bringing clarity and definition to its role. While the fundamental aspects of nonfiction have worked positively in some cases, it has also caused problems and controversies in others. Stead's experience provides an example of how ideas developed in critical texts affect the reading of an author's fictional work in mostly unhelpful and misleading ways. Stead's reputation as a reactionary in the 1980s mainly stemmed from his nonfiction writing in which he elaborated on his political views and opinions in a straightforward and explicit manner. Coming across as insensitive and offensive in his literary criticism, the same message felt less strident and blunt in his fiction. The fictional and nonfictional "representations" of a similar thought correlated in some ways but did not match. An analogous phenomenon was observed in Baxter's work. The prophetic rhetoric of his critical writing helped to construct his public persona as a prophet, which then influenced the perception of his poetry. The analysis of his *Jerusalem Sonnets*, however, demonstrated how the spirit of prophecy wanes when released indirectly through imagery and narrative techniques, such as in the form of address and prayer. Both examples identify the risks faced by literary intellectuals when they choose public exposure and political involvement.

In this thesis, I considered the various ways my selected authors chose to work with different literary genres. While some writers preferred to be more consistent in keeping the two genres apart; others, on the contrary, deliberately experimented by merging and mixing fictional and nonfictional elements into individual texts. The example of Stead and Baxter illustrated the ability of fiction to soften the author's political or religious views. Yet, what if the author did not want his ideas to be softened? Ihimaera's writing presented a case in which in order to make his fiction more argumentative and political, the author chose to intentionally integrate certain elements and techniques of nonfiction. His novel *The Matriarch* is an example of a complex, controversial, and problematic text, merging together various genres, styles, and techniques, trying to address many different audiences all at once. The author's engagement with politics provoked criticism among both Maori and Pakeha critics. While scholars like Stead condemned the novel for its expository tone and overly rhetorical argument, some radical Maori activists, in turn, criticised it for lacking political awareness. However challenging and contradictory, the book received a lot of attention and praise in the country at the time of its publication. It is likely that much of its immediate success is owed to the novel's nonfictional qualities.

Indeterminate, ambiguous texts, in-between two modes, presented a special interest in my study. For Sargeson, Stead, and Ihimaera, the genre of the autobiographical novel offered an opportunity to use their personal experience in their writing while maintaining a certain distance between themselves and their fictional representatives. By demonstrating characteristics and

experiences that the actual author cannot have, the protagonist was able to experiment and further explore the hidden aspects and unrealised possibilities of a real person. Besides, the mask of a third-person narrator has functioned as a buffer between the character and the author, making the author, in some way, less “responsible” for the ideas and opinions of the character. While a mixture of fact and imagination is common in creative fiction, the case of Frame stands out as she adopted this technique in both genres. The blurred line between reality and imagination became a deliberate technique that she used to convey her ideas on the subjectivity of reality. Generating both interest and confusion, this feature of her writing fed the aura of mystique around her personality and surrounded her figure in a cult of exceptionalism. In addition to this, unlike most other authors in this thesis, Frame was notorious for her unwillingness to provide interviews, public speeches, or participate in public events. Her characteristic reluctance to communicate with the public in a direct, straightforward manner—in her writing or through the media—has boosted her celebrity status significantly, adding to the development of a public image that might have very little to do with her private self. The case of Frame stands out in my thesis as an example of a curiously “public” private intellectual, a celebrity figure whose face is easily recognised by people who may have never read her.

As we have seen, the making of a New Zealand intellectual has been a complex, continuing process, involving both external and internal challenges and changes. Having mapped the construction of the figure of the embattled intellectual, we may now get closer to understanding how it functions, its role and significance in the country. Why do we need public intellectuals and what are they good for? The phrase “speaking truth to power”, which was used as the title of Lawrence Simmons’ book on New Zealand public intellectuals implies a non-violent political tactic and suggests an image of the public intellectual as someone with the ability and courage to challenge those in power. How successful is this tactic? Do those in power listen and care? Do public intellectuals have the power to influence, shape, and change government’s decisions, public opinions, and, in global terms, the course of history? Are they leaders, initiators, and enablers of the cultural change or, like everyone else, are they swept along by larger forces and contained within hegemonic structures? While there is no simple answer to these questions, by looking at literary intellectuals in this thesis, we can identify cases in which their work has mattered and resonated among New Zealand society. One way in which intellectuals can precipitate actual change and contribute to society is by raising public awareness and initiating a dialogue around common social concerns and problems. Baxter’s work about Jerusalem helped to draw public attention to social problems, such as drug addiction among the youth. Writers like Edmond and Ihimaera triggered debates and discussions around

New Zealand gender and race politics. Wedde's involvement with environmental activism at Aramoana is an example of how poetry can be "useful" in a practical way.

As we have seen, Stephan Greenblatt emphasises the way culture embraces both constraint and mobility. It functions as a structure of limitations and restrictions and, at the same time, as the guarantor of change and movement. It is not a destination one arrives at but a process: a never-ending journey. This understanding of culture offers a framework that is larger and more inclusive than the particular ideas and attitudes that each author brings into this discussion. It can also help us to understand the way cultural change happens and the causal forces behind it. For Greenblatt, the relationship between great works of art and culture are important and complex, as the two reflect, shape, and define each other. The connection to culture makes literature not only an important agent in the transmission of culture but also an agent for changing and shaping its course. Through their creative intelligence, great works of art have the unique potential to go beyond the author's intentions and speak to future generations. In contrast to nonfiction writing, which is more likely to become outdated, fiction allows readers of each generation to rethink their heritage in relation to their own circumstances and in light of their access to knowledge. Sargeson's closeted gay literature was not fully understood and appreciated by his contemporaries but it found its audience in the readers of future generations. In a sense, what Frame did for mental hospitals through her writing can be compared to what Solzhenitsyn did for the Gulag. Direct and explicit, critical works respond to the issues of a specific period and might be more effective in making immediate changes. It is fiction, however, that "empowers" the "embattled" literary intellectual to make a more profound and long-lasting impact on the march of society and culture.

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